

Miranda Wood's Romance

By Ethel Bret Harte.

The hot summer sun, which had been scorching and lashing into white heat the little New England village of Northfield all day, was now setting red behind a cluster of firs upon the far off flanks of the Berkshire hills, sinking slowly, drowsily to rest in vivid haze, as though worn out with its own fierce intensity.

One cottage, standing apart from this cluster of dwellings, alone seemed desolate, this sense of loneliness being to-night intensified by the almost tragically forlorn figure of a tall, gaunt woman sitting rigidly upon the doorstep, her thin hands clasped tightly about her knees.

But to-night, musing on her doorstep, Miranda felt strangely troubled and perplexed in mind, for a conversation she had overheard on her return from work that evening kept repeating itself to her brain with startling frequency and distinctness.

It had so happened that while passing along the village street she had encountered Deacon Scoville, who, in shirt sleeves and carpet slippers, a corn-cob pipe contentedly tucked away in the corner of his mouth, was chatting lazily over his garden gate with Pete Farman, the latter gentleman being entirely absorbed in the engrossing though somewhat strenuous occupation of cleaning his nails with a large jack-knife.

As Miranda approached the Deacon had halted her with a cheery "Good evening, Miranda. Powerful hot, ain't it?" while Pete, looking up grudgingly from his rugged toilet, had remarked with quiet insolence, "Most hot enough to roast larders on your tin roof, ain't it, eh?"

The Deacon's remarks Miranda had acknowledged with a sharp bow of assent, while her eyes had swept scornfully the impudent, grinning face of Pete Farman. The next instant she had turned the corner of the wood sharply and was lost to view behind the tall lilac hedge which formed an almost impenetrable wall at the side of the Deacon's garden.

Here she stopped, ostensibly to settle her bonnet with an angry jerk, but in reality to recover her breath and composure, which seemed to be slipping from her in gusts of fury. As she was about to start on again, the wind, swaying the lilac tops hither and thither, brought the voices of the two men she had just quitted clearly and distinctly to her ears, holding her as though spell-bound in curious though horrified fascination.

"Hurrah!" laughed Pete Farman; "there goes the gal what's never been kissed; don't wonder, it 'ed take a powerful nerve. Gul, what a face! Looks like she'd been reared on persimmons. Eh?"

Then the Deacon's voice drawled softly:—"I don't believe that yarn 'bout her never havin' been kissed. Miranda's most powerful homely, but she's got a good heart all the same, and that's bound to have fetched some feller, leastwise long enough to give her a kiss."

So now Miranda was turning the details of this conversation over in her mind with Puritanlike precision and candor. She had never had any sympathy or even patience with love and regarded all those suffering from this strange malady as but creatures of unsound mind, to be treated accordingly with contempt scorn.

It had also been Miranda's habit to catechise herself, to turn her emotions to the pitiless light of her almost morbid conscience, and she now insisted emphatically, albeit a trifle mournfully:—"No, I ain't never been kissed."

But already the feeling of anger and resentment which had at first been paramount was giving place to one of singular softness as she thought again of the Deacon's words. So "she had a good heart," she had almost forgotten she had one, and placed her hand hurriedly to her left side to make sure that it was really there.

To-night some stronger will than hers seemed swaying the current of her thoughts—some power at once alluring and suggestive with which Reason battled fruitlessly; some wine which seemed to lull her senses into blissful confusion and to which she finally gave herself up with childlike abandon.

"I wonder what it's like," she murmured, while again that vague softness enveloped her as in a cloak. "I wonder," she repeated—but here the trees began to dance in lazy rhythm before her eyes as, lulled by the drone of insects in the grass, she fell asleep.

II
"Hide me quick, for God's sake!" cried a hoarse voice in Miranda's ear, while a rough hand upon her shoulder shook her violently from her slumbers. Still stupefied with sleep, she gazed confusedly into the strange bearded face thrust close to hers.

The moonlight now bathing the garden in soft radiance, cloaking each familiar object with elish mystery and falling full upon the white face and already dramatically crouched figure of the man, seemed to add to the scene an almost limelight artificiality, a suggestion, at once theatrical and thrilling.

"Hide me quick, for God's sake!" he repeated, seizing her roughly by the hands, with the exclamation of impatience, accompanied by some-

thing that sounded strangely like a oath, as he dragged her unresistingly on her feet.

"Come quickly now! They're after me and they'll kill me if they get me—don't you understand?"

Miranda, however, now fully awake, tore her hands from his grasp, and drawing herself up to her full height, stood a stiff and forbidding sentinel in her doorway.

This, then, was a man, and evidently a bad one.

"Get out of my house, murderer," she cried, in a sharp voice. Then, waving his impatient denial aside with a warning hand, she continued:—"If they're after yer to kill yer, yer done somethin' yer hadn't oughter, and I for one won't stand in the way of seein' justice done."

Then, seizing a broom which lay against the door, and using it rather as a weapon of extermination than of defence, she lunged heavily toward him.

Dexterously dodging this furious onslaught of bristles, the desperate man fell on his knees before her, and raising his eyes, which Miranda noticed for the first time were soft and brown beneath their fringe of black lashes, to her face, whispered between hope and fear:—"Surely there is at least one spark of womanly pity in your heart."

Miranda started, clutching blindly, wildly at the door for support, as the Deacon's words flashed like lightning through her brain:—"She's got a good heart, and that's bound to fetch some man." The hot blood mounted to her face, and she clapped her hands over her ears to keep out the voice, fearing lest the man at her feet should hear it also.

The almost breathless silence which had followed his eloquent pleading was now broken by the sound of voices along the road, and one could discern dimly in the direction of the village a small black stream of figures running in ragged form, now stopping apparently to peer into ditches, and then hurrying on with renewed vigor. Each moment they became more distinct, and Miranda fancied she could distinguish the voices of the Deacon and Pete Farman among the rest.

Swift as a hare she flew to the door, beckoning the man to follow her, then throwing wide the cupboard door, in a voice scarcely less tense than his had been, "Git in there, quick."

The man sprang forward like some liberated animal—and the next moment the door closed upon him.

But none too soon, for already a party of excited men, headed by Pete Farman, had turned in at her garden gate.

"Yer ain't seen nothing of a man running for his life, have yer?" gasped Pete, his gooseberry eyes nearly bulging from their sockets—"A likely young feller with long black whiskers."

"Someone's broke in up to Farmer Cuddyback's and stole all Mary and Hank's wedding silver," panted the Deacon.

"Serves them right for having been such gul darned fools as to git married," was Miranda's cool and tart reply.

But she was feeling very nervous despite this bravado, and when Pete Farman advanced dangerously near the fateful cupboard she cried in a somewhat choked voice:—"I'll thank you, Pete Farman, to take your muddy boots off my clean paint, this ain't no cow shed."

Pete, momentarily awed, withdrew to the door, but from this safe retreat, his courage returning, he growled suspiciously:—"Oh, that's all very fine talk, but I seed him turn in here, and it is my painful dooty, Miss Miranda Wood, to search this 'ere house."

"Search, then, till you're blue in the face, for all I care," replied Miranda, in a voice she fondly believed to be indifferent, but which, though bravely commenced, wavered perceptibly toward the close of the sentence.

"Well, then, we may as well begin here," said the relentless Pete, walking toward the cupboard as he spoke. Like a flash Miranda was before him. Throwing herself defiantly against the door, she cried in a voice terrible to hear:—"I'm blest if you do! There's all my winter preserves in thar, and I'm not going to let any darned man set his foot in there till they've jellied."

Miranda was plain at all times, but now her face distorted with rage, was fearful to behold, and the men fell back a pace. For one moment she stood like a tigress at bay; the next, recognizing her half won battle, she assumed her old, dry manner, and, pointing with a long, bony finger down the road, said, sarcastically:—"And, now, when you gentlemen have done insulting a poor, helpless woman in her own house, perhaps you might see if you could catch that man what's runnin' close to the stone wall yonder."

In an instant the men were in hot pursuit, stumbling over each other in their eagerness to be in at the death. Miranda watched them out of sight, a scornful smile on her thin lips; then suddenly, as though realizing for the first time the enormity of the situation, she walked quickly to a chair, into which she sank, and, throwing her apron over her head, sat rigid and silent for a quarter of an hour.

She was trying to think it all out; who she was, to begin with, and what she had done. So lost was she in her own dreams and calculations she had quite forgotten the man in the jam cupboard until she felt her apron gently pulled from her face, and, looking up, she beheld the man whose life she had saved and for

whom she had told the first lie in her spotless life.

What a change had come over that face! All the terror had gone from those luminous eyes, and in its stead was a soft tenderness.

"God bless you for what you have done to-night!" he murmured in a deep, rich voice. "God bless you!"

Then for one blissful moment Miranda felt his arms about her shoulders, as, bending his head to hers, he kissed her.

III

The sun was high in the heavens and the fire quite cold on the hearth when Miranda finally stirred in her chair.

What had come over her? Had she dreamed it all? No, she had not slept; she had been conscious of every tick of the great clock above the mantel, and, besides, there was the cupboard gaping wide, displaying neat rows of jam pots upon its shelves. No, she had not dreamed; she had simply lived, and, it seemed to her, for the first time in her life. A man had kissed her and asked God to bless her, and she had saved his life. Ah, it was all such a beautiful romance Miranda laughed happily as she pictured herself as heroine.

Singing, she went about her work, absently preparing her meager breakfast, which she scarcely touched. After giving a few almost coquettish touches to her toilet she looked lingeringly about the room in loving remembrance ere she turned the key in the door and went out.

The village street was almost deserted, Miranda noticed gratefully, for though she longed to hear the result of last night's robbery she yet feared to do so, and by the time she had reached the substantial Giles' abode her heart was beating high to suffocation, and her hands trembled so she could scarcely lift the latch of the garden gate.

Had he really managed to escape or was he now languishing in some dreary prison? Her heart sickened at the thought.

At the door she was met by Mary Giles, who, eager to tell the news, did not notice Miranda's flushed face and trembling hands.

Here she learned that the "ruffian" (Miranda's hero) had got "clean away," and with this blissful intelligence the happy, albeit guilty, Miranda set to work with a light heart. She listened to their story of the robbery with that superior judgment of one who knows, feeling herself a clever actress indeed.

She hummed to herself as she worked, slashing rather recklessly into the material Mary Giles had given her for the new bodice. This unwonted brightness puzzled the good people for whom she worked not a little, but when she actually cut two sleeves for one arm their wonder turned to alarm.

"Lands sake, Miranda Wood!" cried Mary Giles despairingly, as she gazed at her ruined bodice, "be you clean crazy? Lord, one'd think you was in love!"

Miranda started guiltily, cutting a horrid gash in the faded bodice as she did so. In tragic silence the two women looked down at the wreck before them; then Miranda said in hard, wooden tones:—"How much did it cost?"

"It cost me seventy-five cents at Martin's sale, and you couldn't git it less than a dollar 'tother times," replied the now almost hysterical Mary Giles in bitter reproach.

Slowly drawing her purse from her pocket, Miranda counted out four twenty-five cent pieces and laid them in a neat pile upon the table. Then before the astonished Mary Giles could recover her breath she had fled.

She hurried along the road her head bent guiltily, scarcely heeding where she was going until, coming in contact with some huge bulk which seemed to her confused senses like a great feather bed, she looked up to find herself face to face with Mrs. Scoville, who, fat and excited, was fanning herself wildly with a newspaper at Miranda's own gate.

"Land's sakes, M's Scoville!" she cried in alarm, "whatever is the matter of yer? Looks like yer was woin' to have a stroke!"

"I've had one ready," exclaimed the Deacon's wife theatrically. "A most shocking thing I call it—most indecent. Here," she added, thrusting the newspaper under Miranda's nose as she followed her, panting, into the kitchen, "read that for yourself."

As Miranda read a faint, sick dizziness crept over her, the ground seemed to sway beneath her feet, and, sinking into a chair, she muttered forlornly to herself, "So it was all a lie after all. It was a traitor's kiss."

What she read was as follows:—

A Clever Criminal Caught at Last.

A paltry robbery of wedding silver at the house of a farmer named Cuddyback, residing in the village known as Scoville's Glen, was the means of running to earth one of the greatest and at the same time cleverest criminals of modern times.

"The prisoner, caught while trying to escape by jumping into a slowly moving freight train three miles below the scene of the robbery, gave his name as Parson, but was found to be a woman in male attire, and has subsequently been identified as Marie Rennie, author of the great diamond robbery at the Hotel—

In Dresden, in which a well known prince travelling incognito was killed, and instigator and prime mover in many subsequent robberies. "Until now she had managed to evade the vigilance of the police through her many clever disguises, the last mentioned being perhaps the most complete."

COST OF CARELESSNESS

Disasters Care Might Have Prevented.

CASES TAKEN TO LAW

Jameson's Raid Due to Misplaced Period—Typhoid Fever From Five Cent Blankets—Insects and Weeds Which Allowed an Entrance, Cost Enormous Sums.

Sometimes the most insignificant piece of carelessness has produced results which have shaken continents. The misplacement of a period was the cause. It is said, of the Jameson raid and therefore indirectly the cause of the Boer war.

When there seemed a prospect of a conflict between the Boer Government and the Uitlander population a letter was sent to Dr. Jameson from Johannesburg, signed by Colonel Rhodes and others.

According to the Grand Magazine the original contained the following sentence:—"We feel we are justified in taking steps to prevent the shedding of blood and to insure the protection of our rights. It is under these circumstances that we feel constrained to call upon you to come to our aid should disturbance arise here. Circumstances are so extreme that we cannot avoid this step, etc."

In the message Dr. Jameson received the full stop was placed after the word "aid," instead of after "here." Thus the qualifying clause was cut off and became a part of the next sentence. The Rhodesians came instantly galloping across the frontier on their ill fated mission.

In May, 1908, eleven boys on board the training ship Cornwall, lying off Purfleet, were suddenly struck down by typhoid fever, and inquiry proved that the outbreak was the result of their sleeping between fever infected blankets brought from South Africa. In flat contravention of army regulations no fewer than 200,000 blankets returned from service had been sold to two dealers at the Cape at five cents each, and of these 15,000 dozen were shipped back to London, those that were tainted being indiscriminately mixed with those free from suspicion carelessness of this sort is in very truth a crime of the deepest dye.

Worse than all in its financial effects upon a great industry was the carelessness which introduced the so-called Bathurst burr into Australia. Wherever this plant has spread sheep's fleeces are thick with the clinging burrs. These spiny seed pods, difficult beyond measure to get rid of, reduce the wool that is full of them to a fraction of its value.

The results of carelessness all too often are beyond the power of man to remedy. An instance in point was the collapse of the Campanile in Venice. For twelve long years before its final collapse Signor Vendracco, an architect in municipal employ, had been urging and imploring the town and Government to repair the tower before it was too late.

But in matters of this sort the Venetian, alas, too strongly resemble the Spaniards with their everlasting "manana." It is a case of never do to-day what can be left till to-morrow. Poor Vendracco received nothing but jeers or abuse, and at last, just a month before the day the Campanile fell, was summarily dismissed for making a last urgent appeal that something might be done before it was too late.

Another irreparable loss to the art world was caused in the winter of 1903 by the carelessness of the owners of the Rosso Palace, also in Venice. Because they could not or would not take the trouble to find out who was competent to be entrusted with the task they sent ten "old masters" to be cleaned by a totally incompetent person.

These pictures included two of the finest Van Dycks in existence and two Gualdo Renis and were all of immense value, both from an artistic and monetary point of view. The incompetent cleaner washed them with an alkaline solution and totally destroyed them all.

An official of an American bank once told the writer that it was not professional swindlers who constituted the chief danger to the banking profession. It was rather the careless methods of customers. In drawing checks and thus giving opportunity for fraud. As an instance, he quoted a case tried three years ago before a Maine court of justice.

The cashier of a certain electric company drew a check in favor of a man named Longacre for the sum of \$100. The treasurer of the company wrote the words "one hundred" in the very middle of the check and the figures thus: \$ 100, with a space wide enough for the insertion of another figure between the dollar mark and the 100.

When the check was presented the words read "Eighty-one hundred dollars" and the figures \$8,100. The bank paid it unquestioningly, and the electric company promptly sued to recover the \$8,000. The case created a good deal of interest, especially when the Court's decision was given that the company, not the bank, should be the losers on account of "gross carelessness" in drawing the check.—New York Sun.

Adversity may test us severely, but prosperity tests us more.

CHINA COMING TO THE FRONT

Pointed Nation Says the Values of Civilization.

The latest proof that China's face is set toward progress is found in the imperial decree recently issued promising a change of laws. While this decree does not promise a constitution, nevertheless it points in that direction, says the Pittsburgh Gazette.

A more vital indication of progress is found in the recent imperial decree making some mastery of Western learning a condition of future employment in the Government service. This decree does not affect existing office holders, and does not apply to candidates for office who have already completed the prescribed course of Confucian learning and have received the first and second degrees.

But the significance of the decree found in the fact that it prescribes the identical condition for future candidates for office which the young Emperor prescribed eight years ago, and which led to the Boxer uprising. It is significant that the Dowager Empress, who then retired the young Emperor for his radicalism, now issues in his name the identical decree which produced the revolution.

A still more striking sign than this paper decree is found in the fact that Yuan Shih Kai, the leading Viceroy of the empire, has already established more than a thousand primary and secondary schools in the Chihli province in order to prepare the young people of his province for the new Government courses. He is



Yuan Shih Kai.

attempting to introduce Western learning, and indeed the English language, into these schools as rapidly as possible.

An indication pointing to the growing influence of Japan in China is found in the fact that 11,000 Chinese students are now in Tokio striving to secure from the Government institutions and private schools the Western learning. The Young Men's Christian Association in Shanghai has seen the significance of this movement, and has sent two American and three or four young Chinese Christians to Tokio to keep in touch with this group of Chinese students.

As some Chinese students are returning from and going to Tokio each month at least 15,000 young Chinamen will pursue their studies in the Japanese capital in 1908. As these young men will furnish the future Yuan Shih Kais, Chang Chih-tungs and Wu Ting Fangs of China one can readily see the influence which the Japanese will acquire in the Chinese Empire. At least 2,000 or 3,000 of these young men would have studied in the United States had it not been for our harsh enforcement of the exclusion law. It now looks as if Japan will become the schoolmaster of the Orient, as Germany has been the schoolmaster of Europe and America. But the United States may lead the race after it is out of school.

Another sign of the times is the increase of the postoffices and the increase of newspapers, especially along the eastern side of the empire. The number is still pitifully small, but the rate of increase is a just cause of surprise and a striking indication of progress. In Tien-tsin four years ago three newspapers were published. To-day twenty-three newspapers are published in that northern port. It is at least significant that the only newspaper on earth published by a woman and for women is now published in Peking.

Perhaps the most striking indication of the Chinese desire for Western progress is found in the recent imperial decree attempting to establish the Christian Sabbath. The decree makes the Sabbath day a legal holiday. It is not probable that the decree will be largely followed throughout China, as, indeed, it is not probable that Chang Chih-tung's decree in regard to the New Testament will be largely observed. These decrees, however, show the aspirations of the Chinese for Western civilization.

Poison From Caterpillars.

Several kinds of hairy caterpillars are known to have a poisonous effect on the human skin, notably the caterpillar of the processionary moth, so called because the caterpillars march in procession after their food. The scientist Reaumur found that this caterpillar's hairs caused him considerable suffering in the hands for some days and that when he rubbed his eyes his eyelids, too, were inflamed. Even approaching too near the nests of these caterpillars has caused painful swellings on the necks of certain persons, from the caterpillars' hairs floated by the wind.

JOBS FOR HANDICAPPED

Bureau Which Does Needed Work.

MANY INDIGENT POOR

Fled Place for These Unfortunate. Still Capable of Doing Some Work—Difficult to Straighten Out—Cost of Maintaining Paupers.

"Instead of using boys and girls of working age for work that would pay full men's wages, why not try to use a capable man, who has some handicap, but who will do your work in spite of it?"

This is one of the questions that have for the last few months been propounded to employers by the men who have in charge what is known as a special employment bureau for the handicapped, says the New York Times.

Statistics have been compiled which show that there is annually a waste of \$50,000,000 worth of labor in the world. In the United States alone 524,000 persons are disabled in industrial accidents. Of these thousands, it is estimated that 215,000 still possess a certain earning power which can be utilized and here is where the bureau expects to appeal to the utilization for help. If these crippled, sick and defective persons can do 50 per cent. as much work as they did before, why should not that 50 per cent. of labor be taken advantage of?

The average yearly wage of the workman is \$450. Take your 225,000 handicapped men who can still make good and multiply by \$225, half the average wage, and you have in round numbers \$50,000,000 a year saved to the world by the placing of willing energies.

Other statistics have shown that it takes about \$10,000 to support a pauper through the natural term of life. Keep on figuring and assume that the world is not willing to take the responsibility of finding work, but in taxes, charities and in other ways prefers to assume the liability of its paupers, and it is not long before you find a sum like \$2,000,000,000 yearly incurred in this way, the well man's burden. Eight million paupers in the British Empire, with one out of every four dying a pauper, is almost equalled by our own records.

In the long list of available "handicaps" none of the 110,000 professional paupers now on the lists of the various charitable organizations has place or part. These latter have been tried in the line of work and patience and have been found wanting—they are the waste heap of humanity for which there is no adequate testing crucible as yet.

The "handicaps" are trustworthy. Their abilities, ambitions, earning power and pasts have been thoroughly investigated and they have been as carefully classified.

All classes in society are represented and all ages. The young girl whose hand has been torn in the machinery of a factory and the professor of belles lettres whose place has been taken in the university by a young man whose each other is the line of classification.

What could be found for a girl of seventeen, crippled as described? The answer that such one has already been placed in the small switchboard of a telephone with satisfactory results; disposes of that question. The professor of belle lettres is more than wanted; with voice made private secretary to a wealthy man.

An old man who has added to the allotted years an extra half decade is pointed out. "At one time," he was chief geologist for one of the Western railroads. He is an expert chemist and, Russian by birth, speaks and writes seven languages. A place was found for him as translator on a mining expedition, but for two years he had tramped the streets of New York seeking employment.

One of the most difficult problems that have been met in the history of the world toward the man who has passed his prime and is on the down grade. Every year the business world levels on the young man, and as squeaked oranges they are thrown aside when youth and vitality are gone. There are many places which might be filled by these "handicaps." If only employers could be made to see that age, while it may debar from certain roles, has its value in the commercial and professional market.

Clerical positions are filled with the young and inexperienced because they can be had cheaper; girls and boys in their teens are found in them often to the detriment of their disappointed employers. A man who has had fifty years experience in the business world might be made much more useful, even with a handicap than a boy of seventeen.

The man who is totally blind is a hard problem, although in one of the candy manufactories a blind man has been employed for years to crush nuts, a task which he fulfills with remarkable expedition.

Switzerland will probably enact a law in accordance with which, extending to crime as well, it will be a prison offense to aimed chiefly at searching.

The South American...