

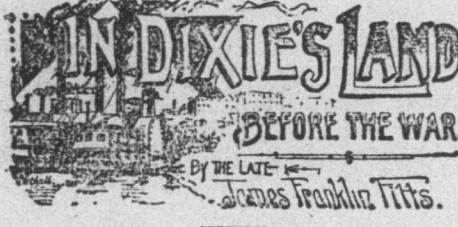
THROUGH THE MEADOW.

When you came through the meadow, May,
At the golden mark of noon,
Low laughter echoed all away
Across the fields of June.
The buttercups their amber bows
Brimmed full of summer sun,
And drank until the thirsty souls
Were tipsy, every one.
The bluebells rang a merry cheer
When you came through the meadow, dear.

When you came through the meadow, May,
You spelled the daisies' name;
Beneath their faces round and gay
They tied their ruffled caps
And bobbed queer little down and up,
Pretending to be shocked
At jolly, tipsy buttercups
That swayed and reeled and rocked.
The happy news spread far and near
When you came through the meadow, dear.

When you came through the meadow, May,
The saucy bobolinks
Flew past the primmest hawthorn spray
With wicked little winks.
The plump grases nodded, too,
And rustled with delight
To think that one as sweet as you
Should pass within their sight.
The dimpled brook laughed silver clear
When you came through the meadow, dear.

When you came through the meadow, May,
The bees, with golden spurs,
Went jingling down the flower way
Among the purple burns.
A royal, jocund butterfly
Bent low on blazoned wing
And kissed the beggar roses shy,
Forgetting he was king;
For they—and I—longed to be near
When you came through the meadow, dear.
—Florine May Alt, in *Outing*.



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CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED.

In the painful silence that succeeded this startling speech, all eyes were fixed on Castex. He rose from his seat, cool and smiling.

"It pleases me very much to retire," he said. "Witness it, messieurs!—yonder gentleman drives me from his table and his house."

He bowed, and immediately left the room. Alphonse Basnet squirmed in his chair, and at last blurted out:

"Bostock, my dear fellow—excuse me—but you see I can't remain. This is a wretched business; I hope it will end here. But I brought my friend here, and of course I must go with him."

And he did. The soup grew cold, and was removed untasted; course after course of the choicest dishes succeeded and were hardly touched. Everybody was under a dreadful constraint; occasionally there was solitary remark, but the effort to keep up a conversation was a flat failure. I have said so much, that I ought to tell the whole truth. When the wine appeared, the guests turned to it as a relief from the awkwardness of the situation. I presume everybody drank too much; I am certain that I did. I will except Bostock. He sat pale, rigid and silent through it all. The guests departed early, with hardly an effort to make the usual compliments to the host.

The next morning I was hardly out of bed when Piero Bostock walked in. He looked as stern and white as when he was denouncing Castex at his own table.

"Well, he's challenged you," was my salutation.

"No. I shall challenge him. Here's the note. Take it to him, and then to the man that he names as his friend."

I was thunderstruck. I tried to remonstrate with him. I told him that, so far as an outsider could judge, if anybody had cause to send a challenge, it was Castex. I begged him to tell me, in the strict confidence of friendship, what the language was that Castex had uttered to him. I told him that I could not act intelligently for him in this matter, unless I was advised. He peremptorily refused to tell all.

"You have been my friend, Dorian," he said. "When I say to you that no human being must know my cause of offense, you will believe that there is the best of reason for my silence. Napoleon Castex knows, no man better knows, the nature of his offense. He knows me, also; and he understands that if he were to lisp a hint of my reasons for challenging him, I would seek him and shoot him down like a dog! Don't argue with me, Alfred Dorian; I tell you the man is a cold-blooded scoundrel; he has sought me out to force quarrel upon me, and there are the best of reasons why the affair must go on."

There was nothing for me to do but to deliver the challenge. I found Castex cool, polite and consenting.

"There is not one of my name," he said, with his marked French accent, "who ever refused the request of a gentleman to meet him on the field of honor. M. Bostock thinks himself insulted. Some might think that I was. No matter; here is his challenge. Take it to my dear Alphonse; he will arrange everything with you. I only say to you, that my remark to M. Bostock was the truth. He knows it to be the truth; and he has not the grace to see that I put it in the language of la belle France, that others might not understand it. So much you may tell him, if you choose."

The affair went on to its frightful end. Nobody could discover the truth. Basnet tried his best to make his man divulge the cause of offense, but in vain.

"I only told him the truth, and told it in French, that it might not be heard by others. After I have fought him, I will tell it very loudly, in your harsh English, do you be sure. Meanwhile, I am quite willing to fight him. I knew him long before you did."

The wound that Piero Bostock received was as nearly fatal as a wound can be and leave the victim alive. The ball traversed his lung; nothing but the extraordinary skill of the doctor saved him. The doctor had served in the Mexican war, and happened to witness the successful operation of a

Mexican surgeon upon a similar wound of Gen. Shields, by cleansing it with a silk handkerchief. In this way Bostock's life was saved; but the fever that followed confined him to his bed for weeks, drained his strength, and left him only the shadow of his former self.

His affection for his daughter seemed doubled, if that were possible, by this dreadful experience. In every walking hour he wanted her with him. In his delirium he would call her name; when conscious he would hold her hand and look silently into her face as she sat by his bed.

I used often to call upon him while he was confined to the house. One day he sent Coralie out of the room and asked me to shut the door.

"You are still my friend, Alfred Dorian—are you not?" he abruptly began.

"To be sure I am. While I am dreadfully distressed by what has happened—"

"No matter about that. I want you to tell me something. What happened after I got that man's bullet? I think my senses were wandering. What did I say?"

I told him. I repeated his expressions—that he regretted that he had killed Castex; that he wanted to spare him; that he was anxious to hear from him a retraction of the words which had caused the duel. His face darkened as he listened.

"Do you mean to say that I said all that silly stuff?"

"I have only repeated your own words."

"Then my brain was wandering. Dorian, I meant to kill him. He has gone to be judged, as I must be one day; but, I tell you, I am not sorry he has gone. He well knew when he came up here with his malignant tongue that either his life or mine must be forfeited."

You can imagine what effect such a declaration had on me. It showed me a side of Bostock's character that I had never suspected to exist. I began to draw away from him, as did others of his friends.

In less than two years after the duel he had alienated himself from all of us. His nature seemed to have changed. He became cold, reserved and haughty. He was very little seen away from his home. When he removed to Louisiana, he passed away from all intercourse with his old friends here. He has answered no letters. When I bought this place, I negotiated with him through an agent.

You can see, knowing all this, that his life before he came here was clouded with something fearful and mysterious. I have wearied my brain in conjecturing what it can be. His wife, Conrad, Coralie,—which of them does it affect—or does it relate to all of them?

If you can guess, you are shrewder than I.

CHAPTER VIII.

BETWEEN DUTY AND TEMPTATION.

I slept very soundly that night. The experience and revelations of the last twenty-four hours had been to me more than incomprehensible; they were staggering. I tried to think about the astounding story that Mr. Dorian had told me, after I had bidden him good night, and had been lighted with a pair of tall wax tapers up a broad stairway to a large, square bed-chamber, where a great high-posted, canopied and curtained bed awaited me. I say I tried to think of it; but I could make nothing of it; I probably gave it up, and lapsed away into slumber.

Bodily and mentally, I was tired, and I slept late. I was aroused by a prolonged knocking at my chamber-door, through which ran a continual current of negro-talk.

"Please, young maussa, would you get up an' come down to breakfast? Maussa Dorian say, wake yo' up easy; an' yo' pass out yo' boots to be shined."

When an hour later, I was seated at the planter's hospitable table, it seemed as though I had been at home here for a year. Mr. Dorian, clad in a loose linen suit, his wife and three daughters, all pleasant, cool and at least one of them handsome, entertained me with easy and agreeable



I WAS LIGHTED WITH A PAIR OF TALL WAX CANDLES.

conversation. It warms my heart now to think of this, my first agreeable introduction to southern hospitality. As for the feast that was spread on that board—I despair of conveying an adequate idea of its profusion. I was the "stranger within their gates;" I was therefore entitled to all that they could set before me. Coffee, and milk, bacon, eggs, white and corn bread, fish from the river, hominy—where shall I stop? I had an appetite; but it soon surrendered before the great supply that loaded the table.

After breakfast, Mr. Dorian took me out on the shady west veranda, and smoked. I declined the weed, and he good-humoredly said:

"You'll have to learn, youngster, if you're going to stay in the south. Like the morning cocktail, tobacco is a social force here. And you've been here at my plantation fourteen hours and haven't said a word about politics or slavery. I am beginning to doubt whether you are northern born or not." I saw that he was bantering me, but I replied, seriously:

"I have never voted yet, and I know nothing about politics. As to slavery, I hope to get some information about it. I have very little yet."

He clapped me heartily on the shoulder.

"You talk like a sensible young fellow. I wish all this noise in congress and in the press could stop, and that the northerners could come down here, and see what slavery is like. Come along with me, and I'll show you a little of it."

We went back to the negro quarters; a small street of comfortable white cabins. As we passed through, the darkies ran out to see "Old Maussa." The young children, with hardly an apology of cotton clothing to hide their blackness, laughed and chattered round him. Withered old crones and rheumatic "uncles" hobbled to the doors to see him. Lusty young negroes and negresses gathered about him, eagerly discussing the prospects of "the crop."

"Here they are," said Mr. Dorian. "Something more than hundred of them. You see their disposition. All that are able to work are aching to get into the cotton field to 'save de crop.'"

"Would you sell one of these slaves?"

"Sell one of them? Me? Why, I'd as soon think of selling one of my own girls."

"Do all planters feel that way?"

"I can't say; likely not. I know of many who do."

"Is it not true that at the slave-marts in New Orleans and Charleston young girls are sold on the auction-block, and that mothers are separated from young children?"

Mr. Dorian answered with some warmth:

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