

**LEISURE HOUR
SERIES.- NO. 204:
JEAN MONTEITH**

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Leisure Hour Series.- No. 204: Jean Monteith by M. G. McClelland

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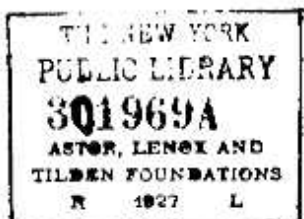
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M. G. MCCLELLAND

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MY DEAR MENTOR :

In putting this note into "Jean" without going through the form of saying with your leave, or by your leave, I have a precarious, insecure kind of feeling akin to that which might accrue from handling an explosive. To speak inelegantly, I think that you will probably "blow me up" for doing it; but I am willing to take the risk for the pleasure of making some feeble acknowledgment of the wise counsels and generous sympathy with which you have aided my intellectual growth. To this end I gratefully dedicate to you my fourth story.

M. G. McC.

ELM COTTAGE, Aug. 21, 1887.

MERCANTILE LIBRARY,
—*—
OF NEW YORK,
JEAN MONTEITH.

CHAPTER I.

MALARIAL fever with a typhoid tendency was rife in the land. Every house was a hospital, every family could swell the sick list with one or more victims. Among the hills, in the out-lying district, the mischief was deadly enough; but in the straggling out-at-elbows village the force of the disease was trebled.

The village—called Melrose, by a homesick Scotchman who had been its founder—was situated among the foot-hills of the Cumberland Range where it crosses the northern part of Alabama. It had started well up on the hillside; but had gradually slipped down on to the low land through which flowed the sluggish stream that supplied motive power to the cotton-seed-oil mill which was the principal industry of the place. Houses of the better sort still looked down from the vantage ground of the hill; but the village proper lay at its foot, and the main street, scarcely *more than a country road*, was not a hundred

yards from the bank of the river. It extended from the west end of the village where were the few stores, the church, and the "Black Bear" tavern, to the east end where were huddled together the shanties of the colored mill-hands.

Here malaria made its stronghold, intrenching itself, with ague for advanced guard and typhoid for a grim reserve. Here the people took to their beds in earnest, or, at best, crawled feebly about their business, too racked and tormented to have strength, or faith, to pray for the frost which would be their bodily salvation.

The cause of all this trouble was a very great improvement set on foot by an enterprising farmer from Vermont, who had come down to the South, as to a land of promise, with a little money and the hope of making more. He bought a goodly tract of land for a price that made him wonder, and sent North for his family with intent to stay, and grow a vine and fig-tree.

The farm was a mile above the village and more adjacent to the mountains, and on it was a great, green pond, the delight of frogs and newts and village lads and lassies, and the cause of half the sickness that visited that region. It was a pretty, pestilential spot, much over-grown, and with no means of flowing outward, for time and neglect had caused the ditch, which had been its outlet, to become choked with weeds and rubbish. *It did its nefarious work so slowly; bred its mi-*

asma so insensibly, and looked so pretty withal, under its marsh weeds and lilies, and the waving of its long-limbed willows, that people forgot to lay the blame where the blame was due, and took no steps for the mitigation of the evil, content to admire the beauty of the spot and to accept their chills as celestial dispensation.

With the new blood came a different standard, and a different way of viewing nature: enterprise took a hard grip on the farm, intelligence cultivated to the point of obstinacy and there left, cast a seeing eye over the situation, and energy promptly turned the cess-pool into the little river. This was a notable bit of engineering, and an improvement on native customs. It deserved applause, for, by it, two full acres of arable land had been recovered, and a good farm rid of a nuisance that, for years, had depreciated it half its value. The only drawback was, that the whole thing, from inception to carrying out, had been premature. Knowledge is wonderful, and enterprise is better; but, to be thoroughly effective, both should be a trifle modest.

"Ef you-un aim ter drain that thar pond o' you-uns, mister," drawled old Jack Johns, when the subject was mooted on the tavern porch, "I reckon yer mout ez well wait t' well arter frost. Ther bottom o' ther pond hev been er stranger ter daylight fur better'n fifty ye'r, an' ther sun hev got er sight o' power. 'Thar's truck that

banks up under water : truck that rots an' makes er stink, ef onduly fetched ter view o' sunshine. Wait t' well arter frost, naybor, wait t' well arter frost."

But this the man of enterprise refused to do, having a large contempt for the counsel of the thriftless. Besides, he had arranged to have the work done at once, and had no mind for waste of time or money. To do him justice, he had, despite his knowledge, no realization of the fervor of the southern sun at noonday, or the languor of the southern air at nightfall, which will absorb all floating poison and then forbear to carry it from the country. And dearly did he pay for his sin of scorn and heedlessness, for the demons of disease, set at liberty by his ditch, swooped down on him and his among the first, and cast all prone upon their beds, smitten of chills and sorely buffeted by fever.

With the effect of unpopular enterprise burned and shaken into him, the stranger, therefore, entered on a season of repentance, and swore by the graves of his fathers, that, if the Lord should spare him from his own, he would attempt naught in this forsaken country, save the getting out of it, without due consultation.

The doctors had a weary time of it, because there were so few. In lonely districts, apart from competition, the stir of money-getting and the *hope of fame*, the professions are scantily repre-