Saturday's Story

AGAINST THE TIDE.

In Three Parts. Part I.

There was one thing comforting about Baby Dick, fragile child though he was; you could not look for a moment into the depths of his laughing black eyes, so full of good, wholesome earthly mischief, without feeling that he had come to stay. He did not have the look of those who die young. Two of his baby cousins had rested their golden heads upon my arm and smiled calmly up into my eyes for awhile before they went back to the golden-haired, smiling choir which surely welcomed them gladly from our too-eager earthly grasp. And then Baby Dick; such a contrast!

"Mouth like a crowfish," said my brother, gazing at his son and heir with mingled anxiety and pride, "no chin to speak of, but plenty of cheek."

"If it's true," he went on, "that the homliest babies grow up the handsomest, won't he be a stunner when he's grown?"

And so he was. But it took some twenty years to bring about the change. His beautiful high forehead, like his great-grandfather's before him, his large dark eyes, so true to the family type, reassured me. I knew that Baby Dick would come out all right.

He had his little peculiarities, what child has not? He wanted to manage everything in his immediate vicinity, but I've seen older people with the same ambition. No one ever accepted punishment with better grace, and less resentment and greater inflexible determination to "do it again" than Baby Dick. When three years old he had an answer ready for everything and never the one you expected him to have. He was also a small politician in his way,—a sure sign of genius. He accepted kisses most agreeably until he had gained the desired end, whether it were raisins or a "big pansy blossom," and then he straightway proceeded to rub off the kiss. My mother would say, "Where's my darling, Dick?" "Right here, mommother?" "Here's some candy for my darling. Now where is he?" "You ain't got none," dancing around gleefully, "you ain't got none." And then, by way of making up, "Let's go play, mommother, let's go see the grasshoppers ride the bicycles."

He was a clever child, all the relations said so. Sometimes strangers thought he was merely peculiar, but, of course, they could not be expected to know so well as the family. I thought that I remarked occasional traces of oddity, but then some people accuse me of always finding out disagreeable things. They attribute it to my being an old maid, though I've seen some very disagreeable people who were not old maids. However, that's neither here nor there.

Well, as I was saying, I noticed that John, my brother, saw tokens of peculiarity, too, but he would not let Baby Dick be persecuted for them. Ah, well, there came a time when he could no longer stand between his boy and the world.

"Don't seem to notice him," John would say, "he's playing dog now and he'll bite you. Don't speak to him. He won't talk now. Dogs don't talk. He'll just bark."

Other times he would play at being a horse, and scamper around on all fours, kicking and whinneying. Sometimes I couldn't very well discriminate one part from another, without my brother around to act as stage-manager and interpreter, but I saw that Baby Dick lived in a land of make-believe that was all very real to him. He had one little play-trick that I never saw in another child. He needed no chair nor strings to play horse. He would go out into the center of the room and throw his rope, hitch up his horses and drive away, all with empty hands and unseeing eyes. "I've caught old Aleck, now, papa," "I'm going to town, now, papa," and so on. Sometimes he would forget and do the same thing over and over until John would speak to him gently and remind him.

He had an exaggerated idea of his own importance, a failing by no means uncommon; he thought that everything on earth was for the sake of Baby Dick and Baby Dick's papa. The little quiet baby girl, a couple of years younger, never got to be much of anything but Baby Dick's sister, and had no rights beyond protection for two or three old cast-off playthings.

As Dick grew up and no longer played dog and horse, everyone seemed convinced that he had put aside childish things and become a man. I knew better. I saw that he loved his world of make-believe no less than before. He asked me questions that puzzled me. He gave me his confidence in a most alarming manner. He had thoughts of his own about heaven, his faith was without belief. An imagination like his could not be entirely bereft of this fountain of all glorious fancies, but his clear reasoning could not accept the evidence of things unseen.

Thus he went on toward his early manhood and all things on earth were beautiful and joyous to him. He feared nothing, he hated nothing, and best of all, he loved none. There was nothing to disturb his healthy young mind. He studied music and John's eye grew bright with pride as he saw his son do the things he had longed to do. But Richard soon stopped his lessons. Music was not a sufficient aim in life to give one's whole ambition for.

He was sent to college, of course—we always go to college in our family—and great things were looked for from Richard. The first half-year his record was surpassingly fine. The home paper applauded vigorously, and the village lads turned yellow when his name was mentioned. The second half year, he barely made his graces. He had decided that it wasn't best to be a college grind.

Never shall I forget that first glad vacation when he came so often to visit his old auntie and we planned out a magnificent novel that should put all my shadowy little stories to shame. Richard put all the life, the novelty, the vehemence into the work, and I—oh, I did little, I just took out whatever there was too much of. He wrote it himself, and it was a beautiful book, but people said it was a pity he hadn't held out as well as he had begun.

How eagerly I looked forward to that second summer! I had longed to write out the full joy and bitterness of human life, Richard should do it for me and so much more skilfully. He came home, however, with his head full of other things. When I spoke about the new book, he laughed at me. His book was not a masterpiece, he said, and he would do nothing but what was of the best. That writing books was, after all, not an end sufficient unto the life of man and worthy of his whole, untiring energy. I am not sure but that he was right. Book-making is a flimsy occupation, a caricature of real life, and his book was only gained by giving all of life and soul and hopes and struggles to one sole end and aim.

Well, as I said, that second summer, Richard came home with some new ideas. He had been studying a good deal of literature that year and reading a great amount of poetry and things of that sort about love, and he used to come and talk them over with me.

"You must have had lovers in your day, I suppose," he said, "I have a notion that you weren't bad looking, and you have such nice ways."

And from the past I seemed to hear the echo of the childish voice, "Right here, mommother, right here's your darling,"—but I told him. Everyone always did what Richard wanted them to do.

"Well," said I, coldly, "all I know about it is this, there are two men I wish I'd never met; one of them I loved and the other one loved me. And looking back, I can't see any great difference between them, except that one had blue eyes and the other had brown, and one was studying to be a lawyer and the other to be a minister. And I trust that on the wide plains of the blessed where kind angels grant our every wish that I may never meet either one of them."

"Didn't he care for you, Aunt Marian?"

"He had the love of heaven in his heart, and when one loves heaven over much he loses sight of earthly claims."

Richard was rather reticent about his own love affairs. It was not from himself that I learned when he found the ideal for his poetic affections in the pretty, blue-eyed daughter of the oil-king, our local Great One. What was the jarring note in their sweet song of love I never knew, but she had arisen from the foreign laboring class, his fathers were gentlefolks as far back as the "family tree" recorded. Her father was rather inclined to laugh at out family tree, called it a pedigree. Richard was essentially a creature of ideals. Amy had been trained in an extremely practical manner, and she took it for granted that such persistent love-making led to establishing a home. She didn't have many poetical fancies, but she was a good little house-maid and she wearied Richard with the many little details of a home, which, truth to tell, he never meant to build.

Then he went back to school again, and forgot her, but every vacation he was haunted by those big insistent blue eyes, tiresomely faithful, from pew or social group, always turned toward him, demanding what had never been hers, the practical, everyday love of the dreamer. This lasted for two years and to Richard's credit be it said, he never spoke of her evident attempt to appropriate him, nor seemed to notice any other girl. But after a while she gave him up voluntarily, she even did more than that in the years to come, she followed him from place to place to show how completely she had given him up. Her father bought a newspaper in order that they might proclaim how completely they hated him, and all the world was free to use that paper for the same noble end and used it was right willingly.

CLARA M. GLOVER.

(To be Continued.)

Debating Club Tonight.

The Union boys' debating club will debate the following question at their regular meeting tonight:

"Resolved, That the legislature of the state should enact a law regulating the liquor traffic, embodying the features of the South Carolina dispensary law."

The affirmative will be sustained by Black and Sawyer, the negative by Joyce and Wheeler.

The Palladians, in this evening's session, will discuss the question: "Resolved, That the demands of England, Germany and Italy for rights as preferred creditors of the Venezuelan government, are unjust." Lightner and Snavely will support the affirmative, Clark and Lee the negative.

Dr. Johnson remarks to The Nebraskan that Mr. Philbrick's statement in Tuesday's paper, "Germans do not know the comforts of life in their homes," needs explanation. It is true that the older houses in all the German cities lack what we term "modern conveniences," in the way of furnace or steam heat, gas lights, bath rooms, etc., but Germans do know and enjoy the "comforts of home," or home-life, even more than their rushed-to-death American cousins. It was only the lack of modern conveniences that Mr. Philbrick found made an American's first week in Germany unpleasant.

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