

## CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE IS NOT PERMITTED TO  
RUN AT ALL.

THE first night which I spent in The Bird's Nest, after my father left me, was passed alone, though my room opened into another that was occupied by two boys. On the following day Mr. Bird asked me if I had met with any boy whom I would like for a room-mate; and I told him at once that Henry Hulm was the boy I wanted. He smiled at my selection, and asked for the reason of it; and he smiled more warmly still when I told him I thought he was handsome, and seemed lonely and sad. The lad was at least two years older than I, but among all the boys he had been my first and supreme attraction. He was my opposite in every particular. Quiet, studious, keeping much by himself, and bearing in his dark face and eyes a look of patient self-repression, he enlisted at once my curiosity, my sympathy and my admiration.

Henry was called into our consultation, and Mr. Bird informed him of my choice. The boy smiled gratefully, for he had been shunned by the ruder fellows for the same qualities which had attracted me. As the room I occupied was better than his, his trunk was moved into mine; and while we remained in the school we continued our relations and kept the same apartment. If I had any distinct motive of curiosity in selecting him he never gratified it. He kept his history covered, and very rarely alluded, in any way, to his home or his family.

The one possession which he seemed to prize more highly than any other was an ivory miniature portrait of his mother, which, many a time during our life together, I saw him take

from his trunk and press to his lips. I soon learned to respect his reticence on topics which were quite at home on my own lips. I suspect I did talking enough for two boys. Indeed, I threw my whole life open to him, with such embellishments as my imagination suggested. He seemed interested in my talk, and was apparently pleased with me. I brought a new element into his life, and we became constant companions when out of school, as well as when we were in our room.

We were always wakened in the morning by a "whoop" and "halloo" that ran from room to room over the whole establishment. A little bell started it somewhere; and the first boy who heard it gave his call, which was taken up by the rest and borne on from bed to bed until the whole brood was in full cry. Thus the school called itself. It was the voices of merry and wide-awake boys that roused the drowsy ones; and very rarely did a dull and sulky face show itself in the breakfast-room.

This morning call was the key to all the affairs of the day and to the policy of the school. Self-direction and self-government—these were the most important of all the lessons learned at The Bird's Nest. Our school was a little community brought together for common objects—the pursuit of useful learning, the acquisition of courteous manners, and the practice of those duties which relate to good citizenship. The only laws of the school were those which were planted in the conscience, reason, and sense of propriety of the pupils. The ingenuity with which these were developed and appealed to has been, from that day to this, the subject of my unbounded admiration. The boys were made to feel that the school was their own, and that they were responsible for its good order. Mr. Bird was only the biggest and best boy, and the accepted president of the establishment. The responsibility of the boys was not a thing of theory only. It was deeply realized in the conscience and conduct of the school. However careless and refractory a new boy might be, he soon learned that he had a whole school to deal with, and that he was not a match for the public opinion. He might evade the master's or a teacher's



will, but he could not evade the eyes or the sentiments of the little fellows around him.

On the first Friday evening of my term, I entered as a charmed and thoroughly happy element into one of the social institutions of the school. On every Friday evening, after the hard labor of the week was over, it was the custom of the school to hold what was called a "reception." Teachers and pupils made the best toilet they could, and spent the evening in the parlors, dancing, and listening to music, and socially receiving the towns-people and such strangers as might happen to be in the village. The piano that furnished the music was the first I had ever heard, and at least half of my first reception-evening was spent by its side, in watching the skillful and handsome fingers that flew over its mysterious keys. I had always been taught that dancing was only indulged in by wicked people; but there were dear Mr. and Mrs. Bird looking on; there was precious Miss Butler without her belt, leading little fellows like myself through the mazes of the figures; there were twenty innocent and happy boys on the floor, their eyes sparkling with excitement; there were fine ladies who had come to see their boys, and village maidens simply clad and as fresh as roses; and I could not make out that there was anything wicked about it.

It was the theory of Mr. Bird that the more the boys could be brought into daily familiar association with good and gracious women the better it would be for them. Accordingly he had no men among his teachers, and as his school was the social center of the village, and all around him were interested in his objects, there were always ladies and young women at the receptions who devoted themselves to the happiness of the boys. Little lads of less than ten summers found no difficulty in securing partners who were old enough to be their mothers and grandmothers; and as I look back upon the patient and hearty efforts of these women, week after week and year after year, to make the boys happy and manly and courteous, it enhances my respect for womanhood, and for the wisdom which

laid all its plans to secure these attentions and this influence for us. I never saw a sheepish-looking boy or a sheepish-acting boy who had lived a year at The Bird's Nest. Through the influence of the young women engaged as teachers and of those who came as sympathetic visitors, the boys never failed to become courteous, self-respectful, and fearless in society.

Miss Butler, the principal teacher, who readily understood my admiration of her, undertook early in the evening to get me upon the floor; but it was all too new to me, and I begged to be permitted for one evening to look on and do nothing. She did not urge me; so I played the part of an observer. One of the first incidents of the evening that attracted my attention was the entrance in great haste of a good-natured, rollicking boy, whose name I had learned from the fellows to be Jack Linton. Jack had been fishing and had come home late. His toilet had been hurried, and he came blundering into the room with his laughing face flushed, his neck-tie awry, and his heavy boots on.

Mr. Bird, who saw everything, beckoned Jack to his side, "Jack," said he, "you are a very rugged boy."

"Am I?" And Jack laughed.

"Yes, it is astonishing what an amount of exercise you require," said Mr. Bird.

"Is it?" And Jack laughed again.

"Yes, I see you have your rough boots on for another walk. Suppose you walk around Robin Hood's Barn, and report yourself in a light, clean pair of shoes, as soon as you return."

Jack laughed again, but he made rather sorry work of it; and then he went out. "Robin Hood's Barn" was the name given to a lonely building a mile distant, to which Mr. Bird was in the habit of sending boys whose surplus vitality happened to lead them into boisterousness or mischief. Gyp, who had been an attentive listener to the conversation, and apparently understood every word of it, followed Jack to the door, and, having dismissed him into the pleasant moonlight, gave one or two light yelps and went back into the drawing-room.



Jack was a brisk walker and a lively runner, and before an hour had elapsed was in the drawing-room again, looking as good-natured as if nothing unusual had occurred. I looked at his feet and saw that they were irreproachably incased in light, shining shoes, and that his neck-tie had been readjusted. He came directly to Mr. Bird and said: "I have had a very pleasant walk, Mr. Bird."

"Ah! I'm delighted," responded the master, smiling; and then added:

"Did you meet anybody?"

"Yes, sir; I met a cow."

"What did you say to her?"

"I said 'How do you do, ma'am? How's your calf?'"

"What did she say?" asked Mr. Bird very much amused.

"She said the calf was very well, and would be tough enough for the boys in about two weeks," replied Jack, with a loud laugh.

Mr. Bird enjoyed the sally quite as much as the boys who had gathered round him, and added:

"We all know who will want the largest piece, Jack. Now go to your dancing."

In a minute afterward, Jack was on the floor with a matronly-looking lady to whom he related the events of the evening without the slightest sense of annoyance or disgrace. But that was the last time he ever attended a reception in his rough boots.

The evening was filled with life and gayety and freedom. To my unaccustomed eyes it was a scene of enchantment. I wished my father could see it. I would have given anything and everything I had to give could he have looked in upon it. I was sure there was nothing wrong in such amusement. I could not imagine how a boy could be made worse by such happiness, and I never discovered that he was. Indeed, I can trace a thousand good and refining influences to those evenings. They were the shining goals of every week's race with my youthful competitors; and while they were accounted sim-

ply as pleasures by us, they were regarded by the master and the teachers as among the choicest means of education. The manners of the school were shaped by them; and I know that hundreds of boys attribute to them their release from the bondage of bashfulness, under which many a man suffers while in the presence of women during all his life.

I repeat that I have never discovered that a boy was made worse by his experiences and exercises during those precious evenings; and I have often thought how sad a thing it is for a child to learn that he has been deceived or misinformed by his parents with relation to a practice so charged with innocent enjoyment. I enter here no plea for dancing beyond a faithful record of its effect upon the occupants of The Bird's Nest. I suppose the amusement may be liable to abuse: most good things are; and I do not know why this should be an exception. This, however, I am sure it is legitimate to say: that the sin of abuse, be it great or little, is venial compared with that which presents to the conscience as a sin in itself that which is not a sin in itself, and thus charges an innocent amusement with the flavor of guilt, and drives the young, in their exuberant life and love of harmonious play, beyond the pale of Christian sympathy.

As I recall the events of the occasion I find it impossible to analyze the feeling that one figure among the dancers begot in me. Whenever Miss Butler was on the floor I saw only her. Her dark eyes, her heavy shining hair, the inexpressible ease of her motions, her sunny smile,—that combination of graces and manners which makes what we call womanliness,—fascinated me, and inspired me with just as much love as it is possible for a boy to entertain. I am sure no girl of my own age could have felt toward her as I did. I should have been angry with any boy who felt toward her thus, and equally angry with any boy who did not admire her as much, or who should doubt, or undertake to cheapen, her charms. How can I question that it was the dawn within me of the grand passion—an apprehension of personal and spiritual fitness for compan-



ionship? Pure as childhood, inspired by personal loveliness, clothing its object with all angelic perfections, this boy-love for a woman has always been to me the subject of pathetic admiration, and has proved that the sweetest realm of love is untainted by any breath of sense.

There was a blind sort of wish within me for possession, even at this early age, and I amused the lady by giving utterance to my feelings. Wearied with the dancing, she took my hand and led me to a retired seat, where we had a delightful chat.

"I think you were born too soon," I said to her, still clinging to her hand, and looking my admiration.

"Oh! if I had been born later," she replied, "I should not be here. I should be a little girl somewhere."

"I don't think I should love you if you were a little girl," I responded.

"Then perhaps you were not born soon enough," she suggested.

"But if I had been born sooner I shouldn't be here now," I said.

"That's true," said the lady, "and that would be very bad, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, ever so bad," I said. "I wouldn't miss being here with you for a hundred dollars."

The mode in which I had undertaken to measure the pleasure of her society amused Miss Butler very much; and as I felt that the sum had not impressed her sufficiently, I added fifty to it. At this she laughed heartily, and said I was a strange boy, a statement which I received as pleasant flattery.

"Did you ever hear of the princess who was put to sleep for a hundred years and kept young and beautiful through it all?" I inquired.

"Yes."

"Well, I wish Mr. Bird were an enchanter, and would put you to sleep until I get to be a man," I said.

"But then I couldn't see you for ten years," she replied.

"Oh dear!" I exclaimed, "it seems to be all wrong."

"Well, my boy, there are a great many things in the world that seem to be all wrong. It is wrong for you to talk such nonsense to me, and it is wrong for me to let you do it, and we will not do wrong in this way any more. But I like you, and we will be good friends always."

Thus saying, my love dismissed me, and went back among the boys; but little did she know how sharp a pang she left in my heart. The forbidden subject was never mentioned again, and like other boys under similar circumstances, I survived.

There was one boy besides myself who enacted the part of an observer during that evening. He was a new boy, who had entered the school only a few days before myself. He was from the city, and looked with hearty contempt upon the whole entertainment. He had made no friends during the fortnight which had passed since he became an occupant of The Bird's Nest. His haughty and supercilious ways, his habit of finding fault with the school and everything connected with it, his overbearing treatment of the younger boys, and his idle habits had brought upon him the dislike of all the fellows. His name was Frank Andrews, though for some reason we never called him by his first name. He gave us all to understand that he was a gentleman's son, that he was rich, and, particularly, that he was in the habit of doing what pleased him and nothing else.

He was dressed better than any of the other boys, and carried a watch, the chain of which he took no pains to conceal. During all the evening he stood here and there about the rooms, his arms folded, looking on with his critical eyes and cynical smile. Nobody took notice of him, and he seemed to be rather proud of his isolation. I do not know why he should have spoken to me, for he was my senior, but toward the close of the evening he came up to me and said in his patronizing way:

"Well, little chap, how do you like it?"

"Oh! I think it's beautiful," I replied.

"Do you! That's because you're green," said Andrews.



"Is it!" I responded, imitating his tone. "Then they're all green—Mr. Bird and all."

"There's where you're right, little chap," said he. "They are all green—Mr. Bird and all."

"Miss Butler isn't green," I asserted stoutly.

"Oh! *isn't* she?" exclaimed Andrews, with a degree of sarcasm in his tone that quite exasperated me. "Oh, no! Miss Butler isn't green of course," he continued, as he saw my face reddening. "She's a duck—so she is! so she is! and if you are a good little boy you shall waddle around with her some time, so you shall!"

I was so angry that I am sure I should have struck him if we had been out of doors, regardless of his superior size and age. I turned sharply on my heel, and, retiring to a corner of the room, glared at him savagely, to his very great amusement.

It was at this moment that the bell rang for bed; and receiving, one after another, the kisses of Mr. and Mrs. Bird, and bidding the guests a good-night, some of whom were departing while others remained, we went to our rooms.

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CHAPTER V.

Avdo. 1625 MONTERREY, MEXICO

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE BIRD'S NEST AS ILLUSTRATED BY TWO STARTLING PUBLIC TRIALS.

SCARCELY less interesting than the exercises of reception-evening were those of the "family meeting," as it was called, which was always held on Sunday. This family meeting was one of the most remarkable of all the institutions of The Bird's Nest. It was probably more influential upon us than even the attendance at church, and our Bible lessons there, which occurred on the same day, for its aim and its result were the application of the Christian rule to our actual, every-day conduct.

I attended the family meeting which was held on my first Sunday at the school with intense interest. I suspect, indeed, that few more interesting and impressive meetings had ever been held in the establishment.

After we were all gathered in the hall, including Mrs. Bird and the teachers, as well as the master, Mr. Bird looked kindly out upon us and said:

"Well, boys, has anything happened during the week that we ought to discuss to-day? Is the school going along all right? Have you any secrets buttoned up in your jackets that you ought to show to me and to the school? Is there anything wrong going on which will do harm to the boys?"

As Mr. Bird spoke, changing the form of his question so as to reach the consciences of his boys from different directions, and get time to read their faces, there was a dead silence. When he paused, every boy felt that his face had been shrewdly read and was still under inspection.

"Yes, there is something wrong: I see it," said Mr. Bird. "I see it in several faces; but Tom Kendrick can tell us just