TALK WITH ALEXANDER ABOUT INSURANCE.

The Louisiana Democrat.

The World Is Governed Too Much.

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THE LOUISIANA DEMOCRAT.

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—AT—

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Official Journal of the School Board.

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W. G. MOBLEY, Editor.

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A WOMAN'S INFLUENCE

CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

"Poor Brian. What a state to be in. Don't shudder any more. The places I go, and the people I meet, only hurt my heart. A very effective hurt, too; for it teaches me to appreciate my own good fortune, and it makes me feel very regretful to sit here amid so much comfort and luxury, and remember the many victims of the world's injustice. You could never imagine, Brian, what passionate delight that poor little crippled girl took in the few flowers I carried her; and, while I watched her, I could not help thinking what a revelation a sight of Elmwood would be to her. I have been thinking of it ever since. So many plans have filled my heart, but they are all impossible. I feel so helpless and—rebellious. Doctor, you are smiling. I don't think you quite enter into my feelings. Can you imagine a woman living on the proceeds of button holes, at a cent and a half apiece? Agnes' mother supports herself so. She is satisfied, she told me, when button holes are plenty. But now they are not. Hooks and eyes have taken their place. I told Nanny the other day that I liked hooks and eyes. Now I hate them, because I know they have taken bread from at least one woman's mouth. And she is not alone. I feel that I have been living in a small corner of the earth up to this time, and I am only just awaking to real actual life. It is a sad revelation for me. I cannot tell you how many women I saw to-day, and how many others I heard of, who sing the Song of the Shirt from daylight to midnight—to whom its heart-break and want are a living reality. How can we talk of the demoralization of the lower classes? How can we preach to them? Shall we imitate the example of the man who gave a Bible when the starving woman asked for bread? We forget our souls when the body is hungry; at least, I should. But, if I were one of those women, wearing out my life for a pittance, I should not forget that the man for whom I starved lived in a palace, and enjoyed the luxuries purchased with my life-blood. The world admires such men, and calls them fortunate and successful, because they have made so much wealth in a few years; but I am very much afraid that, if I were in their place, I should see a wan, hungry face on every dollar."

"Isn't that rather severe, Mrs. Leigh?"

Margaret did not meet Wilson's eye as she answered this question.

"Perhaps it is. I'm afraid I always express myself too strongly. These things appeal to me so forcibly, and when I feel, I feel intensely."

"Then take my advice and don't go among them," observed Brian, practically. "It is not true philosophy to seek out the dark side of life. This is not home, and you cannot be sure into what sort of places your wanderings may take you, or what kind of characters you may meet."

Margaret was thoughtful a moment.

"I do not chance upon much refinement and elegance," she said presently; "but that does not affect me in any way. I feel that I could take the hand of the worst creature on earth and not be lowered. You know I have a prejudice against those people whose excessive goodness shrinks from contact with others—not always so much worse, only more unfortunate than themselves. They are the Pharisees, who thank God they are not as their neighbors are. Suppose we should imitate them. I like to see the picture of the woman clinging to the cross, and I confess I find it inspiring; but at the same time, I cannot help thinking that the woman who holds out her hand to an unfortunate sister is more helpful and more noble. If the world thinks otherwise I disagree with it. Don't draw down your lips in that pathetic way, Brian. This isn't a sermon. I sha'n't say another word."

Margaret settled back in her chair, with an air of determination that rather amused Wilson.

"I am on your side of the question," he replied, with a smile. "So is Brian, if he chooses to admit as much."

"I'm incapable of any admission just now," put in Brian. I am wholly lost in admiration of Margaret's facility for disposing of all opinions not her own, and marching on to victory. She has a way of bringing out her closing remarks, which says quite decidedly 'There, that's final. Dispute if you dare!' It is useless to say 'Oh, Brian!' Margaret. The fact is true. You have a most astonishing tenacity for your own ideas. You can out-argue the greatest logician on earth. Out-talk him, I should say."

"Thanks for the correction. Your distinction is delicate, but obvious. It would be too much, I am sure, for any man to give a woman credit for an ability to argue. I wonder what poor men will do, when they are forced to recognize woman's mental equality. Perhaps even then they will continue to indulge in witty satire, at her expense. We forgive them. To lecture us affords them innocent amusement, and they really haven't the grace to echo Charlotte Bronte's prayer: 'When I have nothing to say, may the Lord give me grace to be silent.'"

"You have us quite defenseless, Mrs. Leigh. Brian has not a word to say, and I am but little better. How are we to find consolation for your unflattering opinion?"

"You would not be a true man, Doctor, if you did not find it within yourself. I have often thought that you are the natural follower of Descartes. Theoretically and practically you find the ego all sufficient."

"Worse and worse," laughed Wilson, "And Brian rejoices in my discomfiture. Shall I regret being a man?"

"By no means," returned Margaret. "It is the next best thing to being a woman. You have the easier side of life, too. We have the harder. The lion's share of suffering falls on us, and we must see our duty under the most painful circumstances. A man may be blind. Indeed, he usually is blind when he wants to be; but it would be quite reprehensible for a woman to pretend defective vision in similar circumstances. So there is some consolation for you. Am I driving you away, Doctor?"

"By no means," rejoined Wilson, who had risen at her question, and now stood looking down upon her with a quizzical light in his eyes. "I am only sorry I can not sit longer; but your sweeping accusation against the convenient blindness of men reminds me that I have a patient waiting for me down the street; and as that is a duty to which I can not be blind, I shall have to say good-night. I admit there is much justice in your remark. Nevertheless, I hope that time may improve your opinion of us poor men. Brian, any moments you have to spare, remember and pity my lonely state."

"You don't deserve pity on that score," rejoined Brian, promptly. "You know the remedy and refuse to apply it."

Wilson laughed in answer, and saying "Good-night," he left them

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LINK FROM THE OLD LIFE.

As Margaret hoped and expected, Bertie put in an appearance two evenings later—the same light-hearted, cheery Bertie, with his never-failing good-humor and his almost inexhaustible store of news and gossip, to carry her back to her home and let her feel, in imagination at least, something of its old pleasures and interests.

Changes in a small place are always more significant and of more general interest than those in a great city, where the identity of the individual is lost in the great labyrinth of humanity, and Margaret, whose affection absence had only increased, took a keen delight in hearing not only of the friends she had left but of even the slightest occurrence about Elmwood and its surroundings, and, in return, Bertie wanted to hear about herself.

"This city air has not brought the roses to your cheeks," he said. "I hope you haven't developed such a fondness for it that you will be sorry to come back to us."

"Never, Bertie; my mind can never even imagine such a possibility. In the first place, I don't like New York, I—I actually hate it, though I shouldn't tell anyone but you; and, in the second place, I love Elmwood dearly. Then there are things I enjoy there which I cannot have here; my rides, for one thing. Occasionally I have a ride in the park, but it isn't the same as at home. Here one must go at a certain gait, and people ride awkwardly, too, I think. I suppose it is the fashionable way, but it isn't half so graceful, to see them pounding their saddles, one might say. It really tries me to look at them. The park is beautiful, though. New York may well be proud of it. I have been around a great deal. Brian takes me everywhere, and I usually enjoy the places we visit."

"And Brian?" questioned Bertie, meeting her eye.

Her head drooped slightly. Bertie saw the action. He left his chair and came to her.

"Tell me, Margaret," he said, placing his hand upon her shoulder, "it isn't so hard for you to answer?"

"No," she replied in a low voice, "it should not be so hard now. My heart has ached, oh, so terribly, and I have been hopeless and despairing, because I was alone—so helplessly alone. Ah, I know what you would say. I have friends. Yes, such true friends. Do you think I ever doubted them, Bertie? But you can understand that there are sorrows which none can share. Lately I have been more encouraged. He has left me so little, but last night he was later than usual, and to-night he is—not here—at all."

Her head drooped still lower and his hand fell until it rested on hers with a gentle, reassuring sympathy in its touch.

"All may be right," he said with an effort at consolation.

"Perhaps," she answered. "I can only hope, and if it should not be, the disappointment will be so bitter. Last night he did not seem perfectly himself. I tried to believe I imagined it, but I am afraid I showed something in my actions. I tried so hard, too—so hard not to let him see."

"Why should you have tried?" cried Bertie, pressing his lips hard. "Why should you consider him? You have feelings, too. Must they always be outraged?"

Margaret raised her eyes at this strong expression of his thoughts.

"I think women can't consider their feelings, Bertie," she returned, with a sigh. "It seems to me that, no matter how hard or how bitter it may be, they can never get beyond the range of duty. I think we grow to be hypocrites in a way. We are so often obliged to hide our hearts. I know I have often smiled my brightest when my eyes were burning with tears I held back. I suppose the baptism of sorrow must touch us all, and I only hope that it may wash out all that should not be in my life, and make me braver and stronger for what is to come. Are you leaving me, Bertie? I'm afraid you find me very doleful."

"I leave you, Margaret, to find him. I cannot bear to sit here and hear you talk and—— There; I'll act like a baby next. Margaret, you are a dear, brave girl. Long ago, when——"

"Before you thought I should grow into such a sedate young woman," interrupted Margaret, hastily. "We used to fight gloriously in those days, didn't we? Uncle fancied I should always be a tomboy. I wonder if he would recognize me now?"

She finished with a sigh, and the light words had held such deep meaning that Bertie found it hard to meet the eyes she raised so bravely to his.

"So long ago?" he said, half absently.

"Not quite six years since I first saw you. I remember the day so perfectly. You were just home from college, and you had two cats tied together by the tails. I thought you such a cruel boy. Well, you want to go? I shall see you again, sha'n't I? You are like a breath from Elmwood, Bertie."

"You will see me again, and soon, Margaret. Now look me in the face and promise me that the day shall never come when you will cease to regard me as a brother. There; good-night; your tears pain me. God forgive Brian; I cannot."

Once upon the street Bertie walked along, absorbed in thought. This brief visit to Margaret had entirely unnerved him, and he seemed wholly incapable of any practical decision. When he arrived in front of the Hoffman House he ran across Wilson, and feeling rather glad of this chance encounter he greeted him warmly.

"This is really the first moment I could call my own to-day," declared Wilson, taking a cigar from the case Bertie offered him. "Where is your destination?"

"I was just trying to decide," was Bertie's answer. "I dropped in to see Margaret, and I haven't recovered from the shock her appearance gave me yet. I never saw her look more wretched and ill, though I am inclined to think the cause is not entirely physical."

"No. Other influences at work. How did you leave her?"

"Alone," was the sententious reply.

"Alone," repeated Wilson. "Then, Brian——?"

"Is off disgracing himself," responded Bertie with much anger. "He ought to be thrashed."

Wilson's face grew very grave.

"I had hoped things might be better," he said, with a sigh.

"They will never be better. I believe Brian has lost his last grain of manhood. He is worse than a coward. If he had a heartless, selfish wife there might be some reason, though never an excuse for his actions. But now there is absolutely nothing that one can say for him. He is simply breaking Margaret's heart. If you had seen her a year ago you could realize what a change these last months have wrought in her. It is his doing; all his doing. After she has left her home, her friends, and all she loves, for his sake. My heart swells with indignation at the thought. I know how she loves Elmwood, and dislikes New York. Yet after all this, she'll continue to talk of duty. Women are enigmas; I give them up. I'd like to thrash Brian, though. It might possibly do him good."

"I can't understand him," remarked Wilson, half absently.

"No, nor can any one else. He doesn't seem worth the understanding. I'll have to find him somehow, and send him home. I can't bear the thought of Margaret waiting in such anxious dread, not knowing whether he is tumbling about in the gutter or disgracing himself in some other way. Are we at your quarters already? How fast we must have walked! No; I can't come in to-night. Some other time, old fellow. I'll have to make the round of the club houses, I dare say. Well, good-night."

Bertie did not find Brian, as he had expected, in any of his probable haunts, though he went to them all, anxiously examined the sea of faces, and even questioned the waiters and attendants.

Rather disheartened after this vain search, he scarcely knew where to go next. In his dilemma, he was in the act of turning a street corner when the full glare of the street lamps falling upon a figure in front of him revealed something very familiar in its outlines.

"Brian," he said, under his breath. Yes, Brian—walking with the uncertain gait that only confirmed his fears. He thought of Margaret, and angry indignation overpowered him; but this same thought brought another, and under its impulse he managed to control himself. With a few hasty strides he was by Brian's side, and, placing his hand rather heavily upon his shoulder, he asked, roughly:

"Where are you going? Come home?"

"Home?" repeated Brian, startled into understanding and shrinking under Bertie's glance. "Home to face her? Never. A few days ago I promised her I would not touch another drop. Yes, promised. A farce, wasn't it? Solemnly promised. You see me to-night. Go home, you say. Go home to see her shrink from me! To see her blush for me! To see—— Ah, heavens, no!"

These words made no impression on Bertie.

"Don't add villainy to cowardice," he said, with flashing eyes. "Come, I say. If you have no self-respect, remember her, and have at least the decency to hide your disgrace under your own roof. You shall not break her heart; you shall not ruin her life. I'll shoot you first."

"Ruin her life," echoed Brian, burying his face in his hands. "My God, I did not intend to ruin her life."

Bertie said no more. Perhaps even he felt some pity for Brian's evident agony, or perhaps he feared that words now would express too much of the anger which burned within him. There are men who can never understand the depths to which others can fall.

Quite silent he walked by Brian, and only left him when the door had closed upon him.

From her own room Margaret heard the faltering step, and knew that Brian had come, but even the great relief of this knowledge did not bring her sleep. All night she tossed restlessly, her mind a prey to miserable doubts and hopeless longings, and when morning came her face told its own story.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A True Story.

One evening an old couple came over to spend a part of the evening with us, and as we were seated around the fire the old lady told us of a celebrated murder that had happened in the town where she had lived for years, and as she had been personally acquainted with the parties concerned, was able to relate to us even the most minute details.

After she had finished and we had spoken of the many strange points of the case, the old man straightened himself out and slowly said.

"Well, I will now tell you a true story."

The feelings of the lady can better be imagined than described—Free Press.

THE New York Tribune observes that cargoes aggregating 42,000 tons are on their way to San Francisco by sea; but it discovers nothing more in the fact than a poetical interest in a revival of the romance which used to be associated with a trip around the Horn. Under the circumstances the prosaic Pacific coaster will concede the poetry or anything else as long as it will keep the cost of transportation down to something like a decent figure.

A DANGEROUS plot has been "nipped in the financial arena of Chicago." This, it is believed, will prove to be an improvement on the old custom of nipping such things in the bud.

IF women were to get into politics generally it would be fun in the middle of a lively canvass to see them trying to nail campaign lies.

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