CHAPTER IX

Just at this time, which was the year before the Civil War, that fashionable summer resort, the White Briar Springs, was at its gayest. Rarely before had the hotel been filled with so brilliant a company. A few extra cases of yellow fever had been the cause of an unusual exodus from the fever districts, and in consequence the various summer resorts flourished and grew strong. The "White Briar" especially exerted and arrayed itself in its most festive garments. The great dining-room was filled to overflowing, the waiters were driven to desperation by the demands made upon them as they flew from table to table and endeavoured with laudable zeal to commit to memory fifty orders at once and at the same time to answer "Comin', sah" to the same number of snapped fingers. There were belles from Louisiana, beauties from Mississippi, and enslavers from Virginia, accompanied by their mothers, their fathers, their troops of younger brothers and sisters, and their black servants. There were nurses and valets and maids of all shades from ebony to cream-colour, and of all varieties of picturesqueness. All day the immense piazzas were crowded with promenaders, sitters, talkers, fancy-workers, servants attired in rainbow hues and apparently enjoying their idleness or their pretence at work to the utmost. Every morning parties played ten-pins, rode, strolled, gossipped; every afternoon the daring few who did not doze away the heated hours in the shaded rooms, flirted in couples under trees on the lawn, or in the woods, or by the creek. Every evening there was to be found ardent youth to dance in the

ballroom, and twice a week at least did this same youth, arrayed in robes suited to honour the occasion, disport itself joyfully and with transcendent delight in the presence of its elders assembled in rooms around the walls of the same glittering apartment with the intention of bestowing distinction upon what was known as "the hop."

Sometimes, in dull seasons, there was a scarcity of partners upon such occasions; but this year such was not the case. Aside from the brothers of the belles and beauties before referred to, who mustered in full force, there was a reserved corps of cavaliers who, though past the early and crude bloom of their first youth, were still malleable material. Who could desire a more gallant attendant than the agile though elderly Major Beaufort, who, with a large party of nieces, daughters, and granddaughters, made the tour of the watering-places each succeeding year, pervading the atmosphere of each with the subtle essence of his gallantry and hilariousness?

"I should be a miserable man, sir," proclaimed the Major, chivalrously upon each succeeding Thursday--"I should be a miserable man in seeing before me such grace and youth and beauty, feeling that I am no longer young, if I did not possess a heart which will throb for Woman as long as it beats with life."

Having distinguished himself by which poetic remark, he usually called up a waiter with champagne and glasses, in which beverage he gallantly drank the health of the admiring circle which partook of it with him.

Attached to the Beaufort party were various lesser luminaries, each of whom, it must be confessed, might well, under ordinary circumstances, have formed the centre of a circle himself; legal luminaries, social luminaries, political luminaries, each playing ten-pins and whist, each riding, each showing in all small gallantries, and adding by their presence to the exhilaration of the hour.

There was one gentleman, however, who, though he was not of the Beaufort party, could still not be considered among the lesser luminaries. He was a planet with an orbit of his own. This gentleman had ridden up to the hotel one afternoon on a fine horse, accompanied by a handsome, gloomy boy on another animal as fine, and followed by a well-dressed young negro carrying various necessary trappings, and himself mounted in a manner which did no discredit to his owner. The air of the party was such as to occasion some sensation on the front gallery, where the greater number of the guests were congregated.

"Oh," cried one of the Beauforts, "what a distinguished-looking man. Oh, what a handsome boy! and what splendid horses."

At that moment one of the other ladies--a dark, quiet, clever matron from South Carolina--uttered an exclamation.

"Is it possible," she said. "There is Colonel De Willoughby."

The new arrival recognised her at once and made his way towards her with the most graceful air of ease and pleasure, notwithstanding that it was necessary that he should wind his way dexterously round numerous groups in and out among a dozen chairs.

He was a strikingly handsome man, dark, aquiline, tall and lithe of figure; his clothes fitted him marvellously well at the waist, his slender arched foot was incased in a marvel of a boot, his black hair was rather long, and his superb eyes gained a mysterious depth and mellowness from the length and darkness of their lashes; altogether, it was quite natural that for the moment the Beauforts and their satellites should pale somewhat by comparison.

When he bowed over Mrs. Marvin's hand, a thrill of pleasure made itself manifest in those surrounding them. He spoke in the most melodious of voices.

"The greatest of pleasures," he was heard to say. "I did not expect this." And then, in response to some question: "My health since--since my loss has been very poor. I hope to recover strength and spirits," with an air of delicate and gentle melancholy. "May I present my boy--Rupert?"

In response to the summons the boy came forward--not awkwardly, or with any embarrassment, but with a bearing not at all likely to create a pleasant impression. The guests could see that he was even a handsomer boy than he had seemed at a greater distance. He was very like his father

in the matter of aquiline features, clear pale-olive skin and superb dark eyes: his face had even a fineness the older man's lacked, but the straight marks of a fixed frown were upon his forehead, and his mouth wore a look which accorded well with the lines.

He approached and bared his head, making his boyish bow in a manner which did credit to his training, but though he blushed slightly on being addressed, his manner was by no means a responsive one, and he moved away as soon as an opportunity presented itself, leaving his father making himself very fascinating in a gently chivalric way, and establishing himself as a planet by the mere manner of his address towards a woman who was neither pretty, young, nor enthusiastic.

There was no woman in the hotel so little prone to enthusiasm as this one. She was old enough and clever enough to have few illusions. It was thought singular that though she admitted she had known the Colonel from his youth, she showed very little partiality for his society, and, indeed, treated him with marked reserve. She never joined in the choruses of praise which were chanted daily around her.

"I know the De Willoughbys very well," she said. "Oh, yes, very well indeed--in a way. We hear a good deal of them. De Courcy's wife was a friend of mine. This one is De Courcy, the other is Romaine, and there was one who was considered a sort of black sheep and broke with the

family altogether. They don't know where he is and don't care to know, I suppose. They have their own views of the matter. Oh, yes; I know them very well, in a way."

When questioned by enthusiasts, she was obliged to confess that the hero of the hour was bountifully supplied with all outward gifts of nature, was to be envied his charm of manner and the air of romance surrounding him, though, in admitting this, she added a little comment not generally approved of.

"It's a little of the Troubadour order," she said; "but I dare say no woman would deny that it is rather taking. I don't deny it, it is taking--if you don't go below the surface."

Never was a man so popular as the Colonel, and never a man so missed as he on the days of his indisposition. He had such days when he did not leave his room and his negro was kept busy attending to his wants. The nature of his attacks was not definitely understood, but after them he always appeared wearing an interesting air of languor and melancholy, and was more admired than ever.

"The boy seems to feel it very much," the lady remarked. "He always looks so uneasy and anxious, and never goes away from the house at all. I suppose they are very fond of each other."

"I dare say he does feel it very much," said Mrs. Marvin with her

reserved little smile. "He is De Willoughby enough for that."

It was not agreed to that he inherited his father's grace of manner however. He was a definitely unamiable boy, if one might judge from appearances. He always wore a dark little scowl, as if he were either on the point of falling into a secret rage or making his way out of one; instead of allowing himself to be admired and made a pet of, he showed an unnatural preference for prowling around the grounds and galleries alone, sometimes sitting in corners and professing to read, but generally appearing to be meditating resentfully upon his wrongs in a manner which in a less handsome boy would have been decidedly unpleasant. Even Mrs. Marvin's advances did not meet with any show of cordiality, though it was allowed that he appeared less averse to her society than to that of any other woman, including the half dozen belles and beauties who would have enjoyed his boyish admiration greatly.

"I knew your mother," said Mrs. Marvin to him one day as he sat near her upon the gallery.

"Did you?" he answered, in a rather encouraging way. "When did you know her?"

"When she was young. We were girls together. She was a beauty and I wasn't, but we were very fond of each other."

He gave his closed book a sullen look.

"What makes women break so?" he asked. "I don't see why they break so. She had pretty eyes when she died, but,----"

He drew his handsome black brows down and scowled; and, seeing that he was angry at himself for having spoken, Mrs. Marvin made another remark.

"You miss her very much?" she said, gravely.

He turned his face away.

"She's better off where she is, I suppose," he said. "That's what they always say of dead people."

And then still frowning he got up and walked away.

The negro servants about the hotel were all fond of him, though his manner towards them was that of a fiery and enthusiastic young potentate, brooking no delay or interference. His beauty and his high-handed way impressed them as being the belongings of one favoured by fortune and worthy of admiration and respect.

"He's a D'Willoughby out and out," said his father's negro, Tip. "Ain't no mistake 'bout dat. He's a young devil when his spirit's up, 'n it's easy raised. But he's a powerful gen'lman sort o' boy--powerful. Throw's you a quarter soon's look at ye, 'n he's got the right kind o' high

ways--dough der ain't no sayin' he ain't a young devil; de Kurnel hisself cayn't outcuss him when his spirit's up."

The Colonel and his son had been at the springs a month, when the fancy-dress ball took place which was the occasion of a very unpleasant episode in the annals of this summer.

For several days before the greatest excitement had prevailed at the hotel. A pleasant air of mystery had prevailed over the preparations that were being made. The rural proprietors of the two stores in which the neighbourhood rejoiced were driven to distraction by constant demands made upon them for articles and materials of which they had never before heard, and which were not procurable within a hundred miles of the place. Bedrooms were overflowing with dresses in process of alteration from ordinary social aspects to marvellous combinations of imagination and ingenuity, while an amiable borrowing and exchanging went on through all the corridors.

On the day before the ball the Colonel's popularity reached its height. As it was the time of a certain local election, there was held upon the grounds a political meeting, giving such individuals as chose to avail themselves of it the opportunity of expressing their opinions to the assembled guests and the thirty or forty mountaineers who had suddenly and without any warning of previous existence appeared upon the scene.

The Colonel had been one of the first called upon, and, to the delight of

his admirers, he responded at once with the utmost grace to the call.

When he ascended the little platform with the slow, light step which was numbered among his chief attractions and stood before his audience for a moment looking down at them gently and reflectively from under his beautiful lashes, a throb of expectation was felt in every tender bosom.

His speech fell short of no desire, being decided to be simple perfection. His soft voice, his quiet ease of movement, his eloquence, were all that could be hoped for from mortal man. He mentioned with high-bred depreciation the fact that he could not fairly call himself a politician unless as any son of the fair South must be one at least at heart, however devoid of the gifts which have made her greatest heard from continent to continent. He was only one of the many who had at stake their cherished institutions, the homes they loved, the beloved who brightened those homes, and their own happiness as it was centred in those homes, and irrevocably bound in that of the fairest land upon which the fair sun shone.

The applause at this juncture was so great as to oblige him to pause for a few moments; but it was to be regretted that nine out of ten of the mountaineers remained entirely unresponsive, crossing their jean-covered legs and rubbing their lean and grizzled jaws in a soulless manner. They displayed this apathetic indifference to the most graceful flight of rhetoric, to the most musical appeals to the hearts of all men loving freedom, to the announcement that matters had reached a sad and

significant crisis, that the peculiar institutions left as a legacy by their forefathers were threatened by the Northern fanatics, and that in the near future the blood of patriots might be poured forth as a libation upon the soil they loved; to eloquent denunciations of the hirelings and would-be violators of our rights under the constitution. To all these they listened, evidently devoting all their slow energies to the comprehension of it, but they were less moved than might have been expected of men little used to oratory.

But it was the termination of the speech that stirred all hearts. With a dexterity only to be compared to its easy grace, the orator left the sterner side of the question for a tenderer one to which he had already referred in passing, and which was the side of all political questions which presented themselves to such men as he. Every man, it was to be hoped, knew the meaning of home and love and tenderness in some form, however poor and humble and unpatriotic; to every man was given a man's privilege of defending the rights and sacredness of this home, this love, with his strength, with his might, with the blood of his beating heart if need be. To a Southern man, as to all men, his right to be first in his own land in ruling, in choosing rulers, in carrying out the laws, meant his right to defend this home and that which was precious to him within it. There were a few before him upon this summer's day, alas, alas! that Fate should will it so, who had not somewhere a grave whose grass moved in the softness of the wind over dead loves and hopes cherished even in this hour as naught else was cherished. "And these graves----"

He faltered and paused, glancing towards the doorway with a singular expression. For a few seconds he could not go on. He was obliged to raise to his lips the glass of water which had been provided for him.

"Oh!" was sighed softly through the room, "his emotion has overpowered him. Poor fellow! how sad he looks."

Mrs. Marvin simply followed the direction his eyes had taken. She was a practical person. The object her eye met was the figure of the boy who had come in a few minutes before. He was leaning against the doorpost, attired in a cool suit of white linen, his hands in his pockets, the expression of his handsome darkling young face a most curious one. He was staring at his father steadily, his fine eyes wide open holding a spark of inward rage, his nostrils dilated and quivering. He seemed bent upon making the orator meet his glance, but the orator showed no desire to do so. He gave his sole attention to his glass of water. To this clever, elderly Southern matron it was an interesting scene.

"If he sprang up in two minutes and threw something deadly and murderous at him," she said to herself, "I should not be in the least surprised; and I should not be the first to blame him."

But the rest of the audience was intent upon the Colonel, who, recovering himself, finished his harangue with an appeal that the land made sacred by those loves, those homes, those graves, might be left solely in the hands of the men who loved it best, who knew its needs, who yearned for

its highest development, and who, when the needful hour arrived, would lay down their lives to save its honour.

When he concluded, and was on the point of seating himself very quietly, without any appearance of being conscious of the great sensation he had created, and still wearing an admirable touch of melancholy upon his fine countenance, Major Beaufort rushed towards him, almost upsetting a chair in his eagerness, and grasped his hand and shook it with a congratulatory ardour so impressive and enthusiastic as to be a sensation in itself.

There were other speeches afterwards. Fired by the example of his friend, Major Beaufort distinguished himself by an harangue overflowing with gallantry and adorned throughout with amiable allusions to the greatest power of all, the power of Youth, Beauty, and Womanhood. The political perspicuity of the address was perhaps somewhat obscured by its being chivalrously pointed towards those fair beings who brighten our existence and lengthen our griefs. Without the Ladies, the speaker found, we may be politicians, but we cannot be gentlemen. He discovered (upon the spot, and with a delicate suggestion of pathos) that by a curious coincidence, the Ladies were the men's mothers, their wives, their sisters, their daughters. This being greatly applauded, he added that over these husbands, these fathers, these brothers--and might be added "these lovers"--the Ladies wielded a mighty influence. The position of Woman, even in the darkest ages, had been the position of one whose delicate hand worked the lever of the world; but to-day, in these more enlightened times, in the age of advancement and discovery, before what great and

sublime power did the nobleman, the inventor, the literary man, the warrior, bow, as he bowed before the shrine of the Ladies?

But it was the Colonel who bore away the palm and was the hero of the hour. When the audience rose he was surrounded at once by groups of enthusiasts, who shook hands with him, who poured forth libations of praise, who hung upon his every word with rapture.

"How proud of you he must be," said one of the fairest in the group of worshippers; "boys of his age feel things so strongly. I wonder why he doesn't come forward and say something to you? He is too shy, I suppose."

"I dare say," said the Colonel with his most fascinating gentle smile. "One must not expect enthusiasm of boys. I have no doubt he thought it a great bore and wondered what I was aiming at."

"Impossible," exclaimed the fair enslaver. "Don't do him an injustice, Colonel de Willoughby."

But as she glanced towards the doorway her voice died down and the expression of her face changed somewhat. The boy--still with his hands in his pockets--was looking on with an air which was as insolent as it was remarkable, an air of youthful scorn and malignant derision which staggered even the enthusiast.

She turned uneasily to the Colonel, who faintly smiled.

"He is a handsome fellow," he said, "and I must own to being a vain parent, but he has a demon of a temper and he has been spoiled. He'll get over it when he is older."

It was a great blow to his admirers when it became known the next morning that the Colonel was suffering from one of his attacks, and even a worse one than usual. Neb was shut up in his room with him all day, and it was rumoured that the boy would not come down, but wandered up and down the corridors restlessly, looking miserable enough to have touched the stoniest heart.

During the morning quite a gloom pervaded the atmosphere; only the excitement of preparations for the evening could have proved an antidote to the general depression.

It was to be a brilliant occasion. The county had been scoured for guests, some of whom were to travel in their carriages from other watering-places for twenty or thirty miles. The ballroom had been decorated by a committee of ladies; the costumes, it was anticipated, would be dazzling beyond measure. No disappointment was felt when the festal hour arrived, but the very keen emotion attendant upon the absence of the interesting invalid.

"If he had only been well enough to be here," it was said, "how he would

have enjoyed it."

Major Beaufort, attired as a Sultan and appropriately surrounded by his harem in sarsenet trousers and spangled veils, gave universal satisfaction. Minnehaha in feathers and moccasins, and Hiawatha in moccasins and feathers, gave a touch of mild poetry to the evening. Sisters of Charity in white cambric caps told their beads through the mazes of the lancers. Night and Morning, attired respectively in black and white tarletan, and both profusely adorned with silver paper stars, combined their forces to add romance and vividness to the festive scene.

There had been dancing and flirtation, upon which those of the guests who did not join gazed for an hour or so as they sat in the chairs arranged around the walls, doubtless enjoying themselves intensely, and the gaiety was at its height, when some commotion became manifest at one of the doors. Those grouped about it appeared to be startled at finding something or somebody behind them, and almost immediately it was seen that this something or somebody was bent upon crowding past them. A loud,
insane-sounding laugh was heard. The dancers stopped and turned towards it with one accord, their alarm and astonishment depicted on their faces. The spectators bent forward in their seats.

"What is it?" was the general exclamation. "Oh! Oh!"

This last interjection took the form of a chorus as two of the group at

the doorway were pushed headlong into the room, and a tall, unsteady, half-dressed figure made its violent entrance.

At the first glance it was not easy to recognize it; it was simply the figure of a very tall man in an ungirt costume, composed of shirt and pantaloons. He was crushed and dishevelled. His hair hung over his forehead. He strode into the middle of the quadrille, and stood with his hands in his pockets, swaying to and fro, with a stare at once malicious and vacant.

"Oh," he remarked, sardonically, as he took in his surroundings, and then everyone recognized at once that it was Colonel De Willoughby, and that Colonel De Willoughby was mad drunk.

He caught sight of Major Beaufort, and staggered towards him with another frantic laugh.

"Good God, Major," he cried; "how becomin' 'tis, how damned becomin'. Harem an' all. Only trouble is you're too fat--too fat; if you weren't so fat wouldn't look such a damned fool."

It was to be regretted there was no longer an air of refinement about his intoxication, no suggestion of melancholy grace, no ghost of his usual high-bred suavity; with his laugh and stare and unsteady legs he was simply a more drunken lunatic than one generally sees.

There was a rush at him from all sides--Major Beaufort, in his Turkish trousers, being the first to fall upon him and have his turban stamped upon in the encounter. He was borne across the room, shouting and struggling and indulging in profanity of the most frightful kind. Just as they got him to the door his black boy Neb appeared, looking ashen with fright.

"De Lord o' massey," he cried. "I ain't lef' him more'n a minit. He sent me down hisself. One o' his cunnin' ways to get rid o' me when he's at de wust. Opium 'n whiskey, dats what gets him dis way. Bof togedder a-gwine ter kill him some dese days, 'n de opium am de wustest. For de Lord's sake some o' you gen'men cum 'n hep me till I git him quieted down."

It was all over in a few moments, but the effort made to return to hilariousness was a failure; the shock to the majority of the gay throng had been great. Mrs. Marvin, sitting in her special corner, was besieged with questions, and at length was prevailed upon through the force of circumstances to speak the truth as she knew it.

"Has he ever done it before?" she said. "Yes, he has done it before--he has done it a dozen times since he has been here, only to-night he was madder than usual and got away from his servant. What is it? It is opium when it isn't whiskey, and whiskey when it isn't opium, and oftenest it is both together. He is the worst of a bad lot, and if you haven't understood that miserable angry boy before you may understand him now. His mother died of a broken heart when he was twelve years old, and he

watched her die of it and knew what killed her, and is proud enough to feel the shame that rests upon him. That's as much as I care to say, and yet it isn't the half."

When those bearing the Colonel to his room turned into the corridor leading to it they encountered his son, who met them with a white-lipped rage, startling to every man of them in its incongruous contrast to the boyish face and figure.

"What?" he said, panting. "You've got him, have you?"

"Yes," responded the Colonel hilariously; "'ve got me safe 'nuff; pick me up ad' car' me. If man won't go out, tote 'm out."

They carried him into his rooms and laid him down, and more than one among them turned curiously to the boy as he stood near the bed looking down at the dishevelled, incoherent, gibbering object upon it.

"Damn him," he said in a sudden outburst; "damn him."

"Hello, youngster," said one of the party, "that's not the thing exactly."

"Go to the devil," roared the lad, livid with wrath and shame. "Do you think I'll not say what I please? A nice one he is for a fellow to have for a father--to be tied to and dragged about by--drinking himself mad

and disgracing himself after his palaver and sentiment and playing the gentleman. He ought to be a gentleman--he's got a gentleman's name, and"--choking a little--"all the rest of it. I hate him! He makes me sick. I wish he was dead. He's a liar and a bully and a fool. I'd kill him if he wasn't my father. I should like to kill him for being my father!"

Suddenly his voice faltered and his face turned white. He walked to the other side of the room, turning his back to them all, and, flinging himself into a chair, dropped his curly head on his arm on the window-sill and sobbed aloud with a weakness and broken-down fury pitiful to see.

The Colonel burst into a frantic shriek of laughter.

"Queer little devil," he said. "Prou' lit'l devil! Like's moth'--don' like it. Moth' used er cry. She didn't like it."