

## A STIFF-NECKED GENERATION.

### CHAPTER I.—ROSAMUND.

"Is there in the world so inconsistent a creature? Is she not capricious, teasing, tyrannical, obstinate, perverse, absurd? Ay, a wilderness of faults and follies; her looks are scorn, and her very smiles—ah me! I wish I hadn't mentioned her smiles!"—SHERIDAN.

Rosamund was just eighteen, and no one could have done more justice to that charming age.

It was not only that her eye was the brightest and her step the lightest in the world; it was that the dark eye could flash, and the little foot could stamp, and that—but the whole may be summed up in one brief word; Rosamund while retaining many an enchanting trait that was all her own, had somehow or other, contrived to borrow here and there an imposing quality from a terribly imposing mother.

Of this more anon: for the present, suffice it to say that my heroine was young, warm, and still sprouting upwards as fast as a springing sapling. To the end of her finger-tips she was glowing with vigorous life. Of a morning she awoke like a giant refreshed, armed at all points at whatever the day might bring forth.

If well met and kindly treated by fortune, there she was; if not—why, there also; very much, indeed, there, heedless of consequences, and defiant of the future.

Evils troubled her much, but not long. Afflictions in the shape of restraint and rule were grievous, but not despicable; and action in any form was a source of pure untempered delight.

In person Rosamund was straight, supple, and rather over the average height; her throat and shoulders were round and white, and her arms very beautiful, long, and tapering; but she swung them as she walked, causing thereby a thunderbolt to fall when, on one occasion, the newly emancipated young lady of King's Common—the Miss Liscard whose name was supposed to be in everybody's mouth, and whom Lady Caroline, in her sombre heart, believed to be creating quite a county sensation—was beheld by the same astonished parent, steaming along through the home park, all unconscious of ill, at the rate of five miles an hour, the aforementioned long arms swinging like the fans of a windmill.

A year ago such a thing might have been endured,—but now!

Rosamund was, in short, "out,"—and in that little word was summed up an infinity of meaning. She was no longer the source of perpetual excitement and stimulus to what was not precisely the acquirement of knowledge in the school-room; she was beyond the reach of the overcharged and unsympathetic governess (for which it may be presumed that functional daily thanked her stars); and she was promoted to having her name printed on her mother's visiting-cards. If a tuck had still to be let down in one of her frocks, the tell-tale was ironed out with infinite pains, as though almost an insult had been offered to the young mademoiselle, who was now "quite grown up," having passed beyond a mysterious Rubicon in the eyes of the household. If her hair fell loose and lay tumbling in the well-known and formerly unappreciated masses on her shoulder, she was respectfully informed of her misfortune. If her hat and gloves were found on the floor, in passage or landing, they were restored to her room, and reappeared as by magic in wardrobe and drawer. Nothing she could now do was wrong in this respect. With a single exception, no one restrained her, no one held her in check,—no one, in fact, considered her as the same Rosamund they had known hitherto.

One person only tendered no allegiance; but even Lady Caroline paused and regarded her daughter with attention.

Now Rosamund had never been handsome as a child. As a troublesome school-girl, often disordered by the agitations of her little world, careless of pleasing, and a sloven in her dress, it had been doubtful whether she ever would possess any looks at all. But on a sudden the scene had changed. Her complexion had freshened, her head had disappeared, and she had begun to take pride in her beautiful hair. It had dawned upon her with a sensation altogether novel that she had a nose, a mouth, a chin. She saw that her hands were pretty, but sunburned; she liked to put a ribbon round her soft throat.

Everything about the child was new and wonderful at this time. With the great event of her emancipation, the world and she had met afresh, and shaken hands upon it. True, her own joyous spirits, warmth of blood, and excellent powers of recovery after suppression, wrath, and wailing, had always borne her along on the high tide of life with a certain zest and force which had made the days fly by fast enough, even when filled with a tumultuous mingling of joy and woe,—but still the difference between past and present remained.

Rosamund had now become a personage while before, her individuality had been merged in that of numbers; and perhaps in this lay the key to the whole.

To explain how such a thing could ever have been, in the case of one so emphatically unlike those about her, so distinctly and absolutely herself and no one else, it must be explained that there was another and a yet stronger, and, by reason of place

and years, a still more dominant nature in the family; and that nothing had ever been further from Lady Caroline Liscard's intentions than that any one belonging to her should be recognized as having a mind or a conscience, still less a whim or a fancy, which did not coincide with her own.

If Mr. Liscard did not thus go for absolutely nothing, he was well down in the rating, and was content to be so. Of him all that need at present be said was, that he was a man whom nature had intended to lead an easy-going, peaceable life, in which case he would have been known as an amiable parent, a quiet neighbor, and a very respectable member of society; but he was plagued by dyspepsia and Lady Caroline, and had grown peevish in consequence. He loved his books, was something of a scholar, and still more of a pedant. To be in communication with literary men now and again, to buy rather so-so editions of valuable works and unpack the boxes they came in himself, to arrange and rearrange his long rows of shelves, to consult with his carpenter over little alterations and conveniences, and to have everything luxurious, calm, and reposeful in his well-warmed, commodious library filled up the measure of his desires.

His wife had brought him a large fortune, but he had no wish to have a hand in the disposal of it. It suited her to rule, and it suited him to—if not ruled, at least let alone, untroubled and unconsulted. Lady Caroline was the very woman for such a husband in many ways, and a shade more consideration, or even a grain more tact, might have given her the place in his heart which she held in his opinion; but, as it was, he occasionally turned upon her ladyship when she least expected it.

He had, however, no mind that any one else should do so. His languid eye would open wide though his tongue would be mute when any living being ventured to take the field with his hardy dame; and buried in his correspondence, his reputation, and his digestion, he was as far removed from the rest of the family, even from the very front ranks of his offspring, as was his imperious spouse, occupied by her determined sway over a chattering neighbourhood, a refractory parish, and two households—that of her maiden sister, Lady Julia Verelst, being quite as much under her thumb as her own.

Neither parent had ever deigned to evince the slightest perception up to the present time that any one or other of that unknown herd, yclept the children, had an individuality of any sort. They had been there, consequently they had had to be provided for—to be fed, clothed, and taught; and the girls had been placed under a governess, and the boys sent to school; and at Christmas time had come the orthodox tree, with its accompanying dry and solemn party, and in the summer there had been the boy's cricket matches and the harvest festival; sea-air also after whooping-cough and measles, and extended holidays when these had been recommended by the family doctor.

But it had all been done in the piece, as it were. Where one had gone, all had gone; what had been found beneficial in one case had been unhesitatingly applied to another; no exceptions had been made; and the severance of any single unit from the entire body was the last thing to be thought of. To sum up in a word, nothing would have surprised Mr. Liscard and Lady Caroline more than to have been told that no two girls and boys of the same age may be reckoned on as having precisely similar feelings and fancies, and to have been made to recognise the amazing fact that among twelve children may be found twelve different minds, consciences, tempers, tongues and stomachs.

"My dear Rosamund, you must be talking nonsense."

"Mamma, it is quite true. The very things Dolly loves, Catherine detests; and the lessons Dolly cries her eyes out over, Catherine does not mind in the least."

"That is merely because there is two years' difference between them. When Dolly is as old as Catherine, of course she will do as Catherine does."

"But, mamma—"

"My dear child, who should know best, you or I? I have given you my opinion of the matter, because you are now old enough to understand,—but there is an end of it. It is my wish that Dolly is advanced so Catherine's standard directly she attains Catherine's age."

In her new-born license Rosamund had been pleading that this might not be; but she had yet to learn that great as had been her advance even in her mother's estimation, Lady Caroline still meant to hold her own as she had ever done.

Every one else, however, as we have said, gave in upon the spot. Even Netley, the magnificent Netley, the very tarts of Tartarus in the shape of a head-gardener—even he called his choicest blossoms for the fair bosom of the *débutante*; while Ossory, known as Mrs. Ossory—Mrs. Ossory in black satin and spectacles, whom even Lady Caroline treated punctiliously and whom her master had never presumed to address in his life—even she sent a message in the form of a humble request to see her young lady robed for her first ball. Request! and that from Ossory, who had so many a time and oft ejected almost by force the whole pack of ravening intruders, with Rosamund at their head, when now and again the store-room, with its spicy shelves and odorous reposi-

tories, had been subjected to a schoolroom invasion! And blossoms from Netley, who, with scarce less ceremony, had bidden them begone from his premises, what time the peaches were ripe on the wall and the grapes thick in the houses! It was almost too much. It struck the recipient with a sense of bewilderment that was akin to awe.

It touched and subdued her, when perhaps all aglow and throbbing from joyous open-air exercise, to meet by chance her wilful despot and preceptress, and to note how cold and thin felt the poor little cross-looking woman's hand. A hitherto unknown compassion and forbearance crept into her heart. The ancient feud died out of it.

Rosamund had never had, it must be owned, affinity with learning. Hot rooms had been her bane, the eternal noise of the piano had worn and fretted her nerves, and sitting still hour after hour had been almost a living death.

Confounding these aversions with what she had naturally supposed to be their end and object, the unpromising pupil had straightway avowed an open enmity with all that her unlucky teacher had held to be of first-rate value and importance, and there could be but one result of such a collision of ideas. Rosamund had been in endless hot water, and had if the truth were told, scarcely cared whether she were in or out. It had at least been an outlet for her exuberant energy and ready tongue; and—must we confess it?—in finding everything to her mind, and nearly every one ready to fall down and worship her star rising, upon a new world, my heroine, in the absence of every opposing force and wholesome friction, was presently in a state to look about for something against which to whet her teeth.

She was not to look long.

### CHAPTER II.—A BORN DESPOT.

"The power which you have o'er us, lies Not in your race, but in your eyes." —WALLER.

Lady Caroline had an only sister, who, although in point of mere age ten years older than herself, was in everything else as many, or as many again, her junior.

Julia—she was as universally "Julia" as the other was "Lady" Caroline—Julia was unmarried, and still lived at the old family seat, within a few miles of the home to which the youngest daughter had taken herself on her marriage with Mr. Liscard.

The bride could not have endured, ill-natured folks alleged, to have gone further away from the stately if somewhat faded and dim glories of Hartland Abbey; could not have borne to have left herself a stranger where she had so long ruled, and where her sway had indeed been recognized as second only to that of the iron old peer himself.

Some sentiments of the kind, put indeed into another form, had certainly been gathered by Lady Caroline's future husband; and as he was by no means a rich man, and could not unaided have afforded to purchase the spacious adjoining domain of King's Common, then in the market, her ladyship with commendable promptitude, and an eye to the sweets of her position as lady of the manor, had volunteered to become herself the owner of the place.

The investment had been considered a good one; but whether the handsome daughter of the proud Lord Hartland would ever have been by him permitted to throw herself away on a man who could not even be his own landlord, may be a very open question, had not the young lady herself been rather too much of a good thing at the Abbey.

The old lord had had no objection, it is true, to having those about him kept in order beneath the autocratic government of a resolute and determined vicar; but when it had appeared that he also was to go Lady Caroline's way and none other, and that her way, as often as not, proved to be exactly opposed to his own, there had ensued stormy weather.

Poor Julia, a gentle creature, as soft and harmless as a puff-ball, would often be going between one and the other half the day ere she could effect terms; and as she never of herself disobeyed Caroline's mandates, never ventured a reproof, and never was provoked into a sharp word, it was understood on all hands that the sisters were devoted to each other—so much so, indeed, that when the purchase of King's Common had been effected, all difficulties and obstacles removed, and the lease signed, Lady Caroline had had all the conviction of bestowing a delightful assurance, when she could then and there promise that, whatever happened, whatever happened—(a widow's cap rose in vision before the eyes of each, created by the emphasis)—she would still be with her dear Julia; still be at her side, as she had ever been.

If Julia did occasionally wish that, short of the widow's cap, some call or claim might arise, which for a brief period should release her from the constant and unrelenting supervision thus frankly promised she took herself to task for the sigh.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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WM. WHEATON, Sheriff.

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