

ACROSS THE PLAINS:

"The plains were wide and vast and drear,
The sun hung low toward the west,
So near, we wished, 'are we to rest.'
But journeying through the closing day,
Our feet are weary of the way;
For, far before our aching sight
The plains lie in the waning light.
The mountain peaks that seemed so near,
And hold our rest forever there,
Are far across the desert lands—
We vainly call with lifted hands.
O bills that stand against the sky,
We may not reach you are we die;
Our hearts are broken with the pain,
For rest and peace we may not gain.
Upon the plains we faint and fall,
Our faces toward the mountains fall;
Our palms are clasped, but not to pray;
To die we with the dying day.

A CONSPICUOUS OPPORTUNITY.

"Why don't I get married?"

"I wonder if there is any process of law or condition of ethics that can protect me from that question?"—and Miss Margaret Winthrop turned sharply round and looked at her brother-in-law as if for a reply.

Dr. Ainslee looked up from his paper with an expression that evinced a certain enjoyment of the chase, rather than a sympathy with the pursued, and answered:

"Yes, there is one means of escape."

"And that is to get married, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

Miss Winthrop was not soothed by the suggestion. She regarded it as an unwholesome state of civilization in which a woman with a handsome income and a natural bias toward contentment could not pursue her own course without being headed off at every turn with that imbecile query. Among her friends she was spoken of as eccentric, a woman who unfortunately had ideas, and, while possessing inestimable advantages, had signally failed to make any use of them. This failure was all the more conspicuous from the fact that in her first season she had promised much. She had allowed brilliant opportunities to slip through her fingers one by one, until she had brought the reproach of spinsterhood upon a family that within the memory of man had married its daughters young and well, and, for anything the world knew to the contrary, happily. She was 28 to-day.

This was the view taken of the situation by her friends. Miss Winthrop regarded it from a different point of observation. She knew many things that the world could not know concerning the alleged felicity of various members of her family, past and present, who had married early, and "well." Then there was the inevitable entail of care and suffering. Why any sane woman should fly precipitately into the consequences of marriage when she had the benefit of other people's experience as a warning was something Miss Winthrop had never understood and did not seek to explain. She had all a woman's horror of being called an "old maid," though the immunities of spinsterhood were at times alluring. It had never been her deliberate intention to join the ranks of the belated sisterhood. Of course she intended to marry at some time, but why be in haste? Did not every married woman of her acquaintance admit that courtship was the most delightful part of all, and that anticipations of post-nuptial felicity were apt to resolve themselves into an unsatisfactory anti-climax? Of course no well-regulated woman wanted to be an old maid, but conceive the wait of foresight in the woman who married her first lover, thus putting it out of her power to enjoy again the delightful experience of courtship, when by rejecting him she could go on repeating and indefinitely with fresh subjects, and under an infinite variety of conditions.

She that loves and runs away,

Will live to love another day

was Miss Winthrop's motto; that marriage was, like death, a thing to be deferred as long as possible, and accepted finally as a heroic remedy for something worse was her philosophy. Being 28 to-day she felt that the time had come for heroic measures. She did not look a day over 20. Her hair was the same soft tint of brown that it had always been; her cheek had a firmness of contour and a delicate blush upon it that might have belonged to a girl of 17; the beauty which had made her conspicuous as a debutante gave no signs of approaching deterioration, but what did all this amount to when everybody knew she was 28, and attested with exasperating indecency that she was "remarkably well preserved."

She could not possibly put it off much longer, and yet she felt a certain shrinking from her destiny—as the hand of a suicide might recoil from its instrument—as she began to review mentally the opportunities remaining to her.

"Money is no object," she exclaimed at last. "I want freedom, and the only condition compatible with perfect freedom is widowhood. Unfortunately we can't be born widows, and the odds against being left a widow without in-cumbrance are infinity to one. If there was only some way of making a woman a widow by an act of Congress or a decree of court! It's shocking to think of the risks a woman must run to attain that seventh heaven of independence. I believe I will advertise for a consumptive, and agree to nurse him tenderly through the remnant of his existence if he will obligate himself to die within a given time."

Mrs. Ainslee, her sister, and her senior by two years, turned toward her the face of shocked and outraged wife-hood.

But Mrs. Ainslee, to the indiscretion of marrying young, had added the folly of spoiling her husband, and Miss Winthrop expected this silent protest from her.

"If you want something of that sort," said the Doctor, laying aside his paper, "it is not worth while to advertise. I have a patient on hand that will exactly fill the bill."

"Tell me about him," she said, with sudden enthusiasm.

"He is not a consumptive," continued the Doctor. "It is even a more hopeless case than that. He may die at any moment; he can't possibly live longer than a few months, and is as sorely in need of competent nursing as any poor devil I ever saw. He has no friends

here, though he was born and raised in this place. I tried to get him into the hospital, but it is crowded, and there has been so much sickness this season that I could not get a nurse for him, though I have been looking for one ever since he came. He was a classmate of mine at college, but he went away, and I have not seen him since he graduated until I was called to attend him several days ago. He was a splendid fellow then, but he is a total wreck now. The worst of it is that the fellow doesn't want to get well. I don't know what has happened to him since he left here, but whatever it is it has crushed him utterly. He seems to have money enough for everything he wants; the only trouble is, he can't get a nurse for love or money."

The Doctor had forgotten what started his recital; he was thinking only of his friend, wondering what could have subdued a jovial and naturally buoyant fellow so completely, when he was suddenly called to order by Miss Winthrop.

"You are positively certain that he cannot recover?" she asked.

"In the natural course of events he cannot. He might be restored by a miracle."

"And can only live a few months at best?"

"I should say five or six months at most."

"This," said Miss Winthrop, with perfect gravity, "is the one opportunity of a lifetime. It would be like flying in the face of Providence not to accept it."

"It looks rather pointed," said the Doctor. "It does not often happen that a woman while indulging a whim can at the same time do an act that may be counted unto her for righteousness."

"If I were to talk like that I should expect something to happen to me," said Mrs. Ainslee, shocked at her sister and surprised by this unusually flippancy behavior on the part of her husband.

Perhaps out of regard for Mrs. Ainslee's abnormally sensitive sympathy the discussion rested here, but the subject was not forgotten. Miss Winthrop pondered it in secret and ultimately evolved a purpose.

John Hemingway had been crushed by no catastrophe. He had simply been uniformly unlucky. A series of unprofitable speculations, each inconsiderate in itself, had melted him once ample fortune to a meager income barely sufficient for his needs. The strenuous effort to retrieve it in a climate unsuited to him had sapped his vitality and sent him back, broken in health and spirit, to die within sight of his ancestral roof, but not beneath its shelter. His parents were dead, the other members of his family had gone away, the only familiar face he had seen since his return was that of Tom Ainslee, his college friend. He was quartered in hired lodgings, and they were as bleak and dismal as such places generally are. In the room where he lay there was a faded Brussels carpet, an armchair out at elbows, a haircloth sofa, a bed, and some other essential articles, in keeping with those already mentioned. The room was hot, and the street below was noisy. He lay there listlessly, looking at the stunted maples, with leaves all covered with dust, whose tops just reached the open window by his bed, yearning for one breath of pure, fresh air, one hour of perfect quiet. But there would never be anything else but this until it was all over; he would never leave this room until he left the world. He turned wearily away from the window and covered his eyes with his hand.

There was a knock at the door, and he responded feebly, "Come in." It was too early for the Doctor; it might be his landlady, who sometimes came in to see if he needed anything, and to give him his medicine. He heard the rustle of drapery, and smelled a faint, sweet odor. He lifted his hand from his eyes and beheld a vision. A fair, slender woman, clad in soft white muslin that seemed to make the room several degrees cooler, was standing by the bed. She wore a bunch of heliotrope in her belt, whose fragrance seemed like a blessed breath from that far-away nook he had been longing for only a moment before; from under the fluffy, feathered poke bonnet fell a slightly curling fringe of bright-brown hair, and a pair of large violet eyes beamed on him with a sweet compassion.

He was an unpromising subject, truly; his face was sharp and sallow, and a beard about a week old added much to its haggardness. He must be very tall, for he seemed to stretch away from her indefinitely, as she stood there at the bed's head, and he was thin to emaciation.

"This is Mr. Hemingway," she said at last.

"I was once," he answered wearily. "I am Miss Margaret Winthrop," she continued. "I am Dr. Ainslee's sister-in-law. I believe you are his patient?"

"Yes; Tom and I are old friends, and I remember your father very well. Won't you be seated?" he asked, suddenly remembering his position as host.

She drew up the shabby arm-chair and sat down by the bed. It was not so easy to begin as she had imagined.

"He will take me for a lunatic or an assassin with designs upon imaginary wealth," she thought as she sat there reviving her cold-blooded scheme and wishing she had deliberated upon it more fully before taking this step. But it was too late to go back now.

What plausible excuse could she give for having come there unattended? He would tell Tom, of course, that she had been there. Tom would tell Annie, who would look unutterable things and lecture her for a week. He had evidently suffered much; he was lying there so miserable and helpless; it seemed that she had never appreciated the inhumanity of the whole proceeding until now. But she was a woman of resolution. She had satisfied herself that the arrangement would be one of mutual advantage. The only question in her mind was how to begin.

"John, your face is certainly getting fuller; suppose after all you should get well?"

This sentence, inspired by a tender interest, had somehow a heartless ring when uttered.

"It would certainly be an ungrateful return for all your kindness, but I am afraid I am getting better," he said, apologetically. "In fact, Tom intimated to-day that I might recover."

John was very kind and thoughtful of you to come, he said, breaking the somewhat protracted silence.

"Thoughtful, but not kind," she replied with nice discrimination. "Tom was telling us to-day how uncomfortable you were here, and how ill. I understand from him that you did not have proper attention and—that you

—could not get well, and I came with a purpose."

He looked up gratefully, and she could not have felt more guilty or contemptible if she had stabbed him with a knife and received in return his dying benediction. But she had the courage of desperation, and she kept on. She told him her plan, which was, briefly, to marry him and attend him carefully for the trifling remnant of his existence. In return for which he was to bestow upon her the inestimable privileges of widowhood.

It was not so bluntly stated, of course, and was accompanied by many whys and wherefores intended to modify to some extent what she considered the fiendish conception and the indecent execution of the plot.

It was of no consequence whatever to Hemingway that she desired his demise; was even figuring upon it at that moment with pleasurable anticipations of a time when it would have cast about her a mantle of unimpeachable dignity and permanent security from social persecutions. She was sitting there, like a section of paradise, fitted into that dingy chair, illuminating the whole room and filling it with the exquisite odor of heliotrope. To such a presence a man may forgive much. There was but one thought in his mind after he was assured that it was not an illusion which had come to torture him with malicious contrast. "Her friends would certainly object."

She assured him with strict veracity that it was her own affair entirely and rested with themselves.

When it all came out Annie was shocked beyond anything. She had always known that "Meg" would do something disgraceful, but she was not prepared for this. To deliberately propose to a man and then coolly sit down with the eyes of the whole community upon her and wait for him to die—it was too much.

The Doctor was secretly in sympathy with what he called the Mutual Benefit association, and the result of all this was an immediate and quiet wedding, at which the groom did not wear the regulation black.

Any unpleasant gossip that might have followed the event was neatly averted by a story industriously circulated by Tom Ainslee to the effect that Hemingway was really an old lover of "Meg," and some mysterious hints of a romantic story in the background that he could tell if he felt disposed.

A week later, when Ainslee came for his usual afternoon visit to the invalid, Meg called him aside and hesitatingly inquired whether he thought it would hurt the patient to be moved.

"Um-m-m, no, I don't think it would hurt him to be moved; in fact, I am sure it would not; but I would suggest that you are in danger of defeating your own purpose. If you nurse him too well, you know, he might recover; and that, under the circumstances, would fall little short of disaster.

"Don't be brutal, Tom," she said. "This place is infallibly dismal, and he may as well be comfortable for the little time that is left."

She took a cottage in the suburbs near the river, with plenty of space around it and windows that looked out upon an expanse of shining water and far-blue rims of hills. It was June; about the verandas and windows hung a mass of climbing roses that filled the place with fragrance, and into the airy front room, with its fine windows and its distant glimpses of river and green hills beyond, went the invalid's bed.

All day long the fresh breeze from the river, laden with the odor of roses, parted the fleecy drapery of the windows and blew softly upon his face.

Everywhere reigned the delicious quiet his tortured nerves had needed above all things; the grateful absence of the sound of wheels and other urban noises that had fretted his soul with their din—the only echo of these that reached him now was the daily pilgrimage of Tom Ainslee's buggy. Near him, all day long, sat "Meg," in her soft, white dress and her flowers, with the soft light on her brown hair, and a softer light in her great, violet eyes, surroundings which certainly invited an interest in terrestrial things, and, as the weeks passed on, John Hemingway—a man of honor and sensitive conscience—began to be troubled with a misgiving—a misgiving that, after all, he was not going to fulfill his part of the contract. He felt that, for the first time in his life, he was about to go squarely back on an obligation. He had entered into a deliberate contract to die within a given time, and what amends could he make for his ungenerous recovery? It would be but a poor return for her assiduous attention and tender ministrations. She could not have been more sweetly careful of his comfort if she had "loved with a love that was more than love," in return for which he was about to inflict upon her a permanent and unmitigated disappointment. In vain he assured himself that he had even dreamed of a possible recovery he would never have allowed her to take such a risk. This could not possibly alleviate her disappointment nor excuse his perfidy.

Most parents, I think, will agree with me that any criticism of this remarkable production is superfluous. The fault of it from beginning to end lies in the fact that it demands from a boy of 12 an amount of observation and experience utterly unnatural at his age.

—A Private Tutor, in London Standard.

of nursing, might not wish himself a single man again; whether there might not be, in all the lands he had traversed, some one he would have preferred to her if he could have had his choice and known that he was going to live; and there was nothing reassuring in his remark that he was "afraid he was getting better."

"Don't you want to get well, John?" she asked, sadly, trying to scan his face in the deepening twilight.

"It is not the thing to do, under the circumstances," he answered, plaintively. After a moment's silence he reached down for the hand that was resting on his counterpane and asked, tremulously:

"Would you be—very much disappointed if I should get well?"

In an instant she was kneeling by the bed, with her arms around him, her moist lashes brushing his face.

"Jack," she said, "if you don't get well I'll be the wretchedest widow of bliss."

"Though a man were dead, yet shall he live at such solicitation," said John, as his arms closed about her with a pressure that argued returning vitality. They were not the arms of a man lying at death's door, indifferent to the possibilities of the world behind him.—Chicago Tribune.

Tough Questions for an English School-boy.

In the interests of suffering humanity, as represented by boys of the tender age of 12 competing for scholarships at our public schools, permit me to lay before your readers some of the questions contained in an examination paper actually set at a public school of some standing:

General Intelligence.—Paper 1. Explain briefly the terms Democracy, Oligarchy, Plutocracy, Pessimist, Anacronism, Swedenborgian, Free Trade, Reciprocity, Jingoism, Verve.

2. Write the names of six of Sir W. Scott's novels, and give a brief account of some of them.

3. Contrast the action of a cow and a horse in rising from a recumbent posture, and of the chaffinch and blackbird in flying. Why do sheep often graze on their knees?

4. We read that the anchor lost by Columbus in his third voyage to the West has lately been dug up by a gentleman in his garden in the Island of Antigua. How could this be?

5. Mention some fact connected with each of the following names: Generic, Mausolus, Diogenes, Michael Scot, Lord Bacon, Ravaillac, Strabo, Ivan the Terrible, Louise Michel.

6. Examine the value of the statements: (1) That the sun shining on a fire in the grate puts it out. (2) That a poker thrust into it makes it burn: (3) That a poker placed over an expiring fire will revive it. (4) That fire burns brighter in frosty weather.

7. What is a patent? Mention some useful patent. Can you have a patent for a book? What is a patent error?

8. Explain what is meant by crusted port, art old Dresden, alkarskin, an heirloom, nepotism, the survival of the fittest, abrasion of the cuticle.

9. If a shriveled apple be placed under an air-pump and the air exhausted, the apple gets plump. Explain particularly how this occurs.

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Tricks in a Tunnel.

A party of four persons were traveling on the Hudson River road one summer. In a seat was a young lady, with a young gentleman who had been very attentive to her. In the seat behind them sat their friends, one of whom was a sportive young lady, fond of practical jokes, and rather defiant of public opinion.

As the train dashed through a short and very dark tunnel she leaned over and imprinted a resonant kiss on the cheek of the young lady in front of her. A scream followed, and laughter came from the darkness all over the car. As the train ran into daylight the insulted young lady turned on her innocent escort, and with snapping eyes and flaming cheeks said:

"How dare you insult me in this manner?"

"I assure you," he said, stammering in confusion at the strangeness of his position, "that I have done nothing."

"Nothing!" she repeated, and burst into tears.

The passengers now ceased laughing, and looked at the unfortunate young fellow indignantly. After further protest, which were not heard, he went to the smoking-car. The sportive young lady wrote a note the next day and explained matters. The young couple were reconciled, married, and the other young lady was not invited to their wedding.

An annoying practical joke was played on a bashful young man who was accompanying a young lady on a journey. While going through a tunnel a friend knocked off the bashful young man's hat, forced his fingers through his hair, kissed the back of his own friend, and then slapped his own face violently. Every one in the car looked in that direction when the light came, and the friend was apparently the most surprised of all. The muzzled appearance and confusion of the astonished victim convinced the spectators that