The Belle of Bowling Green

Amelia E. Barr

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The Belle of Bowling Green

By AMELIA E. BARR

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To My Friend

WARREN SNYDER

A Bookman and a Lover of Books

This Novel is Dedicated

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Prologue

O shades of respectable Vans!
O Livingstons, Kennedys, Jays!
Lend me your names to conjure with,
And bring back the fine old days--
When the trade and wealth of the city
Lay snugly the rivers between,
And the homes of its merchant princes,
Were built round the Bowling Green.
Here’s to the homes that are past!
Here’s to the men that have been!
Here’s to the heart of New York,
That beats on the Bowling Green!

Here’s to the men who could meet
Mockers and doubters, with smiles;
And planning for centuries hence,
Lay out their city by miles.
It has spread far out to the North,

It has spread to the East and the West,
Though the men who saw it in dreams,
Now sleep in old Trinity's breast.
Here's to the homes that are past!
Here's to the men that have been!
Here's to the heart of New York,
That beats on the Bowling Green!

And here's to the maids of the past!
(They were beautiful maids we know,)
That strolled in the Battery Park,
In the years of the Long Ago.
And though maids of to-day are fair,
(No lovelier ever have been)
They are proud to be called by the names
Of the Belles of the Bowling Green.
Here's to the men of the past!
Here's to the maids that have been!
Here's to the heart of New York,
That beats on the Bowling Green!

The Belle of Bowling Green

CHAPTER ONE

Monday's Daughters

Every city has some locality to which its heroic and civic memories especially cling; and this locality in the city of New York is the historic acre of the Bowling Green. With that spot it has been

throughout its existence, in some way or other, unfailingly linked; and its mingled story of camp and court and domestic life ought to make the Bowling Green to the citizens of New York all that the Palladium was to the citizens of ancient Troy. For as the Palladium held in one hand a pike, and in the other hand a distaff and spindle, so also, the story of the Bowling Green is one of the pike and the distaff. It has felt the tread of fighting men, and the light feet of happy maidens; and though showing a front of cannon, has lain for nearly three centuries at the open seaward door of the city, like a green hearthstone of welcome.

In the closing years of the eighteenth, and the early years of the nineteenth century, the Bowling Green was in a large measure surrounded by the stately homes of the most honourable and wealthy citizens; and though this class, before the war of 1812, had began to move slowly northward, it was some years later a very aristocratic quarter, especially favoured by the rich families of Dutch extraction, who, having dwelt for many generations somewhere around the Fort and the Bowling Green, were not easily induced to relinquish their homes in a locality so familiar and so dear to them.

Thus for nearly one hundred and forty years there had been Bloommaerts living in the old Beaver Path, and in Bloommaert's Valley, or Broad Street, and when Judge Gerardus Bloommaert, in 1790, built himself a handsome dwelling, he desired no finer site for it than the Bowling Green. It was a lofty, roomy house of red brick, without extraneous ornament, but realising in its interior arrangements and furnishings the highest ideals of household comfort and elegance.

Sapphira, his only daughter, a girl of eighteen years old, was, however, its chief charm and attraction. No painting on all its walls could rival her living beauty; and many a young citizen found the road to the Custom House the road of his desire. For was there not always the hope that he might catch a glimpse of the lovely Sapphira at the window of her home? Or meet her walking on the Mall, or the Battery, and perhaps, if very fortunate, get a smile or a word from her in passing.

All knew that they could give themselves good reasons for their devotions; they did not bow to an unworthy idol. Sapphira Bloommaert had to perfection every mystery and beauty of the flesh--dark, lambent eyes, hardly more lambent than the luminous face lighted up by the spirit behind it; nut-brown hair, with brows and long eyelashes of a still darker shade; a vivid complexion; an exquisite mouth; a tall, erect, slender form with a rather proud carriage, and movements that were naturally of superb dignity: “the airs of a queen,” as her cousin Annette said. But Sapphira had no consciousness in this attitude; it was as natural as breathing to her; and was the result of a perfectly harmonious physical and moral beauty, developed under circumstances of love and happiness. All her life days had been full of content; she looked as if she had been born smiling.

This was exactly what her grandmother Bloommaert said to her one morning, and that with some irritation; for the elder woman was anxious about many people and many things, and Sapphira’s expression of pleasant contentment was not the kind of sympathy that worry finds soothing.

“In trouble is the city, Sapphira, and over that bit of hair-work you sit smiling, as if in Paradise we were. I think, indeed, you were born smiling.”

“The time of tears is not yet, grandmother; when it comes, I shall weep--like other women.”

“Weep! Yes, yes; but one thing remember--deliverance comes never through tears. Look at Cornelia Desbrosses; dying she is, with her own tears poisoned.”

“I am sorry for Cornelia; I wish that she had no cause to weep,” and with these words she did not smile. It had suddenly struck her that perhaps it was not right or kind to be happy when there was so much fear and anxiety in her native city. The idea was new and painful; she rose and went with it to the solitude of her own room; and her mother after silently watching her exit, said:

“She is so gentle, so easily moved--was it worth while?”

“You think so? Give Sapphira a motive strong enough, and so firm she will be--so impossible to move. Oh, yes, Carlita, I know!”

“Indeed, mother, she obeys as readily as a little child. Our will is her will. She bends to it just like the leaves of that tree to the wind.”

“Very good! but there may come a day when to your will she will not bend; when a rod of finely tempered steel will be more pliant in your hand than her wish or will. We shall see. She is a very child yet, but times are coming--are come--that will turn children quickly into men and women. Our Gerardus, where is he?”

“He left home rather earlier than usual. He was sure there was

important news." Mrs. Bloommaert spoke coldly. Her mother-in-law always set her temper on edge with the claim vibrating through the two words "our Gerardus." "There is so much talk and nothing comes of it but annoyance to ourselves," she continued, "the cry has been war for five years. It comes not."

"It is here. At the street corners I saw the bill-man pasting up news of it. In every one's mouth I heard it. Alive was the air with the word _war_; and standing in groups, men were talking together in that passion of anger that means war, war, and nothing but war."

"The blood of New York is always boiling, mother. When Gerardus comes he will tell us if it be war. I shall not be sorry if it is. When one has been waiting for a blow five long years, it is a relief to have it fall. Who is to blame? The administration, or the people?"

"As well may you ask whether it is the fiddle, or the fiddlestick, that makes the tune."

"At any rate we shall give England a good fight. Our men are not cowards."

"Carlita, all men would be cowards--if they durst."

"Mother!"

"If they durst disobey the nobler instincts which make the lower ones face their duty."

"Oh!"

"Carlita, you have no ideas about humanity."

"I think mother I, at least, understand my husband and sons--as for Sapphira----"

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