

Comment by the Editor

FRUSTRATION

Richard Realf was a sentimental idealist. Never content to engage in common employment, never satisfied long in one place, he seemed to be groping about the world in quest of beauty or adventure or righteousness. Even as a youth he was restless and precocious, living in a realm of fancy more than reality. Nurtured in the society of Lady Byron and literary celebrities, he produced a book of poems entitled *Guesses at the Beautiful*, when he was eighteen.

Before he was twenty, he fell in love with a high-born lady whose parents would not permit their marriage. It must have been a grievous injury to the boy who could describe a contemplated kiss as "a deep, delicious, ecstatic draught of divine rapture from humid lips on fire with royal passion; a kiss which would make your breath shudder with splendid intoxication and shoot tingling arrows of flame along your delicate veins". Obviously, he wrote from vivid memory and in eager hope.

Having come to America in 1854, he busied

himself with desultory writing and espoused the cause of liberty so ardently that John Brown selected him to be Secretary of State in his provisional government. There was substance in his character as well as zeal. For three long years he marched with Sherman and at the end was sorely wounded.

Sick, alone, disconsolate, he attracted the interest of a designing woman. His tender nature welcomed her as a potent charm to blow away "the misty moodiness of morbid brooding" and "conjure up healthful thinkings" that should put the "whole bevy of haunting witch-elves incontinently to flight." But as a wife, he found her utterly incompatible. They parted in poverty, but when he gained an attractive competence, she had their divorce annulled and badgered all his later years. In suicide, he found escape.

And so, the harsh conditions of misfortune and improvidence restricted him who willed to soar aloft.

J. E. B.