

A MODERN INSTANCE.*

BY W. D. HOWELLS,

Author of "Venetian Life," "A Chance Acquaintance," "The Undiscovered Country," etc.

I.

THE village stood on a wide plain, and around it rose the mountains. They were green to their tops in summer, and in winter white through their serried pines and drifting mists, but at every season serious and beautiful, furrowed with hollow shadows, and taking the light on masses and stretches of iron-gray crag. The river swam through the plain in long curves, and slipped away at last through an unseen pass to the southward, tracing a score of miles in its course over a space that measured but three or four. The plain was very fertile, and its features, if few and of purely utilitarian beauty, had a rich luxuriance, and there was a tropical riot of vegetation when the sun of July beat on those northern fields. They waved with corn and oats to the feet of the mountains, and the potatoes covered a vast acreage with the lines of their intense, coarse green; the meadows were deep with English grass to the banks of the river, that, doubling and returning upon itself, still marked its way with a dense fringe of alders and white birches.

But winter was full half the year. The snow began at Thanksgiving, and fell snow upon snow till Fast Day, thawing between the storms, and packing harder and harder against the break-up in the spring, when it covered the ground in solid levels three feet high, and lay heaped in drifts, that defied the sun far into May. When it did not snow, the weather was keenly clear and commonly very still. Then the landscape at noon had a stereoscopic glister under the high sun that burned in a heaven without a cloud, and at setting stained the sky and the white waste with freezing pink and violet. On such days the farmers and lumbermen came in to the village stores, and made a stiff and feeble stir about their door-ways, and the school children gave the street a little life and color, as they went to and from the Academy in their red and blue woolens. Four times a day the mill, the shrill wheeze of whose saws had become part of the habitual silence, blew its whistle for the hands to begin and leave off work, in blasts that seemed to shatter themselves against the thin air. But otherwise an arctic quiet prevailed.

Behind the black boles of the elms that swept the vista of the street with the fine gray tracery of their boughs, stood the houses, deep-sunken in the accumulating drifts, through which each householder kept a path cut from his door-way to the road, white and clean as if hewn out of marble. Some cross-streets straggled away east and west with the poorer dwellings; but this, that followed the northward and southward reach of the plain, was the main thoroughfare, and had its own impressiveness, with those square white houses which they build so large in northern New England. They were all kept in scrupulous repair, though here and there the frost and thaw of many winters had heaved a fence out of plumb, and threatened the poise of the monumental urns of painted pine on the gate-posts. They had dark-green blinds, of a color harmonious with that of the funereal evergreens in their door-yards; and they themselves had taken the tone of the snowy landscape, as if by the operation of some such law as blanches the fur-bearing animals of the North. They seemed proper to its desolation, while some houses of more modern taste, painted to a warmer tone, looked, with their mansard roofs and jigsawed piazzas and balconies, intrusive and alien.

At one end of the street stood the Academy, with its classic façade and its belfry; midway was the hotel, with the stores, the printing-office, and the churches, and at the other extreme, one of the square white mansions stood advanced from the rank of the rest, at the top of a deep-plunging valley, defining itself against the mountain beyond so sharply that it seemed as if cut out of its dark, wooded side. It was from the gate before this house, distinct in the pink light which the sunset had left, that, on a Saturday evening in February, a cutter, gay with red-lined robes, dashed away, and came musically clashing down the street under the naked elms. For the women who sat with their work at the windows on either side of the way, hesitating whether to light their lamps, and drawing nearer and nearer to the dead-line of the outer cold for the latest glimmer of the day, the passage of this ill-timed vehicle was a vexation little short of grievous.

Every movement on the street was precious to them, and with all the keenness of their starved curiosity, these captives of the winter could not make out the people in the cutter. Afterward it was a mortification to them that they should not have thought at once of Bartley Hubbard and Marcia Gaylord. They had seen him go up toward Squire Gaylord's house half an hour before, and they now blamed themselves for not reflecting that of course he was going to take Marcia over to the church sociable at Lower Equity. Their identity being established, other little proofs of it reproached the inquirers; but these perturbed spirits were at peace, and the lamps were out in the houses (where the smell of rats in the wainscot and of potatoes in the cellar strengthened with the growing night), when Bartley and Marcia drove back through the moonlit silence to her father's door. Here, too, the windows were all dark, except for the light that sparsely glimmered through the parlor blinds; and the young man slackened the pace of his horse, as if to still the bells, some distance away from the gate.

The girl took the hand he offered her when he dismounted at the gate, and as she jumped from the cutter,

"Wont you come in?" she asked.

"I guess I can blanket my horse and stand him under the wood-shed," answered the young man, going around to the animal's head and leading him away.

When he returned to the door the girl opened it, as if she had been listening for his step; and she now stood holding it ajar for him to enter, and throwing the light upon the threshold from the lamp, which she lifted high in the other hand. The action brought her figure in relief, and revealed the outline of her bust and shoulders, while the lamp flooded with light the face she turned to him, and again averted for a moment, as if startled at some noise behind her. She thus showed a smooth, low forehead, lips and cheeks deeply red, a softly rounded chin touched with a faint dimple, and in turn a nose short and aquiline; her eyes were dark, and her dusky hair flowed crinkling above her fine black brows, and vanished down the curve of a lovely neck. A peculiar charm lay in the form of her upper lip: it was exquisitely arched, and at the corners it projected a little over the lower lip, so that when she smiled it gave a piquant sweetness to her mouth, with a certain demure innocence that qualified the Roman pride of her profile. For the rest, her beauty was of the kind that coming years would only ripen and enrich; at thirty she would be even handsomer than at twenty, and be all the more

southern in her type for the paling of that northern color in her cheeks. The young man who looked up at her from the door-step had a yellow mustache, shadowing either side of his lip with a broad sweep, like a bird's wing; his chin, deep-cut below his mouth, failed to come strenuously forward; his cheeks were filled to an oval contour, and his face had otherwise the regularity common to Americans; his eyes, a clouded gray, heavy-lidded and long-lashed, were his most striking feature, and he gave her beauty a deliberate look from them as he lightly stamped the snow from his feet, and pulled the seal-skin gloves from his long hands.

"Come in," she whispered, coloring with pleasure under his gaze; and she made haste to shut the door after him, with a luxurious impatience of the cold. She led the way into the room from which she had come, and set down the lamp on the corner of the piano, while he slipped off his overcoat and swung it over the end of the sofa. They drew up chairs to the stove, in which the smoldering fire, revived by the opened draft, roared and snapped. It was midnight, as the sharp strokes of a wooden clock declared from the kitchen, and they were alone together, and all the other inmates of the house were asleep. The situation, scarcely conceivable to another civilization, is so common in ours, where youth commands its fate and trusts solely to itself, that it may be said to be characteristic of the New England civilization wherever it keeps its simplicity. It was not stolen or clandestine; it would have interested every one, but would have shocked no one in the village if the whole village had known it; all that a girl's parents ordinarily exacted was that they should not be waked up.

"Ugh!" said the girl. "It seems as if I never should get warm."

She leaned forward, and stretched her hands toward the stove, and he presently rose from the rocking-chair in which he sat, somewhat lower than she, and lifted her sack to throw it over her shoulders. But he put it down and took up his overcoat.

"Allow my coat the pleasure," he said, with the ease of a man who is not too far lost to be really flattering.

"Much obliged to the coat," she replied, shrugging herself into it and pulling the collar close about her throat. "I wonder you didn't put it on the sorrel. You could have tied the sleeves around her neck."

"Shall I tie them around yours?" He leaned forward from the low rocking-chair into which he had sunk again, and made a feint at what he had proposed.

But she drew back with a gay "No!" and

added: "Some day, father says, that sorrel will be the death of us. He says it's a bad color for a horse. They're always ugly, and when they get heated they're crazy."

"You never seem to be very much frightened when you're riding after the sorrel," said Bartley.

"Oh, I've great faith in your driving."

"Thanks. But I don't believe in this notion about a horse being vicious because he's of a certain color. If your father didn't believe in it, I should call it a superstition; but the Squire has no superstitions."

"I don't know about that," said the girl. "I don't think he likes to see the new moon over his left shoulder."

"I beg his pardon, then," returned Bartley. "I ought to have said religions: The Squire has no religions."

The young fellow had a rich, caressing voice, and a securely winning manner which comes from the habit of easily pleasing; in this charming tone, and with this delightful insinuation, he often said things that hurt; but with such a humorous glance from his softly shaded eyes that people felt in some sort flattered at being taken into the joke, even while they winced under it.

The girl seemed to wince, as if, in spite of her familiarity with the fact, it wounded her to have her father's skepticism recognized just then. She said nothing, and he added:

"I remember we used to think that a red-headed boy was worse tempered on account of his hair. But I don't believe the sorrel-tops, as we called them, were any more fiery than the rest of us."

Marcia did not answer at once, and then she said, with the vagueness of one not greatly interested by the subject:

"You've got a sorrel-top in your office that's fiery enough, if she's anything like what she used to be when she went to school."

"Sally Morrison?"

"Yes."

"Oh, she isn't so bad. She's pretty lively, but she's very eager to learn the business, and I guess we shall get along. I think she wants to please me."

"Does she! But she must be going on seventeen now."

"I dare say," answered the young man, carelessly, but with perfect intelligence. "She's good-looking in her way, too."

"Oh! Then you admire red hair?"

He perceived the anxiety that the girl's pride could not keep out of her tone, but he answered, indifferently:

"I'm a little too near that color myself. I hear that red hair's coming into fashion, but I guess it's natural I should prefer black."

She leaned back in her chair, and crushed the velvet collar of his coat under her neck in lifting her head to stare at the high-hung mezzotints and family photographs on the walls, while a flattered smile parted her lips, and there was a little thrill of joy in her voice.

"I presume we must be a good deal behind the age in everything at Equity."

"Well, you know my opinion of Equity," returned the young man. "If I didn't have you here to free my mind to once in a while, I don't know what I should do."

She was so proud to be in the secret of his discontent with the narrow world of Equity that she tempted him to disparage it further by pretending to identify herself with it.

"I don't see why you abuse Equity to me. I've never been anywhere else, except those two winters at school. You'd better look out: I might expose you," she threatened, fondly.

"I'm not afraid. Those two winters make a great difference. You saw girls from other places—from Augusta, and Bangor, and Bath."

"Well, I couldn't see how they were so very different from Equity girls."

"I dare say they couldn't, either, if they judged from you."

She leaned forward again, and begged for more flattery from him with her happy eyes.

"Why, what *does* make me so different from all the rest? I should really like to know."

"Oh, you don't expect me to tell you to your face!"

"Yes, to my face! I don't believe it's anything complimentary."

"No, it's nothing that you deserve any credit for."

"Pshaw!" cried the girl. "I know you're only talking to make fun of me. How do I know but you make fun of me to other girls, just as you do of them to me? Everybody says you're sarcastic."

"Have I ever been sarcastic with you?"

"You know I wouldn't stand it."

He made no reply, but she admired the ease with which he now turned from her, and took one book after another from the table at his elbow, saying some words of ridicule about each. It gave her a still deeper sense of his intellectual command when he finally discriminated, and began to read out a poem with studied elocutionary effects. He read in a low tone, but at last some responsive noises came from the room overhead; he closed the book, and threw himself into an attitude of deprecation, with his eyes cast up to the ceiling.

"Chicago," he said, laying the book on the table, and taking his knee between his hands, while he dazzled her by speaking from the abstraction of one who has carried on a train of thought quite different from that on which he seemed to be intent,—*"Chicago is the place for me. I don't think I can stand Equity much longer. You know that chum of mine I told you about; he's written to me to come out there and go into the law with him at once."*

"Why don't you go?" the girl forced herself to ask.

"Oh, I'm not ready yet. Should you write to me if I went to Chicago?"

"I don't think you'd find my letters very interesting. You wouldn't want any news from Equity."

"Your letters wouldn't be interesting if you gave me the Equity news; but they would if you left it out. Then you'd have to write about yourself."

"Oh, I don't think that would interest anybody."

"Well, I feel almost like going out to Chicago to see."

"But I haven't promised to write yet," said the girl, laughing for joy in his humor.

"I shall have to stay in Equity till you do, then. Better promise at once."

"Wouldn't that be too much like marrying a man to get rid of him?"

"I don't think that's always such a bad plan—for the man."

He waited for her to speak; but she had gone the length of her tether in this direction.

"Byron says:

*"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart—
'Tis woman's whole existence."*

Do you believe that?" He dwelt upon her with his free look, in the happy embarrassment with which she let her head droop.

"I don't know," she murmured. "I don't know anything about a man's life."

"It was the woman's I was asking about."

"I don't think I'm competent to answer."

"Well, I'll tell you, then. I think Byron was mistaken. My experience is that when a man is in love, there's nothing else of him. That's the reason I've kept out of it altogether of late years. My advice is, don't fall in love: it takes too much time." They both laughed at this. "But about corresponding, now; you haven't said whether you would write to me, or not. Will you?"

"Can't you wait and see?" she asked, slanting a look at him, which she could not keep from being fond.

"No, no. Unless you wrote to me I couldn't go to Chicago."

"Perhaps I ought to promise, then, at once."

"You mean that you wish me to go."

"You said that you were going. You oughtn't to let anything stand in the way of your doing the best you can for yourself."

"But you would miss me a little, wouldn't you? You would try to miss me, now and then?"

"Oh, you are here pretty often. I don't think I should have much difficulty in missing you."

"Thanks, thanks! I can go with a light heart, now. Good-bye."

He made a pretense of rising.

"What! Are you going at once?"

"Yes, this very night—or to-morrow. Or no, I can't go to-morrow. There's something I was going to do to-morrow."

"Perhaps go to church."

"Oh, that, of course. But it was in the afternoon. Stop! I have it! I want you to go sleigh-riding with me in the afternoon."

"I don't know about that," Marcia began.

"But I do," said the young man. "Hold on: I'll put my request in writing." He opened her portfolio, which lay on the table.

"What elegant stationery! May I use some of this elegant stationery? The letter is to a lady—to open a correspondence. May I?" She laughed her assent. "How ought I to begin? Dearest Miss Marcia, or just Dear Marcia: which is better?"

"You had better not put either——"

"But I must. You're one or the other, you know. You're dear,—to your family,—and you're Marcia: you can't deny it. The only question is whether you're the dearest of all the Miss Marcias. I may be mistaken, you know. We'll err on the safe side: Dear Marcia." He wrote it down. "That looks well, and it reads well. It looks very natural, and it reads like poetry—blank verse; there's no rhyme for it that I can remember. Dear Marcia: Will you go sleigh-riding with me to-morrow afternoon, at two o'clock sharp? Yours—yours? sincerely, or cordially, or affectionately, or what? The 'dear Marcia' seems to call for something out of the common. I think it had better be affectionately." He suggested it with ironical gravity.

"And I think it had better be 'truly,'" protested the girl.

"'Truly' it shall be, then. Your word is law—statute in such case made and provided." He wrote, "With unutterable devotion, yours truly, Bartley J. Hubbard," and read it aloud.

She leaned forward, and lightly caught it away from him, and made a feint of tearing it. He seized her hands.

"Mr. Hubbard!" she cried, in under-tone. "Let me go, please."

"On two conditions—promise not to tear up my letter, and promise to answer it in writing."

She hesitated long, letting him hold her wrists. At last she said, "Well," and he released her wrists, on whose whiteness his clasp left red circles. She settled her bracelets over these, and as she tore off a scrap of paper she said:

"Who would think, to see you anywhere else, that you were such a case to carry on?"

"Nobody! That is my secret—my little joke. Respect it; and answer my letter."

She wrote a single word on the paper, and pushed it across the table to him. He rose with it, and went around to her side.

"This is very nice. But you haven't spelled it correctly. Anybody would say this was *No*, to look at it; and you meant to write *Yes*. Take the pencil in your hand, Miss Gaylord, and I will steady your trembling nerves, so that you can form the characters. Stop! At the slightest resistance on your part, I will call out and alarm the house; or I will —" He put the pencil into her fingers, and took her soft fist into his, and changed the word, while she submitted, helpless with her smothered laughter. "Now the address. Dear —"

"No, no!" she protested.

"Yes, yes! Dear Mr. Hubbard. There, that will do. Now the signature. Yours —"

"I *wont* write that. I wont, indeed!"

"Oh, yes, you will. You only think you wont. Yours gratefully, Marcia Gaylord. That's right. The Gaylord is not very legible, on account of a slight tremor in the writer's arm, resulting from a constrained posture, perhaps. Thanks, Miss Gaylord. I will be here promptly at the hour indicated —"

The noises renewed themselves overhead—some one seemed to be moving about. Hubbard laid his hand on that of the girl, still resting on the table, and grasped it in burlesque alarm; she could scarcely stifle her mirth. He released her hand, and reaching his chair with a theatrical stride, sat there cowering till the noises ceased. Then he began to speak soberly, in a low voice. He spoke of himself; but in application of a lecture which they had lately heard, so that he seemed to be speaking of the lecture. It was on the formation of character, and he told of the processes by which he had formed his own character. They appeared very wonderful to her, and she marveled at the ease with which he dismissed the frivolity of his recent mood, and was now all seriousness. When he came to speak of the influence of others

upon him, she almost trembled with the intensity of her interest.

"But of all the women I have known, Marcia," he said, "I believe you have had the strongest influence upon me. I believe you could make me do anything; but you have always influenced me for good; your influence upon me has been ennobling and elevating."

She wished to refuse his praise; but her heart throbbed for bliss and pride in it; her voice dissolved on her lips. They sat in silence; and he took in his the hand that she let hang over the side of her chair.

The lamp began to burn low, and she found words to say, "I had better get another," but she did not move.

"No—don't," he said; "I must be going, too. Look at the wick, there, Marcia; it scarcely reaches the oil. In a little while it will not reach it, and the flame will die out. That is the way the ambition to be good and great will die out of me, when my life no longer draws its inspiration from your influence."

This figure took her imagination; it seemed to her very beautiful; and his praise humbled her more and more.

"Good-night," he said, in a low, sad voice. He gave her hand a last pressure, and rose to put on his coat. Her admiration of his words, her happiness in his flattery, filled her brain like wine. She moved dizzily as she took up the lamp to light him to the door. "I have tired you," he said, tenderly, and he passed his hand around her to sustain the elbow of the arm with which she held the lamp; she wished to protest against his embrace, but she could not try.

At the door he bent down his head and kissed her. "Good-night, dear—friend."

"Good-night," she panted, and after the door had closed upon him, she stooped and kissed the knob on which his hand had rested.

As she turned, she started to see her father coming down the stairs with a candle in his hand. He had his black cravat tied around his throat, but no collar; otherwise, he had on the rusty black clothes in which he ordinarily went about his affairs: the cassimere pantaloons, the satin vest, and the dress-coat which old-fashioned country lawyers still wore ten years ago, in preference to a frock or sack. He stopped on one of the lower steps, and looked sharply down into her uplifted face, and as they stood confronted, their consanguinity came out in vivid resemblances and contrasts; his high, hawk-like profile was translated into the fine aquiline outline of hers; the harsh rings of black hair, now grizzled with age, which clustered tightly over his head, except where they had retreated from his deeply seamed and wrinkled fore-

head, were the crinkled frow above her smooth white brow; and the line of the bristly tufts that overhung his eyes was the same as that of the low arches above hers. Her complexion was from her mother; his skin was dusky yellow; but they had the same mouth, and hers showed how sweet his mouth must have been in his youth. His eyes, deep sunk in their cavernous sockets, had rekindled their dark fires in hers; his whole visage, softened to her sex and girlish years, looked up at him in his daughter's face.

"Why, father! Did we wake you?"

"No. I hadn't been asleep at all. I was coming down to read. But it's time you were in bed, Marcia."

"Yes, I'm going, now. There's a good fire in the parlor stove."

The old man descended the remaining steps, but turned at the parlor door, and looked again at his daughter with a glance that arrested her, with her foot on the lowest stair.

"Marcia," he asked, grimly, "are you engaged to Bartley Hubbard?"

The blood flashed up from her heart into her face like fire, and then, as suddenly, fell back again, and left her white. She let her head droop and turn, till her eyes were wholly averted from him, and she did not speak. He closed the door behind him, and she went upstairs to her own room; in her shame, she seemed to herself to crawl thither, with her father's glance burning upon her.

II.

BARTLEY HUBBARD drove his sorrel colt back to the hotel stable through the moonlight, and woke up the hostler, asleep behind the counter, on a bunk covered with buffalo-ropes. The half-grown boy did not wake easily; he conceived of the affair as a joke, and bade Bartley quit his fooling, till the young man took him by his collar, and stood him on his feet. Then he fumbled about the button of the lamp, turned low and smelling rankly, and lit his lantern, which contributed a rival stench to the choking air. He kicked together the embers that smoldered on the hearth of the Franklin stove, sitting down before it for his greater convenience, and having put a fresh pine-root on the fire, fell into a doze, with his lantern in his hand. "Look here, young man!" said Bartley, shaking him by the shoulder, "you had better go out and put that colt up, and leave this sleeping before the fire to me."

"Guess the colt can wait awhile," grumbled the boy, but he went out, all the same, and Bartley, looking through the window, saw his lantern wavering, a yellow blot in the white

moonshine, toward the stable. He sat down in the hostler's chair, and, in his turn, kicked the pine-root with the heel of his shoe, and looked about the room. He had had, as he would have said, a grand good time; but it had left him hungry, and the table in the middle of the room, with the chairs huddled around it, was suggestive, though he knew that it had been barrenly put there for the convenience of the landlord's friends, who came every night to play whist with him, and that nothing to eat or drink had ever been set out on it to interrupt the austere interest of the game. It was long since there had been anything on the shelves behind the counter more cheerful than corn-balls and fancy crackers for the children of the summer boarders; these dainties being out of the season, the jars now stood there empty. The young man waited in a hungry reverie, in which it appeared to him that he was undergoing unmerited suffering, till the stable-boy came back, now wide awake, and disposed to let the house share his vigils, as he stamped over the floor in his heavy boots.

"Andy," said Bartley, in a pathetic tone of injury, "can't you scare me up something to eat?"

"There aint anything in the buttery but meat-pie," said the boy.

He meant mince-pie, as Hubbard knew, and not a pasty of meat; and the hungry man hesitated.

"Well, fetch it," he said, finally. "I guess we can warm it up a little by the coals here."

He had not been so long out of college but the idea of this irregular supper, when he had once formed it, began to have its fascination. He took up the broad fire-shovel, and, by the time the boy had shuffled to and from the pantry beyond the dining-room, Bartley had cleaned the shovel with a piece of newspaper, and was already heating it by the embers which he had raked out from under the pine-root. The boy silently transferred the half-pie he had brought from its plate to the shovel. He pulled up a chair and sat down to watch it. The pie began to steam and send out a savory odor; he himself, in thawing, emitted a stronger and stronger smell of stable. He was not without his disdain for the palate which must have its mince-pie warm at midnight—nor without his respect for it, either. This fastidious taste must be part of the splendor which showed itself in Mr. Hubbard's city-cut clothes, and in his neck-scarfs and the perfection of his fingernails and mustache. The boy had felt the original impression of these facts deepened rather than effaced by custom; they were for every day, and not, as he had at first conjectured, for some great occasion only.

"You don't suppose, Andy, there is such a thing as cold tea or coffee anywhere, that we could warm up?" asked Bartley, gazing thoughtfully at the pie.

The boy shook his head.

"Get you some milk," he said; and, after he had let the dispiriting suggestion sink into the other's mind, he added, "or some water."

"Oh, bring on the milk," groaned Bartley, but with the relief that a choice of evils affords.

The boy stumped away for it, and when he came back the young man had got his pie on the plate again and had drawn his chair up to the table. "Thanks," he said, with his mouth full, as the boy set down the goblet of milk. Andy pulled his chair round so as to get an unrestricted view of a man who ate his pie with his fork as easily as another would with a knife. "That sister of yours is a smart girl," the young man added, making deliberate progress with the pie.

The boy made an inarticulate sound of satisfaction, and resolved in his heart to tell her what Mr. Hubbard had said.

"She's as smart as time," continued Bartley.

This was something concrete. The boy knew he should remember that comparison.

"Bring you anything else?" he asked, admiring the young man's skill in getting the last flakes of the crust on his fork. The pie had now vanished.

"Why, there isn't anything else, is there?" Bartley demanded, with the plaintive dismay of a man who fears he has flung away his hunger upon one dish when he might have had something better.

"Cheese," replied the boy.

"Oh!" said Bartley. He reflected awhile. "I suppose I could toast a piece on this fork. But there isn't any more milk."

The boy took away the plate and goblet, and brought them again replenished.

Bartley contrived to get the cheese on his fork and rest it against one of the andirons so that it would not fall into the ashes. When it was done, he ate it as he had eaten the pie, without offering to share his feast with the boy.

"There!" he said. "Yes, Andy, if she keeps on as she's been doing, she won't have any trouble. She's a bright girl."

He stretched his legs before the fire again, and presently yawned.

"Want your lamp, Mr. Hubbard?" asked the boy.

"Well, yes, Andy," the young man consented. "I suppose I may as well go to bed."

But, when the boy brought his lamp, he still remained with outstretched legs in front

of the fire. Speaking of Sally Morrison made him think of Marcia again, and of the way in which she had spoken of the girl. He lolled his head on one side in such comfort as a young man finds in the conviction that a pretty girl is not only fond of him, but is instantly jealous of any other girl whose name is mentioned. He smiled at the flame in his reverie, and the boy examined, with clandestine minuteness, the set and pattern of his trowsers, with glances of reference and comparison to his own.

There were many things about his relations with Marcia Gaylord which were calculated to give Bartley satisfaction. She was, without question, the prettiest girl in the place, and she had more style than any other girl began to have. He liked to go into a room with Marcia Gaylord; it was some pleasure. Marcia was a lady; she had a good education; she had been away two years at school; and, when she came back at the end of the second winter, he knew that she had fallen in love with him at sight. He believed that he could time it to a second. He remembered how he had looked up at her as he passed, and she had reddened and tried to turn away from the window as if she had not seen him. Bartley was still free as air; but if he could once make up his mind to settle down in a hole like Equity, he could have her by turning his hand. Of course she had her drawbacks, like everybody. She was proud, and she would be jealous; but, with all her pride and her distance, she had let him kiss her; and with not a word on his part that any one could hold him to.

"Hullo!" he cried, with a suddenness that startled the boy, who had finished his meditation upon Bartley's trowsers, and was now deeply dwelling on his boots. "Do you like 'em? See what sort of a shine you can give 'em for Sunday-go-to-meeting to-morrow morning." He put out his hand and laid hold of the boy's head, passing his fingers through the thick red hair. "Sorrel-top!" he said, with a grin of agreeable reminiscence. "They emptied all the freckles they had left into your face—didn't they, Andy?"

This free, joking way of Bartley's was one of the things that made him popular; he passed the time of day, and was give and take right along, as his admirers expressed it, from the first, in a community where his smartness had that honor which gives us more smart men to the square mile than any other country in the world. The fact of his smartness had been affirmed and established in the strongest manner by the authorities of the college at which he was graduated, in answer to the reference he made to them when negotiating with the

committee in charge for the place he now held as editor of the Equity "Free Press." The faculty spoke of the solidity and variety of his acquirements, and the distinction with which he had acquitted himself in every branch of study he had undertaken. They added that he deserved the greater credit because his early disadvantages as an orphan, dependent on his own exertions for a livelihood, had been so great that he had entered college with difficulty and with heavy conditions. This turned the scale with a committee who had all been poor boys themselves, and justly feared the encroachments of hereditary aristocracy. They perhaps had their misgivings when the young man, in his well-blackened boots, his gray trowsers neatly fitting over them, and his diagonal coat buttoned high with one button, stood before them with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, and looked down over his mustache at the floor with sentiments concerning their wisdom which they could not explore; they must have resented the fashionable keeping of everything about him, for Bartley wore his one suit as if it were but one of many; but when they understood that he had come by everything through his own unaided smartness; they could no longer hesitate. One, indeed, still felt it a duty to call attention to the fact that the college authorities said nothing of the young man's moral characteristics in a letter dwelling so largely upon his intellectual qualifications. The others referred this point by a silent look to Squire Gaylord.

"I don't know," said the Squire, "as I ever heard that a great deal of morality was required by a newspaper editor." The rest laughed at the joke, and the Squire continued: "But I guess if he worked his own way through college, as they say, that he haint had time to be up to a great deal of mischief. You know it's for idle hands that the devil provides, doctor."

"That's true, as far as it goes," said the doctor. "But it isn't the whole truth. The devil provides for some busy hands, too."

"There's a good deal of sense in that," the Squire admitted. "The worst scamps I ever knew were active fellows. Still, industry is in a man's favor. If the faculty knew anything against this young man they would have given us a hint of it. I guess we had better take him; we sha'n't do better. Is it a vote?"

The good opinion of Bartley's smartness which Squire Gaylord had formed was confirmed some months later by the development of the fact that the young man did not regard his management of the Equity "Free Press" as a final vocation. The story went that he lounged into the lawyer's office one Saturday afternoon in October, and asked him to let him take his

Blackstone into the woods with him. He came back with it a few hours later.

"Well, sir," said the attorney, sardonically, "how much Blackstone have you read?"

"About forty pages," answered the young man, dropping into one of the empty chairs, and hanging his leg over the arm.

The lawyer smiled, and opening the book, asked half a dozen questions at random. Bartley answered without changing his indifferent countenance, or the careless posture he had fallen into. A sharper and longer examination followed; the very language seemed to have been unbrokenly transferred to his mind, and he often gave the author's words as well as his ideas.

"Ever looked at this before?" asked the lawyer, with a keen glance at him over his spectacles.

"No," said Bartley, gaping as if bored, and further relieving his weariness by stretching. He was without deference for any presence; and the old lawyer did not dislike him for this: he had no deference himself.

"You think of studying law?" he asked, after a pause.

"That's what I came to ask you about," said Bartley, swinging his leg.

The elder recurred to his book, and put some more questions. Then he said:

"Do you want to study with me?"

"That's about the size of it."

He shut the book, and pushed it on the table toward the young man.

"Go ahead. You'll get along—if you don't get along too easily."

It was in the spring after this that Marcia returned home from her last term at boarding school, and first saw him.

III.

BARTLEY woke on Sunday morning with the regrets that a supper of mince-pie and toasted cheese is apt to bring. He woke from a bad dream, and found that he had a dull headache. A cup of coffee relieved his pain, but it left him listless, and with a longing for sympathy which he experienced in any mental or physical discomfort. The frankness with which he then appealed for compassion was one of the things that made people like him; he flung himself upon the pity of the first he met. It might be some one to whom he had said a cutting or mortifying thing at their last encounter, but Bartley did not mind that; what he desired was commiseration, and he confidently ignored the past in a trust that had rarely been abused. If his sarcasm proved that he was quick

and smart, his recourse to those who had suffered from it proved that he did not mean anything by what he said; it showed that he was a man of warm feelings and that his heart was in the right place.

Bartley deplored his disagreeable sensations to the other boarders at breakfast, and affectionately excused himself to them for not going to church, when they turned into the office, and gathered there before the Franklin stove, sensible of the day in freshly shaven chins and newly blacked boots. The habit of church-going was so strong and universal in Equity that even strangers stopping at the hotel found themselves the object of a sort of hospitable competition with the members of the different denominations, who took it for granted that they would wish to go somewhere, and only suffered them a choice between sects. There was no intolerance in their offer of pews, but merely a profound expectation, and one might continue to choose his place of worship Sabbath after Sabbath without offense. This was Bartley's custom, and it had worked to his favor rather than his disadvantage; for in the rather chaotic liberality into which religious sentiment had fallen in Equity, it was tacitly conceded that the editor of a paper devoted to the interests of the whole town ought not to be of fixed theological opinions.

Religion there had largely ceased to be a fact of spiritual experience, and the visible church flourished on condition of providing for the social needs of the community. It was practically held that the salvation of one's soul must not be made too depressing, or the young people would have nothing to do with it. Professors of the sternest creeds temporized with sinners, and did what might be done to win them to heaven by helping them to have a good time here. The church embraced and included the world. It no longer frowned even upon social dancing—a transgression once so heinous in its eyes; it opened its doors to popular lectures, and encouraged secular music in its basements, where, during the winter, oyster-suppers were given in aid of good objects. The Sunday-school was made particularly attractive, both to the children and the young men and girls who taught them. Not only at Thanksgiving, but at Christmas, and latterly even at Easter, there were special observances, which the enterprising spirits having the welfare of the church at heart tried to make significant and agreeable to all, and promotive of good feeling. Christenings and marriages in the church were encouraged, and elaborately celebrated; death alone, though treated with cut-flowers in emblematic devices, refused to lend itself to the

cheerful intentions of those who were struggling to render the idea of another and a better world less repulsive. In contrast with the relaxation and uncertainty of their doctrinal aim, the rude and bold infidelity of old Squire Gaylord had the greater affinity with the mood of the Puritanism they had outgrown. But Bartley Hubbard liked the religious situation well enough. He took a leading part in the entertainments, and did something to impart to them a literary cast, as in the series of readings from the poets which he gave, the first winter, for the benefit of each church in turn. At these lectures he commended himself to the sober elders, who were troubled by the levity of his behavior with young people on other occasions, by asking one of the ministers to open the exercises with prayer, and another, at the close, to invoke the divine blessing; there was no especial relevancy in this, but it pleased. He kept himself, from the beginning, pretty constantly in the popular eye. He was a speaker at all public meetings, where his declamation was admired, and at private parties, where the congealed particles of village society were united in a frozen mass, he was the first to break the ice, and set the angular fragments grating and grinding upon one another.

He now went to his room, and opened his desk, with some vague purposes of bringing up the arrears of his correspondence. Formerly, before his interest in the newspaper had lapsed at all, he used to give his Sunday leisure to making selections and writing paragraphs for it; but he now let the pile of exchanges lie unopened on his desk, and began to rummage through the letters scattered about in it. They were mostly from young ladies with whom he had corresponded, and some of them inclosed the photographs of the writers, doing their best to look as they hoped he might think they looked. They were not love-letters, but were of that sort which the laxness of our social life invites young people, who have met pleasantly, to exchange as long as they like, without explicit intentions on either side; they commit the writers to nothing; they are commonly without result, except in wasting time which is hardly worth saving. Every one who has lived the American life must have produced them in great numbers. While youth lasts, they afford an excitement whose charm is hard to realize afterward.

Bartley's correspondents were young ladies of his college town, where he had first begun to see something of social life in days which he now recognized as those of his green youth. They were not so very far removed in point of time; but the experience of a larger world

in the vacation he had spent with a Boston student had relegated them to a moral remoteness that could not readily be measured. His friend was the son of a family who had diverted him from the natural destiny of a Boston man at Harvard, and sent him elsewhere for sectarian reasons. They were rich people, devout in their way, and benevolent, after a fashion of their own; and their son always brought home with him, for the holidays and other short vacations, some fellow-student accounted worthy of their hospitality through his religious intentions or his intellectual promise. These guests were indicated to the young man by one of the faculty, and he accepted their companionship for the time with what perfunctory civility he could muster. He and Bartley had amused themselves very well during that vacation. The Hallecks were not fashionable people, but they lived wealthily: they had a coachman and an inside man (whom Bartley at first treated with a consideration which it afterward mortified him to think of); their house was richly furnished with cushioned seats, dense carpets, and heavy curtains; and they were visited by other people of their denomination and of a like abundance. Some of these were infected with the prevailing culture of the city, and the young ladies especially dressed in a style and let fall ideas that filled the soul of the country student with wonder and worship. He heard a great deal of talk that he did not understand; but he eagerly treasured every impression, and pieced it out, by question or furtive observation, into an image often shrewdly true, and often grotesquely untrue, to the conditions into which he had been dropped. He civilized himself as rapidly as his light permitted. There was a great deal of church-going; but he and young Halleck went also to lectures and concerts; they even went to the opera, and Bartley, with the privacy of his friend, went to the theater. Halleck said that he did not think there was much harm in a play; but that his people staid away for the sake of the example—a reason that certainly need not hold with Bartley.

At the end of the vacation he returned to college, leaving his measure with Halleck's tailor, and his heart with all the splendors and elegancies of the town. He found the ceilings very low and the fashions much belated in the village; but he reconciled himself as well as he could. The real stress came when he left college and the question of doing something for himself pressed upon him. He intended to study law, but he must meantime earn his living. It had been his fortune to be left, when very young, not only an orphan, but an extremely pretty child, with an exceptional

aptness for study; and he had been better cared for than if his father and mother had lived. He had been not only well housed and fed, and very well dressed, but pitied as an orphan, and petted for his beauty and talent, while he was always taught to think of himself as a poor boy, who was winning his own way through the world. But when his benefactor proposed to educate him for the ministry, with a view to his final use in missionary work, he revolted. He apprenticed himself to the printer of his village, and rapidly picked up a knowledge of the business, so that at nineteen he had laid by some money, and was able to think of going to college. There was a fund in aid of indigent students in the institution to which he turned, and the faculty favored him. He finished his course with great credit to himself and the college, and he was naturally inclined to look upon what had been done for him earlier as an advantage taken of his youthful inexperience. He rebelled against the memory of that tutelage, in spite of which he had accomplished such great things. If he had not squandered his time or fallen into vicious courses in circumstances of so much discouragement; if he had come out of it all self-reliant and independent, he knew whom he had to thank for it. The worst of the matter was that there was some truth in all this.

The ardor of his satisfaction cooled in the two years following his graduation, when in intervals of teaching country schools he was actually reduced to work at his trade on a village newspaper. But it was as a practical printer, through the freemasonry of the craft, that Bartley heard of the wish of the Equity committee to place the "Free Press" in new hands, and he had to be grateful to his trade for a primary consideration from them which his collegiate honors would not have won him. There had not yet begun to be that talk of journalism as a profession which has since prevailed with our collegians, and if Bartley had thought, as other collegians think, of devoting himself to newspaper life, he would have turned his face toward the city where its prizes are won—the ten and fifteen dollar reporterships for which a four years' course of the classics is not too costly a preparation. But, to tell the truth, he had never regarded his newspaper as anything but a make-shift, by which he was to be carried over a difficult and anxious period of his life, and enabled to attempt something worthier his powers. He had no illusions concerning it; if he had ever thought of journalism as a grand and ennobling profession, these ideas had perished in his experience in a village printing-office. He came to his work in Equity with practical and immediate purposes which pleased the committee

better. The paper had been established some time before, in one of those flurries of ambition which from time to time seized Equity, when its citizens reflected that it was the central town in the county, and yet not the shire-town. The question of the removal of the county-seat had periodically arisen before; but it had never been so hotly agitated as now. The paper had been a happy thought of a local politician, whose conception of its management was that it might be easily edited by a committee, if a printer could be found to publish it; but a few months' experience had made the "Free Press" a terrible burden to its founders; it could not be sustained, and it could not be let die without final disaster to the interests of the town; and the committee began to cast about for a publisher who could also be editor. Bartley, to whom it fell, could not be said to have thrown his heart and soul into the work, but he threw all his energy, and he made it more than its friends could have hoped. He espoused the cause of Equity in the pending question with the zeal of a *condottiere*, and did service no less faithful because of the cynical quality latent in it. When the legislative decision against Equity put an end to its ambitious hopes for the time being, he continued in control of the paper, with a fair prospect of getting the property into his own hands at last, and with some growing question in his mind whether, after all, it might not be as easy for him to go into politics from the newspaper as from the law. He managed the office very economically, and by having the work done by girl apprentices, with the help of one boy, he made it self-supporting. He modeled the newspaper upon the modern conception, through which the country press must cease to have any influence in public affairs, and each paper become little more than an open letter of neighborhood gossip. But while he filled his sheet with minute chronicles of the goings and comings of unimportant persons, and with all attainable particulars of the ordinary life of the different localities, he continued to make spicy hits at the enemies of Equity in the late struggle, and kept the public spirit of the town alive. He had lately undertaken to make known its advantages as a summer resort, and had published a series of encomiums upon the beauty of its scenery and the healthfulness of its air and water, which it was believed would put it in a position of rivalry with some of the famous White Mountain places. He invited the enterprise of outside capital, and advocated a narrow-gauge road up the valley of the river through the Notch, so as to develop the picturesque

advantages of that region. In all this the color of mockery let the wise perceive that Bartley saw the joke and enjoyed it, and it deepened the popular impression of his smartness.

This vein of cynicism was not characteristic, as it would have been in an older man; it might have been part of that spiritual and intellectual unruliness of youth, which people laugh at and forgive, and which one generally regards in after life as something almost alien to oneself. He wrote long, bragging articles about Equity, in a tone bordering on burlesque, and he had a department in his paper where he printed humorous squibs of his own and of other people; these were sometimes copied, and in the daily papers of the State he had been mentioned as "the funny man of the Equity 'Free Press.'" He also sent letters to one of the Boston journals, which he reproduced in his own sheet, and which gave him an importance that the best endeavor as a country editor would never have won him with the villagers. He would naturally, as the local printer, have ranked a little above the foreman of the saw-mill in the social scale, and decidedly below the master of the Academy; but his personal qualities elevated him over the head even of the latter. But above all, the fact that he was studying law was a guaranty of his superiority that nothing else could have given; that science is the fountain of the highest distinction in a country town. Bartley's whole course implied that he was above editing the "Free Press," but that he did it because it served his turn. That was admirable.

He sat a long time with these girls' letters before him, and lost himself in a pensive reverie over their photographs, and over the good times he used to have with them. He mused in that formless way in which a young man thinks about young girls; his soul is suffused with a sense of their sweetness and brightness, and unless he is distinctly in love there is no intention in his thoughts of them; even then there is often no intention. Bartley might very well have a good conscience about them; he had broken no hearts among them, and had only met them half-way in flirtation. What he really regretted, as he held their letters in his hand, was that he had never got up a correspondence with two or three of the girls whom he had met in Boston. Though he had been cowed by their magnificence in the beginning, he had never had any reverence for them; he believed that they would have liked very well to continue his acquaintance; but he had not known how to open a correspondence, and the point was

one on which he was ashamed to consult Halleck. These college-belles, compared with them, were amusingly inferior; by a natural turn of thought, he realized that they were inferior to Marcia Gaylord, too, in looks and style, no less than in an impassioned preference for himself. A distaste for their somewhat veteran ways in flirtation grew upon him as he thought of her; he philosophized against them to her advantage; he could not blame her if she did not know how to hide her feelings for him. His college training had been purely intellectual; it left his manners and morals untouched, and it seemed not to have concerned itself with his diction or accent; so far as his thoughts took shape in words, he thought slangily; and he now reflected that no girl had ever "gone for him" so before; yet he knew that Marcia was the right sort, and would rather have died than let him suppose that she cared for him, if she had known that she was doing it. The fun of it was, that she should not know; this charmed him, it touched him, even; he did not think of it exultantly, as the night before, but sweetly, fondly, and with a final curiosity to see her again, and enjoy the fact in her presence. The acrid little jets of smoke which escaped from the joints of his stove from time to time annoyed him; he shut his portfolio at last and went out to walk.

IV.

THE forenoon sunshine, beating strong upon the thin snow along the edges of the porch floor, tattered them with a little thaw here and there; but it had no effect upon the hard-packed levels of the street, up the middle of which he walked in a silence intensified by the muffled voices of exhortation that came to him out of the churches. It was in the very heart of sermon-time, and he had the whole street to himself on his way up to Squire Gaylord's house. As he drew near, he saw smoke ascending from the chimney of the lawyer's office—a little white building that stood apart from the dwelling on the left of the gate, and he knew that the old man was within, reading there, with his hat on and his long legs flung out toward the stove, unshaven and unkempt, in a grim protest against the prevalent Christian superstition. He might be reading Hume or Gibbon, or he might be reading the Bible—a book in which he was deeply versed, and from which he was furnished with texts for the demolition of its friends, his adversaries. He professed himself a great admirer of its literature, and, in the heat of controversy, he often found himself a defender of its doctrines when he had occa-

sion to expose the fallacy of latitudinarian interpretations. For liberal Christianity he had nothing but contempt, and refuted it with a scorn which spared none of the worldly tendencies of the church in Equity. The idea that souls were to be saved by church sociables filled him with inappeasable rancor; and he maintained the superiority of the old Puritanic discipline against them with a fervor which nothing but its reestablishment could have abated. It was said that Squire Gaylord's influence had largely helped to keep in place the last of the rigidly orthodox ministers, under whom his liberalizing congregation chafed for years of discontent; but this was probably an exaggeration of the native humor. Mrs. Gaylord had belonged to this church, and had never formally withdrawn from it, and the lawyer always contributed to pay the minister's salary. He also managed a little property for him so well as to make him independent when he was at last asked to resign by his deacons.

In another mood, Bartley might have stepped aside to look in on the Squire, before asking at the house-door for Marcia. They relished each other's company, as people of contrary opinions and of no opinions are apt to do. Bartley loved to hear the Squire get going, as he said, and the old man felt a fascination in the youngster. Bartley was smart; he took a point as quick as lightning; and the Squire did not mind his making friends with the Mammon of Righteousness, as he called the visible church in Equity. It amused him to see Bartley lending the church the zealous support of the press, with an impartial patronage of the different creeds. There had been times in his own career when the silence of his opinions would have greatly advanced him, but he had not chosen to pay this price for success; he liked his freedom, or he liked the bitter tang of his own tongue too well, and he had remained a leading lawyer in Equity, when he might have ended a judge, or even a Congressman. Of late years, however, since people whom he could have joined in their agnosticism so heartily, up to a certain point, had begun to make such fools of themselves about Darwinism and the brotherhood of all men in the monkey, he had grown much more tolerant. He still clung to his old-fashioned deistical opinions; but he thought no worse of a man for not holding them; he did not deny that a man might be a Christian, and still be a very good man.

The audacious humor of his position sufficed with a people who liked a joke rather better than anything else; in his old age, his infidelity was something that would hardly have been changed, if possible, by a popular vote.

Even his wife, to whom it had once been a heavy cross, borne with secret prayer and tears, had long ceased to gainsay it in any wise. Her family had opposed her yoking with an unbeliever when she married him, but she had some such hopes of converting him as women cherish who give themselves to men confirmed in drunkenness. She learned, as other women do, that she could hardly change her husband in the least of his habits, and that, in this great matter of his unbelief, her love was powerless. It became easier at last for her to add self-sacrifice to self-sacrifice than to vex him with her anxieties about his soul, and to act upon the feeling that if he must be lost, then she did not care to be saved. He had never interfered with her church-going; he had rather promoted it, for he liked to have women go; but the time came when she no longer cared to go without him; she lapsed from her membership, and it was now many years since she had worshiped with the people of her faith, if, indeed, she were still of any faith. Her life was silenced in every way, and, as often happens with aging wives in country towns, she seldom went out of her own door, and never appeared at the social or public solemnities of the village. Her husband and her daughter composed and bounded her world,—she always talked of them, or of other things as related to them. She had grown an elderly woman, without losing the color of her yellow hair; and the bloom of girlhood had been staid in her cheeks as if by the young habit of blushing, which she had kept. She was still what her neighbors called very pretty-appearing, and she must have been a beautiful girl. The silence of her inward life subdued her manner, till now she seemed always to have come from some place on which a deep hush had newly fallen.

She answered the door when Bartley turned the crank that snapped the gong-bell in its center; and the young man, who was looking at the street while waiting for some one to come, confronted her with a start.

"Oh!" he said, "I thought it was Marcia. Good-morning, Mrs. Gaylord. Isn't Marcia at home?"

"She went to church, this morning," replied her mother. "Wont you walk in?"

"Why, yes, I guess I will, thank you," faltered Bartley, in the irresolution of his disappointment. "I hope I sha'n't disturb you."

"Come right into the sitting-room. She wont be gone a great while, now," said Mrs. Gaylord, leading the way to the large square room into which a door at the end of the narrow hall opened. A slumbrous heat from a sheet-iron wood-stove pervaded the place,

and a clock ticked monotonously on a shelf in the corner. Mrs. Gaylord said, "Wont you take a chair?" and herself sank into the rocker, with a deep feather cushion in the seat, and a thinner feather cushion tied half-way up the back. After the more active duties of her housekeeping were done, she sat every day in this chair with her knitting or sewing, and let the clock tick the long hours of her life away, with no more apparent impatience of them, or sense of their dullness, than the cat on the braided rug at her feet, or the geraniums in the pots at the sunny window.

"Are you pretty well to-day?" she asked.

"Well, no, Mrs. Gaylord, I'm not," answered Bartley. "I'm all out of sorts. I haven't felt so dyspeptic for I don't know how long."

Mrs. Gaylord smoothed the silk dress across her lap—the thin old black silk which she still instinctively put on for Sabbath observance, though it was so long since she had worn it to church.

"Mr. Gaylord used to have it when we were first married, though he aint been troubled with it of late years. He seemed to think, then, it was worse Sundays."

"I don't believe Sunday has much to do with it, in my case. I ate some mince-pie and some toasted cheese, last night, and I guess they didn't agree with me very well," said Bartley, who did not spare himself the confession of his sins when seeking sympathy: it was this candor that went so far to convince people of his good-heartedness.

"I don't know as I ever heard that meat-pie was bad," said Mrs. Gaylord, thoughtfully. "Mr. Gaylord used to eat it right along all through his dyspepsia, and he never complained of it. And the cheese ought to have made it digest."

"Well, I don't know what it was," replied Bartley, plaintively submitting to be exonerated, "but I feel perfectly used up. Oh, I suppose I shall get over it, or forget all about it, by to-morrow," he added, with strenuous cheerfulness. "It isn't anything worth minding."

Mrs. Gaylord seemed to differ with him on this point.

"Head ache any?" she asked.

"It did this morning, when I first woke up," Bartley assented.

"I don't believe but what a cup of tea would be the best thing for you," she said, critically.

Bartley had instinctively practiced a social art which ingratiated him with people at Equity as much as his demands for sympathy endeared him: he gave trouble in little unusual ways. He now said:

"Oh, I wish you would give me a cup, Mrs. Gaylord."

"Why, yes, indeed! That's just what I was going to," she replied. She went to the kitchen, which lay beyond another room, and re-appeared with the tea directly, proud of her promptness, but having it on her conscience to explain it. "I 'most always keep the pot on the stove hearth, Sunday morning, so's to have ready if Mr. Gaylord ever wants a cup. He's a master hand for tea, and always was. There: I guess you better take it without milk. I put some sugar in the saucer, if you want any." She dropped noiselessly upon her feather cushion again, and Bartley, who had risen to receive the tea from her remained standing while he drank it.

"That does seem to go to the spot," he said, as he sipped it, thoughtfully observant of its effect upon his disagreeable feelings. "I wish I had you to take care of me, Mrs. Gaylord, and keep me from making a fool of myself," he added, when he had drained the cup. "No, no!" he cried, at her offering to take it from him. "I'll set it down. I know it will fret you to have it in here, and I'll carry it out into the kitchen." He did so before she could prevent him, and came back, touching his mustache with his handkerchief. "I declare, Mrs. Gaylord, I should love to live in a kitchen like that."

"I guess you wouldn't if you had to," said Mrs. Gaylord, flattered into a smile. "Marcia, she likes to sit out there, she says, better than anywhere in the house. But I always tell her it's because she was there so much when she was little. I don't see as she seems over-anxious to do anything there *but* sit, I tell her. Not but what she knows how well enough. Mr. Gaylord, too, he's great for being 'round in the kitchen. If he gets up in the night, when he has his waking spells, he had rather take his lamp out there, if there's a fire left, and read, any time, than what he would in the parlor. Well, we used to sit there together a good deal when we were young, and he got the habit of it. There's everything in habit," she added, thoughtfully. "Marcia, she's got quite in the way, lately, of going to the Methodist church."

"Yes, I've seen her there. You know I board 'round at the different churches, as the school-master used to at the houses in the old times."

Mrs. Gaylord looked up at the clock, and gave a little nervous laugh.

"I don't know what Marcia will say to my letting her company stay in the sitting-room. She's pretty late to-day. But I guess you wont have much longer to wait, now."

She spoke with that awe of her daughter

and her judgments which is one of the pathetic idiosyncrasies of a certain class of American mothers. They feel themselves to be not so well educated as their daughters, whose fancied knowledge of the world they let outweigh their own experience of life; they are used to deferring to them, and they shrink willingly into household drudges before them, and leave them to order the social affairs of the family. Mrs. Gaylord was not much afraid of Bartley for himself, but as Marcia's company he made her more and more uneasy toward the end of the quarter of an hour in which she tried to entertain him with her simple talk, varying from Mr. Gaylord to Marcia, and from Marcia to Mr. Gaylord again. When she recognized the girl's quick touch in the closing of the front door, and her elastic step approached through the hall, the mother made a little deprecating noise in her throat, and fidgeted in her chair. As soon as Marcia opened the sitting-room door, Mrs. Gaylord modestly rose and went out into the kitchen: the mother who remained in the room when her daughter had company was an oddity almost unknown in Equity.

Marcia's face flashed all into a light of joy at sight of Bartley, who scarcely waited for her mother to be gone before he drew her toward him by the hand she had given. She mechanically yielded, and then, as if the recollection of some new resolution forced itself through her pleasure at sight of him, she freed her hand, and, retreating a step or two, confronted him.

"Why, Marcia," he said, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," she answered.

It might have amused Bartley, if he had felt quite well, to see the girl so defiant of him, when she was really so much in love with him, but it certainly did not amuse him now: it disappointed him in his expectation of finding her femininely soft and comforting, and he did not know just what to do. He stood staring at her in discomfiture, while she gained in outward composure, though her cheeks were of the Jacqueminot red of the ribbon at her throat.

"What have I done, Marcia?" he faltered.

"Oh, you haven't done anything."

"Some one has been talking to you against me."

"No one has said a word to me about you."

"Then why are you so cold—so strange—so—so—different?"

"Different?"

"Yes, from what you were last night," he answered, with an aggrieved air.

"Oh, we see some things differently by day-

light," she lightly explained. "Wont you sit down?"

"No, thank you," Bartley replied, sadly but unresentfully. "I think I had better be going. I see there is something wrong——"

"I don't see why you say there is anything wrong," she retorted. "What have I done?"

"Oh, you have not *done* anything; I take it back. It is all right. But when I came here this morning—encouraged—hoping—that you had the same feeling as myself, and you seem to forget everything but a ceremonious acquaintanceship—why it is all right, of course. I have no reason to complain; but I must say that I can't help being surprised." He saw her lips quiver and her bosom heave. "Marcia, do you blame me for feeling hurt at your coldness when I came here to tell you—to tell you I—I love you?" With his nerves all unstrung, and his hunger for sympathy, he really believed that he had come to tell her this. "Yes," he added, bitterly, "I *will* tell you, though it seems to be the last word I shall speak to you. I'll go, now."

"Bartley! You shall *never* go!" she cried, throwing herself in his way. "Do you think I don't care for you, too? You may kiss me—you may *kill* me, now!" The passionate tears sprang to her eyes, without the sound of sobs or the contortion of weeping, and she did not wait for his embrace. She flung her arms around his neck and held him fast, crying: "I wouldn't kiss you for your own sake, darling; and if I had died for it—I thought I should die last night—I was never going to let you put your arm around me again till you said—till—till—now! Don't you see?" She caught him tighter, and hid her face in his neck, and cried and laughed for joy and shame, while he suffered her caresses with a certain bewilderment. "I want to tell you now—I want to explain," she said, lifting her face and letting him from her as far as her arms, caught around his neck, would reach, and fervidly searching his eyes, lest some ray of what he would think should escape her. "Don't speak a word first! Father saw us at the door last night—he happened to be coming downstairs, because he couldn't sleep—just when you——. Oh, Bartley, don't!" she implored, at the little smile that made his mustache quiver. "And he asked me whether we were engaged; and, when I couldn't tell him we were, I know what he thought. I knew how he despised me, and I determined that, if you didn't tell me that you cared for me, you should never touch me again, except to shake hands, like any one else; and that's the reason, Bartley, and not—not because I didn't care more for you than I do for the

whole world. And—and—you don't mind it, now, do you? It was for your sake, dearest."

Whether Bartley perfectly divined or not all the feeling at which her words hinted, it was delicious to be clung about by such a pretty girl as Marcia Gaylord, to have her now darting her face into his neck-scarf with intolerable consciousness, and now boldly confronting him with all-defying fondness while she lightly pushed him and pulled him here and there in the vehemence of her appeal; and Bartley laughed as he caught her head between his hands, and covered her lips and eyes with his kisses. Perhaps such a man, in those fastnesses of his nature which psychology has not yet explored, never loses, even in the tenderest transports, the sense of prey as to the girl whose love he has won; but if this is certain, it is also certain that he has transports which are tender, and Bartley now felt his soul melted with affection that was very novel and sweet.

"Why, Marcia!" he said, "what a strange girl you are!" He sunk into his chair again, and, putting his arms around her waist, gathered her upon his knee, like a child.

She held herself apart from him at her arm's length, and said:

"Wait! Let me say it before it seems as if we had always been engaged, and everything was as right then as it is now. Did you despise me for letting you kiss me before we were engaged?"

"No," he laughed again. "I liked you for it."

"But if you thought I would let any one else, you wouldn't have liked it?"

This diverted him still more.

"I shouldn't have liked that more than half as well."

"No," she said, thoughtfully. She dropped her face awhile on his shoulder, and seemed to be struggling with herself. Then she lifted it, and "Did you ever—did you——" she gasped.

He put her head down with his hand, and turned his face aside to nestle against hers. Then he said, laughing out his amusement in her:

"If you want me to say that all the other girls in the world are not worth a hair of your head, I'll say that, Marcia. Now, let's talk business!"

This made her laugh, and—

"I shall want a little lock of yours," she said, as if they had hitherto been talking of nothing but each other's hair.

"And I shall want all of yours," he answered.

"No. Don't be silly." She critically explored his face. "How funny to have a mole

in your eyebrow!" She put her finger on it. "I never saw it before."

"You never looked so closely. There's a scar at the corner of your upper lip that I hadn't noticed."

"Can you see that?" she demanded, radiantly. "Well, you *have* got good eyes! The cat did it when I was a little girl."

The door opened, and Mrs. Gaylord surprised them in the celebration of these discoveries—or, rather, she surprised herself, for she stood holding the door and helpless to move, though in her heart she had an apologetic impulse to retire, and she even believed that she made some murmurs of excuse for her intrusion. Bartley was equally abashed, but Marcia rose with the coolness of her sex in the intimate emergencies which confound a man.

"Oh, mother, it's you! I forgot about you. Come in! Or I'll set the table, if that's what you want." As Mrs. Gaylord continued to look from her to Bartley in her daze, Marcia added, simply: "We're engaged, mother. You may as well know it first as last, and I guess you better know it first."

Her mother appeared not to think it safe to relax her hold upon the door, and Bartley went filially to her rescue—if it was rescue to salute her blushing defenselessness as he did. A confused sense of the extraordinary nature and possible impropriety of the proceeding may have suggested her husband to her mind; or it may have been a feeling that some remark was expected of her, even in the mental destitution to which she was reduced.

"Have you told Mr. Gaylord about it?" she asked, of either, or neither, or both, as they chose to take it.

Bartley left the word to Marcia, who answered:

"Well, no, mother. We haven't yet. We've only just found it out ourselves. I guess father can wait till he comes in to dinner. I intend to keep Bartley here to prove it."

"He said," remarked Mrs. Gaylord, whom Bartley had led to her chair and placed on her cushion, "'t he had a headache when he first came in," and she appealed to him for corroboration, while she vainly endeavored to gather force to grapple again with the larger fact that he and Marcia were just engaged to be married.

Marcia stooped down, and pulled her mother up out of her chair with a hug.

"Oh, come now, mother! You mustn't let it take your breath away," she said, with patronizing fondness. "I'm not afraid of what father will say. You know what he thinks of Bartley—or Mr. Hubbard, as I presume you'll want me to call him! Now,

mother, you just run upstairs, and put on your best cap, and leave me to set the table and get up the dinner. I guess I can get Bartley to help me. Mother, mother, mother!" she cried, in happiness that was otherwise unutterable, and clasping her mother closer in her strong young arms, she kissed her with a fervor that made her blush again before the young man.

"Marcia, Marcia! You hadn't ought to! It's ridiculous!" she protested. But she suffered herself to be thrust out of the room, grateful for exile, in which she could collect her scattered wits and set herself to realize the fact that had dispersed them. It was decorous, also, for her to leave Marcia alone with Mr. Hubbard, far more so now than when he was merely company; she felt that, and she fumbled over the dressing she was sent about, and once she looked out of her chamber window at the office where Mr. Gaylord sat, and wondered what Mr. Gaylord (she thought of him, and even dreamt of him as Mr. Gaylord, and had never, in the most familiar moments, addressed him otherwise) *would* say! But she left the solution of the problem to him and Marcia; she was used to leaving them to the settlement of their own difficulties.

"Now, Bartley," said Marcia, in the business-like way that women assume in such matters, as soon as the great fact is no longer in doubt, "you must help me to set the table. Put up that leaf and I'll put up this. I'm going to do more for mother than I used to," she said, repentant in her bliss. "It's a shame how much I've left to her." The domestic instinct was already astir in her heart.

Bartley pulled the table-cloth straight from her, and vied with her in the rapidity and exactness with which he arranged the knives and forks at right angles beside the plates. When it came to some heavier dishes, they agreed to carry them turn about; but when it was her turn, he put his arm about her to support her elbow—"as I did last night, and saved you from dropping a lamp."

This made her laugh, and she dropped the first dish with a crash.

"Poor mother!" she exclaimed. "I know she heard that, and she'll be in agony to know which one it is."

Mrs. Gaylord did indeed hear it, far off in her chamber, and quaked with an anxiety which became intolerable at last.

"Marcia! Marcia!" she quavered, down the stairs, "what *have* you broken?"

Marcia opened the door long enough to call back, "Oh, only the old blue-edged platter, mother!" and then she flew at Bartley, cry-

ing, "For shame! For shame!" and pressing her hand over his mouth to stifle his laughter. "She'll hear you, Bartley, and think you're laughing at her."

But she laughed herself at his struggles, and ended by taking him by the hand and pulling him out into the kitchen, where neither of them could be heard. She abandoned herself to the ecstasy of her soul, and he thought she had never been so charming as in this wild gayety.

"Why, Marsh! I never saw you carry on so before!"

"You never saw me engaged before! That's the way all girls act—if they get the chance. Don't you like me to be so?" she asked, with quick anxiety.

"Rather!" he replied.

"Oh, Bartley!" she exclaimed, "I feel like a child. I surprise myself as much as I do you; for I thought I had got very old, and I didn't suppose I should ever let myself go in this way. But there is something about this that lets me be as silly as I like. It's somehow as if I were a great deal more alone when I'm with you than when I'm by myself! How does it make you feel?"

"Good!" he answered, and that satisfied her better than if he had entered into those subtleties which she had tried to express: it was more like a man. He had his arm about her waist again, and she put down her hand on his to press it closer against her heart.

"Of course," she explained, recurring to his surprise at her frolic mood, "I don't expect you to be silly because I am."

"No," he assented; "but how can I help it?"

"Oh, I don't mean for the time being; I mean generally speaking. I mean that I care for you because I know you know a great deal more than I do, and because I respect you. I know that everybody expects you to be something great, and I do, too."

Bartley did not deny the justness of her opinions concerning himself, or the reasonableness of the general expectation, though he probably could not see the relation of these cold abstractions to the pleasure of sitting with an arm around a girl's waist. But he said nothing.

"Do you know," she went on, turning her face prettily around toward him, but holding it a little way off, to secure attention as impersonal as might be under the circumstances, "what pleased me more than anything else you ever said to me?"

"No," answered Bartley. "Something you got out of me when you were trying to make me tell you the difference between you and the other Equity girls?"

VOL. XXIII.—23.

She laughed, in glad defiance of her own consciousness.

"Well, I *was* trying to make you compliment me; I'm not going to deny it. But I must say I got my come-uppance: you didn't say a thing I cared for. But you did afterward. Don't you remember?"

"No. When?"

She hesitated a moment.

"When you told me that my influence had—had—made you better, you know——"

"Oh!" said Bartley. "That! Well," he added, carelessly, "it's every word true. Didn't you believe it?"

"I was just as glad as if I did; and it made me resolve never to do or say a thing that could lower your opinion of me; and then, you know, you kissed me there at the door, and it all seemed part of our trying to make each other better. But when father looked at me in that way, and asked me if we were engaged, I went down into the dust with shame. And worse than that, it seemed to me that you had just been laughing at me, and amusing yourself with me, and I was so furious I didn't know what to do. Do you know what I wanted to do? I wanted to run downstairs to father, and tell him what you had said, and ask him if he believed you had ever done so to any other girl." She paused a little, but he did not answer, and she continued. "But now I'm glad I didn't. And I shall never ask you that, and I shall not care for anything that you—that's happened before to-day. It's all right. And you *do* think I shall always *try* to make you good and happy, don't you?"

"I don't think you can make me much happier than I am at present, and I don't believe anybody could make me feel better," answered Bartley.

She gave a little laugh at his refusal to be serious, and let her head, for fondness, fall upon his shoulder, while he turned round and round a ring he found on her finger.

"Ah, ha!" he said, after a while. "Who gave you this ring, Miss Gaylord?"

"Father, Christmas before last," she promptly answered, without moving. "I'm glad you asked," she murmured, in a lower voice, full of pride in the maiden love she could give him. "There's never been any one but you, or the thought of any one." She suddenly started away.

"Now, let's play we're getting dinner." It was quite time; in the next moment the coffee boiled up, and if she had not caught the lid off and stirred it down with her spoon, it would have been spoiled. The steam ascended to the ceiling, and filled the kitchen with the fragrant smell of the berry.

"I'm glad we're going to have coffee," she said. "You'll have to put up with a cold dinner, except potatoes. But the coffee will make up, and I shall need a cup to keep me awake. I don't believe I slept last night till nearly morning. Do you like coffee?"

"I'd have given all I ever expect to be worth for a cup of it, last night," he said. "I was awfully hungry when I got back to the hotel, and I couldn't find anything but a piece of mince-pie and some old cheese, and I had to be content with cold milk. I felt as if I had lost all my friends this morning when I woke up."

A sense of remembered grievance trembled in his voice, and made her drop her head on his arm, in pity and derision of him.

"Poor Bartley!" she cried. "And you came up here for a little petting from me, didn't you? I've noticed that in you! Well, you didn't get it, did you?"

"Well, not at first," he said.

"Yes, you can't complain of any want of petting at last," she returned, delighted at his indirect recognition of the difference. Then the daring, the archness, and caprice that make coquetry in some women, and lurk a divine possibility in all, came out in her; the sweetness, kept back by the whole strength of her pride, overflowed that broken barrier now, and she seemed to lavish this revelation of herself upon him with a sort of tender joy in his bewilderment. She was not hurt when he crudely expressed the elusive sense which has been in other men's minds at such times: they cannot believe that this fascination is inspired, and not practiced.

"Well," he said, "I'm glad you told me that I was the first. I should have thought you'd had a good deal of experience in flirtation."

"You wouldn't have thought so if you hadn't been a great flirt yourself," she answered, audaciously. "Perhaps I have been engaged before!"

Their talk was for the most part frivolous, and their thoughts ephemeral; but again they were, with her at least, suddenly and deeply serious. Till then all things seemed to have been held in arrest, and impressions, ideas, feelings, fears, desires, released themselves simultaneously, and sought expression with a rush that defied coherence.

"Oh, why do we try to talk?" she asked, at last. "The more we say the more we leave unsaid. Let us keep still awhile!"

But she could not.

"Bartley! When did you first think you cared about me?"

"I don't know," said Bartley. "I guess it must have been the first time I saw you."

"Yes. That is when I first knew that I cared for you. But it seems to me that I must have always cared for you, and that I only found it out when I saw you going by the house that day." She mused a little time before she asked again.

"Bartley!"

"Well?"

"Did you ever use to be afraid— Or, no! Wait! I'll *tell* you first, and then I'll *ask* you. I'm not ashamed of it now, though once I thought I couldn't bear to have any one find it out. I used to be awfully afraid you didn't care for me! I would try to make out, from things you did and said, whether you did or not; but I never could be certain. I believe I used to find the most comfort in discouraging myself. I used to say to myself, 'Why, of course he doesn't! How can he? He's been around everywhere, and he's seen so many girls. He corresponds with lots of them. Altogether likely he's engaged to some of the young ladies he's met in Boston; and he just goes with me here for a blind.' And then when you would praise me, sometimes, I would just say, 'Oh, he's complimented plenty of girls. I know he's thinking this instant of the young lady he's engaged to in Boston.' And it would almost kill me; and when you did some little thing to show that you liked me, I would think, 'He doesn't like me! He hates, he despises me. He does, he does, he does!' And I would go on that way, with my teeth shut, and my breath held, I don't know *how* long."

Bartley broke out into a broad laugh at this image of desperation, but she added, tenderly,

"I hope I never made you suffer in that way?"

"What way?" he asked.

"That's what I wanted you to tell me. Did you ever—did you use to be afraid sometimes that I—that you— Did you put off telling me that you cared for me so long because you thought, you dreaded— Oh, I don't see what I can ever do to make it up to you if you did! Were you afraid I didn't care for you?"

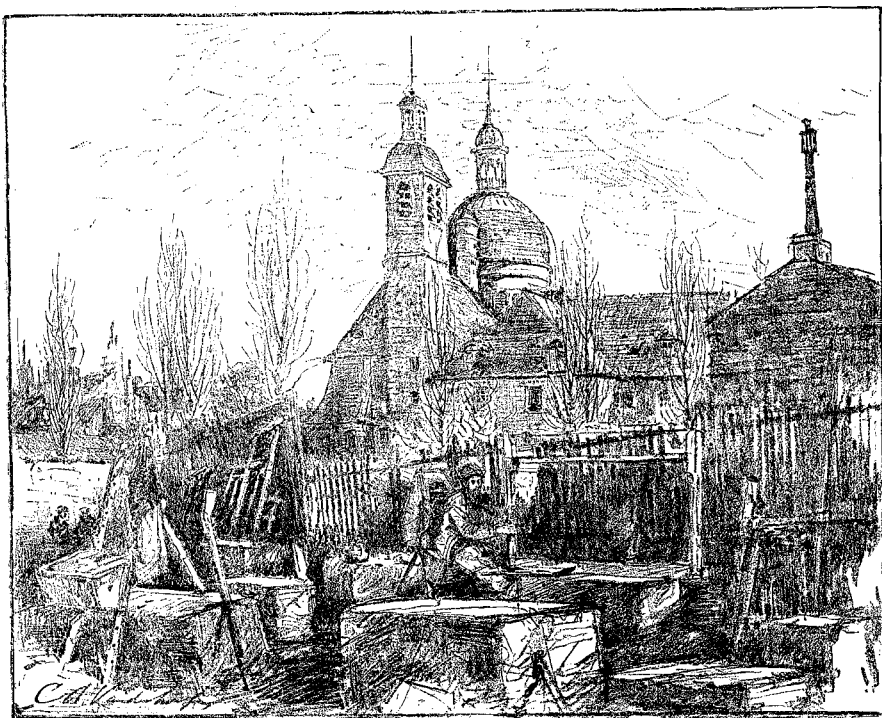
"No!" shouted Bartley. She had risen and stood before him in the fervor of her entreaty, and he seized her arms, pinioning them to her side, and holding her helpless, while he laughed, and laughed again. "I knew you were dead in love with me from the first moment."

"Bartley! Bartley Hubbard!" she exclaimed; "let me go—let me go, this instant! I never heard of such a shameless thing!"

But she really made no effort to escape.

(To be continued.)

THE AMERICAN STUDENT AT THE BEAUX-ARTS.



IN THE LATIN QUARTER. (C. A. VANDERHOOF.)

THE young American who has come to Paris to learn to paint will, of course, make straight for the "Quartier Latin," if only to be near the school of the Beaux-Arts. He will pleasantly recall a good deal he has read about "the Quarter," and he will be too well prepared for delight to escape disappointment. That habitat of the student race is no longer the picturesque tangle of old-fashioned streets with which the prose poetry of the Romantic period has made us familiar. The hand of civic improvement is rapidly reducing the region to right angles. The aboriginal inhabitant or student flies before the invader to the most inaccessible parts of this labyrinth, but, in some instances, he sees the folly of resistance, and takes his lodging in the straight streets. The American, however, is always the last to yield, for to him these most unreasonable thoroughfares constitute one of the charms of living abroad. He likes to wind himself into his house like a shell-fish, as though to find relief from the maddening geometrical memories of a childhood passed in a city of "blocks." There is but little of the old Quarter left, what with the

Boulevard St. Germain cutting through it at one angle, and the equally straight, broad, perfect, and altogether exasperating Boulevard St. Michael intersecting it at another. Between these two, however, some quaint old bits still nestle, or rather hide, as though in terror of approaching dissolution, and, by fairly diligent search, you may find just enough of decay to make a picture.

The men are at first as disappointing as the Quarter, but they are disappointing in the best sense. The novice, fresh from the schools at home, will miss much of the raw art talk, rough-hewed in the block from Ruskin and Symonds. The student of the Quarter is a man of action in art. His devotion, however intense, rarely finds expression in any form of words, though often enough in a quiet endurance of hardships. It is just as bad form at the Beaux-Arts as at Magdalen to talk like a book about the studies of the place. There has, in fact, been a change all around in the character of the youthful colony. It has extended to the girl students, who once gave no small scandal here by trying to ignore the difference in manners and customs be-