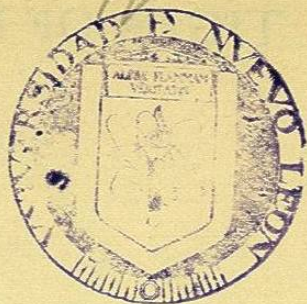


PZ3
W578
75



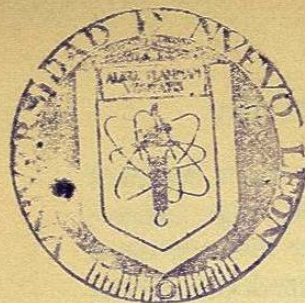
BIBLIOTECA



ACERVO DE LITERATURA

123366

A 5041



BIBLIOTECA
THE TIGER OF MUSCOVY.



CHAPTER I.

AMY ROMALYN: that is the name which has been the most familiar of all names upon my tongue; the name which will occur, I suppose, more frequently than any other in the history I now set myself to write; the name which, I believe, will be the last upon my lips when I die.

What is my first remembrance of Amy? My first striking recollection of her is of a little slender active girl of thirteen; black of hair and eyes, red of lip, pale of complexion, excepting when excited or flushed with exercise, at which times the most delicate of pink shades would come creeping over cheek, neck and brow, adding greatly to the charm of her appearance. When angry—and this was no rare occasion, for Amy was easily roused—the colour which rushed to her face was of a deeper tint.

Amy was never so beautiful as when her eyes flashed and her cheeks flushed with rage, excepting indeed when over her sweet features there fell a certain divine smile of tenderness; but this was reserved for the rarest occasions, and was, I think, seen by very few. As a general rule her smile was full of mischief and roguery; a smile to drive a man distracted when accompanied, as it often was, with words of raillery and a gleam from those flashing black eyes that seemed to pierce the very soul and steal from a man half his manhood.

For myself, for many and many a year I was, I think, less than half a man when in Amy's presence. I was afraid of her, I who—as it pleases me to flatter myself—know not what fear is, whether of man or of devil.

Owing to a distant relationship—our grandfathers were cousins, I believe—and to the fact that we lived close to one another in old Devonshire, Amy and I knew each the other from childhood up. I must have been an odd-looking, long, lanky boy of fifteen or sixteen when she was the girl of thirteen whom I have just described. I suppose I knew her long before we had arrived at these ages, but a certain day I think of is far enough away for the starting-

point of my recollection—a day that is fixed in my memory by reason of an event which has marked it for evermore as one of those which cannot be forgotten; the first day, this was, upon which Amy Romalyn asserted that absolute sovereignty over my being which she has exercised ever since, and against which I should strive in vain—nay, have many and many a time striven—to rebel. In time I have learned to love my chains, but it was not ever thus; for though a captive I have been, indeed, since that day, I have not always been a willing one.

At this time Amy Romalyn was the Beatrice to every little Dante in the countryside: the ideal, most beautiful, most adorable, and most unattainable Queen of Love. She had swains a score; every male child from ten years old to fifteen adored her, and she treated all with equal scorn. Most of them were, certainly, vastly beneath Amy in the social scale, being the sons of farmers upon her father's land or may-be upon my father's estate, for the Romalyn lands lay contiguous with those of the Shadwells, my father—Sir Amory Shadwell—being the squire of the district.

Strangely enough I, destined as I was to become so permanent an adorer, was not at

this time among the devoted worshippers at Amy's shrine. It was my pleasure to affect a contempt for her sex which I did not attempt to disguise in her presence. I think there can be little doubt that I was, at this period of my life—whether in appearance or in manner—a singularly unattractive youth; and if Amy Romalyn, my kinswoman, took every opportunity to show and assure me that her disdain for myself quite equalled the contempt which I displayed towards her, it is certainly no surprising matter.

Upon the day I think of, however, certain foolish episodes took place which made lasting impressions upon one at least of the actors—namely, myself. Many of us, boys and girls together, dwellers in the neighbourhood or in the actual village of Waddeton, on the Dart, were in the habit of meeting by the river-bank for the purpose of sailing our toy ships; for at this time all matters connected with shipping were greatly in fashion, by reason, I suppose, of the late triumphs of our fleets at sea. At any rate, we children would meet daily to sail our boats in a certain broad, almost tideless creek of the river, which here formed an ideal place for such amusement.

I remember that there had been arguments. I think we disputed, Amy and I, as to the merits of our respective ships. If I recollect the incident rightly, her vessel had vanquished mine in a contest of speed, and Amy—after her manner—improved the occasion by laughing at me and by throwing contempt upon my brigantine. Now, when Amy led the way, it was the custom of all her slaves to follow blindly; and their following of Amy on this occasion led them foul of me. One lad of twelve summers or thereabouts aggravated me so much, indeed, that I seized him by the shoulders and swung him as far as I could into the stream. There was nothing much in this, for we were all practised swimmers, but it afforded Amy ground for more sarcasm.

“That is a brave act in one who is two feet the lankier,” she said. “Why not vent thy spleen upon little Edgar Widcombe here, who is the smallest of all?”

I made no reply.

“He will not hurt thee,” she continued. “Here is Philip Ayton, but he—I doubt not—is too big for thee to touch? Nay, fear not; his father being thy father's tenant, he will not dare chastise thee.”

"I will throw him in and thee after to fetch him," I said foolishly, "if thou keep not a civil tongue."

"Oh, oh! hear that, all; he would vent his anger upon a maid. Oh! the coward! well, do so—I defy thee!"

"Father or no father, he dare not throw me," said Philip Ayton; "and as for touching thee, Amy Romalyn, he knows well that——"

"Come then, wrestle, Philip," I said in a fury; "and if I throw thee she shall follow into the water to comfort thee—ay, though every puppy dog of her pack bay at my heels!"

In a moment Philip and I were at loggerheads. He was not so tall as I by a head and a half, but he was strong and determined. We fought for five minutes before I succeeded in sending him, with a mighty push, three yards out into the deep water. The fight had not cooled my anger. On the contrary, I now felt consumed with a burning indignation; every one of those present, at any rate those of my own sex, were strongly against me and on the side of Philip. As for Amy, she had derided me throughout the combat, encouraging my adversary the while, and giving thus the note for the music of the rest, who howled about

me in the key she had set them. When Philip flew from my arms riverwards I turned to Amy.

"Now, you scolding wench," I muttered, "it is your turn."

"You dare not!" she said, shrinking from me and paling a little, for I suppose she had not expected that I would really carry out my foolish threat.

"Dare I not? You shall see!" I said.

I seized her forthwith, and in spite of her struggles—for she did struggle, and that stoutly, though she never uttered a sound after the first "You dare not!"—I threw her far out into the stream, which she reached with a great splash and commotion nearly five yards from shore.

No sooner had I done it than the enormity of my offence became clear to me. "What have I done?—what have I done?" I muttered, and almost as quickly as her body touched water, my own carcass was submerged also and moving with frenzied speed to her assistance.

But Amy would have none of my help. She did not need it, for she was a swimmer like the rest of our company. She made for shore and reached it as quickly as I, scrambling, puffing and choking up the bank without assistance.

Half a dozen of her devoted knights standing dryshod above me, furious, I doubt not, at my treatment of their mistress, anxious, too, to act in such a manner as to win her approval, attacked me when I would climb ashore, and prevented my landing. But Amy, perceiving this, bade them desist.

"Let him land!" she said imperiously, and I was allowed to climb dripping up the bank. I had the grace to approach Amy immediately and to ask her pardon. "I am ashamed," I said, "I know not why I acted so unmanly!"

But Amy laughed merrily. "Why," she said, "cousin, to tell you honest truth I have never liked thee before this moment; I doubt not I shall dislike thee again presently; but at this moment I am pleased with thy spirit, of which I have seen but little hitherto."

"Let us throw him in the river, the coward; let us beat him, Amy Romalyn!" cried the boys; "he has attacked a maid; he must be taught manners."

"Teach him what you will!" she replied, with a laugh, and quickly enough I was attacked.

Her remark about my lack of spirit had stung me. "I will show her," I now thought, "whether I have spirit!"

It was a battle royal. Amy Romalyn sat upon the grass and watched, laughing aloud, and encouraging now one side now the other. I was by far the biggest present, but by dint of numbers I was vanquished and thrown into the river, yet not before I had ducked a round half-dozen of my assailants, one or two of whom were, it seemed, so enraged with me that they were all for letting me drown, when at last I was tripped and sent flying into mid-stream, rather than allowing me to land; for again they bawled and shouted and struck at me, making it impossible for me to obtain a foothold—indeed, I know not how I should have landed at last but for Amy's interference; for seeing, I suppose, that my position grew somewhat serious, she bade them for shame leave me to climb ashore. "You cowards!" she said; "you are nine to one, and the lad is exhausted with keeping afloat!"

"He should not have attacked a maid!" some one shouted, but she continued:—

"Tut! I like him the better that he kept his word when he had threatened me!" To the favour of this kind speech Amy added a greater one: she allowed me to escort her home. During the walk she bade me take no

thought of favour in what she had said. "I told thee I never liked thee so well as this day, and that is true," said she, "for up to this morning I have seen in thee little better than a lamb that scarce dares bleat for the terror of hearing its own voice; but to-morrow, I doubt not, thou wilt be the same sheep as before, and I shall like thee no better."

CHAPTER II.

NEVERTHELESS Amy did like me better, on the whole, though indeed she was scornful enough at times. As for me, I began from the first day of her grudging kindness towards me to lose my heart to her. Strange that this should have been so, yet so it was. In alternate close comradeship and enmity—temporary yet bitter—we passed several years of this portion of our lives; then came separation.

Amy, it so happened, was related somewhat distantly to no less distinguished a person than the very greatest in the land, Queen Elizabeth herself, through the mother of her Grace, who had been second cousin to the mother of Amy. This was not, indeed, a very close kinship, yet it served as an excuse for the parents of Amy whereupon to base a petition that Amy might be taken into the household of her Grace, which petition was presently granted to them.

As a result, away went fair Amy to the Court in London, while I remained behind in