

With love and admiration,
I dedicate this book to the memory of my friend,

THOMAS ALEXANDER SEDDON.

PRINCESS.

CHAPTER I.

When the idea of a removal to Virginia was first mooted in the family of General Percival Smith, ex-Brigadier in the United States service, it was received with consternation and a perfect storm of disapproval. The young ladies, Norma and Blanche, rose as one woman—loud in denunciation, vehement in protest—fell upon the scheme, and verbally sought to annihilate it. The country! A farm!! The South!!! The idea was untenable, monstrous. Before their outraged vision floated pictures whereof the foreground was hideous with cows, and snakes, and beetles; the middle distance lurid with discomfort, corn-bread, and tri-weekly mails; the background lowering with solitude, ennui, and colored servants.

Rusticity, nature, sylvan solitudes, and all that, were exquisite bound in Russia, with gold lettering and tinted leaves; wonderfully alluring viewed at leisure with the gallery to one's self, and the light at the proper angle, charmingly attractive behind the footlights, but in reality!—to the feeling of these young ladies it could be best appreciated by those who had been born to it. In their opinion, they, themselves, had been born to something vastly superior, so they rebelled and made themselves disagreeable; hoping to mitigate the gloom of the future by intensifying that of the present.

Their mother, whose heart yearned over her offspring, essayed to comfort them, casting daily and hourly the bread of suggestion and anticipation on the unthankful waters, whence it invariably returned to her sodden with repinings. The young ladies set their grievances up on high and bowed the knee; they were not going to be comforted, nor pleased, nor hopeful, not they. The scheme was

abominable, and no aspect in which it could be presented rendered its abomination less; they were hopeless, and helpless, and oppressed, and there was the end of it.

Poor Mrs. Smith wished it might be the end, or anywhere near the end; for the soul within her was "vexed with strife and broken in pieces with words." The general could—and did—escape the rhetorical consequences of his unpopular measure, but his wife could not: no club afforded her its welcome refuge, no "down town" offered her sanctuary. She was obliged to stay at home and endure it all. Norma's sulks, Blanche's tears, the rapture of the boys—hungering for novelty as boys only can hunger—the useless and trivial suggestions of friends, the minor arrangements for the move, the decision on domestic questions present and to come, the questions, answers, futile conjectures, all formed a murk through which she labored, striving to please her husband and her children, to uphold authority, quell mutiny, soothe murmurs, and sympathize with enthusiasm; with a tact which shamed diplomacy, and a patience worthy of an evangelist.

After the indulgent American custom, she earnestly desired to please *all* of her children. In her own thoughts she existed only for them, to minister to their happiness; even her husband was, unconsciously to her, quite of secondary importance, his strongest present claim to consideration lying in his paternity. Had it been possible, she would have raised her tent, and planted her fig tree in the spot preferred by each one of her children, but as that was out of the question, in the mother's mind of course her sons came first. And this preference must be indulged the more particularly that Warner—the elder of her two boys, her idol and her grief—was slowly, well-nigh imperceptibly, but none the less surely, drifting away from her. A boyish imprudence, a cold, over-exertion, the old story which is so familiar, so hopeless, so endless in its repetition and its pathos. When interests were diverse, the healthy, blooming daughters could hope to make little headway against the invalid son. *They* had all the sunny hours of many long years before them; he perhaps only the hurrying moments of one.

For Warner a change was imperative—so imperative that even the rebellious girls were fain to admit its necessity. His condition

required a gentler, kindlier atmosphere than that of New York. The poor diseased lungs craved the elixir of pure air; panted for the invigoration of breezes freshly oxygenized by field and forest, and labored exhaustedly in the languid devitalized breath of a city. The medical fraternity copiously consulted, recognized their impotence, but refrained from stating it; and availed themselves of their power of reference to the loftier physician—the boy must be healed, if he was to be healed, by nature. The country, pure air, pure milk, tender care; these were his only hope.

General Smith was a man trained by military discipline to be instant in decision and prompt in action. As soon as the doctors informed him that his son's case required—not wanderings—but a steady residence in a climate bracing, as well as mild, where the comforts of home could supplement the healing of nature, he set himself at once to discover a place which would fill all the requirements. To the old soldier, New England born and Michigan bred, Virginia appeared a land of sun and flowers, a country well-nigh tropical in the softness of its climate, and the fervor of its heat. The doctors recommended Florida, or South Carolina, as in duty bound, and to the suggestion of Virginia yielded only a dubious consent; it was very far *north*, they said, but still it might do. To the general, it seemed very far *south*, and he was certain it would do.

In the old time, he remembered, when he was in lower Virginia with McClellan, he had reveled in the softness, the delight of that, to him, marvelous climate. He had found the nights so sweet; the air, vitalized with the breath of old ocean, so invigorating, the heat at noonday so dry, and the coolness at evening so refreshing. There were pines, too; old fields of low scrub, and some forests of the nobler sort; that would be the thing for Warner. He remembered how, as he sat in the tent door, the breeze scented with resinous odors used to come to him, and how, strong man though he was, he had felt as he drew it into his lungs that it did him good.

In those old campaigning days, the fancy had been born in him that some time in the future he would like to return and make his home here, where "amorous ocean wooed a gracious land"—that when his fighting days were over, and the retired list lengthened by his name, it would be a pleasant thing to have his final bivouac

among the gallant foes who had won his admiration by their dauntless manner of giving and taking blows.

The exigencies and absorptions of military life, in time, dimmed the fancy, but it never altogether vanished. Out on the plains with Custer, away in the mountains and the Indian country, vegetating in the dullness of frontier posts, amid the bustle, the luxury and excitement of city life, the fancy would return; the memory of those soft starlit Virginia evenings would unfold him with a subtle spell. In thought he would again sit smoking in the tent door, the gray shadows stealing out from their covert in the woods, reconnoitering all the country ere they swept down and took possession, in the name of their queen—the night. The air would grow cool with the fragrant breath of the ocean and the pines; whip-poor-wills would chant in the tree tops, and partridges sound their blithe note away in the fields. It was not wonderful that when the necessity of securing a country home arose, the fancy should resume its sway, and that a meditated flitting southward should suggest Virginia as its goal.

The idea that any portion of his family would be displeased by the realization of his fancy, or feel themselves aggrieved by his arrangements, never entered into the veteran's calculations; he returned from the South with his purchase made, and his mind filled with anticipations of the joy the unloading of this precious honey would occasion in the domestic hive, and when he was met by the angry buzz of discontent instead of the gentle hum of applause, his surprise was great, and his indignation unbounded.

"What the devil are they grumbling about?" he demanded of his wife. "Shirley's a fine plantation. The water is good, the air superb; there are excellent gardens and first-rate oyster beds. The house is old-fashioned, but it's comfortable, and a little money will make it more so. What's the matter with them?"

"The girls are young, Percival," explained the mother, putting in a plea for her rebels. "They are used to society and admiration. They don't take interest in gardens and oyster beds yet; they like variety and excitement. The country is very dull."

"Not at all dull," contradicted the general. "You talk as if I were requiring you all to Selkirk on a ten acre island, instead of going to

one of the pleasantest and most populous counties in the oldest state in the Union. Mr. Byrd, the former owner of Shirley, told me that the neighborhood was very thickly settled and sociable. I counted five gentlemen's houses in sight myself. Southerners, as a rule, are great visitors, and if the girls are lonely it will be their own fault. They'll have as much boating and dancing and tom-foolery as is good for them."

"Are there any young men?" demanded Mrs. Smith, who recognized the necessity of an infusion of the stronger element to impart to social joys body and flavor.

"Yes, I guess so," replied her husband indifferently, masculinity from over-association having palled on him; "there's always men about everywhere, except back in the home villages in Maine—they're scarce enough *there*, the Lord knows! I saw a good many about in the little village near Shirley—Wintergreen, they call it. One young fellow attracted my attention particularly; he was sitting on a tobacco hogshead, down on the wharf, superintending some negroes load a wagon, and I couldn't get it out of my head that I'd seen his face before. He was tall, and fair, and had lost an arm. I must have met him during the war, I think, although I'll be hanged if I can place him."

Mrs. Smith looked interested. "Perhaps you formerly knew him," she remarked, cheerfully; "it's a pity your memory is so bad. Why didn't you inquire his name of some one, that might have helped you to place him?"

"My memory is excellent," retorted the general, shortly; for a man must resent such an insinuation even from the wife of his bosom. "I've always been remarkable for an unusually strong and retentive memory, as you know very well—but it isn't superhuman. At the lowest computation, I guess I've seen about a million men's faces in the course of my life, and it's ridiculous to expect me to have 'em all sorted out, and ticketed in my mind like a picture catalogue. My memory is very fine."

Mrs. Smith recanted pleasantly. Her husband's memory *was* good, for his age, she was willing to admit, but it was not flawless. About this young man, now, it seemed to her that if she could remember him at all, she could remember all about him. These hitches

in recollection were provoking. It would have been nice for the girls to find a young man ready to their hands, bound to courtesy by previous acquaintance with their father.

She regretted that her husband should fail to recall, and had neglected to inquire, the name of this interesting person; but the knowledge that he was *there*, and others besides him, ameliorated the rigor of the situation.

Mrs. Smith did not care for the south or southern people; their thoughts were not her thoughts, nor their ways, her ways. In her ignorance, she classed them low in the scale of civilization, deeming them an unprofitable race, whose days were given over to sloth, and their nights to armed and malignant prowling. For the colored people of the censured states, she had a profound and far-off sympathy, viewing them from an unreal and romantic standpoint. This tender attitude was mental; physically she shrank from them with disgust, and it was not the least of the crosses entailed by a residence in the south that she would be obliged to endure colored servants.

But all this was trifling and unimportant in comparison with the main issue, Warner's health. To secure the shadow of hope for her boy, Mrs. Smith decided that any thing short of cannibalism in her future surroundings would be endurable.

The information gleaned from her husband was faithfully repeated by Mrs. Smith to her daughters, with some innocent exaggeration and unconscious embellishment. She always wanted to make things pleasant for the children.

Blanche looked up from her crewel sun-flowers with reviving interest, but Norma walked over to the window, and stood drumming on the panes, and regarding the passers with a lowering brow.

"I wonder what Nesbit Thorne will think of it all?" she remarked, after an interval of silence, giving voice to the inwardness of her discontent.

"He'll *hate* it!" spoke Blanche, with conviction; "he'll abhor it, just as we do. I know he will." Blanche always followed her sister's lead, and when Norma was cross considered it her duty to be tearful. She was only disagreeable now because Norma was.

Percival, the youngest of the family, a spoiled and lively lad of twelve, to whom the prospect of change was rapture, took up the last remark indignantly.

"Nesbit won't do anything of the kind," quoth he. "Nesbit isn't a spoiled, airified idiot of a girl. He's got sense enough to appreciate hunting and fishing and the things that are of importance to *men*. I guess he'll want to come to Shirley this autumn for his shooting, instead of going down to North Carolina." Norma stopped her tattoo and turned her head slightly; the boy, observing that he had scored a point, proceeded: "Just the minute he gets back from Montana, I'm going to tell him all about Shirley and beg him to come. And if he does, I'm going gunning with him every day, and make him teach me how to shoot—see if I don't," regarding his mother from under his tawny brows threateningly. Percival's nature was adventurous and unruly: he had red hair.

"Nesbit got back last night," announced Warner from his sofa beside the other window. "I saw him pass the house this morning. There he is now, coming up the street. If his opinion is a matter of such importance, you can call him over and get it. I don't see that it makes any difference what he thinks, myself." The latter part of the sentence was muttered in an unheeded undertone.

Norma tapped sharply on the glass, and beckoned to a gentleman on the opposite pavement, her brow clearing. He nodded gayly in response, and crossing, in obedience to her summons, entered the house familiarly without ringing the bell.

CHAPTER II.

All turned expectantly toward the door, pausing in their several occupations; even Warner's eyes were raised from his book, although his attention was involuntary and grudging. The attitude of the little circle attested the influence which the coming man wielded over every member of it; an influence which extended insensibly to every one with whom Nesbit Thorne's association was intimate. He was Mrs. Smith's nephew, and much in the habit, whenever he was

in New York, of making her house his home—having none now of his own.

He was a slender, dark man, with magnificent dark eyes, which had a power of expression so entralling as to disarm, or defy, criticism of the rest of his face. Not one man in fifty could tell whether Nesbit Thorne was handsome, or the reverse—and for women—ah, well! they knew best what they thought.

In his air, his carriage, his expression, was that which never fails to attract and hold attention—force, vitality, individuality. He was small, but tall men never dwarfed him; plain, but the world—his world—turned from handsomer men with indifference, to heap consideration upon him. To borrow the forceful vernacular of the street, there was "something in him." There was no possibility of viewing either him or his actions with indifference; of merging him in, and numbering him with, the crowd.

There are men whose lives are intaglios, cut by the chisel of destiny deep into the sard of their generations; every line and curve and faintest tracing pregnant with interest, suggestion, and emotion. Men who are loved and hated, feared, adored and loathed with an intensity that their commonplace fellows are incapable of evoking. They are loadstones which attract events; whirlpools which draw to themselves excitement, emotion, and vast store of sympathy.

Some years previous to the opening of this story, Nesbit Thorne, then a brilliant recent graduate of Harvard, a leader in society, and a man of whom great things were predicted, whose name was in many mouths as that of a man likely to achieve distinction in any path of life he should select, made a hasty, ill-advised marriage with a Miss Ethel Ross, a New York belle of surpassing beauty and acumen. A woman whose sole thought was pleasure, whose highest conception of the good of life was a constantly varied menu of social excitement, and whose noblest reading of the word duty was compassed in having a well ordered house, sumptuous entertainments, and irreproachable toilets. A wife to satisfy any man who was unemotional, unexacting, and prepared to give way to her in all things.

Nesbit Thorne, unfortunately, was none of these things, and so his married life had come to grief. The first few months were smoothed and gilded by his passionate enjoyment of her mere phys-

ical perfection, his pleasure in the admiration she excited, and in the envy of other men. Life's river glided smoothly, gayly in the sunshine; then ugly snags began to appear, and reefs, fretting the surface of the water, and hinting of sterner difficulties below; then a long stretch of tossing, troubled water, growing more and more turbulent as it proceeded, boiling and bubbling into angry whirlpools and sullen eddies. The boat of married happiness was hard among the breakers, tossed from side to side, the sport of every wind of passion; contesting hands were on the tiller ropes. The craft yawed and jerked in its course, a spectacle for men to weep over, and devils to rejoice in; ran aground on quicksands, tore and tangled its cordage, rent the planking, and at the end of a cruise of as many months as it should have lasted years, it lay a hopeless wreck on the grim bar of separation.

The affair was managed gracefully, and with due deference to the amenities. There was gossip, of course—there always is gossip—and public opinion was many sided. Rumors circled around which played the whole gamut from infidelity to bankruptcy; these lived their brief span, and then gave place to other rumors, equally unfounded, and therefore equally enjoyable. The only fact authenticated, was the fact of separation, and the most lasting conclusion arrived at in regard to the matter was that it had been managed very gracefully.

The divorce which seemed the natural outcome of this state of affairs, and to which every one looked, as a matter of course, was delayed in this instance. People wondered a little, and then remembered that the Thornes were a Roman Catholic family, and concluded that the young man had religious scruples. With Mrs. Thorne the matter was plain enough; she had no reason, as yet, sufficiently strong to make her desire absolute release, and far greater command over Thorne's income by retaining her position as his wife.

When his domestic affairs had reached a crisis, Thorne had quietly disappeared for a year, during which time people only knew that he was enjoying his recovered freedom in distant and little frequented places. There were rumors of him in Tartary, on the Niger, in Siberia. At the expiration of the year he returned to New York, and resumed his old place in society as though nothing untoward

had occurred. He lived at his club, and no man or woman ever saw him set foot within the precincts of his own house. Occasionally he was seen to stop the nurse in the park, and caress and speak to his little son. His life was that of a single man. In the society they both frequented, he often encountered his wife, and always behaved to her with scrupulous politeness, even with marked courtesy. If he ever missed his home, or experienced regret for his matrimonial failure, he kept the feeling hidden, and presented to the world an unmoved front.

In default of nearer ties, he made himself at home in his aunt's house, frequenting it as familiarly as he had done in the days before his marriage. In his strong, almost passionate nature, there was one great weakness; the love and admiration of women was a necessity to him. He could no more help trying to make women love him, than the kingfisher can help thrusting down his beak when the bright speckled sides of his prey flash through the water. It was from neither cruelty nor vanity, for Thorne had less of both traits than usually falls to the lot of men; it was rather from the restlessness, the yearning of a strong nature for that which it needed, but had not yet attained; the experimental searching of a soul for its mate. That sorrow might come to others in the search he scarcely heeded; was he to blame that fair promises would bud and lead him on, and fail of fruition? To himself he seemed rather to be pitied; their loss was balanced by his own. Thorne had never loved as he was capable of loving; as yet the *ego* was predominant.

As he entered the room, after an absence of weeks, with a smile and a pleasant word of greeting, the younger members of the circle fell upon him clamorously; full of themselves and their individual concerns. Even Warner, in whose mind lurked a jealousy of his cousin's influence, forgot it for the nonce, and was as eager to talk as the rest. Nesbit found himself listening to a demand for advice, an appeal for sympathy, and a paean of gratulation, before he had made his salutations, or gotten himself into a chair.

"Hold on!" he cried, putting up his hand in protest. "Don't all talk at once. I can't follow. What's the matter, Norma?"

His eye turned to his favorite involuntarily, and an almost imperceptible brightening, a lifting of the clouds on that young lady's

horizon, began to take place. She answered his look, and (assisted by the irrepressible Percival) unfolded to him the family plans. Thorne, with good-humored enthusiasm, threw himself into the scheme, pronounced it delightful, and proceeded to indulge in all manner of cheerful prognostications. Percival was enchanted, and, establishing himself close beside the arm of his cousin's chair, commenced a series of vehement whispers, which lasted as long as the visit. Norma's brow cleared more and more, and when Thorne declared his intention of paying them a long visit during the hunting season, she allowed a smile to wreath her full crimson lips, and snubbed poor little Blanche unmercifully for still daring to be lachrymose.

The talk grew momentarily merrier, and the mother listened, smiling; her eyes, with a tender glow in them, fixed on Warner's face. The sick boy was in raptures over the old house mossed over with history and tradition, which would be his future home. Noting the eagerness of his interest, her heart gave a sudden bound, hope took her by the hand, and she dreamed dreams. There might come a reaction and improvement. At times the intuition of an invalid was the voice of nature, crying out for that which she needed. Warner's longing for this change might be the precursor of his cure. Who could read the future?

CHAPTER III.

Backward and forward, from pantry to sideboard, from sideboard to china closet, flitted Pocahontas Mason setting the table for breakfast. Deftly she laid out the pretty mats on the shining mahogany, arranged the old-fashioned blue cups and saucers, and placed the plates and napkins. She sang at her work in a low, clear voice, more sweet than powerful, and all that her hands found to do was done rapidly and skillfully, with firm, accustomed touches, and an absence of jar and clatter. In the center of the table stood a corpulent Wedgwood pitcher, filled with geraniums and roses, to which the girl's fingers wandered lovingly from time to time, in the effort to coax each blossom into the position in which it would make the

bravest show. On one corner, near the waiter, stood a housewifely little basket of keys, through the handle of which was thrust a fresh handkerchief newly shaken out.

When all the arrangements about the table had been completed, Pocahontas turned her attention to the room, giving it those manifold touches which, from a lady's fingers, can make even a plain apartment look gracious and homelike. Times had changed with the Masons, and many duties formerly delegated to servants now fell naturally to the daughter of the house. Perhaps the change was an improvement: Berkeley Mason, the young lady's brother, maintained that it was.

Having finished her work, Pocahontas crossed the room to one of the tall, old-fashioned windows, and pushed open the half-shut blinds, letting a flood of sunshine and morning freshness into the room. Under the window stood an ottoman covered with drab cloth, on which the fingers of some dead and gone Mason had embroidered a dingy wreath of roses and pansies. Pocahontas knelt on it, resting her arms on the lofty window-sill, and gazed out over the lawn, and enjoyed the dewy buoyance of the air. The September sunshine touched with golden glory the bronze abundance of her hair, which a joyous, rollicking breeze, intoxicated with dew and the breath of roses, tangled and tumbled into a myriad witcheries of curl and crinkle. The face, glorified by this bright aureole, was pure and handsome, patrician in every line and curve, from the noble forehead, with its delicate brown brows, to the well-cut chin, which spoke eloquently of breadth of character and strength of will. The eyes were gray, and in them lay the chief charm of the face, for their outlook was as honest and fearless as that of a child — true eyes they were, fit windows for a brave, true soul.

The house, neutral-tinted with years and respectability, stood well back from the river, to whose brink the smooth, green lawn swept in scarcely perceptible undulation. The river here was broad, almost resembling an arm of the sea it was moving languidly to join. There was no haste about it, and no fret of ever active current; as all large bodies should, it moved slowly, and the eye rested gratefully on the tranquil flow. Across the water, apparently against the far horizon, a dense line of trees, fringing the further shore, rose tall

and dark, outlined with picturesque distinctness against the soft, warm blue. The surrounding country was flat, but relieved from monotony by a certain pastoral peacefulness, and a look of careless plenty which, with thrift, might have become abundance. In the meadows the grass grew rich and riotous between the tall stacks of cured hay, and the fields of corn and tobacco gave vigorous promise of a noble harvest. The water also teemed with life and a shiftless out-at-elbow energy. Shabby looking fishing smacks, with dirty white wings, like birds too indolent to plume themselves, passed constantly, and flat-bottomed canoes, manned by good-humored negro oystermen, plied a lazy, thievish trade, with passing steamers.

Presently a gate slammed somewhere in the regions back of the house, and there was a sound of neighing and trampling. Pocahontas leaned far out, shading her eyes with her hands, to watch the colts career wildly across the lawn, with manes and tails and capering legs tossed high in air, in the exuberance of equine spirits. Following them sedately came a beautiful black mare, stepping high and daintily, as became a lady of distinction. She was Kentucky born and bred, and had for sire none other than Goldenrod himself. In answer to a coaxing whistle of invitation, she condescended to approach the window and accept sugar and caresses. Pocahontas patted the glossy head and neck of the beauty, chattering soft nonsense while the little heap of sugar she had placed on the windowsill vanished. Presently she laid an empty palm against the nose pushed in to her, and dealt it a gentle blow.

"That's all, Phyllis; positively all this morning. You would empty the sugar bowl if I'd let you. No, take your nose away; it's all gone; eleven great lumps have you had, and the feast of the gods is over."

But Phyllis would not be convinced; she pushed her nose up over the window ledge, and whinnied softly. As plainly as a horse can beg, she begged for more, but her mistress was obdurate. Placing both hands behind her, she drew back into the room, laughing.

"Not another lump," she called, "eleven are enough. Greedy Phyllis, to beg for more when you know I'm in earnest. Go away and play with the colts; you'll get no more to-day."

"You'll never make Phyllis believe that, my dear," remarked a tall, gray-haired lady, in a pretty muslin cap, who had entered unperceived.

"Oh, yes, mother. She understands quite well. See, she's moving off already. Phyllis knows I never break my word, and that persuasion is quite useless," replied Pocahontas, turning to give her mother the customary morning kiss, to place her chair before the waiter for her, and to tell her how becoming her new cap was. The Masons never neglected small courtesies to each other.

The branch of the Mason family still resident at the old homestead of Lanarth had dwindled to four living representatives—Mrs. Mason, who had not changed her name in espousing her cousin Temple Mason, of Lanarth, and her son Berkeley, and daughters Grace and Pocahontas. There had been another son, Temple, the younger, whose story formed one of those sad memories which are the grim after-taste of war. All three of the Masons had worn gray uniforms; the father had been killed in a charge at Malvern Hill, the elder son had lost his good right arm, and the younger had died in prison.

Of the two daughters, Grace had early fulfilled her destiny in true Virginian fashion, by marrying a distant connection of her family, a Mr. Royall Garnett, who had been a playmate of her brothers, and whose plantation lay in an adjoining county. With praiseworthy conservatism, Mrs. Garnett was duplicating the uneventful placidity of her parents' early years, content to rule her household wisely, to love and minister to her husband, and to devote her energies to the rearing of her children according to time-honored precedent. Pocahontas, the youngest of the family, was still unmarried, nay, more—still unengaged.

They had called her "Pocahontas" in obedience to the unwritten law of southern families, which decrees that an ancestor's sin of distinction shall be visited on generations of descendants, in the perpetuation of a name no matter what its hideousness. It seems a peculiarity of distinguished persons to possess names singularly devoid of beauty; therefore, among the burdens entailed by pride upon posterity, this is a grievous one. Some families, with the forest taint in their blood, at an early date took refuge in the softer, prettier