

**THE
CHOSEN VALLEY**

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The Chosen Valley by Mary Hallock Foote

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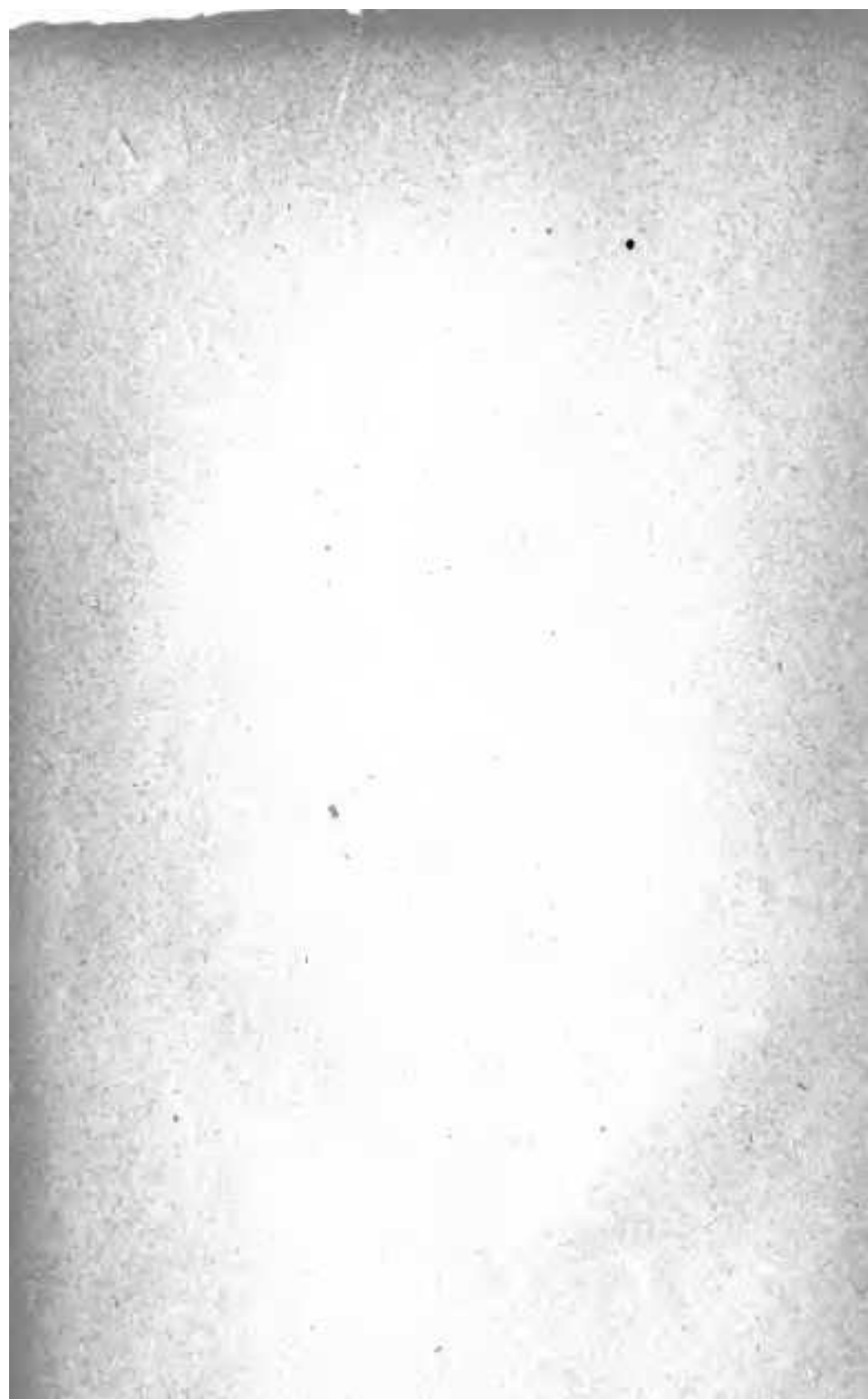
MARY HALLOCK FOOTE

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THE CHOSEN VALLEY.

I.

PHILIP REPORTS FOR WORK.

“WHAT is it that you hope to do over there? What is the most you have promised yourself?”

“Why do we always say ‘over there’? Is n’t it time, if only as a courtesy, we began to call it home?”

“Should I be at home — on the desert plains?”

“You might concede something to the fact that you will soon have a husband and a son there.”

“I might concede everything and go myself! But then there would be one reason less, though a poor one, I admit, for your coming back. No; you need not remind me, Philip, that I have nothing left.”

Mrs. Norrisson was a pretty, spoiled

mother; one that should have died young and lived in the memory of her charm. She could argue, very logically, from her own predispositions, but she failed in that logic of the heart which enables a woman to feel another's reasons. Nothing could have convinced her, now, that she had not a bitter cause, as the sorrows of women go, even with one who sends a son into battle or gives him up to a fatal choice in marriage. Yet all her grief was that her son had chosen a profession which she called narrow, and elected to practice it in his, in their, native West; while Philip's culpability lay in that he had not revealed to her this purpose as it grew. There had been the natural affection, but never a perfect understanding, between them. If Mrs. Norrisson had guessed this fact before, she knew it now, passionately declaring there is no mystery in life like the being one calls one's child.

Mr. Price Norrisson had married his wife just "off the range," as they say in the cattle countries; sixteen, and the most beautiful girl he had ever met; mixed blood, of course. The marriage was pronounced, in the language of his set, "a good gamble." In the course of her subsequent remarkable

social progress Mrs. Norrisson had left the range far behind. The fields in which she sought distinction lay to the east; and here she would have detained her son, but that some reactionary sentiment in the young man called him back.

Mr. and Mrs. Norrisson had been much apart since the experiment of their marriage began, — he, frankly in pursuit of money; she, of the most enlightened ways of spending it, — and Philip had idealized the parent he saw least of. He was prouder of his father's summons, in the name of his Work, than a young cadet of his first commission in the service of his country; but how commend this enthusiasm to a woman professedly weary of both husband and country?

“I am looking for an engineer,” his father's letter ran, “with about what I take your qualification to be, to go on big irrigation work, — an extension of our present system near the town of Norrisson. Don't you think you had better come and see what you can make of it over here? I shall have use for all your science, — you should have got considerable by now, — and I can give you the practical experience no engineer, no American engineer, can afford to dispense

with. Cable me your answer directly. The place can't wait."

Mrs. Norrisson held this letter, folding it and pinching it small, in her delicate, but not generous hands.

"What does he want with an engineer?" she demanded. "A county surveyor is all they need to build what they call their 'ditches.' They are always working against time, and the quality of the work is quite a second matter. Take my word, Philip, your methods will not suit your father. He values nothing but time. He is what they call a driver."

"That, quite possibly, is what I need," Philip answered with provoking humility: "to learn something of that drive, which has done so much over there."

"So much and so badly," the fair renegade retorted. "I don't deny they have pluck; but look at their chances, in a new country where they are first in the field! You'd think they might afford at least to be honest. But they have the courage of their opportunities. Take the history of their continental railroads, for example. But granting you can keep out of all that, what sort of a school is it for a young man who

has n't finished his education? Your father built a ditch over there — the one that has made Norrisson — not only without consulting a single engineer of reputation, but actually in defiance of a very able one, a sort of partner of his. He stood in his way, and your father got rid of him, because he had a conscience about his work. You need not look at me, my dear, as if I were talking scandal. He will tell you the story himself. He glories in succeeding in just that illogical, immoral way. It is the triumph of makeshift. That is his school of 'practical experience.' They say the country drives them, and they have to keep the pace, somehow, or 'get left.' I don't go into the philosophy of it. I'm only speaking of its effects. You can see them in me. I was bred in that same school; I got on famously; I could do anything I pleased, up to a certain point. There I stopped. There I have stopped for want of thoroughness in the beginning. I hoped you would be a school-boy till you were twenty-five, then take five years for travel. By that time you would have been something more than an 'American engineer.' I meant that my son should be a citizen of the world, not a local man in a profession half learned."