

PERTURBED SPIRITS.

I.

WHEN it was announced that Mr. Francis Meredith had been appointed secretary to the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society, the friends of the other candidates for that office were violently indignant, and declared that the appointment was one conspicuously unfit to be made. The friends of Mr. Francis Meredith smiled pleasantly as they protested mildly in his behalf; they said that he would do very well after he mastered the duties of the post, and that the work was not onerous, even for a man wholly unused to any regular occupation; but while they were saying with their tongues that Fanny Meredith was a good fellow, in their hearts they were wondering how a round young man would manage in a square hole. From this it may be inferred that the opponents of the appointment were altogether in the right, and that one fortunate man owed the place to a freak of favoritism.

It may serve to indicate the character of Mr. Francis Meredith to record that to his intimates he was known, not as Frank, but as Fanny. He was a charming and most lady-like young man, who toiled not neither did he spin. He owed his exemption from labor and his social standing to the fact that he was the only son of his mother, and she a widow of large wealth. He had managed, somehow or other, to creep through college in the course of five years. He was a kindly youth, but heedless, careless, scatterbrained, and fixing his mind with ease only on the one object of his existence—the conducting of a cotillion. To conduct the cotillion decently and in order seemed to Fanny Meredith to be the crowning glory of a young gentleman's career. Unfortunately his mother's trustee made unwise investments and died, leaving his affairs curiously entangled, and it became necessary for Meredith to do something for himself. He scorned a place under government; besides, he could not pass the examination with any hope of appointment. As it happened, Mrs. Meredith's trustee had been the secretary of the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society, and his death made it possible to work out a sort of poetic justice by giving the post to Fanny Meredith.

It is difficult to speak without awe of that august conclave, the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society. During the original

Dutch ownership of Manhattan Island, and before New Amsterdam experienced a change of heart and became New York, certain worthy burghers of the city had combined in a benevolent association which continued its labors even after the English capture of the colony and through the long struggle of the Revolution. When at last New York was firmly established as the Empire City, no one of its institutions was more deeply rooted or more abundantly flourishing than the Saint Nicholas Relief Society. It was rich, for it had received lands and tenements and hereditaments which had multiplied in value and increased in income with the growth of the city. It did much good. It was admirably managed. It had a delightful aroma of antiquity, denied to most American institutions. It was fashionable. It was exclusive. To be a member of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society was the New York equivalent to the New England ownership of a portrait by Copley,—it was a certificate of gentle birth. To be elected to the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society was indisputable evidence that a man's family had been held in honor here in New York for two centuries. Just as the court circles of Austria are closed to any one who cannot show sixteen quarterings, so the unwritten law of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society forbade the election to the council of any one whose ancestors had not settled in Manhattan Island before it surrendered to Colonel Nicolls in 1664.

Among the descendants of the scant fifteen hundred inhabitants of New Amsterdam were not a few shrewd men of business. The affairs of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society were always ably and adroitly managed, and the property of the society was well administered. Its annual revenues were greatly increased by a yearly ball given just before Lent allowed the ladies of fashion time to repent of their sins. This public ball—for it was public practically, as any man might enter who could pay the high price asked for a ticket—being patronized by the most fashionable ladies of New York, was always crushingly attended, to the replenishment of the coffers of the charity. To this public ball there succeeded, after the interval of Lent, a private dinner of the council, invariably given on the Tuesday in Easter week, the Tuesday after Paas. The Dutch word still lingers, and perhaps the Paas dinner of the council of the

Saint Nicholas Relief Society may have helped to keep it alive and in the mouths of men.

To attend to the annual ball and to the Paas dinner were the chief duties of the secretary of the council; it is possible even to assert that these were his sole duties. He had nothing whatever to do with the management of the society; he was the secretary of the council only; and it was precisely because the obligations of the office were little more than ornamental that the friends of Mr. Francis Meredith maintained his perfect ability to fulfill them satisfactorily. He had been elected at the January meeting of the council, and he was told to exercise a general supervision over the arrangements of the ball, which was to take place just in the middle of February — on Saint Valentine's day, in fact.

"I wonder how Fanny Meredith will make out," said Mr. Delancey Jones, when he heard of the appointment. "Fanny Meredith is a good-looking fellow, and a good fellow too, and the girls all say he dances divinely; but he is more different kinds of a fool than any other man I know!"

As it happened, Fanny Meredith had very little to do with the ball, but he did that little wrong. He blundered in every inconceivable manner and with the most imperturbable good humor. He altered the advertisements, for one thing, just as they were going to the newspapers and without consultation with any one; and the next morning the members of the council were shocked to see that tickets would be for sale at the door until midnight — there having been hitherto a pleasing convention that tickets could be had only by those vouched for by members of the society. Then, at the February meeting of the council, he arose with the smile of a man about to impart wisdom and suggested that as the clergymen of New York were always willing to lend a helping hand to charity, it would be a very clever device if they were to request the rectors of the fashionable churches to make from the altar formal announcement of the ball, with full particulars as to the price of tickets and the persons from whom these might be purchased. And when the night of the ball arrived at last, and Fanny Meredith was requested to welcome the journalists who came to "write it up" and to provide for their comfort, internal and external, he said something to Harry Brackett, who had been sent up from the "Gotham Gazette" to provide a picturesque description of the ball, to be supplemented by the more personal notes of the "society reporter." Just what it was that Fanny Meredith said to Harry Brackett no one has ever been able to ascertain exactly, but, whatever it was, it took the journalist

completely by surprise; he looked at the secretary of the council for a minute in dazed astonishment, and then, his sense of humor overcoming his indignation, he said slowly, "Somebody must have left a door open somewhere, and this thing blew in!"

But the petty errors the new secretary committed at the ball were as nothing to the mighty blunder he made at the Paas dinner of the council. The Saint Nicholas Relief Society may have any number of annual subscribers, but it has only two hundred members elected for life. From these two hundred members is chosen a council of twenty-one. Among the members are many ladies, and at least a third of the council are of the sex which wears ear-rings. It is this mingling of sharp men and clever women in the council which gives its strength to the Saint Nicholas Relief Society. In nothing is the skill of the management shown to more advantage than in the choice of members of the council. There are young ladies, there are old bachelors, there are substantial matrons, and there are fathers of families; and they dwell together in unity, so far, at least, as the Saint Nicholas Relief Society is concerned. A meeting of the council presents a sight at once heterogeneous and characteristic. Possibly it is this variety of persons and of points of view that makes the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society so successful as it has been in its task of administering wealth and of ministering to the needy. Certainly the dissimilarity of character and the unity of object help to make the annual Paas dinner a season of refreshment. Most of the members of the council are busy, but it is very rare indeed for one of them to be absent from his seat or from her seat, as the case may be, at the Paas dinner.

The number of the council is twenty-one, and has always been twenty-one. Fanny Meredith forgot all about the Paas dinner until reminded of it less than a week before Easter. Then he rushed off to the old-fashioned restaurant where the dinner was always given, and he spent four hours there in the ordering of a proper series of courses for twenty-one people. He had seized the nearest annual report of the society, and he gave it to a copyist with a score of blank invitation cards, telling her to send them out to the members of the council, in accordance with a list printed at the end of the report. The copyist did as she was bidden, and the invitations went forth by the post.

But when the members of the council assembled on the evening of the Tuesday after Easter they were only thirteen in number. They waited nearly an hour for the other

eight, and then they sat down ill at ease. While they were yet eating their oysters Mr. Francis Meredith came in to gaze on his handiwork. Mr. Jacob Leisler, Jr., asked him if he had sent all the invitations.

"Of course I did," he answered; "you don't think I could make a mistake about a little thing like that, do you?"

To this leading question there was no answer; so Meredith continued, taking a report from his pocket:

"I wouldn't trust myself to write them, so I gave this list to a copyist, and I put all the envelopes in the post myself."

"Let me see that report," said Mr. Leisler, holding out his hand. Mr. Jacob Leisler, Jr., was the chairman of the finance committee, and a man speaking with authority. On the present occasion he was presiding.

The unsuspecting Fanny gave him the pamphlet. Mr. Leisler glanced at it, read the list of the council, turned to the date on the title-page, and then inquired calmly:

"Mr. Meredith, do you know when this report was printed?"

"Last fall, of course," answered the secretary.

"Just twenty-two years ago last fall," Mr. Leisler returned; "so if you have invited to this dinner here to-night the council whose names appear in this report, you have not asked the eight absent members who are alive, and you have asked eight members who are dead! And that accounts for the empty chairs here."

Fanny Meredith laughed feebly, and then he laughed again faintly. At last he murmured, "I seem to have made a mistake."

As he shrank away toward the door, amid an embarrassed silence, Mr. Leisler whispered harshly to a mature and sharp-featured lady who sat at his right:

"And we seem to have made a mistake when we elected him to be secretary to the council."

There was a gentle murmur of assent from the members of the council, in which nearly all joined, excepting a young old maid with frank eyes and cheerful countenance, who was sitting about half-way down the dinner-table, with a vacant seat by her side. She looked at the abashed Fanny Meredith with a compassionate smile of encouragement.

"Since you have not attended to your duty," said Mr. Leisler severely, checking the helpless secretary on the threshold, "since you have not seen that the other members of the council received invitations, of course they will not come—we cannot expect them. We must dine by ourselves—thirteen at table. I cannot speak for the others, but to me it is

most unpleasant to see those eight empty chairs!"

As the crestfallen Fanny Meredith retreated hastily from the dining-room, he could not help hearing this rebuke heartily approved by the council.

II.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Jacob Leisler, Jr., and Mrs. Vedder, the energetic lady on his right, and Miss Mary Van Dyne, the pleasant-faced old maid farther down on his left, and Mr. Joshua Hoffman, who sat beside her, and the rest of the thirteen members of the council who were present, saw eight empty chairs, which made awkward gaps in the company about the board—although they could count only thirteen at table, it is to be recorded that in reality these eight chairs were not empty. They were filled by those to whom the cards of invitation had been sent—the former members of the council, dead and gone in the score of years and more since the printing of the report which the new secretary had used. To the eyes of the living the eight seats were vacant. To the eyes of one who had power to see the spiritual and intangible they were occupied by those who had been bidden to the feast. How the invitations had reached their addresses no one might know, but they had been received, and they had been accepted; and the invited guests sat at the council as they had been wont to sit there twenty-two years before. Perhaps the invitations had gone to the Dead Letter Office, and so had been forwarded to the dead whose names they bore; perhaps they had been taken—but speculation is idle. It matters not how or by whom the invitations had been delivered, there sat the ghostly guests, in their places around the dinner-table of the council. There they sat in the eight chairs, which to the eye of man were empty.

It was the first time that the dead had been bidden to this feast of the living. It was the first time since they had laid down the burdens of this world that they had been allowed to mingle with their friends on earth. It was the first time—and they feared it might be the last, and they were eager to make the most of their good fortune. For a long while they sat silently listening with avidity to all stray fragments of news about those whom they had left behind them in the land of the living. Some of these spectral visitors had only recently quitted this life, and perhaps they were the most anxious to learn the sayings and doings of those they had loved and left. Some of them had been dead for years, and their placid faces wore a pleasant expression of restful and comforting tranquillity. One of

them, a handsome young fellow in a dark blue uniform with faded shoulder-straps, had fallen twenty-two years before in the repulse of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. Another had gone down in the *Ville de Nice*, in the Bay of Biscay, in 1872. A third, a venerable man with silvery hair and a gentle look in his soft gray eyes, had died of old age only a few months before.

Mr. Jacob Leisler, Jr., sat at the head of the table, and at his right hand was Mrs. Vedder, a square-faced lady of an uncertain age, with grizzled hair and a masterful mouth. The chair on her right was apparently empty, to her evident dissatisfaction. Probably her annoyance would have been acutely increased had she been aware that the invisible occupant of this place by her side was Jesse Van Twiller, her first husband, dead these ten years or more, during eight of which she had been another man's wife.

Jesse Van Twiller had been among the earliest to arrive; and when he found that his wife was to sit next to him he was delighted. No spook ever wore a broader smile than that which graced his features as Mrs. Vedder took her place at table by his side. But his joy was commingled with a portion of apprehension, as though he feared his wife as much as he loved her. He was a little man, of a nervous temperament, with a timid look and an expression of subdued meekness; as though he was used to be overridden by an overbearing woman. He glanced up as his former wife sat down. He seemed disconcerted when her eyes fell on him with no look of welcome recognition. For a moment he wondered if he had offended her in any way since they had parted. Then, all at once, he knew that she had not seen him: he was invisible to mortal eyes. He chafed against this condition; he wanted her to see him and to know how glad he was to see her. To be there by her side, to be able to stretch his arm about her waist as he had done in the days of yore, to long to fold her to his heart which beat for her alone, and to be powerless as he was even to communicate to her the fact of his presence—this was most painful. The poor ghost felt that fate was hard on him. He would have given years of his spectral existence for two or three hours of human life.

These were his feelings at first. Then he wondered how she would receive him if she knew he were in her presence. He gazed at her intently as though to read her thoughts. She was older than she was when he had died—there was no doubt about that. She had the same commanding mien, the same superb port, the same majestic sweep of the

arm. Yet it seemed to the man who had left her a widow that the air of domineering determination he recalled so well was not a little softened, as though from want of use. "She has missed me!" he said to himself. "How gladly would I have her scold me now as she used to scold me so often, if only she could see me! She could not rebuke me for being late this time, but she could easily find something else to find fault about. I shouldn't care how much she bullied me, so long as I could tell her I was here. And then," he concluded cautiously, "if she made it too hot for me, I could be a ghost again, and she would be so surprised!"

Just then Mr. Leisler spoke to the spouse of the spook.

"I was beginning to fear that we might be deprived of your presence too, Mrs. Vedder," he said. "Were you not a little late?"

Jesse Van Twiller looked at his old friend Leisler in the greatest surprise. Why had he addressed Mrs. Van Twiller as Mrs. Vedder? The first husband even turned and looked at the chair next to his, on the chance that that was occupied by the lady addressed; but Mr. Leisler's own wife sat there. His astonishment increased as he heard his wife's answer.

"Yes," she said, "we were late. But it was not my fault. The doctor is a most unpunctual man."

"The doctor?" thought Van Twiller. "What doctor? and what had she to do with any doctor? Had she been ill? She seemed to be in robust health."

"Dr. Vedder is a busy man," rejoined Mr. Leisler, "and perhaps he cannot control his time."

So it was Dr. Vedder his wife had been waiting for. Van Twiller looked across the table at Dr. Vedder, whom he knew very well and had never liked. Dr. Vedder was a sarcastic man, with a sharp tongue, and a knack of saying disagreeable things. It was Dr. Vedder who had once asserted that Van Twiller had no more sense of humor than a hand-organ. Suddenly, with a sharp pang of jealousy, Van Twiller recalled a vague, fleeting, and half-forgotten memory of Dr. Vedder's admiration for Mrs. Van Twiller. He remembered that the doctor had once declared that he liked a masterful woman, and that Mrs. Van Twiller was a Katharine with a poor Petruccio quite incapable of taming her.

"That's no reason he should keep his wife waiting," said the former Mrs. Van Twiller plaintively.

"His wife!" repeated Van Twiller to himself. "Who is his wife?"

"I was never treated in that way by my first husband," continued the lady.

"Her first husband!" The poor ghost shrank back. At last he saw the change in the situation. His wife was not his wife any more. She was the wife of Dr. Vedder, a man whom he had disliked always, and whom now he hated. He was seized by a burning rage of jealousy, but he was powerless to express his feelings. His condition was hard to bear, for he could see, he could hear, he could suffer, and he could do nothing.

As Van Twiller was thinking this out hotly, the sharp voice of Dr. Vedder stabbed him suddenly.

"I have noticed," remarked the doctor, who was seated exactly opposite his wife's first husband, "that a woman always thinks more highly of a man after he is dead and gone. She is ready enough to praise him when it is too late for the commendation to comfort him. I believe a widow doubly cherishes the memory of a hen-pecked husband."

With the suave smile of a conscious peace-maker, who sees possible offense in a speech, Mr. Leisler said, "You are hard on the widows, Doctor."

"Not at all," the doctor answered, with a dry little wrinkle at the corners of his mouth, "not at all. I am a scientific observer, making logical deductions from a multitude of facts. To the man who lives out West, the only good Indian is a dead Indian; so to the widow, the only good husband is the dead husband!"

"I'm sure," cried Mrs. Vedder indignantly, "that Mr. Van Twiller would never have said anything like that."

"Certainly not," her husband replied. "Van Twiller couldn't, for Van Twiller wasn't a scientific observer."

A covert sneer in Dr. Vedder's tone as he said this cut little Van Twiller to the soul, and again he longed for material hands that he might clutch his rival by the throat. At the thought of his absolute inability to do aught for himself, he shivered with despair.

It was perhaps some frigid emanation from Van Twiller which affected Mrs. Vedder's nerves, for she shuddered slightly before replying to her husband.

"It is not for us to bandy words now about Mr. Van Twiller's attainments," she remarked deliberately. "He was truly a gentleman, with all the mildness of a gentleman, quite incapable of giving any one a harsh word or a cross look."

"In fact, he had absolutely no faults at all," said Dr. Vedder sarcastically. But if he could then have seen the expression on the pallid face of his predecessor, he would have been in a position to contradict his wife's last assertion.

"He had very few indeed!" replied his wife; "in my eyes he was perfect!"

She paused for a second, and Van Twiller wished that she had believed in his perfection while he was alive. Then she added bitterly, "To know him was to love him!"

The dry little wrinkle returned to the corners of Dr. Vedder's mouth as he answered quietly, "Perhaps so — I didn't know him well!"

And again the poor ghost writhed in invisible anguish, utterly helpless to resent the insult.

"I remember Mr. Van Twiller distinctly," remarked Mr. Leisler blandly; "he was an easy-going and good-natured man, with a kind word for everybody."

"In fact, he was everybody's friend," Dr. Vedder returned, "and nobody's enemy but his own. His best quality in my eyes is that he is not here to-night."

The doctor could not know that the little man at whom he was girding was separated from him by the breadth of the table only, and was suffering with his whole being as every sneer reached its mark far more surely than he who shot the chance arrow could guess.

"You are bitter," said Mr. Leisler easily; "I fear you are a misanthrope."

The doctor laughed a little, and answered, "No, I'm not exactly a misanthrope or even a misogynist, but I have ceased to be philanthropic since I discovered that man is descended from a monkey."

Mrs. Vedder was about to make a hasty reply to this, when she caught the doctor's eye. To the surprise of Van Twiller, she hesitated, checked herself suddenly, and said nothing. He wondered how it was that his wife had changed; he knew that she had never quailed before his eye; and he found himself doubting whether he would not have preferred to see her show her old spirit. He saw that she was sadly tamed now; and he marveled why he should regret the quenching of her fiery spirit. She did not seem the same to him, and he missed the old mastery to which he was accustomed. This blunted the joy of the meeting he had anticipated hopefully ever since he had received the invitation. His wife was no longer his. She was not even the woman he had loved, honored, and obeyed for years. The poor ghost felt lonelier than he had ever felt before. He began to regret that he had been permitted again to come on earth.

A waiter had filled Dr. Vedder's glass. He took it in his hand. "No," he said, "I'm not a philanthropist; I take no stock in the aggressive optimism of the sentimentalists. In fact, I suppose I'm a persistent pessimist. What is my fellow-man to me — or my fellow-woman either?"

Mr. Jacob Leisler, Jr., was not a man whose perceptions were fine or quick, but he was moved to resent clumsily the offensiveness of these words.

"But your wife ——" he began.

"Oh, my wife!" interrupted Dr. Vedder; "my wife and I are one, you know."

Van Twiller looked at Mrs. Vedder to see how she would take this. She said nothing. She smiled acidly. It was not doubtful that she was greatly changed.

"I try to shape my course by the doctrine of enlightened selfishness," continued the doctor. "Let us enjoy life while we may. Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die. In the struggle for existence the fittest survive and the weakest are weeded out — and so much the better!"

Both Mrs. Vedder and Mr. Leisler made ready to reply, when the doctor suddenly went on, sharpening his voice to its keenest edge:

"So much the better for him! Your dead man is your happy man. He has no enemies, and even his widow praises him — especially if she has remarried. In fact, he has all the virtues, now he has no use for any of them." Then the doctor raised his glass. "The toast of the English in India suggests true wisdom, after all:

"Ho! stand to your glasses steady!

The world is a world of lies;

A cup to the dead already,

And hurrah for the next man that dies!"

Mr. Leisler drew himself up with dignity and addressed the doctor with a stiff severity of manner:

"I am surprised, Dr. Vedder, that you should express such views of life on such an occasion as this. I confess I do not hold with you at all. I ——"

"You cannot lure me into a debate at dinner," the doctor answered, as Mr. Leisler paused for fit words to express his complicated feelings. "I never get into a discussion at table, for the man who isn't hungry always has the best of the argument."

The unfortunate spook, forced to listen to this unmannerly talk of the man who had married his widow, sat silent and abashed. He knew not what to think. He did not recognize his wife. When he was alive she had been full of fiery vigor and of undaunted spirit. He would never have dared to address her thus boldly and to brave the wrath which was wont to flame out, at odd moments, like forked lightning. In dumb wonder he waited for her swift protest; but she said nothing; whereat he marveled not a little.

Mr. Leisler asked himself why Dr. Vedder

was unusually disagreeable this evening, for the doctor was a clever man and could make a pleasant impression when he chose. With the hope of turning the talk into a more cheerful channel Mr. Leisler addressed Mrs. Vedder.

"Isn't Miss Van Dyne looking very well to-night?" he asked.

Mrs. Vedder looked down the table at the cheery and young-looking old maid.

"Yes," she answered, after a moment's hesitation, "she seems almost happy; but then, she is not married."

"She has been faithful to the memory of her lost love," said Mr. Leisler. "Let me see — how many years is it now since Captain De Ruyter was killed at Gettysburg?"

"You don't mean to tell me that you believe that a woman has been in love with a dead man for twenty-two years, do you?" Dr. Vedder asked with an incredulous smile.

"Why not?" returned his wife.

The doctor evaded an answer to this direct question. "If your diagnosis is right, she has had a dull enough time of it," he said. "And she has nothing to show for her devotion."

"Virtue is its own reward," Mr. Leisler remarked judiciously.

"But love isn't," the doctor replied. "Love is like this champagne," and he raised his glass; "it is very sparkling when it is young, but as it gets older it loses its flavor." He emptied the glass and set it down. "And if one is all alone with it, there may be a headache the next morning."

"What has made you so sarcastic this evening?" asked Mr. Leisler.

"I don't know," Dr. Vedder answered. "I am in company with evil spirits, I think. If I were a believer in such things, I should say that I was subject to an adverse influence. And I was all right when I came. Perhaps it is this wretched dinner."

Perhaps it was the dinner, but little Van Twiller was conscious of a throb of ill-natured joy at the thought that it was possibly his presence, all unknown as it was, which had thus disturbed the equanimity of the doctor and revealed his lower nature. He looked at Mrs. Vedder, and he saw she was eating her dinner slowly and in silence, with a stiffening of the muscles of the face — a sign he had recognized readily enough.

"After all," continued the doctor, "these are the two great banes of man's existence — dyspepsia and matrimony."

"Come, come," Mr. Leisler said cheerfully, "you must not abuse marriage; it is the chief end of life."

"It was very nearly the end of mine," returned Dr. Vedder; "I caught such a cold

in the church that I have not been into one since."

Just then one of the waiters came to Mr. Leisler with a request that he should change his place for a little while, and take his seat at the other end of the table, where there was a vacant chair. Glad of an excuse to get away from a man in ill-humor, Mr. Leisler apologized to Mrs. Vedder and withdrew to join his other friends.

Van Twiller saw a red spot burning brightly on Mrs. Vedder's cheek, and he knew that this was another danger-signal.

She bent forward toward her husband, and in a low voice, trembling a little with suppressed ire, she hissed across the table, "I see what you are after! But you will not succeed. I can keep my temper though I bite my tongue out. It takes two to quarrel, remember!"

"It takes two to get married," retorted Dr. Vedder, "so that proves nothing."

For the first time the poor ghost saw his wife's eyes fill with tears.

"Mr. Van Twiller never treated me so," she said hurriedly. "I wish he were alive now!"

The dry little wrinkle came back to the corners of the doctor's mouth, but he made no reply.

Little Van Twiller looked from one to the other, as they stared at each other. Then he said to himself, sighing softly:

"Well, well, perhaps it is better as it is!"

III.

MISS MARY VAN DYNE was sitting almost in the center of one side of the long dinner-table. At her right was Mr. Joshua Hoffman, a man whose heart was as large as his purse was long, and who kept both open to the call of the suffering. At her left was a vacant chair—or what seemed so to the eyes of the living men and women at the table. They did not know that it was occupied by Remsen de Ruyter, whose maiden widow Mary Van Dyne had held herself to be ever since a bullet had reached his heart on the heights of Gettysburg. For nearly twenty-two years now she had lived on, alone in the world, but never lonely, for she had given herself up to good works. Her presence was welcome in the children's ward of every hospital, and the love of these little ones nourished her soul and sustained her spirit. Between her and Joshua Hoffman there were bonds of sympathy, and they had many things in common. The good old man was very fond of the brave little woman who had tried to turn her private

sorrow to the benefit of the helpless and the innocent.

They were glad to find themselves side by side at table, and they talked to each other with interest.

"You are not really old, Mr. Hoffman," she was saying; "you look very young yet. To-night I wouldn't give you fifty!"

"My dear young lady, you haven't fifty to give," he answered with a smile; "and if you had, why, I should then have a hundred and twenty-five—which is more than my share of years."

"You are not really seventy-five?" she asked.

"Really, I am seventy-five. I am a past-due coupon, as I heard one of the boys saying on the street the other day," returned Joshua Hoffman, with a smile as pleasant as hers.

"And how old am I?" she inquired.

"Whatever your age is," he answered, "to-night you do not look it!"

"Shall I arise and courtesy for that?" she asked, blushing with pleasure at his courtly compliment. "You see I like to be flattered still, although I am an old maid of two-score years."

"Really now, my child," said the old man, "you are not forty? Let me see—it does not seem so very long ago since he came and told me how happy he was because you had promised to marry him. Does it pain you to talk of him now?"

"I think of him always, day and night. Why should I not be glad to talk about him with you whom he loved, and to whom he owed so much?"

"He was a good boy," Joshua Hoffman continued in his kindly voice. "I can recall the day he told me about you; it was a fine, clear morning in early spring."

"It was the 16th of May, 1863," she said simply. "He had asked me to marry him the night before, and he said that you were the first he would tell."

"He was a good boy, and a brave boy, and he died like a man," said the old man gently. Then he relapsed into silence as his thoughts went back to the dark days of the war.

Miss Mary Van Dyne was also thinking of the past. Unconsciously she lived again in her youth when she first saw Remsen de Ruyter, a bright, handsome boy, scarcely older than she was: he was only twenty-one when he died. They had loved each other from the first, although it was a whole long winter before he had dared to tell her—a long winter of delicious doubt and fearful ecstasy. She recalled all the circumstances of his avowal of his love, and her cheeks burned as

she thought of the gush of unspeakable joy which had filled her heart as he folded her in his arms for the first time. She remembered how, two nights after, before they had told the news to any one but her mother and his benefactor Joshua Hoffman, she sat next to him at this annual dinner of the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society; they were the very youngest members, and it was the first time they had been asked. So strong was the rush of memory of the happy scene, that she gave a quick glance at the place on her left, as though half-expecting to see him seated there still. And there he was by her side, although she could not see him now.

He was there, but he could not speak to her; he could not tell her of his presence; he could not tell her how he loved her still, and more than ever. It was hard. Yet he was glad to be by her side, to see her, to look into her frank face, to gaze on her noble eyes.

And she felt comforted, she knew not why, as though by an invisible presence. Her heart was lifted up. Although the grass had woven a green blanket over his grave for now more than twenty years, he did not seem so far from her. She hoped she would not have so long to wait before she might join him, never again to be parted. Then her thoughts turned to the last time she had seen him, the morning his regiment had left New York for the front. It was a beautiful day early in June when he came to bid her farewell for the last time. They talked all the morning seriously and hopefully. Then the hour came at last, and all too soon. She bore herself bravely; without a tear she kissed him and held him in her arms for a minute, and bade him go. She watched him as he walked away. How well she could recall everything which her senses had noted unconsciously during the two minutes before he paused at the corner of the street to wave his hand before he vanished forever. There were roses beginning to blow in the little bit of green before the house; there was a hand-organ in the next street from which faint strains of "John Brown's Body" came over the house-tops; the noon whistle of a neighboring factory suddenly broke the silence as he blew her a kiss, and went out of her sight to his death. Then she had been able to get to her room somehow—she never knew how—and to throw herself on her bed before she broke down.

The memory was bitter and sweet, but never before had it been as sweet. She turned her eyes on the vacant chair by her side, and involuntarily she reached out her hand. It grasped nothing, it felt nothing, yet her fingers tingled as with a shock of joy. She gazed at the empty chair again in charmed wonder. She

could not tell what subtle influence of peace and comfort enveloped her as she mused upon the past with her arm resting on the chair beside her. Then her glance fell on a card beside the plate, and with a sudden suffusion of the eyes she read his name. The new secretary of the council had used the list of twenty-two years before, and again his place had been set beside hers. The tears which veiled her sight hid the empty chair from her for a minute, and if she turned her head she might almost fancy that he was seated there. It was a fancy only, but it pleased her to indulge in it. It brought back the happy past. It brought him back, almost, for a fleeting minute.

And he, as he sat there, could make no sign. With the keen intuition of love, he read her thoughts in her face. He knew that she was thinking of him, and that in the thought of him she was happy again.

And thus the long dinner drew to an end at last.

When the president gave the signal for the withdrawal into another room that the usual business meeting of the council might take place, the members rose together. Joshua Hoffman was silent, as though he divined her mood and sympathetically respected it. He offered her his arm, and she took it, looking back regretfully, with a longing and lingering gaze, at the place where they had sat side by side.

IV.

AS THE living members of the council left the dining-room, the ghostly guests gathered together to talk over what they had seen and heard. Only Remsen de Ruyter was silent; his feelings were too sacred to find vent in words. He alone wore a smile of consolation and comfort. The rest chattered along in tumultuous conversation.

"It has been a strange experience," said the very old gentleman, "a very strange experience."

"More painful than pleasant, I think," little Van Twiller remarked.

"I thought we had been invited as a compliment," said another of the ghosts discontentedly, "but it seems it was all a mistake of the new secretary—Fanny Meredith, they call him."

"Excellent young man!" the old gentleman declared with emphasis—"an excellent young man; so thoughtful of him; so considerate of the feelings of his elders. I shall accept his invitation next year."

"So shall I!" added several voices.

"Oh, I'll come too," said Jesse Van Twiller. "I want to see what will happen next."

Only Remsen de Ruyter said nothing.

v.

BUT long before the next annual dinner of the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society, the resignation of Mr. Francis Meredith had been requested, and in his stead there had been elected a secretary of more trustworthy habits; and the new secretary was very particular in sending out the invitations to the next annual dinner.

So the poor ghosts never had another chance. If they had been asked again, there would have been one more of them, for ten days after the dinner which Fanny Meredith had so miserably mismanaged Dr. Vedder died suddenly.

The new secretary took great pains also in the ordering of the dinner, and in the arranging of the guests. His efforts were rewarded; there was general satisfaction expressed by the members of the council; and he was congratulated on the most successful dinner ever given. Amid the pervading gayety of the occasion there was only one guest who regretted the dinner of the year before. This was Miss Mary Van Dyne. She said nothing about it to any one; indeed, she was accustomed to keep her feelings to herself. But she missed an inexplicable something which had made the other dinner the most delightful memory of her later life.

Brander Matthews.

REUNION.

REGIMENTAL OFFICERS, 1885.

IT is twenty years, my comrades, twenty solid years to date,
 I Since we were stripling captains, dapper youngsters slim and straight;
 And now in portly manhood, wise and serious, we are met,
 To gossip of the stirring times of sword and bayonet.

Our portly manhood, as above, our silvered heads and all,
 May be respected, more or less, by circles large or small;
 But, my comrades, all the honors of our civil walks and ways
 Seem but empty to the glory of the old heroic days.

Yet the martial pomp and grandeur, failing somehow to connect,
 Were not always clearly present at the time, I recollect.
 There were dusty, weary marches, not romantic in the least,
 More especially if rations chanced to fail for man or beast.

There were times when human nature had to murmur just a bit;
 There were seasons of bad language, yes, the truth I must admit;
 There were bivouacs in the rain or snow, black darkness overhead,
 The sodden ground beneath us, with a fence-rail for a bed.

But what appetites for lobsconse, and what dinners large and free,
 Supplemented by a canteen full of "Commissary B";
 With the haughty Sothron's hoe-cake, and the colored aunty's pie,
 And a streamlet for a finger-bowl, if one meandered by.

Do you remember, comrades, how we fought and overcame
 Those guerilla ducks and turkeys, war-like pigs and other game?
 And those savage rebel chickens, who would die, but never yield,
 Whom we faced with deathless valor on so many a Southern field?

Though we murmured, though our language was at times a trifle queer,
 Though we had but little reverence even for a brigadier,
 Though we grumbled at the Government with almost every breath,
 Yet we faced the gray battalions, all undaunted, to the death.

We fought them and we killed them, and they killed us in return;
 But we never thought to hate them, and we never cared to learn.
 We met them on the picket lines, with flags of truce between:
 They were "Johnnies," we were "Yanks," and better friends were never seen.

What anomalies and contrasts! I recall a day in June,
 When the world was warm with summer, and the birds were all in tune;