

A QUESTION OF HAPPINESS.¹

BY GRACE MARGARET GALLAHER.

"IT's a pretty sight," murmured Captain Minnie; "I declare, I dunno why I want ter spile it cuttin' it down. Let 'em call it slack, I say." He hung his scythe on the fence, smiling in deprecation at an imaginary tribunal. "It ain't neat, that's a true word, but I dunno when I've seen anything more cheerful." He gathered a handful of buttercups and grasses, touching each in silent salute. "Come ter think o' it, the river's 'bout the worst-lookin' thing round here—all witchy waves. None of 'em runnin' the same way, neither. Wonder folks 'low it in front their doors."

His wonted tranquillity restored by this little joke, he turned his eyes toward the Connecticut, flashing like diamonds where the sun smote it. Around him stretched a tangle of grasses and buttercups. A narrow parting, as by a comb, showed the path to the house, a large building hidden among lilac-bushes and syringas. The village folks said Captain Minnie would have had a "sightly place, if he'd only fix it up." To the same critics the owner was as his grounds—potentially praiseworthy, as possessing elements of worth and attractiveness, but actually prevented by neglect and whims.

Captain Minnie was accounted "dreadful queer" by his fellow-townsmen, and was pointed out by them to strangers as one of the sights of the village, a concise biographical sketch being added.

Such a sketch, made on the fair morning when, somewhat after the manner of the valiant King of France, he came out with his scythe, and went in with it again, would have described him as a very tall man of fifty, with dark, sad eyes, a sensitive mouth, and gray hair hanging over his coat-collar. He did not often let you look in his eyes; when you did, it was like a glimpse into some deep, still pool. Somehow your heart quickened its beat and your breath flowed less smoothly for an instant, as if in the presence of a mystery. You do not often see the human soul. He carried himself like a soldier on parade, never relaxing into a comforta-

ble slipshodness. This martial bearing stiffened into wooden rigidity at sight of a stranger or a woman; and that is to touch upon the spring whence proceeded half Captain Minnie's queerness. He was the victim of a shyness so vast and so relentless, it might properly be called a disease. His malady was too powerful to manifest itself in any of the ways common to lesser forms of it, such as stammering, blushing, and breaking down in speech. His shyness turned him into a haughty statue, whose monosyllabic replies chilled the most vivacious seeker after truth in that particular well. Like the pious anchorite of whom Burton writes, the presence of a woman produced in him a "cold palsy." Every movement of his life was craftily planned with reference to the number of women he must face in its performance. If too large a number of the "unquiet sex" were involved,—and six made a regiment to him,—the contemplated act was given up unhesitatingly. Although a firm upholder of religion, he was never able to seek its visible temple, for there the women so far outnumbered the men that he felt in physical jeopardy. This "manfearing spirit," as old Parson Howard had pronounced it,—though he should, with strict adherence to the truth, have called it "woman-fearing,"—threatened for a time the one systematic habit of Captain Minnie's day. He went every morning, at exactly ten, to the post-office to get his morning paper. This short trip—down one street and up the next—was heavy with perils; for at the junction of the two roads stood the village hotel, in summer gay with guests, in winter the home of various old maids and widows, who seemed fastened in the front windows. Captain Minnie had endured all things from that hotel—had foregone his paper for days, had expended sums in hired carriers. Then light dawned. He discovered a safe route. This ran through his long acres to the lower side of the river-basin, then along the shore, where mud, dirty boats, and fish-oil were as a castle moat to all women, through Joey Dibble's back yard,—Joey was an old bachelor of evil reputation,—across Aunt Temperance Parmelee's garden,—Aunt

¹ In THE CENTURY'S college competition of graduates of 1897, this story was deemed worthy of receiving the first prize.—EDITOR.

Temperance was bedridden,—and into the back of the office. Only once had this route betrayed him. Rushing home one morning,—rushing was the only method of locomotion known to him, apparently,—he broke into the midst of a girls' sketching club encamped in his own meadows. They surrounded him; they asked him questions about the country, the river, the village; they begged him to pose for their pictures. Captain Minnie's orchard lay open to every small boy, his garden to any friend, and he had been known to invite stray cows to pasture themselves in his clover, because he pitied their grassless wanderings. But on the morrow following this experience the entrance to his fields bore a huge placard which read: "All trespassers will be punished to the full extent of the law."

Captain Minnie received this shyness as a heritage from his father. Minton Ware had been so afraid of his fellow-mortals that report said that if his mother had not performed the office of an intermediary between him and the woman he married, he would have died a celibate. Their one child was brought up in seclusion, his only companions his mother and father. He never went to school; he studied with his father. To avoid the confusion arising from the fact that father and son had both the same name, the son's was shortened by his parents to "Minnie." To the world without the name seemed peculiarly fitting for the timid little boy, and at once was fastened upon him. At twenty came the climacteric of the boy's life; he went to the war, and he became engaged. How the latter event was brought about, the village could not tell; its knowledge went no further than that he did his own "courtin'." He had small chance to enjoy his love-making, for he enlisted at the first call for soldiers. The tall, gawky boy blushed painfully when, at the station, where the villagers had assembled to cheer their departing soldiers, the minister called him "the youngest hero of the noble band." He forgot to blush when he reached Dixie, there was so much else to do. At the end of the four years he came back a captain. In its pride and affection, the village adopted the title, prefixed to the earlier name. His father and mother had both died in his absence. He found still another change: his sweetheart was to marry another man. She was a good, gentle girl, beloved by the village, which could not find place in its heart for stern chiding when she pleaded: "Captain Minnie is an excellent young man, but I was n't nothin' 'cept a

girl when he courted me. I'm a grown woman now, and feel very different toward Alfred from what I did to him." As for Captain Minnie, he said nothing. He went to the wedding, and, if not the most joyous guest present, was not the saddest. He lived on by himself, cooking, and caring for the old house, as his mother had taught him.

Thoughts of love, war, or death were far from him as he gazed over the river, which there by the village broadens into a hill-encircled lake. His dreamy eyes flashed out glints like those in the river. Contentment rested on his face. "A fair prospect," he said aloud (those who live alone often talk to themselves)—"a fair prospect."

"Goin' ter cut yer lawn, Minnie?" said a gruff voice behind him. "It's been a-needin' it fer considerable time back."

Captain Minnie stood to attention.

"Good mornin', Jared. Nice day, ain't it?" He spoke in a slow, gentle bass.

"Pretty good," responded the gruff voice, in the accents of one who could have made it better if he tried. "Terrible wet spell last week, was n't it?" He climbed the wall which separated the garden from the pasture with clumsy movements, for he was old and heavy. "Say, Minnie, um—er—" He shuffled about in the long grass uneasily, and then suddenly broke out: "Did you know that Virginy Green's a-dyin'?"

"No."

"Well, I'm relieved. Says I, 'Like ez not, some one 'll go blurtin' it out ter him 'fore I kin git there, an' break him all up.' So I come streakin' right off myself, soon ez I heard, ter tell you. I never did jest make up my mind 'bout how you felt that time when she up an' mittened you fer Alfred Green—you goin' ter the weddin', an' that, made it kinder queer. Did you know she 'd been sick long back?"

"Yes; consumption."

"Terrible wearin' disease. Seems ez if folks could n't die of it. Now, Virginy she's been 'bout so ever since 'long Christmas-time."

Captain Minnie looked pitifully at the river, as if for aid. A white sail suggested a way of escape.

"'Lect Beebe's hauled his new boat up ter my dock," he said.

"Has? Well, I guess I 'll mog 'long ter see what 'Lect's made out ter buy." As he stumped toward the river he said grimly to himself: "Can't tell no more 'bout Minnie Ware's feelin's than you kin 'bout a woman's. Tell Harriet piece news big enough ter scoop

her right off her feet, all she 'll say 'll be, 'Um, that so?' Like ez not, all the time she 's a-ravin' like Huedie inside."

Left alone, the captain seated himself on the stone steps at the back of his house. This was his favorite seat, as it fronted the river.

"Virginy dyin'," he repeated softly. "She's been dead to me a good many year. Twenty-five year it is since I come home, an' she told me Alfred was her ch'ice. Twenty-five year!" He closed his eyes to let the long dead years pass before his inner sight.

"Virginy was the prettiest girl I ever knew, an' the best," went on the groper in the past. "It was n't no wonder she loved him. He was a good man, too, an' he had sights er things 'bout him I did n't—stirrin' ways, an' nice manners ter folks. They said it was a sin fer her ter treat me so. Why, she could n't help thinkin' more o' him than she did o' me! It would hev been a sin if she 'd 'a' married me, lovin' Alfred all the while, sp'ilin' two lives 'stead o' one. An' mine ain't sp'iled. I 've hed considerable comfort here, all by myself." Then, as if the silent house and lonely garden pressed in upon him, he exclaimed, with a weary droop of the voice: "God knows, this 'd been a different place, an' me a different man, if she 'd 'a' lived here! Always singin' ter herself she was, an' movin' from one thing to 'nother, same ez a bird. I 've seen her, times out o' mind, comin' up the path yander, an' them with her. Like her they be, an' yet some like me; but most like her. I 've seen 'em in the garden playin', an' on the steps here."

Captain Minnie was making his version of

I see their unborn faces shine
Beside the never-lighted fires.

"Mother said she liked her, 'cause she was pretty-behaved, an' kind, an' good-dispositioned. Jared he said she was shifty. I never pulled her to pieces that way to see how she was made. Why, I 'd as soon think o' pullin' a violet to pieces to see how many leaves it 's got, an' how them little green spikes in it are sot on. S'pose you do find out? It 's a violet jest the same, an' has a sweetness an' beauty right down from heaven you can't tell nothin' how it got. I used ter call you my spring, Virginy, do you mind? You made me feel jest like spring does—contented, an' pleased, an' real anxious ter be good. 'T was easy ter be good with you, Virginy. Folks said 't was queer I did n't take on more. Guess I was like Fred Bushnell when the shell burst an'

made him stun-deaf—jest one awful pain, then did n't never anything seem ter come anywheres nigh him."

Some one was coming down the flagged walk. He rose with his usual gentle face.

"Good morning, Captain Ware." The speaker was the minister.

"Good mornin', sir." Captain Minnie regarded ministers with only a shade less of fear than he did women.

"I have a request to make of you. Are you aware Mrs. Virginia Green is—ah—"

"Dyin'?" supplied Captain Minnie, tersely.

"Yes, dying. She has sent me to ask you to come to her. She especially desires to see you, as you were a—er—girlhood friend."

"When she want me?"

"Now, if possible."

Without a glance at his checked shirt and overalls, Captain Minnie followed the minister to his carriage, and drove silently off with him.

The Green farm stood on a lonely road two miles from the village. Lilacs, with their white and purple plumes, surrounded it on three sides. Behind it a sea of white fruit-blossoms stirred and sighed in the breeze. Narcissus, tulips, and jonquils made the dooryard glow. Hard to realize, amid all this exultant life, that the heavy numbness of death was stealing over the house! A woman met them on the porch. She led Captain Minnie down the hall to a door. "She 's there," she said, and left him. He entered on tiptoe, closed the door behind him, and stood with eyes fastened upon the ground.

"You 've come quick; it 's real good o' you," said a sweet, thin voice.

Captain Minnie stood as silent as before.

"Won't you come sit by me, so ez I kin say what I want ter without gettin' so spent?"

Then, at last, he looked at the woman in the bed. She was fair and pretty, like a girl. He had not seen her since her illness, but that had not changed her. No lines of suffering showed on her face. Perhaps approaching eternity had smoothed away those left by vanishing time. He took the delicate hand she held out, and seated himself opposite her.

"Minnie," she said quickly, "you was always good—always, always. I knew it when I treated you so. Mother says to me then: 'He 's an excellent good man, Virginy, an' you 'll suffer fer the way you 're actin' now.' An' many a time I 've thought I was, jest ez mother said, bein' so unfort'nate in money matters, an' Alfred dyin', an' now me, jest

in my prime. Why, Minnie," with a sudden cry, "I ain't but forty-nine. I s'pose I des-serve it all; I done wrong."

"Don't, Virginy, don't! You could n't help lovin' Alfred. I never blamed you."

"I know you did n't. I 'd 'a' made you happy, though I was n't good enough fer you, I guess, Minnie."

"But would you hev been ez happy your-self? That 's the pint."

"No," she answered slowly. "Alfred was the only man ter make me happy."

"An' that was what I cared 'bout most—yer happiness. If we 'd been married, an' you 'd begun ter love Alfred, why, if I could hev done it so ez it 'd been right, I 'd 'a' give you right over ter him."

His voice was very low. A sunbeam lighted his gray hair till it shone silvery bright. On his face was a look beautiful and solemn, as if touched by some thought from that far-away world whither the dying woman was hastening. A bewildered, almost annoyed expression crossed her face. She thought, as often before, "Minnie certainly does lack." When she spoke, it was with the gentle indifference of the dying.

"Hev it yer way 'bout my bein' good, an' I 'll hev it mine 'bout you. 'T ain't 'bout the dead an' dyin' I want ter talk. It 's 'bout the livin'. You know how all my poor little first babies died off, so I ain't got no children left but Mary an' Robbie. They ain't but jest twelve an' thirteen year old. I want you ter be their guardeen, Minnie, an' the executor of my will. Phillenda 's comin' here ter live."

"Phillenda?"

"My sister from Rocky Ridge. Don't you mind her? She was only 'bout ten years old when we—when I was married. She went over ter Grandma Start's ter live 'bout then. She 's been takin' care o' me these last months. She 's a real smart, likely girl. I think the world o' her. She 's goin' ter be j'int guardeen an' executor with you; that is, if you 'll take it"—appealingly.

The awful truth was dawning upon Captain Minnie: she wished him to enter into a sort of partnership with this unknown woman. He wrung his hands as they lay concealed in his lap. He would have groaned but for the sick woman. In fifty years no kindness had ever been asked of him which he had refused. He felt it too late to begin now.

"I 'll do my best," he said simply.

"Seems if I could die easier now. 'Fore you go, Minnie, tell me you forgive me, won't you?"

"There ain't nothin' ter forgive."

"Jest say you forgive me, then."

Captain Minnie smiled, as on a little child.

"I do forgive you, dear," he said; then he bent down and kissed her.

For days Captain Minnie's one desire was that Virginia Green might live for weeks—not for her sake, or that of her children, but that he might postpone as long as possible the dreaded partnership. Vain desire! Mrs. Green died within a week. He went to the funeral, and to the reading of the will. In the gloom of the farm-house parlor, and among the host of relatives who seemed suddenly to have sprung up, he could not make out his particular woman. The day after the funeral was one of acutest misery. When must he go to see her? He decided not that day, or the next, or the next. Then he felt that the time had come. He cooked an early supper, which he was too unhappy to eat, harnessed his horse, dressed himself in what he called his "church clothes," though he had never entered a church since he owned them, and drove mournfully off. At the fork in the road which led to the farm he turned his horse up the opposite way. "Too early ter be goin' yet," he said. He drove on for a mile, circled the rear of the farm, and drove up the approach to the back door. "This ain't right," he said, a minute later. "Looks ez if I was a thief, a-comin' round the back way." He drove round the circle once more till he was again at the fork of the roads. "Kinder light fer callers yet, I guess," he said, peering through the last faint rays of the spring twilight. "Think I 'll drive down ter the old bridge an' back."

Undue lightness could not be urged against his visit as he drove back. He struck a match to see the time. "Nine o'clock! Too late to go to-night." And he drove briskly home, with I know not what joy in his breast. The next night he drove straight down the lane to the farm, with never a glance at the comforting circle. Just at the gate he saw another carriage tied. He turned his own so swiftly that he nearly upset. "Better wait till she ain't got company." The third night he walked. He felt that escape would be more difficult with only two feet than with four, and he had made up his mind that he must not escape. His head swam, his body seemed on fire, and the surrounding world was one red blur, out of which a voice said:

"This 's Captain Ware, ain't it? I 'm real glad ter see you. I 've been expectin' you fer days."

Captain Minnie almost forgot to be frightened, the voice was so low and rich.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

"Now let's set right on the porch an' be comfortable, fer I've got sights ter say ter you."

This seemed to call for no response, so none was given.

"You take this rocker, an' I'll move right 'longside. When folks's got business ter talk over, I think it's pleasant ter get near together; don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered the guest, to whom nothing seemed more awful.

"Well, let's begin right 'bout the farm. I think—" And then followed a long list of Miss Phillenda's ideas upon that not too fruitful piece of land. Some of her ideas were wise, some otherwise; but to all Captain Minnie gave a cordial assent. As she talked he stole glances at her. No resemblance to the dead Virginia proved her sisterhood. She was a little, dark woman, with plump red cheeks, merry eyes, and hair as curly as a child's.

"I must be goin'," he announced abruptly, though Miss Phillenda seemed nowhere near the end of her ideas; then, to temper the suddenness of his withdrawal: "I'll come again soon."

"Now, do! Why, I kin keep on talkin' fer hours yet. Guess you think I'm a regular eight-day clock!" She laughed gaily. "I'm real glad you come, fer it's considerable lonesome down here."

Captain Minnie had decided that such virtue as he had just displayed in making the call merited a reward of a week's respite from further trials. The words, "it's considerable lonesome," touched his heart, however. Who knew better than he the bitterness of being alone? Therefore three nights later he went again. Miss Phillenda talked unceasingly, as before, while he listened.

"Come real soon, won't you? I want ter consult you 'bout the children."

"Real soon" fell on a Sunday night. He had hoped she would be at church, and told her so, only he said "feared" for "hoped."

"No," answered Miss Phillenda, sadly; "I can't go. Ezra [the hired man] goes home every night, an' I das n't drive up myself."

Captain Minnie sighed drearily.

"Ain't you feelin' well?" asked the little woman, drawing her chair beside his with the quickness with which she did everything.

"Yes, ma'am," he responded, drawing his chair back with equal speed; "I was jest drawin' a long breath."

"I did n't know but what you'd been a-overdoin', havin' two farms on yer hands. I'm 'bout tuckered out with one."

Captain Minnie sighed more drearily still. Duty was calling; he must answer.

"I've been thinkin'," he began solemnly, "it's a real shame fer you ter lose yer church privileges 'long o' livin' here. I'll come fer you an' bring you back every meetin' night."

"Now, ain't that kind!" she exclaimed. "I've kep' a-sayin', 'If I could go ter preachin' service Sunday nights, an' conference meetin' on Wednesdays, I should n't mind stayin' here a bit.'"

Silence followed. Miss Phillenda rocked placidly. Captain Minnie inwardly brooded.

"Captain Ware," she said suddenly, "who bakes yer bread?"

"I do, ma'am."

"You do! Is it fit ter eat? 'Xcuse me, please, but I never could reconcile myself ter men-folks tearin' round a kitchen; much out o' place ez an elephant, I say."

"It's pretty tasty, though it ain't jest like mother's; don't seem ter rise like hers."

"Lands! Do you make cake an' pies an' puddin's, too?"

"I kin, all but pies. Them I buy out the baker's cart. I've tried ter bake 'em, but they don't come out right, somehow."

Miss Phillenda laughed till the echo came up from the hollow by the brook. She jumped up.

"Come right in here with me! You're a-goin' ter hev some o' the best pie you ever set yer mouth round. Think o' a man livin' on baker's pies!"

The unwilling guest protested feebly: "I've had supper; I can't eat it."

"Don't tell me that there's ever a time men-folks can't eat pie; I know better."

Poor Captain Minnie! Hitherto the darkness of the porch had been as a shelter; now he was to be exposed to the pitiless lamp-light. Miss Phillenda set forth the pie on the kitchen table.

"T ain't no wonder you can't make pies," she said, watching him eat. "Pies is dreadful hard ter make good. I made one once, when I was a girl, one o' my old beaus waitin' on me then said could n't be cut with an ax. He was n't no beau o' mine after that, I kin tell you." She laughed so infectiously that he joined, in spite of his misery. He watched her admiringly as she moved about the room; her small figure, curly hair, and quick movements made her seem like a young girl.

"Wonder she never got married," he

thought, then sickened with horror to find he had thought aloud.

Miss Phillenda laughed without offense.

"I declare, it 's funny, you sayin' that. Reminds me of a story 'bout old Jane Hotchkiss, over ter Deep Brook. Some one called her 'Mrs.' out real loud, one day. 'Miss, please,' sez she. 'Not but what I 've had plenty o' chances to be Mrs., if I was a-mind ter tell o' them.' I ain't sayin' it's the same with me, but I do say ez I ain't wearin' the willer fer any man."

A remembrance of her guest's own sad love-affair came to her. She blushed, and then took Captain Minnie's hand with solemn kindness.

"Captain Ware," she said, "Virginy's told me 'bout you 'fore she died. I think it's jest good in you ter help me, an' she did too, after what she done."

"Don't say anything ag'in' Virginy, Miss Phillenda," he protested gently.

"I ain't goin' ter. I never blamed her none fer lovin' Alfred 'stead o' you. Love ain't a thing you kin go sendin' hither an' yon like a little dog."

Slow tears rose to the man's eyes. In all the years no one had ever understood his feeling before.

"Thank you," he said.

Miss Phillenda brought the conversation back to an every-day safety by saying briskly:

"I 've wrapped up a pie an' loaf o' bread fer you ter take home. I 'll have 'em ready every meetin' night. 'Turn 'bout 's fair play,' 's my motto."

As he drove home Captain Minnie thought of his promise with terror, and yet with a thrill of expectancy.

Wednesday night a soft wind blew from the east, bringing sweet spring scents on its breath; late birds twittered drowsily, and far-away church bells sounded a melancholy yet peaceful cadence.

"Don't let 's say a word," said Miss Phillenda, as Captain Minnie helped her into the buggy. "I kinder like ter sit still a night like this, harkenin' ter all them pleasant sounds, an' a-feelin' the wind a-blowin'. Seems most like prayer-meetin' 'fore I get there."

Captain Minnie gave her one of his rare direct looks, and smiled as if pleased.

One night, several months later, she said to him as they drove to church:

"Why don't you ever come ter meetin'? Ain't you a professor?"

"I dunno, exactly. I ain't never j'ined no church."

"Why not?" asked Miss Phillenda, with kindly directness.

"I was always too 'fraid o' folks," he answered, with the truthfulness which never forsook him even in extreme terror.

"You air bashful; I 've noticed it considerable," she replied, in the commonplace tone in which she would have said, "You air near-sighted."

To the man who hitherto had known his affliction as the subject of jests or of commiseration only, this view came as a revelation of his kinship with the rest of humanity.

"Better come in to-night; it 's so warm there won't be many there," she urged mildly. "We're early, so folks won't see us go in."

Thus, after nearly forty years' exile, Captain Minnie returned to church. He listened with a rapt look to the old organ and the choir of girls and boys. He listened with painful frowns to the sermon, one on predestination, with special reference to those predestined to go in the wrong direction.

"Well, how 'd you enjoy it?" asked Miss Phillenda, as they drove home.

"The music was real pretty."

"What did you think of the sermon?"

"I guess I did n't jest like it."

"Me neither. This believin' one was born ter be saved, an' another born ter be lost, is more than I kin fellowship with. What 'd the Lord make folks fer, if he wants ter burn 'em right up again, I 'd like ter know?"

"I think this 's 'bout good ez church." He pointed to the young grain lying white in the moonlight, and then to the dark woods beyond, whispering their unending secrets.

"Me too," agreed Miss Phillenda.

As spring wore into summer, and summer into autumn, Captain Minnie became more and more a companion to Miss Phillenda. He went to the house at all hours. He took her driving, berrying, chestnutting. The terror at seeing her departed, but the thrill abided. He found so many points of sympathy in her—her love of flowers and the outside world; her care for all animals, especially the sick ones; her broad and simple religious faith, untainted by doctrinal bitterness. His lonely, repressed heart grew young and joyous again in the warmth of her kindly, merry nature. The old house by the river seemed drearier than since the days when his parents were just dead. Its silence awed him as if he had been a child. He would seek comfort in the farm, with its noisy children and its happy little woman, who sang as she worked, and whose voice

greeted him from within: "That you, Captain Ware? I'm real pleased ter see you."

One day in early spring, when he walked into the farm sitting-room unheralded by any knock, as was his custom, he found a strange man seated by the fire, who sprang up with a shout when he entered.

"Why, if it ain't Minnie Ware! Well, I am glad ter see you. You hev n't forgot John Kingsley, hev you, an' Company D?"

Captain Minnie grasped the stranger's hand hard.

"I declare, I forgot you lived down in these parts," went on the stranger. "My brother 's bought the next farm ter this. I'm visitin' him a spell. Dropped in ter see Phillenda. Her an' me 's known each other, over in Rocky Ridge, twenty-five year, hev n't we?"

"I was born over here, so I guess it ain't quite twenty-five," replied Miss Phillenda, her eyes twinkling.

"Ha, ha! That ain't hard ter take in when one looks at you, Lin. How 's the world used you, Minnie?"

"Oh, I've been very happy. Hev you?"

"I've had my ups an' downs. Lost my wife fifteen year ago; terrible cross ter me, it was. But I've got two nice, smart girls—grown up now, they air. You're an old bach, ain't ye? I remember you always hated women."

"Better not tell 'bout old baches when I'm here; folks think 'bout old maids same time," said Miss Phillenda, quickly.

The guest laughed, and immediately plunged into war reminiscences.

"This fellow was a regular Turk in battle, Lin," he said. "Fight as if there was n't nothin' in this world he lived fer but jest killin'. After it was over he'd set down an' cry 'cause he'd killed so many folks."

Captain Minnie listened while Kingsley rattled on. He was a big, jovial man, whose kind face had a certain boyishness in spite of gray hair and wrinkles.

"I'll come to-morrow an' see 'bout that corn," Captain Minnie said, rising at the first pause in the talk. In his heart, however, he knew he would not come. He did not go the next day, or the next, or for a week. "Was n't convenient," he told himself; yet he knew that was not the reason.

One morning John Kingsley came over to see him. While he planted, the other talked about affairs in general.

"Tell you what, Minnie, that Phillenda Hooker 's a smart girl, an' a nice one, too. She 's been doin' too much lately.

Now she 's sick abed, an' got a lame ankle beside."

Captain Minnie looked at the sky as if for signs of rain, and remarked indifferently, "Too bad."

When John Kingsley had gone, he hurried into the house, muttering, "I'll go right over after supper, an' see her, poor girl."

As he went out toward his barn that night a sudden red glow arose before his eyes. It shot higher into the air, and leaped, and quivered. "Fire!" he gasped. "Over toward the farm, too."

He had not ridden since he left the army; yet, saddleless, he sprang on his horse's back, and galloped in the direction of the light. It was the farm—not the house itself, but the barns. Neighbors were appearing with buckets of water.

"Oh, go get Aunt Phillenda," shrieked one of the children. "She can't walk."

He hurried up-stairs. On the landing stood Miss Phillenda, pale, but cool.

"I'll carry you all right," he said, in as gentle a voice as he used in talking to her on every-day occasions.

"I guess I'll be all the load you want, without stoppin' fer any furniture," replied Miss Phillenda, whose spirits seemed undaunted by the disaster.

He put his arms carefully around her waist, while she clasped hers about his neck. Thus he carried her to one of the neighbors' wagons, returning to help extinguish the fire. He was too exhausted to think over what had happened. He flung himself on the hay in his own barn, and slept till morning. When he awoke, he lay looking up through the open scuttle into the blue sky. He repeated over and over: "I love her! I love her!" He had not dreamed of this before. When he had felt her arms about his neck he knew that he loved her. He did not ask if she loved him. The great and joyous fact of his own love was enough for him. Year after year he had lived a lonely, friendless life, having no one to whom his heart could cling, no one for whom he felt any stronger emotion than kindness. Now through all his being tingled the joy and excitement of love. It meant youth, happiness, life itself, to his numbed heart. He boarded his little boat. He wanted to be out on the Sound, where there was room to breathe, where his heart could expand limitlessly. As he set the sail he sang in a wandering, tuneless voice. The words were sad old hymns; for him they were pæans of joy. He had not felt so when he loved Virginia.

He was a boy then, his father and mother still alive, his future before him; now he was old and alone, and behind him stretched years of isolation. Then he had been as a man at a feast who partakes of one more delicacy; now he was as a starving man who sees food. When he returned at night the longing grew upon him to tell some one. Gathering a bunch of white violets, he sought the little graveyard where his parents were buried. He laid the flowers on his father's grave, and pressing his face into the wet grass of the mound, he whispered: "I love her." No thought of John Kingsley entered his mind. He loved Phillenda. In time he could teach her to love him. As he walked homeward he heard some one calling him.

"What's wanted?" he called back.

John Kingsley was waiting on the steps for him.

"I thought I'd raise you if I hollered," he said. "Set down; I want ter talk. Minnie, I'm in trouble."

Captain Minnie laid a hand on his knee silently.

"Three year ago I was in awful money straits. I give my note. It's due now. I ain't got a cent ter meet it. My house that I built myself I'll lose, an' my share in the factory—all I've got ter live on. I could stand it fer myself, but there's my girls; an', besides, Minnie, I want ter get married."

"Married?"

"Yes. I've lost one wife—the best one ever lived; I ain't lookin' ter fill her place. But one of my girls is gettin' married soon, an' the other's set on teachin'; so I need some one ter make a comfortable home fer me. I set great store by Phillenda, too."

"Phillenda!"

"Why, ain't it never occurred ter you I was fond o' her? She's 'bout the smartest, nicest girl I ever see. I calculate ter come over here ter live on the farm; that is, if she has the same notion ter me I hev taken ter her. I ain't 'fraid that way; it's the money worries me. I've come ter you, Minnie, ter ask if you'd loan it ter me. I'll pay every cent, if I live; an' if I don't, there's my life-insurance you kin hev. Folks say you're rich, anyhow."

Captain Minnie breathed hard.

"Does she—does she—feel the same ter you?"

"'Course I can't jest tell 'bout a thing like that; but, near's I kin see, she does. She give Grant Lewis the mitten over to Rocky Ridge, an' folks did n't hesitate ter say it was 'cause she favored me. She was tickled

ter death ter see me when I come last week. Oh, I'm pretty nigh certain."

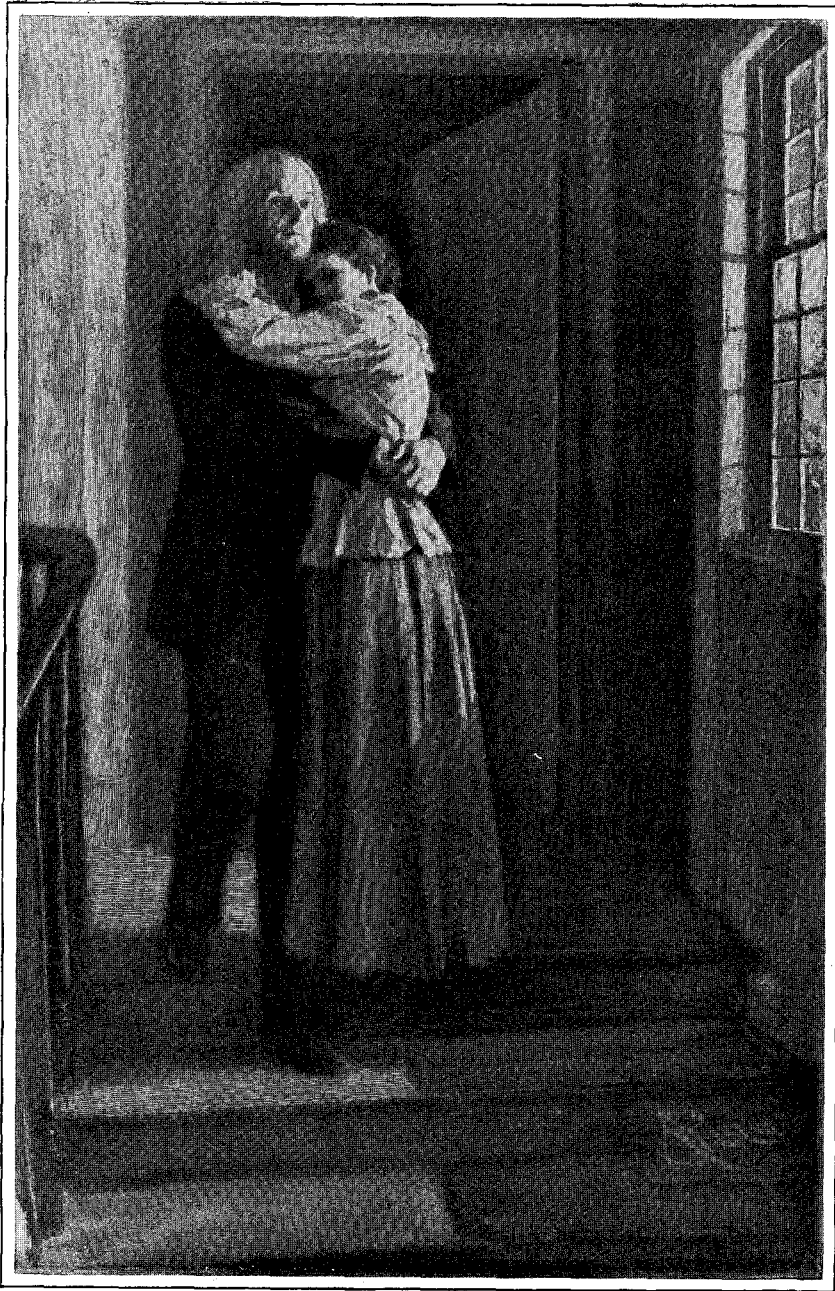
The other looked away.

"I can't say 'bout the money to-night, John"—he spoke slowly; "I'll tell you to-morrow."

"That's fair," said the other, in a disappointed tone. "Good night. Jest remember it's everything ter me."

When his visitor had gone, Captain Minnie walked wearily down to the river, and pushed off in the boat he had so lately left. He rowed till he came to a sandy strip of land known as "the desert," and shunned because of a reputation for being haunted. He strode up and down in the thick sand, talking in a loud, hoarse voice, his face convulsed with passion.

"It ain't right fer John Kingsley ter take all I've got. He's had a wife an' children. I've never had nothin'. His girls would make him happy an' keep him company. Who've I got? Nobody! He sha'n't hev her. I'll refuse the money, an' then where'll he be? S'pose I could n't marry her. I could see her every day, like I've been doin'. An' I could learn her ter love me, too. I was goin' ter help her 'bout her flowers, and get her a dog, an' take her off in my boat. Lord! it ain't fair fer him ter hev her, when I want her so. I can't go through what I did when Virginia left me!" He went on, his thoughts reverting to the first desolate years of his bereavement. "I can't—I won't! I've been kinder contented an' cheerful, livin' on by myself, before she come; but I can't go back where I was, any more than the river there kin go back an' be the little spring it was up ter Vermont." He flung himself, face down, on the sand, and lay there for hours, only the fierce movements of his arms showing that he was awake. Slowly he rose, saying in a wondering tone: "I've been forgettin' the past all 'long. What's goin' ter make Phillenda happiest—marryin' me or marryin' John? He said she cared 'bout him, an' I guess she does. I guess she's grown ter love him all these years she's known him. He's the sort she'd love quick enough. He's young-actin', an' full o' fun, same ez she is; an' he's like folks. I ain't any of them things. I'm old, an' queer, an' glum. 'T would be mighty strange if she loved me better than him. I guess she'd be happiest with John, an' that's all I'm after—hevin' Phillenda happy. What sort o' comfort'd I take if I send him away without the money? An' then, every time I saw her, I'd be a-thinkin' I'd spiled her happiness. No,



DRAWN BY BERNARD ROSENMEYER.

"HE PUT HIS ARMS CAREFULLY AROUND HER WAIST."

no! I guess there's some things ez is harder ter bear than not hevin' the girl you love, an' that's hevin' the girl you love unhappy."

Dawn was streaking the east as he rowed home, his body bent with exhaustion, his face as peaceful as the smoothly flowing river. He walked steadily the two long miles to John Kingsley's house.

"John!" he called under the window. "John!"

"Who's there?" A sleepy face was thrust out.

"It's me, John. I come ter tell you you could hev the money all right. I'll throw in an extra two hundred, jest fer good measure." He was gone before the other could say more than "God bless you!"

After the day's work,—and he had taken no rest since the night before,—Captain Minnie sat on his back steps watching twilight deepen into night. The frogs were croaking loudly. Lonely lights glimmered here and there across the river. Away in the distance a mother was calling her children to bed. Her voice was like that of the woman he loved and had lost. Great tears ran down his cheek, and a sob shook his tired body. He did not turn at the rustle of a dress, nor when Phillenda stood beside him; he had seen her that way all day. He gave a great start when a voice said:

"Ain't you goin' ter greet me when I've come ter make my first call?"

"Phillenda!" he exclaimed, springing up, "what's happened?"

"Nothin', Minnie," she answered, pushing him down, and seating herself beside him. "John Kingsley's been tellin' me 'bout your loanin' him money. First I thought you did it 'cause you thought so much o' him, an' like enough that was one reason. Then I says: 'No; he done it ter make me happy.' When I thought that, I come right over here ter see you."

"That was it. I wanted ter make you happy. An' you air, ain't ye?" he asked wistfully.

"Oh, yes, I am; at least, I shall be," answered the woman, with a laugh and a sob.

"And John'll be happy, too," said he, wistfully.

"I 'low John ain't so pleased ez you think. Did you think I loved John Kingsley?"

"I—I did n't know; I thought—yes."

"Well, I don't, an' never could, nor will—there!"

"Then—why—what do you mean by—who do you love?" stammered the bewildered man.

"Minnie Ware!" exclaimed little Miss Phillenda; then she threw her arms around his neck as impulsively as a girl, whispering in a gust of laughter, yet with tears wetting his face: "Do you want folks ter say I did the courtin', an' me not able ter deny it?"

Captain Minnie caught her in his arms.

"Phillenda," he cried joyously, "air you sure it's fer yer best happiness?"

BUILDING UP A WORLD'S FAIR IN FRANCE.

BY BARON PIERRE DE COUBERTIN.

NOT long since I read in a French newspaper that the Emperor William, while studying in detail the conduct of the Spanish-American war, had been particularly impressed by the excellence of the citizen soldiery of the United States and by the efficient aid which they rendered the regular troops. This, however, was no surprise to me, for I have long been of the opinion that, even in the art of war, the thousand and one complications with which the Old World is saddled are in no wise indispensable, and that, although it may not be possible to improvise soldiers, there should be little difficulty in making good soldiers out of free citizens. In short, we see that though Europe, through all phases of national existence, has remained

complicated, America has retained its original simplicity, which, indeed, is the chief characteristic of transatlantic civilization, and gives it just that plasticity, that possibility of progress, that rapidity of realization, which make it a civilization superior in many points to ours.

Never, it would seem, has that quality of simplicity—or, better, that talent for simplification—been brought into sharper relief than in the preparations for the exposition at Chicago. This undertaking was a colossal one. It was necessary to raise large sums of money for preliminary expenses, and to establish at once the entire executive machinery, from the highest officials down to the very guards who were to insure the