

## Select Tale.

[From Godley's Lady's Book.]  
**THE COSMETIC.**  
 A SKETCH OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY PAULINE FORSYTH.

THAT a slight event has sometimes made or marred the happiness of a life-time is a fact, doubtless, familiar to all who have read or observed much. Mohammed's life was saved by the flight of a bird, and Bruce drew from a spider's perseverance the energy and resolution to fight his last triumphant battles. If the destiny of those with whom the destinies of nations are involved is influenced by what seems to us such mere trifles, it is not difficult to imagine that the fate of little people often hangs upon a circumstance in itself most trivial and unimportant.

In one of the pleasantest streets of New Orleans stands the residence of Mr. Davis Bertram. It is only necessary to enter it to see that every luxury or comfort, that taste could select or wealth procure has been employed to fill and ornament the rooms and halls, all spacious, airy, and elegant. Into the softly shaded apartments the fresh cool air of morning finds its way through clustering vines and shadowing trees, and leaves everywhere traces of its wanderings over the perfumed orange groves and jessamine flowers around. All through the house, in the halls, on the veranda, or in the luxurious drawing-rooms, the light tones and laughter, and the little tripping feet of children, make a never-ceasing domestic melody. If any visitor, puzzled by the ubiquity of these household treasures, should take the trouble to gather them all in one group, he would find that five little Bertrams—"her little steps," Mrs. Bertram called them—were all that were necessary to keep up from morning till night a chattering and pattering, that ended only when sleep had laid its soft calmness over each little foot and tongue.

Five prettier children it would have been hard to find. And so evidently the mother thought; for the most delicate muslins, and softest laces, and purest linens set off to the best advantage each little one.

If you would like to pay Mrs. Bertram an unceremonious visit, you need not look for her in the drawing-rooms, with their elegant curtains, their soft, rich carpets, and their comfortable lounges and chairs; neither would you be any more likely to find her in the library, filled though it is with books of every sort, and with a few exquisite pictures hanging against its walls, seeming to invite you to an intellectual kind of dream-life. But Mrs. Bertram is not a reading woman; and, besides her five cherubs that have the range of the house, there is another very little cherub that only perpetrated its first smile a week ago. It lies all the day in the nursery, doubling its rose-bud of a fist, and kicking its equally rosy feet in a way that seems to Mrs. Bertram, who has seen the same phenomenon only five times before in her life, always new, curious, interesting, and delightful.

The nursery has been for the last few years Mrs. Bertram's principal abiding place. But she does not look in the least worn or harassed. She has a fair and matronly kind of beauty, and as she bends over her youngest darling, and tries by all kinds of maternal blandishments to win from it another dawn of a smile, you can see on her placid brow, and by the tranquil light of her eye and her sweet smile, that cares and time have touched her lightly.

In another street, but a little distance from the one in which Mr. Bertram lives, stands a row of low squalid buildings. In one of the smallest and most confined rooms in the poorest of these houses sits a woman busily sewing. The garment she is making is evidently not for herself. People that live in such places do not wear linen of a texture so exquisitely delicate. She sews hurriedly and rapidly, for she knows that when that haggard and stern-looking man, who lies stretched on the poor pallet they call a bed, rouses himself from his deep sleep of intoxication, she will have to lay aside the work by which she procures food for both, to administer to the immediate wants of one whose demands are always insisted on with unfeeling pertinacity.

As her fingers move steadily, she thinks of her four children, two of whom are in their graves, and the other two removed from the degrading influence of their father's example, and from the heavy pressure of poverty, by the care of kind relatives, who would do the same service for the wife, if she would consent to leave her worthless husband. She made the attempt once, but was recalled to his side by hearing that he was suffering under a severe attack of fever, and could never be persuaded to leave him again. Truly there is a love stronger than death.

But for one of those trivial mischances which exercise so great an influence over our lives, Mrs. Bertram would have been in the place of that poor toiler with her needle, instead of living as she did in the midst of all the blessedness of affluence and affection.

My first acquaintance with Henrietta Williams was on the occasion of Virginia Percy's marriage to Lieutenant Marshall. She was to have three bridesmaids—her sister Ellen, Henrietta Williams, a distant relative of the family, and myself. According to appointment, we assembled at Mr. Percy's three or four days before the wedding, to keep up the spirits of the bride elect, and prevent her from sinking under the crisis of her destiny, that was impending over her in all its awful and irrevocable certainty.

It is no slight matter to prepare for a wedding where there are no confectioners or professed cooks and well-drilled waiters to be found, and Mrs. Percy was quite overwhelmed with the manifold duties that devolved upon her. Besides the general superintendence of the bridal paraphernalia, and of all the ordinary offices of the household, there was an enormous table, the whole length of a very large dining-room, that was to be heaped up with all manner of delicacies, besides a large side-table, on which the substantial part of the supper, the hams, chickens, ducks, and other things of the kind, were to be placed.

Ellen Percy, Henrietta, and myself took upon ourselves the management of the lighter and more ornamental portion of the arrangements. Virginia made a show of assisting us; but, having proved her incapacity by a series of blunders, she was, with one accord, requested not to make another attempt to be useful, seeing that in every instance disaster had followed her like a shadow. She hurried out of the dining-room to avoid the railway that was showered upon her, and took refuge in her own room, where she remained, for the greater part of the day, in a sort of mazy, but happy kind of state, in which her own thoughts seemed to be to her such satisfactory companions that any interruption from us of the outer world was a thing to be endured with a gentle patience, but not sought or appreciated.

Henrietta Williams was rather a pretty girl, but quiet and reserved. She seldom spoke unless she was addressed, and appeared quite absorbed in her occupations.

Late in the afternoon she slipped away from us, and I saw her walking down the broad straight path that led to the gate. As I gazed after her in some surprise at her choice of a solitary walk, at an age when all are generally inclined to sociability of the warmest kind, I noticed that she turned off into a side path that led into the woods. It was winter, though the warm, bright days laughed in our faces as we called them by that cold name, and, through the bare branches and trunks of the trees, I could long distinguish the waving folds of the light gray cashmere as it floated in and out, while its wearer steadily pursued an onward course into the deepest depths of the disrowned woods. At last it entirely disappeared, and then I fell into a self-reproachful train of thought.

"How could I," thought I to myself, "allow Miss Williams to go by herself so far? She is pale; doubtless she is not well, and the physicians have prescribed exercise. She is timid, evidently, and would not like to ask any of us to accompany her, as we are so busy. Virginia and Ellen are really too much occupied to think of it. But I was doing nothing. It was very stupid in me to stand staring after her out of the window, instead of running out to overtake her."

After I had brought myself into a meek and humble state of mind, I was aroused from my self-upbraidings by a summons to witness the triumphant success of some culinary experiment, and confess that in the excitement and delight consequent thereupon, I entirely forgot Henrietta and her solitary walk.

As far as visitors were concerned, our days passed very quietly. It was an understood matter that no gentleman was to be admitted to the house to divert our attention from our important duties; and the ladies of the neighborhood had too much discretion to call at such a busy time. And all day long we were really kept quite hard at work. Our evenings were spent round a large fire in a room which had been appropriated to Virginia and her bridesmaids. Here Ellen took it upon herself to do the honors. She was almost seventeen, and she bore the burden of so many years with a spirit and self-reliance that were truly refreshing. The rest of us were a year or two older, and were already beginning to think it necessary to be a little grave and discreet. But for Ellen, we should have sat still and conversed in a proper and sentimental manner suited to the occasion;

but she set us upon all kinds of queer experiments.

After telling us ghost stories and robber stories, and tales of witchcraft and murder, until we hardly dared to look behind us, she proposed a number of charms by which those of us whose destiny was still undecided might discover who their future husband was to be. We spent a long evening trying to muster courage to go alone into a dark place and repeat an incantation, which Ellen dictated to us, three times; after which, we were assured, our future husband would appear in a luminous vision before us. But each attempt ended in a little shriek, and a sudden rushing into the friendly light.

Unsuccessful in this, the next night Ellen introduced the subject of complexion, always an interesting one to young girls, and induced us all to put on, before retiring, a mask of dough, assuring us that it was the best thing in the world to make the skin fair and white. Just as we had fitted the masks nicely to the face, and were beginning to get a little uneasy and nervous at the hideous, death-like appearance our companions made, Henrietta entered the room. She had been mysteriously absent for an hour, and we had been wondering what had become of her. At the first glimpse of our corpse-like faces, she shrieked and turned to run, but fell trembling on a couch near her. Nor would she consent to pass the night in the room until we unmasked. I was quite relieved myself to see Virginia's real face again, for I was conscious of a strong shrinking and repugnance to the figure that had represented her a short time before.

Ellen did not take our weak fears very patiently; but, after reproving us rather severely, and telling us that it was ridiculous to be afraid of each other, she asked "if we had ever tried buttermilk and tansy?"

"No," said we.  
 "Well, that is one of the best things in the world for the skin. It takes off freckles and sunburn, and everything else. Henrietta, you ought to use it, for you know that, in the spring, you are always troubled with freckles."

"Not much," said Henrietta.  
 "But there is no need for any. I will get some fresh buttermilk to-morrow, and you must try it."

The next afternoon I saw Henrietta setting forth on her solitary walk. I hastened to overtake and join her. She was far in advance of me, and I soon lost sight of her; but, following the narrow winding path through the woods, I came at last on a small open space. Henrietta was standing there, turned away from the direction in which I stood, talking in a low voice to a young gentleman. He raised his eyes as I approached, and our glances met. I turned quickly away, and went back wiser than I came. From an instinctive feeling of delicacy, I did not mention to any one what I had discovered, and I saw by Henrietta's manner that she was unaware of my untimely attention to her.

This was the last evening before the important one of the wedding, and Ellen, pressing upon us the necessity of looking as well as possible, urged us to use the buttermilk she had obtained for our beautifying. This was an improvement on any of her other suggestions, and we yielded willingly, not without a certain faith in her assertion, that we should find ourselves as fair as lilies in the morning.

Henrietta was again absent, and did not return until the candle was dying away in the socket, and we were almost asleep.

"Where have you been?" asked Virginia.  
 "On the porch. It was such a pleasant night that I could not bear to stay in the house."

"Have you been alone all this time?" said Ellen, pityingly.

"Oh, I don't mind that; I sit alone a great deal at home."

I noticed the indirectness in the answer, and understood it; but the others were unsuspecting.

"If you will call Abby, she will bring you a fresh candle," said Virginia, half asleep.  
 "No, I thank you. The moon gives light enough for me."

I fancied from the tones of Henrietta's voice that she had been weeping; but she kept in the shade, so that I could not see her. Just as she was about to retire, Ellen roused herself to remind her of the cosmetic.

"I put some away for you," said she. "It is in a bottle on the lower shelf in the wardrobe. Shall I get up to find it?"

"Oh, no, I can get it easily. Here it is; how shall I use it?"

"Wash your face thoroughly—very thoroughly with it; that is all."

Henrietta obeyed, and soon all was silent. Virginia slept soundly by my side. From the other bed I could distinguish, amid the

regular breathings of Ellen, a deep sigh that seemed to be forced from the heavy heart of her companion. After a while even that ceased, and I was beginning to lose my own consciousness, when I was roused by Henrietta's voice. She was calling Ellen in a low, suppressed, but some what impatient tone. Ellen's slumber was never an easy one to shake off, and it was some time before she showed any tokens of wakefulness. At last she asked "What?" in a drowsy tone.

"How does this buttermilk feel on your face?" asked Henrietta.

"Feel? Yes—it feels—yes!"—And Ellen was sound asleep again.

"Oh, Ellen, do wake up for a moment. Is it sticky?"

"Sticky? Yes—oh, yes, very."

And again Ellen dropped her head on the pillow. Several minutes passed; then I again heard Henrietta.

"Ellen—Ellen?"

"Yes," murmured Ellen.

"Something is the matter with me, something very strange. I can't open my mouth; my face is perfectly stiff. Do get a light."

Ellen rose slowly, and, calling the nurse from her mother's room, soon procured a candle.

"What's the matter, Miss Ellen?" asked Abby.

"I am afraid Cousin Henrietta is sick," was the reply. "Come and see if she wants anything."

Henrietta lay with her eyes half-opened, and blinking as the rays of the candle fell on them. Aunt Abby looked at her a moment, and exclaimed—

"Bless us, how your face do shine! And it's all red and fiery. What have you been and done?"

"It's that buttermilk," said Henrietta.

"Oh, no, it cannot be that," said Ellen; "that's impossible."

Aunt Abby took a bottle from the toilet-table. "Is this what you used?" asked she.

"Yes," said Henrietta.

Aunt Abby examined it sagaciously. "This is misses' bottle of varnish," said she. "I was in a mighty hurry this morning, and Miss Ellen called me in to dress her; and so I slipt the varnish in the wardrobe, and never thought no more about it, till this blessed minute. You've varnished yourself, honey, dat's all."

"Oh, Aunt Abby, will it ever come off?"

"Yes, I s'pect so, but your skin will come off, too, mos' likely. I'll do what I can for you."

Mrs. Percy's medical knowledge was called into action in this emergency, and everything that could be thought of was done for Henrietta's relief; but the next morning she was far from presentable. Another bridesmaid had had to be obtained to fill her place. While confined to her room and bed, she lay suffering evidently from something more than mere bodily pain. She was anxious and nervous, and her eyes followed us about with an earnest, wistful glance, as though she wished, yet shrank from asking some important question.

Among the guests of the wedding, I observed the same gentleman I had seen talking to Henrietta in the woods. He was a small, slight man, whom one, at first glance, might call insignificant; but a few minutes' study of the face and head would remove that impression. There was upon them the marks of an extraordinary mind, of a strong will, and of a perfect, though carefully repressed, consciousness of his own power. I became very much interested in watching him, and perceiving how naturally his intellectual superiority and force of character enabled him to be the tacitly acknowledged in every conversation in which he took part. His manner towards the ladies was particularly curious. There seemed to be a kind of unaccountable fascination in it, which gave to his little *tele-tele's* with them an air of love-making, so devoted and absorbed did he seem with each one. Young as he was, and he could not have been more than twenty-three or four, he had a *blase* worldly-wise look that would have suited a man of forty, and that did not harmonize very well with a youthful recklessness and impetuosity that were now and then apparent.

He sought an introduction to me, and I could not repress a feeling of repugnance that rose involuntarily as I returned the salutation. If politeness had permitted, I would have turned away without speaking, but in less than five minutes, I was quite charmed by his manner, so self-possessed, and yet so deferential and insinuating. His powers of conversation were remarkable, and he had a skill in flattery that, distrustful as I was of compliments and complimenters, induced me to listen to the pretty things he said to me, with a feeling of satisfaction that one person at least thoroughly appreciated me.

We did not allude to our former meeting, but when Mr. Powell, for that was his name, had brought me into a general communicative mind, he began to question me about Henrietta and her illness. Henrietta had begged us not to tell the cause of her non-appearance, so that I could not satisfy his curiosity entirely; but, remembering that Aunt Abby had said, "it would be two weeks before she would be fit to be seen, for her face was all blistered over," I mentioned that circumstance to Mr. Powell. He seemed somewhat troubled, grieved I thought, at the prospect of not seeing her for so long; and I sympathized with him. Soon after I saw him talking with Nannie Porter, a soft, giggling, and rather pretty girl, who had the reputation of being an heiress in a small way. He hovered around her the whole evening, and they talked in whispers in the corners of the room and in the hall. It seemed to me that he was paying her quite too much attention, considering that his heart was engaged elsewhere.

At last the wedding guests departed. I sought my room with feet so weary with dancing that they could hardly bear to thither. Henrietta was waiting to hear the particulars of the evening's gaiety, and I was, sleepily relating them, when Nannie Porter entered.

"I am going to stay here to-night, girls," she said, in a hurried way. "My head aches and I sent Bob home with the carriage, to say that I could not come till to-morrow."

We said all that was proper, and Nannie was silent for a few minutes; then she asked me for writing materials. I told her that they were all in the library, which, owing to the house being rather crowded with guests, was at present occupied as a sleeping-room. She could not obtain them till morning. She moved about the room uneasily. She seemed burthened with a secret too heavy for her powers of retention. At last it came out—

"Girls will you never tell something I am going to tell you?"

Of course we promised.

"Well, I am going to be married to-morrow morning."

"To whom?" asked Henrietta.

"To some one that has loved me ever so long more than a year. We were engaged six months ago, but mamma made me break it off, and forbade him to come to see me. He went to New Orleans after that, and mamma thinks that he is there still, or she would never have let me come here without her. But I saw him here to-night, and he told me he had been ill with a brain fever in consequence of my treating him so, and that he was near dying. He says he is constantly threatened with it again, and that if I don't marry him directly, he knows he cannot live a year. He looks pale and thin, poor fellow, and I cannot help pitying him. I have promised him that I will go with him early in the morning to a minister, who lives about seven miles from here. We can be married there, and go quietly to see mamma; but I thought I would like to send a little note first."

"What is the gentleman's name?" asked Henrietta.

"Harry Powell!" exclaimed Henrietta.

"He is engaged to me. He gave me this turquoise ring, an emblem of his truth, he said."

"He gave me this emerald," said Nannie, "that I might know that hope had something yet in store for us. He wrote me some pretty verses, too, about it," and she repeated the poetry.

"He sent those very lines to me," said Henrietta. "I have them at home now."

Nannie began to cry.

"I am sure he loves me better than any one else in the world; he has told me so a hundred times. He did say once—that if I did not marry him, and he survived it, he might be induced to marry some one else from interest or necessity, but that his affections would be forever blighted."

"But," said Henrietta, "he has been addressing me for three years, long before he saw you. I have refused him several times, for my friends did not like him at all, and each time he told me the same thing he told you, and I confess I believed him. I will tell you something else. I promised to slip away from the house this evening, and go with him to the same minister's to which he was to take you, I presume, and for the same purpose. But for that varnish, I should have been Mrs. Powell by this time, and you would have made a great escape. I think we have rather cause for delight than sorrow."

But Nannie went on weeping, while Henrietta flung her ring into the fire.

"Who is this Mr. Powell?" asked I.

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