OUR COMPLAINT BOOK.

[NOTE.—Letters intended for this column must be accompanied by the writer's full name and address to insure attention. Complainants who are unwilling to comply with this rule simply waste time in writing.—ED. HERALD.]

CARELESS DRIVERS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

I witnessed an act of carelessness this morning on Broadway, near Houston street, by the driver of stage No. 70 of the Broadway, Twenty-third street and Ninth avenue line, that might have resulted in a serious accident to a lady who was alighting from the stage in question, assisted by a gentleman, to which I have concluded to call your attention. Before the lady could get off the step the driver started up his horses, causing her to lose her balance, and had it not been for the efforts of the gentleman she would have had a serious fall.

I have been a frequent witness to similar acts of carelessness or design by the stage drivers of the various lines, besides having heard ladies complain of the difficulty of getting in and out of stages for this reason. AN EYE WITNESS.

THE HUNTER'S POINT ODORS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

Would you be kind enough to receive in your complaint column one more protest against the nauseating odors from the Hunter's Point oil works and bone boilers which trouble all the east side and especially Beekman Hill and Prospect place? In the present advanced state of chemical science it would seem as though some use could be found for such a quantity of waste gases, at least enough to pay for the trouble of keeping them from the air. If the parties who own these places had any idea that it would pay or that they were wasting anything valuable we should probably have prompt relief from all such things. It is certainly time that some of those who are supposed to understand chemistry took hold of this in earnest, for, after all the complaints to the health officers for the last five years, it is now worse than ever. M. N.

FIX THE PUMP.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

I respectfully wish to call the attention of the Commissioner of Public Works to the condition of the pump on the corner of 141st street and Eighth avenue, which has been repeatedly reported to the department and no notice whatever taken of it. It is a neighborhood which is inhabited by poor, hard working people, and who are too poor to have Croton water in their little homes. PUMP.

LICENSE THE MILKMEN.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

Venders of fish, vegetables, crockery, woodenware, &c., are compelled by ordinance to take out license for peddling their wares through the streets of this city; and why not compel the milkmen to take out license for their wagons? Why should they be privileged to use and wear the streets without assisting to pay for repairs? There can be no doubt of the powers of the Common Council to pass such an ordinance. It would net the city a handsome sum annually, besides being the first step in destroying the traffic in swill milk, by bringing its venders under the immediate surveillance of the city authorities. T. P.

A BOY'S GRIEVANCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

I feel rather backward in writing to you, as I am but a boy; but being a great admirer of your journal, I trust you will excuse me if I intrude upon your valuable time for a few short moments. What I would wish to express to you is this:—I am an industrious lad, being engaged from early in the morning till quite late in the evening. I am, you see, deprived of many sports which it is quite natural for one of my age to enjoy, more particularly baseball playing, which is now quite popular. Not being able to indulge in this sport during week days, I (with a few friends) often take a journey to Hoboken on Sunday and endeavor to have a quiet game in some secluded spot, unseen by none save ourselves. In this we are often interrupted by a big policeman, who, when the opportunity presents, generally treats us like a "pack of sheep." In fact, everywhere nowadays the cry seems to be, "Down with the boys!" They are expected to work hard for poor wages and often deprived of a little fun which they might enjoy. Now, do you for a moment think that it is any harm for us on that secluded spot to while away a few hours on a Sunday afternoon in such a harmless pastime? The field at Hoboken is so different from the city, and often where they drive us from our sport a great many go and enjoy themselves in a way not quite so good and quite more injurious. PERRY STREETER.

THE GROCERY CLERKS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

Let me call your attention to the poor grocery clerks who have to work eighteen hours a day, and on Sunday all day long, for $12 a month, and have to keep themselves in clothes. I am one of the unfortunates. GROCERY BOY.

FERRYBOAT CABIN CURTAINS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

Noticing in Friday's issue (25th inst.) of your valuable paper a complaint signed "Hamilton," pertaining to window curtains on the Brooklyn ferryboats, I wish to say that I think he is quite right. I myself, being ferried over the water every morning, can therefore sympathize with "Hamilton," and think this thing ought to be looked into and remedied, which certainly would be a blessing to the "weak eye" class in general. F. L. WALLACE.

DOWN WITH THE ORGAN GRINDERS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

I would like to call your attention to the intolerable nuisance of organ grinding. The discomfort experienced by invalids, students and literary people from this detested species of begging is most distressing. From morning till night we are compelled to listen to the discordant notes of old worn out organs, frequently accompanied by most unearthly yells and shrieks. Who has not noticed the shameful manner in which little children are made to collect the pennies for these unlicensed scoundrels, or has not been disgusted by the sight of organs on wheels, surrounded by a couple of filthy, ragged babies, hired for the occasion? It is time these lazy beggars were compelled to evacuate the highways they have so long defiled, and it should be the office of the HERALD to raise its powerful voice against those whose avocation is the source of so much profanity and hard feeling. A. K.

THE SWILL MILK TRADE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

You deserve the highest approbation for the humane course you have pursued in regard to the nefarious swill milk traffic in Brooklyn, and yet, while I would not discourage you, I feel that nothing but a miracle can awaken the citizens of Brooklyn to a sense of their danger. We residents of that unfortunate city are at the mercy of almost all evil-minded people, and so the swill milk abomination exists, in fact flourishes, under the eyes of the sworn officers of the law, who calmly ignore the postilential condition of the cow stables and turn with renewed vigor to the discussion of political matters. Therefore the resolute stand you have taken merits the heartiest commendation from all our respectable citizens, who, although sufficient in numbers and ability to exterminate the lawless, have, like Samson, been shorn by the Delilah of partisan folly, until when the Philistines are upon them they find themselves weak as babes in the hands of giants, and can only await deliverance from some strong and chivalrous hand like yours stretched out to help them. I trust that you will "not weary in well doing," but persevere in your warfare in behalf of our children, until the people shall arise in their might and drive these murderers and all their aiders and abetters out from their midst, as they would drive out any other wild beasts which had been preying on their families and destroying their children. In the name of humanity persevere. NEMESIS.

STREET RAILROAD DANGERS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

Having been a reader for many years of your valable paper, I trust you will publish the following complaint:—I live up town, and in this heated term generally take an open car. Very often the seats are all taken, and I am then obliged to stand on the board or platform which lines each side of the car. Now, what I wish to complain of is that the car company (Third avenue) has posted at the junction of Fourth and Third avenues and the Bowery, where the Cooper Institute is, a large barrel or tank filled with water for the car horses. This tank is placed directly between the upgoing and down-going tracks, and should a person standing on the sideboard not take the greatest care (as one is likely not to observe it) the chances are that he may receive severe bodily injuries, as was the case with me three days ago, when I received such a fearful bump on my knees that I could not leave my house for two days. This complaint also has reference to the same nuisance on the road of the Second Avenue Company, who have a barrel placed the same way on the corner of Second avenue and Houston street. This evil could easily be remedied by the car companies placing two barrels instead of one in the middle on each side of the rail nearest the sidewalk, and thus save their passengers the chances of injuring themselves. A. L. C.

A PERTINENT INQUIRY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

Having waited a reasonable time for a reply to the pertinent inquiry of "Quiz" in a previous issue of your paper, I would respectfully urge the matter by asking what disposition was made by La Favorita Dramatic Association, of Harlem, of the proceeds of a performance for the benefit of the "Brooklyn sufferers?" By kindly giving this space in your valuable paper you will oblige PHIZ.

A FATAL MISTAKE.

BY ELIZA A. DUPUY,

AUTHOR OF "THE HEIRESS OF WILMOT HALL," "WHICH SHALL BE HEIR?" &C.

CHAPTER I.

A VIRGINIA HOME A HUNDRED YEARS AGO—GREAT NEWS—AN IMPROMPTU CELEBRATION.

A stately home situated on a lofty bluff overlooking the windings of the lovely Potomac is the opening scene of my story. Magnificent forest trees cast their wealth of shade over its hospitable roof, and threw flickering shadows on the verdant lawn, which stretched smoothly toward the river, terminating in an abrupt embankment, through which a carriage road was cut leading to the landing below—a rude platform built of heavy logs, overlaid with rough boards securely fastened down.

The house was imposing in appearance, though it was but a story and a half high, for it covered a large space of ground, and a wide verandah supported by heavy Doric pillars extended nearly the whole length of the front. This was paved with tiles brought from Europe, for at that day nothing of the kind was manufactured in this country.

On this opened three doors—the centre one the most imposing in size and finish. This led into a hall twenty feet wide, with a handsome staircase of polished oak rising from it to the upper chambers. A door at the foot of this led into a room of moderate size, with a corner fireplace which marred its proportions—one chimney serving this apartment and a smaller one which opened from it. Beyond these lay the library, a room of more imposing dimensions, with shelves filled with the standard English literature of that day.

On the opposite side of the wide hall, two rooms, exactly similar to the small ones described, opened from it, and through either of these access was gained to the state dining room, which extended the whole depth of the house and was wide in proportion. An immense arched window, with side lights, occupied the centre of the eastern wall, and two small ones in front gave cheerfulness to the large room, in which were often assembled the élite of that day—the brave and lovely women who formed what was afterward known as Washington's court. A few miles above lay Mount Vernon, built much on the same plan as Carmora, the homestead of Robert Carr, a gentleman of English descent and strong prejudices, but as stanch a patriot as if he had not been the descendant of a noble English house.

The great battle had been fought through years of discouragement and bitter hardship, but now it was nearly won, and the closing scene at Yorktown was looked for with extreme solicitude.

Mr. Carr was too old a man to take an active part in the struggle, for he was more than sixty years of age, but his wealth had helped to sustain the cause, and his enthusiasm was equal to that of the youngest man who gave his life for the country he loved. His grandfather had built Carmora, and laid the foundation of a large fortune which descended to him as the only male representative of the family. His only sister had been sent to England to her mother's family to be educated there. She never returned, having married there almost as soon as she escaped from the schoolroom, and died a few months afterward.

Mr. Carr was still the owner of an immense estate in land, but nearly all of his ready money had been exhausted by the exigencies of the times, and his own open handed liberality throughout those years which so severely tried men's souls. Yet there was still enough to spare, he declared, and his house was always open to those who claimed or needed the shelter of his hospitable roof.

In a large, morocco covered arm chair he is seated now; this is drawn near enough to the door of the wide hall we have described to afford a view of the windings of the beautiful river which he considers unrivalled by any other in the world.

He is a heavily built man, who, in the progress of years, has lost the lithe, *debonair* grace which once distinguished him in hall or hunting field. He has grown fat and unwieldy, and the gout has attacked his feet and partially disabled his right hand. But if his body is somewhat helpless, his brain is active enough and his will as strong—perhaps stronger—than in his palmiest days.

The head which crowns his heavy figure is lion-like in its contour, and the long masses of floating yellow hair, thickly mingled with gray, which ripple and curl around his shoulders, add to the resemblance. He will not submit to have it dressed after the fashion of the day except on grand state occasions, and then only by the gentle hands he loves best of all in the world—those of his only and adoringly beloved daughter.

The eyes which look out from this strongly-marked face are dark gray, large and well set, the expression varying from genial good humor to passionate fury, as the mood of their owner changes. For if the will of the lord of Carmora is set at naught he is capable of such wild excesses of rage as are frightful to those who fall under the ban of his displeasure, though luckily they are soon over.

And the one who dreads these outbursts most is the daughter he so loves, for alas! her will clashed with his in the most important crisis of her life, and for two years past Bettina Carr has had a secret of her own, which, if revealed to the hasty and passionate man who claims her as the one priceless jewel of his old age, will certainly lead to an explosion which may either cost her father his life or end in her own expulsion from the roof which is so dear to her.

He has no suspicion of the dread in which she lives, for open as day himself, Robert Carr has no dream of the fatal weakness of which his darling has been guilty. The time was swiftly approaching when all must become known, and Bettina, in a panic of fear, held herself aloof from her father as much as possible, dreading that he might discover her nervousness and seek to learn its cause.

The two young negroes were playing on the lawn, and suddenly the voice of the master arrested their gambols.

"Cæsar, Pompey, both of you young rascals go in search of Miss Betty, and tell her that a boat is coming up the river with flags flying. It brings good news—good—good, for the God of battles has been with us. Yorktown has fallen! I know—I know it must be so. It could not be otherwise if justice reigns in heaven. The God of our fathers would not forsake us in the supreme hour of our destiny."

The lads hastened to obey the command as soon as it was given, and at the close of his impassioned monologue a slender figure came swiftly from the lower edge of the lawn, where a rustic seat commanding a good outlook on the river was placed.

Bettina Carr did not resemble her father in any single trait of person. She was tall, lithe as the swaying willow, with brunette complexion, black hair and eyes, and delicate, clearly-cut features. She was now deadly pale, and her breath came in quick, short gasps, as she crossed the lawn in obedience to the summons of her father.

When within a few yards of the veranda she paused to gain self-control, but lifting her hand to shade her eyes pretended to be looking out on the boat which was swiftly approaching, with a band of music playing 'See, the Conquering Hero Comes."

"Gerald is there," she muttered, with white lips. "He promised me if he escaped from the perils of the battle, which I know now has been fought and won, that he would come in joy and triumph to claim me. Ah me—ah me! dare I suffer him to tell the truth? Shall I dare to face my father after it is told? He will never forgive me, never! and, oh, I cannot give him up—my darling, passionate old father—even for the man I once thought I loved beyond my life—that I could give up everything for. Now, I know that my heart is a divided one, and I cannot be happy ever again if papa refuses to forgive me. Hark! he is calling to me again, and I must go; but how I shall sustain my courage Heaven alone knows."

She moved forward with faltering and unwilling steps, and when she stood before him, Mr. Carr, in the midst of his elation, was struck by the expression of her face. He hurriedly asked:—

"Are you not well, Betty? You look strangely, and you hardly seem to be glad of the glorious news that must be coming. The long agony is over, my daughter, and our freedom is won. That is what that boat was sent to tell Mrs. Washington, and it brings to all on the river the glad tidings as well. If I could stand on my feet I would throw up my hat and make the welkin ring with huzzas; but as I am only an old cripple on his last legs, I must provide the best substitute that I can. Get out the old bugle and I will wind a blast on it that will bring up the darkies, and I'll make them howl till they are blacker in the face than nature made them."

Glad to turn his attention from herself, Bettina went into the hall, and presently returned with the bugle, which was ordinarily used to call the farm hands together. A long and musical peal was sounded, and before the boat made the landing a group of negroes, grinning with delight, had gathered on the bluff, yelling and hurrahing with as much vim as if the approaching news included their own emancipation from slavery.

The boat merely touched the landing and threw out a printed bulletin announcing the fall of Yorktown and the virtual conclusion of the war. A young man stepped on land, and beckoning Pompey, who had rushed down to the river on the first appearance of the schooner, gave him two letters, and hurriedly said:—

"For Mr. Carr, from headquarters." Then lowering his voice he significantly said:—

"Give the one with the corner turned down to your young mistress, and let no one see it. No one, mind, Pompey; and if you are faithful you know what you may hope for."

The lad nodded intelligently, and, with a broad grin, said:—

"I knows, sar. I'se seen furder'n do ole master. Miss Betty'll be glad to git it, an' I don't mean dat any but her shall know 'bout it."

He skipped up the pathway, stopping half-way up the ascent to utter a stunning war whoop by way of parting salutation to those who had already gone on; and then carefully concealing the secret missive in the sleeve of his shirt, Pompey hastened to deliver the letter confided to him, although efforts were made by some of the older negroes to take it from him.

He vaulted away from them dexterously, eluding the grasp ready to clutch him, crying out:—

"No, no; you don't discombobbolate dis chile often dat fashion. I'se de bearer o' de 'spatches, caze Marse Gerald give 'em to me, an' I'se gwine to put 'em in de han's dey was 'tended fur; so you git out'n de way, you poor, bamboozled niggers."

When Pompey gained the shelter of the piazza, no further attempt to intercept him was made, and he soon drew near enough to his master to make a deep salaam before him, pulling the front lock of his hair as he said:—

"I'se bring your letter safe, marster, though dem onmannerly old folks thought they'd a better right to it than I had. Marse Gerald gin it to me, an' he's done gone on a'ready."

A swift flash of anger came from the old man's eyes, and a heavy frown settled on his brow. He brusquely said:—

"His room is better than his company, any way. Of course he was only the bearer of the letter, for he can have nothing to say to me on his own account. Where are my glasses, Betty? Bring them to me, child, that I may read the glorious news for myself."

Bettina gladly hurried away to find the glasses, and Pompey glided after her, carrying in his hand the letter he had drawn from his sleeve. It was not the first time he had delivered missives from the same hand in a most mysterious manner, and Bettina took it with a half smile, though she shivered perceptibly as her hand came in contact with it. She only said:—

"You are very faithful, Pompey, and I will not forget it."

An expression of impatience from her father hurried her movements, and she had not time even to look at the address upon her own letter before she returned to him.

"Here are your spectacles, papa," she managed to say in a steady voice, "and now let us exult together in the great news your letter must contain."

"Yes—yes, my girl; you are true grit as well as myself, and I believe you will exult as I do, when the accursed foot of every invader of our soil is forever removed from it. But how comes it, I wonder, that Gerald Denham was made the bearer of despatches, the smooth faced, good for naught!"

In a voice Bettina vainly tried to steady, she said:—

"Since he came over to our side you know he has been a sort of attaché to General Washington's staff. He could be better spared, I suppose, than the more experienced officers."

The old man uttered a contemptuous expletive:—

"It is an honor that no traitor to his blood, no renegade to his country should have had bestowed upon him. Gerald is of English birth and breeding, and he only took sides with us for the sake of your favor and mine. You know how much he gained of my good will by that move, and I should carry a sore heart within me if I thought he had won much more of yours."

While he spoke thus Mr. Carr was too intently occupied with unsealing his letter with tremulous hands to observe the effect of his words upon his daughter. An expression of intense anguish and alarm spread over her colorless face, and she seemed to shrink from his words as if they were blows.

At length the missive was opened, and a message, about as brief as that of Cæsar to the Roman Senate, was found within written in a large, careless hand:—

"OLD FRIEND—The victory is ours, and the contest virtually ended. Denham will tell you the rest.

G. WASHINGTON."

Tears flowed from the eyes so little used to shedding them, and, lifting the letter above his head, Mr. Carr reverently said:—

"Thank the Lord of all the nations that He has given us a place among them; and, next to Him, thanks to the noble and true man, the grand cavalier, who has conducted us to a safe haven at last. Tho Bayard of his day, without fear and without reproach, the men of all ages and all lands shall hold him in reverence as the incarnation of all that is best in human nature."

Having uttered this tribute to the friend of his lifetime, the old man bowed his head upon his hands, and his lips moved as if in prayer.

His daughter stood beside him, deeply moved by his emotion, though at the same time intensely occupied with her own affairs, and shrinking within herself at the terrible ordeal through which she knew she must soon pass.

Carr suddenly raised his head, glanced at her marble-like face, and, with sudden irritation, said:—

"I am almost tempted to believe that you have no sympathy with me in this hour, Bettina, for you are looking as pallid as a ghost and as joyless as if this great news had no meaning for you, as it must have for every woman in the land. What has come over you, girl? Your spirits have been variable for a long time past, but I accounted for that by the uncertain condition of the times. Now they have mended, and there is no excuse for that woe-begone expression. I hope you are not thinking of that worthless scamp who passed up the river just now? I hoped and believed that folly was dead and buried long ago."

With dry lips, Bettina managed to say:—

"You are very hard on me, papa; I exult in the success of our cause as much as you or any one can, but I am not quite well. My nerves have been severely tried lately, and—and I cannot control myself as well as I once could."

"I cannot think what you have had to try them," said her father, dryly. "If you are building new hopes on the appearance of Gerald Denham in this neighborhood you may dismiss them at once, for he shall never darken my doors again with my consent. Dishonorable to the core of his heart, I would sooner see you wedded to the tomb than allow him for one hour to believe that I would permit him to approach you in the character of a lover. He did it once; he abused the hospitality extended to him as a distant kinsman to attempt to win my heiress, knowing, too, how unworthy he had proved himself of any pure woman's love. Do you think I had not good cause to send him away when I steeled my heart against your prayers and refused to hear from him such feeble and false defence as he would have attempted? I would not tell you the story then, my daughter, because I wished to spare you the knowledge of all his baseness; but after all this time, if there is still a weak spot in your heart which clings to him, I will lay bare the record that you may know how utterly worthless Gerald Denham is."

Bettina cowered beneath this outburst—how hopelessly, how helplessly, her father could never have suspected. She shuddered through every fibre of her frame as he went on, and at the close of his long speech put out her hand deprecatingly, and almost hysterically said:—

"Don't—don't tell me anything papa. I know enough—too much already that—that bears hardly on him. I did love him once—oh, how dearly! how dearly! But you need not tell me anything to disenchant me now. He has done that himself effectually enough, and I love you ten thousand times better than I ever can love him again."

"Ah-h! that is well, my daughter, for it will be a hard struggle for me to give up the first place in your heart even to a good man. Certainly not to such as I know Gerald to be. There, my dear, brighten up, and let us think what we shall do in honor of the great news we have heard this evening. By Jupiter! there is a bonfire rising already on Mason's place. Call up the darkies, and I will give them their orders."

The negroes had gathered into groups on the lawn, waiting and watching the progress of the boat up stream, every available part of which was decorated with the flag which was so proudly borne as the emblem of victory. They knew that a celebration of some kind would be attempted, and they waited for the orders that were certain to come.

A few thrilling notes wound on the bugle soon collected a dark mass in front of the veranda, overflowing with excitement and animal spirits, and the order to make a magnificent bonfire on the lower end of the lawn on a point of land jutting out toward the river was received with jubilant cries and wild capers from the more juvenile portion of the laborers.

Pompey cried out in shrill tones—

"Mayn't I set fire to the pile, massa? I bring de letter, an' I'se de bes' right."

"Yes—yes," was the laughing reply, "and be sure to make a blaze that shall light up the river far and near. Make Carmora outshine the others, if you can."

Signal fires were burning already as far as the eye could reach along the banks of the river, and in a brief space of time a ruddy flame arose on the point, which increased in volume as fresh fuel was heaped upon it; and Pompey had the satisfaction of seeing that in size and brilliancy the fire he had kindled could scarcely be surpassed. Dark figures flitted around it several hours, to whom refreshments were sent out from the house in honor of the occasion. Among those was a jug of Jamaica rum, from which the health of the great chieftain was drunk as jubilantly by the blacks as if their chains had been broken too on the day which gave him the victory over his foes.

"Poor devils," muttered their owner, "they have all the fun and we shall reap all the benefit. It is hardly fair to set them to rejoicing over freedom in which they have no share; but they seem to like it well enough. 'Care killed a cat,' says the proverb; but it's not likely to prove fatal to a jolly race like that of the negro. Sambo is so different from us that we can hardly judge him by the same standard.

"Ah, there is the supper bell. Betty, give me your arm, please; it is better than a cane. Ah! what would I do without my lily-belle, my true and loving child?"

Bettina listened to this with a great pang, but she smiled and made no sign. She had conquered outward composure at least, though her letter burned in her bosom, and she had great fears as to the nature of its contents.

CHAPTER II.

A WRETCHED MYSTERY—WILL FORGIVENESS BE ACCORDED WHEN IT BECOMES KNOWN?

In the small back room on the eastern side of the hall the table was laid for three persons—the master, and his daughter, and the elderly lady who, at the death of Mrs. Carr twelve years before, had taken on herself the care of the house and the training of the only child.

Mrs. Ronald was a childless widow, nearly related to Bettina's mother, who gladly accepted the comfortable home which was offered her at Mrs. Carr's decease, and carefully saved the greater part of her liberal salary, intending to return it at her death to the being she loved best in the world—the impulsive, giddy, willful girl she had helped to train to womanhood, who was now reaping in bitterness the tares sown by the weak indulgence granted to her most capricious fancies in the days when her character was forming for good or for evil. Had Bettina Carr's nature been an evil one, she might have matured into something repulsive, but fortunately she was a bright, frank, affectionate child, who, in some measure, tried to rule herself, that she might not become an object of aversion to those around her.

Her temper was imperious, her will strong, her liberty untrammelled, and it she remained unspoiled under such circumstances it was due to the innate nobility of spirit bestowed upon her.

One fatal error she had made which she was repenting now with tears of blood, wrung from her aching heart; but she smiled and talked and made no sigh, lest her father should be again aroused to suspicion as to the cause of her depression.

The small, fair woman who fluttered about the head of the table as if uncertain what to do or say looked from one to the other when the father and daughter entered the room, and the expression of uncertainty died from her face. She smiled in her soft way and said:—

"This is a grand day for us, sir, and it's a pity we cannot do something worth speaking of to signalize our rejoicing. A bonfire is a fine thing, to be sure, and I have ordered the cook to get up something the negroes will like by way of refreshment. I am sure the poor creatures must be hoarse with all the shouting they have done. One might think it was their jubilee."

"Theirs may come some day," said Mr. Carr, prophetically, "and when it does I hope they will make as good use of it as we intend to make of ours. Send them out something to be jolly on, Mrs. Ronald—I beg your pardon—Cousin Nancy; let them have some of the rum that is still in the storeroom, for now we shall have no difficulty in getting plenty more."

Mrs. Ronald cast her small light blue eyes toward Bettina in a furtive manner while this was said; but her quiet demeanor and the supreme self-control the young girl imposed on herself reassured the duenna, who had been careless of her charge, and who knew as well as Bettina did that a blow was impending which must bring stupendous results to the three gathered around that table. To two of them eternal banishment, perhaps, from beloved Carmora—to the third one, desolation and despair over the defection of his trusted and adored daughter.

Mrs. Ronald knew that Denham was on the passing boat, and that he had left no token for Bettina she thought impossible—yet such questions as she had been able to put to Pompey were baffled, for that acute Mercury was uncertain as to how far the housekeeper was in the confidence of his young lady, and he was true to the pledge he had given.

That Denham had returned to the neighborhood with the intention of defying Mr. Carr and proving to him that his hold upon his daughter was too strong to be lightly shaken off, Mrs. Ronald felt assured; and she quaked and quivered before the revelation she felt sure was coming, although she had only been taken into the confidence of the lovers when it was necessary to have a friend who could be implicitly relied on.

She had been that friend—she had deceived the good old man who trusted her—and now her punishment was approaching. She was a soft-hearted, feeble little woman, with small power of resistance when a will stronger than her own was brought to bear upon her, and the deception which had long been carried on against the master of the house had only been submitted to because she could not help herself in the position in which she was placed.

The old gentleman was greatly elated and talked much more than usual, and the two women listened with a show of interest, though it he could have seen how heartsick they really were, as much on his account as on their own, he would have shrunk before the bitter grief and humiliation which were approaching him.

The table was at length cleared, but Mr. Carr retained his seat, and talked on of what he meant to do in the near future, and uttered predictions of the future greatness and prosperity of his beloved country, which seemed extravagant then, but which have since been far transcended by the growth of the nation, then an infant in its swaddling clothes.

"We shall have a republican form of government,' he said, "for I know Washington's mind on that subject, and his will be the ruling spirit in our councils. In his own mind he has already fixed on the site of the future capital, and it is not so very far from us either; but all that is to be settled in the future. What I am thinking of now is the fine figure I mean you to make, Bettina, in the court of brave men and fair women who will gather around our great chieftain. You shall be bravely decked, my daughter, and I will order from France such finery as you will need. The jewels you gave to the cause must be replaced by something finer, for no bright lady of the republican court shall eclipse the heiress of Carmora."

Bettina faintly murmured:—

"You are very good, papa, and I thank you with all my heart. Let what will happen, believe, oh! believe that I shall be grateful to the last hour of my life for the love you have felt for me, the pride you have taken in me."

Mr. Carr threw up his massive head in a way peculiar to himself, and in angry surprise asked:—

"What can happen, I should like to know? What crotchet has got into your brain, Betty, and half addled it? Of late you seem always to be dreaming of evil, though nothing but good can be in store for you. You need something to brighten you up. Order wine, if you please, Cousin Nancy. Some of the rare vintage bequeathed to me by my father. A few bottles yet remain, and I have reserved them especially for this occasion. One of them we will have to-night, and the rest shall be kept for the grand reception we will have when our hero comes back to Mount Vernon. We will drink his health to-night, and, by my faith! I shall expect you and Betty to drink bumpers on so joyful an occasion."

Glad to get away for a few moments, Mrs. Ronald fluttered from the room, and after a short absence returned, followed by the black butler, bearing a bottle of wine, which he had carefully dusted and uncorked under the supervision of the old lady. Glasses were placed upon the table, and with reverent care Mr. Carr filled three to the brim, and, rising to his feet with some effort, said, as he lifted his glass above his head:—

"This to the health, prosperity and long life of the grandest man whom God has sent through all the ages to save and bless the new home prepared for the down-trodden of all nations. The refuge of the oppressed, the hope of the world, we will make it, with the blessing of that benign Providence which has favored us so far."

He tossed off his wine, and the two ladies, catching some of his enthusiasm, did the same, though they drank it more slowly.

"That is right; and now for a libation to our country," and he moved toward the open window, broke the bottle, and poured its precious contents on the ground without, much to the dismay of the sable attendant, who had hoped to have a portion left in it for himself.

Catching the expression of his face the master laughed merrily and said:—

"Such vintage is not for such as thou, old Cæsar, though thy name smacks of the palmy days of Rome. Apple-jack and Jamaica rum are better suited to thy palate, and I give you leave to help yourself from the cellar to as much of them as you choose to drink—but beware that you stop short of drunkenness, old man. I tolerate nothing like excess, you know of old."

"Yes, marster—thank you, sir, ever so much for de privilege, an' I'll not 'buse it. But I should ha' liked a taste o' de gold sea, all the same."

"I dare say. It is well named, for it is worth its weight in gold, therefore was it a fit offering on behalf of my native land. Go now, and solace thy disappointment with such inferior tipple as is suited to thee, but do not fail to drink to the hero of Yorktown."

"Yes, sar; an' to you, marster, for you's a'most as big a gomphin as Marster General Washington."

With this the negro disappeared, grinning from ear to ear. Mr. Carr turned to his daughter and said:—

"Hear that now, that old numbskull thinks because I have more land than is in the Mount Vernon estate, and as good a house as is on that, that I am to be placed side by side with an immortal."

Both the ladies were still standing, and Bettina, burning with impatience to be free to read her letter, made a movement toward the door. Her father arrested her by saying:—

"I meant to make you drink confusion to all traitors," Miss Carr, but in my enthusiasm I forgot that such reptiles exist; and the basest of all traitors, in my estimation, is he who is faithless to the land that gave him birth."

The faint flush the wine had brought to Bettina's cheeks faded away at this thrust, but a sudden fire gleamed in her dark eyes as she replied:—

"You are right, papa; the man who is false to his country is scarcely to be trusted in any relation in life. I feel that deeply—deeply."

"Then you are safe from the machinations of a base man who has come hither to try and cast his glamour over you a second time, my daughter," he replied, as he stooped forward and imprinted a tender kiss upon her brow.

Bettina almost shrank from the caress, and she woefully thought:—

"If he knew—if he only suspected my treason against himself he would never kiss me again. I shall be cast out of his heart forever when he hears the story, as soon he must, and I shall be thrust from my Eden in sorrier plight than Eve, for she at least had faith in her Adam when they went forth into the wilderness to face the world together."

Mrs. Ronald gave a little frightened gasp, and said:—

"Suppose we go out on the piazza and take a look at the bonfires that have been kindled at every point on the river. Night has fallen and it must be a fine scene."

The others mechanically followed her lead, and presently they stood together, looking out upon the river. The moon had not yet risen, and the cloudless concave above, thickly sown with stars, looked calmly down on the lurid light reflected in a thousand fantastic forms in the flowing stream, throwing out in strong relief the wooded shores, and revealing glimpses of the few homes scattered at intervals far apart from each other.

Fires had sprung up in every direction, and the booming of guns from the direction of Alexandria showed that the news had gained that point, and the people of the town were celebrating the victory with salvos of artillery.

When they had thoroughly taken in the scene Mrs. Ronald hastened to say:—

"A damp, chilly air is rising from the river, Cousin Robert, and I think it is not safe for you to expose yourself longer to the night breeze. You are not well now, you know."

"Nothing is the matter with me but growing old, Nancy," he replied, with a short laugh. "Once I could brave a chillier blast than this with impunity, but now I feel that I am drawing near the three score and ten years allotted to man as his heritage of life. Yes, let us go in, that I may not risk dying before things are properly set going in this land which the Lord has given to us. I have letters to write, too, and Betty must be my amanuensis as usual, though I am sorry to tax her to-night."

"Oh, dear papa," cried Bettina, impulsively, "I hope there will not be many letters to write, for I am tired with all the excitement I have gone through in the last few hours. Will not to-morrow morning do?"

Her father turned and regarded her with something like surprise as they entered the lighted hall. He saw that she was pale and worn-looking, and he gravely said—

"It is not so long since that nothing seemed to have power to fatigue you, Betty; but of late you seem to have lost all your natural elasticity both of mind and body. What ails you, child? Do you find the air here disagree with you?"

"Oh, no, no! Carmora is the dearest place in the world, and I am always better here than anywhere else. I am only tired to-night, and if your letters are not very important I had rather play the part of scribe to-morrow, papa."

"Then to-morrow let it be. I cannot overtax you, my child, and you look as if you need repose. I will smoke my pipe and meditate on the bright future opening to us; that will be better, at any rate, than occupying myself with other things at this time."

"Repose!" mentally repeated Bettina. "There will be little enough of that for me to-night. Poor father! He dreams of happiness, and I shall bring him only blight."

But she kissed him affectionately and cheerfully said:—

"You are always kind and considerate, papa, and I sometimes feel quite self-condemned when I think of all I owe you, and how poor a return I have made for it."

"Don't depreciate yourself, my daughter," he said, with a fond smile, for no man can claim a fairer or more devoted daughter than it is my happiness to possess. Sleep soundly and get back some color in your cheeks, my pet, and may Heaven's benison rest upon you."

He passed his hand caressingly over her hair, and she bowed her head in silence and felt, with bitter pain, how unworthy she was of that blessing.

Mr. Carr went into the library, above which his sleeping room was situated, access to which was gained through a small lobby communicating with a private staircase—one of the odd nooks about the old fashioned house. This room was his sanctum in which all of his business transactions of every kind were conducted, and to the owner of a large plantation, and also a local magistrate, life was no sinecure in those days.

A small fire burned on the hearth and the lamp was carefully trimmed, for both housekeeper and daughter were scrupulously attentive to his comfort. Ensconced in a large, country made chair, the curling smoke rising at intervals from his lips, the old man sat happily musing, unconscious of the scene enacting in his daughter's room, which, if known to him, would have put to flight all happy visions and filled his heart with dismay, to be followed by bitter anger.

No sooner was she freed from her father's presence than Bettina ran up the wide stairs leading from the hall, and turning to the left entered her own room and closed the door precipitately, though she did not bolt it. A light was burning, and a dark form was cowering over the small fire on the hearth which she seemed to have just kindled. The girl arose and said:—

"You's earlier than usual, Miss Betty, an' de fire has hardly had time to burn yet. 'Scuse me, please; I'se been out lookin' at de fires, an' they was so grand like that I forgot about de one I had to kindle here."

"You are very excusable, Melissa, on such a night as this. I shall not need you, and you may go at once and see all that is going on."

"Oh, thank you, Missy, I am ever so glad to git out wi' de people ag'in. They's dancin' an' junketin' finely down to the p'int, an' the master sent word they might keep up the fun till ten o'clock.

"Under such circumstances of course I shall not keep you here, Lissa. Go out and join them as soon as you please."

The girl hastened to avail herself of this permission and Bettina threw herself into a cushioned chair, covered with quaintly flowered chintz, and drew from its concealment the letter which had lain as a leaden messenger of evil so long against her heart.

If it had been written by a beloved hand the action which greeted its first appearance was certainly singular. With strong repulsion she threw it from her nearly across the room and an expression almost of loathing came into her face as she sat silently regarding it as if unable to make up her mind to read its contents, anxious as she had been to make herself mistress of them. While she sat thus a faint, timid knock came upon the door, but in the fierce working of her own mind Bettina did not heed or hear it. The sound was repeated again without attracting notice, and then the door slowly opened and Mrs. Ronald came in, carefully closing and bolting it after herself, though all was so quietly done that until she spoke Bettina was not aware of her presence.

"Oh! Betty, why do you look so strangely?" she quavered. "You got a letter, of course, though that boy would not admit it to me. What does Gerald say? What is he going to do? I have been wretched ever since I heard that he has ventured into the neighborhood again."

"I don't know what he says, and I do not much care," was the defiant response. "Of course, it is something to torture me, some threat to show me that I am fatally in his power. You can pick it up and read it if you choose. I have not broken the seal. By some magnetic power I divined the nature of its contents while I held it in my hand, and I threw it from me as if it had been a reptile that could sting me."

Mrs. Ronald stooped and lifted the letter, though she made no attempt to open it. She sat down suddenly, as if unable to sustain herself longer, and after a brief pause tremulously said:—

"Of course, I cannot, even with your permission, break open a letter belonging to you, my dear. Gerald, no doubt, expected, while writing it, that your eyes alone would read the messages he has sent to you. Do read it, and find out from it what his object is in coming so near us again."

"He has but one object, and that is to drive me to desperation," responded the girl, sullenly. "He has violated every pledge he made to me. I gave him all I had to give, to leave me to the supreme wretchedness he has brought upon me, never to show his guileful face to me again, and here he is, haunting my steps and renewing his old persecutions. Oh, Nancy! what am I to do? What can I do to save my poor old father from learning the secrets of my life for two years past?"

"We cannot tell what may be done till you read your letter, Betty, and see what Mr. Denham has to say for himself. I fear that he is a very bad man, but he is your husband—the father of that poor child through whose existence he has great power over you. It is on her account that he may have come hither."

"Oh, my baby! my baby! my poor, helpless little one! Given up to strangers, while I yearn through every hour of my life for her sweet caresses," wailed Bettina, wringing her hands in anguish. "