

[Copyright secured.]

JUAN HALLADO: A STORY FROM LIFE.

BY F. C. VALENTINE.

I.—STILL WATERS RUN DEEP.

"HE'LL never set the river afire," was commonly said when Walter Miller was discussed. Not that people considered him stupid, or even dull—he simply was a very ordinary man. He had not been a signally brilliant boy. His childhood was marked by its absolutely negative history; he had no likes or dislikes; he grew up, learned his lessons, advanced from class to class, never excelled in anything, never took any prizes, and not even his fond mother prognosticated greatness for him, nor did he ever pass through the period when boys are oft-times assured that they are destined to be hanged. His father never had cause to administer even the slightest kind of a reproof, and was astonished, even confounded, one day, when Walter was fourteen, to note him attentively observing the movements of a watch in a transparent case. From this trifling circumstance Mr. Miller formed the wise opinion that Walter had a predilection for the watchmaker's trade. He was at once taken from school and apprenticed to the house of Meredick & Co., watchmakers and jewelers. There Walter preserved his equanimity and acquired the *sobriquet* of "Sterling," simply because he performed all of his duties faithfully, though without enthusiasm, and his advance was known to his parents only by the repeated increase of his salary.

As he approached manhood Walter did not shine in society. He danced well; he sang fairly, and played accompaniments with obliging amiability when others desired to sing. He was considered a most trustworthy young man by parents, and was held up as a model to their children, none of whom loved him devotedly, nor on the other hand disliked him. None played pranks on him. Yet he was welcome at all times, especially when illness or any other misfortune came, for his company, in a negative way, was pleasant, his attentions delicate, and his advice manly and practical. When they tired of calling him "Sterling Walter Miller," they varied the prefix by converting it into "Solid," to distinguish him from his uncle, "Liquid Walter Miller," a gay old beau who prided himself on still being "one of the boys," despite his bald head and iron-gray mustache. He was a jolly old fellow, full of fun, though his fun sometimes verged on indiscretion. Uncle Walter was the only one who at all disparaged his nephew's steadiness, by winking whenever his name was mentioned, and remarking that "Still waters run deep"; but it was never known how he would have the phrase applied. At all events, Walter remained ever the same steady, industrious, trustworthy young man, enjoying everybody's respect, yet provoking no one's enthusiasm or animadversion.

Walter was twenty-four years old when, on returning home one Saturday evening, he courteously apologized to his mother for delaying dinner. "We were busy," he explained, "arranging the details of the partnership."

"What partnership?" asked his father.

"Meredick & Co.," answered Walter, adding quietly as he turned to his brother, "Will you oblige me with some bread, Edgar?"

"Taking in a new partner?" asked Uncle Walter.

"Yes," responded Walter calmly, as he said and did everything.

"To increase the capital?" asked his uncle.

"It will not be increased materially," said Walter, not evincing the slightest annoyance at his uncle's pertinacity, and continuing in the same tone said to his mother, "Yes, thanks, I should like a little more soup."

"But say, Wal—the new partnership," persisted Uncle Walter.

"Well, what of it?" asked Walter affably.

"What sort of a man is the new partner?" asked the uncle.

"Why, Uncle Walter, I am the new partner."

"You!" exclaimed all of the members of the Miller family in concert.

"Yes," responding Walter, calmly as ever, and showing not the slightest reflex of the elation that suffused his parents' faces.

"Why, confound your confounded equanimity, Walter, I congratulate you, confound you!" blurted Uncle Walter, grasping his nephew's hand and endangering several cruets in the castor as he vehemently rose and reached over the table.

"Thank you, uncle," answered Walter calmly; "I hope my fork has not hurt you?" he added solicitously.

"No, I guess not," said the elder gentleman somewhat ruefully, "only it is hardly kind of you," and he examined the slight indentations made in his wrist, "to receive the congratulations of your family at the point of the bayonet."

"Oh, then, I presume I should put down my weapons entirely, when I tell you that I think of getting married," rejoined Walter, laying his knife and fork across his plate.

"Married!" echoed the Miller family, in tones that conveyed consternation as well as amazement.

For the first time in his life matter-of-fact Walter Miller manifested astonishment. His relatives' manner seemed to express regret, but whether at his prospective separation from them or for his future wife, he was at a loss to determine.

His father's voice sounded almost severe when he asked, "And whom do you propose to marry?"

"Miss Mathilda Meredick."

"Oh, ah!" was long drawn out by those assembled, and the youngest member of the family even added, "Poor Mattie."

"And why do you sympathize—"

"It is not that, dear," interposed his mother; "but Mattie is such a sprightly, wide-awake girl, so fond of life, and you are so—so—old, you know."

"Then none of you object to Miss Mathilda?" said he.

"Oh no, dear no," exclaimed all those to whom this general query was addressed.