



BY VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.

YESTERDAY I found a delightful book, and of course it was in an attic. Our ancestors may not have stored things in attics expressly to have us discover them, but we continue to do so from time to time, and they are undoubtedly more interesting from being a bit cobwebby and mysterious. The attic in which I found the delicious book had in it hidden things which looked as if they might be the first patterns of everything we use now. Probably the most desirable trait about this attic was that it did not possess a place for anything or anything in its place.

For instance, I found a bonnet hanging on a pair of andirons.

But for the green silk strings no one would ever dream it was a bonnet. It looked much more like a coal-scuttle, and had as many enormous bones as a prehistoric skeleton. It must have belonged to a very-great-grandmother. No one without several greats before her name could have worn that bonnet! Behind the andirons was a cradle, and in the cradle was a long pole with a red silk arrangement which once meant a fire-screen. Beside it stood a clock with a moon face and long chains and weights. It looked so much like a Dutch doll, with just head and legs, that I laughed aloud. But an attic is not a place in which to laugh unless one has company. Everything was rebukingly still, and so was I immediately.

Near the clock was a table shaped like a long-legged spider. It looked as if just ready to walk off alone. I was quite sure it belonged to the bonnet and the fire-screen, and that

somewhere there were blue cups and saucers, which one might break by talking too loud, and that they belonged to the table.

In a far corner stood a picture with its face to the wall.

I drew it out and rested it against the table. Of course it was dusty. I never heard of the right sort of an attic which was kept dusted. It was the picture of a lady. I knew that at once, just as we always know a lady when we see one. The picture was rather dim, but I could easily discern that she was very young and slim, with a white throat and bright, dark eyes. Her hair, done very high, was of a ruddy brown, and she had on a short-waisted white satin frock, and held a half-open fan primly in her hands.

It was easy to see that she was just where she belonged—beside the spider-legged table. I had no doubt that she could have told the whereabouts of the blue cups and saucers! Thinking about this lady, my eyes encountered another pair of eyes staring straight at mine. My heart jumped once and stood still until I recognized the eyes as my own.

I was gazing into a mirror. It was a dim, queer mirror with a crack like an enormous smile across its face, and pale enough to hold only the ghost of light which once shone in it. Two rods supported it. They held a brass candlestick apiece, and rested on a little stand which had a drawer. I sat down on a hair-trunk before this little stand. The drawer had brass knobs and might have been locked once, but time or rust made it open easily, and then—

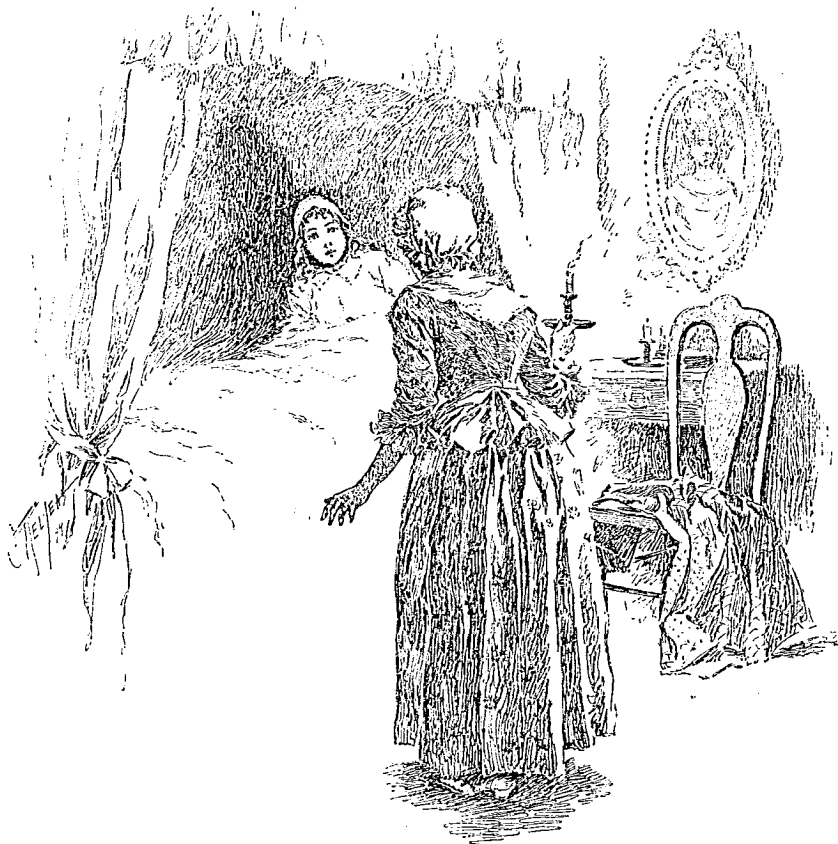
such an assortment of odds and ends! Faded ribbons and flowers and beads, and a feather-fan which, when I opened it, filled the air with a musty dust that made me sneeze! Under these scraps was a box, and under the box was a book—*The book*.

The box first.

It held a silk bag, yellow with age—a bag

colored; and painted on one pale blue side was a young person in rose-colored panniers and enormous hoops, who was coyly accepting a bouquet from a young gentleman who wore crimson breeches and a white wig.

Where had I seen that fan? My eyes met those of the lady. Yes, the same fan was in her hand. I could just make out a glimpse of



“THOU MUST BE UP AND AWAY BEFORE BREAK OF DAWN.” (SEE NEXT PAGE.)

which used to be called a reticule. In the reticule were a handkerchief, fine and lacy and also yellow; a tiny looking-glass set in shells; and a square of paper carefully pinned. The last contained only dry, yellow rose-leaves. Under the bag lay another fan. It had delicate sticks and a cord and tassel which once were rose-

the rose-hued damsel and the bouquet. Inside the box-top was written one word, nearly faded out:

*Lois.*

She was Lois, then, this young lady with the slim white throat and the dark eyes, and this

was her fan; and Lois, I knew, had been my great-grandaunt. The book came next.

It had a square of paper pasted on its brown cover, and on it was written in unformed characters:

#### LOIS, HER BOOK.

Underneath, in the same childish letters:

"mother Says i shall Rite dayly in This book that Whitch doth impress Me most and Also that falt whitch needs Be coreckted."

She immediately adds:

"i need Care in My Riting and speling."

There begins from that date, on which she says she is eight years of age, a daily chronicle written with laborious care. It noted some occurrences which the child thought important, or some faults which she was trying to correct.

The second entry reads thus:

"the Ducks strayed to the Berynground [doubtless the churchyard] i Went to fetch them but Did not Want to."

The third entry:

"Father says i Can Hav Clovers Caf fore my Owne. i wud Hav it wen it Grows Bigger and Get More munny. Mother says Munny is A Root of Evle whitch I do not Understand We do Not plante munny."

These entries varied only according to the daily duties in the domestic régime, or the childish faults which were sometimes noted with a large black cross on certain days. On two occasions the pages were sadly smeared and blurred as if unwilling tears had been shed thereon. Once was when the Dominie made her turn her face to the wall for being late to school because she stopped to pick blackberries. Again was when her mother forced her to rip out a long seam twice and do it over. This last was evidently written in an outburst of childish rebellion, for the black cross was very heavy.

At a date two years later my Aunt Lois's handwriting and spelling had improved vastly. The steady, painstaking practice of writing daily in her book showed its results. In the time which followed she grew older rapidly, doubtless from hearing and experiencing the excitement shed around her by the expected War of the Revolution. The Day Book soon ceased to be a

daily duty. When she wrote, it was with the grave fears and hopes which she heard uttered by her elders, yet, withal, a note here and there of her own vivacious spirit which she admits "doth cause my mother oftentimes to shake her head and rebuke me for having many words."

At the bursting of the war-cloud of American Revolution she goes on to tell of busy hours filled by herself and her mother in preparing food and supplies. Then comes the day when her father left home to enter the army, and again the page is blurred.

There is little of importance thereafter until the longest entry of all, which I will copy from my Aunt Lois's book, beginning under the date of January 10, 1777.

She writes:

When I awakened New Year's night and beheld my mother over me with a candle, I thought it was a dream, but she laid her hand on me and spake aloud:

"Lois! Lois! Awake quickly; I have need of thee!"

[The mother of my great-grandaunt being raised a Friend, both she and Aunt Lois had acquired their mode of speech. She continues:]

"It is not dawn," said I; for not having a man to help us, I must even go out to the barn at dawn and make ready for the day.

"No, God be thanked, it is not dawn," quoth my mother. "Thou must be up and away before break of dawn, my child; so hasten!"

I sprang up and quickly put on my clothing, knowing that my mother would explain it in her own time, for at best she hath few words. Coming nearer, she said, "Breathe it not, Lois, but thy father is here,—shot!"

"My father!—here—shot?—" I began in fear. But she urged me to hasten and pause not. My mother then made known to me how that my father had been given a most perilous errand,—namely, to gather some information, and bear it or send it by means of a paper to our Commander-in-chief, General Washington, he then being, as my father surmised, on his way from Trenton to Princeton, but nobody knew by what road. My father, in making a wide circuit around for better concealment, was shot; but not so "General," his horse, who

rushed for the woods, and in so doing concealed my father the better. My mother went on to tell me that inasmuch as my father did lose several hours from unconsciousness and weakness, though still clinging to General's neck, he found himself when he aroused all but home, whereto General had brought him straight.

"'T is wonderful he did not fall off!" spake my mother; "and, Lois, see to 't no one learns from thee of thy father's coming."

"Nay," quoth I; "there is no other gossip to prattle with saving thyself and Clover."

Then marked I my mother's face as she laid her hand upon her heart and let her eyes rest upon me, and some way I understood.

"Lois," quoth she, "thy father's errand must be finished for him. I dare not leave him to go."

"Nay," said I; "I will go, mother."

She spake not, but turned away, and I saw she was sorely troubled.

"Mother," spake I, hastening the more, "let it not fright thee. I know not what the errand be, but my father is wise and good, and I will but do as he saith. I have no fear!"

"Nay, hadst thou more I would fret less," spake my mother. "'Thou art thy father again, Lois,—ever venturesome and knowing not of fear!"

While speaking she laid by me my heavy quilted petticoat and pelisse, for the snow which came after was already in the air. Then by the lantern's light, at my mother's bidding, I put my own saddle on General George, adding my father's saddle-pockets. For General, whom I have named after good General Washington, hath tremendous strength, and was already, having had a meal, fit to be off again. I then straightway ate a hasty bit which my mother had prepared, placing the remainder in the saddle-pockets. My mother then put on me her own quilted bonnet, and over it tied a heavy comforter: I still not knowing what it was I should undertake, but knowing I should hear in good time. I strove to push back the comforter, but my mother adjusted it, saying:

"Nay; let be! 'T were better to have thy face covered when a lass like thee goes about at such an hour."

Then in the dim light I sought my father's couch, where he had fallen an hour before.

"My daughter, are you there?" spake my father.

I answered, and drew nigh as he said:

"You are going an errand for me, daughter?"

"Yes, father," quoth I.

"Do you know its nature, Lois?" said he, weakly.

"No, father," said I.

"It is to bear that which is of value and intrusted to me. It must go to the first officer of the American army you can find this side of the town."

"The town!" quoth I, in wonderment; for that is full thirty miles away.

"And I would not have you go thinking it a safe or wise thing for a maid to do," quoth he. "There are dangers which I cannot even warn you against, not knowing them. Only this: you may be arrested and searched, Lois; hence you must bear naught about your person. You must also feign some reason for going toward the town at this time; hence, your mother will put in the saddle-pockets two ducks she hath already killed. You are going to bear them to Mistress Van Tyne, who dwells this side of the town; they are a New Year's dinner from thy mother—" His voice failed from weakness, and my mother held a hot drink to his lips before he went on.

"One thing, my daughter: should you be halted on the way, and should they strive to take the ducks, give up the white one with a show of resistance, but hold to the black one with life and wit—"

"And why the black one, father?" I asked.

"The papers are in its craw."

I being too amazed at this to speak, he went on.

"Should you find no trouble, and should you meet with one of our own commanders, give him the paper or the duck, and tell him straightway what I have told you. Should no one meet or molest you, ride on to Mistress Van Tyne's, near by the town. Tell her all, and that 't is pressing needful that the black duck be sent on to General Washington. I know not where you may find any of our men six hours hence. Keep but your eye keen, your wit clear, and your trust in God. Go, now!" I kissed my father and went, as he bade me.

"The pass, which may be of use to thee, is stitched in the crown of thy hood, lest wind blow it away," said my mother, kissing me. She followed me with a lantern, as I went out and mounted General George.

It was very dark and cold; and my mother held my hand closely for an instant, and then went in and shut the door. There was no sound as General cantered down the lane, saving here and there the faint bark of a dog, and always the echo of the horse's hoofs on the frozen ground. I knew that he must not go too hard at the first; for both he and I would need the speed and exercise when it grew colder, as it soon did. I felt it but little for some time, so muffled was I by the comforter. Indeed, at cock's crow I marked two women going toward their barns with lanterns; but they would not have known me, and remembering I was about business of moment, I made no sign. Now and then I felt the saddle-pockets to be certain of the safety of the ducks, and of the bag of feed which mother had tied on for General.

Of the long, lonely ride in the darkness my Aunt Lois says but little. I think she must have been bent too seriously on her errand to feel actual fear, although once she speaks of being startled for an instant by a scarecrow in a field "which did come upon me suddenly." She continues:

The way was all alike save that as I rode I became more and more stiff and tired; but I feared to get down lest some one should come suddenly from ambush and steal the ducks.

Mile after mile did General and I travel before the first summons to halt, which was about daybreak. The sudden stopping brought my heart into my mouth. I had turned a corner and come upon a clearing against a bit of woods. There was a small fire, and some men



"THE SENTRY BADE ME HALT."

around it. Another did walk sentry-like to and fro. 'Twas he who bade me halt. He scanned me most curiously, and then laid his hand on General's bridle.

"You are my prisoner, mother; so dismount!" quoth he, very superior-like.

"Nay, nay, good sir," said I, ducking a

courtesy as well as one may on horseback. "I have often heard tell how that the brave British fight only their equals or superiors in strength, whereas old women and children are by right left unmolested."

"Truly said, mother," quoth he, laughing. "You bear at least a ready tongue, but you may be bearing more than your tongue, for aught I know. Whither would you ride at this hour, and alone?"

"I go alone because I know each stick and stone of the way, good sir; and I go for that I bear a pair of ducks for Mistress Van Tyne as a New Year's gift from our own farm."

He shook his head, and the men near by began to gather around, while my heart did sink lower than the ground on which General was pawing. But at the instant two horsemen appeared out of the woods. One rode rapidly up and drew rein before me, and I marked that he was fair and well built, with honest blue eyes and fearless of mien.

"Whom have we here?" he asked.

"A prisoner, sir," said the man at General's head.

"Nay," quoth the young officer, "'t is an old lady! What will you, mother? You had better turn about and go back home before you meet others."

"Nay, good sir," quoth I; "for I have a pass permitting my family to go to and from the town with supplies. But 't is stitched in the crown of my hood. So I would I might remove my hood, good sir, and prove it thee!"

At this the young officer laughed, and said he, "I am sorry, mother, to have you remove your hood in the cold; but it needs must be unless you become my prisoner before instead of afterward!"

"Nay, nay," quoth I; "I would fain remove my hood, then; for I have had that off before, but I have never yet been prisoner of war!" So dropping the reins on General's neck, I unbound the comforter. The air felt most grateful to my head, which was warm, and my face flushed; and as I pushed the hood back my hair did tumble all about my neck in troublesome confusion, and the soldier who had cried "Halt!" exclaimed aloud:

"By my sword, 't is a lass!"

The officer made a sign toward him, and as I looked up he bowed, his own face being quite flushed, and said:

"You will pardon me, fair Mistress, for mistaking your age!"

"Surely, sir, 't was the fault of the hood and comforter," quoth I, meeting his frank, blue eyes as I handed him the pass from out the hood.

"This allows no luggage, Mistress," he spake hesitatingly.

"Oh, I bear no luggage," said I, "save a New Year's dinner which I did raise myself."

I was fumbling at the saddle-pockets, meanwhile, with a show of courage which I did not feel, for my heart was thumping because of the black duck.

I drew it out,—for I saw he was waiting to see what I might carry,—and laid it across General's neck, meanwhile stroking its glossy plumage.

"And wilt thou help me lift the other one out, good sir," said I, "that thou mayest examine the saddle-pockets and the bag of feed for my horse?" So, holding the white duck in one hand, he examined the saddle-pockets with the other.

"Following my own will, Mistress," said he, "I would fain let you go on; but know you not that Lord Cornwallis hath already crossed the Assanpink, and hath his forces stationed in the town? Hence you will surely be arrested and searched this side of it. Therefore, Mistress, my duty is—" He paused, and in a second I saw that I had to do as my father had enjoined, and use my wit.

Taking up the black duck, I held it outward, saying, "Good sir, please hold this, too, for me an instant"; which he did; and I slipped from General's back, nearly falling from stiffness as I reached the ground. I shook out my petticoat, and showed the empty saddle; then I laid my hand upon his horse's neck, looking up in his face, and said I:

"Thou hast my word, sir, that thou dost hold in thy hands my sole reason for going up to town. I bear naught else about my person, and that I may prove the ducks quite good to eat, I pray thee keep one of them, and so share our New Year's dinner."

"Go to, little Mistress!" quoth he, looking

down on me, with a laugh. "A skilful pleader for one so young! Thinkest to bribe the British army?"

"Nay," said I, meeting his honest blue eyes as I leaped back on General. "I think not, good sir, indeed; but I would fain thou shouldst keep one, for 't is like as not thou art far from home." As I spoke, I took the black duck, and left the white one in his hand.

"Thank you kindly, sweet Mistress," said he; "but despite my will, I must do my duty, and I fear me thou must come with us."

Even as he spake there was a burst of musketry from the woods behind them, which made him wheel around, and every man spring to his feet. In a trice I had given General such a cut as he never had before, and darting ahead, dashed down the road to the left, whither I galloped like mad, pausing not to look behind until I knew there was a mile or more between us, and that I was not being overtaken. Then, halting, I fastened the duck again in the saddle-pocket, and let General take it slowly while I wondered what next to do.

My Aunt Lois then tells of her quandary on learning the town to be full of British.

"I did not fret to think of being a prisoner," she writes; "for at worst I knew they would not shoot a defenseless maid. But I feared me lest they should seize the black duck."

She then made up her mind to go straight ahead, and to hold until the last to the black duck—"which," she says, "they should not take from me unless by force of arms, and then I was determined to go likewise!"

She had no further stoppings until she found herself six miles from the town, riding by a piece of woods. She heard there the sound of horses and of tramping.

"And then it was," she writes, "that I felt somewhat of fright, and straightway wheeled General into the woods, and waited. It was a body of men coming very rapidly and, methought, quietly, and my heart thumped loudly until—what was my joy to see the uniforms of our own American army! Knowing this, perhaps, to be my only chance, I rode out in the road straight before them, whereat they halted in much surprise."

Then Aunt Lois tells of her interview with their leader, General Mercer, who got his mortal wounds shortly after at Stony Bridge.

"He was in great haste," she writes, "and I said I did but bear a black duck of which I must tell him, whereupon he ordered his men to march on, and straightway said he, in some surprise:

"Now, Mistress, what is it?"

"It is my father's—John Bradley's—errand," quoth I, "to bear this black duck to one who would send it or its contents to General Washington this morn, immediately."

"So!" said he, drawing a long breath. "And thy father?"

"Was shot while making his way with the papers."

"And the papers?"

"Are in the duck's craw, sir," said I, drawing the bird from out my saddle-pocket.

"And at what time didst start, little Mistress?"

"At two o'clock this morn, sir."

"Well, well!" He took the duck and slung it across his saddle before him. "I must hasten. I shall see General Washington within an hour, God willing, and he shall get the papers—if not by me, by some one else. Good day, Mistress Bradley." He bowed. "The American army has done well to count you in it!"

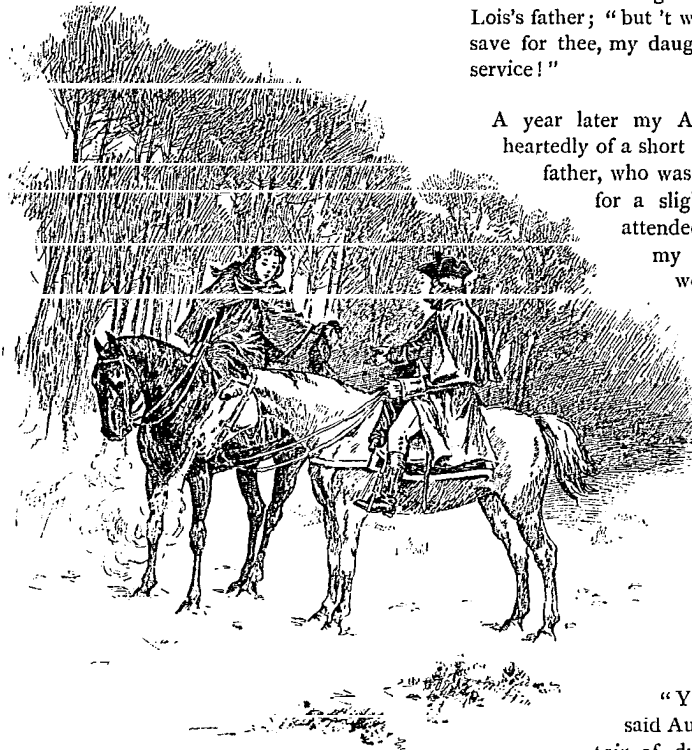
"In truth, sir," said I, "if they count by hearts, and not by muskets, their biggest following is left behind!"

"Which, when I did tell my mother to-day, she shook her head at me from the buttery door, saying, 'Lois! Lois!' But my father, from his couch where he lieth weak, saith, 'Tut! Let the lass be, so that she doth but speak the truth!'—which from my heart I did."

My Aunt Lois's ride home was uneventful. As every step took her further from the approaching armies, she was unmolested, and feared naught save that General might give out. It was snowing hard for the greater part of her journey, and the horse stumbled homeward, stiff with cold and lame with fatigue. She writes:

"Twice after night-time I fell asleep on General's neck; and when I spied the candle-light from the kitchen window, from sheer joy

I could have wept. But I called to mind what the officer had said about being in the American army, so bore up until my mother did open the door and fly outward. I could not stand alone, and fell forward when I slipped from General's back. They raised me and bore me into the house.



LOIS DELIVERS THE BLACK DUCK TO GENERAL MERCER.

"But once in the light of the fire, I marked, for the first time in my life, the tears running down my mother's face as she held a hot posset to my lips.

"Tell father it went safely," said I,—the black duck'; and then I must have fallen dead asleep at once, on the settle whereunto my mother drew me."

My Aunt Lois must have slept for many hours after that ride, of the hardship of which she says so little, though she owns, the second day after, to "a sorely stiff and cramped feeling."

I think, though, that she was fully repaid even before her father showed her a letter, long afterward, signed "G. Washington," which among other things expressed the writer's thanks "for an important service rendered his country."

"I went a dangerous errand," said Aunt Lois's father; "but 't would have been naught save for thee, my daughter; so yours was the service!"

A year later my Aunt Lois writes lightly of a short trip southward with her father, who was quite recovered "but for a slight lameness," when she attended a grand ball "with my hair done high, and wearing a new sleeveless white satin gown—the same which father hath had done in the portrait." On which occasion she had the honor of a presentation to General and Lady Washington; where, upon General Washington, who knew her father, said:

"And is this the Mistress Bradley who carried the duck?"

"Yes, your Excellency," said Aunt Lois, laughing,—"*a pair of ducks*; but I bethought me that thou wert sharing naught else with the British, hence I gave them one!"

"At which," she writes, "my mother doth shake her head, and say, 'Oh, Lois! Lois! Thou wilt ever have the last word!'"

Sweet, bright, brave Aunt Lois!

I closed the book, smiling at its blithe pages, and knowing that some time sad ones must follow. But, if they do, they belong solely to the dim, ghostly attic and the dead rose-leaves, whereas I know she would gladly have us read about the black duck!