A FLIRTATION.

WRITTEN FOR THE EVENING STAR BY WILL CARLETON.

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CHAPTER I.

ONE OF THE HOTTEST days that New Jersey had known that summer closed at last with the celebration of a singularly gorgeous sunset. A soothing coolness from the neighboring hills was brought by a cozy, whispering little breeze that seemed to encourage all nature in drawing a long breath. The tired little country world in which Badger McPherson was a pilgrim and a stranger, became more lively and aggressive; sounds of mirth and jollity came to him from green farms along the broad white ribbon of a wagon road, on which, afoot and alone, he was journeying. Once in a while strains of vocal music, their roughness softened by distance, came from some one of the little valleys or hill tops and made him homesick.

The young man had a long, narrow cylinder under his arm, about the length of a Winchester rifle. But it was not a gun, for it had no lock, stock or barrel. Neither was it a telescope, although the young gentleman had a scholarly look. It was not a roll of manuscript with gigantic pages. It was a parcel of maps.

Badger McPherson was a fine-looking, well-limbed young theologue from Minceton. He was still a junior, but had studied enough to compel him to brace up his health with a great deal of athletics and resolution. He was ambitious and felt that he had undeveloped talents, if not genius, that would burst forth into an arc of oratorical electric lights immediately after his ordination. His primary idea was, of course, to succeed in winning souls from the wrath to come, but he had no objection to the possession of more or less earthly affection. In fact, in the pictures that he painted of his future ministrations there were a good many worldly successes interspersed. He had decided not to be an ascetic in any form and had quite a long list of earthly pleasures on the program tablets of his mind, not incompatible, he thought, with his divine mission.

One of these pleasures was that of flirting; innocent social amenities, he called it. He had a best girl down in Wilmington, Del., and loved her very dearly; but they could not be together all the while; he did not know exactly when they would be able to marry; and, being more than usually attractive, why should he not make himself agreeable to the other sex, he thought.

Badger McPherson was, greatly to his constant chagrin, poor; he had nothing but his life, and even that was mortgaged. He was making his way through college with borrowed money, secured from a half philanthropic money lender, with an insurance policy on himself.

There were several other students in the college besides Badger McPherson who had none too much spending money; and some, not so needy, who wished a summer "business lark," and a slight addition of money to their purses, and so had been organized, at the beginning of that summer, "The Scholastic Canvassing Club."

This was a small devastating army of students, who went through the country armed with maps of the United States, made, according to the publisher and the general agent, with a minuteness and completeness that topographical science had never dreamed of before. These commercial troops marched in parallel lines through several counties of the state, captured what unsuspecting farmers they could and organized their prisoners of the subscription list into "clubs"—each student receiving a commission for every victim he made.

The young gentleman walking down this particular road had not today done a good ten hours' work, although expending so much eloquence and erudition that he felt on the verge of mental bankruptcy. People did not want maps just then; the resident population seemed quite content to stay mentally, as well as physically, within their present environment without any reference to other states and territories. He had been asked two or three times why he didn't work for a living. A benevolent-looking old lady had offered him his dinner if he would saw a cord of wood. Once he had been taken for a tramp and ordered to "move on there, now!" when he tried to enter the gateway to a rural nabob's mansion. He began to have some more little babyish thrills of homesickness, alternated with defiant flashes of feeling, in regard to how these people would stand it when they should hear of him as the most popular pulpit orator of the land. He had procured their addresses, one from another, as he went along, and vowed to some time send them all tracts and sermons (of his own composition, of course,) until they trembled for an undesirable eternal future—produced partly by indifference to unknown theological students and partly by ignorance of the map of the United States.

As the sun went inexorably out of view he began to wonder in what house he should stay all night, or if he should have to sleep in some uninteresting barn, with the permission of the horses, mice and insects within it, or in one of the rough, improvised bed chambers of a straw stack. He had been told by several well-to-do members of the Farmers' Alliance that they were not in the lodging house business that year; that they didn't find keeping boarders profitable; that there was a neat little tavern a few miles further on, &c., &c. But his purse was light and his heels growing heavier and heavier, and he determined at last to make a most desperate effort to assist in getting back some of the money laid out on a house roof.

He finally saw a handsome old farm house on a grove-sheltered hill just ahead of him, and determined to sleep in that abode if human ingenuity could obtain the desired permission. He hid his sample case of maps in a very obscure recess of a covered bridge and went with a refined boldness up to the hospitable-looking door of his chosen shelter for the night.

A handsome, aristocratic-looking old mastiff lay on the broad piazza near the steps. This singular cur had none of the standard accomplishments of ordinary bucolic dogs, which are to howl wildly at unoffending people passing the house and to worry every casual visitor into temporary nervous prostration. "This dog knows that I don't belong to his race," mused Badger. "He recognizes a gentleman when he sees one." The fine old animal did not even rise; he twisted a friendly, intelligent eye up toward the young topographical missionary as if to say, "Good evening, sir; I will waive the formality of smelling of and nipping at your heels, as it is you. You'll find the people of the house just inside," gave a civil wag and a half to his tail and composed himself again to canine reminiscences.

"I was taking a pedestrian tour, have been belated and stopped here to see if you could put me up for the night." This little historical romance Badger recited to the courtly old gentleman who came to the door, and in a manner that Lord Chesterfield would, under the circumstances, have found no particular fault with. It surprised Badger to see how fleet and magnetic he really was with no maps to encumber him.

"Certainly, you can stay, sir," replied the old gentleman, with a glance at the good-looking young man, and a confiding air that cost the young man some feelings of mild remorse, when he thought of the different reception he might meet, if the covered bridge could run in and say a word or two.

"Certainly, sir. Your name, please?"

The gay student presented one of his cards, which he fortunately had with him, labeled "Mr. Badger McPherson, class —, Minceton University," and from that time was an honored guest in a very fetching domestic circle.

The family was large, but orderly and refined; the essence of good rules, without their substance, appeared to magnetize everything. It was a great piece of luck, this falling in with a first-class family, and its congeniality rested him more than he could tell even himself. He wished there was a relay of such families all the way along the line he was to travel. But this seemed impossible; it was the first evening of the kind he had found in the whole trip.

The courtly old gentleman who had met him at the door had a harmonious, ladylike wife and two sons and three daughters, evidently acquired somewhat late in his prime; and with a rather bold flight of the imagination for a young theologue Badger had the glimpse of a feeling that he would like to possess just such a family (with a city twist on it) when he had captured the world by his pulpit eloquence and was pausing a little to take spiritual and physical breath.

The supper being over, there was a miniature informal party in the cozy but spacious sitting room, in which the young theologue shone brilliantly and became a doubly welcome guest. He told several exhilarating college stories, of which he was himself the half-admitted hero; joined all the songs with a very passable and adjustable voice, which could be utilized as a tenor, alto, soprano or bass; suggested that one of the boys should try a course in his college; drew wildly exciting pictures of tennis, foot ball and rowing tournaments; recounted all the first principles of college athletics, and really lighted up the old farm house as it had not been for some time before.

The pet serpent of flirtation, however, soon managed to creep into this happy little domestic garden. The eldest daughter was about eighteen, a charmingly half-incomprehensible kind of young lady and one that constantly put poor Badger on his mettle. She fascinated him in a way that caused him to almost pity his "best girl" down at Wilmington, although at heart he was faithful enough. Her eyes contained an expression of combined recklessness and pathos that he did not remember having found before. Her laugh was musical, but possessed the least tinge of bitterness—that touch or shade which makes some girls' merriment so queerly charming. He found himself in a mild sort of flirtation—a fit of false-falling-in-love—a superficial frenzy that was delightful while it was tantalizing. It was his imagination that was at work (or play) rather than his heart; but in an intense manner such as he had never used before in a flirtation, although something of an artist in these affairs of the outer approaches to the heart. It seemed perfectly natural to find himself at last standing on the veranda alone with her, communicating the names of the different stars in sight, fancying he saw them all reflected in her eyes, and mentioning that fact, with a slight confirmatory pressure of her hand, which he had managed somehow to borrow for a few moments.

"Oh, you are probably like all the rest of your terrible sex," she purred, softly, with that bitter-sweet laugh, which puzzled while it thrilled him. "You flatter us poor girls, and get us to liking you, and then forget everything you have said, and us, too, as soon as we are out of sight."

What could poor Badger do, he thought, but give her hand an affirmative little pressure, and state his firm intention never, never to forget her, in tones whose soft touch upon the ear was at least first cousin to tenderness?

"Still, it is easy enough to say you will never forget any one, you know," insisted the young maiden, changing the stars reflected in her eyes to falling ones. "But when it comes to really doing anything for her—sacrificing, you know—why, then, your whole race is faithlessness itself."

This innocent little verbal trap caught poor Badger completely. He asserted that she was cruelly mistaken in him, that he would be willing to do anything he could for her in the world, even at the risk of his life, and she must surely let him know, whenever he might be of any service whatever.

"Which I certainly will," she replied, in a strangely sweet tone and a very slight pressure of the hand—so delicate that he was almost in doubt whether it were real or imaginary. And soon afterward they parted, with a very congenial and rather lingering good night.

CHAPTER II.

It was about 11:30 and Badger was in the neat room where he had been billeted writing, not to his best girl in Wilmington, Del., as he had intended, but to one of his more confidential college chums. "I'm staying in a daisy place tonight," he had just said; "fine old farm house—people cordial and well bred—and have met here one of the divinest rural maidens you ever saw, Tom. I have never before found such a singular combine of keenness, simplicity and loveliness. She is deep, but the depths are clear as the unsullied latent waves of a placid sylvan lake." (He had borrowed from himself a figure that was in one of his note-books, entitled "Ornaments for future sermons when in a hurry.") "If you could only see her, Tom"——

There was a dainty little tap at the door. The young man hurriedly donned a coat, which he had thrown off for ease, and, to his great surprise, admitted the young lady he had been writing about only a few instants before.

"You are very much surprised," said this girl, in a low, mystery voice, making a very pretty picture of herself as she stood gracefully outlined against the dark wall, with the lamp light shining full upon her. And, indeed, Badger, who fancied he had upon his person a rule never to be taken off guard at anything, was somewhat startled and blushed, in spite of several consecutive efforts to the contrary.

"All the people are in their 'little beds' but us," she continued, with an expansion of simplicity that gave the good young man an almost fatherly feeling toward her. "Nobody can know I am here, unless—unless—(with a very slight installment of the bitter-sweet laugh) you choose to tell them. I knew you would trust me, for students are always decreasing the oil products of this country while other people dream. You said, a little while since, that I was to let you know when you could serve me. I told you I would. Well, I have come to let you know."

Badger had recovered his rule never-to-be-surprised from the pit into which it had temporarily fallen and waited calmly for further information, though with a considerably accelerated movement of the heart.

"I thought you didn't mean it, you know," continued the young lady, looking at him gravely and reflectively. "But I got to thinking afterward and decided that you did. I will tell you what I want in a very few words, and you can do it for me easily—I want you to elope with me."

"Goodness! mercy! What does the girl mean?" mused poor Badger. He lost his rule, never-to-be-surprised, this time, completely and unreservedly, and admitted it, even to himself.

"You surprise me, very, very, very much," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "What in the world can you mean? Why, here you have known me only four or five hours and now want to elope with me. What can you be thinking about?"

"You heard every word I said," insisted the young lady, with a lovely dignity that precluded any idea of "softness" or intending forwardness. "I believe you can be trusted. And I want you to elope with me tonight."

Mr. McPherson felt flattered—why should he not?—even in the midst of the horror aroused by the proposed enterprise. To be sure, he knew that he was attractive enough, you know, and had some ways of his own, of course, and he believed—that is, he couldn't help believing, he was somewhat magnetic, you see, and girls would fall in love with him once in a while of course—so he must do the father, brother and spiritual advisor act, all in one, in this case; it would make a very pretty and creditable story to tell Tom and one or two others—though the best girl at Wilmington must, of course, never hear anything about it; and it would be right. He nerved and composed himself for the contest with this dainty little morsel of misdirected sentiment.

"My dear girl," he murmured quietly and friendly, taking one of her hands in his with a somewhat awkward paternal air. "You must pardon me for solemnly warning you against this infatuation."

"But what use is it to warn me?" asked the girl, looking him straight in the eyes with an air of graceful honesty that he could not but respect while he admired. "There is no escaping the infatuation. I do not think heaven meant me to escape it."

"Oh, yes, it did," insisted Badger, quite positively. "Heaven always intended so lovely a girl should escape everything wrong; and, besides, it would be impossible for me ever to join my fate with yours in the bonds of holy matrimony. I am—am—am—engaged." The best girl at Wilmington, Del., shed her benign influence upon Badger's sense of memory and gave him a glow of pride that he was able to be thus faithful in the midst of dire temptation.

"Oh, the stupid I am," she exclaimed, her little, slightly bitter laugh encompassing the remark like soft music in a dream. "I didn't tell you all. It is not you I am infatuated with. I don't want you to join your fate with mine in holy matrimony; I want you to take me to another young man."

The opportunity for doing this dear child good still remained, but it must be said that Badger's interest in the matter suddenly sustained a decline in spite of himself and the whole affair became tedious and almost disgusting. He tried hard not to make an exhibit of this fact, but the quick intuition of the girl understood and half pitied him for it. He tried to smile, but his smile was all made land and existed entirely in the lower regions of his countenance; the eyes, which everybody finds it at times hard to control, did not join in the facial festivity, but had a feeling-disappointed-in-spite-of-yourself look.

"You see, I couldn't help it," she murmured, looking at McPherson pettingly and half pityingly. "I met him years ago and—loved him at first—and—love him more and more, longer I know him—just as any one would you—I am sure—just as your sweetheart does, you know, probably. Don't you see?"

Badger replied that he saw and tried hard to view the whole matter in a way not uncomplimentary to himself, still with a feeling that his vanity had received a curiously hard blow.

"But in that case what do you want to elope with me for?" he inquired with the slightest twist of asperity to his tone. "What do you want to elope for anyhow?"

"That is the curious part of it," mused the girl, "and the most difficult. You see," with a deep, brooding look in her glorious eyes which the best girl in Wilmington, Del., could not approach, "I love him—I love him so——"

"Yes, you love him," interrupted Badger, with increasing curtness, which he toiled hard to keep courteous. He began already to feel nearly exhausted with this fellow whom she "loved, loved so." "You told me that. But what do you want of me?"

"Oh," persisted the eccentric beauty, "I ought to love him awfully well, for I'm the only one of the family that does. They all hate him but me—poor, dear, unappreciated Hughie!"

So "Hugh" was the given name of this fellow, who was, no doubt, a rascal. Badger had never liked the name Hugh, anyway, and its pet elongation into "Hughie" struck him as peculiarly unpleasant. His own best girl had sometimes called him "Badgie," but even that seemed "stale, flat and unprofitables," just now.

"Father, mother, brother, sisters, all hate him," continued the maiden reflectively. "Even Voltaire never would let him come into the yard, if he could help it."

"Who is Voltaire?" inquired Badger. "Another fellow?"

"Voltaire is our family dog," replied the girl. "We named him that because he does not revere his maker. Everybody is down on poor Hughie, except me, and I never, never will desert him! He is unfortunate, and most people hate misfortune, even in anybody else. He has explained all his troubles to me, and I am the only one that understands him. All the rest of the world is against him."

A large symmetrical tear that had been listening to the conversation from behind the corner of one of her eyes now discovered itself, came boldly out, and in a manner tried to join the company. But it was promptly rebuked and sent away. This girl was no maiden Niobe, no matter what else she might be.

"Well," replied Badger, getting his second wind, "the elopement industry is generally understood to be a wicked, dangerous, everlasting regretable kind of business; but, for the sake of the argument (laying your own sake aside for a moment), if you two want to elope, why in the world don't you do it? Why doesn't he come here, chloroform Voltaire and run off with you like a man? Why do you go telling other folks about it and try to get them to go along with you? Why doesn't he——"

"He is not able," murmured the young lady. "He cannot go anywhere just at present. I can elope, but he can't for an hour or two yet at least. He—he—isn't very well. Poor, dear Hughie!"

"Where is he?" asked Badger, in rather an authoritative tone, feeling that there must be something very queer, if not crooked, in the young man in question.

"Hughie is in—in—in—jail," replied the maiden, with a quaver in her sweet voice. "But he has explained it all to me; now he happened to be found with the horse, the silks, and the jewelry, and the marked bills, and the counterfeit money, and all the things that they have been accusing him of. Oh, it is too bad! If they knew Hughie as well as I do they would understand that he never would demean himself so as to steal horses, dry goods and things."

"It is, indeed, unfortunate that the authorities hold the opinions you mention," replied Badger, dryly. He was fast dropping into sarcasm. "But, admitting for the sake of argument (and laying your own sake aside once more), that he is innocent, I should not think he would be in a very good condition to receive visitors in the dead of night until after he has been tried and acquitted."

"No," replied the young lady pensively, but with growing cheerfulness, "he is not in a very good condition to receive visitors, but for my sake he will brace up to it. He has been tried and convicted and will be sentenced and taken to state's prison tomorrow morrow we go and help him out tonight. I have gathered enough getting-out tools to let him through to me in ten minutes. The jail is old, rotten and crazy. He can get everything through the grates by a string. He can cut a whole window out in a few minutes, he says, if he only has the tools. Poor Hughie is a natural mechanic. Then, you see, away we go! Hughie, and I, to some place where true worth is appreciated and innocent young men are not accused of burglary and other absurd crimes. I have gathered up enough money to keep us till poor Hughie is proven innocent. We will commence life over again, my true love and I!" and she smiled Badger and the absurd idea sweetly in the face.

"Well, in the name of all that's diabolical, go on and do it, then," blurted out the student, now thoroughly off his temper. "If you're bound to wed yourself to vice and crime for the remainder of life, forge ahead. But why should you try to mix me up in it? I've enough delinquencies of my own without going into partnership with 'Hughie.'"

"Oh, have you delinquencies?" inquired the girl, with so demure and well-balanced a manner that Badger has never been able to decide whether she was sarcastic or in earnest. "I thought you were about perfect. But I tell you, Hughie is innocent!" with a slight flash in her steady, but constantly changing eyes. "It will be proved so, some day, he says, and Hughie wouldn't tell me a lie. Oh, no! He would die sooner! He said so." (Badger reflected sombrely and savagely on the depths to which woman's infatuation could descend.) "It was all a mistake—a whole lot of mistakes. If he can only get out now, before he has incurred the disgrace of going to state's prison, and stay there under another name, somewhere where he can be appreciated—it will be all right, and that's what I want you to help me to help him to do."

"Well?" punctuated Badger, with sullen curiosity.

"You see," continued the enterprising young lady, "I will tell you just how we can make it all come out, including Hughie. The jail is only four miles from this house. We will steal from here quietly, and in a half hour we can be there. Hughie will be expecting me; he always is, and especially tonight. He whispers through the grating and says: 'Is that you, Co?' (Co is my short name for 'Columbia.' 'Yes, Hughie, and be awful quick,' I will say. 'Throw out the dangler.' (That's what poor Hughie calls a string in that connection.) I'm afraid he has learned some slang in that terrible jail. He throws out the 'dangler' and pulls up the 'priers,' as he calls them, opens the crazy old window of grates, or whatever it is, draws up a rope ladder and is soon on the ground beside me."

"In such a case two would be a tete-a-tete and three a convention," replied Badger. "So you've no use for me, and I certainly have none for the proposed excursion of innocents. So good-night and a pleasant journey."

"Oh, but you can be of more use than you think," insisted the girl. "Let me go on. Poor Hughie gets to the ground and sees you. He says: 'Who's this bloke you've got with you?' (Hughie was always a little jealous of me.) And then I say: 'It's not a bloke, Hughie, but a dear, good, sweet theological student from Minceton, who says he will do anything in the world he can for me, and now he's proving it.' And then you see, dear Mr. McPherson, you climb up the rope ladder and get into the cell, in Hughie's place"

"The—that is, the dickens I do!" growled Badger, under his breath.

"You understand," continued this singularly well-informed young lady, "the jailor has an inopportune way of owling through his old dungeon once an hour, just nowadays, and peeping into all the cells, on account of some restless and desperate counterfeiters who need watching. If he should see that Hughie was gone when he came around next time he would shout and ring bells and call out the militia or something and we should be caught. It will take us till broad daylight to get to the cave in the woods, which we will make our first hiding place, and we need all the time. Now, you climb up the ladder; get into the cell; replace the windows and things; put on poor dear Hughie's coat, having exchanged with him before you climbed up; lie with your face to the wall, and when the jailor peeps in he thinks Hughie is there and goes along about his business. You lie quiet that way till he does that three or four times, and Hughie and I are well on our road. Then you—you can skin down the ladder, as poor Hughie calls it, mount old Plunger, an extra horse that we will take along for that purpose, and before our family are up you can be snug in bed here. You will have to be a little cross with Plunger or he may throw you over his head, but I know you can manage him, being an athlete. How fortunate that all students are athletes in these days! And now," she continued, in a hurried manner, as if Badger had already eagerly fallen into her plans, "we must be off immediately. The horses are harnessed, saddled and waiting—although, poor, dear pets, they don't know what it's for." And her eyes moistened a little for these honest, unconscious steeds of the farm, for whom she evidently cherished a genuine love.

"Who the——, that is, who the dickens harnessed and saddled them?" said Badger.

"I did," replied the young lady, "just before I came in here. I must now go to my room and write a farewell note to my parents—and brothers—and sisters"—she burst into tears for the first time, but recovered herself immediately.

"Steal softly through the door and meet me twenty rods down the road, to the west of here. Don't make any racket; there's no need of it. The doors are all unlocked—the hinges oiled. Now, be sure!" And this singularly determined and high-spirited girl fought back her tears, gave Badger's hand a hearty comrade-like pressure and was going.

"And you think I will join in such an insane, such a thoroughly wicked expedition?" groaned the student.

"What, are you backing out?" exclaimed the girl, turning round with a withering glance. "Afraid to do a little thing like that to save my life from being wrecked, when only a few hours ago you were ready to die for me! You don't dare do it! Oh, you don't look so very much like a coward!"

"I am not a physical coward, I think," replied McPherson, "but I am afraid to help you in a course that will not only wreck your life, but your soul!"

"I tell you you don't know Hughie," shouted the thoroughly infatuated girl in a half whisper. "He doesn't go around wrecking souls, or hearts either. He is as good, as true, as honest, as you are! Oh, you don't know him, you don't know him—you don't care or dare to help him or me! Then I haven't one friend, till I get to him, and I will go alone! Good-bye!" She started to leave the room.

Badger was thinking very fast. He thought he saw the right way out of the difficulty. It would certainly be no sin to deceive this wayward, headstrong girl, in order to keep her from ruin. He let himself down gingerly into a bit of pious strategy.

"Well, if you put it that way," he said, "I can't resist you. I don't know as a little lark like that would hurt me, after all. You are sure I can get back in time?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" exclaimed the delighted girl. "You are so good, so kind, so brotherly."

"Hardly brotherly," replied the disembling youth. "A brother wouldn't do this sort of thing for you. He'd lock you up first."

"More than a brother you are!" exclaimed the girl. "A brother that understands me; a brother that helps one the way she wants to be helped. Oh, it was lovely—lucky that you happened to come here! You are so good."

She threw her arms around the young man's neck and gave him a thrilling, never-to-be-forgotten kiss. It was an innocent though intense caress of gratitude, but a bewildering one. Poor Badger forgot the Delaware young lady entirely for a moment. But with the reaction came more than ever a feeling that he must save this glorious creature, must keep her from the criminal who had somehow entrapped her in the meshes of his fascinations and was trying to drag her down to himself.

"I must hurry," she exclaimed. "It is almost time we started. Oh, I shall soon be in dear Hughie's arms again!" And she, who had just had poor Badger for one stunning moment in her own, had flown softly to her room.

That last sentence did not decide the young man, but hastened him. He happened to know where her father's bed room was, for the courtly old gentleman in last evening's conversation, he remembered (although it seemed now about a century agone), had been explaining the peculiar and advantageous construction of his little rural mansion.

He felt, as he stood there after knocking, like Iago ronsing Brabantio to inform him of Desdemona's famous elopement with the brawny Othello. Fortunately the old gentleman was a light sleeper and his wife a heavy one. He hastily threw on his garments and came to the door. He saw in a moment who it was by the lamp that Badger had brought with him.

"What is it, sir?" he said courteously. "Are you ill?"

"No, sir," was the reply, "but I feel it my duty to inform you that your eldest daughter is in her room preparing to elope with a Mr. Hugh somebody, after helping him out of jail. She——"

"Come with me, sir, if you please," interrupted the old man, who, evidently from former information, comprehended matters immediately. "I would like to have you with me." And they proceeded to the young lady's room, Badger very reluctantly, but not knowing exactly how to avoid it. She was in the midst of her note of farewell when so invaded; she had locked her door as she supposed, but the bolt had slipped outside the slot, as bolts sometimes will do when shot in a hurry. The old gentleman now locked it with very noticeable precision.

"I am very sorry, my dear daughter," he said kindly, "that you yet hold your extraordinary infatuation for that young man, and are willing to carry it to such lengths. Have you not read in the Good Book not to follow the steps of him that goeth astray?"

She said not a word, but retreated to a corner, where she stood like a half-penned tigress about to spring. Badger, somehow or other, found himself standing in an opposite corner, just as far from her as he could get. The old gentleman proceeded:

"My dear, you have never become sufficiently acquainted with this holy book, although possessing such a beautiful edition of it." He picked up an elegant Westminster copy and seated himself at the table on which she had just been writing her letter of farewell, at which he glanced, saying in a kind but judicial way: "Very well composed, my dear. You are improving in English composition. Only, the matter—the subject matter—is at fault."

The good but shrewd old gentleman turned to the proverbs of Solomon and read along and everything he could find that bore upon the case. The girl half threw, half crouched herself gracefully on a small sofa near the corner and said never a word.

The young student would have gone to his own room, but the door was locked and the key in the other man's pocket. So he stood and listened (getting mighty tired, too), for a long time before the courtly old gentleman remembered to offer him a chair. For a long time the reading went on, varied by correlative passages in other parts of the sacred writ, which this erudite parent found by means of a concordance. Badger loved the Scriptures, but he felt that this was rather more than he needed at one installment. He did not like to ask for egress from the room and, indeed, somehow had a faint suspicion that the old gentleman had covertly noticed his flirting the evening before, and decided that he, as well as the young lady, would be none the worse for some Biblical instruction. At any rate they both received it, and it was not until a gleam of daylight removed all danger of jail breaking that he arose, unlocked the door, bade Badger a courteous and his daughter an affectionate "good morning, dears," and went out to discharge from duty the horses that had been waiting so long for events that never came.

During the reading of the Holy Word poor Badger tried his best to keep his eyes off the beautiful prisoner in the corner, but she fascinated them there continually. Her tongue had no need to speak to him; her eyes were orators. They kept saying such things as these and he, poor fellow, understood them only too well:

"Oh, you would do anything in the world for me, wouldn't you? I was to know whenever you could help me, even at the risk of your life, yes? Brave, gallant young man! A true knight of chivalry! If I had wanted to elope with you now you wouldn't have informed my father after having consented to the plan, would you? And then you would no doubt have sneaked off and deserted me afterward. So glad you came along. You have helped me so much. Congratulations to the young lady you are engaged to. I had rather have Hughie's little finger in jail than your whole body, brain and soul all at large."

She also quite often wiped her lips vigorously with a dainty handkerchief, and Badger understood this, too. She was trying to brush away the memory of that kiss of gratitude she had given him.

When our young hero, feeling very little like a hero, was finally released from the room, he went with true athletic agility to his own and made hasty preparations for leaving the house. But just as he was at the head of the staircase, the thought struck him, why? He had done nothing wrong, was in a true position; although deeply and throughly mortified and humiliated as he never had been before, he was conscious of no ill-doing. "I will stay and see it out," decided he. And he flung himself on the bed and slept until called to breakfast.

CHAPTER III.

Apparently nobody but the three most interested knew of the events of the evening before. All seemed as bright, jolly and cordial as ever, and the family smiled on their attractive young guest who had made the preceding evening so interesting to them. "How little one-half a house knows what the other two-thirds is doing!" parodied Badger to himself. Even his fair and winsome fellow-actor in the comedy of the still small hours came in, a little late, said "Good morning," as if nothing had happened, and was in the cozy sitting room with the others when the old gentleman conducted the family devotions preliminary to breakfast.

The chapter seemed very long to Badger, as he had had a great deal of the same kind of pabulum so short a time before, and when asked to "join us in prayer," he did not feel up to himself in petitionery eloquence. He was rather noted among his associates as very efficient in invocation, but this time he felt considerably like a failure and that he made the safe port of the "amen" with the there wreck of a prayer in tow. Just as the services closed and the family arose from their knees to their feet the sound of a wagon at the gate was heard. Voltaire was soon off the doorstep into the yard, baying and yelling, snarling and howling, all in the same monologue. The people from the wagon had fairly to fight their way to the door.

A sturdy, prosaic looking man at last entered, who was greeted calmly by the courteous old gentleman as "Sheriff Davidson." He had with him a very meek, inoffensive looking young man, who looked about as much like a robber as a plate of unbaked doughnuts would.

As they entered the young lady with whom Badger had had his experience of the night before gave a pathetic little screech and flung herself all over the young fellow, and never ceased kissing him till she had him on the sofa with her, sitting arm in arm.

"You see, sir," said Sheriff Davidson, addressing the head of the family, but awkwardly, "this is a dumbed queer an' inconsistent case. This 'ere young feller has been in jail two months for stealin' goods that another feller took, an' that he didn't know nothin' about till they was found—the goods in his room in his cousin's house an' the horse in the woods back of his great uncle's farm. It was first-class proof, as circumstantial evidence goes, and he was on his way to state's prison tomorrow as sure as cud be. Guilty as a dog, if ever a feller was guilty by circumstantial evidence. But last night, about 1 o'clock in the mornin', some fellers tried to break jail an' git out. One on 'em was shot an' they all was bagged ag'in. The jay that was clipped thought he was goin' to die, an' the doctor thought so, too, awhile, just to see if he wouldn't confess somethin'. He was a superstitious, sentimental sort o' feller and insisted on recountin' of his whole life—a darned mean life it was, too. Among other things he gave us sure clues, so's we've found out, that this young feller was as innocent of ever tryin' to do anything ag'in the law as that young lady there a-settin' amongst him. It's all been put up on him, an' very ingenious, too. He's goin' to be let out on his own responsibility after breakfast, an' will be set free reg'lar in a few days. I tried to git him to keep quiet, but he said No, he must give you folks down here the information that he wasn't a thief before he slep' or e't, an' so I come out with him this early, provid'n' he won't sue nobody for false imprisonment or anything connected with the mistake."

It was certainly a very extraordinary affair Badger thought as he abstracted his roll of maps from the improvised store room of the covered bridge and started off again to increase the geographical knowledge of the rural districts.

The young fellow had suffered so keenly and so unjustly that the heart of the sympathetic family had melted toward him. Even Voltaire had consented to take his case under canine consideration, study it carefully, report later and meanwhile contemplate him in cheerful and inoffensive silence. Consent had been obtained to a marriage in the family at the ensuing Christmas or thereabouts and Badger had been invited to be the best man and bring his best girl from Wilmington, Del. The young lady had behaved very well in the midst of her unexpected proud triumph and had only said as she bade her midnight fellow conspirator a warm, cordial good-bye, with not half as much regret in it, though, as he could have liked:

"You see, I was right; poor Hughie is a good, true-hearted boy, as well as the most lovable one in the world; he wouldn't steal any sooner than you or I would. And you were right, too; for if we'd tried to help him out, we might have been discovered the same as the counterfeiters were, as we should have been there about the same time; might have got mixed up with the gang, in fact, and been arrested for breaking jail. Good-bye, be sure and come at Christmas."

And Badger muttered as he started for the next house with the usual every-day hope that geographical knowledge might be in demand there, "May be I will."

WILLIAM'S BRANDENBURG SPEECH.

A Literal Translation of the Remarks Which Have Caused so Much Comment.

It has been intimated that the late riots in Berlin, Leipsic and Danzig were provoked in part by some imprudent speech on the part of the German emperor. It is thought that it would have been wiser had he suppressed the remark written in the *Frendenbuch* at Munich, "The king's will is the highest law." "But concerning his speech made at the banquet in Brandenburg," a writer to THE STAR says, "a single quotation out of it misrepresents the ideas and intentions he had at the time. For instance, most papers quote part of that speech, which contains an earnest appeal to all who are discontented to leave the country at once. But to do the emperor justice, I give below the most interesting part of that speech, literally as given by the *Reichsanzeiger*.

"'I am sorry to state that it has become the custom of late to find fault with and to grumble at everything that is done on the part of the government. Under the most trifling pretexts the quiet of the people is disturbed and the happiness of their own life and their delight in the life and the prosperity of our great, united German fatherland is embittered. By such instigation and such grumbling finally the thought comes to many, as if our country be the most unhappy and the worst governed of the world and a torment to live in it. That this is not so all of us know, of course. But would it not be better if those discontented grumblers would shake the dust from their feet and escape in that way from those miserable, wretched state of affairs. It is all they desire and to us they would do a great favor.

"'We live in a passing condition. Germany outgrows by degrees her childhood to arrive at the age of youth, therefore it might be time to do away with children's diseases. We are experiencing animated and exciting days, in which the judgment of the mass of people is unfortunately lacking objectivity. Yet those days more quiet ones will follow if our nation shows herself manly, reflects, and, disregarding foreign voices, puts her confidence in God and in the honest, providing work of her legitimate monarch.'

"In a very appropriate way the emperor went on comparing this passing condition with an episode on the voyage of discovery of the English admiral, Sir Francis Drake, to whom a Central American chief showed the Pacific ocean when he and his companions had almost despaired of seeing it.

"Then he continued: 'Be it so with us. The assurance of your faithful sympathy supporting me in my work always gives me new strength to continue in the work and to walk in the way appointed to me by heaven. Besides the feeling of the responsibility to our Supreme Master on high and my immovable conviction that our old ally of Rossbach and Dennewitz will not forsake us on this occasion. He gave himself such endless trouble with our old Mark and our house that we could not suppose he did it in vain. No, in the contrary, Brandenburger, we are destined still to great things and I lead you on to most happy days. Only let no grumbling and no discontented talk of party obscure your vision and darkon the future or take away your pleasure at participating in the work. With words alone it cannot be done, and in spite of those overlasting, discontented intimations about a new course and its men. I reply quietly and decidedly: My course is the right one and it shall be followed. That my honest troops of the Mark will assist me in it, I confidently trust. Therefore I drink to the welfare of Brandenburg and her men.'"

IN CASE OF WAR WITH ENGLAND.

How the Arrogance of Great Britain Might Be Humbled.

THE UNITED STATES EVEN IN ITS DEFENSELESS CONDITION A NATION THAT WOULD HAVE EVERY ADVANTAGE OVER ENGLAND—HOW ENGLAND'S COMMERCE MIGHT BE SWEPT FROM THE SEAS.

"NOTWITHSTANDING THE ALMOST certain prospect of an amicable and satisfactory settlement of the Bering sea difficulty," said an old soldier and a careful student of public affairs to a STAR reporter, "those abnormally patriotic people who always—in season and out of season—favor the old flag and a large appropriation are sedulously and energetically endeavoring to raise the hue and cry and convince the country of the imminent danger of a war with Great Britain. Sixty days ago these same alarmists were just as energetically predicting war with Chile, drawing gloomy pictures of the defenseless condition of all our sea coasts and pointing to the probability that the overpowering Chilean ironclads would bombard and devastate San Francisco and other towns of the Pacific coast. But nobody was frightened and there was no war, as the administration and the public had confidently foreseen. And there will be no war with England.

"There was never a time in her history when England could less afford to go to war with this nation than at the present moment. And while it is not at all probable our negotiations relating to the Bering sea matter are predicated upon the assumption that England can be bullied because she dreads a collision with the United States President Harrison and the Senate know there is not the slightest danger of war with that country over this or any other controversy unless we become unreasonable or the British government loses its senses. Nor is it likely England's diplomats will be encouraged to enlarge upon and press their demands with a threat of war because of the alleged defenseless and indefensible condition of the American frontier along the great lakes and Canada. There will be—there is—moderation on both sides, and those best informed are perfectly confident the controversy will be arranged without friction.

"People as intelligent as the Americans and English will not long be deceived or misjudge the merits of the case or misunderstand the situation from the utterances of a few hot-headed, inconsiderate orators and newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic, based on insufficient and often mistaken data, and sometimes dictated by prejudice or design. As a matter of fact there is very little beat over the matter on either side.

ENGLAND'S VULNERABLE POINT.

"There is no question of the English courage to fight this or any other nation under the sun. And doubtless she is more powerful today in all the elements for warfare than when she won her greatest victories over France and Spain and Holland. But on the other hand, in one important and vital particular, she is relatively weaker and more vulnerable than ever, and especially so in a fight with a bold, resourceful, seafaring nation like the United States. It is in respect of her vast commerce, which covers every sea, and amounts to more than that of all the other nations combined, that Britain is weak and vulnerable. She could doubtless inflict great damage on this country with her powerful navy, but it is hardly possible that on land her army could make more than a temporary impression. On the other hand, notwithstanding her great naval fleet, it would prove entirely inadequate to the task of protecting her merchant marine.

"When the civil war began in this country America's commerce was second only to that of England; indeed, we were rapidly overhauling our great rival. Yankee merchant ships traversed all the seas. Yet before the close of the war a beggarly half dozen confederate ships, manned largely by Englishmen, had completely cleared the ocean of our commerce. It was proved that a swift sailing third or fourth-rate armed ship is an easy commerce-destroyer. A big, unwieldy unarmed merchantman stands about in the same relation to a man-of-war that a cow does to a bulldog.

THE SEA WOULD SWARM WITH CRUISERS.

"Once fairly embarked in a contest with England, the oce