

Mrs. Williamson

By Mrs. W. K. Clifford.

CHAPTER I

Edward Travers had been taking out a year's leave in England. The cold had worried him a good deal, and country houses and London society alike bored him, but he had struggled through the winter, even to the end of the Easter holidays. Then he sprained his foot, which obliged him to lie up and gave him time for reflection. Let it be said here that he was four and thirty and good-looking. He cared little for frivolities, he read books when they were not too stodgy, but he was neither particularly learned nor even highly cultured. He had agreeable manners and pleasant instincts; he was affectionate to his sisters, though he could get along well enough without them; staunch to his friends, though he did not care to see too much of them, or easily make acquaintances. As for falling in love, it simply did not occur to him; life was pleasant enough; why complicate it with untried conditions?

"I think I shall go and do a travel," he said to his mother when his foot was better. "There are some ships that go from Liverpool along the Mediterranean. From Genoa I could easily get to Milan and the Italian lakes, over a pass into Switzerland, and wait there for you all." The Travers family went to the Engadine every August as naturally as it went to church every Sunday. "Then we could be together till I have to hurry back to the coast and catch ship for Bombay." It was a peculiarity of his that laying out a programme meant, as a rule, a sense of obligation to carry it through.

Tom Darton went down to Liverpool to see him off. The Arab was not to sail till three. So they lunched at the hotel, and were as silent as old chums often are—they had seen at Woolwich together—when a starting is at hand. Darton tried to talk of the people and doings they both remembered; but it was no good. Then he noticed a woman, quietly dressed in some sort of dark roolen stuff, and a little hat close-fitting and soft, lurching alone at the next table. She was thin and wore worn looking, even a little insignificant at the first glance, and not young—three or four and thirty, perhaps. There was something pathetic about her. There was a half-anted look in her eyes that arrested attention.

"I think I have seen her before," Darton said; "her face seems to be familiar. Wonder who she is?" "Sensible, anyhow," Travers answered. "Mutton chop and a glass of claret. I can't stand a woman who has a poached egg and a cup of tea in the middle of the day. You may take it as a pretty safe rule that she doesn't know much and is 'sensible.'" Then the talk drifted into other channels and the solitary woman was forgotten.

Late in the afternoon when Travers stood watching the shore retreating into the already dim distance, he saw the slim figure again. She was leaning over the side of the ship, watching the distance, too, with an eager, thankful manner—for there was no one near her and she imagined herself unobserved. Travers looked at her for a moment and heeled round to retreat. Suddenly she sprained her foot and gave way and he went down. An expression of pain and vexation escaped him; it was tortifying to measure his length at a strange woman's feet. She turned quickly and put out a hand to help him but it was unnecessary.

"You are hurt," she said. "You must be hurt," and her tone was half frightened, half compassionate. "It's nothing," he answered, "thank you very much. I sprained my foot pretty badly six weeks ago and ought to be more careful."

"Of course you ought, a sprain is such a slow thing to recover from," her voice was deep and sweet; it seemed to burrow its way into his heart; but his foot was hurting and he saw it.

"Sit down and rest," she said. "You are in pain. This floor is so slippery—stay, let me get you a deck chair."

"This will do quite well," he sat down gracefully on the seat of the deck chair, while she remained standing beside him. "They made me of the new dodge," he explained, talking. It is rather weak still; yes way at unexpected moments. "You ought to rest it well," she said, still compassionate, "but you will be able to do that easily on board the ship."

"I am only going as far as Genoa. I wanted to make my way from there over the St. Gothard and do some walking." "It won't be safe," she said, and looked up with an air of conviction that was impressive. He saw that her eyes were gray, deep and clear, and that the half-hunted look of the morning had gone from them. "You must not walk for a long time," she said, "at least not much." There was an irresistible magnetism about her; he felt it in every word she said.

"It is a great love," he said, and there was a pause. Then suddenly he asked, "Didn't I see you lurching at the North-Western to-day?" "Yes, I was there." "Are you going far by this ship?" There are some questions people are always privileged to ask their fellow passengers.

"To Naples." "The orange trees will be in bloom; but it doesn't do to stay there long—so unhealthily." "I am going to stay above it at Posillipo," she spoke reluctantly. "I know Posillipo. There's a little restaurant up there, where one goes to breakfast, you know."

"I don't know anything about it yet," she answered distantly. "I have never been there." She turned as if to go below, then hesitated. "You must be careful of your foot," she said. "I could fetch you a stick, or give you an arm back to the stairs, if you are going down?" Her manner was quite indifferent. It showed no desire in it to strike up acquaintance—rather the reverse. She was evidently merely doing her Christian duty toward a stranger.

"Oh, I shall manage all right," he said gratefully, and she slowly went her way. "She doesn't look more than eight and twenty when she speaks," he thought. "Wonder who she is—probably a strolling spinster," for he had noticed that she wore no wedding ring. "Perhaps dissatisfied and restless, as women of her age often are. But she's rather nice. I like her, somehow."

An hour or two later, when he sat down for the first time to dinner on board the Arab, he found that his place was next to hers. "We are to be neighbors for a whole week," he said, "unless you object?" "I am not likely to object. Why should I?"

She was very unsophisticated, he thought. "People sometimes become intimate on board ship in a week, then say goodby and usually never set eyes on each other again. I often watch them on the way out."

"Do you travel so much, then?" "I have been to and fro a good deal. I am a soldier. Going back to India in October—on leave till then." He paused, thinking she might give him some information about herself, but she said nothing. He noticed that she had a beautifully shaped head and soft brown hair grew close round her ears and was coiled up very simply at the back. She looked up once, as if trying to take in the evidently novel scene about her, and he saw that the gray eyes had long dark lashes. It was very odd about this woman, he thought; at first sight she seemed insignificant, then gradually you felt that there was something almost beautiful about her; but her attractions came out slowly, and one by one, as stars in the twilight. "Do you know any of the people here?" he asked, simply to make talk.

"Not a soul," she answered. "I don't want to know them," she added half to herself.

"Well, they are rather an ungodly looking set. Most of them will probably be invisible by this time to-morrow—perhaps you will, too."

"Oh, no," she answered with a little shudder, "nothing will hurt me; I mean to sit on deck all the time and feel the four winds of heaven."

"Blowing away the cares of life, eh?"

A sudden idea seemed to dart from her eyes. "Yes, blowing them all away," she said. "I wonder if they will?"

She seemed unwilling to talk, but he liked her for it. He hated people who snatched at a new acquaintance, who chattered at tables d'hote and hung about hotels to attract attention; they belonged to a definite class he despised. He was vexed with himself for trying to draw out; he felt as if he was forcing himself upon her, but for the life of him he couldn't help it.

She disappeared quickly when the dinner was over, but he saw her an hour later. He grew tired of the smoking place and the group that filled it and went to try if with the help of a stick and under cover of the darkness he could manage to drag his foot along for a few turns on deck; he meant to be careful this time and not to sprawl on the bulwarks again. The lamps from the saloon shed blurred lengths of light on the waves that broke softly against the ship, while the entrancing sound of cutting through the water, of going onward and away that always excited him at the beginning of a voyage, made an accompaniment to the stirring in his heart. He passed quite near her and was rather ashamed of it, but it was so dark that at first he had not readily made her out. She looked up and recognized him.

"Ought you to be walking?" she asked. "Is your foot better?" "It's getting all right, thank you—only a little stiff." He hesitated, then said shyly, nodding to the distance. "May I come and look out, too?"

She made a movement of assent, and he stood by her, leaning on the rail as she was doing. She looked at him for a moment, the shadows seemed to make way for her face, and he saw it quite clearly. It gave him a little thrill, and he wondered what it meant; for he was a hardened sinner, he thought, four and thirty, with the remembrance of many seasons not only in England,

but at Simia; never in love in his life, or, at least, only once for a month, when he was 19, with Dolly Ronaldson, who laughed at him and married the curate. He was used to P. & O.'s, too, up to the ways of entrepeneuring damsels and giddy grass widows, ready to beguile the monotony of a voyage in any way to which the other sex would respond. And yet, for no reason at all that he could define, here was this little woman in black, with a pale face and a pair of big eyes, stealing over his senses and rousing not only his curiosity, but some sort of feeling that made him eager to listen to her, grateful to stand beside her, and that set him wondering about her past and future. Quite suddenly she asked a question,—

"I wish you would tell me your name?" she said.

"Travers," he answered quickly. "Edward Travers. I know who you are," he added. She started a little and looked at him; it seemed as if she held her breath. He thought she resented his curiosity. "Miss Henrietta Williamson. I saw it in the passenger list."

"Oh!" "And you are travelling alone?" "Yes, alone."

"No one even to see you off to-day?" "No one."

Then she asked him something else. "Tell me who you are. I know your name quite well."

"My Governor's name I expect you mean; he's a Judge, you know."

"I have seen him—somewhere," she added, after a moment's hesitation. "I have heard that he was a very kind man."

"Awfully kind. It breaks his heart if he has to hang anybody." Some one on the piano played a German air. He stopped for a moment and listened. "That tune brings back things," he said. "We used to call it the long Indian day at Simia."

"It's a 'Herz, mein Herz.'" "It makes me think of the Waylett case last year."

She turned and looked at him again. Her face flashed something that was like defiance.

"Why?" she asked. "My father was trying it. We were waiting for the verdict at home—just before dinner—for it was late when it finished. We felt sure she would be found guilty, and we knew what it would be for my father to sentence her. And it's an awful thing, you know, for anyone to be hanged, especially a woman."

"What has 'Herz, mein Herz' to do with it?" she asked. She had put her elbows on the rail and supporting her chin on her hands was looking straight out to sea again.

"A brass band was playing it in the square when the telegram came—he always telegraphs his big verdicts home. Ten minutes later he came in. He had summed up in her favor."

"Yes?" her voice was faint as if she took but little interest in the subject.

"For he said that even if she had done it the man was such a brute that he deserved it. I believe some of the jury felt that, too."

"Besides," she said, almost bitterly, "we might generally spare ourselves the trouble of setting out pains and penalties for criminals. Greater punishment is generally attached to the crime than any that can be invented outside of it."

"Oh, come," he was a little shocked; "we must have laws and things, you know." But she answered nothing. "Are you going to stay long at Naples?" he asked by way of changing the conversation.

"I don't know."

"Not going to friends?" "I am going to an old friend of my mother's," and then, with a sudden rush of confidence, "she is badly off and keeps a pension there."

"Shall you stay long?" "I don't know. All my life, perhaps—or only a day. I wish I had travelled," she went on suddenly. "I have been nowhere. I want to see everything in the world. I think one ought, and somehow I will."

She lifted her chin and doubled her fists beneath it, her tone was determined, she spoke as if for a moment she had forgotten that she was with a stranger.

"That's right," he said. "I don't think that I should be content with a little slice of the world myself." She turned away; evidently she took no interest in what might or might not content him.

"I am going down," she said; "it is time."

"Have you a good stateroom?" "Yes, thank you, and a woman who appears to be quiet enough has the other berth." She stopped while she spoke and looked round as if into the shadows that crowded over the deck.

"Rather a bore, though, having anybody at all, isn't it?" "Oh, no," she answered with a little shudder. "I hate being alone." Then she disappeared into the darkness; he felt as if a mystery went with her.

CHAPTER II

Ten days later the Arab had battled across the Bay of Biscay into calm seas, coaled at Gibraltar, plowed through the treacherous Gulf of Lyons, and was within a few hours of Genoa. It seemed to Edward Travers that he had lived years since he left Liverpool—long, satisfying, dreamy years. Miss Williamson had

proved herself as excellent a sailor as he himself was, and they had been almost inseparable. Their companionship was for the most part a silent one; neither was a great talker; but each seemed instinctively and almost unconsciously to seek the other if they were but an hour apart. Through long days of rough weather, when everything was battered down, and all the other passengers were invisible, they sat in the saloon; reading generally, but sending now and then a look or a word across the space between them, till it was possible to creep out to the deck once more. Then, as a matter of course, they went together, for an hour at first, and then for whole long hours that sped as the ship did through the rushing water. Gradually the air became like velvet, and happiness seemed to be softly stealing over the sea toward their ship—or so he felt. To her it was different. The sound of the screw, the calming of the leaping waves, the sight of a distant sail, and of nothing else save the sea and sky, the long deck, and the white awning that had just been put up over it, the wonderful morning when she first saw Gibraltar and the dim African shore far away, everything seemed to burn its memory into her heart and soul. She looked neither forward nor backward; she just dared to live and that was all. Love, and remembered hate, despair, desperation and maddening dread, each had their hold of her in turn. Travers found her difficult and reticent, though now she allowed him to stay beside her on deck or in the saloon, as naturally as he took his place beside her at dinner, and gradually she waited and watched for him. Most of the other passengers had been invisible till the night they sighted the lights of Lisbon. The two people who had seen each other casually for the first time at the Liverpool hotel seemed to have inherited a world to themselves, and if the woman stared fate in the eyes dumfounded, the man was unafraid. He knew perfectly that he had fallen in love with Miss Williamson, that all the years that has been his hills of defense were leveled under her passing footstep. He hungered, thirsted, panted, to know more of her, to wake her from the half sorry dream that it struck him sometimes she had found life, to rouse her into happiness from the sad apology for it that he imagined the world made her now, to know everything about her, above all, to see the gray eyes that he could swear remembered sorrow, light up with love—and love for him.

"By Jove," he said to himself, "I have come by a cropper this time, and for a woman I had not set eyes on ten days ago. What an ass I am. But she's like no one I ever saw on earth before. If I could only make her care for me, what a time I'd give her in India." He was not going to leave the ship at Genoa. He remembered that it was four years since he had seen Naples, that it would be rather a good thing to go on; besides, he told her, it was better for his foot, which was getting strong a few days more would make a difference to it.

"It seems as if we had known each other for years," he said as they sat on their deck chairs that night. The watch had just been changed, there had been a rumor of phosphorescence, the air was soft and warm; the breath of Italy was in it; the delicious sound of the water was in their ears, the whole world seemed half an enchantment. "To-morrow we shall be at Genoa. We ought to land for a little while; I should like to show you the Red palace if you will let me."

"I am sorry we are coming to the land again," she said. "I should like to stay on the sea forever, yet I want to see everything."

"How is it you have never been away before?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered. He knew as little about her as he had on the day they met first. She listened to everything he said concerning himself, but she told him nothing of her own history.

"Perhaps you had relations to look after?"

"Yes, I had them to look after," she hesitated, and then went on. "There were a great many of us at home, and I was the eldest. We were poor and had no time to go about. I used to teach my little sisters their French verbs and make them play their scales till I was eighteen. That was ten years ago—I feel like a haggard old woman, but I am only eight and twenty."

"But you have not just left home—"

"I left when I was nineteen. I went—to take care of some one. I don't want to talk about it," she added, "but I have never had any happiness—never in my life—and I have longed for it so much." Then with a quiet jerk of her voice, she went on. "You spoke of the Waylett case the other night; your father tried it, do you remember? I knew that woman—and I have longed for happiness just as she did—"

"You knew her?" He was almost startled.

"Yes; I knew her very well."

"I can't tell you that, but I know that she married him to escape from poverty and worry. He treated her shamefully, he grudged every penny she spent or cost and any moment's peace that seemed possible. The world is better without such men. If she killed him she lost her soul in doing a righteous deed, and it was her desperate hunger for happi-

ness that made her do it—if she did it, I say."

"What I couldn't stand about her was that, after she was acquitted, she calmly proved his will and took his money. He couldn't have been such a very bad chap, for he left her all he had."

"He couldn't take it with him," she said grimly. "Do you know what became of her?"

"She disappeared—I suppose she is an outcast forever."

"Well! Crime or no crime, she hasn't gained happiness yet."

"People never gain it; they only pursue it."

"By heaven!" he said with sudden emotion, "what an awful thing to be that woman!"

"But there are so many awful things in the world," she said. "It's just a chance which variety we draw."

"You must have suffered horribly," he said uneasily, "to speak as you have done to-night."

"Perhaps."

"Anyhow, you're not as badly off as the Waylett woman is, if she did it. I mean you've nothing on your mind."

"No," she said, "I suppose not. I have certainly done nothing that I would not do over again; though I suppose we have all done some things that we regret." She looked over her shoulder in the odd way that characterized her, as if she were half afraid of the dark. "But sometimes we do such desperate things to gain happiness," she said almost in a whisper, "only to lose its possibility. We are like slaves who make a desperate struggle for freedom, and only make their captivity worse."

"Why do you harp so much on happiness? I wish you would tell me about yourself," he said suddenly. "Is it—I mean, you have cared for someone?"

"No," she said in a low voice. "I have never loved any one," she hesitated almost as if she were going to say "before," and chose her words carefully, "in the way you mean—in my whole life. Perhaps that is really the tragedy of it."

"Won't you trust me?" he said hoarsely. "We have known each other only a few days, but we have hurried years into them. I feel toward you as I never felt yet toward human woman, but when I reach out to you in my thoughts it is into the unknown or the darkness—"

"Into the darkness?" she echoed. "Tell me about yourself," he said passionately. He rose and pulled her from her seat, and putting his arm about her waist drew her gently toward the end of the ship. It was dark and none could hear. "Trust me with your whole life. Tell me if I may care for you, if you could ever come to think of me. It is such a little while since we met, but we are not strangers. I feel as if we had started out from opposite ends of the world to meet each other."

"I have felt it too," and, as if against her will, she drew closer to him.

"I love you," he said. "I swear I love you."

A little sound came from her lips. She put her arms up softly around his neck.

"I think it is killing me," she answered.

"No—no. It is all right," he answered, "we are not fools, we can't have made a mistake. We love each other and there is no reason why we should not—"

"Love you," she said. "I feel as if I stood by heavens open door—but I shall never enter it."

"You will! You shall! We will walk its whole length together. Oh, my beloved woman, whom God has given me." But she only shuddered at his words.

"God will take me from you," she said.

"Why should He be so cruel?" "Say you love me, say it again. It goes through me," she said desperately.

"I love you," he repeated. "I love you," and he held her in his arms and kissed her long and slowly, while he felt as if the world stood still to let them drink deep of love. Suddenly through the darkness they heard footsteps.

"Who is it?" she cried starting.

"It is only the captain," Travers said. "How nervous you are!"

"He frightened me," she whispered. "I thought—"

"A dark night," the captain said cheerily; "doesn't look as if we should be at Genoa in the morning, does it?"

"What time do we get in?" "About seven, I hope, and out again at night. Just a day there," and he passed on.

"A good long day," Travers said, as he turned to her again. But she held him away further.

"I cannot," she said; "I cannot! Let me go. To-morrow you will understand." He took the hands she was holding out, and stooped and kissed them. "I want to tell you again," she went on, under her breath, "I have never loved any one in my whole life before—I mean, in this way. It has changed everything." She drew her hands away, and in a moment she had vanished altogether.

A gray, damp morning; the beauty of Genoa hidden in the mist and rain. Travers, lying in his cabin, woke with the sound of the dripping on the deck. "Italy and rain," he thought. "I won't get up till the bell rings. It may clear up

in a couple of hours—we can go on nothing in a downpour." There were footsteps overhead. Some one was going on shore, ship's officers, probably, to get fresh food for breakfast. He heard the sound of a coat being laid down, the splash of oars as it went toward land, but it was no concern of his. He dozed off, wondering what she would say when she met him; he could not divine in his hazy thoughts the manner of how they would spend next; but time would make it plain. Why hurry or forestall it?

It was nine o'clock when he awoke. The breakfast bell had rung. He dressed quickly, but before he was ready some one knocked at his door. It was the steward with a letter.

"Miss Williamson gave it to me this morning, sir. She changed her mind about going to Naples, and she was put ashore with her luggage; said she was going by train somewhere else." Travers took the letter without a word. He shut the door and stood staring at it, hating the while to the steward's retreating steps along the passage; they sounded like the drawing back of life. Then he tore open the envelope. It contained a little bit of folded newspaper and a note, which he read at a glance,—

"I told you that I stood on the steps before the open door of Heaven, now I am closing it upon myself forever. Good-by."

He put it down bewildered, and unfolded the bit of newspaper. It was evidently a cutting—a portrait of Miss Williamson, badly reproduced but unmistakable. Under it was printed:—

"Mrs. Waylett. Acquitted last week of the charge of murdering her husband." Against it, in pencil, was the date of a year ago, and the words, "I did it." He looked at them stupefied for a moment. Then he remembered her kisses, and her arms how they had stolen closer and closer round his neck. The steward came again a little later.

"Beg pardon, sir; but shall I bring you some breakfast?"

"No, no; I am coming." He reached out his hand for a match case and setting fire to the letter and the bit of newspaper, watched them slowly burn away. Then he gathered up the ashes, and lest anyone should enter and divine what they had been, he put them through the porthole; and a groan escaped him, but he did not see them as they vanished or know the direction in which the wind had scattered them.—Detroit Free Press.

Our New Caviar Producers.

Strange stories are told of many queer fish, but few fish are queerer in appearance or stranger in their habits than the new caviar-producer of the lower Mississippi. It has as many names as a confidence man, and few thieves ever eluded justice as persistently as this species has outwitted its development from the naturalist. In Louisiana it is known as blifish, billdom, and paddle-fish; in Mississippi, spoon-billed cat or spooney; and in Arkansas as the spoonbill or spoonbill-sturgeon. The lakes and rivers of these three States supply at present much of the caviar and "dried sturgeon" of the markets. "Polyodon spatula" is the dignified title by which the spoonbill is known to naturalists, though the word "polyodon" signifies many-toothed, while the fish has no teeth.

A Woman's Heroism.

History has presented few examples of greater heroism than that of Mrs. S. J. Rooke, the telephone operator of Folsom, N. M., who, when warned by a resident of the hills to flee for her life from the flood speeding to engulf the valley, rejected the opportunity to save herself and employed the hour that intervened between the warning received and her own death by drowning in calling up subscribers by telephone and acquainting them of their danger. More than forty families have already acknowledged their lives were saved through the magnificent courage of one frail woman, whose lifeless body, with the telephone headpiece still adjusted to her ears, was found twelve miles down the canyon.

Chief Winnemucca.

Like the great Montezuma of old Mexico, Chief Winnemucca, who was born and lived the most of his life beside Pyramid lake, Nevada, had a thinking mind and a large, warm heart. He was chief of an Indian tribe called the Piutes, and before any white men came over the Rocky mountains to disturb them there were several thousand Indians, to whom he was like a father. He saw to it that they had plenty of good food to eat, nice furs and skins to wear, and handsome tepees (or wigwams) for their families to live in. He had a good wife and many children of his own; he was always very kind to them, and took much pains to teach all he himself knew to his eldest son, who was to be Chief Winnemucca after him.

Tannin for Toothache.

Neuragia from untoward teeth is very common at Ischi, Austria, and a local dentist has succeeded in discovering a remedy in tannin, which he applies to the gums as a lotion of two parts of tannic acid in ten parts of rectified spirits. Almost every kind of dental pain is relieved, while loose teeth are made tight and given power for mastication.