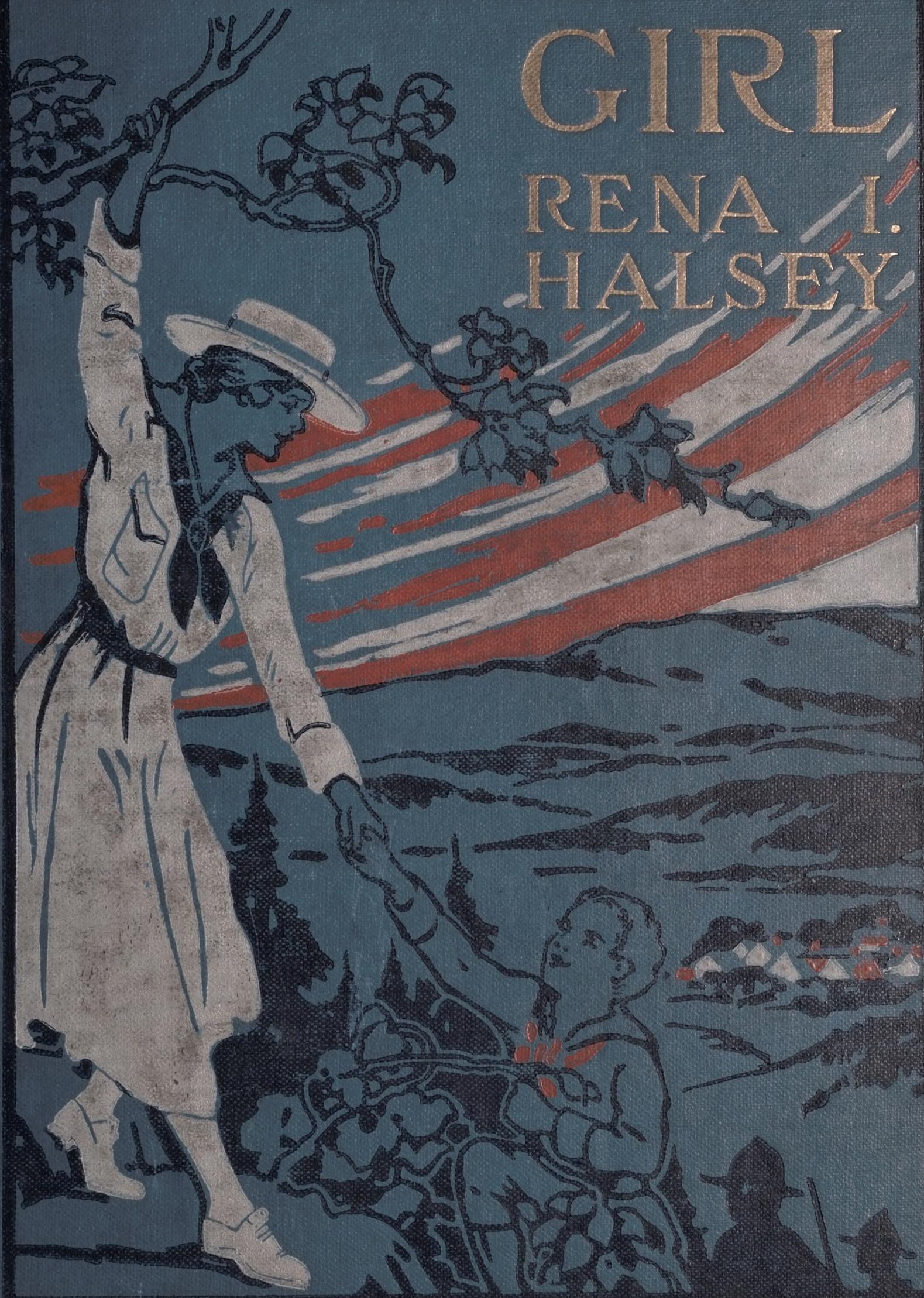


The LIBERTY
GIRL
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HALSEY





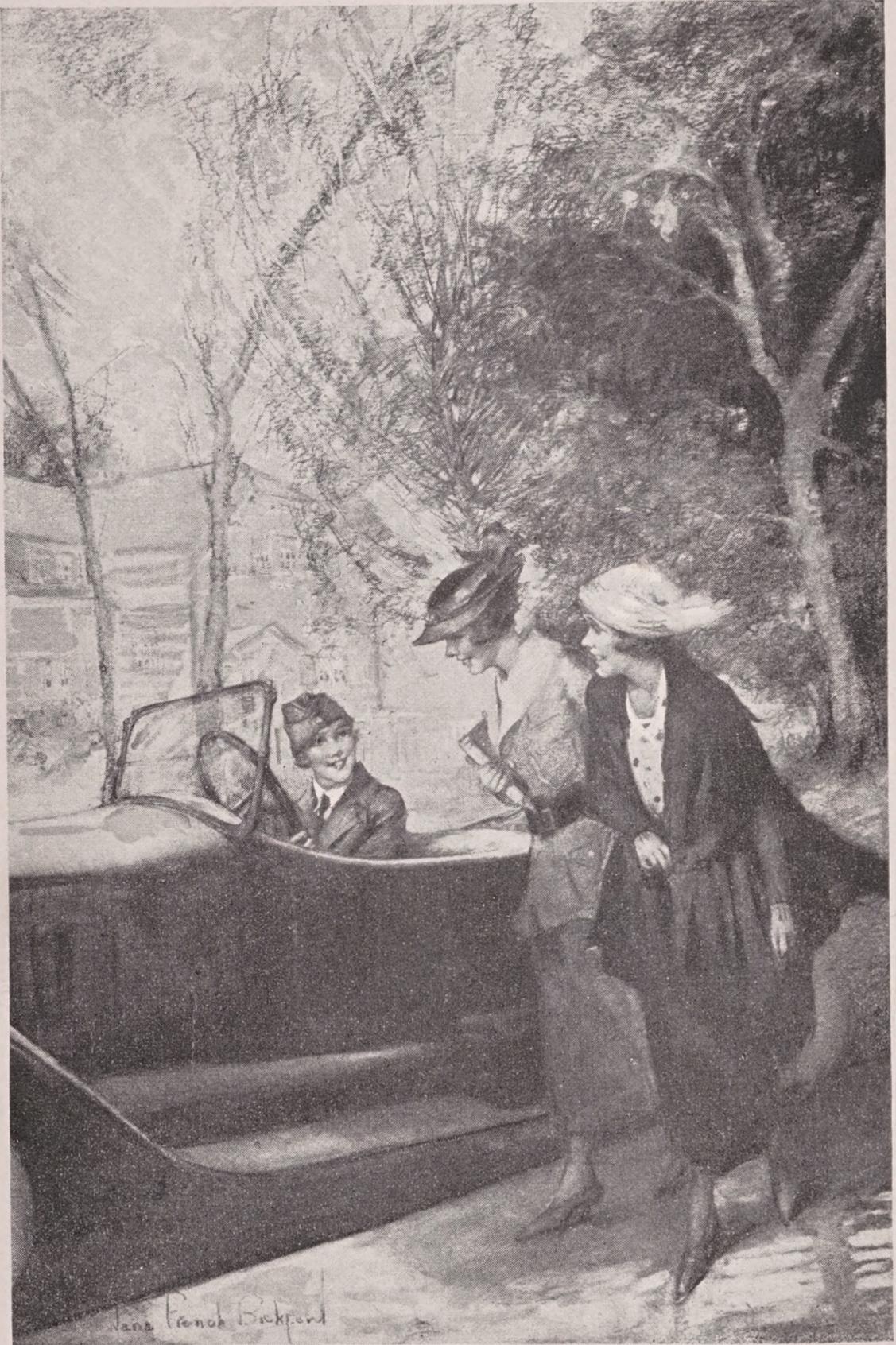
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"AH THERE, GIRLS! HOW ARE YOU?"—Page 11.

THE LIBERTY GIRL

BY
sabell
RENA I. HALSEY

Author of "Blue Robin, the Girl Pioneer"
and "America's Daughter"

ILLUSTRATED BY NANA FRENCH BICKFORD



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THE LIBERTY GIRL

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INSCRIBED,
WITH DEEP APPRECIATION,
TO
THE SONS OF LIBERTY,—
ALL THOSE SOLDIERS, SEAMEN, AND AIRMEN,
WHO HAVE HEROICALLY GIVEN OF
THEIR BEST FOR THE
BROTHERHOOD
OF MAN

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THE LIBERTY GIRL

CHAPTER I

“GOD SPEED YOU”

“OH, Nathalie, I do believe there’s Grace Tyson in her new motor-car,” exclaimed Helen Dame, suddenly laying her hand on her companion’s arm as the two girls were about to cross Main Street, the wide, tree-lined thoroughfare of the old-fashioned town of Westport, Long Island.

Nathalie Page halted, and, swinging about, peered intently at the brown-uniformed figure of a young girl seated at the steering-wheel of an automobile, which was speeding quickly towards them.

Yes, it was Grace, who, in her sprightliest manner, her face aglow from the invigorating breezes of an April afternoon, called out, “Ah there, girls! How are you? Oh, my lucky star must have guided me, for I have something thrilling to tell you!” As she spoke the girl guided the car to the curb, and the next moment, with an airy spring, had landed on the ground at their side.

With a sudden movement the uniformed figure clicked her heels together and bent stiffly forward as her arm swung up, while her forefinger grazed her forehead in a military salute. "I salute you, comrades," she said with grave formality, "at your service as a member of the Motor Corps of America.

"Yes, girls," she shrilled joyously, forgetting her assumed rôle in her eagerness to tell her news, "I'm on the job, for I'm to see active service for the United States government. I've just returned from an infantry drill of the Motor Corps at Central Park, New York.

"No, I'll be honest," she added laughingly, in answer to the look of amazed inquiry on the faces of her companions, "and 'fess' that I didn't have the pleasure of drilling in public, for I'm a raw recruit as yet. We recruits go through our manual of arms at one of the New York armories, drilled by a regular army sergeant. Oh, I've been in training some time, for you know I took out my chauffeur's and mechanician's State licenses last winter.

"One has to own her car at this sort of government work,"—Grace's voice became inflated with importance,— "and be able to make her own repairs on the road if necessary. But isn't my new car a Jim Dandy?" she asked, glancing with keen pride at the big gray motor, purring contentedly at the curb. "It was a belated Christmas gift from grandmother.

“ But I tell you what, girls,” she rattled on, “ I’ve been put through the paces all right, but I’ve passed my exams with flying colors. Phew! wasn’t the physical exam stiff!—before a regular high official of the army medical corps. I was inoculated for typhoid, and for paretyphoid. I’ll secretly confess that I don’t know what the last word means. Yes, and I took the oath of allegiance to the United States Government, administered by another army swell,—and that’s where my Pioneer work proved O. K. And then we had the First Aid course, too, at St. Luke’s. The head nurse, who gave us special lessons in bandaging, said I was A No. 1; and in wigwagging, oh, I did the two-flag business just dandy.”

“ But what is your special work? ” asked Nathalie, for the two girls were somewhat surprised and bewildered by all these high-sounding, official-like terms. To be sure, Grace had long been known as an expert driver, but she had never shown her efficiency in any way but by giving the girls joy-rides once in a while; yes, and once she had driven her father to New York.

But war work, thought Nathalie, for this aristocratic-looking, sweet-faced young girl, whose eyes gleamed merrily at you from under the peaked army cap — with its blue band and the insignia of the Corps, a tire surmounted by Mercury’s wings — set so jauntily on the fluffy hair. To be sure the slim, trim figure in the army jacket, short skirt over trousers, and high

boots did have a warlike aspect, but it was altogether too girlish and charming to be suggestive of anything but a toy soldier, like one of the tiny painted tin things that Nathalie used to play with when a wee tot.

“Do? Why, I am a military chauffeur,” returned Grace patronizingly, “and in the business of war-relief work for the Government. At present I’m to act as chauffeur to one of our four lieutenants, Miss Gladys Merrill. Oh, she’s a dear! I have to drive her all over the city when she is engaged on some Government errand. You should see me studying the police maps, and *then* you would know what I do. Sometimes we are called to transport some of the army officers from the railroad station to the ferry, or to headquarters. Then we do errands for the Red Cross, too.

“Why, the other day I helped to carry a lot of knitted things down on the pier, to be packed in a ship bound for the other side; they were for the soldiers at the front. We do work for the National Defense, and for the Board of Exemption. I’m doing my ‘bit,’ even if it is a wee one, towards winning the war,” ended the girl, with a note of satisfaction in her voice.

“O dear, but wouldn’t I like to drive an ambulance in France! But I’ve got to be twenty-one to do that sort of work,”—the girl sighed. “But did I tell you that brother Fred is doing American Field Service? I had a letter from him yesterday, and he said that he and a lot of American boys have established a little encamp-

ment of ambulances not far from the front-line trench. They live in what was once a château belonging to Count Somebody or Another, but now it is nothing but a shell.

“ Oh, Fred thinks it is glorious fun,” cried the girl, with sparkling eyes. “ He has to answer roll-call at eight in the morning, and then he eats his breakfast at a little café near. He has just black bread,— *think of that*, coffee, and, yes, sometimes he has an egg. Then he has to drill, clean his car, and — oh, but he says it’s a great sight to see the aëroplanes constantly flying over his head, like great monsters of the air. And sometimes he goes wild with excitement when he sees an aërial battle between a Boche and a French airman.

“ Yes, he declares it is ‘ some ’ life over there,” animatedly continued Grace, “ for even his rest periods are thrilling, for they have to dodge shells, and sometimes they burst over one’s head. Several times he thought he was done for. And at night the road near the château is packed with hundreds of *marching* guns, trucks of ammunition, and war supplies and cavalry, all on their way to the front.

“ But when he goes in his ambulance after the *blessés* — they are the poor wounded soldiers — it is just like day, for the sky is filled with star-shells shooting around him in all colors, and then there is a constant cannonading of shells and shot of all kinds. When he hears a purr he knows it’s a Boche plane and

dodges pretty lively, for if he doesn't 'watch out' a machine-gun comes sputtering down at him. He's awfully afraid of them because they drop bombs.

"But he says it would make your heart ache to see him when he carries the *blessés*. He has to drive them from the *postes de secours* — the aid-stations — to the hospitals. He has to go *very* slowly, and even then you can hear the poor things groan and shriek with the agony of being moved. And sometimes," Grace lowered her voice reverently, "when he goes to take them out of the ambulance he finds a dead soldier.

"But dear me," she continued in a more cheerful tone, "he seems to like the life and is constantly hoping — I believe he dreams about it in his sleep — that he'll soon have a shot at one of those German fiends. Yes, I think it would be gloriously exciting," ended Grace with a half sigh of envy.

"Gloriously exciting?" repeated Nathalie with a shudder. "Oh, Grace, I should think you would be frightfully worried. Suppose he should lose his life some time in the darkness of the night, alone with those wounded soldiers? O dear," she ended drearily, "I just wish some one would shoot or kill the Kaiser! Sometimes I wish I could be a Charlotte Corday. Don't you remember how she killed Murat for the sake of the French?"

"Why, Nathalie," cried Helen with amused eyes,

“ I thought you were a pacifist, and here you are talking of shooting people.” And the girl’s “ Ha! ha!” rang out merrily.

Nathalie’s color rose in a wave as she cried decidedly, “ Helen, I’m *not* a pacifist. Of course I want the Allies to win. I believe in the war — only — only — I do not think it is necessary to send our boys across the sea to fight.”

“ But I do,” insisted Helen, “ for this is God’s war, a war to give liberty to everybody in the world, and that makes it *our* war. We should be willing to fight, to give the rights and privileges of democracy to other people, and our American boys are not slackers who let some one else do their work.”

“ *Our* boys! You mean *my* boy,” said Nathalie, with sudden bitterness. “ It’s all right for *you* to talk, Helen, but *you* haven’t a brother to go and stand up and be mercilessly bayoneted by those Boches. And that is what Dick will have to do.” Nathalie choked as she turned her head away.

“ Yes, Nathalie dear,” replied Helen in a softened tone, “ I know it is a terrible thing to have to give up your loved ones to be ruthlessly shot down. But what are we going to do?” she pleaded desperately, “ we must do what is right and leave the rest to God, for, as mother says, ‘ God is in his Heaven.’ And Dick wants to go,” she ended abruptly, “ he told me so the other day.”

“Yes, that is just it,” cried Nathalie in a pitifully small voice, “and he says that he is not going to wait to be drafted. Oh, Helen, mother and I cannot sleep at night thinking about it!” Nathalie turned her face away, her eyes dark and sorrowful. No, she did not mean to be a coward, but it just rent her heart to picture Dick going about armless, or a helpless cripple shuffling along, with either she or Dorothy leading him.

“Oh, I would like to be a Joan of Arc,” interposed Grace at this point, her blue eyes suddenly afire. “I think it would be great to ride in front of an army on a white charger. And then, too,” she added more seriously, “I think it takes more bravery to fight than to do anything else.”

“Perhaps it does, Grace,” remarked Helen slowly, “but when it comes to heroism, I think the mothers who give their boys to be slaughtered for the good of their fellow-beings are the bravest—” The girl paused quickly, for she had caught sight of Nathalie’s face, and remorsefully felt that what she had just said only added to her friend’s distress. “But, girls,” she went on in a brighter tone, “I have *something* to tell you. I’m going to France to do my ‘bit,’ for I’m to be stenographer to Aunt Dora. We expect to sail in a month or so. You know that she is one of the officials in the Red Cross organization.”

There were sudden exclamations of surprise from the girl’s two companions, as they eagerly wanted to

know all about her unexpected piece of news. As Helen finished giving the details as to how it had all come about, she exclaimed, with a sudden look at her wrist-watch: “Goodness! Girls, do you know it is almost supper-time? I’m just about starved.”

“Well, jump into the car, then,” cried Grace Tyson, “and I’ll have you home in no time.” Her companions, pleased at the prospect of a whirl in the new car, gladly accepted her invitation, and a few minutes later were speeding towards the lower end of the street where Helen and Nathalie lived.

After bidding her friends good-by, Nathalie, with a *tru-al-lee*, the call-note of their Pioneer bird-group, ran lightly up the steps of the veranda. Yes, Dick was home, for he was standing in the hall, lighting the gas. With a happy little sigh she opened the door.

“Hello, sis,” called out Dick cheerily,—a tall well-formed youth, with merry blue eyes,—as he caught sight of the girl in the door-way. “Have you been on a hike?”

“Oh, no, just an afternoon at Mrs. Van Vorst’s. Nita had a lot of the girls there —” Nathalie stopped, for an expression, a sudden gleam in her brother’s eyes, caused her heart to give a wild leap. She drew in her breath sharply, but before the question that was forming could be asked, Dick waved the still flaming match hilariously above his head as he cried, “Well, sister mine, I’ve taken the plunge, and I’ve come off on top,

for I've joined the Flying Corps, and I'm going to be an army eagle!"

"Flying Corps?" repeated Nathalie dazedly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, Blue Robin, that I'm going to be an aviator, a sky pilot," replied the boy jubilantly. "I made an application some time ago to the chief signal officer at Washington. I was found an eligible applicant, for, you know, my course in the technical school in New York did me up fine. To-day I passed my physical examinations, and am now enlisted in the Signal Corps of the Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps. I'm off next week to the Military Aeronautics School at Princeton University. It's an eight-weeks' course. If I put it over,—and you bet your life I do," Dick ground his teeth determinedly,—"I go into training at one of the Flying Schools, and then I'll soon be a regular bird of the air; and if I don't help Uncle Sam win the war, and manage to drop a few bombs on those Fritzie, I'll go hang!"

For one awful moment Nathalie stood silent, staring at her brother in dumb despair. Then she turned, and with a blur in her eyes and a tightening of her throat, blindly groped for the stairway. But no! Dick's hand shot out, he caught the hurrying figure in his grasp, and the next moment Nathalie was sobbing on his breast.

"That's all right, little sis," exclaimed the boy with a

break in his voice, as he pressed the brown head closer. Then he cried, in an attempt at jocularity, “ Just get it all out of your system, every last drop of that salted brine, Blue Robin, and then we’ll talk business.”

This somewhat matter-of-fact declaration acted like a cold shower-bath on the girl, as, with a convulsive shiver, she caught her breath, and although she burrowed deeper into the snug of her brother’s arm her tears were stayed.

“ Dick, *how could you do it?* Think of mother?” Then she raised her eyes, and went on, “ Oh, I can’t bear the thought of your getting ki —” But the girl could not say the dreaded word, and again her head went down against the rough gray of Dick’s coat.

“ Well, Blue Robin, I’m afraid you have lost that cheery little *tru-al-lee* of yours,” teased the boy humorously. “ You’ve cried so hard you’re eye-twisted. In the first place, I don’t intend getting killed if I can help it. And I can’t help leaving mother. You must remember I’m a citizen of the United States —” the boy was thinking of his first vote cast the fall before — “ and I am bound by my oath of allegiance to the country to uphold its principles, even if it means the breaking of my mother’s apron-strings,” he added jokingly.

“ Oh, Dick, don’t try to be funny,” Nathalie managed to say somewhat sharply, as she drew away from her brother’s arm and dropped limply on the steps of the stairs, in such an attitude of hopeless despair that

Dick was at the end of his tether to know what to say. He stared down at the girl, unconsciously rubbing his hand through his hair, a trick the boy had when perplexed.

Suddenly a bit of a smile leaped into his eyes as he cried, in a hopelessly resigned tone, "All right, sis, seeing that you feel this way about it I'll just send in my resignation. It will let the boys know I've laid down on my job, for if you and mother are going to howl like two cats, a fellow can't do a thing but stay at home and be a sissy, a baby-tender, a dish-washer-er-er —"

"Oh, Dick, don't talk nonsense," broke in Nathalie sharply. "I didn't say that you were not to go, but, — why — oh, I just can't help feeling awfully bad when I read all those terrible things in the paper." Her voice quivered pathetically as she finished.

"Well, don't read them, then," coolly rejoined Dick. "Just steer clear of all that hysterical gush and brace up. My job is to serve my country,— she wants me. By Jove, before she gets out of this hole she'll need every mother's son of us. And I've got to do it in the best way I can, by enlisting before the draft comes. I'll not only have a chance to do better work, a prospect of quicker promotion, but, if you want to look at the sordid end of it, I'll get more pay. And as to being killed, as you wailed, if you and mother will insist upon seeing it black, an aviator's chance of life is ten to one better — if he's on to his job — than that of the

fellow on the ground. So cheer up, Blue Robin. I'm all beat hollow, for I've been trying to cheer up mother for the last hour.”

“Oh, what does mother say?” asked a very faint voice, just as if the girl did not know how her mother felt, and had been feeling for some time.

“Say! Gee whiz! I don't know what she would have said if she had voiced her sentiments,” replied Dick resignedly. “But the worst of the whole business was that she took it out in weeping about a tank of tears; all over my best coat, too,” he added ruefully. “You women are enough to make a fellow go stiff.

“Now see here, Blue Robin, don't disappoint me!” suddenly cried the lad, as he stared appealingly into his sister's brown eyes. “Why, I thought that you would be my right-hand man. I knew mother would make a time at first, but *you*,—I *thought you had grit*; you, a Pioneer, too. Don't you know, girl—” added Dick, rubbing the back of his hand quickly across his eyes, “that I've got to go? Don't you forget that. I'm on the job, every inch of it, but, thunderation, I'm no more keen to go 'over there' and have those Hun devils cut me up like sausage, than you or mother. But I'm a man and I've got to live up to the business of being a man, and not a mollycoddle.”

But Nathalie had suddenly come to her senses. Perhaps it was the brush of the boy's hand across his eyes, or the quivering note in his voice, but she roused. She

had been selfish; instead of crying like a ninny she should have cheered. "Oh, Dick," she exclaimed contritely, standing up and facing him suddenly, "I'm all wrong. I didn't mean to cry, and I wouldn't have either," she explained excusingly, "if you had only let me go up-stairs.

"No, Dick, I would not have you be a slacker, or a mollycoddle, or wash the dishes," she added with a faint attempt at a smile, "and we haven't any babies to tend. Yes, old boy, I don't want you to lie down in the traces, so let's shake on it, and I'll try to brace up mother, too," added the girl, as she held out her hand to her brother.

"Now that's the stuff, Nat, old girl," cried the boy with gleaming eyes, as he took the girl's hand and held it tightly, "and while I'm fighting to uphold the family honor and glory,—remember father was a Rough Rider,—you stay with dear old mumsie. Keep her cheered up, and see that everything is made easy for her. Do all you can to take my place here at home. Yes, Blue Robin, you be the home soldier. Gee whiz, you be the home guard!" added the boy in a sudden burst of inspiration.

"The home guard! Yes, that's what I'll be," cried the girl, her eyes lighting with a sudden glow. "And then I'll be doing my bit, won't I? I'll cheer up mother, and do all I can," she added resolutely; "and don't worry any more, Dick, for now,"—the girl drew

a long breath, “ I’ll be on the job as well as you.”

And then Nathalie, with a wave of her hand at the boy as he stood gazing up at her with his eyes fired with loyal determination, hurried up the stairs, straight on and up to the very top of the house to her usual weeping-place, for, oh, those hateful tears would not be restrained, and if she did not have her cry out she would strangle!

Ah, here she was in her den, the attic. Dimly she reached out her hand and pulled the little wooden rocker out from the wall and slumped into it, and a minute later, with her face buried in the fold of her arm, as it rested on the little sewing-table, she was weeping unrestrainedly.

Presently she gave a sudden start, raised her head and listened, and then was on her feet. for, oh, that was her mother’s step,— she was coming up after her. Oh, why hadn’t she waited until she had a hold on herself. The next moment the little wooden door with the padlock opened, and Mrs. Page was standing in the doorway gazing down at her.

“ Why — oh, mother! ” Nathalie cried in surprise and wonder, for her mother was smiling. The girl’s eyes bulged out from her tear-stained face in such a funny way that her mother broke into a little laugh. Then her face sobered and she came slowly towards her.

“ No, daughter mine, mother is not weeping. Yes,

I heard what you and Dick said, and you are patriots, and have shamed mother into trying to be one, too." Mrs. Page took the girl in her arms with tender affection.

"And Dick is a dear lad. Oh, Nathalie, in our grief at the thought of parting with him,—perhaps of losing him,—" her voice weakened slightly, "we have forgotten that he has been fighting a greater battle than we.

"It is surely a great thing," continued Mrs. Page sadly, "for a young man in the buoyancy of youth and the very heyday of life, to give it all up. For youth clings more tenaciously to life than older people do, for to them it is an untried and shining pathway, flowered with hope, anticipation, and the luring glimmer of unfulfilled aims and ambitions.

"And then to have to face about," her voice lowered, "and silently struggle with one's self in the great battle of self-abnegation, to end by taking this glorious life and casting it far behind you,—this is what makes a hero. Then to face the dread ordeal of a battlefield, and go steadily forward, buoyed only with a feeling of bravery,—the heroism of doing what you believe to be right,—and, taking your one chance for life in your hands,—plunge into the unknown darkness and the horrifying perils of a No Man's Land."

There was a stifled sob in Nathalie's throat, but her mother went steadily on: "No, Nathalie, we must

not weep. We must smile and be cheerful. We must inspire Dick with courage and hope, and if it is meant that he is to give his life, we must let him go with a ‘God speed you,’ his memory starved with the thought of a mother’s love and a sister’s courage, and with the soul-stirring song of the victor over death.

“And, Nathalie, Dick belongs to God; he was only loaned to me,— to you,— and if the time has come for God to call him home, we must not complain. We must gladly give him back. Then we must remember, too,” went on the patient mother-voice, “that, after all, life is not the mere living of it, but the things accomplished for the betterment of those who come after. And if Dick has been ‘on the job,’ ” Mrs. Page smiled, “no matter how small his share in this great warfare for the right, he will be the better prepared to enter into the Land where there is no more suffering, or horrible war, but just a glorious and eternal peace.”

The last word was almost whispered, but, with renewed effort, she said: “Now, Nathalie, let us be brave, as father would have had us,— the dear father, — and go down to Dick with a bright smile and inspiring words of cheer.” Mrs. Page bent and kissed the girl lightly, but solemnly, on the forehead, and then she had turned and was making her way towards the door.

CHAPTER II

GIVING HER BEST

“As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.”

NATHALIE sat in the big rocker on the veranda, sewing a star on a service-flag. Yes, as soon as Dick had gone to do his “stunt,” as he called it, in the great warfare,—gone with all the honors of war, as his mother had laughingly declared as he kissed them a noisy good-by,—Nathalie had felt that it was incumbent upon her to sustain the honor of the family, and had run lightly up to the attic. Here, in the big piece-trunk she found a bundle of Turkey red, a bit of white, and then, after begging a snip of blue from Helen for the star, she had set to work.

She was sure that star would not come off, for she had double-stitched into every angle and on every point. She held up the patriotic square, bordered with red, and sorrowfully stared at that one lone star, although a thrill of pride stirred at her heart and caused her eyes to beam.

She must hang it up. And then she was busy tacking the little flag to a small staff, which she had fastened to the roof of the porch so it could be seen.

Ah, the wind had caught it, and it was waving in a salute to its many mates curling from the neighboring porches, and to the Red Cross insignias that starred a window here and there, oftentimes overshadowed by the graceful sweep of the Stars and Stripes.

But Nathalie's heart was still sore, for although she had given up Dick with as good a grace as she could muster, and had tried to show that she possessed the true American spirit, yet it did seem as if it was a needless sacrifice. With a sudden turn on her heel, the girl burst into a new patriotic air that she had heard somewhere, as if hoping that it would drive away the rebellious thoughts that jarred her attempt at cheer, and hurried into the kitchen.

As Nathalie stepped to the window and stared carelessly out, her eyes were caught by the gleam of yellow crocus and purple hyacinth as they peeped up at her from their beds of green. Somehow their flaunting colors reminded her of the spring blooms that used to nod so gayly to her from the flower-beds in her beautiful city home in the upper part of New York.

She could hardly believe it was a year since her father's death. The poignant grief she had suffered then again caused her eyes to fill with tears, and her mind dwelt upon the sorrowful circumstances surrounding her loss, the changes that had followed, in their financial losses, and the many sacrifices it had entailed.

She again saw the sorrowful farewell to the first and only home she had ever known; she again felt the grief that came to her in the giving up of the many things that had made life so happy,— her schoolmates, her many enjoyments, and her hope of going to college. She again experienced the dolefulness that had assailed her mother, her brother Dick, her younger sister, Dorothy, and herself, on their coming to the humble cottage home in Westport, the being associated with strangers, and the many people who at first had seemed so different from their city associates.

Yes, there was the tree where she had found the nest of bluebirds. The girl's eyes gleamed amusedly as she peered down the garden at the old cedar tree, and remembered that she had called them blue robins, thus giving Dick an opportunity to nickname her, Blue Robin.

Nathalie attempted to smile, but the thought of Dick's going away aroused her slumbering grief, and once more the tears flowed silently down her cheeks. But she bravely brushed them away and went on with her reminiscences,— the remembrance of spraining her ankle up in the woods, and how it had led to her meeting Helen Dame, her next-door neighbor, and *now* her dearest friend.

How lovely Grace Tyson had looked that day, and dear old Barbara with her near-sighted eyes, and the girls' favorite, Lillie Bell, with her gracious charm

and dramatic poses. The girl smiled again as she remembered Edith Wharton, the sport, and her harum-scarum oddities. Yes, they were all dear girls. And how glad she was that she had become a Pioneer, and a real blue robin, by joining the Blue Bird group.

And what a dear Mrs. Morrow, the Pioneer director, was that day the Pioneers called. Oh, that was the day the "Mystic" had passed. Who would have thought she would turn out to be Mrs. Van Vorst, who was so lovely. And that ride with Dr. Morrow to the big gray house, and then she mentally saw herself, with that handkerchief over her eyes, talking to the Princess, Nita, the little hunchbacked girl. And what good friends they had become through those history lessons!

The many useful things she had learned from the Pioneer hikes and crafts, and the joys she had experienced from their many sports and activities had certainly proved worth while. And the "overcomes" she had fought for by adopting the Pioneer motto, "I can," had certainly meant something in her life.

But they did have gloriously good times at Camp Laff-a-Lot at Eagle Lake, with the Boy Scouts, Miss Camphelia, Miss Dummy, and all the other good sports. Then, too, there was the surprise, on her return to learn the good that had come to Dick through the money so kindly loaned by Mrs. Van Vorst. Indeed, that one year had brought many new things into her

life, for — O dear, there was all that silver to be cleaned! For, now that her mother kept no maid, this duty, with many other menial tasks, had devolved upon Nathalie. Oh, how she hated that job!

With a resigned air, however, she managed to carry the basket of silver from the sideboard to the kitchen-table, and then returned to the dining-room for the tea-service. After getting her cleaning cloths, her brushes, and the scouring-powder, with vigorous determination she began to rub and polish.

But somehow everything acted aggravatingly mean, for she dropped the polish, and the powder flew all over; then she knocked the tray and the knives and forks clattered to the floor. O dear! what ailed things anyway? And how her arms ached trying to polish those horrid tarnished stains on the teapot! The tableware had never seemed so obdurate, nor the means for making it bright so utterly ineffective.

“Oh, I guess I am the one who is ailing,” she exclaimed glumly, as she suddenly realized that her mind was not on her task, and that the elation of playing at being a patriot had departed, with Dick evidently, leaving her as limp as a rag. Oh, it does seem such a shame that we had to get into that war — Nathalie bit off her thought like a thread, resolved not to let her mind dwell on that forbidden topic. But how angelic her mother had acted when Dick went. Well, she was a dear, anyway, so brave. But suppose he *never*

should come back after all. Something suddenly seemed to snap in the girl's breast, and down went her head on the tray, into a heap of powder, while a great sob strangled out of her throat.

O horrors! Nathalie's brown head bobbed up from the tray, not very serenely either, for she had heard a step on the kitchen porch. Oh, Helen always came in that way! "Where *is* my handkerchief?" The girl grabbed desperately at something white lying on the tray, dimly seen through a blur of tears, and began to scrub her nose energetically with alas, not her handkerchief, but the powder-cloth with which she had been polishing the silver! "Ah chee! Ah chee!" sneezed Nathalie again and again, while groping frenziedly, but blindly, for her handkerchief. She must have dropped it. And then Helen's arms were around her, and she was kissing the flushed cheek.

"What's struck you, honey girl?" she asked in that gentle way of hers. "Have you got the influenza? But here's a very necessary article at times, if that's what you're after," she finished with a laugh, as she stooped and picked up Nathalie's handkerchief from the floor.

"Influenza? No," blurted out Nathalie savagely, tortured to a pitch of desperation at her unfortunate predicament. "I've been rubbing my nose with that dirty old piece of rag I clean the silver with. Serves me right, I suppose, for being such a fool as to cry

when I should be 'on my job,' as Dick says." She shamefacedly tried to hide her red eyes from her friend's keen gaze.

"Oh, well, it will do you good to cry, Nathalie, dear," advised Helen softly, as she stroked the brown head caressingly, "for you were quite a heroine when Dick went away, so courageous and cheery. Mrs. Morrow says you are the nerviest Pioneer she knows."

"But I'm not," confessed Nathalie honestly, "in fact, I'm beginning to think that I'm a bluff. But anyway, I'm glad to get a bit of praise, something to warm me up, for I have felt like a congealed icicle for the last few days. Yes, I have smiled and smiled like the poor Spartan boy, while the fox of Grief was gnawing a hole into my internals. That sounds like one of Lillie Bell's dramatics, doesn't it?" she smiled pathetically into her friend's kindly eyes.

"But, Helen, you are a dear, anyway," cried Nathalie in a sudden burst of admiration for her tried and trusted friend, who was always such a stanch and timely comforter. "And do you know," she added, swinging about in her chair with the teapot in one hand and the despised polishing-cloth in the other, "you grow better-looking every day. Oh, I think you are just lovely!"

"*I lovely?*" mocked Helen, opening her eyes in surprise at this unexpected praise. "Well, Blue Robin, what started you on that trail? You must have been

kissing the Blarney Stone, for you are handing me out 'the stuff,' as the boys say, for fair. Poor me, with a knob on my nose, a wide mouth, and green eyes — to call me lovely is a libel on the word."

"Oh, Helen, your eyes are just lovely — every one says that, for they are so expressive," retorted her friend loyally; "and as for the knob on your nose, no one would know it was there if you weren't constantly telling them about it. But I don't care what you look like anyway," she added determinedly, "for I think you are a love of a friend. But when do you go to France?" she finished abruptly.

"I don't quite know yet," replied the girl; "perhaps not until a month or so. But mother is brave about letting me go. She says it will be a fine experience for me,— as long as I don't have to go 'over the top.' Oh, you finished your service-flag! It's a Jim Dandy!" Helen plunged recklessly into another topic, again blaming herself for her trick of alluding to forbidden subjects, for she had seen Nathalie's lips quiver as she said "Over the top."

"Yes, I finished it, and now the neighbors know where *we stand*, even if *you* consider me a pacifist," said the girl a little defiantly. "Well, perhaps I shall think differently some day," with a quickly repressed sigh.

"Yes, and that day is coming very soon, too, Blue Robin," rejoined Helen; "for I'll bet you a box of

candy that you won't be a pacifist after you hear Mrs. Morrow talk on liberty. Surely you haven't forgotten that we are to go to a Liberty Tea at her house this afternoon?" she inquired as she saw her friend's face settle down into an expression of gloom.

"Oh, I don't think I'll go," retorted Nathalie quickly, "for I don't feel a bit Pioneery this morning, and then I have all this silver to clean."

"But, Blue Robin," returned her friend cheerily, "I'm going to help you finish up that silver, and then I'm going home to dress for this afternoon. Then I'm coming over here and just make you go to that Liberty Tea with me. You know, Nathalie, it would be mean for you to desert Mrs. Morrow," she added wisely, "for you are the leader of the band and should help to entertain the girls."

Whereupon, Helen caught up one of Nathalie's kitchen-aprons, and a few moments later the two girls were laughing and chatting in the best of spirits, as they rubbed and polished with youthful ardor, every bone and muscle keyed to its task.

Yes, it was enlivening to be so warmly welcomed by her hostess, Nathalie decided, as she greeted her a little later in the afternoon, and her depression vanished. And how perfectly lovely Mrs. Morrow looked in that blue gown; yes, it was just the color of her blue-gray eyes. Under the fascination of this lady's charming personality Nathalie was soon flying about,

showing the girls how to start sweaters, or to purl, as this task had been delegated to her by the director, who herself had taught Nathalie.

When the tea was served it was Nathalie who occupied the place of honor at the little tea-table, decorated with the United States flag, and who dispensed the dainty little china cups filled with what was patriotically called *Liberty Tea* in honor of the young ladies who had given it its name over a hundred years ago, and who the Pioneers had impersonated last year in their entertainment of "Liberty Banners."

After the teacups had been removed, and one or two announcements of coming events had been made, Mrs. Morrow, with sudden gravity, said:

"We have gathered here to-day, girls, to commemorate the Spirit of Liberty, the one great principle that has budded like Aaron's rod, and brought forth other qualities as splendid and compelling as itself, as, for example, the principles represented in our national emblem. The principle of humanity, which means living the Golden Rule by taking thought for your neighbor; democracy, the equal rights of mankind, which in turn gives rise to justice, loyalty, and unity,—the principles that have not only given us that wonderful, mystical something called Americanism, but the principles that mean the Christianity of Christ."

After the girls had discussed the meaning of liberty and summed it up as standing for man's right to self-

expression, either by words or actions, and made it clear that it had to be governed by the law of self-control, as too much freedom would mean license or lawlessness, Mrs. Morrow continued her little talk.

“Liberty is not something that sprang into being with the coming of the settlers to America, for it is as old as man himself; but under the rule of king-ridden states it has been fighting its way through many long centuries, because the peoples of the Old World failed to grasp its meaning.

“Under the stimulus of the Reformation and the Revival of Learning, induced by the printing of the Bible and other books, the early comers to America, as they endeavored to worship God as they thought right, not only left the intolerant forms and bigoted narrowness of the Old World, but threw the first light on liberty by teaching man his right to freedom of the soul. The Pilgrims and Puritans were the Pioneers of liberty, for they not only gave us religious freedom, but, by establishing a government for and by the people without the aid of king or bishop, laid the cornerstone of a great commonwealth, and gave us democratic liberty.

“If you girls would make a study of the history of the Thirteen Colonies,” went on their director, “you would learn that not only each Colony contributed to the principles embodied in every stripe, star, and color of our spangled banner, but that a universal love of

freedom seems to have animated the settlers. Each individual group, to be sure, had its own peculiar belief, but, in the working-out of their cherished ideals and aspirations, liberty was the bone and sinew of every colony.

“It was under the influence of these early settlers — the giving of their best to mankind in their struggles for freedom — that the ideals and beliefs of the New World were molded into higher and better institutions, purified and strengthened by a new significance. Their ideals and aspirations were essentially different from anything known before,— ideals peculiar to this soil, which were absolutely American, not only in religious freedom, but in the institutions of local government and the union of all states into one, which gave rise to the United States of America.

“Now we have come to the great subject of the hour, the war, and a question I have heard several of you girls ask, ‘Why are we in the war?’”

Nathalie felt her face redden, and shifted uneasily in her seat. O dear! she did wish she had not come. Of course the talk was very interesting, but still she didn't want to think of this terrible war.

“I have heard it said,” pursued Mrs. Morrow, “that we are in the war to avenge the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and that we must not allow the Germans to break the international law by killing our sailors and seamen. I have heard it said, too, that if they con-

quered the Allies they would come over here and fight us. These are all sufficient reasons in a sense."

The lady paused, and then, with grave solemnity, said: "And I have heard it put forth that we are in the war to maintain our national honor and integrity. I think I hear some of you girls say, 'But we haven't done any wrong; we have kept neutral; our principles are not involved.'"

Nathalie's eyes were aglow as she bent forward, and with parted lips anxiously awaited Mrs. Morrow's reply to this question.

"Now that we realize the depth and grandeur of the principles given to us by the founders of this nation, and know that every time our flag is unfurled it tells the world that religious and democratic liberty were born on these shores of America, are we going back on these principles? Are we going to allow other nations to say that our principles are just in the flying of our colors, that they stand for nothing but self-praise and the nation's glorification?"

"No," cried the lady with grave emphasis, "by our love for our flag, by our love for our birth-land, by our reverence for the men who taught us these principles we swear to defend every time we hoist our colors, we must get into this war. We must prove that our flag is in the right place, and that we carry it in our hearts. We must strive to show with our

soul's might that we are living these principles by being true to ourselves and to our nation's honor, and carry our feelings into action.

“We must forget self, our desire for selfish ease and pleasure. We must align ourselves with the suffering masses of people across the sea, and help them to rid themselves of the iron-shod heel of one-man power. We must stand side by side with the Allies for humanity, democracy, and liberty. We must show the world that the so-called divine right of kings is a worn-out belief of savagery, and prove by the principles back of our flag, prove by the living of these principles, the sacredness of God's heritage to man, the right of the world's people to know, as we know, the principles that have made us the freest people in the world.

“Each one of you girls must not only do your bit, but must give of your best to your brothers and sisters over the sea. And if the best means the giving-up of those who are so dear to us, we must prove that we are true daughters of liberty, and send them forth cheerfully, to give freedom and liberty to the world.”

There was an impressive silence, and then Mrs. Morrow's voice broke into song. In another moment the girls had joined their voices with hers, and were loudly sounding forth the old-time tune and the well-beloved words:

“In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

“He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet;
Our God is marching on!”

Later in the afternoon, as the girls hurried happily out from the white house on the corner, each one chatting merrily, intent on telling what she had done or intended to do for the war, Nathalie alone was silent, weighed down, as it were, by a strange sense of shame. Yes, she had been blindly selfish, and had failed to realize the momentousness of the great questions of the day. When she had been called upon, to give love and sympathy to her neighbors, the poor suffering masses of people over seas, she had selfishly turned her back to the call—she had failed to show herself a daughter of liberty. Why, she was not a patriot,—no, not even an American; and in the spirit, if not in the letter, she had dishonored Dick, yes, and her father, who had always been so steadfast and true to everything that was American.

That night Nathalie could not sleep, but tossed restlessly from side to side, as parts of Mrs. Morrow's speech kept forcing themselves upon her memory. And just as she had succeeded in driving them away,

and also the remorseful thought that she had not given her best, that she had failed to show greatness, the song the girls had sung that afternoon, with the luring, old-time air and the soul-stirring words, flashed with vivid distinctness :

“ As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.”

The girl sat up in bed, and in a crooning whisper hummed the whole verse through, repeating again and again,

“ As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.”

The beauty as well as the significance of the words had made their appeal. Christ had died to make men holy; she must give of her best to make men free. She must show herself great, but what could *she* do?

But even as the question came, so flashed the answer, and Nathalie was again softly humming,

“ Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet;
Our God is marching on.”

And then suddenly a thought stamped itself upon her mind. The girl caught her breath. Yes, she had given Dick up because she had been forced to do so, but now she would make the sacrifice, give the best of herself; she would stop once and forever all useless repining. She would keep herself cheered by the

thought that she was glad — she gritted her teeth determinedly — that she had Dick to give to help make people free.

Yes, but she *must do something* — she must give *her best*; no, it might not be anything very great or big, but she must show she was a true daughter of liberty. Ah, she knew what she could do, and then Nathalie fell back on her pillow, and although she lay very still, her brain was alert, thinking and planning. Yes, she could get the girls together; she would begin the very next morning. She would have every one in it, for liberty wouldn't be liberty unless it was free to all. And then one thought and another kept popping into her mind, until finally the tired brain went on a strike and refused to register any more thoughts, and Nathalie, without a word of protest, tumbled into the land o' dreams.

The next morning she was up betimes, and was soon singing cheerily at her work, every now and then stopping in the midst of some favored melody, to repeat softly,

“As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.”

In such a state of cheerfulness time flew swiftly, and soon Nathalie was up in the attic writing a note. Yes, it sounded all right, she decided as she read it over slowly. And then her hand was again flying

over the paper, and another note was written, and then another, and still another, until, with a sigh of relief, Nathalie found that she had them all finished. No, she wasn't going to leave any one out. Quickly gathering up the notes the girl was off, running lightly down the stairs, and then flying swiftly across the lawn to see what Helen would think of the thing she had planned in the stillness of the night.

CHAPTER III

THE LIBERTY GIRLS

“**Y**ES, we must prove that we have the true spirit of liberty, the spirit of humanity,” Nathalie spoke very earnestly, “and that is why I have asked Marie Katzkamof to belong to the club. She is the little lame girl, *you know* who she is; she sits at the news-stand on the corner of Main and West streets, and sells the papers when her father is at business. She is always knitting — sweaters for the soldiers, she says. It makes me feel ashamed when I realize how hard she works to do her ‘little bit.’”

“You are right, Nathalie,” replied Helen thoughtfully, “for you have struck something big in your idea that we are all Americans, and that the club should be free to all. But hurry over, and see what Mrs. Morrow has to say. I believe she’ll think the whole scheme is fine.”

But Nathalie was already at the door, her brown eyes sparkling with suppressed excitement, and her cheeks flushed with the soft pink that all the girls admired, and *some* envied. And then she was making her way across the road to the white house on the corner, still softly humming,

“As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.”

The Tuesday that Nathalie had designated in her notes to the invited girls had arrived, and the girl, somewhat pale from nervousness, was standing before a small table in the living-room of her home. Facing her were a dozen or more girls, all more or less in an attitude of expectant interest as they sat, some on chairs, others on the couch in the hall, while the Pioneers, as was their wont when chairs were limited, were seated in a circle on the floor.

“Now, girls,” cried Nathalie, determined to plunge ahead and get the thing started before her enthusiasm and nerves collapsed to a frazzle, as she told Helen afterward, “I have asked you all here to-day, to form a club in the interest of liberty. The Girl Pioneers know just how big a thing liberty is, for they had the pleasure of hearing Mrs. Morrow, our Pioneer director, in her little talk on liberty. Oh, Lillie Bell, would you mind repeating what you remember of Mrs. Morrow’s speech?” Nathalie broke off abruptly, turning towards that young lady, one of the most popular of the Pioneer girls. “I know you have a good memory, Lillie,” Nathalie pleaded, “and are such a good elocutionist that you can do it better than any one else I know.”

This calling upon Lillie Bell was a stroke of finesse on the part of Nathalie. For Lillie, when she had

learned that the club was to be so democratic that the daughter of her newsdealer, a Russian Jew, had been invited, had loftily declared that although she was a good American, and wanted to do all she could for liberty, well, she didn't know that she cared to chum with all the Jews in the town.

Nathalie had been keenly alive to the desirability of having Lillie a member, because she was not only bright and efficient, but because she was such a good entertainer. This declaration of Lillie's, however, had caused her spirits to fall below zero, and she began to fear that the whole thing would prove a fizzle. But when so many girls had responded to her invitation, all keyed to expectant curiosity — Lillie among them — her spirits had taken a leap into the nineties. Immediately her alert mind had begun to plan in what way, and how, she could interest Lillie in the club, so that she would take an active part in its doings. And here was her chance.

Lillie Bell, with her usual timely poise, gracefully and smilingly rose to the occasion. In her most luring manner she not only repeated Mrs. Morrow's speech, but interpreted it with such a stirring American spirit, that not only was Nathalie electrified, but the whole audience were inspired to such a pitch of enthusiasm that they broke into hearty applause.

As soon as the clamor subsided, Nathalie cried earnestly, "Now that we all know what liberty means,

and the possibilities that lie before us, I propose that we form ourselves into a club to be known as 'The Liberty Girls.' "

Another outburst of approval brought the speaker to a halt, but only for a moment, and then she went on smilingly, "Well, I am glad that you like the name, for it means something." Then she briefly told of the seventeen young girls, who, over a hundred and fifty years ago, had formed a club called "The Daughters of Liberty."

"They did their bit," smiled the girl, "by sewing all day on homespun garments to prove that the colonies could be independent of the mother-country, and swore that they would drink no tea until the tax had been removed. They also declared that they would have nothing to do with any of their young gentlemen friends who dared to drink the detested beverage.

"But, girls," said Nathalie rather hurriedly, as she stepped from behind the little table, "if we are to form ourselves into a club, we shall have to have a chairman, for although the idea originated with me, that does not mean that you have got to have me for a leader," she ended modestly.

"But we don't want any one but you," called out some one enthusiastically, which cry was so emphatically echoed by others, that Nathalie stood hopelessly bewildered, a wave of color dyeing her face a rose-pink.

But in this crucial moment Helen came to her rescue, and jumping on her feet cried,—even Lillie, Grace, and Edith bobbed up too,—“Girls, I make the motion that we form ourselves into a club to be known as ‘The Liberty Girls,’ and that we elect for president, Miss Nathalie Page. All in favor of this motion stand up!”

There was a quick, simultaneous movement of many feet, and then, as Helen sensed that Nathalie had been duly elected leader by her mates, she called out, “Well, Nathalie, you will have to be president, for every one wants you.”

“Yes, and we won’t have any one else,” added Edith quickly, with a sudden clap of her hands. This was the signal for the girls to start up a loud clapping in approval of the newly elected president, whose rose-pink cheeks had deepened to scarlet as she stood bowing, somewhat confusedly, to them.

Whereupon Lillie Bell gracefully came to the fore, and dramatically seizing the hand of the young girl while leading her back to her seat, in an impressive manner cried, “Allow me, Miss Nathalie Page, to lead you to the seat of honor, as the president of the club, ‘The Liberty Girls.’”

Nathalie bowed and laughed with embarrassment, but she determined to carry off the honors bestowed upon her with a good grace, and as soon as the some-

what noisy demonstrations of pleasure from the girls had ended, she said modestly, "Girls, I thank you for wanting me to be your leader, and only hope I will make a good one."

There was more plaudits, and then Nathalie, with grave seriousness, said: "Girls, now that we have pledged ourselves not only as a club, but as individuals, to further the cause of liberty, I would suggest that our watchword be, 'Liberty and humanity — our best.' Humanity means to be helpful and kind to our neighbors, our best means to work with a strenuous will to do everything we can to that end. Our neighbors at the present moment loom very large and big as the needy and suffering ones overseas, as the sick, the wounded, the dying, the prisoners, the refugees, and all those who are fighting on land and sea; yes, and those in the air, and all those who are helping to care for the ones I have mentioned, as the doctors and nurses, for they, too, all need help. If we can't fight, we have got to help those who are fighting in our stead. Yes," she added solemnly, "and we must be prepared even to have the desire to do what we can for our enemies, for as liberty makes no discrimination as to who shall enjoy it, so in the doing of humane acts we should remember all."

As Nathalie, highly elated by the enthusiasm shown by her audience, stood waiting for quietness, suddenly

her eyes rested on little lame Marie Katzkamof, whose big black eyes shone like two stars from her pale, sallow face. Nathalie had another inspiration.

She bent forward and in a low, earnest voice cried, "Do you think, little Marie, that you would enjoy being a member of this club? Wouldn't you like to do something — yes, *your best* — to help the poor refugees in France and Belgium, and the brave soldier boys who are fighting, so that the whole world can enjoy liberty?"

"Yiss, ma'am; I have a glad on liberty," the girl giggled nervously, "but it's like this mit me, I likes I shure I don't make you no trouble."

"But it won't be any trouble to us, Marie," answered Nathalie with a smile. "We will all help you; humanity means to help others."

"But, Missis Page," the girl's face was scarlet, her big eyes mournful. "It's like this mit me, I ain't stylish like these young ladies; I make nottings mit them, for I ain't shmardt, hein? Und this leg it ain't yet so healthy. Und, Missis Page, I'm lovin' mit liberty, but I ain't lovin' much mit Krisht, for I'm a Jewess."

Nathalie faltered a moment, for she had seen a smile creep into the eyes of the girls, which she knew would become a laugh if she did not say the right thing. "Yes, you may not love Christ, as we Christians," she answered quickly, "but if you love the liberty, per-

haps you may learn to know what it means to love Him. And then, Marie, that will make no difference, for as long as you want to help the suffering ones, and show humanity, that makes you an American, no matter who, or what you are."

"Thank you, Missis Page," the girl's face had lighted with repressed joy, "sure I'm an American, I can't do nottings mit the fight, like the soldiers, but you bet yer life I can knit for them, hein?" And the little daughter of Israel held up a strip of wool with its two shiny needles. "Shure und my hands are straight," she continued pathetically, "even if my legs ain't healthy."

Nathalie's eyes blurred, but she answered smilingly, "Why, that will be lovely, Marie." Then, turning towards the girls, she cried, "Every one in favor of appointing Marie Katzkamof captain of the Knitting Squad, please hold up her hand." And every hand went up. "And we'll call you Captain Molly," went on Nathalie, "in memory of that brave young woman, Molly Pitcher, who, when her husband fell dead at the battle of Monmouth, during the Revolution, took his place,— she was carrying water to the soldiers,— seized the rammer of his gun, and fired it. And she kept on firing it," cried Nathalie with glowing eyes, "with the shot and shell flying all about her, until the battle was over. And with that name and the bravery of *that* Molly — for I know you are brave, Marie —

I know you will do *your best* for liberty, and for the soldiers who are on the firing-line, doing their best, as the Sons of Liberty, for the right of every man in the world."

After Lillie Bell had been duly elected vice-president of the club, and several other club matters had been disposed of, Nathalie proposed, as an inspiration to the girls, that they form a circle in the center of the room, and stand with clasped hands, to show the interdependence of one upon the other. "Then in turn," she explained, "let each girl tell of some woman, or girl, who, by her bravery in doing what she could for some one else, or for the world, has given of her best to mankind, and shown that she was a true lover of humanity, and a daughter of liberty."

The girls, quickly grasping Nathalie's idea, were soon standing in a circle, hurriedly trying to concentrate their minds on some one woman who had given of her greatness to mankind.

"Can we tell about the Pioneer women?" asked a Girl Pioneer timidly.

"Yes, indeed," answered the young president, "and we ought to hear about them first, too, for they were the ones who really taught us what it means to love liberty. Although they were not the first women who did great things for their fellow-beings, they were the ones who made clear to us that real liberty means humanity, justice, and democracy for all."

Helen now started the liberty chain by clasping the hand of her neighbor on each side of her and telling of the women of the *Mayflower*, who, by their acts of sacrifice, and stern determination to worship God as they thought right, gave us religious freedom.

Nita told of the coming of the ship, the *Arbella*, to Gloucester with John Winthrop, the governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the two noted Puritan brides, the Lady *Arbella* and Anne Bradstreet, the latter our first American poetess. And gave testimony of their devotion to Puritanism, and their desire to benefit mankind.

One Pioneer told of America's first club-woman, Anne Hutchinson, portraying her trial and banishment from Boston, in her efforts to benefit mankind by teaching them freedom of thought. Another told of Mary Dyer, the noted Quakeress, and how she was hanged from an old elm on Boston Common because she believed in freedom of religion.

Margaret, the wife of John Winthrop, the governor, and Susannah, the mother of John Wesley, both beloved for their sweet piety and charity, were cited as examples of having given of their best in being the ideal wife and mother. Lillie Bell told of Florence Nightingale, the young English woman who gave up a life of luxury to help the soldiers during the Crimean War in 1854. She became known as "The Lady of the Lamp," from a statue of her as she stands with a

nurse's lamp in her hand, erected in a church in London.

A Girl Scout told of Dorothy Dix, that wonderful woman who made it her life-work to visit prisons and insane asylums, in order to institute reforms for the care and comfort of the inmates. She also did much for the relief of the wounded soldiers during the American Civil War.

Jenny Lind, the great Swedish singer, was cited as having given to humanity when she gave her time and voice to raise thousands of dollars for the benefit of broken-down musicians and writers. Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe gave of her best, Edith declared, when she wrote her book, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and showed the world the evils of slavery; as also Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, when she wrote that wonderful patriotic song, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The two noted women astronomers, Caroline Herschel and Maria Mitchell, when they studied the heavens in the interest of science, gave of their best. Also Charlotte Cushman, the great actress, who raised large sums of money by her acting, and gave it to the Sanitary Fund, during the Civil War, was quoted as a lover of humanity.

The Baroness Burdett-Coutts and Miss Helen Gould, two of the world's noted philanthropists, as well as Miss Louisa Alcott, in her writings for the youth of America, and other women writers were

added to the growing list of Liberty Daughters. Dolly Madison, the beautiful First Lady of the Land, showed herself a true American during the War of 1812. When the British burned Washington she refused to leave the White House until the portrait of Washington was carried to a place of safety, while she herself took the Declaration of Independence, with its autographs of the signers, away with her, so that it would not be lost to America.

Even Marie, alias Captain Molly, caught the inspiration of the Liberty Chain, and told of a young Russian girl, who, rather than betray the secrets of a great man, from a paper that had fallen into her hands, allowed herself to be exiled to Siberia. Then came the war stories, as that of the noted Quakeress, Lydia Darrach, who, during the Revolution, on learning the secrets of the British officers who were quartered at her house, endured untold hardship in traveling many miles in the dead of winter to reveal them to the American patrol, so as to save the Continental Army from disaster.

Hannah Weston, who filled a pillow-case with pewter-ware when she heard that a certain town was in need of ammunition, and carried it many miles through the woods at night, was cited for her bravery and her sacrifice, in her effort to help others. The story of Betty Zane, and how she ran from the palisade of a Western fort to her brother's hut for a keg of powder

in the fire of a tribe of Indians, although a familiar one, was listened to with glowing interest.

Ruth Wyllis, who hid the charter of Connecticut in an oak tree, and Katy Brownell, the color-bearer at the battle of Bull Run, who stood by the flag in the face of the advancing foe, and who would have been shot to death if a soldier had not pulled her away, were but two recitals of brave deeds for the sake of humanity.

But at last the liberty chain came to an end by Nathalie telling of Saint Margaret, a plain, uneducated Irish woman, who, after losing her husband and child, devoted her life and every penny she made to the cause of orphan children. A statue, she said, had been erected in New Orleans to this noble woman, who gave of her best to humanity when she devoted her life to these little waifs.

After the girls had returned to their seats, Nathalie appointed seven squads. She had made it seven, she said, not only because it was a lucky number, but because there were just seven letters in the name, *Liberty*. Helen was made the captain of the Florence Nightingale Squad, since she had gained many honors, as a Girl Pioneer, as an expert maker of bandages.

Nita, with a Girl Scout as a running mate, was made captain of the Scrap-Book Squad, which meant the making of scrap-books for the convalescing soldiers in the hospitals. Lillie Bell and a Camp Fire Girl were placed at the head of the Garments Squad for the cut-

ting and sewing of garments for the refugee children of France and Belgium. Two Girl Scouts were made captains of the Flower Squad, with the purpose of raising and selling flowers for the Liberty Loan fund.

Jessie Ford had charge of the comfort-kits for the soldier-boys, while Barbara Worth, who was an expert knitter, was appointed to work with Captain Molly, the Russian Jewess. Nathalie was unanimously chosen as the captain of the Liberty Garden, with Edith Whiton and several other Girl Pioneers. They were not only to raise vegetables and fruits in their garden-to-be, but they were to do canning as well.

After some discussion it was decided that the club members wear a uniform consisting of a white shirt-waist, with the letters L. G. in red on the arm, on the corners of their white sailor-collars, and on the hat-bands of their white sailor-hats, and to wear white or khaki skirts.

Nathalie had just appointed a committee to scour the town for a parcel of ground to use as a flower and Liberty garden, when a sudden noise was heard. The girl looked quickly up, to see Mrs. Morrow standing in the doorway leading from the dining-room, with her arms filled with flowers. In her hand was a large bell, which she was jingling softly, while her blue eyes smiled down upon the girls with radiant good-will.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERTY GARDEN

NATHALIE stared in amazement, and then, recovering her usual poise, she cried, "Oh, Mrs. Morrow, please come right in, for I want you to meet my Liberty Girls." As the girl spoke she advanced towards her unexpected guest, who was coming slowly forward, as if not assured of her welcome. But the cordiality expressed in the tones of Nathalie's voice, and the fact that the girls had all risen on their feet,—her own girls at attention in the Pioneer salute,—with their faces aglow with pleasure, quickly assured her that her welcome was a hearty one.

With a sudden movement she turned to Nathalie and asked, "May I have the floor a moment, Miss President?" As the girl assented, although somewhat mystified, Mrs. Morrow took her place behind the small table, and with a quick nod of greeting to the faces upturned to hers, cried: "Girls, I am greatly pleased to see you here to-day, and to know that our Pioneer Blue Robin's little plan to make you all work with a keener zest for liberty, has succeeded so well. I also want to assure you of my hearty co-

operation, and my wish that all of you, those who are Pioneers, and those who belong to other clubs, will be inspired to better work in your own organizations by the fact that you have banded together to stand unitedly as Daughters of Liberty, in order to show that you are all *loyal Americans*. In proof of my good wishes I am going to present the club with a bell. It is needless to say that it is not *the* Liberty Bell, but a facsimile in miniature.

“Wait, I have not finished,” laughingly protested the lady as she held up her hand,—for some of the girls had started to clap. “I want you to know before your president rings it,—it is to be rung to call you together in the sacred cause of liberty,—that way up in the top has been inserted a very tiny chip from the real Liberty Bell,—the bell that was rung over a hundred years ago to announce that the thirteen colonies had become the United States of America. I hope, girls, that when you hear this bell ring you will feel the same inspiration to do your best as animated the patriots in the war of 1776.”

As Mrs. Morrow paused, the long-delayed clapping burst forth with such vigor that she and Nathalie — she had drawn the girl to her and was pressing the bell into her hand — had to smile and bow again and again. But the clapping only halted for a space, for when Nathalie saw that quietness reigned, she rang the liberty bell so loudly and determinedly, while a mischiev-

ous twinkle glowed in her eyes, that it broke forth again.

As soon as the demonstration was over and the bell-ringing had subsided, Mrs. Morrow's voice was heard again: "Now, Liberty Girls, I am going to ask your president to take a vote to get your opinion as to *who you think* told the best story about great women in your liberty chain.

"Perhaps you do not know," the gray-blue eyes deepened, "but I was in the dining-room, although not purposely an eavesdropper, and had the pleasure of hearing the stories told. I have formed an opinion as to the best story-teller, but would like to know if your opinion coincides with mine."

But alas, there were so many different opinions as to the best story, and as to who was the best narrator, that, to even matters Mrs. Morrow had to take her big bouquet of flowers and divide it into three or four nosegays. But a smile of satisfaction gleamed in the eyes of many when Marie, the little Jewess, received a bouquet, and a few words of commendation from the giver. The little captain's delight was so genuine, and her eyes beamed so joyously, that every one rejoiced with her.

After the flowers were distributed, and the girls had sung a few patriotic songs, they filed out into the sunshine, happily aglow with the joy of the meeting and the inspiration it had brought to them.

Several weeks later we find Nathalie coming slowly down the garden-walk with its old-time hedge, from the big gray house. The tall pines — now good old friends — that bordered the path bowed their tops in a cheery good-morning, as she walked beneath their shade.

She had just given her usual morning lesson of two hours to her young friend, for Nathalie, on her return from Camp Laff-a-Lot last summer, had found that her studies with Nita were to be continued. Yes, and she had banked every penny that she could spare from her weekly salary of ten dollars. It had seemed such a big sum at first, but alas, now that her mother's income had slowly dwindled, and she had been compelled to use it for her own personal needs, and to lay part of it aside every week to repay Mrs. Van Vorst the loan for Dick's operation, it seemed a mere pittance.

But to-day she felt unusually joyful, for the last penny of that haunting debt had been paid, and she was now free to call her money her own. If there had been many disappointments in life — the going to college was still a luring hope — and self-denials, added to the unpleasantness of doing housework since their coming to Westport, there had been several compensations that had cast their rosy shadows across the darkness.

One was the joy and the profit she had gained from

being a Pioneer, and the other was the great pleasure that had come to her in the knowledge that she had a purpose in life. Yes, she had told Helen many times, "I think it is one of the delights of life to be legitimately busy, and to know that you are really doing something that is a help to yourself or some one else." And now, added to these compensating joys had come the thrills and joys from the new organization, the Liberty Girls, for that little patriotic club now numbered almost a hundred. And it had thrived so well, and Nathalie had gained so many honors from being its founder, that sometimes she feared that she, too, would become a bird of the air, like Dick, only in a different way, from sheer conceit.

But if she had been overmuch praised, and had found it a pleasant diversion to plan and dream over the club's future successes, she had also found hard work and great discouragement. Discouragement, too, over such small things, when the girl came to face them in the coolness of after-thought, that she had felt like throwing the whole thing up, or else just letting things drift, and taking what pleasure she could, without so much conscientious worry over doing *her best*.

But through all the storm and stress Helen had buoyed her with the frequent, sensible remark, that if it had taken the world thousands of years to comprehend the true meaning of democracy and liberty, she

must expect her girls would be slow in realizing many things. But it was tiresome to hold the reins of government, and yet sometimes be unable to stop their silly chatter, or useless argument over mere trifles, all the while holding back the legitimate work by their dallying.

Yes, and it had been an awful strain to manage that Liberty Garden. Of course the Pioneers were all good workers, and she had given each one some one thing to study over, but still she had had to know about these things herself, so as to be sure they would do the right thing.

But it was something worth while, she reflected sagely, to know that there are three kinds of soil, how to test it with litmus paper to see if it was sour or not, and, if it was, how to neutralize it, or sweeten its acidity. Then she had had to know what kind of chemicals acted as food to the soil, so as to know what each plant or vegetable required to enrich it and to sustain life. She had also learned how to draw moisture from the land and how to fertilize it.

By placing seeds on wet blotting-paper in saucers she had demonstrated how long it would take them to germinate, so as to be able to write her germinating-table for the girls. How old seeds should be before planting, how deep to plant each kind, the method of planting, and how many seeds to plant, and the distance apart, had all seemed tiresome and trivial things

to many, but it was necessary knowledge to a would-be farmer.

Ah, she had reached the bank. She was going to get that ten dollars deposited before it melted away. Suddenly her eyes became pools of brightness, and the dimples twinkled in the red glow of her cheeks, for there, right in front of her, stood Mrs. Morrow, with a kiddie boy, as the girl called the twins, on each side of her. There was such genuine pleasure in the lady's smiling blue eyes, that Nathalie impulsively cried, "Oh, Mrs. Morrow, this is just lovely! I'm so glad to see you? When did you get back?" for her good friend had been away for several weeks.

"Last night, Nathalie, and I am so pleased to meet you," was the cordial greeting, "for I have heard so many reports about the Liberty Girls' club that I am anxious to hear all about it from you."

"Oh, it is just the dandiest thing, Mrs. Morrow," cried the girl jubilantly. And then, lured by the kindly interest in her friend's eyes, her tongue unloosened, and she was soon busy telling about the club's many experiences, and the good that had come from the industry of its members.

"And Helen is a dear," Nathalie rattled on, "for she has taught her girls the most wonderful things, and now they have all enrolled as Red Cross members. She had been reading to them from Florence Nightingale's 'Notes on Nursing,' and now she has taken

up other works on the same subject. Lillie, too, reads to the girls at the club meetings about great women, while I inspect the work. The Garment and Comfort-Kit squads meet together, and Jessie Ford not only tells them about the French villages and the towns that have been destroyed by the Germans, but reads to them from the 'Prince Albert Book.'

"We are to have our Liberty Pageant to-morrow, and all the people who live on the line of parade have been perfectly lovely, for they have sold tickets for the seats on their verandas, and are to give the money to us for the Liberty Fund, so we can buy Liberty bonds. And the day after," continued Nathalie, "we are to have a liberty sale on Mrs. Van Vorst's grounds, the Pioneers' meeting-place, you know. Indeed, we are almost over the tops of our heads in work, and we have enough plans to last the rest of the summer. Mother declares I am the busiest girl she knows."

"And the Liberty Garden, has that turned out well? I understand it is the work of my girls, the Pioneers."

"Indeed, yes," returned her companion; "it has been said to be one of the beauty spots of Westport. We have bordered it with nasturtiums, poppies, marigold, sweet peas, and all sorts of old-time posies. But *we had* a time getting the ground, for this year every one was hysterically wild to cultivate every inch of ground for a war-garden, and nobody wanted to loan any. Finally, however, Edith and Lillie tried their

powers of persuasion on old Deacon Sawyer,— you know he's one of the pillars of the old Presbyterian church, and he let us have an old lot of his on Summer Street, about a hundred feet or so square.

“ And how we have worked over it, for of course it had to be plowed. Peter, Mrs. Van Vorst's gardener,— he's the kindest-hearted thing alive,— offered to plow it for us, but we declined with a vote of thanks, for we felt *that* wouldn't be our work. So Edith scoured the town until finally she borrowed an old nag from the livery-stable man,— he was just ready to crumble to pieces,— and Nita got a plow from Peter, and we plowed it ourselves.

“ But the time we had with that old steed,” Nathalie's eyes gleamed humorously, “ for just as he would be going nicely across the field, he would be inspired to take the ‘ rest-cure ’ and stand stock-still, and no amount of pulling — we all got behind him and pushed — or coaxing would induce him to budge a hair. O dear, we worked over him until we thought we should expire with the heat, our faces all red and perspiring.

“ Then Edith took to pulling his tail; she said she had read that would make a balky horse go. Oh, it was funny to see her!” Nathalie laughed outright. “ But, dear me, it only made him lift one leg, very slowly, and then the other, and then settle down in the same old rut, as still as the wooden horse of Troy,

“You know Edith is a stick-at-the-job sort of person,” commented Nathalie confidentially, “and what do you think? She actually got a firecracker and set it off under that beast. But even that fiery commotion only caused him to wink one lash and then resume his restful pose. But finally the spirit moved him, and so suddenly,” laughed the girl, “that Edith went sprawling on the ground, and Jessie tumbled in a most humble attitude,—on her knees,—minus the reins, while our noble steed went careering at a loping gallop across the field, while we, like a lot of mutes, stared at him in stupid wonder.

“Well, after we got the land all plowed,” resumed Nathalie, “we had irrigated it, by making a little ditch to let the water run down from the hilly slope at one end, we planted our vegetables in rows. But alas,” the girl gave a sigh, “when the plants began to come up we found that the whole field was filled with coarse rye-grass which had roots, and which had simply been cultivated, one might say, by the plow.

“We did not know what to do at first, until we remembered our Pioneer motto, ‘I Can,’ and then we set to work with a will, and spaded every inch of that lot; and it meant hard labor, too, for the grass was like gristle. When the little plants began to come up and a girl would pull a blade to see how it was doing, part of the plant would come up with the roots.

When we planted the different kinds of beans, using the string and stakes, and pressing down the ground hard with our feet, on *five* different occasions a violent rain came up during the night, and the next morning we found all the seeds uncovered and washed down into little piles at the end of the garden, and everything had to be done over again.

“After we had planted rows and rows of hills of corn and rejoiced to see coming forth little green plumes three inches high, we went to the garden in our uniforms one day, laden with our garden-tools, ready for work. But alas! we found that the crows had pulled out the corn from almost every hill; the little black imps had bitten off the kernels and gulped them down, and the stalks lay withering on the ground.

“Oh, I shall never forget the expression on Edith’s face that day,” said Nathalie thoughtfully, “when she saw the havoc wrought by those crows; it was such utter despair. I thought she was going to cry, but she didn’t — just hurried to the little shed where we keep our tools and things. When she reappeared her face was a sunbeam all right, as she exclaimed, ‘Well, girls, let’s get the better of those crows, and plant all over again.’

“Really, Mrs. Morrow, Edith inspired me to such respect for her indomitable courage and pluck,” went on the girl candidly, “that I shall always keep a very

warm place in my heart for her, notwithstanding that she sometimes gets on my nerves. Things went on swimmingly then until that awful drought came. We had no way of watering the garden except by watering-pots, and then we couldn't do our weeding, or cultivating, until late in the afternoon on account of the hot sun. But we did our best, and we have been repaid," smiled Nathalie, "although we did not produce as much as I had hoped. Still — well, you'll see at the pageant to-morrow." Nathalie, suddenly realizing that she had kept Mrs. Morrow standing for some time, while she rattled on about that garden, now bade her a hasty good-morning and hurried into the bank.

The young president of the Liberty Girls' club passed a somewhat troubled night, oppressed with the anxiety of her onerous responsibility, knowing that the following day would be a well-filled one. As the proposer and planner of the pageant there were numerous details to arrange at the very last moment, and she was so afraid that she would oversleep, that she awakened several times with a nervous start, only to find everything enveloped in darkness.

Arousing finally, to see the East streaked with red, and the golden rim of the sun gleaming above a silver line of clouds, she sprang out of bed with a devout little prayer of thankfulness that the day at least was to be a sunshiny one. An early breakfast, a hurried doing of her customary duties, and then she and Grace

— in the latter's car — were off to inspect the floats, eighteen of them, all ready in barns, or garages, awaiting her word that they were properly equipped for the liberty parade, which was to set forth on its journey through the town at two in the afternoon.

And then, with many misgivings, fearing that the whole thing might prove a fizzle,— for of course, many things had been wrong,— she hurried home for luncheon. Then came a hurried dressing, a whirl in an automobile, and she was dazedly taking her seat, a post of honor, on the front row of the grand-stand, erected by the Boy Scouts and Peter, in front of Mrs. Van Vorst's high garden-walls.

She barely had time to realize that the notables of the village were seated to the right and left of her, and to exchange a few greetings with one or two old-time friends, when she heard the ringing of a bell, the bell in the tower of the old Presbyterian church. This was the signal that the Liberty Pageant, way up at the other end of the town, was to issue from its shelter of green trees in front of the brick schoolhouse, and set forth on its march down through Main Street, the most important thoroughfare of the sleepy little town, with its wide, asphalted road shaded by noble old elms.

CHAPTER V

THE LIBERTY PAGEANT

NATHALIE was sure that she would never forget those tense, anxious moments as she stared with strained eyes, trying to catch the first glimpse of the coming show, while listening with alert ears to the oncoming tread of many feet, the noise and bustle of moving equipages, and the buzz and hum from the excited voices of the paraders and the on-lookers. High above the tumult floated snatches of patriotic song, as sung by the Liberty Girls, and the loud outbursts of applause from the villagers, who lined the street.

Ah, there it was! The girl's heart leaped in wild bounds, she bent forward eagerly, and then she was sitting with nervously clasped hands, gazing with wide-open eyes at the slowly passing floats of the Liberty Pageant. It was heralded by a procession of small maidens costumed as Greek goddesses, who, while moving and swaying rhythmically, and holding festoons of white flowers high above their heads, were singing Thomas Paine's "Liberty Tree." As they burst out with the old familiar words:

“In a chariot of light from the regions of day,
The Goddess of Liberty came;”

Nathalie was forcibly reminded of the time when she had last heard that song. Yes, it was almost a year ago, on Mrs. Van Vorst's lawn, when the Girl Pioneers had held their little playlet of “Liberty Banners.”

But her thoughts were again on the series of living pictures, and she smiled with her neighbors at the two small boys, one gowned as a doctor of the law, and the other as a brass-buttoned, blue-coated guardian of the peace, mounted on small horses caparisoned in white, whose trappings were marked in gold with the words “Law” and “Order.” As the diminutive doctor removed a pen from behind his ear, and peered learnedly through his goggles at a ponderous volume of law resting on a rack in front of him, while his companion on the neighboring flower-bedecked steed flourished a somewhat formidable-looking club, in token of the duties of his office, roars of laughter broke from the spectators.

But as their eyes wandered on to the snowy chariot, where the Spirit of Liberty stood with outstretched hands, one holding a branch of evergreen, and the other a lighted torch, their laughter ceased, and a strange hush stilled their noisy clamor. For this beautiful maiden in loosely flowing garments, with eyes as bright and shining as the starry chaplet that

wreathed her golden, unbound hair, was the little hunchback of the big gray house, Nita Van Vorst!

High above the "angel face," as Nathalie heard some one designate the girl's countenance, beautiful in its inspiration of happiness and patriotism — her deformity hidden by her white wings — was a large banner inscribed with the words:

"Enter at Freedom's porch,¹
For you I lift my torch,
For you my coronet
Is rayed with stars
My name is Liberty,
My throne is Law."

Guarding the Spirit of Liberty, while holding the streamers that floated from the banners above, were three more white-robed figures, representing the three great principles for which the world was striving. The unbound tresses of each were banded with white, and the first bore the word, "Democracy," the girl holding a white dove on her hand. The second was Humanity,— who cuddled a little Belgian refugee in her arms; and the third was Justice, who held aloft a pair of scales.

Nathalie's eyes radiated with gladness as she heard her neighbors voice their commendations in praises of the snowy chariot, the symbol of freedom, man's divine heritage from God. She began to feel that the many

¹ "Liberty Enlightening the World," E. C. Stedman.

hours that she and Helen had spent in devising and planning the details of this float and its mates, after all, might be appreciated.

The second picture was a marriage scene, a float marked "Virginia, 1607," and bore the famous words of its well-known orator, "Give me liberty, or give me death." It was decorated with white flowers in honor of the bride, Pocahontas,—impersonated by a Camp Fire girl in an Indian deerskin robe wondrously embroidered, and gay with many-colored beads,—who stood by the flower-decked pulpit amid a bower of green, being united in the holy bands of matrimony to John Rolfe.

The pose of the Indian maiden, the sweet seriousness of her tawny-dyed face and melting black eyes, the dignified pose of the Virginia planter, so vividly portrayed the romantic episode of the first American colony, that the many onlookers broke forth into shouts of approval. The quaintly attired figures of the Jamestown settlers in the foreground, and the group of Indian warriors with their war-plumes and dabs of paint were backed by a miniature tower. Some one inquired if it was a monument, much to the young president's disgust, as she considered it a noble work of art, which had been laboriously built of old bricks by the Girl Pioneers to represent the ruined tower of Jamestown.

Massachusetts was identified by the words, "The



“MY NAME IS LIBERTY,
MY THRONE IS LAW.”—Page 75.

Founders of Liberty," and a simulated boulder, which Blue Robin watched with great trepidation for fear the blithesome Mary Chilton, who stood victorious on this Forefathers' Rock, in too zealous jubilation would shake it too much. But the sprightly Pilgrim maiden, in gray cape and bonnet — it was the Sport — remembered the perilous foundations, and her scorn was discreetly tempered with caution as she gazed at the somewhat crestfallen John, who stood with one foot on the rock, and the other in a miniature shallop, where the Pilgrim Fathers stood dismally regarding this forerunner of the progressive American girl.

New York's contribution to the cause of freedom was a float brilliantly rampant with the Stars and Stripes, and a little white flag with a black beaver on it, the State's emblem. This float, which bore the words, "The Sons of Liberty," was in commemoration of the brave lovers of freedom on the little isle of Manhattan, who, in February, 1770, raised the first Liberty Pole in America at what is now known as City Hall Park. To be sure, it was cut down twice, but Liberty was afire, and it was finally hooped with iron and set up the third time, this time to stay.

"Liberty Hall," the name of the home of a one-time governor of New Jersey, was conspicuously seen on the next float. The girls had had some difficulty in getting an appropriate design for this little garden State that could be conveniently staged on a small-

sized platform. But they had evidently succeeded, for the quaintly gowned young maiden who acted her rôle in pantomime was loudly applauded as she flew to an improvised window, only to exhibit wild alarm, and then in frenzied haste scurried to an old-time escritoire. Here she rummaged a moment or so, and then extracted a bundle of letters, which she hurriedly secreted behind a loosened brick beside a simulated fireplace. In explanation of this silent drama Nathalie told that the young girl was Susannah, the daughter of William Livingston, the governor, who, when she saw the redcoats marching towards the house in her father's absence, quickly remembered his valuable papers and hid them for safety.

Five girls in homespun gowns, sewing on a United States flag, composed the New Hampshire float, which flew the State emblem, with its motto of Liberty inscribed on its side. The flag-makers, out of their best silk gowns, were making, in accordance with the description in the resolution just passed by Congress, June 14, 1777, the first Stars and Stripes that floated from the *Ranger*, to which Captain Paul Jones had just been commissioned, and which became known as "the unconquered and unstricken flag."

The Connecticut float bore the words, "The Liberty Charter," while a Liberty Girl, in a good impersonation of Ruth Wyllis, stood by a ladder resting against a somewhat strange simulation of the Charter Oak,

handing the supposed charter to the redoubtable Captain Wadsworth, who quickly secreted it in the hollow of the tree.

Terra Marie, the land of Mary, not only blazoned the words, "The Rights of Liberty," but portrayed Margaret Brent, the first woman suffragist, as she stood before the Maryland Assembly and pleaded with those worthies, with masculine energy, for her right to a say in the affairs of the little State, the State noted for its Toleration Act of 1649. Surely the good woman, as the representative of the deceased Governor Calvert, who had given his all to her with the words, "Take all, and give all," had a right to demand that she be heard.

The "Daughters of Liberty" made a brilliant showing in big letters on the little Rhody float, to honor the seventeen young girls who, in 1766, met at the home of good old Deacon Bowen, in Providence, and not only voiced their disapproval of the Colonies' tax on tea and on cloth manufactured in England, but formed the first patriotic organization known in America. It was the same inspiration of liberty that impelled their emulators to adopt their name, and to plan and push through the demonstration of which every one was so proud. As these Liberty maidens sat and spun at their looms, or whetted their distaffs on the float before the gaping crowd, they were guarded by two impersonations,—one the father of toleration, Roger Williams, who looked benignantlly down upon these devotees of free-

dom, and the other, America's first club-woman, the learned and martyred Anne Hutchinson.

Ah, but who is this riding astride a horse of sable blackness, curveting and prancing with chafing irritation at the tightened rein of its rider, who

“Burly and big, and bold and bluff,
In his three-cornered hat and coat of snuff,
A foe to King George and the English state,
Was Cæsar Rodney, the delegate.”¹

Of course there were a few who were not familiar with this little incident in the history of Delaware, and how the aforesaid Rodney, a member of the Continental Congress, spurred his horse from Dover to Philadelphia, a distance of eighty-one miles, to reach Independence Hall before night, in order to cast the vote of Delaware for freedom and independence. It was, indeed, a great ride, and the townspeople must have appreciated it, for the horse and rider were heartily cheered as they read the words on the banner: “It is Liberty's stress; it is Freedom's need.”

North Carolina proved most interesting, with the inscription, “The First Liberty Bell of America,” on a big hand-bell resting in the center of the float. The inscription and the bell aroused so much curiosity as to why it should take precedence of the old Liberty Bell at Philadelphia, that Nathalie was called upon by a group of friends sitting near, to explain that it really

¹ “Rodney's Ride.” Poems of American History. B. C. Stevenson.

was the first Liberty Bell used in the Thirteen Colonies, having sounded its peal for liberty when rung by the patriots of that State in 1771.

“ These patriots,” went on the young Liberty Girl, “ were the farmers and yeomanry of that State, who, in a vigorous protest against the tyrannous acts, misrule, and extortion during the administration of Governor Tryon, banded themselves into a company known as the Regulators. This bell was used to call them together in their struggle to maintain the rights of the people. These Regulators were not only hounded, persecuted, and sometimes executed as if they were rebels, but many of their number were killed at the battle of the Alamance,— so named because it took place on a field near that beautiful river,— when called upon to defend themselves, when fired upon by the governor and a company of the king’s troops. This battle has been called by some the first battle of the Revolution,” continued the young girl, “ and really inspired the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, the forerunner of the noted Declaration signed at Philadelphia. Some historians claim that ‘ God made the flower of freedom grow out of the turf that covered these men’s graves.’ ”

After this little story, the inscription,

“ And well these men maintained the right;
They kept the faith and fought the fight;
Till Might and Reason both
Fled fast before the oath

Which brought the God of Freedom's battles down
To place on patriot's brow the victor's crown!"¹

on the float was eagerly read and doubly appreciated. By the bell stood a tiny maid in the long skirt of the days of colonial childhood, wearing a long white apron. With the crossed kerchief and two bright eyes peeping from beneath the golden curls that strayed from below the little one's Puritan cap, she looked so sweet and demure that murmurs of admiration surged through the crowd, as they recognized that this diminutive lady represented the first white child born in America, little Virginia Dare.

Perhaps only a few knew that the white fawn that she was holding by her side featured the legend of the white doe that was said to haunt the isle of Roanoke for many years after the return of John White, who found only the word *Croatan* to tell him that his dear little granddaughter had disappeared, never to be found. The legend was so suggestive of the romance of North Carolina that the girls could not forbear giving it prominence on the float. They had had some trouble to find a white doe, but they had succeeded, and as Nathalie gazed at it she was again reminded of how the legend told that it used to stand mournfully gazing out to sea, on a hill of the little isle. The Indians, tradition asserted, had failed to kill it, until one day it was shot and killed by a silver bullet from the hand of an Indian chieftain, who claimed that the bul-

¹ "The Mecklenburg Declaration," Wm. C. Elam.

let had been given to him by Queen Elizabeth to kill witches, when a captive in England. As the beautiful doe sank upon the green sward and expired it was said to have murmured, "Virginia Dare! Virginia Dare!"

South Carolina, glaringly conspicuous with red and blue bunting, was marked "Liberty" in honor of one of the most famous flags used in the Revolutionary War. It was an ensign of blue with a white crescent in one corner, said to have been designed by Colonel Moultrie, of Carolina fame, and was declared to have been the first flag raised for liberty in the South.

In the center of the float a miniature trench had been raised, on the parapet of which stood a young lad waving this little blue flag, in honor of that gallant hero, Sergeant Jasper, who, when the flag was shot down during the bombardment of Fort Moultrie, June 28, 1776, leaped fearlessly to the top of the ramparts, received the colors, and held them in his hand until another staff was found.

"Lo! the fullness of time has come,
And over all the exiles' Western home
From sea to sea the flowers of Freedom bloom."

This little quotation was an apt one, from the Poet Whittier, but it was not necessary to make known to those gazing at it, that it stood for the strongest and proudest of the sisterhood of States, the home of free-men and heroes, of Robert Morris, Dr. Franklin and our good brother, William Penn.

This promoter of tolerance, independence, and the equal rights of men was fittingly portrayed by a Boy Scout. Benignant of face, mild of eye, with long hair falling from beneath his broad-brimmed hat, this friend of the friendless stood surrounded by a group of Indian warriors, resplendent in all the trappings of their tribes, making one of the numerous peace treaties.

But the Georgia float, buried in white to represent bolls of cotton, in memory of Eli Whitney, aroused such loud and long cries of admiration that Nathalie feared that after her hard labor the other floats had not received their due mead of appreciation. But no, it was the rousing melody of "Marching through Georgia," with its telling lines of,

"So we made a thoroughfare for Freedom and her train,
Sixty miles in latitude — three hundred to the main;"

and the inspiration that always comes to every Northern heart when they think of that gallant Son of Liberty, Sherman, and his triumphant march to the sea, that had created the sudden tumult.

The few men in regimentals of the Union army,— in real life, boys in brown from Camp Mills,— who were playing fifes and bugles on the float, and the straggling darkies in the rear, who were shouting with verve and gusto, as they followed in the wake of "Massa Sherman," intensified the appeal.

Ah, but now comes another edition of Liberty; this

time no less a personage than Lillie Bell, who, in the old costume worn over a year ago on the lawn of the big gray house, was standing on a chariot, an old farm wagon ablaze with the colors of Freedom, driven by four soldiers, representing France, England, Belgium, and America. The young goddess with sad and tragic eyes shining from beneath her helmet, gazed straight before her as she held a drawn sword clasped closely to her breast, in a graceful pose beneath the colors of the Allies floating gayly above her head.

Yes, there was no doubt, as Helen had often said, Lillie was born for stellar rôles, for somehow she had the happy faculty of always falling into the desired attitude and mood of the part she was to portray. A sudden silence gripped the line of people standing on the curb, as they saw this familiar figure of Liberty, in a new and strange rôle. On a beflagged chair of state good old Uncle Sam was seated, driving America's symbol of Freedom with reins of roses. Yes, roses to typify that the good protector of the United States' joys and interests was on the job,—as the Sport expressed it,—but doing it with the silken reins of love.

In the rear of this float a very small one appeared, but it was large enough to display a cannon and a pile of cannon-balls, and also a member of the United States Marines' crack quartet of machine-gunners. As he was the genuine article, as one of the girls declared,—being one of the town's boys home on a leave

of absence, and held a Lewis gun, he was received with wild cheers. A Jackie was perched on what was supposed to be a conning-tower, apparently on the watch for a submarine, while another soldier of the seas was ramming an old cannon, which created much laughter.

It wasn't much of a naval display, Nathalie thought regretfully, but it was the best they could do with their poor equipment, for these Daughters of Freedom were resolved to give due honor to these brave guardians of the sea.

A contingent of husky young chaps from Camp Mills were lionized as soon as their khaki-clad figures were sighted on the next float, which was marked, "Liberty Boys." A somewhat crude representation of a trench, piled with sand-bags, with a few boys in tin hats, with guns in their hands, clambering over it, represented to the spectators an "Over the Top" scene. In the rear of the trench a few soldiers were grouped around a camp-fire, presumably in a rest *billet*, having "eats." Every moment or so a soldier on this float would break forth into some war-song, which was quickly taken up by his comrades, and which helped to make the scene very realistic.

A small float with the Red Cross insignia, bearing the words, "The Cross of Liberty," with a few nurses seated around a table making bandages, now appeared. A white cot, with a soldier boy in it, suddenly silenced the cheers,—it was so suggestive of what every heart

held in silent dread and fear, ever since the United States had buckled to the fray.

But the sudden quiet was broken as the next, and last, float hove in sight. It was so artistically gotten up as a Liberty Garden, and represented so much freshness and beauty with its Liberty Girls, each one dressed to represent either a fruit or a vegetable, that it was wildly cheered. Masses of fruit piled up here and there peeped from bowers of green leaves, or hung in festoons across the float. Potatoes, green and red peppers, onions, cucumbers, and many other products of the garden were lavishly in evidence. Carol, the Tike, was arrayed as a pumpkin, a row of yellow leaves standing above a bunch of green ones. Carrots, cucumbers, turnips, even beans, beets, and strawberries were ingeniously represented by crêpe paper.

But the love of every heart were the Morrow twins, standing in the front of the float in blue overalls, wide-brimmed hats, and blue shirts, with rakes and hoes in their hands, as farmerettes, each one vigorously waving a flag. This float completed the series of pictures that Nathalie now felt had been duly admired, and she smiled happily at the many plaudits that again burst forth. But when the farmerettes and these living representations of fruits and vegetables broke into ¹

“Yes, we’ll rally round the farm, boys,
We’ll rally once again,

¹ “Patriotic Toasts,” Emerson Brooks.

Shouting the battle cry of 'Feed 'em.'
We've got the ships and money
And the best of fighting men,
Shouting the battle cry of 'Feed 'em.'

"The Onion forever, the beans and the corn,
Down with the tater — it's up the next morn —
While we rally round the plow, boys,
And take the hoe again,
Shouting the battle cry of 'Feed 'em!'"

it captured every heart present, and such prolonged applause rent the air that Nathalie was duly satisfied.

As she turned to leave the grand-stand it seemed to the tired girl as if every one in town stopped to shake hands, and to congratulate her on the huge success of the Liberty Pageant. When she finally arrived home, it was some hours before she reached her couch, for she found the family unduly excited, all eagerly talking; no, not about the pageant, but about a rather strange letter that had been received by Mrs. Page that afternoon.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRANGE LETTER

“OH, Helen, mother received the strangest letter last night,” cried Nathalie suddenly the following day, as she stood with her friend and Nita in the Red Cross booth at the Liberty Sale. “And I am afraid it means,” the girl’s eyes shadowed, “that I shall have to resign as president of the club.”

“Resign?” exclaimed Helen and Nita simultaneously. “Oh, Nathalie, you must not do that.”

“Well, I fear it will be necessary,” sighed the girl dolefully, “for the home duties come first, especially the duties to mother, and she wants to go — she really needs the change — and —”

“Go where?” questioned Helen sharply. “Oh, Nathalie, you are talking Dutch to us, and —”

“Sure she is,” voiced Nita quickly, “jumbling letters and resignations all together in a very queer way. Now suppose, young lady,” she commanded imperiously, seizing her friend by the arm impulsively, “that you unravel our tangled brains and tell us what you are aiming at.”

“Well, I guess I shall have to, from the stew you two girls have sizzled into,” replied Blue Robin laugh-

ingly. "Well, as I said," she continued more soberly, "mother received a letter last night. But I shall have to tell you a bit of family history, if you want to understand," she added hesitatingly.

As the two girls laughingly assured her that that would only make her explanation more interesting, Nathalie gathered up her threads and went on with her story. "Father had an older half-sister, whose mother — who came of very wealthy people in Boston — left her all of her money, so that she was quite wealthy, and in due time became very eccentric. Father said she was spoiled with her pot of gold.

"She married when quite young and had one son, who, shortly after the death of his father,— as soon as he was graduated from college,— went to Europe, fell in love with a pretty girl, and married her. I have never heard the details of this marriage, but I believe the girl was French. No, she may have been English; anyway it was quite a romance, and the young couple were quite happy.

"My aunt, however, was deeply wounded to think that her only son, her idol, had spoiled all her plans and married some one whom she considered beneath him. So when Philip came to America with his young wife, my aunt refused to see her. This angered him so deeply that they quarreled, and Philip rushed from his mother's presence, declaring that she should never see his face again.

“And she never did,” asserted Nathalie with grave emphasis. “Presumably he immediately returned to Europe with his young wife, for although Mrs. Renwick soon repented of her folly, as father called it, and wrote her son again and again, she heard nothing from him. After employing detectives by the score with no result, she finally went abroad and endeavored herself to find some trace of him, but was not successful. She finally returned to America and started to seek him here, but found no clew to his whereabouts.

“As time passed — I think the matter preyed on her mind — she began to have queer spells. No, she wasn't crazy, or anything like *that*, but just worried and unhappy, going off alone by herself for months at a time, presumably still trying to find her boy. After a time she would return from one of these erratic journeys, but she never told where she had been, and never mentioned her son's name.

“Now we have come to the letter mother received yesterday. It was from my aunt's lawyer, who summers in Littleton, New Hampshire. You see, Mrs. Renwick had considerable property in Boston and other places, but she was very fond of the White Mountains and always summered on Sugar Hill, where she had a lovely place called Seven Pillars, only a few miles from Littleton, and just a short distance from the mountain village of Franconia.

“The lawyer,” continued Nathalie, who by this time

had quite an interested audience, " writes mother that Aunt Mary went off on one of her queer jaunts over a year ago and has not returned. In accordance with her wishes,— she always leaves a letter of instruction when she goes off this way,— mother and two cousins of mine from the West have been invited to spend the summer at this place on Sugar Hill. Mother wants to go, and I feel that she needs the change, so I shall have to go with her, and give up being a Liberty Girl."

" But why should *you* have to go? " questioned Nita insistently. " Couldn't your cousin, Lucille, or your sister, Dorothy, go with her? And then, oh, Nathalie, you could stay with us! Oh, that would be the dandiest thing! Oh, say yes, Nathalie; say yes."

" Yes, Nita," smiled Nathalie teasingly, as she placed her arm affectionately about the young girl, " it would be just dandy, as you say, for indeed I would like a rest myself this summer, because when the warm weather comes, housework does drag on one so. But Lucille is going to California to visit some cousins of hers, and has planned to take Dorothy with her. Dorothy is wild to go, and mother would not disappoint the child for the world. And then, too, the lawyer wrote mother that I was to come with her, as my aunt had given instructions. Oh, I just hate to give up my Liberty work! "

" But you will be back in the fall, Nathalie," suggested Helen, " so why not let Lillie Bell take charge

— she is vice-president — for the summer? It will give her something to think about, too, for she is possessed with the idea of going on the stage, and her mother is worrying herself ill over it.”

“ Lillie wants to go on the stage? ” repeated Nathalie in surprise. “ Why, I didn’t know she had aspirations in that line. But do you think she would care to take charge of the club? O dear! ” she broke off abruptly, “ we had planned to do so many things this summer.” The girl’s voice was almost a wail.

“ Why not carry your plans to the mountains with you,” inquired her friend, “ and form a club of Liberty Girls up there? I am sure there will be some one who will be glad to belong, and you have such a fine way of getting people interested in things, Nathalie.”

“ Possibly mother may change her mind and decide not to go,” returned Nathalie, brightening a little, “ for she wants to be near Dick; you know he is now stationed at the Aviation Camp, Hazlehurst, at Mineola, near Camp Mills. And then, too, she says she hates to leave the house alone for so long a period.”

“ Why don’t you rent the house for the summer? ” suggested Helen practically. “ You know that Westport is getting to be quite a summer-resort since the new hotel was built on the bluff.”

“ No such good luck for us, I’m afraid,” answered Nathalie dejectedly, “ but I’ll look up Lillie and see what — ” But Helen had hurried away in answer to a

call for the captain of the Red Cross Squad. Nathalie stood a moment watching her friend, as she helped one of the "white-veiled" girls into her white head-covering, starred with its cross, and then went slowly out of the booth.

As her eyes swept over the lawn in search of Lillie, her glance fell upon the little flag with its Red Cross insignia floating cheerily from the top of the booth she had just left, as if in a salute to its companion cross placed below on the front, so that its arms stretched outward, dividing the booth into two sections.

Ah, here was the poster drawn by Barbara Worth, representing a Red Cross nurse standing by an invalid-chair, in which sat a soldier boy with bandaged eyes. The girl's face saddened at its implication, and then she had bent forward and was reading the placard persuasively held forth by the nurse, on which was written:

"Please buy a Liberty bond of me,
It's for the soldiers across the sea,
Bravely fighting to make the world free,
Wounded, and dying, for you and me."

But now her eyes were held by the poster of a white-robed figure,—representing the Spirit of Liberty which had heralded the pageant of the day before,—waving a flag victoriously above her head, while holding a shield with the Biblical quotation:

"I have fought a good fight . . . I have kept the faith,"

The face of this water-color sketch of Freedom, although bearing no resemblance to Nita's, was so bright with hope that it thrilled the girl's heart with the suggestion that the Allies, by their faith in God and their desire to do right, would finally win a victory over sin and wrong.

At this moment she heard the voice of Nita as she called her to come and see the display of small dolls, miniature Red Cross nurses, to be used as weights, door-holders, or pincushions, which were on sale. But some real dolls, as Nita called them, proved more interesting to Nathalie, because they were the work of a shut-in, as her bit towards winning the war, and because they were impersonations of some of the crowned heads of the allied nations. They were queer little things, stiff and stilted-looking, although several were excellent imitations, especially those of their majesties, King George and Queen Mary, and the little Princess Marie of Belgium.

The girl could not forbear giving Shep — a big, tawny-colored collie belonging to the Morrow twins — a love-pat, as he stood in front of the booth with red-hanging tongue and patient resignation in his brown eyes, while several young nurses fussed over him. They were trying to fasten a strip of white cloth around the center of his body, with a red cross on each side, in imitation of a war-dog who had served with a Red Cross hospital in France, and who had become

famous by his acts of bravery, running into shell-holes and dug-outs in search of wounded soldiers.

But Shep was no patriot, and evidently did not realize the honor of that big red cross, for suddenly he gave his huge body a shake, slipped from beneath the fussing fingers, and bounded away after his young masters, leaving a gentle friend to humanity lying sprawling on the grass.

As Nathalie turned, her eyes traveled slowly from one booth to another. There were seven of them, three on the left and three on the right of the Red Cross booth, which was in the center of the lawn, at one end, fronting its sister booths. The war booth, on the left, ablaze with the flags of the Allies, was curiously decorated on its front and posts with the paper coverings from magazines and books. On its counter were displayed the latest war books,—all donated after a sharp drive by the hostesses, the Camp Fire Girls, who wore embroidered deerskin robes aglitter with many-colored beads, and trench-caps stuck jauntily on one side of their heads, which gave them a very coquettish and natty appearance.

Scrap-books, in which were pasted funny verses, tidbits of news from all over the world, with many-colored pictures, and songs and rhymes to amuse the convalescents in the hospitals, were also on sale. Little candles of paper added to the attractiveness of this booth's display, while one or two Camp Fire Girls were

in attendance, who, on the payment of a nickel, taught the uninitiated the knack of making these trench-candles.

But the booth that held the first place in Nathalie's heart was the Liberty Garden booth, a leaf-embowered tent. Here were brilliant splashes of color from the vegetables piled on wicker mats, as carrots, turnips, beans, onions, beets, and other products, artistically softened by the light green of lettuce, the red of beet-leaves, and the delicate, lacy leaves of the carrot.

Here and there herbs tied in bunches, as thyme, caraway seeds, catnip, sweet lavender, and other herbs, suggested the days of long ago, when these little garden accessories held a higher place with the housewife as necessities of the day. Unwieldy tomatoes and potatoes, lazily resting on plates, added to the picturesque effect of the display, as well as the festoons of peppers, radishes, parsnips, and vegetables of similar character that were hung from side to side of the tent.

This booth was certainly a brilliant showing of the work done by the Pioneers. Oh, how they had scrubbed and polished those vegetables to bring out their colors, so they would not be messy or huddled-looking! And the time it had taken to print the little labels so neatly fastened to each exhibit!

Yes, through the sweat of her brow Nathalie had come to realize that gardening was not merely a matter of digging, plowing, or even planting or weed-

ing, but that it meant straying into many paths of knowledge that hitherto had been closed to her. Then, too, there was the trench warfare, as she called the unceasing onslaught against the bugs, insects, and garden-slugs, by a constant fire of hand-grenades and bombs, as the girls had come to call the spraying and powdering of the plants.

Ah, there was Lillie, with a number of Girl Pioneers, who, in bright-colored overalls and shirt-waists, and coquettish little sunbonnets tied under their chins, were rather gay editions of farmerettes, as they stood in picturesque attitudes, with their rakes and hoes. But a moment later Lillie was forgotten, for as Nathalie reached the booth she burst into a sudden squeal of delight on suddenly perceiving, on the top of a wall of canned vegetables, a little green imp, ingeniously made from a string-bean. He not only had a most rakish air, with his tiny soldier-hat cocked on one side, as he stood at attention with a flag for a gun, but he held forth a little placard on which was written:

“Little Beans, little Beans, whence did you come?”

“We came from the ground at the sound of the drum.”

“Little Beans, little Beans, why are you here?”

“We were scalded and canned by a Girl Pioneer.”

“Oh, who wrote that?” merrily inquired the girl of one of the Pioneers, for it was something she had not seen before.

“Why, one of the Pioneer directors,” answered the

farmerette smilingly, pleased at the young president's surprise.

A moment's inspection of the fine display of canned goods, and Nathalie turned to seek Lillie, but that young lady had mysteriously disappeared. One of the girls, suggesting that Lillie had gone to the Liberty Tea booth to regale herself with a cup of tea, Nathalie hurried on to that booth, where the Daughters of Liberty, attired in quaint, old-time costumes, dispensed that beverage.

But Lillie was not drinking tea, and again Nathalie hurried across the lawn, on her way to the opposite booth, a mass of vines and flowers, the result of the labors of the Girl Scouts in their garden, which they had named the Garden of Freedom.

Ah, here was Lillie talking to a brown-clad soldier-boy by the big Liberty pole that had been erected in the center of the lawn, facing the Red Cross booth. It flew the Stars and Stripes and the club's ensign, a little red banner blazoned with the white stars of hope, while a big liberty bell was hung from a cross-beam. On its flag-bedecked platform Carol Tyke was stationed as the bell-ringer, for later in the afternoon she was to strike the big bell to announce some patriotic speech, or fiery oration, to be made in a sharp drive to sell the Liberty bonds.

Lillie, seeing Nathalie coming in her direction, advanced towards her, and immediately presented her

soldier-friend, and in a few moments the three young people were having a sprightly chat. But Nathalie, soon recalled to the business on hand, turned and told the young vice-president why she was so anxious to see her.

“Yes; yes, indeed, Nathalie,” cried the girl quickly. “I am Hooverizing this summer, and as I do not expect to leave town until late in the fall, I shall be most delighted to accept the office of acting president for the summer.”

A few moments later, relieved of her anxiety as to what would become of the Liberty Girls in case she went to the mountains, Nathalie thanked her friend, and hastened over to the Garden of Freedom, where nasturtiums, pink poppies, sweet peas, phlox, and other old-fashioned blooms peered at her in a riotous flaunt of color.

The Girl Scouts, who were charmingly gotten up to represent flowers, beamed with pleasure as their president complimented them on the splendid display they made, and the honor they had won by their hard labor. They not only sold cut flowers, but potted plants, as well as toothsome sweets, made without sugar, they declared, as they coaxingly tempted Nathalie to sample a few.

But she had time only for a nibble or two, and then she was off to the knitting booth, where a bewildering assortment of sweaters, helmets, mufflers, socks, and

other knitted articles stared at her in a "homespuney" sort of way that reminded her of her grandmother. She remembered how, as a child, she used to watch her as she sat by the fire knitting, and the fun it was when the ball went rolling under the table and she scrambled after it.

No, she could not hurry by this booth, for Marie's eyes, big but shy, and bright with a beautiful soft blackness, shone so pleadingly from the clear pallor of her ivory-tinted skin, that they could not be resisted. "Oh, Mees President," cried the girl in her soft musical voice, "I shall tell somethings on you. I likes that you look at mine table — iss it not shmardt, hein? My mamma she says it iss stylish. Shure, und the peoples — oh, they buys und buys lots and lots of sweaters, und mufflers, und the helmets — yiss, ma'am, they have a glad on them, for they go fast mit the wind."

"Yes, isn't it lovely, Marie," returned Nathalie, smiling into the limpid eyes, "to think that every one is so patriotic, and so anxious to make the soldier-boys who are to fight for us, happy and comfortable?"

"Shure, Mees, that iss because they are lovin' much mit the liberty. Oh, here comes mine papa. He buys sweater of me. I likes that you speak mit mine papa, Mees," exclaimed the little Jewess shyly, as her eyes again pleaded with Nathalie.

The young president turned, to see a rather crumpled, mussy-looking little man by her side, who

stared at her with sudden embarrassment as she quickly extended her hand in a cordial greeting to him.

Mr. Katzkamof seized the outstretched hand and shook it nervously, while his bright black eyes beamed with good-natured surprise. "I be glad to meet young Mees," he cried hurriedly, "who makes mine little girl be so happy. She sing, she smile all the day mit the liberty that you gives to her."

"But *I* didn't give it to her," answered Nathalie quickly. "God gave it to her. I am only trying to show her how to give it to those who haven't learned what liberty means. But you," she added quickly, "you are an American,—you love the liberty, too?" The girl raised her eyebrows inquiringly, somewhat frightened at her temerity, for she suddenly remembered that she had heard Edith say that the newsdealer was a fiery socialist.

"Yes, Mees, I be an American. I vote for the President. But I no like the war," the black eyes hardened. "It makes me cold in mine heart. I think it no right for the people to fight mit one und the other, likes the cat und the dog. They spill much of the blood. I am lovin' mit the peace. I no fight."

"Yes, it is a terrible thing to have to fight and kill one another," replied the girl sadly. "And the mothers,—oh, I feel so sorry for them, when they have to give up their boys to go and fight. But it must be done," she added valiantly, although there was a catch

in her breath as the thought of Dick came to her.

“ Oh, no, Mees, if all the people say *no fight*, they be no soldiers, they be no war, we have the peace.”

“ Yes, but what kind of a peace,” exclaimed the girl. And then a sudden thought loomed big. “ Ah, Mr. Katzkamof, you love the Christ. Did He not die to make men free? Shall we not die to give liberty to the world? ”

“ No, Mees, I ain't lovin' mit Krisht. I make nothings mit Him.” The man's tone was surly, although he shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

“ I beg your pardon,” cried Nathalie with reddening cheeks. And then, as if to recover lost ground. “ But you believe in God, *your God, the God* who brought the Israelites dry-shod over the Red Sea? And did *He* not command you to fight and drive out the enemies of God, the heathen, who did not serve him, and who were in the Promised Land? And is not the Kaiser a Hun, a heathen, when he tortures and kills little children and women? Yes,” continued Blue Robin, impelled by some indefinable feeling to rush blindly on, “ this is *God's* war. He has commanded us to fight, to do away with tyranny and oppression. They must be overcome, so that all the world shall have liberty, and then,— why then we shall have peace, a peace that the Germans can't destroy.” And then Nathalie smiled, although her heart was leaping in great bounds at her sudden boldness. But another thought had come, and,

turning towards her companion, for she had turned to leave him, she added smilingly, "And I am sure that you are big-hearted enough to be willing to fight, so that you can give to others the liberty that gives so much happiness to you."

The man's eyes had brightened with a sudden strange light, and he opened his mouth to reply, but Nathalie had passed on, angry at herself for being so outspoken. But O dear! she felt so sorry for those poor ignorant people, who thought and did violent things just because they couldn't reason, and didn't understand.

But she had reached the Love booth, the name given by the girls to the tent where the comfort-kits were sold. By a pile on a seat in the rear she knew that business had been brisk, and that people had not only donated kits and then bought them back again, but had patriotically returned them to the sellers, so that they could be given to the soldier-boys.

Blue Robin stood a moment and watched the girls, who, busy as bees, were selling their wares, as they chatted merrily over their sales, and then she turned to cross the lawn to the Red Cross booth. She had not gone more than a step or so, however, when a sudden clang of the liberty bell brought her to a halt. Oh, some one had bought a Liberty bond; yes, three bonds, for the three clangs of the bell announced the number sold. Oh, it was still ringing! What did it mean?

She started to rush towards the booth where the bonds were being sold, and then glanced back at the booth she had just left, to see that the girls, in their eagerness to know who was buying so many bonds,— for the bell was still clanging,— had dropped their work and were rushing in frantic haste towards the booth.

Nathalie smiled, and turned to follow after the group of girls who were speeding past her, when a sudden thought leaped into her mind. She halted and again glanced back at the Comfort-Kit booth. Not a girl was to be seen. Ah, now was her chance to get rid of that letter. The next moment she had turned and was flying back to the now deserted booth.

CHAPTER VII

THE VISIT TO CAMP MILLS

AS Nathalie reached the booth she glanced quickly about; no one was in sight. With a hurried movement she drew a letter from the bag that hung from her wrist, and after glancing at the written words, "To whomsoever this Comfort Kit may come, greetings and good wishes," she slipped out the enclosure and slowly read:

"DEAR MR. SOLDIER BOY:

"Please remember that you are going to fight under the banner of the Cross, which means that you belong to a Christian nation whose motto is, 'In God we Trust.' Hold to the feeling that you are a gentleman by the culture — not 'Kultur' — that comes from kindness, courtesy, and consideration for all people, so please don't kill anybody unless you have to.

"Don't forget that you are an American patriot, and that your heart is seared with the Stars and Stripes, which means the red of courage, the white of purity, and the blue of loyal devotion to the right, and starred with the divine fire of liberty.

"Remember you are fighting for the mothers and children; yes, fighting so the mothers and children of all nations may have liberty and peace. Be strong and

brave in the thought that this war is to maintain the principles back of our flag, the ideals given to us by the founders of this nation. As Christ died to make men holy, so these men suffered and shed their blood that you might have the joy and independence that comes from the liberty which God has given to us. Be happy with the thought that no matter what comes to you, you will not have lived in vain, but will have fought for the grandest and greatest things in life,—liberty and humanity. The best of luck to you,

“BLUE ROBIN.”

Nathalie returned the letter to the envelope, and then rummaged under a pile of kits that had been filled and fastened, ready for the boys at camp, until she found one way down beneath the pile. She quickly opened it. Then something stayed her hand.

“No, it will not be a wicked thing to do, for it can't do any harm,” she reasoned doubtfully; “and yet I just *hate* to do it, but I feel that I must do something to try to help some boy, who, perhaps, has a lagging spirit, whose heart may fail him when he thinks of what is before him, or who, perhaps, fails to realize the greatness of what we are fighting for, the way I did. This letter may spur him on, give him courage to do *his best*, perhaps, when he realizes the truth. And *no one will know* who Blue Robin is, and yet it will do for a name, as mother always says it is not considered fair to send an anonymous letter to any one, and I surely would not sign my own.”

Nathalie heaved a deep sigh, and then, as if she

would not let herself have any more misgivings, she seized the letter and dropped it into the bag. A moment later she was on her way to the Red Cross booth, to learn who had won the prize for buying the first Liberty bond.

“ Oh, Nathalie, Dr. Morrow bought fifteen bonds! ” came in an excited chorus from a group of girls, who were standing in front of the booth, chatting excitedly over this unlooked-for event.

“ Fifteen? Oh, isn't that just too lovely, ” answered the girl. And then she hastily made her way towards the Morrow group, where the doctor, with the twins clinging excitedly to his coat-tails,— trying to climb up his back, he declared,— was signing the bond-certificate that made each one of them the possessor of five bonds, and his wife the owner of five more.

A Liberty button was now fastened to the doctor's coat as a guarantee that he was a good patriot, and then he was presented with the prize, a box of Liberty candy from the Girl Scouts' booth, something he never indulged in, he laughingly asserted, as he stood with the box in his hand, looking helplessly at it. But the twins did, and they quickly relieved him of it and were soon blissfully happy as they munched on the sweets.

A good beginning must have brought the girls good luck, for as soon as Mrs. Van Vorst heard of this sale she followed the doctor's example and invested in ten bonds, five for herself and five for Nita. A few more

followed suit, some buying two or three, while others only took one, but every little helped, the girl delightedly cried, jubilantly happy at the many sales they were having. And then a surprise came, as her cousin Lucille pushed her way through those surrounding the booth, and bought three bonds,—one for herself, one for Dorothy, and one for Nathalie.

“Oh, Lucille, don't do that!” cried distressed Nathalie with flushed cheeks. “It is too much to give me.”

“Indeed, it is not,” insisted Lucille smilingly, who could be very generous at times, as her cousin knew by the gift of her Pioneer uniform. “I think you have worked hard enough for these Liberty Girls to have that much at any rate.” And several must have agreed with her,—judging by the nods and claps that came from those who were standing near and heard this remark.

As Nathalie, sometime later, sat gathering up her certificates,—she had been kept busy all the afternoon making out the little blue and pink receipts that certified as to her many sales,—Lillie came flying up.

“Oh, Nathalie, hasn't it been a big success!” she cried with gleaming eyes. “And the patriotic speeches and recitations have been just fine. But, O dear!” she added with a sudden note of disappointment in her voice, “there are a lot of things that have not been sold. Of course they will all go to the boys at camp,

but I was in hopes that everything would be sold, so as to add to our fund for the bonds." For those who had purchased that afternoon had patriotically returned the things they had bought, as their donation for the boys at camp, thus giving the girls an opportunity to use the purchase money for Liberty bonds.

"Yes, we have several sweaters and mufflers left," announced Barbara, who had been talking to Nathalie, "and poor Captain Molly is quite disappointed, as she was so sure that we should sell everything we had."

"And we have a number of flowers and potted plants that have not been disposed of," added a Girl Scout in a disappointed voice.

"But we can give those to the hospital," answered Nathalie quickly, "and give some sorrowful heart a bit of cheer."

"Well, we have some boxes of candy, too," added the Girl Scout dolefully, "and they won't do for the sick ones for—" "And we have some books left over," interrupted another bystander.

"Oh, I have an idea, a big one, too," broke in Helen, her eyes all of a glow. "Why could we not have an auction sale? Of course a good many will return what they buy,—and I think it will be lots of fun."

This idea was voted a good one, and a few minutes later Dr. Morrow announced from the Liberty platform that he was to act as auctioneer. A few brief

words of explanation and the auction was on. First a box of candy was bid for, which, after much laughter, was finally knocked down for one dollar, a much larger sum than it would have brought earlier in the afternoon. A few books were now disposed of, a pile of canned vegetables, a number of comfort-kits, and so on, until everything, even to the posters and decorations, had been auctioned off.

As the girls were counting up the proceeds of this unexpected sale, old Deacon Perkins came up, and, after a few hems and haws, told the girls that if they wanted to make a raid on his cherry-trees the next morning, they could do so, and carry the fruit to the boys. They were to visit Camp Mills the following afternoon, and present their many donations to the young soldiers.

“Oh, isn't that jolly good luck!” “Oh, that's just glorious!” and many similar outbursts of joy caused the old deacon to beam with complacent benignity. The Sport, with a little giggle, whispered to Lillie that she knew old Perkins had never felt so goody-goody in his life before,—he was called the meanest man in town.

“Yes, girls,” admonished Nathalie, after the old deacon had been overwhelmed with thanks, and had gone smilingly on his way, “you will all have to get up very early to-morrow morning if you want those cherries, for you know we are to start for Mineola at

an early hour, for it is some drive. Mrs. Morrow kindly offered me her car, so I asked her to be one of the chaperons. Mrs. Van Vorst is the other, and then Grace, you know, will take some of the party in her car.

“I am sorry,” her face sobered a little, “but there will only be room in the three cars for the officers of the Club, and,—yes, I think we ought to ask Marie, Captain Molly,” she explained, “to ride with us, for you know, of course, that she can’t walk far. The rest of you girls will have to go by train, that is, those who want to go.”

“But we all want to go,” called out several voices eagerly, “and we expected to go by train, for Lillie and Helen have given us a time-table, so we shall know just what to do, and we’ll meet you at the camp.”

The raid on the cherry-trees proved “a lark,” Edith declared, as, an hour or so before the girls started in the cars, she and Grace whizzed up in the car, filled with several baskets of cherries. A little later the three cars started for the camp, passing two or three groups of the girls on the road, en route for the depot. But they were soon left far behind as the cars whirled along the Merrick road, every one in the best of spirits, the little newsdealer so buoyantly happy to think that she was riding in the same car with the young president, that it did one good to look at her face, keenly aglow with delight.

Nathalie's eyes were sparkling, too, for the little Jewess had just cried, "Bend down your head, Mees President, for I likes I shall whisper mit you in your ear." And then, as the girl had smilingly complied, she heard the happy announcement, "My papa, he says like that you iss my friend, und so my papa he buy me a Liberty bond, for he says you are loving now mit me." The owner of the pink ear into which these words had been loudly whispered, dimpled with pleasure, and then came the thought, "O dear, I wonder if my little liberty lecture had anything to do with papa's buying the bond?"

There was a short stop at the Military Police guard-house, to learn the way around the encampment, where several soldier-boys, with the big letters M. P. on their arms, were viewed with much curiosity by the girls. A call at the hostess house now followed, where the gifts for the soldiers — the knitted articles, the books, candy, and fruits — were left, the girls reserving the baskets of cherries to distribute to the boys themselves.

The slow ride through the encampment, with its streets flanked by brown and white tents, reminded Nathalie somewhat of an Indian encampment, and she gazed about with eager interest, as this was her first visit to an army post. The girls were specially interested in the prisoners,—two or three men here and there guarded by a soldier-boy,—who were acting as

White Wings by gathering up flying papers, or débris of any kind lying about, while other groups were digging ditches or performing similar duties.

"But see," cried one of the girls, "the prisoners carry clubs, while the guard in the rear hasn't any."

"No, but he carries an automatic pistol in his trousers' pocket," answered Mrs. Morrow quickly, who had visited the camp many times; "and if he should fire it, a crowd of soldiers would immediately surround the prisoners and disarm them. And then, too," she added, "you must remember that these prisoners, as a rule, are not real jailbirds, but just young, thoughtless lads who have probably been punished for what we would consider a very slight misdemeanor."

But they were now in what Mrs. Morrow called the "chow" quarters, that is, where the mess-tents were. It was quite an interesting sight to see a long line of soldiers, with their plates, cups, and pans in their hands, standing waiting for the "eats" at one of these tents.

The girls, alert-eyed, watched them with more than the usual curiosity, for when they were supplied with food they came straggling out of the line with their "chow" and sat down here and there in groups, while others sat down on the street-curb and began their meal, using their laps for a table. This elicited many exclamations of surprise, especially when their director told them that Uncle Sam's soldiers were not

allowed to sit at tables, but had to dine standing. Their denunciation of this system and their expressions of pity were loud, but when they were told that it was these very hardships to which a boy had to be inured that made him a well-trained soldier, they became somewhat reconciled to what they had seen.

Just at this moment a sudden inspiration came to Nathalie, and, leaning forward, she whispered softly to Mrs. Morrow. That lady smiled and nodded approval evidently, and immediately brought the car to a standstill so that Nathalie and Helen could alight. Going swiftly towards a couple of boys who were sitting on the curb, their eyes bright and keen, and their faces tanned to a rich brown, Nathalie said, somewhat timidly, "I beg your pardon, but wouldn't you young gentlemen — er — soldiers —" she hastily corrected herself laughingly, "like to have some cherries to eat with your dinner?"

"Most assuredly we would," responded one of the lads, a tall broad-shouldered chap with dark hair, from whose sun-tanned face two dark-lashed eyes looked down at her, with a half-smile in their blue. The boys had courteously risen and were standing at attention when the girl spoke.

Nathalie's cheeks took on a deeper pink, and then she turned, and the two girls walked back to the car with the boys in their wake. But unfortunately, as she attempted to lift one of the heavy baskets over the edge

of the car, something jarred her elbow, and the next moment the basket had fallen to the ground with the cherries rolling all over the road.

There was a loud shout from the boys, and then a dozen or more khaki-clad figures had rushed to the girl's assistance, and presently soldier-boys and girls were all scrambling about in the dust of the road, gathering up the fruit. Indeed, by the time it was replaced in the basket,— for, of course, the girls had to polish off the dust from the luscious red fruit — they had all become very merry with one another.

Several minutes later, as the car whirled around the corner of the long street, they saw the soldier lads gathered about the basket, while laughing and joking with one another in good-natured banter. Suddenly one of the boys looked up, and as he spied the now disappearing car he took off his cap and waved it in a parting salute. Nathalie smiled back, for she recognized this good-by as coming from the boy with the dark-lashed, blue eyes.

“Wasn't that young soldier a handsome boy?” queried one of the girls admiringly, as the car flew along the level road. “And what lovely blue eyes he had!”

“Yes, and that boy with the light hair was nice-looking, too,” chimed in Helen. “He had such a frank way of looking you right in the eye. I'll warrant you he's no coward.”

But the cherries and the boys in the "chow" quarters were forgotten as the girls drove by a group of buglers, who were sitting on the grass near a large tent, practicing on their bugles. Every eye was curiously watchful as the three cars went slowly past, for Mrs. Morrow, who was driving, had slowed up as she saw "the camp alarm-clocks," as she called them. Every head was bent forward and eyes grew big with alertness, for had the girls not set out that morning with the avowed intention of not missing anything worth seeing, and surely a group of soldier buglers was an interesting feature of the camp.

They were a merry-eyed crowd, those boys with their happy, care-free faces under the brown hats with their gay-colored cords. All on undress parade, Helen declared, as she noted their brown flannel blouses and belts, as they knelt or stood upon the grass, blowing on their golden horns as Captain Molly called their brass instruments.

Evidently they were not worrying about going overseas, or losing their lives in No Man's Land, but were good examples of live-wire American lads, with the grit inherited from their ancestors, the Yanks, inspiring them to make good when called by Uncle Sam to the job of making war.

The girls were alert and watchful, as they spied into open tents, or behind flying flaps, at the rows of tiny white cots, or at a few stray articles of clothing seen

here and there, yes, even a pair of shoes set out in the sun to dry were objects of their silent adoration as they swung along the road.

But now the scene had changed as they whirled along, for, instead of tents, the streets were lined with little wooden houses, or cabins, the barracks of the United States Aviation School at Mineola, which adjoined Camp Mills. A stop at the hostess house was next in order, where a call was sent in for Dick.

Twenty minutes later Nathalie was blithesomely happy, as she and her brother, over in a corner of the little wooden building, chatted about home news,—how mother was getting along, yes, and about the wonderful events that had occurred in the last few days. Then Nathalie turned inquisitor, and Dick was subjected to a series of questions in regard to his life as a war-eagle. In fact Nathalie's questions were so many and so swiftly put that her brother declared that one would have thought that he was being interviewed by some expert reporter.

Yes, reveille was at five in the morning, followed in half an hour by breakfast. His sister immediately asked, somewhat anxiously, if he got enough to eat.

"You bet your life I do," was Dick's laughing rejoinder. "The 'eats' are O. K.—nothing to be added. At six," he continued, "I report at headquarters for flying, and then, with an instructor, learn a few flying stunts. I return to barracks at ten, and

from eleven until two-thirty have a 'do-as-you-please time,' which includes luncheon, and, generally, a nap, for, by Jove!" exclaimed the young aviator, "this flying business makes a fellow feel drowsy.

"Then we drill for a while, listen to a lecture," he went on, "and then again for a space I am a bird of the air. We dine about half-after eight, and at ten comes taps, or 'lights out.' Anything more you would like to know, young lady?" he inquired teasingly. But Nathalie was satisfied, for surely her brother's ruddy cheeks, tanned skin, and glowing eyes attested to what he called the "joy-time of his life," and a few moments later the little party started for the aviation field.

Here Dick conducted them around the field and showed them many kinds of aircraft, as aëroplanes, dirigibles, kite-balloons, serviceable in war; in fact, they were so well instructed as to the uses and mechanism of so many different machines that Mrs. Morrow declared that they would be well-versed in aëronautics. But the little personal stories that Dick told about the heroism of well-known war-eagles over in France made a stronger appeal to the girls, especially when he explained the several varieties of aviators and their special work.

To the girls' disappointment there was no flying going on while they were on the field, but they were partly appeased when Dick showed them a group of students,

aviation observers, he called them, who were learning to sketch from a miniature battlefield, and in this way learn how it would look from the air. As they were about to leave the field they saw some students bringing out a machine, to get it ready for flying, as testing the motor and so on.

At this particular moment one of the girls uttered a sudden cry, and as all eyes glanced upward with newly awakened eagerness, they were rewarded by seeing an aëroplane returning from a training flight. As Nathalie gazed eagerly at the machine that flew like some strange monster above their heads, the perils of flying in space came to her with a sudden, keen realization, and, with a sickening pang as to what might happen to Dick some day, her eyes darkened with apprehensive terror and she turned hastily away. But Dick, catching sight of the girl's pale face and fear-haunted eyes, as if to divert her mind from dismal forebodings, called attention to the camp mascot, a little yellow police-dog, who was standing by his master, equipped, like him, with goggles. The girls were soon laughing heartily as Dick told of the dog's alertness in doing "stunts," and the eagerness he showed when waiting to take a flight in one of the machines.

CHAPTER VIII

SEVEN PILLARS

NATHALIE, seated in a low chair at one end of the broad white veranda, gazed with rapt intentness at the sun-hazed landscape, rising in green, undulating waves against the purple blur of the towering mountain-heights, that stretched in wide expanse before her, with a strange, mystical beauty.

Into her eyes, city-tired, came rest, as they swept over the velvet green of the meadow, splashed with the bloom of wild flowers, its scrubby bushes aglow with pink spires, and its spruces and maples standing upright with the slimness of youth, as it sloped gently down to the glen below. The trees of the glen, closely massed in a rich, feathery green, sombered by the darker line of the pines and firs, to the girl seemed weird and mysterious.

Her eyes quickly gathered in the stillness of the sunny slopes that rose from the darker hollow in squares of yellow cornfields, or the light green of unripe wheat or grain, and the brown of mountain meadow-land, dotted with browsing cows. Here and there a lone farm-

house stood forth on some higher knoll, or, from a background of forest land, came the bright red of a solitary barn; while still higher, a hotel, its gables and chimneys spying upward, glimmered picturesquely from the green. And beyond all, high and dark, with majestic brooding silences, rose the jagged ridge of mountain blue, its peaks looming with a strange distinctness against the clear, soft blue of the sky, while sweeps of white cloudlets trailed like films of spun silk across their tops.

The girl closed her eyes as if to imprint upon her subconsciousness the rare loveliness of the scene, and then, as if fearful that in some passing, whimsical mood the picture would flash out of view, she opened them quickly. At that moment a passing breeze fluttered the pages of a letter lying on a table by her side. With sudden recollection she caught them up, and then as if to impress upon her mind what she had written, in a soft, low tone read:

“DEAR HELEN:

“I presume you are now in glorious *La France*, wondering why you have not heard from me. But my excuse is this magnificent mountain scenery, and my new duties, which have taken every minute of my time until to-day. We came up on the fifteenth from New York. Mother knitted and read during the ten-hour ride, while I wished inexpressibly good things for Mrs. Van Vorst for renting our little dovecote, and planned liberty work. I have decided to adopt the

club's motto, 'Liberty and Humanity — our best,' for the summer's watchword. As it means to try and be helpful and kind to people, whether I like them or not, wish me success, for I have undertaken something big.

"Mr. Banker, my aunt's lawyer, met us at the Littleton station with his car. He is a tall, lean man, but his brown eyes have a quizzical gleam in them that makes you feel that you are affording him some amusement. The seven-mile ride up one mountain slope and down another, in the shade of the woods that gloomed dark and weird on each side of the road, with the hush of the gloaming in their moist depths, was most enjoyable.

"From out of their rustling shadows the white birches and poplars peered at us like ghosts, while the resinous aroma from the pines made us sniff with delight. Mountain villages with a straggle of white cottages, and grizzly gray churches, in a setting of purple mountain-peaks, strangely somber and still, as they stood forth from feathery masses of clouds tinted with sunset's glow, with gossamer wreaths of mist floating above them, stilled us to a mute ecstasy of sheer joy.

"Stone gate-posts, beds of old-time posies, backed by cobble-stone walls with hedges of green, and a little white house, like a keeper's lodge, peered curiously out of the silver shadows of the rising moon as we whizzed up the roadway to Seven Pillars, and came to a stop under the *porte-cochère* of a large, white mansion, set on a green knoll, facing the rocky heights of far-distant mountains. Here square glass lanterns threw yellowish gleams on the wide, low veranda, with its seven magic pillars,—round, fluted columns reaching high above the second-story windows, as with lofty stateliness they held the pointed dome above the portico.

“Passing through the quaint, white-columned doorway, with its tiny panes of glass and shiny brass knocker, we stood, dazed and tired, in a broad, gloomy hall, where, in the flare from a snapping log-fire, numerous trophies of the hunt eyed us glassily, as we were welcomed by my cousin, Janet Page, and her sister, Cynthia.

“Janet is a winsome thing. We have already become great chums, although she is a few years older than your lonesome. She is short and plump, with a white, satiny skin, and apple-blossom cheeks that make you feel that you want to kiss the pink of them. Her eyes fairly beam with kindness as she looks at you from under her short, wavy brown hair. She’s a pacifist and a suffragist, and aims to be a farmerette. Although she has decided ideas on the war and voting questions, they are rather vague on farming, but she goes about saying, ‘God speed the plow and the woman who drives it.’

“Cynthia Loretto Stillwell — she always insists on the Loretto, as it is the sole heritage from some Italian ancestor, famed for his noble birth and deeds of valor — is not my own cousin, as she is the daughter of my uncle’s wife, who was a widow when they married. She is distinctively tall, somewhat angular, with sharp features, a drooping, discontented mouth, and a sallow skin which she endeavors to hide by dabs of white and pink powder. Her eyes are large and dark, and would be handsome, if they did not repel you at times by their hard, metallic glitter. Her coiffure is a wonderful combination of braids, curls, and puffs, and made me wonder how she did it. She greeted us effusively, but somehow its warmth seemed cold and artificial, and — well, I don’t believe I’m going to like her.

“After our hunger was appeased,— Janet said she

got the supper, as we shall have to be our own maids up here,— Mr. Banker ‘ personally conducted ’ us through many high-ceiled rooms with recessed window-seats, big doors, and dark closets, up winding stairways, and through rambling corridors. The antique furniture, carved and black-looking, musty-smelling and stuffy, made one feel as if long-ago-dead people were peering at you from the eerie shadows of the hide-and-seeky nooks.

“ Mr. Banker then read my aunt’s letter of instruction,— an odd document, as it stated that each one of ‘ we girls,’— as Cynthia calls us,— she’s almost as old as mumsie,— during our stay is to search the house for the most valuable thing in it. And the lucky finder of the ‘ mysterious it,’ as Jan and I call the valuable thing, is to inherit something. Whether this something is property, or money, or just some personal effects of my aunt’s, I don’t know, for that letter was so queer it made me feel creepy. And once, when I glanced up, it really seemed as if her eyes were glaring menacingly at me from a large portrait of her which hangs over the library mantel.

“ Each one of us is to keep a diary, and if we have not looked for ‘ It ’ each day, we are to state what particular thing prevented us. We can search every nook and corner in the house but one room, the *mystery room*, as we call it, which is on the second floor, and barred and locked so that no one can enter. Mother only laughs when Janet and I talk about ‘ It,’ and declares that the whole thing is just my aunt’s eccentric way of doing things. You know mother spent a summer up here with her when I was a wee tot, and my aunt grew very fond of me.

“ Although I have had no time as yet to search for the mystery of mysteries, my first entry in my diary

reads: 'Arose at 7 A. M. and prepared breakfast. Cooked three meals and did housework all day, and am too tired to do anything but go to bed. Jan meant to help me, but she had to hurry with her plowing, and Cynthia Loretto says she never does housework, as it makes her hands rough.'

"You would laugh if you could see Jan scratching the earth with a baby rake. She was going to plant before she plowed, and hadn't the slightest idea as to the proper time and way of planting her seeds. But she looks a dear in a smock and a big pink sunbonnet that matches the pink in her cheeks and on her nose, for her dear little snub has burned to the same color.

"It is great sport to see her take the stump, as I call it, and hold forth on woman suffrage. She talks beautifully, is so earnest and looks so sweet, and, as mumsie says, knows so little about it from a common-sense point of view. But when Cynthia Loretto suddenly appears and squelches her eloquence by witheringly ordering her to do something for her,—she bosses her dreadfully,—poor Jan drops from her pedestal and crawls about with the meekness of a mouse for the rest of the day.

"I was afraid my dreams of teaching liberty were doomed to oblivion, for there don't seem to be any girls about to form a club, when one day, while reading the paper, an inspiration came. *Fi-fo-fum*, I have written to Mrs. Van Vorst, and she is going to send me three little slum boys, and I am not only going to give them the joy-time of their lives, but teach them 'Liberty and Humanity — your best.' When I asked Mr. Banker if there would be any objection to having these little waifs, he not only consented, but said he would pay their way up here. Isn't that the dandiest thing going?

"Mother objected at first, but when I said I would

teach them to wash the dishes — how I hate that job! — and to do chores about the house, she only said, ‘ Well, you will have to make the bread then, for three hulking boys will eat a cartful,’ — you know mother is the bread-maker. Then her eyes twinkled, and I had to hug her good and tight, for I knew she was just testing my ‘ I can ’ motto.

“ Janet thought the idea fine, but when Cynthia Loretto heard of it she declared that she hated boys, they were such horrid, smelly things,— one would have thought they were weeds,— and that *she* would not have them in the house. Well, I was not going to be bossed by her, so promptly told her in my bestest manner — I am always very cool and sweet when *awfully mad* — what Mr. Banker had said. Well, that silenced *her*, but I can foresee that she will make trouble for my little liberty kids, for that’s what they’re going to be.

“ Did I tell you that Cynthia is an artist? Her studio is up in the little square cupola, or tower that crowns the house. Here she paints, and sleeps until all hours of the morning, for she slumbers in a beauty-mask — Janet let that out — and it has to be kept on until noon. Janet has to bring up her coffee every morning. At dinner my lady with ‘ the manner ’ and artistic temperament appears in a freakish get-up. Yesterday she was a Neapolitan maiden in a red skirt and blue bodice, with a rug for an apron, and a white cloth on her head. She dresses this way to create atmosphere, she declares, as she is her own model, and paints herself in a big mirror, that she got Sam to lug up from one of the lower rooms.

“ She can be extremely disagreeable, for yesterday, while I was on one of my mountain prowls — mother was taking a nap — she was sitting on the veranda in one of her outlandish costumes, when an odd, little old

lady came along in a black poke-bonnet, carrying a basket on her arm. As soon as Cyn saw that basket she jumped up and ordered the old lady off the premises, saying that we could not be bothered with peddlers.

"The poor old soul immediately turned about and hobbled away, muttering and mumbling to herself, for Jan heard her as she came up the path from her miniature hillside farm. Mother was quite annoyed when she heard about it, for she said that she was undoubtedly one of the neighbors, and had brought us something in the basket to be friendly, as country people do. I think Cynthia should have allowed her to rest on the veranda, even if she was a peddler.

"I must close my letter if I want to get it in this mail, as I have to walk almost a mile to post it. So, with a bushel of kisses and good wishes, I am as ever your friend

"NATHALIE PAGE.

"P. S. Be sure you tell me all about your work, and if you are anywhere near the front-line trenches. I am wild to know. Again, with love,

"BLUE ROBIN."

As Nathalie stood by the window putting on her hat in front of the old-fashioned dresser, her eyes suddenly widened. "Why, isn't that the strangest?" she queried, as she stepped nearer the casement and stared down at the farther end of the lawn, where, from between the fringe of woodland on the side dividing their garden from their neighbor's, came the glimmer of a little red house, fronting the road.

"Why," said the girl, almost wonderingly, "that red house glimmers through the trees in the form of a

cross." Then her eyes brightened with the sudden thought, "I do believe it has come that way on purpose, and, yes, I am going to let it be my Red Cross insignia, warning me that I have work to do this summer by not losing my temper, and by being kind to people, even if it is *that irritating Cynthia Loretto*."

"I wonder who lives in that little red house," soliloquized the girl. "I must ask Sam. Ah, I remember now. I saw an old lady with silver-gray hair, the other day, poking about in that little flower-garden; she seemed to be weeding. Well, those flowers certainly repay her for her care, for they are a mass of bloom and color." And then Nathalie, humming a snatch of melody, turned away and hurried down the stairway.

Some time later, on her way to the post-office at the near-by village of Sugar Hill, as she passed the red house she again saw the old lady with the silver hair, in a flopping sunbonnet, digging in the garden. She raised her head as she heard Nathalie's footsteps, and the girl, with smiling eyes, pleasantly bowed a good-afternoon. But, to her surprise, the old lady stared at her rudely for a moment, and then, without returning her greeting, went on with her weeding.

"What a disagreeable old lady!" was the girl's sudden thought, the blood rushing to her cheeks in a crimson flood. "Why, I always thought country people were pleasant and chatty with their neighbors. Well,"

she murmured ruefully, in an attempt to ignore the slight, "perhaps the poor old thing is near-sighted. No, I won't worry, for, as mumsie says, it is just as well not to be in a hurry to think that people mean to be rude to you."

So the little incident was forgotten, as she wended her way along the road, cool and dark with the moisture and shade from the woodland that fringed it on each side. On one side the trees screened green hills and sloping meadows, while on the other they guarded Lovers' Lane, a narrow footpath, skirting the base of Garnet Mountain, that rose upward in scrubby, brownish pasture-land to its summit, crowned with dense masses of green foliage.

Nathalie hummed softly, in tune to the ripple of a tiny brooklet from a spring near by, that trickled and splashed in a low murmur over its pebbly bed in the ditch, fringed with straggling wild flowers in flaunting July bloom. They were too luring to be resisted, and presently the beautiful dull pink of the Joe-Pye weed, saucy black-eyed Susans, yellow buttercups, wild carrot, and blue violets, nodded gayly from the nosegay pinned to her blouse.

A short walk and the woods had been left behind, as the girl stood on a wide-spreading knoll with the rock-lit eyes of Garnet Mountain peering down at her on her right, while on the left grassy meadows stretched away into velvety slopes. Their green was crossed

by low stone walls, patched with the gray of apple orchard, and ribboned with avenues of stately trees, or fringes of woodland, but always ending in the rugged grandeur of craggy summit.

Nathalie drew a deep breath of the sweet-scented mountain breezes, as her eyes dwelt on the scene before her, for to her every blade of grass, or feathery fern, as well as each peeping floweret, wide-spreading tree, or gray boulder, were but details that added to the charm of each day's mountain-picture. The rare splendor of the scene inspired her, as it were, to new thoughts and feelings, vague and undefined, but the shadow of things to come, in the birth of ideals and words that were to find expression later on.

But now she was strolling along under an avenue of stately maples, bordered by a stone wall almost hidden with clambering vines, until presently she had passed by another silent greenwood, to arrive at a little white church, set on rising ground. A swift turn and she was walking down the flagged street of the mountain village, sheltered with friendly old trees, and lined with the usual straggle of white cottages, blurred with the red of an old barn, while just beyond, against the pearl gray of the horizon, rose the jagged line of the Green Mountains.

She glanced admiringly at the tiny Memorial Library perched conspicuously on a terrace opposite, and then she was at the post-office, once a small white cottage,

but now used by Uncle Sam as a mail distributor, the lounging-resort of aged mountaineers and sons of the soil. Here, too, the village gentry, as well as the citified summer folk from the boarding-houses and hotels on the upper slopes of Sugar Hill, lingered for a chat or a word of greeting when they came for the mail.

After slipping her letter into the box, Nathalie found that although the mail had come in it had not been distributed, so she decided to wait for it. With ill-concealed impatience, for she hated to linger in the stuffy little store, she leaned idly against a glass case, in which one saw the yellow-brown of maple-sugar cakes, the red and white of peppermint sticks, as well as post-cards of mountain views, and pine pillows. As it was the only store within a radius of some miles, its wares were numerous and varied, as almost anything, from a loaf of bread, a lollypop, or a case of needles, to a bottle of patent medicine, was on sale.

Suddenly, as if impelled by some unknown power, the girl raised her eyes to encounter the bold stare of a tall young man in a gray Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers, and high leather boots, who was nonchalantly leaning against the opposite counter, with his cap pushed on the back of his head, smoking a cigar.

CHAPTER IX

THE LITTLE OLD LADY IN THE RED HOUSE

THE girl turned her head quickly aside, for there was something in the ill-concealed admiration in the man's black eyes that caused the color to rush in a wave to her cheeks. Several minutes later a careless glance in the man's direction, as she casually surveyed the other occupants of the store, impelled her to stare curiously, as she perceived a rather peculiar motion,—a sudden twitching shake of his head, repeated every moment or so. Realizing that the man was the victim of some nervous affliction, her eyes involuntarily softened with pity, and then noting that there were several letters in her box, she hurried forward to get them.

Slipping them into her bag, she hastened from the store, drawing quickly back, however, as the man who had been staring at her brushed rudely against her. Nathalie glanced up with annoyance, but as he begged her pardon, with a sweep of his cap in an exaggerated bow, and another bold, somewhat mocking glance from his eyes, the pink in her cheeks deepened angrily.

Nathalie, irritated at the incident, walked slowly down the narrow path leading to the flagging, but suddenly remembering her determination to explore the little village set in the hollow of a hill, the unpleasant occurrence passed from her mind. Attracted by the many flower-beds that bloomed so luxuriantly with such vivid coloring in the door yards of the little New England cottages beyond the post-office, she turned about and slowly strolled in that direction.

Presently she came to a sudden pause to gaze admiringly across the road at a white, gable-roofed house, with bright green blinds, on a grassy terrace, peeping from beneath a mass of vines and leaves. It was surrounded by a garden from which came the gleam of many colors, in the tall, flowering rows of sweet peas that flanked its sides. But it was not so much their beauty that held her eyes as the small east wing of the building, where a wide, roomy porch was surmounted by the sign,

THE SWEET PEA TEA-HOUSE
Come in and have a cup of tea

Nathalie would have enjoyed going over and having a sip of that social beverage, lured by the daintiness of the house and its sweet-pea garden, but, on discovering that she had left her purse at home, she continued her walk. A few steps down the road, and she

was staring up at a timeless clock — looking as if its hands had been swept away in the mad rush of the hours — in the steeple of a church some distance back from the road. Then she was watching a horseshoer pounding with a noisy “Clank, clank” on the hoof of a horse, patiently standing in front of the blacksmith shop.

A half-hour later, as she stood in front of a little neglected cemetery at one end of the village, staring in melancholy mood at its time-scarred stones, gleaming with a dulled whiteness from the rank and overgrown shrubbery, she heard the purr of an automobile.

Turning carelessly, she noticed a bright red car, with the glossy, shiny look of newness, coming slowly in her direction, and quickly perceived that its only occupant was the bold-eyed man who had annoyed her in the post-office. She quickly glanced in another direction, but, to her surprise, the car came to a sudden stop, and as the man threw away his cigar, while doffing his cap, he said, pleasantly, “You have chosen rather a dreary place to linger, have you not, on this beautiful afternoon? Would you not like a little ride,— just a help up the hill, you know?”

For a moment Nathalie was tongue-tied with astonishment, and was about to walk quickly away, when sudden resentment at the man’s impertinence overwhelmed her. Swinging about, with marked emphasis she answered in stiff formality, “Possibly I might

— with friends.” The next second she was hurrying down the road, without waiting to see the man’s eyes darken with annoyance, as he emitted a low whistle. With the peculiar motion of the head already referred to, he started up the car, and a moment later whirled around the bend out of sight.

Nathalie in her haste, caused by her anger and annoyance at the man’s impertinence, was oblivious to the fact that the clouds had been gathering for a thunderstorm, until she heard a loud clap of thunder and a drop of rain swirled into her face. She was tempted to start and run, for she was an arrant coward in a thunderstorm, but remembering that a swiftly moving object is apt to attract the lightning, she curtailed her speed, trying to make as much headway as she could by extra long strides.

Oh, it was coming down in great big drops! What should she do? But with her heart thumping nervously, she kept resolutely on her way, covering her face with her hands in a spasm of terror every time a streak of lightning zigzagged before her eyes. Oh, she had reached the tea-house! She would take refuge on the wide veranda.

The next instant she was racing across the road; but before she gained the desired haven, a deafening clap of thunder, followed by a blinding glare of red flame, came bolting through the trees, causing her to utter a loud, frightened scream, as she stumbled blindly up

the steps. Another instant and the door of the house was flung wide, as a sweet-faced lady, with pleasant, smiling eyes, hurriedly beckoned for her to hasten in.

Nathalie, with a little cry of relief, made a wild rush for the door. As the lady closed it, with shaking limbs and white lips, but with an attempt at a smile the girl cried, "Oh, you are very kind to let me come in, for I am just about drenched"; quickly pulling off her hat as she spoke, and then shaking her wet, clinging skirts.

"Oh, my dear child! you must come in and take off your wet things," at this moment came in sudden call from an adjoining room, whose door was standing ajar. Nathalie started in surprise, for the voice was singularly low and sweet, in strange contrast to the somewhat high-sounding, rather unpleasant voices of the few villagers whom she had heard conversing, when waiting for her mail in the post-office.

Fearing she would be intruding,— she had noticed that the lady who had opened the door for her, although she smiled pleasantly, had not seconded the invitation,— she shook her head. "Oh, no," she protested with evident embarrassment, "I shall not take cold. I can stand here until the storm is over. I am sure I shall be all dry in a moment or so."

But as the voice insisted that she come in, and the woman with the smiling eyes laid her hand on her arm as if to lead her into the room, she reluctantly entered. As she attempted to stammer forth her

thanks, and her fear of trespassing upon their kindness, she saw that the owner of the voice was an elderly lady, evidently an invalid, for she sat in a Morris chair by the window, propped up with pillows. As she motioned for the girl to come nearer, and slowly and awkwardly put forth her hand to feel her wet skirts, Nathalie noticed that her hands were swathed with white cloths.

“Dear me,” she murmured worriedly, “you are *wet*. I am afraid you will take cold. But just take off your blouse and skirt, and Mona will dry them for you in a few moments by the kitchen fire.”

Then, with a few strange motions of the bandaged hands to the sweet-faced woman,— which immediately revealed to Nathalie that she was deaf and dumb,— the wet garments were quickly removed and taken out to the kitchen to dry. Presently the girl, with humorous amazement, found herself snugly wrapped in a silk Japanese kimono, seated in a big chair by the invalid lady, gazing at her in silent admiration.

It was a face that could lay no real claim to beauty, and yet to Nathalie there was a singular charm in the clear-cut outlines of the delicate features, and the soft, warm tints of a complexion that, although many years past youth's fresh coloring, resembled a blush-rose. But it was the eyes that held Nathalie, black-lashed, deep-set, with a calm, peaceful expression in their deep blue; and the brown hair, slightly threaded with

gray, parted in the middle, and curling in a natural wave on each side of her face, gave it the quaint sweetness of some old-time miniature.

Fascinated, as it were, by the charm of the lady's personality, the girl was soon chatting volubly, as she told how she came to get caught in the storm. "I am sure I should have reached home before the rain came," she cried in an aggrieved voice, "if it had not been for that *horrid* man. For I intended going home by the road he took, which is much shorter, but he had made me so nervous by his rudeness that I took the longest way back, for I was afraid I should meet him again."

"Oh, you must not feel annoyed at receiving an invitation to ride in an automobile when trudging up these mountain roads," laughed the lady, "for it is quite the customary thing to give a pedestrian a lift up the hills. But I think, in your case," she added more soberly, "that you did right in refusing the man's offer, for he was rude, as you say, and all young girls should be careful."

Won by her companion's sympathetic interest, Nathalie told that they were spending the summer at Seven Pillars, up near "Peckett's on Sugar Hill," but she was cautious not to tell of the peculiar conditions of their stay, or of her aunt's strange letter. Miss Whipple, as that proved to be the lady's name, said that she had known her aunt, Mrs. Renwick, and considered

her a very interesting woman, although, to be sure, she was somewhat eccentric. Nathalie also told about her Liberty Girls, a subject that was always close to her heart, and how she was going to try to teach liberty to the little settlement-boys, who were coming up to stay with her for a few weeks.

The invalid, and also her sister, were both greatly interested in Nathalie's merry chatter; for Mona had come from the kitchen and seated herself on a low stool by the feet of her sister, who would interpret to her as the girl rattled on. In return for Nathalie's confidences she told how she and her sister, although having been born in the White Mountains, had lived since childhood in Boston. On the death of their parents, after meeting with some reverses, she explained, they had determined to come up to the old homestead and start a sweet-pea farm, as her sister was passionately fond of flowers.

It was delightful work, she said, and it meant so much that was beautiful and joyous to her sister, who, of course, on account of her infirmity, was deprived of many pleasures that other people enjoyed. They had an old farm-hand who had lived with them when they were small children, who did the rough gardening, and who made the farm pay by selling the flowers to the mountain hotels.

“The tea-house was my sister's inspiration,” con-

tinued Miss Whipple, "and has always been a source of great enjoyment to us both, as so many of the young people from the hotels and boarding-houses would drop in of an afternoon for a cup of tea, or a little dance, as I always used to make it a point to be on hand to play for them. My sister," she added a little sadly, "although deprived herself of the joys of girlhood, has always been passionately devoted to the young, and has spent any amount of labor in trying to make our little tea-room attractive.

"But now, as I cannot play any more,—you see I am the victim of inflammatory rheumatism,"—she held up her bandaged hands pathetically,—“the young people do not come in as much as they did. It is a great disappointment to us both,” concluded the invalid dolefully, “although perhaps my sister is partly compensated by her work among her flowers.

“But I am wrong to complain in this way,” she hastened to add, a sudden expression of contrition darkening the sweetness of her glance, “for every one has to endure disappointment and sorrow, sooner or later, as my mother used to tell me when I was a girl; and, after all, ours might have been much worse. I try to comfort myself with the thought that all these little jars of life are just ‘helps’ to fit one for the greater life beyond. Indeed,” she added softly, “I grow ashamed of myself for thinking I am even dis-

appointed, when I think of the renunciation, the sufferings, and the agony of the Man of Sorrows, that we might have joy."

Nathalie made no reply, not only because she was at a loss for words to express her sympathy, but stilled, possibly, by the beautiful look of calm peace that had crept into the sweet eyes.

"But I am wearying you," smiled the invalid, her eyes lighting with a warm glow, "making you think I am a great martyr because I am deprived of a few things that I think needful to my happiness. Perhaps I am in a particularly rebellious mood to-day, for I am so anxious to read a book a friend sent me, but with my poor hands I cannot hold it, and it makes my neck ache to read from the bookstand. But here comes Mona with your dried clothing; yes, and to bring me off my cross of martyrdom by her sweet patience, for she is always cheery and smiling under *her* great deprivations."

"Oh, and she can't even read to you!" lamented Nathalie impulsively, suddenly reminded of what it must mean to live with a person who could not talk to you.

"Yes, and that is one of the nails in the cross," said the shut-in, with whimsical sweetness, "for I not only want some one to talk, to read to me, but sometimes I just yearn for the sound of a human voice.

Oh, but I am getting selfish again—for,— Yes, as soon as you get your gown on, you must go with Mona to see her sweet peas; she would love to show them to you.”

“And I would love to see them,” replied the girl as she dropped the kimono and slipped into her skirt, “for I, too, adore flowers.” And then, as Nathalie fastened up her blouse, and put on her belt, Miss Whipple made her sister understand that their guest wanted to see her bunches of sweet peas.

Mona’s face lighted happily as she comprehended, and in a few moments she and Nathalie were standing in an outer shed, where masses of the dainty flowers were piled in heaps, waiting to be tied into bunches, their delicate odor filling the place with quite perceptible fragrance. Nathalie watched the deaf-and-dumb woman tie a few bunches, dimpling in gratified embarrassment as she softly touched the blossoms. She held a beautifully pink-tinted one against the girl’s cheek, to indicate that they were of the same hue, and then smilingly fastened a big bunch to her waist.

By this time the worst of the storm was over, and Nathalie, seeing that it had settled down to a slow drizzle, decided that she must hurry on, for fear her mother would worry. So, after thanking her kind hostesses, and declaring that she would return their umbrella very soon,— she had promised to make them

a real visit, as Miss Whipple called it, in answer to their repeated urgings,— she hurried out into the rain and was soon on her homeward way.

It was not a pleasant walk, this plodding over a road deep with mud, and in some places running in tiny rivulets, for the girl had no rubbers on, but she kept up her cheer by whistling softly, for not a person was in sight until she reached the road through the woods, leading to Seven Pillars. Here she spied a queer-looking little figure in black, hobbling on ahead of her with a cane, but no umbrella.

Something, perhaps it was the basket the woman carried, suggested that she might be the old lady who had called the afternoon before, so the girl hurried her steps, hoping, by the proffer of her umbrella, to atone for the seeming rudeness of her reception of the previous day.

As she reached the black figure, she pantingly cried, "Oh, won't you come under my umbrella, for I am sure you must be wet." As she spoke she peered at the woman's face, almost hidden by the wide brim of an old, rusty-looking black bonnet. But the bright blue eyes in the withered face, under its halo of black, only stared coldly, stonily, while the drooping mouth, seamed with a network of fine wrinkles, and deep lines of worry and disappointment, narrowed into a tightly compressed slit of red.

But Nathalie, notwithstanding the disdainful glare,

and the woman's oppressive silence, pushed her umbrella over her head, and, somewhat to her own amusement, after a shuffle or two, was soon walking in step to the old woman's hobble.

"It has been quite a storm, hasn't it?" ventured the girl, although her cheeks were flushed with embarrassment under the ill-timed silence of the woman, who acted not only as if she could dispense with the shelter of her umbrella, but with her company as well.

The only reply to the girl was a sniff,—sounding almost like a sneer,—but, determined not to be daunted by the old woman's surliness, Nathalie kept up her chatter, telling how charmed they were with the mountains, especially with Seven Pillars, with its magnificent view, and expressed her regret that they had not been at home the afternoon before, explaining that her mother had been lying down and did not know of her call.

Presently, with a sudden movement, the old lady came to a halt. Before Nathalie could understand what she was stopping for,—her umbrella was held so closely over her companion's head that she didn't perceive the splash of red peeping from between the trees,—she had turned in at a little gate and the girl suddenly realized that the queer old lady was her neighbor of the little red house!

For a moment she was speechless; then a smile dawned in her eyes, as she suddenly understood why her greeting had not been returned when passing by

earlier in the afternoon. Quickly recovering her wits, however, she stepped forward, and as she held the gate open for her new-found neighbor to pass through, she cried, "Oh, I am so glad I met you, and know that we are near neighbors. Mother will be very pleased to meet you, I am sure, and will soon run over to see you."

But no reply was forthcoming, and Nathalie, her patience at a boiling point, hurried on, inwardly vowing that she was never going to speak to that cantankerous old woman again, for had she not done her best to apologize for an unintentional slight? As she reached the veranda with its magic seven pillars her eyes gleamed humorously, as she suddenly realized how funny she must have appeared, hobbling along with that old woman. What a funny way she had of sniffing, and *that* old black poke-bonnet. Then she wondered if the rest of their neighbors were as peculiar and queer as the old lady in the little red house.

CHAPTER X

THE SWEET-PEA LADIES

NATHALIE, with girlish eagerness, hurried into the house, and was soon telling her mother about her "adventure day," as she called it, dwelling at length upon her experiences at the Sweet Pea Tea-House, and, with some show of resentment, on her encounter with their neighbor in the little red house.

Mrs. Page became intensely interested in the Sweet-Pea ladies, as her daughter designated them, but cautioned her against cherishing any resentment at the rudeness of the little old lady in black, as, naturally, she was offended that her overtures of friendliness had been slighted by the city folks. She and Nathalie would go very shortly and call upon her; she did not doubt but that her apologies would be accepted, and that the unpleasant incident would be forgotten.

The next morning, while Nathalie was gathering some lettuce in the garden near the barn, she met Sam, the tow-headed young farm-hand, who looked after the place, and who, with his buxom young wife, lived in a small white house a short distance down the road.

He was a thick-set, sturdy, young fellow, with a broad, good-natured face, from which white-lashed, piglike blue eyes peered bashfully out above his shiny red cheeks. When he met any of the city folks, as he called the inhabitants of Seven Pillars, he would grin bashfully, and slowly drag off his old straw hat in a greeting, growing very red from embarrassed shyness if called upon to engage in conversation with any of them.

But Nathalie, who had had to depend upon Sam for a certain amount of necessary knowledge in relation to the house and garden, had not only grown to depend upon him in many ways, but had become quite friendly with him. She had learned that he was a level-headed, well-meaning young man and that his eyes could twinkle responsively, even if he was somewhat slow of tongue.

As he began to show Nathalie how to select the heads with the soundest hearts, she told him how she had been caught in the thunderstorm the afternoon before, and the kindness of the inmates of the Sweet Pea Tea-House.

“Sure, Miss, they be nice ladies,” assented Sam. “I’ve knowed them this long time. They were born in that old house, but when the old man Whipple growed rich — some relative or t’other left him a pile o’ money — they went skylarking down to Boston — thought we country folks weren’t smart enough fur

them, I reckon. But when the old man's luck went agin him and he died, them gals come home to roost. I feel right sorry for them, for the Lord knows they don't have no stuffin's to their turkey these days. Too bad about the tea-house er goin' to shucks, for sure it use ter bring in er penny er two in the sellin' o' them posies.

"I see ole Jakes, with his old flivver a wheezin' and blowin' up these ere hills, er takin' them to the hotels er pile er times. By Gosh, that Jakes sure is ole, fer he's been er luggin' round these parts with one foot half-buried fer the last ten years. When he goes off the handle what'll become of the poor ole ladies — the folks hereabouts are er guessin'. That deaf-and-dumb one — she makes me feel sort er lonesome," Sam suddenly confided, "with no gift of gab to er, and t'other one with the rheumatics, sure they do be afflicted."

Nathalie also told Sam about meeting their neighbor in the little red house. But when she questioned him as to who she was, and if she lived there all alone, his face became impassive and he grew evasive in his answers. Surmising that he might possibly be a relative of hers — as she had seen him working about the place, she said no more, but hurried into the house, her mind intent on the Sweet-Pea ladies and their pathetic little story, as told by Sam.

"What a misfortune," she mused, "to be poor, an

invalid, and with only a deaf-and-dumb sister to depend upon. O dear! what terrible things people have to suffer when they grow old. Well, I shall have to go this afternoon and return that umbrella, and — yes, I just wish I could do something to help them in some way, for Miss Whipple is a dear!”

But, as she hastened to her room to make her customary entry in her diary, the two ladies were forgotten. This daily duty the girl found quite irksome, especially when she had forgotten, and had to make her entry at night when she was tired and wanted to tumble right into bed; and then, too, she did not see how the everyday doings of *her* life could interest any one. And as for searching for the most valuable thing in the house, this she had never found time to do. Possibly she had not tried very hard to find time, as deep within her heart she considered the whole thing sheer nonsense. And how was she going to judge the value of the things in the house, anyway, she questioned rebelliously, for was it not just an old curio shop filled with strange, odd junk, that her aunt had brought from the other side?

But when she hinted this to her mother, she had been duly rebuked, although Mrs. Page agreed with her daughter that it would be a difficult task to determine the value of anything she might select. She said, however, that she considered that Nathalie, as a courtesy to her aunt, who was giving them such a delightful

summer up in those beautiful mountains, should do all that she could to comply with her request, even if she thought it absurd.

“I doubt if the finding of this very mysterious valuable thing would bring either money or property to any one,” continued the lady, “as I understand that Aunt Mary left the bulk of her estate to some charitable institution as long as no near relative or heir appeared. But she was, as I have told you before, very queer in some ways, and probably took this method of giving away some of her personal effects. It is not at all likely, Nathalie, that you will be the lucky finder,”—there was a smile in Mrs. Page’s eyes,—“but still you should make it a point to search for it, no matter how you feel.”

“Oh, I intended to hunt for the old thing, anyway,” returned Nathalie excusingly, “but I have been a little slow, perhaps, because Cynthia has been so obsessed with the idea, that I hate to be as silly. Jan says she spends most of the day hunting in the attic and through the house when we are down-stairs. She is wild to get into that mystery room, for she thinks it is hidden there.

“But you should have seen her last night, mother,” giggled Nathalie. “I was coming through the hall and suddenly saw a flash of light on the stairs. And there was Cynthia, down on her knees, peering under the stair-carpet and poking about with her flash-light.

She seemed quite annoyed when she saw that she was discovered, and, jumping up quickly, scurried down the hall. Dear me! she is the queerest thing."

"Well, let her look," replied Mrs. Page kindly. "Perhaps her efforts will be rewarded, for, as I understand, she is engaged to a Mr. Buddie, and he is very poor, Janet says. I presume it would make them both very happy if Cynthia came into a little money, or found something of value, for perhaps they could be married."

"But, mother, Janet hasn't looked once. She hates this mystery prowl, as she calls it, as much as I do," emphasized Nathalie, "and I have hard work making her write in her diary. She is busy writing a speech on suffrage, which she expects to deliver this fall. Just imagine, mother, Janet making a speech," and Nathalie smiled at the thought.

Later in the day, dust-begrimed and with her hair all of a frowse, Nathalie came trudging wearily up the staircase. She had been searching for two hours in the library, a great dark room, lined with bookcases, and whose wainscoted walls were hung with family portraits,—Nathalie called them the Renwicks' Honor Roll,—interspersed with medallions of great authors and musicians, and valuable etchings.

The girl had laughed at Cynthia for prowling about, but as she threw herself on her bed, tired and aching from stretching her arms and climbing step-ladders,

in order to peer behind the pictures and cornices, she felt that she would never laugh at her again. For the more she had searched, the more her interest had increased, and with it the conclusion that her aunt, for contrariness, had *really hidden* something of great value, in order to try the patience of the searchers, in some eerie corner or nook.

But was Mrs. Renwick really dead? This was a question that assailed the girl whenever she passed the mystery room, whose door loomed big and dark, with its heavy crimson curtain, in the long hall. Somehow, she had confessed to Janet, whenever she hurried by that door she had a strange feeling, a feeling of nearness to some one,—the way one would feel, she imagined, if they looked up suddenly and found some one watching them with a strange, fixed stare.

Could it be that some one was hidden in that room? But she always dismissed the thought with a half-laugh, as being very silly. Nevertheless she always raced by that door, especially at night, when the hall was wrapped in an uncanny gloominess from the dark shadows that came from the big grandfather's clock, the heavy, black-looking wardrobe at one end, and other ponderous and carved pieces of mahogany resting against the wall.

The following afternoon Nathalie set forth to return the umbrella to its owners, laden with a basket of fruit, in appreciation of their kindness to her. As she

walked cheerily along, a sudden thought loomed big in her mind; she had been thinking how she was going to live up to her watchword, "Liberty and humanity — our best," when it had occurred to her that one way would be to offer to read to Miss Whipple every day. The girl's eyes glowed, and then she wavered. "Oh, no, I don't see how I can do *that*, for I have so much to do at home, and I do not want to miss my walks." Her face clouded as she silently struggled with herself, divided with the desire to cheer her new friend, and yet not to have to forego her walks.

She found the invalid lying back in her chair, looking pale and wan, but when Nathalie inquired if she was suffering, she hastily answered, "Oh, no, I am just pure tired, for I have been trying to read my new war-book, and it has made me ache all over."

"Oh, Miss Whipple," broke from the girl impulsively,—somehow she could not be selfish,— "wouldn't you like to have me come and read to you for a little while each day?"

"Oh, you dear child, that is most kind of you," the lady's eyes brightened. "Indeed, I should be delighted, but it would be selfish to keep you indoors on these beautiful mountain days." A little sigh ended the sentence.

"But you would not be keeping me in," insisted her companion, "for I should just love to read to you, and I know I shall find plenty of time to walk some-

where every day." And then, as an added plea to her request, she told of her mornings with Nita Van Vorst, and how their taking turns at reading to one another had been a source of great instruction to them both.

In a short time Nathalie was happily reading to her friend, who listened with keen enjoyment. After a time, fearing the girl would tire, they stopped for a little chat, and it was during one of these chats that Nathalie told of meeting their queer neighbor who lived in the red house, and how rudely she had been repulsed by the old lady, when she had tried to atone for her reception of the day before.

"A little old woman in a black bonnet, with a basket?" repeated Miss Whipple in a puzzled tone. "Why, that is strange, for I didn't know that any one lived in that little red house. Some years past Mrs. Renwick allowed a poor old woman to live there rent free, but she died a few years ago. I shall have to ask Jakes about it, for he knows every man, woman, or child who lives on these mountains."

During one of these pauses Mona came in, and her sister, noting the wistful look in the patient brown eyes, surmised that she, too, would like to enjoy Nathalie's youth and charm. And so, in a few moments, the girl was out in the sweet-pea garden, delighting Mona with her enthusiastic interest in the delicately tinted flowers that grew in tall, long lines on each side of the house.

Here, too, she met Jakes, an old white-haired man, bent almost double with age. He made up for her companion's enforced silence, by showing the many different varieties of these exquisite flowers, which, on their rough stems, with their tendril-bearing leaves, peeped coyly at her, in almost every tint of their varying colors.

But the girl glanced up with quick surprise, when she heard the old man, in his quavering, broken voice, softly repeat:

“Here are sweet peas, on tiptoe for a flight;
With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,
And taper fingers catching at all things,
To bind them all about with tiny rings.”

As the old man saw Nathalie glance up at him in ill-concealed astonishment at his aptness in repeating the poetic quotation, he smiled and said, “Ah, Miss, I have planted, transplanted, trained, tended, and watched these sweet posies for many a long year as carefully as a mother-hen tends her tiny chicks. But it was my dear lady, herself, who taught me that verse, and sure I have never forgotten it, although I do not know the name of the poet-man who wrote it.”

Nathalie, with her hand in Mona's, who seemed to love to hold it, was now led by her into the little shed, where she was soon busily employed in helping her tie the sweet peas into bunches, to be delivered the next morning to the hotels by Jakes.

From the making of bouquets she wandered into the tea-room, where Mona had hurried, on seeing a couple of young ladies come in, who wanted to buy some post-cards. While they were selecting them the deaf-and-dumb woman hastened into the kitchen for her tea-tray. Nathalie, meanwhile, waited by the little glass case in one corner of the room, carelessly studying the mountain-views that lined it, and where boxes of maple sugar, pine pillows, and various knick-knacks that Miss Whipple said she had made before her hands had become so helpless, lay scattered about for sale.

As she turned restlessly away from the case, her glance fell on the two girls, who stood examining the cards on the wall near, and she half smiled at their grotesqueness, as she called their modish style of apparel. For the girls, fair samples of the average fashionable summer girls, wore their hair plastered down on the sides of their faces in deep scallops, while their cheeks were carmine-tinted, and their noses white-washed with powder. With their long, thin necks rising in kangaroo fashion from their turn-over, low-necked collars, and with their short-waisted belts and narrow skirts, high above their high-heeled, white boots, they reminded Nathalie of some funny French dolls that she had seen once in a museum in New York.

She was wondering why so many girls of the present day thought it improved them to make themselves so

ungainly and painted-looking, when one of the girls suddenly turned her face to her. A sudden exclamation, and she had stepped towards Nathalie, who was now staring at her in puzzled recognition.

"I declare, if it isn't Nathalie Page. Why, don't you remember me?" she shrilled excitedly. "I'm Nelda Sackett. You remember we used to be desk-mates at Madame Chemidlin's?"

"Why, Nelda, how do you do? Yes, I remember you now," smiled Nathalie cordially. "How stupid of me not to have recognized you before. But dear me, you have changed!" And then, fearing that the girl might detect her lack of admiration for her modish appearance, she hastily added, "Oh, you have grown to be quite a young lady."

"Young lady! Well, I should say that I was," flashed the girl in a slightly aggrieved tone. "Why, I'm eighteen, and Justine,—you remember Justine Guertin,—she is nineteen."

By this time Justine had joined them, and after greeting Nathalie with condescending graciousness, the three girls were soon chatting about their school-days and former friends. The girls were both very curious as to their old schoolmate's life in her new home. Nathalie determined to hold her own and not be cowed by their ultra-fashionableness, and, despite the jarring realization of the fact that they knew of her changed circumstances since her father's death, bravely told

about her new life in their little home on Main Street, in the old-fashioned Long Island town. She not only dwelt with persistent minuteness on the many details of her more humble life, but told of her connection with the Girl Pioneers, the pleasure it had brought her, the fineness of its aims and purposes, and the wholesomeness of a life lived in the open, with its knowledge of bird and tree lore, and the many new avenues of knowledge it opened to a girl.

This sort of thing, however, did not seem to appeal to these New York girls, and they stared somewhat coldly, although a bit curiously, at Nathalie during her recital, and then abruptly changed the subject by telling of their own gay life in the city. Oh, and what a time they were having at the Sunset Hill House, playing golf and tennis, and dancing in the evening with gay college boys and other young men.

By this time Mona had returned, and, as Nathalie saw her trying to wheel a small tea-table into the room with both hands full, she hastily flew to her aid. And later, when she returned for some needed articles in the kitchen, the young girl arranged the teacups and saucers on the tray before the girls, as they had asked that they might be served with a cup of tea à la Russe.

The girls continued to chatter in a desultory fashion for a while, although Nathalie, whose intuitions were keen, sensed that they had grown a little less cordial in their manner towards her. Presently, finishing

their tea and paying for it, they nodded Nathalie a careless good-by and hurried out, somewhat to the girl's surprise, who had naturally supposed that they would invite her to come and see them at the hotel, or express a desire to visit her at her home.

With reddened cheeks and a disappointed expression in her eyes Nathalie watched them as they crossed the road to the flagged walk opposite. It was true, she was lonely up there in her new surroundings, with no special friend to run in and chat with, as she had been accustomed to do with her friend Helen. She wanted young company, and the meeting with her former schoolmates had revived old memories and worn-out longings.

Although she did not approve of their style of dress, or their airy manners, still they were something that belonged to her former life in New York, and she would have enjoyed having a chat with them once in a while for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne."

With the quick thought that they were not worth a pang of regret, for they had shown that they had become very snobbish, she turned away, and aimlessly wandered over to an old piano that stood on one side of the room. As if to ease the hurt feeling that still jarred her sensitiveness, she sat down and carelessly ran her fingers over the old yellow keys. A sudden call from the invalid in the adjoining room,— the door

stood open,— for Nathalie to play something, brought the girl to herself with a sudden start.

“ Oh, I do not know anything to play,” she weakly pleaded, “ for I am no musician.” Nathalie spoke the truth, for she not only had no special talent for music, but the little accomplishment that she had acquired in that line had been sadly neglected since she had taken up housework.

But as the invalid's plea was insistent, and the girl did not want to be disagreeable, she again swept her hands over the keyboard, this time unconsciously falling into one of Chopin's waltzes, something that she supposed she had forgotten. From this she wandered into a few rag-time airs, and then came snatches of old-time melodies, until finally she was playing a well-known reverie by a noted composer.

But suddenly realizing that she had heard nothing from the next room, and fearing that she had wearied Miss Whipple, she hastily arose and hurried to her side, to find her lying back in her chair with a strange restful expression on her face, but with closed eye lids, through which tears were slowly trickling.

“ Oh, Miss Whipple, I should not have played so long,” exclaimed the girl remorsefully. “ Perhaps I have made you feel sad.”

“ No, no, my child! Your playing has brightened me up.” The invalid sat up quickly, as she shame-

facedly wiped away the stray tears. "Indeed, my dear, I pay you a compliment when I cry, for if the music did not go right to my heart the tears would not have come. No, I would never regret being an old shut-in if I could hear music once in a while. But that was a lovely little thing you played last; it is one of my favorites."

"Oh, I must try to get Janet to come down and play for you," cried Nathalie with a relieved sigh, "for she is a *real* musician, and plays for us every evening as we sit on the veranda in the moonlight. But it is getting late and I must go, for I have supper to get. When my boys come, perhaps I shall have more time, for, you know, I am going to put them through their paces and teach them to be helpful."

After a hasty good-by, Nathalie was hurrying across the road, while waving her hand to the sweet, patient face smiling at her from the window. Some twenty minutes later she arrived at Seven Pillars, her eyes happily aglow, as she told her mother of the readings to be, to help lighten the burdens of her new friend, the shut-in.

Several days later Nathalie, with her mother, walked slowly down the garden-path, with its border of old-time hollyhocks and peonies and white stones, to the gate-posts. A step or two, and they stood before the door of the little red house, as the girl, with pleased eyes, cried, "Well, mother, she's in, for I saw her

sitting at the window as we came up the path, so we can get this ordeal over."

But unfortunately she reckoned without her host, for although they knocked and knocked, Nathalie even pounding on the door with her parasol-handle, for she had planned to take a walk after the call, no one came to the door. After a time she peered at the window, but some one had drawn the shades down so that nothing was to be seen.

"Mother, she is *so angry* she just won't let us in," cried the young caller with flushed cheeks. "Oh, I think she must be a very disagreeable old lady, and I do not think there is any use in trying to be nice to her."

Mrs. Page had evidently come to the same conclusion, so they slowly turned and retraced their steps back to the house, and in a short space she was seated on the veranda with her darning, as Nathalie started for a walk. As she passed the red house, and caught sight of the silver-haired old lady knitting at the window she quickly turned her head away, determined to ignore her in the future. "And so this is the end of our acquaintance with our next-door neighbor," she mused ruefully, as she passed on down the road. "Well, it certainly did not prove very progressive. Of course I don't really care,—she's just an old lady,—but still I do wish Cynthia Loretto had stayed up in her old studio, and not made trouble for us by her unkind ways."

CHAPTER XI

THE RIDE THROUGH THE NOTCH

NOTWITHSTANDING that the inmates of Seven Pillars were neighbored by a disagreeable old lady, as Nathalie had mentally dubbed the occupant of the red house, the time passed pleasantly to the girl, although she had days when she longed to see Helen, to open her heart to her in confidential mood. But the lonesomeness gradually lessened, occupied as she was with her manifold household cares, her exploring trips, her visits to the Sweet-Pea ladies, and the sometime prowl for the mysterious *It*. To her satisfaction she soon found that by hurrying a little over her morning tasks, she not only had time to read to her friend, and to help Mona at her work, but that she did not have to miss her walks.

She finally succeeded in getting Janet to go with her to the tea-house, and that volatile young woman was so won by the charming personality of the invalid, and the sweet patience of Mona, that she not only played during her call, but made arrangements to come down twice a week and give them a musical afternoon, to the great joy of the invalid.

On one of these days a party of ladies from the Hotel Look-off, out for an afternoon constitutional, dropped in for a rest and a cup of tea. They were so pleased that they told others about these musical afternoons, so it soon became quite the fashionable thing to drop in at the Sweet Pea Tea-House, especially on Wednesdays and Saturdays. On these days a score of ladies, old and young, could frequently be seen having a social chat over the teacups, while listening to some popular ragtime air, or a classic from one of the old composers, while knitting for the soldiers.

There had been one unpleasant occurrence that had jarred Nathalie extremely, and that was that Cynthia Loretto, when she learned of the Sweet-Pea ladies and the musical afternoons, was quite insistent that Blue Robin take some of her paintings and etchings down, and hang them up so that they could be seen, in the hope of making a sale.

Nathalie, at first, had refused to accede to this request, and then she began to argue with her conscience, giving for her refusal many reasons that only existed in her imagination. Finally, Mrs. Page, with her motherly intuition, perceiving that her daughter was at war with her better self, one day led the conversation to the subject, by saying that she thought it was almost pathetic the way Cynthia yearned to make money so she could marry Mr. Buddie.

“You must remember, daughter,” she persuaded,

after listening to the girl's objections in regard to the paintings, "that even if you are not attracted to Cynthia, she has feelings, hopes, and disappointments as well as you. Some day, perhaps, you may be old and alone in the world with your living to earn, and will be almost willing to make a bore of yourself if you can only earn a little money so as to give yourself some pleasure." Nathalie made no reply, but somehow she began to question if she were really trying to live up to her motto to be helpful and kind, or was it just a *make-believe* thing with her, as she called it. The next day she reluctantly broached the subject to Miss Whipple, and, to her surprise, found that she would be very pleased to have the paintings and etchings on the wall. "The room really needs papering," the lady explained, "and they will help to hide such disfigurements as stains and tack-holes on the faded paper." This conclusion settled the matter very satisfactorily to Cynthia, and made Nathalie rejoice that she had, after all, come out conqueror in her fight with self.

The girl had begun to wonder why she did not hear from Mrs. Van Vorst as to when her boys were coming, when a letter arrived. To her great joy it announced that they would be due at the Sugar Hill station the following Saturday, as they would leave New York in the White Mountain express, probably reaching their destination about seven in the evening.

Nathalie was somewhat disappointed that the boys were not to go on to the Littleton station, where Mr. Banker had planned to meet them. But alas, she could not ask him to come all the way over to the Sugar Hill station, and then, too, she knew that he and his wife generally took little outings through the mountains every week-end.

Deeply perplexed, she pondered over the matter with no little anxiety, and then suddenly it came to her that she would see if Miss Whipple would not let her hire her machine, and then go for the boys herself. She had learned to know the mountain roads in riding with Jakes when he went to the different hotels to deliver the sweet peas. He had often let her drive, as she had previously learned to handle a car from her many rides with Grace, and had even secured a license through the insistence of her friend.

Hurrying through her work, she hastened down to the tea-house, where she found the two ladies in a state of unusual excitement, for Jakes, Miss Whipple explained, was quite ill, and they were at a loss as to how they were to get their flowers to the various hotels the following day. And the Profile House had sent in a special order, for there was to be some kind of a festivity there that evening, and they wanted the bunches of sweet peas for prizes.

“Oh, don't worry over that,” cried the girl quickly, as she perceived their distress, “for I can deliver the

flowers for you. I can drive and I know the roads, for I have been about so much with Jakes and Mr. Banker."

After some little hesitation the two ladies consented that Nathalie should deliver the flowers, insisting, however, in return for her kindness to them, that she should have the car for her own use in the afternoon, to drive to the station for the boys.

To Nathalie it was quite a new experience, to get up in the cool gray of early dawn, dress hurriedly, swallow a hasty breakfast,—her mother was to act as housekeeper for the day,—and then hurry down to the tea-house. It did not take her long to load the car with its flowery burden, and then she was speeding through Sugar Hill village, and on to the Long Green Path, as she called the road through the woods that led to Seven Pillars and Franconia. The air was so cool from the moisture of the night dew that still lay in glistening gems and silvery cobwebs on the hilly greens, the leaves, ferns, and wild flowers, and bracing from the ozone of the mountain breezes that heralded the new-born day, that the girl's pulses throbbed with buoyant exhilaration.

There was a moment's stop at Seven Pillars for Janet, who had consented to accompany her, and then they were off, Nathalie happily waving her hand to Sam as he came through the pasture with the cows. A few moments later they were whirling past Roslin-

wood Farm, with its big white barn, and then past a long, low, white-gabled, red-chimneyed building, with the old-time hostelry sign, "Peckett's on Sugar Hill," swinging from its porte-cochère, with its flower-garden, riotous with many-colored blooms, across the road, almost under the shadow of Garnet's sloping meadow.

Now they were flying down the long sloping hill, around the tiny white schoolhouse at the cross-roads, and then they were passing Garnet's grassy hillside, as it nodded a greeting to its taller fellows, the Franconia Range, that towered on the girls' right. Its verdant meadows were squared with cobble-stone ledges, and awave with the glossy plumage of stately trees, as it rose upward from the road, until its slope was lost in a tangle of feathery treetops which crowned its summit like a cap of green.

"The Echoes," a homey little hotel nestling at the base of the green hill, with its square white tower, peeped picturesquely from the protecting sweep of graceful willows and silvery poplars. Here they had a magnificent view of the mountains as they rose from their mists of gray, their rugged crests, spires, and domes sharply outlined against a glorious riot of sunrise color.

Lafayette, the king of the range, towered his grizzly head in blue-hazed grandeur far upward, standing like some giant up from the mists that covered the

valleys below like a silver lake, while Lincoln's rounded summit, with its twin slides, was almost hidden by trailing wreaths of pearly gray. The gaps between the Sleeping Infant, sharp-peaked Garfield, the North and South Twins, and the Sleeping Giant, were so thickly silvered with mist that the peaks of these mountains looked like islets of green on a shimmering gray sea, with their tops scarfed with pink and violet streaks, that floated mistily against the golden splendor, reflected from the crimson-hued ball in the east.

Directly before them rose the undulating slope of Breakneck Hill, bowing in gentle humility to the more rugged beauty of the lofty range opposite, while between the widening gap, far in the distance, loomed the Presidential Range, their tops white-wreathed with cloud. Mount Washington, with majestic stateliness, soared far above his comrades, while the smaller mountains below and on the left, scattered here and there through the cleft between the two ranges, gleamed gray, purple, and pink, as they peered at them from their hoods of gray.

It was a swift whirl down the half-mile hill, and then they were passing through the little mountain village of Franconia, with its white cottages, its stone sidewalks, its beautiful Gale River, with its bush-fringed banks and little stone tower, surrounded by level stretches of green pasture-land, merging into the low foothills that skirted the higher range. It was a

wonderful ride through that five-mile Notch, in the glint of the rose-tipped sunlight, with the ever-changing flash from one mountain-picture to another, each one gripping you with the witchery of the illusive charm of Nature in her varying moods, now frolicsome, gay, or blithe, or strangely stilled in the grandeur of a sunrise calm.

As the girl came down the steps of the Profile House, her first stopping-place, she paused a moment and peered up at Eagle Cliff, a precipitous wall of rock opposite, rising to the height of fifteen hundred feet above the road. It was thickly set with evergreens, climbing birches, maples, and spruces, and intermingled with patches of a softer green, from where purple-tinted bits of rock, like giant's eyes, looked down upon the wayfarers that traversed the road beneath.

Nathalie had heard that the cliff had received its name from the "Arabs of the air," which at one time had lodged in its airy heights. But evidently they had long since departed, and after a disappointed glance, as her eyes swept the tall steeps, she rejoined Janet in the car, and was soon guiding it through the green-wooded road to her next halting-place, some few miles beyond.

This was the Flume House, a long, low, yellow building, grouped about with mountain crags,—the gateway to the Flume, a remarkable fissure in Liberty Mountain, over fifty feet deep, and several hundred

long, where an ice-cold cascade dashed with snowy spray, to flow in more quiet mood over ledges of granite rocks between perpendicular walls.

After leaving their flowers at the office the girls started on their homeward way. The distance was soon traversed as they chattered of the scene before them, sometimes hushed into stillness by the sudden surprise of some wonderful trick of Nature as they flew swiftly past.

As they reached the little schoolhouse at the cross-roads Janet descended from the car to walk up the hill to the house, while Nathalie continued on her way. She had soon passed the artist's bungalow, with its studio, on her left, and Hildreth's maple-sugar farm, with its big barn, coming out shortly at the little red Episcopal church, with the deserted, falling-to-pieces hotel, the Marimonte, just beyond on a knoll.

It did not take her long to ascend the long hilly slope to the Hotel Look-off, where a basket of sweet peas were left, and then she had swung her car around and was speeding down the declivity to the Sunset Hill House, where she again brought her car to a halt.

As she neared the big entrance-door, heavily burdened with her flowers, she came face to face with her two New York friends, who were sauntering carelessly from the office, evidently having lingered over a late breakfast. As the girl sighted the familiar faces she forgot their apparent slight of a few days before,

and nodded pleasantly, her cheeks dimpling with pleasure. But, to her surprise, a rigid stare was their only response to her greeting, and, with a sudden start of shocked dismay, the girl hastened past them into the office, where she was relieved of her flowers by one of the bell-boys.

Smarting from the rankle of the insult, but still dazed at the suddenness of it, she walked slowly down to the car and mechanically stepped into it. As she glided down the road she sat stiff and erect, her mind apparently on the steering-wheel, although in reality her senses were in a maze of dumb bewilderment.

A half-hour later, after running the car into the stable, for she was to use it again later, she made her way into the house, up to her room, and to her closet. Here, with her face buried in the blackness of hanging skirts and coats, she stood silently for a few moments, trying to argue herself out of the hurt feeling that would not be downed.

"Oh, what a little ninny I am," she exclaimed at last. "*What do I care* if they did give me the 'go by,' as Dick says." She gave a half laugh, that quickly merged into a long sigh as the thought came, that, after all, the girls had not really hurt her as much as they had hurt themselves. "No, I will not allow myself," she closed her mouth determinedly, "to be so small as to let it hurt me any more."

She had a very restful afternoon, with a good long

nap, and a nice time reading out in the hammock, and then, a little before six, she set out on her ride to the station in a tense state of expectancy, for she was anxious to see her Liberty boys, as she had elected to call them.

The drive was a delightful one after the burden and heat of the day, and she bowled swiftly along, slackening her speed every now and then to admire an unusually fine landscape view, or the golden, violet-tinted clouds that drifted up from the west. She had just turned into her last lap, as she called it, for she knew that she must be very near the station, when, with a sudden skidding motion, her car came to a standstill. She got out and cranked it, but although there was plenty of gasoline still on hand, it refused to go. She poked about, here and there, to see what had caused the stoppage, but although she cleaned out her carburetor and saw that her spark-plugs were all right, she failed to discover what was wrong. Her heart began to beat feverishly, for she was well aware that, although she could drive a car, in reality she knew little about its mechanism, and therefore could not remedy any very serious trouble. She got down and crawled under the car, to examine first one part and then another, but alas! it was exasperatingly useless, for she could see nothing wrong, and she finally crawled out again, covered with dust and grime. At this moment she heard the far-distant whistle of an

oncoming locomotive, realizing with a pang of despair, that it was the White Mountain express, and that she would not be at the station to meet the boys.

Suddenly her face gleamed hopefully, for at that moment she heard the near hum of an automobile, and the next second saw it whirl around the curve in the road. "Oh, perhaps it will be a man who can help me," quickly flashed through her mind, as she peered intently at the nearing car. And then she almost laughed aloud from sheer joy, for, yes, the car was driven by a man, who, with one quick glance at the girl's flushed face, and the stranded vehicle, brought his car to a standstill and jumped quickly out.

As the man came towards the girl, who had begun to pleadingly explain her mishap, and the hurry she was in, Nathalie caught her breath with a startled gasp, as she suddenly was made aware that he was the bold-eyed man who had accosted her in the post-office a week or so before, and who had spoken to her near the cemetery. But she was so distressed and fearful that she would miss the boys — poor little things, what would they do if there was no one there to meet them! — that this fact was submerged in the greatness of her need.

In a moment or so she had regained her customary poise, as the young man, after a cursory glance over the machine, discovered what was wrong. Ah, it was a short-circuit. With a wrench he took from his

pocket, he soon adjusted the difficulty, and then turned smilingly towards the girl, and with another of his bold stares assured her that her car was all right.

Nathalie involuntarily stepped back, and then, half ashamed of her timidity when the man had been so kind, cried hastily: "Oh, I am so much obliged to you! I do not know what I should have done, if you had not come along. Thank you, very much," she ended abruptly, then, pleading that she must hurry, she cranked her car, and, with a little stiff bow, stepped into it, and a moment later was whirling down the road.

But she had not gotten rid of her helper as quickly as she thought, for it was only a second, as it seemed to her, when, on turning her head as she heard the throb of a machine in her rear, she saw, with a sudden qualm of fear, that the man was following her. "Oh, why does he do that?" she thought in nervous apprehension. "Yes, he must be following me," she mentally decided, "for he was going in the opposite direction when I hailed him."

But sensibly determining to pay no attention to him, she kept on her way, although an aggravating dread assailed her that she could not account for, that the man might waylay, and try to rob her, the bold glance of his eyes having filled her with a feeling of distrust.

Ah, she was at the station. As she glided up to the

little wooden platform she peered anxiously around, but no one was in sight. Bringing her car to a halt, she jumped hastily out and scurried around to the other side of the platform, only to see the ticket-agent locking up the waiting-room, as he prepared to depart on his nightly journey home, as the station was only open for certain trains.

“Did you see any little boys get off the White Mountain express?” inquired the girl breathlessly.

“Why, yes,” replied the man, as he slipped the door-key into his pocket, “I saw three,—no, four boys. They waited around here for some time, and then they went away. They looked like foreigners; one little chap must have been an Italian, for he carried a violin under his arm, and wore a queer embroidered vest.”

“Did you notice in what direction they went?” cried the girl, while a chilled feeling swept over her as to the fate of the boys. Oh, suppose they should get lost in those mountain woods!

No, the man had not noticed, and Nathalie with a dejected attitude, turned away, nervously wondering what to do, and where to look. Well, she must do something, for those boys must have been the ones Mrs. Van Vorst had sent to her. Once more she was in her car, and then, in sudden desperation, she determined to try every road in succession,—for there were several leading from the station,—until she found

them, for surely they could not have gone very far, as they were walking. Buoyed with this thought, she plunged into the graying shadows of the road nearest to her, dimly conscious that the bold-eyed man in the automobile, who had been circling around the little square of green in front of the station, was close behind her.

CHAPTER XII

NATHALIE'S LIBERTY BOYS

ON and on she rode, peering through the gloaming until her eyes ached, ever conscious of the "throb, throb," of the car directly behind her. What a mistake, she thought dismally, to have ventured on these lonely roads alone. And, O dear! how her mother would worry when she failed to arrive home on time.

Suddenly she stopped and stared fixedly through the gray light, and then her heart leaped, for down the road a little distance, trudging slowly and uncertainly beside the mountain-ditch, were four little figures. Oh, they must be those boys, but she had sent for only three.

With a glad thrill of hope urging her forward, the machine responded to her touch, and in a moment she had reached the boys, one of whom, at the sound of the oncoming car, had swung around, and was staring at her with large, liquid brown eyes. The girl suddenly decided that he must be the Italian lad, who the ticket-agent had said wore an embroidered vest, and carried a violin under his arm. Yes, there was the violin!

Nathalie brought her car to a sudden stop, and called out, "Hello there, boys; hello!"

At the sound of the girl's call all four swung about and faced her, while a boyish, gruff voice answered: "Hello yourself. What do you want?"

Nathalie laughed happily, for a sudden intuition told her that her search was over. And then she said: "Why, I am looking for some little boys, who were to have come from New York on the White Mountain express. Are you the ones?"

A chorus of trebles piped excitedly, "Yes, mum; we comed off the train," while the tallest lad, to whom a smaller child of six or seven was nervously clinging, stepped forward. As he lifted his ragged cap he cried politely, "Be you Miss Nathalie Page?" The girl, as she stared down at the questioner, saw a close-cropped head of reddish hair, and a freckled face of an unhealthy pallor, from which two sharp blue eyes were anxiously peering.

"Yes, I'm Miss Nathalie Page," responded the girl, with a note of relief in her voice, not only glad that she had found the boys, but at the sudden thought that her tormentor would now let her alone, for, with four boys to keep her company, he would not dare to molest her.

"I'm awfully sorry not to have met you at the station," she went on regretfully, "but something happened to my machine and I was detained on the

road. But I did not know that there would be four of you," she added a little doubtfully. But before she could finish her sentence, the lad who had constituted himself the spokesman for the group, silently handed her a letter.

Nathalie tore it open, and then hastily read it. She was so excited, however, by the many events that had crowded one upon the other that she did not sense its full meaning. Recognizing the signature, "Elizabeth Van Vorst," she cried hastily, "Well, it's all right, boys; jump into the car," as she stuffed the letter into the pocket of her coat. Nathalie immediately saw that a second invitation would not be needed, as the boys made a wild lunge forward, scrambling and pushing each other, as if to see which one would get there first, all but the little chap, who stood whimpering by the side of the car.

"Now, boys, no pushing or pulling," cried Nathalie with a laugh in her voice, "for there's plenty of room, and you're all going home with me. But here, you big one, get out and put that little kid up by me, for the poor tot must be hungry and tired."

"Sure, he is, Miss," replied the older lad, who evidently was his brother, jumping down and lifting him up into the seat by Nathalie, despite his kicks and protests that he wanted to sit with Danny.

"Ah, there, kid," coaxed the bigger boy softly, "don't be a girl. Show you're a boy. Sit up there

nice-like. Sure the leddy won't eat yer." This suggestion of being a girl had a magical effect upon the child, for he immediately ceased to whimper, and settled back in the seat with a repressed snuffle.

Nathalie turned the car around,— the man who had been following her had long since disappeared in the darkness,— and was soon speeding towards home. She glanced every now and then at the three figures on the back seat, who sat as still as three blind mice, snuggling up to each other for warmth, while the little chap at her side clutched her frantically as he lurched forward every time the car swung around a corner, or bumped over a "thank-you-ma'am."

"Here, kiddie," cried the girl presently, suddenly looking down at the child, whose big, reddish-brown eyes were staring up at her half fearfully from out of a wan, white face. "Put your head on my lap! There, that's it," as the child, to her surprise snuggled up to her, and then silently obeyed. "Now look up," she added laughingly, "and count the stars."

Although this injunction brought forth a chuckle from the back seat, it sufficed to keep the little one quiet, and the girl, as she drove rapidly on, could hear him droning, "One, two, three,—" until, with a drowsy little sigh, the counting ceased, and the girl saw that he was asleep.

It was almost nine o'clock when Nathalie whirled under the dimly burning lantern of the porte-cochère at

Seven Pillars, where, on the veranda, Janet and her mother were anxiously watching for her.

“Oh, Nathalie, I have been so worried about you,” began her mother plaintively. “I will never let you go off this way again.” But her lamentations were cut short as her daughter cried, “Oh, it’s all right, mumsie; something happened to the car and detained me. But do help me get these hungry boys into the house, for the poor things are just dead with the long ride and for something to eat.”

Several minutes later, as the girl came hurrying from the kitchen, where she had been to see if the boys’ supper was ready, she found them lined up in the hall, four pathetically weary little figures. Their pale faces were smeared with railroad dust, and their foreheads oozed perspiration, but their eyes were bright and expectantly keen, on the alert for the something good that they knew was coming.

As her eyes swept smilingly down the line, the smile suddenly wavered, as her glance was arrested by the thin, emaciated face of a strange grayish whiteness,—of a peasant lad, who, bewildered with dumb amazement, was staring at her with a dogged look, his dark eyes haunted, as it were, by an expression of fear.

He was huddling something in his right arm, a yellowish-brown thing that squirmed and twisted uneasily, while the left sleeve of his soiled shirt-waist, strapped with one suspender, was pinned to his shoul-

der in an empty, flat way that was infinitely pathetic, for the little lad had only one arm!

The girl stared back at the boy with a suppressed cry, as into memory flashed the many stories she had heard of the Belgian and French children who had been so mercilessly ill-treated and maimed by the German soldiers. Oh, this must be one of those refugees. Yes, she dimly remembered now, seeing the word "Belgian" in Mrs. Van Vorst's letter, which she had read so quickly. With sudden effort, her natural kindness coming to her aid, she smiled into the fear-haunted eyes, crying gently, as she softly touched him on the one arm, "Is that your dog? Oh, I love dogs. What is his name?"

A sudden flash of joyful relief radiated from the boy's face, momentarily driving away that dulled, cow-like bewilderment from his eyes. It was a look that caused Nathalie's heart to quiver with pain, for it was the look of some dumb animal that had been wantonly punished or brutally hurt by the hand it loved; a look that haunted her for many days, constantly urging her to try and say something, or do something, so as to drive it away.

The next moment a little yellow-brown terrier was crouching on the floor at his master's feet, while thumping the floor with his tail, and licking his hand, then trying to crawl up his trousers' leg, as if to get back to the shelter of that one lonely arm.



"IS THAT YOUR DOG? OH, I LOVE DOGS!" — *Page 184.*

“Oh, the poor animal must be hungry,” exclaimed Mrs. Page, just as the boy had given his name as Tige. “But come, children,” she added, “and get your suppers; and the dog, too,” patting the brown head of the refugee, while a look of infinite pity shone from her kindly eyes.

The boys needed no further urging, as Danny, with a wild hoot of delight, yelled, “Come on, fellers; it’s eats.” And then, notwithstanding Nathalie’s well-laid plans that each one should have a good wash-up before eating, they made a straight run for the kitchen.

Here they were soon putting down everything in sight in a way that almost frightened the girl, as she suddenly realized the care and responsibility she had taken upon herself. And that *one-armed boy!* O dear! she had never thought of such a thing as *that*.

But if they didn’t have their wash before supper, they had it very soon after, as the girl marched each one separately to the washbowl in the bathroom, and, after making him duck his head in the water, proceeded to give it a vigorous shampoo, notwithstanding sundry squirms and twists, for Nathalie believed in taking things by the forelock, and they just *must be clean*.

Then the scrubbed one, after being supplied with towels and soap, was informed that he must give himself a good scrubbing in the tub, and if he failed to do it properly, he would have to do it all over again. Nathalie’s somewhat severe admonition was met with

stony silence on the part of her victims, unless it was a rather loud, "Gee whiz, fellers; here's me for a swim!" that involuntarily escaped Danny, the older boy, when he found himself before the well-filled bath-tub.

When it came to the little chap's turn, Nathalie's young heart revolted at letting him go through the washing process all by himself, as he was so little, tired, and sleepy, so she said that she would give him his bath. To her surprise he began to whimper, while his older brother protested most vehemently that he could bathe him.

"Oh, no," returned the young lady decidedly; and a few moments later her charge was standing in the bath-tub, ready for his scrubbing, Nathalie meanwhile talking to him gently, as if to quiet his fears.

Some time later, with a red, heated face, the young girl emerged from the room, dragging a little white-robed figure by the hand, whose face was, strange to say, wreathed in dimples. "Here, dear, you get into Miss Natty's bed," said the girl, leading the child into her room, "and brother will stay with you until I return," motioning to Danny, who had been waiting outside the bathroom, with a strange, worried look on his face.

"Oh, mother," exclaimed Nathalie a moment later, as she came rushing out to the porch. "What do you think? Oh, I never was so surprised in my life!"

"Why, Nathalie, what is the matter with you?" ejaculated Janet, as she placed her arm caressingly around the girl. "You are as white as a ghost, and you're all of a tremble."

"Oh, I've had such a scare,— such a *terrible* surprise," stammered the girl. And then she broke into a little laugh as she cried: "Oh, mother, you know the littlest chap? Well, he isn't a boy at all; he's a girl!"

"A girl!" echoed three voices simultaneously, and then Mrs. Page gave a laugh, a laugh in which every one joined.

It did not take Nathalie long to relate her experiences in the bathroom, and then she remarked: "I wonder if Mrs. Van Vorst knew he was a girl. It's awfully funny. Oh, I'll read her letter again."

The next moment, with the letter opened before her, she was slowly reading aloud:

"DEAR NATHALIE:

"I am sending you four boys instead of three. The fourth lad is a one-armed Belgian refugee, and his story is so pitiful I am sure, when you come to learn it, you will be glad I sent him to you. A Buffalo lady sent word to the Belgian Relief Committee that she would take one of a number of refugees recently arrived from France. But when she found that the poor lad had been mutilated by the Germans, her heart weakened. She claimed that she could not stand unpleasant things — what about the sufferings of the boy? — and returned him to the committee.

“A member of the committee, hearing that I was looking for some boys, and being greatly distressed over the cruelty of the case, begged me to send him to you, if only for a little while, so as to give them a chance to place him later. I, of course, will be responsible for any expense he will be to you. I am sorry, but I had no opportunity to clothe him. He seems a strange, docile child. I think he is still living in the horrors of hell, from those terrible eyes of his. Oh, it is heart-breaking, but I know that you love children, dear, and I am sure that you are just the one to bring something of the child in him back to his face again.

“His story is only one of many. His village was overrun by the German soldiery, and the brave little lad, while trying to defend his mother from the atrocity of a German officer, was bayoneted, and finally lost his arm. His mother was carried away into Germany, but the boy believes her dead. I will not tell you the rest of his story, for some day he may want to unburden his child mind and tell you his pitiful tale himself. His little yellow dog has been his comrade through all of his weary wanderings, the *only thing* that remains to him of his once happy home, and no one had the heart to take it from him.

“The Italian lad was found wandering in the streets on the East Side, making an effort to support himself by playing on his violin, as his aged grandfather,—he seems to have been an orphan,—who was a hurdy-gurdy man, had just died. The two brothers were found living in a cellar, where Danny, the older one, had been trying to support his brother, after the death of the aged woman who had had charge of them. He sold papers, but, when sick and unable to do so, was found half-starved in the cellar. It is hoped that the

bracing breezes of the mountain air, with good healthy food, will make new children of these boys.

"Dear Nathalie, if you could only realize the bigness of the work you have undertaken in taking these slum children into a wonder-land of healthy living, the beauties and wonders of which will mean to them a new and glorified world. God bless you, dear, is all I can say and pray.

"Your friend,
"ELIZABETH VAN VORST."

"No, this letter proves that Mrs. Van Vorst did not know that the child was a girl," said Nathalie, as she tucked the letter in her shirt-waist. "But, mother, what *shall* I do about it?" she continued, in such a dejected voice that her mother burst out laughing.

"Don't do anything about it, daughter," Mrs. Page replied, still laughing. "A girl is as good as a boy any day, and we will just set to work, this very minute, and rig up some clothes from some of your old things, for the child to wear."

"Oh, I think she will make a lovely girl, with those great brown eyes of hers," cried Janet, enthusiastically. "And she has dimples, too. I know we can make the sweetest thing of her, and —"

But Nathalie didn't wait to hear the rest. She was so overjoyed to think it had turned out all right, that she was in a hurry to reassure Danny, whom she realized had been greatly worried over the circumstance. But how did they come to dress the child as a boy?

she queried as she hurried into the room, where the now little girl had fallen fast asleep in Nathalie's bed, while her brother watched beside her with a white, frightened face.

"Tell me, Danny," inquired Nathalie gently, as she laid her hand on the boy's head, "how did you come to make a boy of your sister?"

A quick sob broke from the lad. And then, with a stiffening of his chin, as if with the resolution that he would not give way, while furtively wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, he told how, when Granny Maguire died, and his little sister's clothes, after a time, wore out, he had been compelled to clothe her in his cast-off rags, because he had no others, and he didn't know where to get them.

"She didn't like it no way at first," the lad's blue eyes twinkled, "but she got kind o' used to it, an' then I promised that when she growed big I'd let her be a girl. And whin the leddy that does the settlement work comed round and wanted me to go ter the country I couldn't leave the kid, and when she said he could come too, I didn't squeal on meself, but jest kept mumlike, for they wouldn't have let her come wid me if they knowed she was a girl. Sure, marm, we'll have ter wait till morning to go back," the lad tried to steady his voice, "fur the boss wid the brass buttons on the train told me there ain't no train till then.

Can we walk to the station, do yer think?" he inquired pleadingly.

"But you're not going back, Danny," replied Nathalie. "You're going to stay right here with me, as long as you're good and mind me. It doesn't make a bit of difference if your sister is not a boy. I wrote for three boys, for I thought boys could take care of themselves in a way. Then, as we have no servants here, and I get tired sometimes with so much to do, I thought that boys would be more of a help. But we'll dress your sister as a girl, and — Oh, don't cry, Danny," for the boy had turned his head aside, and was silently struggling with his sobs.

But they were sobs of joy, as Nathalie soon discovered, as, with a final shake of his thin shoulders, he faced about and cried: "Oh, thank you, ma'am. No, I ain't no blubberin' calf, but sure I just couldn't let the kid go back alone — and — But Gee, leddy, it sure is heaven up here with these big hills — and the green trees — and the flowers — And, leddy," he pulled at Nathalie's sleeve as she turned to go away, "I kin be a sight o' help ter yer, for I knows how to wash dishes, and I kin cook too, a good bit."

"Oh, that will be just fine, Danny," enthused Nathalie, "for I am wild to have a man chef, and I'll let you wash all the dishes you want to, for that's a job I hate. And, Danny," said the girl, patting the boy's

shoulder gently, "we are going to make it as near like Heaven up here as we can. But come, son, you must be tired." And then she led the boy up-stairs to the upper floor, where, in a large corner-room, she had taken the other boys, who were undressed and ready to tumble into the three beds.

After directing Danny to sleep in the double bed, as he was the largest, so that each one of the smaller boys could have a bed to himself, she showed them the closet and how to hang up their clothes,— what little they had, they had brought tied up in handkerchiefs, or on their backs,— she turned to go. "Yes, and you must be sure to get up, *every one of you*, when you hear the big bell ring in the morning."

She had reached the door, after bidding them good-night, when a sudden thought turned her back. And then Nathalie had her first solemn moments with her boys, as she told each one that, before getting into bed, he must say his prayers, so as to thank God for the good things that had been given them that day. The little Italian lad immediately drew out his rosary and began to say his beads, but Danny scratched his head in a dubious sort of way, and mumbled that it was so long since he had said his prayers that he couldn't remember what he was to say.

But this forgetfulness on Danny's part was soon remedied, as the girl made him kneel by her in the moonlight that streamed through the window, and sol-

emly repeat, "Now I lay me down to sleep," adding a few words as a suggestion to the boy as to what he should add to the prayer. Danny, with a brighter face, now began to prepare for bed, and Nathalie, as she again turned to leave the room, stopped to speak with the refugee. And then the girl's eyes grew moist, for he had stolen into the darkest corner of the room, and, with his one hand solemnly upraised, was repeating a prayer softly to himself, while the little yellow cur stood at attention by his side.

CHAPTER XIII

“THE MOUNTAINS WITH SNOWY FOREHEADS”

IT was something of a surprise the next morning to Danny's companions, to see a little maid, clothed and in her right mind, as Janet expressed it, come shyly into the dining-room,— a little maid who bore a very strong resemblance to the brown-eyed, curly-haired, whimpering little lad of the day before. The black eyes of the Italian boy, Tony, widened, and then, with a shy gleam of humor in their liquid depths, he nodded at the little girl, crying under his breath, “Oh, Boy!” But the little maid proved herself competent to manage the situation to her satisfaction, as she quickly made a face at him, for which she was properly rebuked by Nathalie, who, however, was on the verge of a laugh, while a ripple of amusement gleamed in her mother's eyes.

Jean, the Belgian refugee, stared with some perplexity at the small girl, and did not comprehend the curious situation until the children had left the breakfast-table, when Nathalie made it plain to him.

The girl found that the morning hours were well-occupied, as she started right in to put her boys through

their paces, as she called her drilling, so as to prepare them not only for a very happy, but a useful, summer's stay. She had noticed, during the morning meal, that the children, with ready sympathy for the maimed boy, had been rather officious in trying to help him, and that his thin, sickly face had flushed with embarrassment and over-sensitiveness at the fact that to them he was an object of pity.

Instantly divining how she would have felt under like circumstances, Nathalie managed to get Danny and Tony together, when Mrs. Page, whose mother-heart had gone out to the boy, had taken him down to the barn to show him where he could keep his dog, and Janet had taken possession of the little maid.

In a few words she told them the tragic story of the Belgian, and, after gaining their interest, made it clear to them how they themselves would have felt if they had been different from their mates, and warned them about being too open in their method of helping him. She suggested that little acts of subtle kindness would be more appreciated, as they would not offend his sensitiveness.

Danny was now installed, with a big apron tied around his waist, in front of the kitchen sink, taking his first lesson in Nathalie's method of washing dishes, with Tony, the second helper, as the dish-dryer. Divining that it would not only be better for Jean, the refugee, to have employment so as to fill his mind with

something besides his sad experiences, and realizing that he would naturally want to do as the other children, Nathalie made him her right-hand man, as she called it, and showed him how he could assist her in a number of ways. In a few moments he was laboriously carrying out, with one hand, the food to Nathalie, who quickly placed it in the ice-box, or closet, while little Sheila removed the soiled dishes to the kitchen, happy at being on the job, as Danny said.

From dish-washing, preparing the vegetables for dinner, sweeping the kitchen and shed, and dusting the dining-room, it was bed-making. Jean was made captain of the Working Squad, eager to help by doing what he could with his one hand, while seeing that the boys did their work as Nathalie had instructed them.

Fortunately for Nathalie, she was a fair French scholar, and as the Belgian lad had lived in one of the Walloon provinces, where French is generally spoken, she had no difficulty in conversing with him. He could speak a little English, but in a queer, hesitating way that made him shy over it.

When the morning duties were finished, and they were not done with a magician's wand by any means, but with the exercise of great patience on the part of their young instructor, and a good deal of drilling on the children's part, they all hurried out into the sunshine. Here they raced about, enjoying the fresh air, the green trees and the flowers, and the beautiful

mountain views, and then they made the acquaintance of Sam, who not only introduced them to the fascinations of the barn,— as the cows, pigs, and chickens, the soft cooing doves who flittered over the barn-roof,— but to the one dray-horse. This animal proved a source of unfeigned joy to the boys, as Sam taught them how to harness it, and then allowed each one to ride it bareback, even Jean, whose pale face glowed with a strange joy, as he held the reins with his one hand, and rode up and down on the road in front of the house.

From the barn there was an inspection of the farm, going down a green slope to watch the sheep as they quietly browsed, and then on to the orchard, where they had their fill of fruit, while in the vegetable garden many hands proffered willing assistance to Nathalie, as she gathered what was needed to replenish the vegetable larder. From here they all trooped down to pay a visit to the farmerette, whereupon Janet set them all to weeding. Strange to say, Jean pulled up the greatest number, to Nathalie's surprise, who, by this time, began to understand that real industry, even if one-handed, can accomplish a good deal.

Finally Nathalie lined her charges up under the trees on the lawn at attention, and undertook to teach them the military salute, but before she was through she was somewhat puzzled as to whether she or the boys was the instructor. After they had saluted the

flag, which Sam had run up on the top of the barn for that very purpose, and which was to be the boys' duty in the future, they had a little soldier's drill.

A few words were then read, very softly, by Nathalie from the Bible. She had concluded that this would be a good way to give them a bit of religious instruction, especially for a beginning. She had begun the reading by getting them interested in the book, on whose fly-leaf was written the name, Philip Renwick, by telling them how she had found it in a little room on the upper floor of the house. She then told them about this boy who had left his mother to travel abroad, how he had married, and had then come home, only to leave his mother and return to Europe, never to be seen by her again. They were much interested in the story, especially when she showed them the picture of the young man in the library, and from that time onward the little Bible seemed to possess a peculiar interest to them, and thus led them to become more interested in the every-day Scripture lesson.

After the "Star-Spangled Banner" and several patriotic songs had been sung, and the "Marseillaise" had been given with much spirit by the boys, Janet, who had just come up from her farm, appeared, and patriotically kept time with her rake. She became so interested in the little singers that she volunteered, to Nathalie's delight, to drill them in the national anthems of the Allies.

Whereupon Jean, with a new eagerness in his bewildered eyes, up with his hand, and made Nathalie understand that he could sing, too. Nathalie smilingly encouraged him, and in a few moments the lad's thin, quavering voice, that grew deeper as he caught the spirit of the words, gave them Belgium's song of cheer. This inspired Tony, and he became the soloist, and sang Italy's national anthem.

There was a "do-as-you-please time" after dinner down on the lawn for an hour or so, and then the boys were mustered in the bathroom and initiated as to how to manipulate a tooth-brush, in a tooth-cleaning drill, Nathalie having supplied herself with three new brushes in anticipation of this procedure. Sheila, who was not one of the drillers,—only three brushes having been provided,—looked with envious eyes upon this performance, and, when Danny had finished, in a plaintively aggrieved voice complained to their young teacher that he would not let her have his brush so that she could clean her teeth, too.

Explanations were now in order, Nathalie smiling amusedly at the idea of loaning a tooth-brush, and then they were all made as presentable as possible, considering their ragged clothes, which had begun to prey upon Mrs. Page's mind, as well as Nathalie's. But the clothes part was something that had not presented itself to the girl when she had planned the boys' coming, and she was at a loss to remedy the trouble.

Certainly something must be done to do away with Tony's old velveteen embroidered vest, his greatest treasure, and Jean's soiled white shirt, which seemed to be the only one he possessed. Danny's clothes, although they had been queerly darned and glaringly patched, and were miles too small for him, *were clean*, and he did have a change of underclothing, to Nathalie's relief.

However, the general shabbiness of the boys' apparel had not affected their merry spirits, the girl decided, as she sat knitting on the veranda, and heard the happy, joyous voices that floated up from the lawn, as they played leap-frog, ran races, and turned hand-springs. Even Jean, caught by the contagion of the moment, turned a somersault, to her breathless amazement.

She was beginning to realize what Mrs. Van Vorst meant when she spoke of what the glorious wonders of these mountains would mean to the half-fed, sickly little waifs of humanity from the East Side of New York. Yes, it meant a new world, with no more squalid, stifling two-by-two rooms, or damp, moldy cellars. No more nauseating smells, odors from the backyard garbage-can, the rattlety-bang of heavy trucks and milk-wagons, or the jarring creak of the Elevated. For, as Sheila expressed it, they were in a "big green world, with high blue walls, with flower stars a-peepin' at 'em from the grass, and little teeny birds a-singin'

and rockin' their babies to sleep in tall trees, that nodded to 'em with a swishy whisper."

Suddenly the serenity of Nathalie's cogitations received a shock, as a horrible swear-word came, no, not floating, but yelling, its way across the green. The girl jumped up and rushed down under the trees, to see Tony, with his soft, appealing ways, and Danny, with the blue eyes that she had already begun to trust for the frankness of their gaze, rolling on the lawn, locked in a vice-like grip, as they pommeled and pounded each other in a way that made Nathalie gasp.

Sheila, with squeals of delighted glee, was circling about the combatants, piping shrilly, "Give 'im a plug in the snoot, Danny! Pound 'im in the mug!" to the accompaniment of big, forceful oaths that rolled from the mouths of the fighting boys. As the little maid sighted Nathalie, she ejaculated, with a broad grin, "Ain't them kids fierce!" which caused poor Nathalie to gasp again.

"Oh, boys, you mustn't fight!" the agonized girl cried, as she reached down and tried to separate the young pugilists, with her limbs all of a tremble. But her efforts were useless, and, regardless of her screams and expostulations, the punching and scratching continued, punctuated by defiant yells, and such horrifying language that the girl shivered.

As she stared as if fascinated by this new and revolting experience, she saw a little trickle of blood ooz-

ing down Danny's face, for Tony, who was the underdog, was an expert at nail-digging. It was a *fearsome* sight, and Nathalie, appalled by the thought that he might dig out an eye or so in his blinded wrath, in frenzied horror screamed, "Oh, Tony, you're killing Danny!" But the only result of her cry was, "Yer bet yer life he ain't!" and the hair continued to fly, as Danny yelled triumphantly, "Gee! I knew I could lick yer wid one hand!" and the gory battle continued.

Then, in sheer desperation, hopelessly wringing her hands, she started in the direction of the house to call her mother. Suddenly she stopped. Oh, no; her mother would send them away, and then — O dear! Ah, she knew what she would do. Terror speeded her feet, and two minutes later she reappeared on the lawn, and with one swing of her arm there came a terrific "Clang! Clang!" as the girl, with big excited eyes, thrust the still clanging bell between the faces of the boys.

The effect was magical, for the lads, with screams of terror, unlocked their arms, hands, and legs, and rolled apart, while gazing with dilated eyes, as if they had heard the crack of doom, at the bell that Nathalie had thrust into their faces.

A few moments later, almost unclothed, dust-begrimed, blood-besmeared, and both sniffing from nerve-shock, but still breathing out dire vengeance one upon the other, Nathalie led her two charges up-stairs

and thrust one into the bathroom and the other into a dark closet. Jan, at this moment, appeared in the hall, and the girl excitedly dragged her into her bedroom, and, in a hushed, nervous whisper, made known the proceedings of the last few moments.

But Jan, who at home was a district nurse, and had witnessed many slum fights, burst into a peal of laughter. And then, with her face still red with mirth and laughter, demanded, "Well, young lady, what else did you expect if you will take ragamuffins and street Arabs to your bosom?" Nevertheless Janet's sympathies were aroused, for Nathalie, if not for the boys, and in a few moments the two girls were industriously making the boys presentable once more.

And then Nathalie led the culprits into a chamber apart, and began to upbraid them, trying to impress their young minds with the enormity of the wrongdoing of which they had been guilty.

But the spirit of the cave-dweller was not yet subdued, and, notwithstanding the girl's persuasiveness, and her pleading attitude in her endeavor to make them see the error of their way, they kept up a wrangling duet of recriminations, each one accusing the other of punching him first, while stubbornly crying, "Now, ye didn't lick me."

Presently Nathalie, under the strain of overwrought nerves, and the sudden realization of the unforeseen responsibility of her position, burst into tears. Lo, to

her amazement, her tears acted like oil on troubled waters, for the next instant a grimy hand tugged at her sleeve, as Danny, with troubled eyes, in a sudden wave of contrition, cried: "Oh, Miss Natty, don't take on like that. Sure and I'm never goin' to fight no more."

Meanwhile Tony's black eyes, in dumb entreaty, grew bigger and bigger, until he, too, in sudden repentance, began to stroke her hand caressingly as his soft, musical voice pleaded, "Please Mees Natta, Tonee, he lova you — he fighta no more."

Peace was making its way into each heart, when the purr of an automobile was heard, and as Nathalie hurried to the window, she saw Mr. Banker whirling under the porte-cochère. As the boys, paroled on their honor, a little later hung around the car, discussing its many merits, they were duly presented to the newcomer. That gentleman evidently liked small boys, for he immediately made arrangements to call for them some day, and take them to Littleton for an all-day good time.

The following afternoon Nathalie, holding Sheila by the hand, with Jean by her side, and the two boys in front of her, started to show them the mountains. At the post-office at Sugar Hill village Jean, who had been delegated to act as postman the coming week, was duly initiated into the business of opening the mail-box, an office he accepted with a sudden lighting of his dazed

eyes, which Nathalie began to fancy were already losing some of their fear-haunted expression.

A short visit was paid to the Sweet-Pea ladies, where they were treated to some maple sugar, Mona very earnest in her endeavors to show sympathy for the little refugee, and her admiration for Sheila. As they hurried away, a bunch of sweet peas was seen on each little breast, pinned there by that gentle lady.

A walk on the long, curving board-walk up the hill, with a rest on one of the benches under the maples, to Hotel Look-off, now followed. The three boys were anxious to start that very minute to climb Iron Mountain, but were soon persuaded that it was too warm a day for a mountain hike. From the long veranda of the hotel they were lured to admiration of the hilly, wide-spreading green sward, and the magnificent views of the mountains, as they rose and fell, receded and advanced, with their jutting pinnacles of rock, gloomed with the green of mountain forest.

After slacking their thirst at the little spring-house in the grove, they sauntered down the board-walk to the Sunset Hill House, and as they interestedly watched the golfers in their bright-colored coats on the velvety green links, Danny proudly informed them that he knew how to caddy. But their enthusiasm grew tense when they stood on the little observation tower in front of the hotel, and Nathalie pointed out the Presi-

dential Range, with Mount Washington towering six thousand feet up among the clouds.

She then showed them the Franconia Range, explaining that the great mountains were divided into clefts, or notches, from which flowed four long rivers and many smaller ones, several of them being named after the Indians, who, in the early times, lived on the mountain passes.

With the help of the chart they soon learned that Lafayette was the highest peak of this smaller range, and that Pemigewasset, seemingly the nearest peak to the hotel, had been named after a great Indian chieftain. The adjoining peaks, as the Kinsman and the Three Graces, proved of interest; also Cannon, or Profile Mountain, when the young girl explained that it not only had a stone, shaped like a cannon, on its top, but that from one of its sides a great stone face was to be seen.

Nathalie now told her young listeners how the mountains were first seen, over four hundred and fifty years ago, a cluster of snowy peaks, by John Cabot, from the deck of his ship when sailing along the New England coast. They were called Waumbekket-meyna, the White Hills, and sometimes "The mountains with the snowy foreheads," by the Indians.

The first white man to ascend these heights, she related, was an Irishman named Field, who, two hundred

years after they had been seen by Cabot, with a few white companions, climbed to the topmost crag of the highest peak. "Field found a number of shiny crystals which he thought were costly gems," laughed the girl merrily, "but, alas, they proved to be only beautiful white stones, but, on account of this occurrence, the mountains came to be called Crystal Hills.

"The Indian guides who had accompanied Field part way up the mountains," continued Nathalie, "refused to go any farther, for fear that the Great Spirit, who they believed lived in a magnificent palace on the highest peak, would destroy them if they ventured too near him. They were so surprised to see Field return in safety a few hours later that they decided he was a god, for during his absence a great storm had arisen, which they believed had been sent by the Indian Manitou to kill him. The redmen not only believed that the Great Spirit sent forth the frost and snow, as well as the rain and fire,—the lightning,—but declared that the thunder was his voice."

The Indian legend of Pawan was eagerly listened to, as Nathalie told how the Indians asserted that when the earth was covered with water and every one was drowned, he and his wife, carrying a hare, had ascended to the highest peak. When the waters began to abate, Pawan sent forth the hare, and when it did not return he and his wife descended to the earth and dwelt

there in safety, for the waters had dried up from off the land. From this man, the Indians declared, every one on the earth had descended.

During the recital of these stories, Sheila's red-brown eyes darkened to black, and every mountain peak assumed a weird and wonderful personality to her imaginative mind, fed, as it had been, by stories of fairies, pixies, and gnomes, as told to her by Danny, when playing the little mother.

But the tourists now found that their appetites had been whetted by the keen mountain air, and gladly started on their homeward way to enjoy the supper that awaited them. After tea they gathered on the veranda, and Tony entertained them by playing on his violin. Nathalie soon discovered that he not only played with considerable skill, but that Danny could whistle like a bird, while Jean and Sheila could pipe forth snatches of song in clear, childish trebles.

The boys were rendered exuberantly happy a few days later at the unexpected arrival of Mr. Banker, who had come to give them a day's outing at Littleton. Morning chores, military tactics, and other occupations were quickly forgotten, as Nathalie and her mother made them tidy for the trip, Danny, by the way, having kindly washed Jean's one shirt the day before,— a housewifely occupation that he had become proficient in, from sheer necessity,— and Nathalie had ironed it.

It was long past tea-time when the boys returned

from their pleasure jaunt, and told in high good spirits of the "bully" time they had had, what they had seen at the movies, and many other sights. Nathalie's joy almost equaled the boys' when they descended from the car, and she saw three smartly equipped lads, each one in a khaki suit, with brown shoes, a brimmed hat, a knapsack, and, the most prized possession of all, a gun! The girl's eyes filled with tears, and she had rather a tremulous time of it as she thanked Mr. Banker for his kindness, and especially for those *much-needed clothes*.

Nathalie, with her brown-suited boys,— Tony with his violin and his embroidered vest, as he had soon discarded his khaki suit, Jean with his empty sleeve, and yellow-brown terrier,— and Sheila, in a pink sunbonnet, soon became familiar objects on the mountain roads. They were always greeted with pleasant smiles and nods from the passing tourists, Jean being regarded with more than the usual curiosity, as his story had been rumored about.

Many of them would stop and give him money, until he had so many silver coins that Nathalie had to make him a bag to keep them in, as he had declared that he was going to save them to take him back to France, so he could find his father. It was not long before they had not only become hardy mountaineers, but familiar with all the near-by walks in and around Franconia and Sugar Hill. Jean, too, had begun to show a decided improvement, not only having gained flesh

and color, but having a brighter and more cheerful expression in his eyes.

And so the sunny days passed, cementing the bond between Nathalie and her charges, and each one learning something that would be of help in the days to come. And then, one day, Nathalie had an inspiration!

CHAPTER XIV

“SONS OF LIBERTY”

ONE day Nathalie led the boys to a terrace, a few feet back of a brown-shingled cottage across the road from Peckett's, and which stood on a lower spur of Garnet Mountain, facing the Franconia Range. Here, on this grassy ridge, gently sloping down to a green meadow below, skirted by a tree-fringed road edging the rocky pasture-land which gradually merged into the lower slopes of the range, she pointed out King Lafayette, and his lower mate, Lincoln, with his two slides. The Sleeping Infant, lying between the latter and Garfield's sharply defined peak, was immediately heralded by the little maid, Sheila, as the long-lost infant, which some kind-hearted fairy some day, with her magic wand, would awaken. The Twins, and the huge Sleeping Giant, and some of the lower peaks, all came in for a share in the mystic doings of the little girl's fanciful imagination.

The atmosphere was so translucent that each shaggy crest, pointed dome, and spire of the range, sharply defined against the sapphire-blue of the sky, stood forth with a strange lucidity, seemingly so near that

one had the inclination to put forth a hand to touch them.

Lafayette's craggy foretop, standing up from the deep green-verdured gorge that cleft one side of it, was startlingly like some huge elephant's head, with a mouse-colored, wrinkly and baggy-skinned trunk. The boys accentuated the resemblance by locating two big rocks, which, they declared, were the beady eyes of the animal, while Sheila insisted she could see the eyes move.

As they rested on the ledge of a little circling wall of cobble-stones, evidently the unfinished foundation of a stone tower, Nathalie told how Lincoln's rounded dome had been named in honor of a great American named Abraham Lincoln. "Some people used to call him 'Old Abe,' or 'Father Abraham,' not from any disrespect," continued the girl, "but because he was so kindly in his nature, his heart so filled with love for mankind, that it was a title of honor, and showed the love of the people for him."

"Ain't he the gink that got to be President of the United States, and made the darkies free?" inquired Danny eagerly.

Nathalie nodded, and then led the boy on to tell how Lincoln, from a long-legged, ungainly pioneer youth, brought up in a log cabin in the wilds of Indiana, ended his career as the hero of the greatest republic in the world.

The little newsie told his story importantly, proud to think that he had remembered these odd bits of knowledge from the little schooling he had received. And what he didn't remember Nathalie did, dwelling at length on the part this leader of men took in freeing the slaves, and what slavery meant to the negroes of the South.

As the little group listened with wide-eyed interest, the girl suddenly cried, “ Oh, children! think what it would mean to you if you were not allowed to move about as you pleased, but were forced to do what you did not want to do, although you might be tired and hungry, and were driven about like cattle, and lashed if you disobeyed your master! ”

She then explained that all men were born free and equal, and that God never intended that any man should be a bond-servant to his fellow-men. “ Every one,” she emphasized, “ has the right to enjoy the beautiful things of life without being subjected to cruel treatment, and forced to hard labor, as the slaves had been, just because their skin was black instead of white.

“ But there is another kind of slavery,” said Nathalie earnestly, “ which, although it may not mean the slavery of the body, like that of the negroes on a plantation, is the slavery of the will. That is, a man may not be lashed on his back, but his will is made subject to another man's will, and he has to obey and direct his life the way this man says, whether he wants to

or not. All over the world, for centuries, the people of different nations have been forced to obey the will of one man, that is, the ruler, or the king, of the nation to which they belonged. The peoples of the world have not been free; they have not had the right, or the liberty, to do as they thought or felt."

She then tried to make the children understand that liberty was something as high and wide, and as vast, as the beautiful mountains which rose before them. "It is like the air," she said, "or the atmosphere, which stretches about you on every side, and around the great earth like a gray blanket. It is so big it can't be seen, like the mountains, or measured, and yet it can be felt. For if you were shut up in a box without any air, or atmosphere to breathe into your lungs, you would die. So liberty, God's special gift, is so dear and sweet to man, that without it he can't grow or expand, for he is like a man shut up in a box without air. He is like a little Tom Thumb, for he can only grow just so high."

Nathalie now interested the children in the story of the Pilgrims, the pioneers of liberty in America, telling how, because they were not allowed to have liberty under the rule of the English king, they came to this new world and sought to worship God as they deemed right. In doing this, she explained, they not only founded a colony where they had the right to worship God as their conscience dictated, but they made re-

religious freedom possible for the people who came after them. By the signing of the Compact in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, they gave this nation democratic liberty, by giving every man the right to express his thoughts and feelings, thus giving him a say as to how the people should be ruled, which meant a government for and by the people.

Nathalie now told of the patriots, and how, in the War of the Revolution, they fought the mother-country, England, in order to maintain the liberty given them by the founders of the nation. “ By uniting the thirteen colonies into one, they not only added unity to justice and liberty, but gave us the United States of America.

“ These lovers of liberty also organized a society, in New York, which became known as the Sons of Liberty, all the members determined to defend with their lives the liberty and principles given them by their forefathers. As liberty means the right to express our thoughts and feelings, it also means that these thoughts and feelings must be good and pure, *the best within us,*” added the girl with sudden gravity. “ And these Sons of Liberty were so called not only because they *fought for liberty*, but because *they gave of their best to mankind.*”

Danny added another link to this story of liberty by telling about the Declaration of Independence, and how the Liberty Bell was rung from the old State-

House in Philadelphia, so that every one should know that a new nation had been born. The ride of Paul Revere was described with spirited impressiveness by the boy, as well as what had occurred on Lexington common, and the famous battle by the old North Bridge at Concord.

Whereupon Nathalie pointed out Mount Washington's cone-tipped crest, majestically rising above a wreath of silver-gray clouds, and explained that, although the Indians had named it Agiochook, in later years the white people had named it Mount Washington, in honor of the great man Danny had been telling about.

After dwelling upon Washington's magnificent character, and recalling little incidents from his life, Nathalie said that, like the great mountain that towered so far above its fellows, so George Washington, the first President of this great nation, was known to civilization as one of the greatest men in the world, because he had given of his best to help his fellow-men, and proved that he was a *true* Son of Liberty.

Jefferson Mountain, its crest rising in low humility near Washington's greater height; Adams, whose stony front stood forth in rugged grandeur on the left; and Madison, Monroe, Franklin, Clay, and Webster, as well as other peaks, were pointed out to the children, each one named for some great American, who had proved his right to be known as a Son of Liberty.

To be sure, some of the peaks were shrouded in a veil of mystical haze, while others were but dimly discerned, as they peeped between the gaps made by their nearer mates, but each and every one served to illustrate in whose honor it had been named, and why he was a lover of what every one loved — liberty.

Nathalie now drew the children's attention to Mount Lafayette, and said that this peak had also been named in honor of a great man, also a Son of Liberty, although he was not an American. The children had heard the name of Lafayette mentioned so often in connection with the present war, that they listened with greedy avidity as the girl told about this “ Boy of Versailles,” as some one had called him, when, as the young Marquis de Lafayette,— a mere boy,— he used to lead the revels at that famous French palace in helping the girl queen, Marie Antoinette, make merry at her garden parties, when her boy husband was too busy in his workshop, taking some old clock apart, to entertain his guests at court.

She told how the little marquis loved to walk behind the brave soldiers of the day, the one ambition of his life being his longing to be a soldier. She told, too, of his life in the lonely castle among the southern mountains of France, where his only companions were governesses and masters, all intent upon drilling him to dance, to bow with courtly grace, to pick up a lady's handkerchief, and other accomplishments of the court.

After leaving the College du Plessis, where his education as a courtier was completed, he returned to his estate, now the heir to great wealth, where he used to spend his time making friends with the peasants,— the people who lived on his lands,— thus becoming acquainted with their mode of life. In this way he learned the need of liberty, the liberty that gave people the right to think and feel, and to express their thoughts and feelings, and the great need that the people of the nations in the world should have a voice in their own government, and thus learn to govern themselves.

Nathalie then told how, when the patriots of America began to fight against King George in order to gain their rights, that the young nobleman, now tall and slender, with reddish hair and bright eyes, heard of it, and, although an officer in the French army, he determined to go to America and help these people of the colonies to win their liberty. He had a young and lovely wife,— they had been sweethearts when children,— and yet so inspired was he to help the Americans that he left her. With a friend, the Baron de Kalb, he eluded the spies and officers of his own country, and in various disguises finally reached Spain, whence he embarked for America, and gallantly fought with the American patriots during the War of the Revolution, winning fame not only for his bravery, but for his great friendship for Washington.

“ Indeed,” said the girl, as she finished her recital, “ he was a real Son of Liberty, and it is a splendid thing to think that these two grand old mountains, facing each other in such magnificent grandeur, should now be the monuments to these two wonderful men, monuments, too, that can only perish when the mountains turn and flee away at the command of the Most High God.

“ Lincoln, whose life-story you know,” Nathalie pointed to the green-wooded heights of Mount Lincoln, “ also proved himself a Son of Liberty when he gave of the noblest and best that was in him to the people, in his great struggle to free the slaves. In fact,” the girl spoke a little sadly, “ this great man was not only a Son of Liberty, but he was a martyr to Liberty.” And then she told how he had lost his life because of his heroic determination to do what he thought was right.

“ Children,” cried the girl suddenly, facing the row of intent, eager faces regarding her, “ can any of you tell me who to-day are proving themselves true Sons of Liberty? ”

“ The soldiers who are fighting in the trenches! ” burst from Danny quickly.

Before Nathalie could assent, a thin, quavering voice burst out with the ringing cry, “ Vive la Belgique! Vive la Belgique! ”

“ Good for you, Jean,” cried the girl, as she enthusiastically clapped her hands in approval. “ *It is long*

live Belgium. Yes, Jean, the soldiers of Belgium, of France, England, and America, too, now, are proving themselves Sons of Liberty, because they are all fighting to give liberty to the world. And brave Belgium," patting the shoulder of the refugee, whose pale face was strangely illumined, "every man in that little country has proved that he is a Son of Liberty, when, rather than dishonor the great principles of liberty and justice, he took up arms and defended it against the Germans when they made their mad rush to Paris. They not only saved France, but every nation as well, saved it so that each man in it could fight and thus give liberty to the world. Now, children, let us cry with Jean, 'Vive la Belgique.' "

When this cry ceased, Tony's velvety black eyes, with a sly gleam of humor lurking in their shadows, became scarlet flames, suddenly remembering that his native land was also in the war, and, with dramatic fervor, he yelled, "Viva l'Italia!"

Danny, not to be outdone in this burst of patriotism, immediately started in with the lusty shout of, "Hurrah for the United States! Hurrah for the United States!"

Altogether it was a very patriotic little company that stood by the old stone ledge facing those blue-hazed mountains on that sunny afternoon and "yelled their heads off," as Danny said, in honor of the Sons of Lib-

erty, who were fighting in the trenches across the sea to give liberty to the world.

After the shouting and demonstration of the patriots had begun to wane, Nathalie put up her hand for silence, and then, in her simple way, the way that somehow always seemed to go right to the heart of every child, said very softly, “ And now, children, let us show that we, too, each one of us, want to do what is right, to give of our best to make others happy. Let us show that, although we cannot go and fight in the trenches, we are still Sons of Liberty, by keeping a big, deep place in our hearts for the boys in the trenches, not only our American boys, but the boys of the Allies, every soldier of every nation who is fighting for the victory of peace and right.

“ I know you all want to belong to the Sons of Liberty, that you would like to show that you are real soldiers, fighting for the right; and so, will you not bow your heads for a moment, and down in the big, deep place in your hearts, silently say a little prayer? Just ask God that He will bless the soldiers, these Sons of Liberty across the sea, who are fighting for you and me, and give them a great victory in this world’s battle for the rights of men, a victory that means happiness, love, and peace for every one in the world.”

CHAPTER XV

THE GALLERY OF THE GODS

THERE was a frightened look on the faces of the children for a moment or so, and then Sheila cried in a distressed tone, "But, Miss Natty, I don't know how to pray that way."

Danny immediately flung about and flashed an annihilating look upon the little girl, but Nathalie, drawing the child close, explained what a silent prayer meant. Then, as she solemnly bowed her head, every little head went down, and for the space of a moment or so, up there on that high mountain,—that Nathalie always felt must be very close to God,—there was a reverent silence, a sacred moment, as from each child-heart went up a prayer. Perhaps it was only a dumbly spoken word, or a reverent desire, but surely God heard.

As Nathalie raised her head, and the children followed her example,—evidently there had been some peeping eyes,—all but Jean, who still kept his head down, his pale lips slowly moving, there was a moment's quiet, and then Nathalie exclaimed, "Oh, boys, what do you say to calling these rocks a fort?"

"Crackie! that will be dandy!" responded Danny quickly. "And, Miss Nathalie," he added, his face

lighting with sudden thought, "why can't we call it Liberty Fort?"

And so the round ledge of cobble-stones was named Liberty Fort, and then, before Nathalie realized what the suggestion carried, Tony proposed that the path at the foot of the terrace on which the fort stood, on the summit of the lower slope leading down to the meadow, be a trench.

Other suggestions followed, which culminated in a lengthy discussion, leading the children the following afternoon to the woods, where they gathered dried leaves, and little pebbles and twigs, to fill some bags, which Janet and Nathalie had made out of some old potato-sacks, to represent sand-bags to pile on top of the trench. The two girls meanwhile sat in the fort and not only made epaulettes for the young soldiers' shoulders, but also gas-masks, which these Sons of Liberty vociferously declared that they must have, or they would be gassed.

After the Stars and Stripes, with the various flags of the Allies, had been fastened to a pole and mounted on the fort, the battle of the Marne took place, represented by these small soldiers, with guns held high, leaping over the sand-bags and rushing madly down the slope to the meadow below, which had been named "No Man's Land." Here, with eyes aflame and hair all tousled, they fought frenziedly with the imaginary gray uniforms of the German soldiery, who were sup-

posed to have rushed towards them from their entrenchments, the stone wall by the road just beyond the meadow.

It was great sport, notwithstanding that their helmets — old tin pails — would insist upon falling over their faces just when some very wonderful capture was about to be made. But they soon learned not to mind a little thing like that, as Danny observed with officer-like brusqueness — he was the general-in-chief of these liberty forces — that only slackers or mollycoddles would stop fighting for a hat. So they fought most furiously, imitating in every way possible the maneuvers and tactics of the soldiers in France.

They took possession of a rustic seat on the ridge near the woods for an outpost, and here Sheila, with a big paper soldier's cap on her head, was posted to parade with military precision before it as a sentry. Danny, meanwhile would climb a tree, to watch a make-believe enemy's aëroplane, or to play the rôle of a bird-man, getting ready to fly in a patrol over the enemy's entrenchments.

The parts the little girl played were numerous, sometimes acting as a canteen girl, selling lemonade and make-believe "smokes," — twigs trimmed to represent cigarettes, — or again, playing the part of a captured Boche, always insisting that she was a prince, or some high German official. She entered into the playing of holding up her hands in token of surrender, while call-

ing "Kamerad" with dramatic fervor. Then, as if suddenly reminded that she was a scion of royalty, she would take to fighting and kicking furiously to be released, bringing her teeth into action, and inflicting sundry bites on her captor with such energy that Nathalie, or Janet, tricked out with a white head-gear, starred with a red cross, would hurry to the scene, and bind up with soft rags the wounds of the afflicted one.

Jean, who had begun to prove that his real self was only lying dormant beneath a shroud of sorrow, was triumphantly happy as the bugler, and one day suggested that they have a tank,— he had seen one on a battle-field. An old tin can was then procured from Sam, which had done duty in holding chicken-feed. It was now made to roll, in a horribly queer way, down the slope and over No Man's Land, maneuvered by Jean, who was inside of it, and who proved that he was a keen trailer of the Boches, as the lad always called the Germans.

The boy frightened Nathalie, sometimes, by the intense hatred he displayed whenever the Germans were mentioned, as his face would grow tense and a sudden fire would flame up in his eyes, while his one hand would clench rigidly and his little form tremble with the force of the passion within his breast.

But the children did not always play at war in France, for sometimes they were Indians, and would wriggle over the grass snake-fashion. They were all

sachems, or big chiefs, named after some red-skinned hero of some Indian tale Nathalie had told them, each one intent on scalping some white man. Sometimes Jean would teach the boys how to play some of the games played in Belgium, as *jet*, a game which seemed to be played with a stick on a stone, and which they all seemed to enjoy. Then again they would play hopscotch in Jean's way, and which he called "Kalinker." But always at the end of their play they would line up in the circling ledge of stones, and, as if inspired by Nathalie's suggestion on the day of their first visit to the fort, stand very still as they again bowed their heads in a silent prayer for the boys who were fighting "over there."

Then, one morning, a telephone message came from Mr. Banker that he would be up that afternoon and take the children to the Flume. Whereupon they all became so exuberantly happy that Nathalie had rather a hard time pinning them down to their usual duties.

After a delightful drive, in which Nathalie and Mr. Banker were kept busy answering the many queries propounded by the sightseers, as they gazed in awed wonder at the strange rock formations with their purple and green tints, the silvery waterfalls, and the many natural beauties of the Notch, they arrived at the Flume.

Here, opposite the Flume House, they climbed a zig-zagging path up a hill backed by two massive moun-

tains, and then went through a belt of woodland to inspect the Pool. This was a mountain freak, a great basin over a hundred feet wide and forty deep, hollowed out by the Pemigewasset River's age-old tools, sand and water, as they flowed over its rocky bed.

The lustrous green of its waters rippling between lichen-covered cliffs, and canopied by overhanging trees — that looked as if they would fall from age — was so transparent that the children could see the shiny pebbles at the bottom of the Pool.

On returning to the road they started for the Flume, passing over a wooden bridge, and then up an incline, a sort of up-hill-and-down-dale road, as it followed the mountain brook flowing from the cascade that dashed over the rocks at the head of the gorge. The wild picturesque beauty of this "Gallery of the Gods," as Mr. Banker called it, not only elicited many exclamations from the children, but brought forth more weird fancies from Sheila, which challenged the humorous gleam in that gentleman's eyes many times.

The child's mind was so rich in imagery, that every hooded mountain or queer-shaped cliff, every passing cloud or glint of sunlight as it filtered down through the leaves in the forest, and the soft patter of the rain-drops as they danced on the window-pane in a storm, were sources of constant delight. In childish prattle she would tell Nathalie what the wind said as it swept through the trees, or came with a soft rustle around the

corner of the veranda on a breezy day. The soft twirl of a leaf, the trill of a bird in the silent forest, were all pixie-whispers.

She would pick up a leaf from the road, beautiful to her in its satiny greenness, or some gay-petaled flower, and talk to it as if it were her dolly, or some tricky creature from fairy-land, always giving it some fanciful name that was keenly suggestive of its nature. Animals she caressed and fondled with the fearless confidence and love of trusting childhood.

They finally reached the remarkable rock gallery in the very heart of the mountain, which Nathalie now introduced to them as Liberty Mountain. She explained that it was cut in two by the deep gorge, or fissure, known as The Flume, whose walls reached to a perpendicular height of fifty or seventy feet, while at its farther end a mountain-brook came dashing down with great splashes of white foam.

The children were hushed to profound wonder at the frowning gloom of the great wall that reached so high and dark above their heads, with its patches of green moss, and where, from its many crevices, young birches had fastened their roots, and ferns and vines clung to soften its harsh gray. Every now and then a tiny white mountain-flower could be seen peeping down at them, like a fairy, Sheila declared, from a mossy bed of green.

They climbed up and up, stepping from rock to

rock, to clamber at last over the slippery smoothness of the granite ledges. Here the cascade had simmered to a lazy flow, to eddy with a silver tinkling into the many hollows that perforated the rocks, making tiny glistening pools, which gave the children unfeigned delight as they dipped their hands in its soft trickle.

But when they reached the narrow foot-bridge, sometimes only railed by a single birch pole, or a rope that clung tremblingly to one side of the steep wall, and looked down into the gorge below, they came to a sudden halt. With a haunting fascination they watched the brook as it now dashed with a mad plunge, splashed with patches of snowy foam, over the masses of green-embossed boulders, that looked as if they had been tossed, helter-skelter fashion, into the narrow slit of rock, in angry mood, by old Father Time.

With strange awe they glanced up the gorge, through the weird gloom of the scene, at the pearly glitter of the falling water, with its blur of green background, that appeared as if some miraculous hand had suddenly wrenched the earth apart to send forth its flashing spray. And then they grew curiously still as they spied the eerie shadows on the high black wall, where the sunlight, as it glinted down into the glen in wanton sport, played hide-and-seek with golden glimmer.

But the silence was broken as Mr. Banker pointed out a huge tree-trunk that had fallen across the stream, reaching from side to side of the gorge, making an

aërial pathway high above their heads. When the gentleman said it was called "The Devil's Bridge," and that sometimes people had walked on it across the gorge, their tongues began to clatter.

Fired by curiosity, the boys regained their nerve and pushed manfully up the foot-bridge, barred with slats, like a horse's plank, while Mr. Banker, holding little Sheila by the hand, followed close behind. Nathalie, with a strange timidity, hesitatingly followed, always being oppressed by an odd, queer feeling when ascending any great height, a feeling that she wanted to cling to something more tangible than space. But there was nothing to cling to but that shaky old railing, and little Jean was hanging to it fearsomely with his one hand, his little form shaking tremulously, and his eyes black with an odd fear.

Stirred to pity, Nathalie drew the child to the other side of her, near the high wall, away from that gaping rut in the earth beneath, and then caught him firmly by the shoulder. Then suddenly, perhaps it was a quick glance down into the depths below, she felt a strange, indefinable sensation pass through her. A deathly faintness seized her; she closed her eyes, and then she felt herself falling, falling —

But a pitiful cry from the boy, "Oh, Mademoiselle Natty! No, you not fall! Jean will hold you," aroused her, and she opened her eyes to see the white

face of the boy, as he stared up at her while clutching her frantically with his one hand.

“Oh, no, Jean; I’m all right now,” but even as she spoke that same old sensation again thrilled her. She felt sick and faint again, and then —

“Rather steep just here, isn’t it? But cling to that rail, and you’ll be all right; you can’t fall.”

The girl turned quickly, once more roused from the sudden fear that had assailed her, and found herself gazing into the sun-tanned face of a young man in khaki. He had slipped his arm back of her, against the railing, as if to prevent her from falling, while from under the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat two dark-blue eyes, heavily lashed, smiled down at her reassuringly.

Nathalie heaved a deep sigh. Oh, it was such a relief to see that strong, brown hand grasping the rail. And then, with a quick little smile, in sudden realization of her foolish fancy that she was slipping down into the gorge below, she cried, “Oh, I don’t suppose I could fall, but something — O dear! I know I am very foolish, but I always feel so queer when I stand on any great height, especially when I look down.”

“That is a sensation that is shared by many people when they get up in the air, I guess,” was the kindly response. And then, as if to give the girl time to regain her poise, he turned to Jean. “Do you see that

place between the walls?" directing the child's gaze to a place midway between the top of the gorge and the brook below. "Well, ever since the Flume has been known to white men," he continued, "a great rock, or boulder, was wedged, or suspended, between the two walls. It was like a nut in a cracker, a most curious sight.

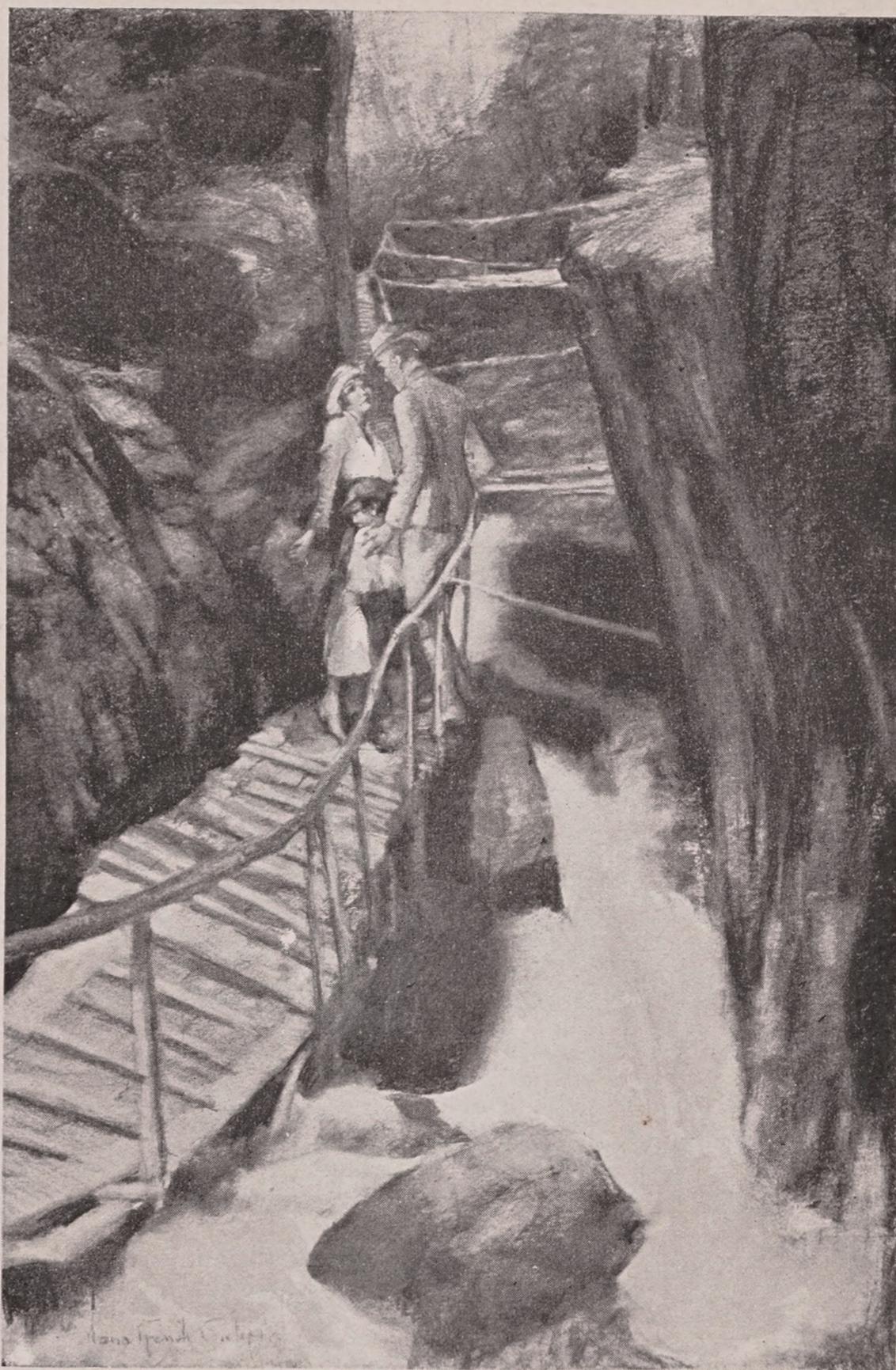
"I remember it as a child, when up in the mountains," he related, "and always had a strange fear that it would tumble down. But every one asserted that it was an impossibility, for it would take an earthquake, or some great convulsion of nature, to dislodge it. Nevertheless I always fought shy of it, and would scurry by as if a witch was after me. But, strange to say," continued the young man, smiling, and showing his even white teeth, "the prophets were away off, for it fell just a few years ago, and without the aid of an earthquake."

"Oh, did it fall on any one?" gasped the girl quickly.

"No, luckily for the wise-alls; for it fell in the middle of the night, and no one was hurt."

Nathalie drew a relieved sigh. "What an escape! Oh, suppose it had fallen when some one was passing beneath it!"

"Well, they would have been pulverized," laughed the young man. "I beg your pardon, Miss, but would you not like to have me help you to the top? For I



THE GIRL FOUND HERSELF GAZING INTO THE SUN-TANNED FACE OF A YOUNG MAN IN KHAHI.—Page 231.

see you have the little boy with you, and, as you are timid, I do not think I would risk it alone."

"Oh, thank you; you are very kind," replied the girl hastily, her face dimpling, for she had begun to feel like her old self. "But no; I don't think I will venture any farther. I guess I am too timid. I will go back." She glanced down at Jean, who was gazing up at the young soldier with worshipful awe in his eyes.

"Let me assist you down, then, to where you will not be affected by the height." And Nathalie, glad to think that she did not have to turn back and go down that plank alone, allowed the young man to pilot her down, firmly grasping her by the arm, until she stood where she asserted she felt no fear. She would wait there on the rocks, until the rest of her party came down, she said, after thanking her rescuer.

The young man bowed silently, lifted his hat, and turned to ascend the foot-bridge again, while Nathalie sought a rock where she and Jean could sit down. But in a moment he was back at her side, crying, "I beg your pardon," Nathalie noticed that he had a pleasant voice that somehow had a familiar ring to it, "but perhaps the little boy would like to go up to the top, as every one likes to see the cascade as it plunges over the rocks. I will take good care of him if he would like to go," glancing at the little empty sleeve with a compassionate expression in his eyes.

Nathalie was on the verge of saying, "Oh, no; I think Jean would rather stay with me," when she caught a sudden expression in the boy's eyes that caused her to say, "Jean, would you like to go to the top with this gentleman? Mr. Banker and the boys are up there, you know."

There was no doubt as to the child wanting to see and to do as the other children, or his evident trust in the young soldier, and a minute later the young man, with Jean's hand held firmly in his, was guiding the child's steps up the foot-bridge.

Some time later, as the car glided along the road on its homeward journey, a short distance from the Flume House, Mr. Banker showed the party a singular rock-formation, caused by the undulations of the topmost ridge of Liberty Mountain. The outlines were those of a huge recumbent figure, wrapped in a cloak or shroud, and bore such a close resemblance, especially the contour of the forehead and nose, to those of General Washington, as after his death he lay in state, on view to the public, that it had been called "Washington in State." Many people, he asserted, claimed that the great American's body should lie at rest on this mountain ridge, named for what the great man had striven so hard to maintain, liberty, and thus be his everlasting mausoleum.

A six-mile ride and they descended from the car, to

walk to the shores of Profile Lake, a few feet from the road. But it was not to look at the sunlit sheen of silver water, embedded like a gem in a green and purple forest setting, but to gaze with awesome wonder at a huge stone face. It was the Old Man of the Mountain that gazed forth with a stony stare from a steep and craggy setting, twelve hundred feet high above the lake, on the battlemented spires of Profile, or Cannon Mountain.

It was another weird formation created by Father Time, that Mr. Banker claimed looked as if it had been stuck on the huge mountain-cliff, like the head of some criminal of medieval days, when spiked on the stone gateway of some kingly stronghold for some dastardly deed.

“But this face is not that of a felon, for note the calm majesty, the beautiful benignity of its expression. To me,” commented the gentleman, “it is an unchangeable token and an everlasting confirmation that there is a Creator, and bears witness to the account in Genesis where it says that God created man in His own image, ‘in the image of God created he him.’”

Mr. Banker explained that the face was composed of three masses of rock, one forming the forehead and helmet, another the nose and upper lip, and the third the chin, and that the whole length of the rock-face was eighty feet from the top to the bottom. When

viewed at a close range it lost its contour, and seemed but a few huge rocks tumbled one upon another, with no regularity of form or feature.

After the boys had studied the gigantic "face in air," as Sheila called it, and deciphered many oddities upon it, evoked by her imagination, Nathalie told them the story of "The Great Stone Face."

They were all greatly interested in Hawthorne's tale, and readily grasped its meaning, that, after all, it was goodness and greatness gained by studying the great and good in others, the giving of our best to our fellows as Sons of Liberty, Nathalie tried to explain, that helped one to become godlike.

Mr. Banker then told the legend called Christus Judex, which told of an artist, who had resolved to paint a picture of Christ sitting in judgment, and how he wandered up and down the world from one place to another, seeking in art galleries, palaces, or churches, a face that would serve him as a model for his great masterpiece. But alas, it was not to be found, not even among the paintings of the old masters, and finally, lured by some wayfarer's tale, he crossed the sea, and in this great stone face found the countenance that embodied the features and the expression that satisfied his ideal.

After walking a short distance around the lake, to view its beauties, and picking out the stone cannon on the top of the mountain, they drove to the Basin, an-

other rock-wonder, a miniature edition of the great Pool. Giant's Heel, a rock-formation of a human leg and foot, seemed to possess a luring charm to the children, and after they had studied it, and then discussed it with curious wonder and awe, the little party started on their homeward drive.

On the way Mr. Banker pointed out various stone formations, among them the Elephant's Head and the head of a dog, while Echo Lake, alight with the calm glow of a setting sun, revealed so many tempting bits of lake-wonders that the children begged that they might spend a day there, as it was not far from Franconia village.

Nathalie was unusually quiet on the homeward ride, not only feeling almost too tired to talk, but pondering with a puzzled air over the young soldier-boy. She had a vague feeling that she had seen his face before, but where? She finally determined to push the matter from her mind, when a sudden smile leaped to her eyes. Oh, what a ninny she was, for he was one of the soldier-boys she had met at Camp Mills, to whom she had proffered the cherries! And he had not only helped to gather them up from the dust of the road, but *he* was the boy who had waved his hat to them in a parting salute as the car whirled out of sight!

CHAPTER XVI

BUTTERNUT LODGE

ONE afternoon, as Nathalie was preparing to take the children on a tramp to Butternut Lodge, an old farmhouse on the opposite side of Garnet Mountain, that had been fitted up for picnic parties by the proprietor of a near-by hotel, her mother called her.

“Nathalie,” she said, as the girl appeared in answer to her call, “I wish you would run over to the little red house and see Mrs. Carney. Sam tells me she is ill, and that his wife, who generally looks after her, is visiting some relatives. It would be only neighborly if you would take her some fruit custard; there is plenty in the ice-box, left over from dinner.”

“But, mumsie,” pleaded the girl in an annoyed tone, “I can’t go this afternoon, for I have promised to take the children to Butternut Lodge. And then,” she added rebelliously, “I don’t want to go to see that horrid old woman. Why, I thought that you had decided not to have anything to do with her, after the disagreeable way she acted!”

“Yes, that is so, daughter,” replied Mrs. Page with

a slight smile, "but, like a good Christian, I changed my mind, a privilege I reserve to myself when occasion warrants. When I heard from Sam that the poor creature was alone in the world, I made up my mind to play the part of the good Samaritan. We can well overlook the oddities of the aged, and it must be trying to lie there all alone, with no one to give you a helping hand or a comforting word."

Nathalie was not conquered, as she had a stubborn will, and she had been rudely repulsed so many times that she felt her duty did not require her to accept any more humiliations. She was about to argue the case, when suddenly the motto that she had vowed to make her own that summer, flashed before her mental vision with a vivid distinctness.

Making no reply, she slowly walked out on the lawn, where the children stood waiting for her. After explaining her reasons for giving up the afternoon hike, she turned to hurry into the house, determined to get the disagreeable task over as soon as possible. Half-way up the steps she paused, her eyes lit up with an amused thought evidently, for, with a half-laugh, she turned and hurried back to the group standing with woe-begone faces, trying to think what they could do to ease their disappointment. A moment later they were crowding about her, listening eagerly as she talked, their faces keen and bright, as if with the inspiration of a novel appeal.

Some time later, Nathalie, with a queer little smile dimpling the corners of her mouth, knocked softly on the screen-door leading into the little red house. As she heard a faint "Come in!" in answer, she gently pushed the door open and entered. In her hands she carried a bowl, while behind her, all cautiously tiptoeing, as if afraid of making the slightest sound, came four small figures, each one carefully holding something for the invalid, whom they found lying on a couch in the front room.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Carney," said Nathalie, and then, in a distressed tone, "Oh, I'm afraid we have disturbed you, but Sam said you were not feeling well, and mother sent me over with the boys, to see if we could not help you in some way. We have brought you something, too, that may possibly make you feel better."

The girl was in the throes of despair, as no reply came from the recumbent figure, only the slow-moving of a big fan. O dear! she thought, perhaps her little ruse to relieve the awkwardness of a most curious situation was not going to succeed.

But at this instant, Sheila came forward. Her sympathies had been aroused on learning about the curious old lady, and on finding that there was nothing for her to carry to the sick one, she had gone out to the roadside and gathered a big bunch of wild flowers, to her a panacea for every ill.

These she now thrust towards the figure on the couch, crying, in her sweet childish treble, "I'm sorry, lady, you're sick, but here's some flowers; I picked 'em for you." The child spoke in a half-frightened tone, somewhat at a loss to understand the silence beneath the handkerchief-covered face.

Suddenly the handkerchief was withdrawn, and the old lady sat bolt upright, with a startled exclamation, gazing in amazed wonder at the four small figures, with their pleading eyes and offerings of sympathy, standing in a row before her.

"Bless me!" she cried, a half smile dawning in her sharp eyes. "Where did these children come from?"

"Oh — why — they're my Liberty boys," answered Nathalie quickly, with a sudden flash of relief that at last the old lady's silence was broken.

"Your Liberty boys?" she questioned with some bewilderment, as she peered keenly at the slim young figure. "But you're too young to have these boys."

"Oh, but they're not mine! I'm not married," exclaimed Nathalie, a merry note in her voice. "Why, I've just adopted them for the summer, so I call them my boys. I suppose they're what you call Fresh-Air-Funders; that is, they live on the East Side in New York, and I'm afraid the poor things wouldn't have had any outing if I hadn't brought them up here to get a breath of this mountain air, and —"

But at this point, Jean, scrupulously faithful to Na-

thalie's drilling, took a step forward, and, holding out his plate of fruit, in his fright forgetting the little English he knew, cried, "Voici du fruit!"

The woman peered at the boy, and then, with a slight cry as she saw the little empty sleeve, drew him to her, as she took the plate of fruit carefully from his hand. "Why, you poor lad!" she exclaimed in sudden tenderness. "So you have some fruit for me. Is he a refugee?" she queried softly, turning inquiringly towards Nathalie.

As the girl nodded dumbly, Tony pushed forward his offering, a covered dish of milk toast. Quickly removing the cover, he smacked his lips with gusto, while his velvety eyes glanced in a smile, as if to say, "Here's something nice for you, too!"

By this time Nathalie saw that the atmosphere had cleared, and after she and Danny had proffered their gifts,— some chicken soup and custard,— with the help of the boys she drew a table to the side of the couch. Deftly unfolding a napkin for a covering, she spread out the toothsome dainties before her hostess, while Sheila, in childish prattle, entertained her new friend by telling about the fairies, whom she insisted lived in the flowers.

As the old lady partook of the edibles that had been prepared for her, the children, won by her seeming interest, with childish confidence told her about their lives in the city, how they liked the beautiful moun-

tains, all about their many battles down at the old stone ledge, and how they were all learning to be Sons of Liberty. This drew Nathalie into the conversation, and she was soon animatedly telling how she happened to become a Liberty Girl, and how she was not only trying to carry out her plans in regard to liberty up there in the mountains, but was anxious to help the children know what it meant to become good Americans, and to understand why our nation had sent soldiers across the sea to fight the Hun.

Tony needed but one invitation, and the violin was brought forth from under his arm,—he always carried it,—and presently he was playing some little Italian airs, after which Jean sang Belgium's national anthem, at Mrs. Carney's request, and Danny recited a war-poem that Janet had taught him. Even Sheila contributed her quota to the impromptu entertainment and recited "Betsy's Battle Flag," as she, too, was a pupil of Janet's, that young lady having become so interested in the children that she had not only helped her friend to teach them to sing, but had taught them to recite.

But now it was time to go, as Nathalie did not want to weary Mrs. Carney, although, to the girl's surprise, that lady insisted that her sick headache had disappeared, cured, she laughingly confessed, by the young visitors, who had entertained her so charmingly.

With the promise to call again with her charges,

Nathalie hurried them away, happily content that she had followed her mother's suggestion and tried to be helpful and kind to her seemingly odd little neighbor. "It pays to be pleasant with people," she remarked sagely, as she related the results of the visit. "For even if you don't like them it gives you a pleasant feeling to think that you have done 'your bit' in keeping the chain of brotherly love well oiled."

Mrs. Page sat knitting on the veranda the following morning when Nathalie came hurrying out of the house with an angry light in her eyes. "Oh, mother, what do you think?" she exclaimed irritably. "Cynthia has set the children all looking for that *mystery thing*. Did you ever hear of anything so absurd? And they have gone wild about it, and are running around the attic and the upper floors, pulling things about in a most disorderly fashion. Oh, I do think she is the limit!"

Mrs. Page looked at Nathalie in silence for a moment, and then said, with some amusement in her eyes, "It is absurd, but don't get wrought up about it. Cynthia hasn't stopped to think. She is so anxious to find it that it has become an obsession with her. But it won't do to let the children get mixed up in anything of that kind." Her face sobered, and for a space the only sound was the clicking of her knitting-needles, while Nathalie, with a frown on her face, pondered how she was going to undo the mischief that Cynthia

had wrought, keenly realizing what would follow if the children were not stopped in looking for something that she knew they would never find.

“Go and tell the children to come here, Nathalie,” said her mother, “and we’ll have a little talk.” The girl, with a brighter face, complied, as she always felt greatly relieved, when anything went wrong with her boys, to have her mother straighten things out.

In a moment they were on the veranda, looking very much bedraggled and dust-begrimed, as, with faces eagerly alert, they told what they had been doing, after a little adroit questioning on the part of Mrs. Page. It did not take the good lady long to make it clear to the mystery-seekers that this *valuable thing* that they had been searching for was something that only concerned Nathalie and her cousins.

She now made it clear to them that the searching was undoubtedly a whim on the part of the former inmate of Seven Pillars, and that the finding of it simply meant a reward to the one of the three girls who had proved the most industrious in looking for it. She ended by saying that it would not likely be of any great value, adding, “And, children, it would not be yours even if you found it.”

“Oh, but we’re going to give it to Miss Natty!” came a chorus of determined little voices. “And Miss Cynthia said it was something awful rich,” added Sheila, “and I just guess that it must be a great big

jewel, or a pot of gold." "Sure, and we want Miss Natty to have it," ended Danny, with big, disappointed eyes.

This was not the first time that Mrs. Page had had to do away with a seeming mystery connected with Mrs. Renwick's peculiar instructions. For the mystery-room had proved a source of morbid curiosity to the children, as they questioned as to what was behind that great, dark red curtain. They would scurry by the door with bated breath and big, excited eyes, in whose depths lurked a latent fear of some unknown terror, until Mrs. Page had ordered the curtain down, declaring that the door simply closed, and barred, would end the mystery.

Fortunately the children's attention was now turned to other matters, but Nathalie, somehow, could not put the incident from her mind. She had a vague, conscience-stricken feeling that *she* would never gain the reward for being industrious, for although she had not failed to make an entry in her diary, she *had failed* to search as diligently as she should have done. Whereupon, with a silent vow that she would put aside an hour every day for this disagreeable task, she hastened upstairs to put her plan in execution.

Nathalie was lying in the hammock in the moonlight a few evenings later, half-drowsing. She was more than usually tired, for they had spent the day at Butternut Lodge. It had been an all-day hike, setting

forth in the forenoon with a climb up old Garnet, starting in at the log gate-posts opposite Peckett's flower-garden.

Ascending a grassy incline studded with rocks, where mountain-sheep and a gray donkey meandered, nibbling the coarse grass, they entered the cool damp of the forest gloom, where hundreds of trees confronted them. Age-ringed and gnarled, their limbs twisted in eerie contortion to grotesque shapes, they stood in the dim cathedral light bristling with shadows, a battalion of ghoulish-looking sentinels, guarding the rock-crowned heights.

But on they climbed, up the pine-needled path, stepping from lichen-covered rocks to gnarled tree-roots, or clambering deftly over blackened, flame-licked tree-trunks, that barred their way like yawning chasms. Every now and then they would stop to gather some tiny wood posy peeping coquettishly from the crevice of a broken crag, or a crimson-dyed leaf on a mossy patch, or to brush aside the black loam to burrow among dead leaves for feathery ferns, or one of the tiny umbrellas, as Sheila called the many-colored toadstools that grew by the path. But when the little maid spied a *fleur des fées*, a daintily-colored anemone, her delight was beyond bounds.

Sometimes they would pause to listen to the mountain-wind as it swayed the tops of long rows of trees, that, with the daring recklessness of new life, stretched

their bare-limbed trunks upward to catch the golden sunlight on their glossy leaves. But the sweetest melody, perhaps, was the wind that swept in solemn-toned harmony through the twisted boughs of the old mountain-guard.

But the wind was not the only musician that sunny morning up there in the stilled hush of the green wood, for sometimes it was the soft note of a belated bird's warble, coming with a haunting sweetness from the dim recesses of the shadowed gloom, or the hammer of a woodpecker as he plied his tool of trade.

But feathered songsters and musical wind were forgotten when the children struck the Red Trail,—splashes of red paint smeared at intervals on the bark of the trees to keep travelers in the path. The boys, as they scurried ahead, soon discovered a Yellow Trail, and then a Blue Trail, sign-posts to the lone wood-chopper, perhaps, as he comes down the woodland path in the deep snows of winter. The Yellow Trail, they discovered, led down the mountain, coming out on the road near Lovers' Lane, the wooded path opposite Seven Pillars. Nathalie now showed them how to blaze a trail that belonged exclusively to the Girl Pioneers, and their interest became tense with excitement as she became their leader and deftly bent the twigs in the shapes that meant so many things to the Pioneers.

A little log cabin nestling beneath a clump of pine

trees, on the edge of a slope, just below Agassiz's Rock, tempted the children to wander from the beaten path. But they soon returned, and, in wide-eyed wonder, declared that they had seen a pair of shoes by the door. Sheila was quite insistent that some fairy godmother lived there, whereupon she was rudely told by the boys that fairies never wore shoes. The children, however, were loth to leave the spot, curiously wondering as to who lived in the log hut.

But as no one was to be seen, either within or without the cabin, they followed Nathalie, and were soon standing on a jagged rock on Garnet's top, in a wonderland of views that made them feel that they were indeed birds of the air, skimming swiftly through a dim, mystical atmosphere. With hushed breath and wide-seeing eyes they gazed down upon low-lying valleys,—dabs of green between craggy rocks and lofty steeps, gemmed with silver water, yellow corn-fields, and brown pasture-land. And above all, in picturesque grandeur, towered a rim of battlemented crests and ridges, silhouetted against curtains of crystalline blue, where sweeps of white cloud drifted in gossamer veils.

On the wide green slopes surrounding the farmhouse the children reveled in a summer-land of daisies and buttercups, that jeweled the softly creeping grass. While Sheila wove a wreath of mountain posies Nathalie told how, some years before, a bag of gold had been found in a log of wood in the old farmhouse.

This added a new glory to the scene, and there were many surmises in regard to this find, while the Girl Pioneer plied her craft and showed them how to make leaf-impressions in their little note-books, as each one had gathered a leaf from many trees on their way up the mountain.

After Danny had made a camp-fire and they had had a hike lunch of frankfurters, roasted potatoes, and many toothsome edibles found in their lunch-boxes, they hurried back to the old farmhouse, and while the children peeped into the old-fashioned brick ovens in search of another pot of gold, Janet played on the yellow-keyed piano. Then came a stroll to a weather-beaten barn, where an old coach was stored, which had once been the mountain's only method of conveyance, some decades ago, and on which was the name "Goodnow House." Of course they all had to mount the rickety steps and crawl inside on the wide leather-cushioned seat, large enough to hold almost a dozen children. Danny and Tony, however, soon clambered out and mounted still higher, up to the two-step-driver's seat, where they pretended they were driving a tally-ho, with Sheila and Jean sitting back, within the railed top, as outside passengers, while Nathalie and Janet, on the wide old seat within, acted the part of tourists traveling to the top of Mount Washington.

Wearying of these childish sports, Nathalie and

Janet hied themselves back to the farmhouse, where, after resisting the inclination to drowse, induced by the lulling hum of the bees as they darted busily about in the sweet-scented, sunny air, they sat down on the little porch and took out their knitting.

Suddenly the deep silence that they had drifted into, lured to thought by their active fingers, was broken by loud squeals, mingled with boyish shouts of laughter. And then a thrill came, as Nathalie suddenly perceived the old stage-coach, drawn by Danny and Tony as horses, while Jean, as the driver, was exultantly happy, perched up in the driver's high seat. Sheila, meanwhile, bewreathed and betwined with wild posies, sat within the coach, posing as a beautiful white princess who had been captured by bandits.

Nathalie's heart swung in wild leaps as she saw the one-armed boy's perilous position, as the ramshackle, clumsy coach rocked like a cradle, and realized what it would mean if anything happened to it, as it was a most valuable relic to the proprietor of the hotel.

With a sudden cry she jumped to her feet, and a moment later was excitedly explaining to the would-be bandits the wrong they had committed. In disappointed silence Jean was helped down from the top of the coach, and Sheila, in whimpering protest, was hauled out. Then, amid a profound and tragic stillness to the children, they managed, with the help of the two girls, to get the stage back in the barn.

Whereupon, Nathalie closed the door and marched her charges off in another direction, while pondering how to amuse them, for she had learned that their active brains and nimble fingers must be kept busy or mischief would brew.

A low cry from Sheila roused her, to see a few feet away, on the outskirts of the wood, a baby deer, gazing at them with mild eyes of wonder. But the cries from the boys caused it to leap wildly into the woods.

Such had been the events of the day.

Nathalie stirred uneasily, as a ray of moonshine fell athwart her face. She rubbed her eyes, and then sat up in the hammock, staring about in a bewildered, sleepy fashion. "Why, I must have been dreaming," she thought, vaguely conscious that she had been living over again the long day with its many adventures.

"But it must be late; the children should be in bed." She could hear Danny and Tony down on the lawn, their voices in loud and excited argument. O dear! she hoped they were not going to fight again, and then she gave a hurried "Tru-al-lee!"

At the familiar call the boys came hurrying across the lawn, when, to her surprise, she saw that Sheila was not with them. As she questioned them sharply as to her whereabouts, they insisted that they supposed that she was with her. The girl, somewhat alarmed, for the little lady was inclined to wander off by herself, instituted a search. The barn, grounds,

Lovers' Lane opposite, and even the little red house were peeped into, but all to no purpose.

As Sam was in Littleton for the night, the boys were dispatched to Sugar Hill village to make inquiries, while she and Janet, who had just returned from a stroll in the moonlight with Mrs. Page, started to look on the road leading to "The Echoes." Some time later the searchers returned to Seven Pillars to report that no clues as to the child's whereabouts had been discovered. Suddenly distracted, conscience-stricken, Nathalie gave a low wail.

"Oh, I do believe she has gone to the top of Garnet Mountain!" The girl had suddenly remembered that for several days Sheila had been telling how one of the boarders at Peckett's — a lady as white as snow — had told her that every moonlight night at twelve o'clock the fairies came out of the woods and danced on the top of Garnet. She had even suggested that if Sheila could see them, she might be rewarded by receiving some of the beautiful garnets that were hidden in the rocks, and which only the fairies knew where to find.

There was a grim silence at Nathalie's cry, as each one stared at the other with a white, dismayed face, while Nathalie, with clasped hands, nervously swayed herself to and fro.

A sudden scuffle of small feet caused them all to swing about, to see Danny hurrying towards the door.

“Oh, where are you going, Dan?” cried Nathalie in a choked voice, staring at the lad with bewildered eyes.

“I’m going to find my sister — Sheila —” came in a strangled sob from the boy.

“But don’t go alone. I will go with you,” exclaimed Nathalie, quickly springing to his side, as he stood with his face buried in his elbow, while his slim body heaved convulsively.

It was soon decided that Janet and Dan would climb the mountain-trail that came out near Lovers’ Lane, Mrs. Page and Tony would hurry in the direction of Hildreth’s farm, while Nathalie and Jean would follow the Red Trail of the mountain, opposite Peckett’s hotel.

Twenty minutes later Nathalie and Jean, breathless from their hurried climb, paused for a moment by a big tree that stood ghoulishly somber by the path. As the girl, still panting, leaned against it, a ray of moonlight filtering through the canopy of leaves overhead showed that it was the Seat Tree, as they had named it on their climb that morning, on account of its singular formation.

By some freak of nature, from its main trunk, a short space from the ground, another trunk had sprung, giving it the appearance of two trees in one, and in this hollow some kindly-intentioned person had placed a seat. As the girl perceived the seat she sat down,

and feeling Jean's soft breath come puffing against her cheek, drew the tired boy down on her lap. Tige, the yellow terrier, crouched at their feet, his red tongue hanging out of his mouth like a signal-light in the weird darkness.

Fortunately the darkness of the ascent had been lightened at intervals by the moon, which was at its full, so that the girl had not been compelled to use her flashlight except in the deeply shadowed places. When they had begun to climb, Jean had whistled, his customary way of calling Sheila, while Nathalie had not only called the child by name, but had given her Pioneer call of "*Tru-al-lee.*"

But these calls had only re-echoed through the cathedral arches with such a dismal, dirge-like sound that they had desisted. Feeling sure that the child would keep near the path, Nathalie had kept her eyes busy peering on all sides of her, thinking that she could easily discern Sheila's white dress if she was anywhere near.

All at once a low cry escaped the girl, as, with a convulsive clutch of Jean's slight body, she bent forward, and peered through the eerie tree-shadows to a dim, flickering light that shone some distance beyond in the deep recesses of the forest. As the boy's eyes followed her glance, in a tense whisper he cried, "Oh, Mademoiselle! see, there is a man digging in the ground!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE CABIN ON THE MOUNTAIN

YES, it was a man digging in the ground. The quivering, yellowish glare from a torch that had been stuck in the ground by his side — as it flickered and flared, sometimes almost extinguished by the night air, and then suddenly blazing to a vivid flame — silhouetted his form in sharp outline against the high rock by which he was standing.

As the girl's eyes dilated in puzzled wonder as to who the man was, and why he was digging in the woods at this hour of the night, a queer, odd quiver, or twitching of his head at times, as he bent over the spade, aroused within her a vague consciousness that she had seen some one before who had that same peculiar motion.

Tige, the little yellow dog crouching at their feet, at this moment gave a low growl, a warning that he might betray their presence. Nathalie, quickly pushing Jean from her lap, grabbed the dog, and snuggled him close to smother the growl, afraid that the man would discover that he had been seen. Assailed by a nameless fear, she seized Jean's hand and pushed on

up the incline, stepping cautiously, almost noiselessly, on the fallen leaves and stones, ever and anon glancing back, as if fearful that the man would pursue them.

Recalled to herself at Jean's wide, frightened eyes, and the tremor of his slight form, she whispered with assumed courage, "Oh, I guess the man is only burying some dead animal, or something of that kind up here in the woods." Nevertheless she was almost as frightened as the child, and was devoutly thankful when they reached a little clearing nearer the top, where the moon shone down with the brightness of day.

Yes, it would be about here that Sheila would come, for it was not far from the jutting rock where they had seen such beautiful views that morning. With keen eyes the girl peered around, but only craggy rocks, scrubby bushes, tree-stumps — weird black objects in the moonlight — here and there, backed by a forest of heavily-branched trees met her gaze. Oh! what was that tiny glimmer of light over by the tree yonder? Was it a light held by the man who had been digging, and who was perhaps watching them from behind the tree?

Nathalie's heart gave a wild leap, again shaken by that nameless fear, and then, to her intense relief, she saw that the light came from the little log cabin the children had found that morning in prowling about the clearing. Yes, some one must live there. But

suppose it should be the man they had seen? Ah, they would hurry on, and gripping Jean's hand in a closer pressure, she started forward. But no; Jean stood obstinately still, with low-bent head, as if listening.

What was it? Oh, it was a noise,—a low sound like a moan. Could it be Sheila? Was she lying somewhere there in the woods? Why, it sounded as if it came from the little cabin! Nathalie's head went up as she peered resolutely through the gloom. No, she would not allow her foolish fear to master her. She would go forward and see what it was — perhaps. A moment or so later the girl, still frenziedly clinging to the little boy's hand, her heart leaping with anxious agitation and nervous fear, tapped loudly on one of the log posts of the open doorway, which was hung with what appeared to be a large dark-colored shawl that waved dismally in the wind. Almost immediately, in answer to her rap, the shawl was pushed hastily aside and a man stood in the doorway.

From the weird red gleam of a lantern that hung from the center of the cabin, Nathalie perceived that the man was young, with a strange pallor on his lean, brown face, which was lighted by large, densely black eyes, that were peering down at her from beneath a tangle of soft, wavy black hair.

Inwardly quaking, but determined not to show her fear, Nathalie inquired, "Have you seen anything of a little girl about?" Without answering, the man

turned and was pointing towards a log couch built up against the wall, spread with an old army-coat. Nathalie gave a hurried glance, and then made a wild rush forward, for the little form lying so strangely still on the coat was Sheila!

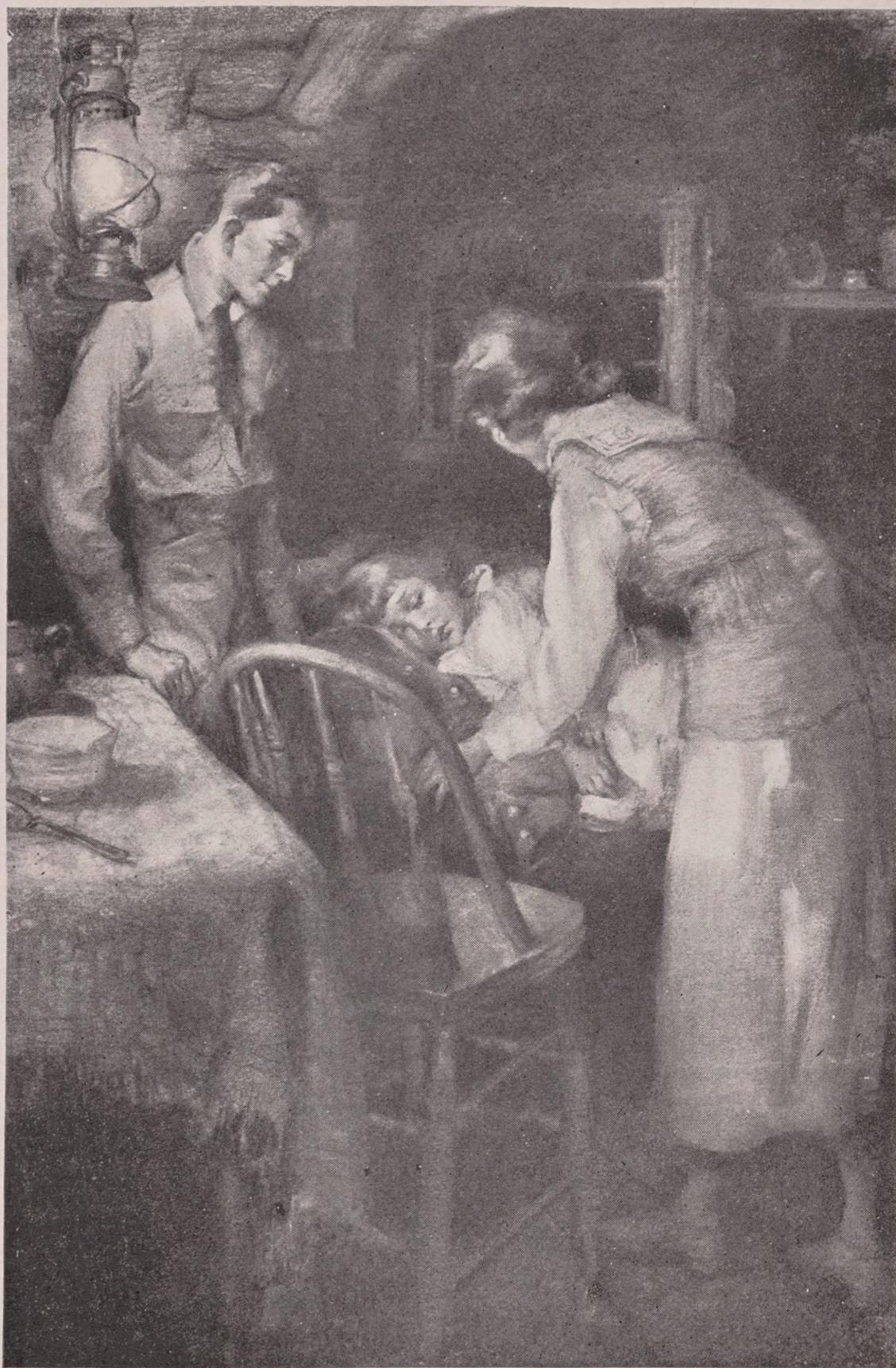
But the man's hand stayed her as he said in a low, but pleasant-sounding voice, "Sh-sh! I would not awaken her. Poor little thing, she cried herself to sleep." He then briefly explained how he had been awakened by the low whimpering of a child, and, on going out to the clearing, had found her sitting on a rock, crying piteously for the fairies to come and get her. He was moved to question her, and then, by a little coaxing, and the explanation that the fairies had all gone back to fairyland, as it was long after midnight, he had coaxed the child into the cabin, and finally she had fallen asleep. As Nathalie bent over her in anxious solicitude she saw the undried tears still on her lashes, while low, whimpering moans — the sounds that had arrested her attention — came at intervals from between the soft, red lips.

As the girl pondered as to how she was to get Sheila home, Danny's policeman's whistle, as he called it, followed by Janet's shrill "hoo-hooing," announced that the rest of the party of searchers had arrived. In a short space they were all in the little cabin, animatedly discussing how to carry the little girl down the mountain. Danny, meanwhile, had hastened to the couch

and was down on his knees, softly kissing the little hand thrown over the side, in the abandon of sleep, while the young man stood at one side, quietly watching the little group.

It was soon decided, at his suggestion, that they leave the little girl there in the cabin with Danny until morning, when there would be more light to get her down the mountain. This difficulty settled, with relieved hearts they were about to set forth on their return journey down the trail, when Nathalie, whose eyes had been wandering about the rustic hut, cried, "But do you live here all alone up on this mountain?"

The young man's eyes lighted. "Why, yes, I live alone up here. It is not much of a summer-resort," he said, with a rarely winning smile. "Still it answers my purpose, for I am guaranteed plenty of pure air. I am an English soldier," he volunteered somewhat slowly, "and have recently come over here from England. I was wounded,—" he glanced down at his arm with its gloved hand, and which Janet had been eying rather sharply, for it hung down in a strangely stiff way,—"and I thought the mountains would benefit me. But I am very glad I found the child," he broke off abruptly, as if he had been revealing something he did not care to talk about. "I hope she will be none the worse for her adventure," he continued kindly, "even if she failed to find the fairies." Nathalie had explained how the child had come to wander away.



NATHALIE BENT OVER IN ANXIOUS SOLICITUDE.—Page 259.

Early the next morning Danny and Sheila appeared, the little girl now quite wide-awake, but she grew very shamefaced when Mrs. Page scolded her gently for giving them such a fright, dwelling upon the deep anxiety she had caused Miss Natty, when she had been so good to her, too. The tears came into the brown eyes at this rebuke, and, impulsively running to the girl, she protested with a stifled sob that she would not run after any more fairies.

Of course Nathalie had to kiss the woeful little damsel, but perceiving that the auspicious moment had arrived to impress her with a fact that she should know, she took her out on the porch, and then gravely and carefully made clear to the little mind that there were no fairies, but just beautiful fancies that existed in the brains of people, who put them in stories so as to make them interesting to children.

But Danny, apparently greatly distressed, now drew Nathalie to one side, and confided to her that he believed that the young man must be hungry and very poor, for there seemed to be no food in the cabin. And he had heard him mutter,— when he thought the boy was asleep,— as he counted some loose change he had taken from his pocket and thrown on the table, “Well, that won’t get much food.” And then he had sat very quiet for a long time, as if thinking.

Nathalie immediately rushed to impart this news to her mother, with the result that, a half-hour later,

Danny and Tony, each with a basket filled with food, started up the mountain-trail. In his pocket Danny carried a note written by Mrs. Page, in which she not only thanked the young man again for his kindness to Sheila, but made it clear that the food came from the child, a thank offering to him, and that she hoped he would find it acceptable, as she knew that it must be a difficult matter to obtain much food up there on the mountain top.

Some time later the two boys returned in a state of great excitement. They claimed that they had found the young man asleep on the couch, and although they had tried to awaken him, and had "hollered and hollered right into his ear," as Danny expressed it, he had not even stirred. The faces of the listeners grew grave as they heard this, and Janet, with a sudden sharp exclamation, turned and rushed up-stairs, to reappear in a moment with a medicine-case and her hat. Her training as a district nurse was now to be put to a real test. "I just believe that boy has been starved to death," she ejaculated, her blue eyes luminous with sympathy, "for I could see by the look of him last night that he was in a bad way."

Of course Nathalie would not let Janet go alone, and so the two girls and the boys again hurried up the mountain to the cabin, where they found the young man not dead, as Nathalie had vaguely feared, but in a state of unconsciousness. Under Janet's able minis-

trations he was finally brought to, and after Nathalie had warmed some broth — Danny had made a fire in the open — it was gently fed to him by Janet. As Nathalie watched her, she opened her eyes in amazement at the girl's deftness and gentleness in handling her charge, for this indeed was a new phase of her cousin's character.

Won by the girls' sympathy and interest, Philip de Brie — as that proved to be the young man's name — said he had been wounded at the battle of Loos, and then wounded again and taken a prisoner at the battle of the Somme. After many months, under most harrowing circumstances, he had made his escape, and finally reached England, only to find that his mother had died in the meantime. "As I was alone," there was a perceptible quiver in his voice,—"my father had died when I was a lad,—I decided to come over here.

"My father was an American," he continued. "I was born in America, and, as I knew that I had a grandmother living here, now my only relative, I felt that I wanted to see her. But I found that she, too, had died," the young man's eyes saddened, "and, well, once up on these grand old mountains, somehow I wanted to stay, they seemed so restful after the nerve-shocked life of a battle-field and my prison experience. I found this old shack up here one day in wandering about, and, after finding its owner, hired it for the

summer. You see, my arm was bayoneted by a German," his mouth set in a hard line, "and was never properly treated in the German camp. Sometimes I fear I will lose it altogether. But you have been very kind to me — I shall get along now." He attempted to rise, but Janet, forcing him back, insisted upon ripping open the sleeve covering the bayoneted arm, notwithstanding his protests, and here she found a condition that made her eyes grow very grave.

After cleaning the wound and applying what remedies she had on hand, she rebandaged the arm, which made the patient feel much better, he affirmed. After giving him a soothing draught, and fixing him as comfortably as she could with the meager bed-clothing in the cabin, so he could sleep, she and Nathalie withdrew outside.

Under the trees the two girls sat and discussed the situation with much perplexity, for Janet maintained that it was a serious case,— that the young man's temperature was not only rising, but that his arm needed a surgeon's care. But what were they to do? And the girls' eyes grew tragically grave as they realized that the young man was an object of much solicitude, alone and ill in a strange country, and evidently without any means.

It was finally decided that they take turns in caring for him, with the help of Danny, who was not only sympathetically interested, but who was quite a handy

man in many ways. He said he had learned to care for Sheila, and for the old woman whom he called his nurse, who had cared for them, and who was not only very aged, but miserably ill for some time before she died.

But the next morning, unfortunately,— Janet and Danny had remained during the night,— the patient's condition was worse and Janet, with tears in her eyes, besought Nathalie to go to the village and see if she could get help.

As the girl hurried down the trail her mind was active. Oh, she did hate to make the young man a public charge, as he looked so refined, and had such a noble, winning way with him. And he was a soldier, too; yes, a "Son of Liberty," as she confided to Tony, who was by her side. For had he not been fighting in France to give liberty to the world? "Why, there isn't anything too good for him," lamented the girl, "and yet there he is up there alone, perhaps at the point of death for want of proper care." And yet where was she to get the money to call a physician, and where could she find one, were perplexing questions.

As these thoughts ran rapidly through the girl's brain, sometimes spoken aloud in her stress, inspired perhaps by Tony's unspoken sympathy, as he gently patted her hand, she caught her breath quickly, and a bright flash illumined her eyes.

“Yes, I will do it,” she muttered aloud, absent-mindedly returning the boy’s caresses. “I will take the money. I was saving it. O dear!” Nathalie almost wailed, “shall I ever be able to save even a *sou* towards going to college? Well, it can’t be helped. I’ll just have to take it and see if I can’t get some one to tell me where I can get a physician.”

Hurrying into the house, Nathalie informed her mother as to the patient’s condition, and then told that she intended taking the money she had saved and call a doctor. Mrs. Page kissed the girl softly with troubled eyes, saying gently, “Never mind, Nathalie, you are investing your money at a greater per cent of interest in giving it to this unknown stranger, than if you used it for yourself. And then, who knows, dear? Something may turn up some day —”

“Oh, no,” cried Blue Robin in a discouraged voice, “*nothing* will ever turn up.” And then, with a feeble smile, she cried, “But, as you often say, mumsie, things are foreordained, and so perhaps it wouldn’t be for my good to have my wish. And then, anyway, I shall have the satisfaction,” the brown eyes were sparkling again, “of knowing that the ‘drop in the bucket,’ is going to do some good to some one.”

After finding Sam, who was rarely ill and could give her no information as to where to get a physician unless it was at Littleton, she started for the village. As she passed the little red house she ran in for a

moment to tell Mrs. Carney about the man in the cabin, as she had become much interested in the young man's story. The queer old lady and the girl had become very good friends since that visit with the children, for Nathalie had learned that the sometimes sharp gray eyes covered a kindly nature, notwithstanding the old lady's brusque, queer ways.

"Yes, it just breaks my heart to take my college money," she dolefully confided. Then, half-ashamed of her repining, she tried to explain how college had been the dream of her life, and how many times she had been disappointed. A kindly gleam in Mrs. Carney's eyes, however, assured her that the old lady understood how she felt, and after a hurried good-by she was on her way to the post-office.

Nathalie feared she was going to get no more information here than what Sam had imparted, when suddenly a lady, who had been standing near, and who had been interested in her story, informed her that there was a famous surgeon from New York up at the Sunset Hill House, and that possibly she could get him.

Thanking her warmly, the girl hurried up the board walk to the hotel,—the children tagging on behind her,—feeling extremely nervous as she realized her boldness in asking a big physician, who had probably come to the mountains for a rest, to be bothered with a poor patient. And then, too, who knew what terribly high prices he might ask for his services? Na-

thalie began to feel that her "drop in the bucket" might not prove of any help after all.

But, bracing to the ordeal, she told the children to wait at the little Observation Tower, as she called it, in front of the hotel, and hurried to the office. She had just nervously cleared her throat to question the clerk when the sudden cry, "Oh, Nathalie! Nathalie! where did you come from?" caused her to swing about. The next moment Nita Van Vorst had her arms about her, and was hugging and kissing her excitedly, while her mother stood by with pleased, shining eyes.

After a hearty greeting from Mrs. Van Vorst, Nathalie cried laughingly, although the sudden revulsion from nervous anxiety had brought tears to her eyes, "Oh, where did you come from, and when did you get here?"

"We arrived last night," replied Nita, bubbling over with delight at being with her friend again. "Our coming here is a surprise *for you*, and we were just going to see if we could get some information as to where Seven Pillars was, so as to motor there."

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you, and now you can see my boys!" And then, after Mrs. Van Vorst had led them into one of the little side-rooms opening from the long hall, where they could converse without being heard, she told all about her boys,—Sheila, the boy-girl, as she called her, the good times they were all having, and about the young man who was lying so

ill up on the mountain, and what had brought her to the hotel. "I am so nervous," sighed the girl, as she finished her story, "for I don't know this big man, and I dread to speak with him, for fear he will be brusque and sharp with me, but *something* must be done for that poor soldier boy."

"Excuse me a moment," exclaimed Mrs. Van Vorst after she had conversed a while; "I want to go and see if I have any mail." But, to Nathalie's surprise, she did not go in the direction of the desk, but hurried after a tall, rather stout gentleman who at that moment passed through the hall.

But the little incident was forgotten, as Nathalie and Nita had so much to say to one another that they both talked at once, as if their tongues were hung in the middle. Nita insisted that her friend would have to remain to dinner with her, as she had so much news to tell, especially about the Liberty Girls, that it would take hours to tell it.

In the midst of these many bits of enjoyed information, Nita's mother returned, and Nathalie in a moment was dazedly bowing to the tall gentleman, whom her friend presented as Dr. Gilmour. "He is the surgeon, Nathalie," she added smilingly, "whom you came after. As he is a very old friend of mine, and a good American to boot," she nodded at the gentleman, "he has consented to go with you up the mountain to see your Son of Liberty, as you call him."

“ Oh, I am so glad! I am so glad! ” burst from the girl with a joy-thrilled voice. “ And, oh, I thank you so much; it is so kind of you, ” she added with misty eyes, turning impulsively towards the physician.

But the big man, with an amused smile in his keen gray eyes, patted her on the shoulder as he said, “ My little lady, I think that every true American should stand ready to do anything to help any man, or boy, who has been brave enough to face those fiendish Huns. ”

“ Oh, I think so, too, ” cried the relieved girl, a wave of color flushing her cheeks, “ and I think it must have been that thought that gave me the courage to come and ask you. ”

“ Oh, isn't it just dandy! ” enthused Nita, as Dr. Gilmour hurried away to get his little black case, while Nathalie led her friend down the steps of the veranda to where three little figures sat patiently waiting for her on the tower-steps.

But the girl's eyes widened as she suddenly perceived that they were not alone, for a brown-clad figure with soldierly bearing, but with a golf-bag slung over his shoulder, with one foot on the steps, was bending down and talking to the children. And then a sudden thrill stirred her as she recognized the soldier lad who had helped her down the foot-bridge that day at the Flume, and who had so kindly taken Jean to see the cascade.

As Nathalie reached the children, she became embarrassed, as she suddenly realized that she did not know the name of the young soldier. But her embarrassment was momentary, as Nita called out merrily, "Hello, Van. Is *that* what you are doing, making love to the kiddies? I thought you were going to play golf."

"That was my intention," replied the boy, straightening up and lifting his hat, and then his dark blue eyes brightened quickly, as he perceived Nita's companion.

Nathalie was now introduced to Mr. Van Darrell, the son of a friend of Nita's mother, and then the little group were chatting merrily as they waited for Dr. Gilmour, and Mrs. Van Vorst, who had gone to order the car to take them to the foot of the Trail that led to the top of Garnet Mountain.

All at once young Darrell turned towards Nathalie as he said, "But, Miss Page, have we not met before? Were you not one of the girls at Camp Mills one day last month, who asked a party of us if we did not want some cherries? And then, if I remember rightly, we all helped you to gather up the fruit after you had knocked the basket from the car."

"Oh, yes, I remember you," dimpled Nathalie. "No, not when I met you that day at the Flume, although your face haunted me as being familiar, but it all came to me on the ride home."

“But I knew you right away,” said the boy half shyly, “although I did not like to make myself known, for, of course, I did not even know your name.”

“Or I yours,” laughed Nathalie. And then, with her mind filled with thoughts of the young English soldier, she told his story to Mr. Darrell, who immediately became so interested in Tommy Atkins, as he called him, that he begged Nathalie to let him go with her, quite assured, he declared, that he could be of some assistance to him.

Before the girl could reply a new voice suddenly shrilled, “Oh, Nathalie, how do you do? Did you come up here to call on us?”

The girl, thus addressed, stared with some bewilderment, to see her two New York schoolmates hurrying towards her. They looked very fetching in their modish golf-costumes, with their bags slung carelessly over their shoulders, as each one seized her hand and shook it cordially, while smiling down upon her in a most friendly and chummy way.

For a full second the girl simply stared, dazed and confused, as it suddenly flashed into her consciousness that the last time she had met these girls they had snubbed her, deliberately turning their backs upon her, when she greeted them, the day she had come to the hotel to leave the sweet peas. Ah, a sudden red leaped into Nathalie's cheeks, her eyes flamed angrily, and she was about to return their snub by turning her

back upon them, for she had intuitively divined that they were nice to her because they wanted to be introduced to her friends. Yes, they wanted to know the soldier-boy.

But something deep within the girl, her finer nature, whispered, "Never mind, ignore their slight, and show that you are above them by acting the lady." With simple dignity the girl coolly returned their effusive greeting, and then, with cold formality, introduced them to her two friends. Oh, how delighted they were to meet Miss Van Vorst; they had heard all about her from a friend of hers,—Nita never was able to discover this friend. Then, turning from Nita as quickly as possible, they made an onslaught upon the soldier lad. Oh, how pleased they were to meet him; they had been just wild to know him ever since they had sighted his uniform. Was he a New York guardsman? What regiment did he belong to? These, and a score of similar questions were quickly hurled at the young man, somewhat to his embarrassment. Nathalie could not hear all they said as she chattered with Nita, but vaguely realized, as they rattled on, with an angry flutter of her heart, that they were again ignoring her, as she heard them urging Mr. Darrell to join them at a game of golf.

But a few moments later, when Nita waved a good-by to her mother from the car, she was seated between the soldier lad and Nathalie, with the children

crowding upon their laps, and the doctor in front with the chauffeur.

As the car whizzed away from the hotel Nita gave Nathalie's sleeve a sudden twitch as she cried, "Oh, look, Nathalie; there's the *Count!*"

"The *Count,*" repeated her friend in mystified wonder, as she bent forward to gaze after a young man who had just flashed by in an automobile. But suddenly, with a curious gleam in her eyes, the girl drew back, a slight flush on her cheeks.

"Oh, no, he's not a *real Count,*" informed Nita with some amusement in her eyes; "but every one calls him that because they think he's so Frenchy-looking, with his dark skin and big black eyes. The girls seem quite wild about him, for he takes them riding in his car. Some one told mother that he was from Chicago, and was quite wealthy."

But Nathalie manifested no further interest in the gentleman whom Nita had dubbed the Count, although she immediately recognized the young man as the one who had repaired her car the day she had gone after the children. But, alas, she felt that he was no gentleman, for had he not stared at her rudely in the post-office, and then accosted her near the cemetery a short time later?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LIBERTY CHEER

AFTER Nita's arrival the two Pioneer-Liberty girls were so occupied with things to see and do, that at the week's end it was hard to realize it was not a month since her coming.

In the order of events had been the anxious moments waiting to know the doctor's decision as to the condition of the young English soldier. This had been followed by Nathalie's deep joy when she realized that her "drop in the bucket" was doing its bit. Yes, the doctor announced that the young man's condition was serious, induced by his gangrenous wound and the life he had lived for the last two years. Still, as he had a good constitution, and youth is a ready up-builder, with proper care and food,—emphasizing the word "food,"—he would be all right in a short time. Yes, Janet had sensed the situation when she had proclaimed that she believed the man was more than half starved.

Under the care of the skillful surgeon, with Janet's good nursing, assisted by Nathalie and Nita, who had

begged hard to be allowed to help, the patient soon began to improve. Possibly the atmosphere created by having three young nurses, the soldier-boy as orderly, Danny as handy man, with the other children as servants, with nourishing food, had done as much as medicine and skill in giving renewed ambition to a man who had been dragging out his life on half-rations, in the solitude of a friendless existence.

The most important aid to the convalescent's recovery, undoubtedly, was the thought of being able to refill an empty pocketbook, for Mrs. Van Vorst, as soon as she learned that he was a proficient French scholar,— he had lived in France, his mother being a French woman,— and was graduated from Oxford, had immediately made the suggestion that he give Nita French lessons. With her usual tact the suggestion had been so delicately made, pleading it as a personal favor to her, so as not to offend the fine sensibilities of the young man, that it had been soon arranged.

The young soldier's peculiar situation had been noised about, and general interest and sympathy being awakened, many of the guests from the near-by hotels had climbed the mountain trails, with offerings of fruit or some delicacy for the invalid.

When the fact became known that Nita was to take French lessons from him, other young ladies at the hotels were eager to be his pupils, among them Nathalie's two New York schoolmates, who ardently

sounded the praises of the handsome English soldier, whose refined scholarly face, tall, athletic figure, his romantic story, bade fair to make him a possible rival of the Count, who was considered the most eligible *parti* at the hotel. But the fact that the young man up in the cabin had played a soldier's part in the present war, was an asset that carried more weight than mere wealth, in the minds of the ladies, particularly when it was fashionable to be patriotic.

Possibly Nathalie's two friends seized upon this opportunity to make themselves one of a very happy party of young people, who somehow managed to have a most enjoyable time in ministering to their charge. As soon as the sick man was able, he was made comfortable in a hammock under the trees, on a clearing near the cabin, where each one vied with the other to cheer him.

Sometimes there would be a reading, then again just a merry chat, but as the meetings gained in numbers, stories became the vogue, the story-teller generally relating some tale about the mountains, or an Indian legend, while the listeners sat and knitted for the soldiers, as even Sheila and the boys,— all but poor Jean,— had become expert knitters, under Nathalie's tutelage. As the patient had brightened so perceptibly at these little mountain-top gatherings, Nathalie had dubbed them Liberty Cheers.

When Blue Robin saw that her two schoolmates had

foisted themselves upon the party, she felt indignantly grieved, as the snub they had administered to her still rankled. She had been on the point of revealing the incident to Nita, in one of their little confidential chats, when that young lady had remained at Seven Pillars over night, as she loved to do. But second thoughts stayed her, as she knew her friend's loyal devotion to her, and her vehement way of disposing of people when they displeased her, the result of her spoiled childhood. Nathalie, also, was afraid to offend the two girls, for fear they would not continue to take lessons of Philip de Brie, and she knew that would mean a loss to him.

Van Darrell, the Camp Mills soldier, and Philip had fraternized as "mates"; for the latter, by his life on the battlefield, and in the trenches, and with his experiences in a German prison-camp, had a stock of information at his command that Van was greedy to devour. With the wholehearted patriotic enthusiasm of our young American boys when called to the colors, he was keen to be on the "firing-line," so as to get a chance, as he expressed it, "to get a few jabs at the Big Willie gang."

Philip's deep appreciation of Nathalie's kindness to him, and also that of her friends, was not only expressed in words, but by the warm, eloquent glances of his dark eyes. His deferential courtesy to all, his chivalrous manner towards her and Janet, and his kindly, winning way of making friends with the chil-

dren, had won the girl's admiration. Nevertheless she had noticed that it was Janet who had won his deepest regard. It was to her that he turned with questioning eyes when anything of moment came up, on her that his admiring, ardent glances fell when that young lady appeared in some simple, but fluffy, bewitching little costume, which she had taken to doing lately, somewhat to Nathalie's surprise.

When he grew tired and showed a restlessness, a desire to be free of the merry-makers, a pleased look would dawn in his eyes when they left him to the ministrations of the head nurse. The somber shadows in his eyes would light with a strange glow as she hovered about him, trying to make him comfortable, or giving him the medicine that he probably would have forgotten if she had not been there to give it to him.

And Janet? Well, she had been, as it were, curiously transformed into a new creature, seemingly, by the sweet pity in her soft eyes, and the flush on her winsome face, as, with tireless patience and quiet diligence, she performed her duties. Evidently, for the nonce, her vocation of mingled pacifist, farmerette, and suffragette had been relegated to the past.

Oh, no, the girls did not spend all their time with Philip, for, as this was Nita's first visit to the White Hills, there were many things to see. One of the first places she had been taken by her friend was to the Sweet Pea Tea-House, to meet the invalid and the

deaf-and-dumb lady. She was not only charmed with their garden of gardens, but enthusiastic in her warm admiration of the charms of its owners. And it was not long before she was alternating with Nathalie in reading to Miss Whipple, for Nathalie had managed, with her many duties and joys, to keep up the readings to the shut-in.

Mrs. Carney, of the little red house, also received a call, and the young girl had come away curiously impressed with the oddities of the queer little old lady, whose small black figure, with her basket of yarn for knitting, always in that funny poke-bonnet, was a familiar sight on the road.

Janet, Nita declared, was "just lovely," and that this admiration was reciprocated was evidenced by Janet taking her down to her farm, although sadly neglected at present. Here Nita not only did her share of weeding, but returned with such glowing accounts of the farm's luxuriance, expatiating so glowingly upon its fertility, and what wonders Janet had been able to accomplish so late in the season, that Nathalie forebore poking fun at it, as she generally did.

Nita had gazed at the mystery room with a keen desire to peep within, had read Nathalie's diary of each day's doings, and had prowled all over the house, intent on selecting what she thought was the most valuable thing for Nathalie to select, as she, too, was anxious that she should "win the prize," as the children

called it. She had even visited Cynthia in her sanctum sanctorum, to Nathalie's astonishment, the artist apparently having taken a great fancy to the hunchback girl, being particularly cordial to her, and returning Mrs. Van Vorst's call, to the amazement of Mrs. Page, before that lady had had a chance to do so.

But the reason therefor was apparently explained, when it became known that she had suggested to Mrs. Van Vorst that she allow her to paint Nita's portrait, insisting that her golden hair and violet eyes would show up beautifully on a canvas. Nathalie was still more surprised when that kind-hearted lady, whose income was amply sufficient to allow her to indulge in many whims, consented, and Cynthia was in a glorified state at the success of her plan.

Liberty Fort had proved a good inspirer of patriotism, as Nita not only became, for the time, a most valiant Son of Liberty, entering with great zest into the children's sham battles on the meadow below, but she introduced an element of war that was hailed with delight. This was a battery gun, which she contrived to make, with the help of Jean, out of an old lead pipe found in the cellar, and which was placed on wheels, the remains of an old hayrack, and installed at the top of the terrace in front of the fort.

She had also helped the boys to make wooden swords out of sticks, and also hand-grenades of thick paper filled with gravel, which would have had a most disas-

trous effect upon the enemy if the latter had not been imaginary.

It was here one afternoon, as the boys were having a battle with all the horrors of war, that young Darrell appeared, and as he and the two girls sat on the stone ledge, he told them how he was "all in" by having had a boxing-match with a prisoner when on police duty.

"The chap was a foreigner," he explained. "He could only speak a little English, and I had heard him mutter to himself several times in rather a queer way. Suddenly, when I was off my guard, he let his club fly at me and gave me a whack on the head that knocked me silly. I saw stars for a moment, and then I let out on the chap,—he was a big fellow, as strong as an ox,—and was just about to use my automatic when the Military Police rushed up and in a few moments they had him as tight as a drum. It turned out that he was off his nut, and I believe he is now in some asylum. Anyway he put me in the hospital with a cracked skull for a while, and then I was granted a furlough, and came up here with mother."

The girls, under the spell of the military, were inclined to make a hero of the soldier-boy, with the long-lashed, merry blue eyes and cheery laugh, in their minds at least, if not openly. Later, when he was sitting alone with Nathalie, in a burst of confidence, with sudden gravity, he lamented that he feared that he would never reach the "firing-line" overseas. When

Nathalie expressed her surprise at his fears, he explained that he had been detailed to sanitary work in the hospital, and then he added, with gloom-shadowed eyes, "And it looks to me as if it would be steady company; but it is up to Uncle Sam, and a soldier is no soldier if he kicks at his job."

"Oh, I just wish I were a man, so I could go over there," sighed Nathalie a little dolefully. "Sometimes I wish I had a million lives so I could give them to my country, and go over and fight."

"Ho! ho! Blue Robin! You have changed your mind then, haven't you?" good-naturedly jeered Nita, who had just come up behind them. Her blue eyes gleamed mischief as she continued laughingly, "Surely that was not the way you felt a short while ago."

"No, that is true," replied Nathalie with reddened cheeks, "but I was selfish then, and failed to read the handwriting on the wall."

As Nathalie looked up in a shamefaced way at the young soldier she saw a strange expression flit across his face as he gazed down at her.

"Did you call Miss Page Blue Robin?" he asked hurriedly of Nita, with a sudden, strange interest.

"Oh, that is just a nickname," began Nathalie, "and —"

"No, it isn't a nickname," returned Nita, with a defiant toss of her head. "It is just your own particular name. Shall I tell Mr. Darrell how you came by

it?" And then, without waiting for permission, she told their companion the story of how Nathalie found the nest of bluebirds in the old cedar tree and thought they were blue robins. And when the Girl Pioneers claimed that she must become one of them, she had to join the Bluebird group. "Because, you see, she was a real bluebird," ended the girl.

It was then that Nathalie, who hated to be the subject of a conversation, began to tell the young soldier of her many trials in training her boys in military tactics. To her joy he offered to give them a lesson, whereupon the young Sons of Liberty were lined up, Nita and Sheila with them, and drilled in a simple manual-of-arms,—how to stand as a sentinel on post, how to salute an officer or civilian, and how to stand at attention when the national anthem, the "Call to the Colors," or "To the Standard," were played, and when the flag went by.

There was a drill in calisthenics, and then the young military instructor explained to his youthful audience the necessity for a Son of Liberty — he had caught the phrase from Nathalie — to have clean hands, face, teeth, and finger-nails. "No boy or young man," he emphasized, "will ever make a good soldier who will not discipline himself in these small things. It is also essential for a soldier not only to be clean, but to be courteous, helpful, and kind, especially to the aged and weak."

The drill was conducted in such a masterful, soldier-like way, and the little talk made significant by so many points that Nathalie was laboring to teach her boys, that the girls were greatly impressed, and also the children, if one were to judge by their alert attention and the worshipful glances they cast upon the young soldier as they went through their war maneuvers.

Nathalie and the boys were anxious to show Nita their mountain walks, and so, with young Darrell, they spent many an afternoon, from glen and vale, in studying the mountains, with their rugged crests and beautiful cloud-effects. Their ever-changing beauty, their gigantic immensity, their awe-inspiring silences lifted the newcomers to a reverent calm, as they gazed at these everlasting memorials to the omnipotency of the Creator.

Sometimes the little party would walk four or five miles, something that the little hunchback had never been able to do until she became a Pioneer. The visit to the Flume was not only repeated, but they visited the Lost River. The weird mystery of the silver stream, as it gleamed luringly between massive gray boulders, tempted them down the little ladder, to slide over rocky ledges, and climb stony declivities, until at last they were standing beneath the rocks in Shadow Cave. The Giant's Pot Hole, with the shiny water peering at them from between the stone walls, so suggestive of giants and strange dragons, with its weird,

mystical stream, made the underground trip to Mother Nature's caverns a revelation and a delight to all of the party.

They ascended Mount Agassiz at Bethlehem, where they tried to signal to Philip and Janet on the top of Garnet, through the sun's rays shining on a mirror, but although this method of signaling was greatly enjoyed, it was not very successful. With all of the merry times, however, the young invalid on the mountain was not forgotten, although he and Janet — with Mrs. Page for company sometimes — passed many hours in each other's company.

Then came a cool, sunny afternoon in August, when they all gathered around a trench camp-fire on the top of Garnet, for Philip had convalesced sufficiently to do a little climbing, and had a luncheon in the woods. And it was the two young soldiers who boiled the potatoes in a pot that hung from a green pole, fastened in crotches on two upright saplings over the fire-pit, from which a trench a foot deep branched out on each of its four sides. This new kind of fire, as Sheila called it, was a real soldier's fire, for it was where Philip had cooked his meals before he was visited by Nathalie and Janet, his good angels, as he called them.

With keen satisfaction the children watched Philip toast the sweet, nutty bacon for his guests, while Van showed the girls *his way* of making flapjacks, as he

tossed them so high in the air that a shrill, "Oh, you'll lose it!" almost unnerved the would-be cook.

But no such dire catastrophe happened, and soon they were all enjoying the brown cakes spread with maple sugar, and war-bread sandwiched with bacon between. After the edibles had been disposed of and the fire was banked, as Philip called it, for a later meal, Danny and Tony made a Pioneer Camp-fire, and around its glowing embers — for the wind was keen that cool August day up there on those craggy heights — they held a Liberty Cheer.

As they were about to cast lots as to who should tell the first story, Van, who never tired of listening to Philip's experiences, begged him to tell the girls something of his life as a soldier fighting in France.

CHAPTER XIX

“THE WHITE COMRADE”

PHILIP, who sat leaning against a tree, with his arm around Jean, softly stroked the lad's dark head. Somehow he had shown more than the usual interest in the little refugee, undoubtedly drawn to him in recognition of the fact that he was also a victim of German barbarity, and because they both spoke the same language. Nathalie, with a thrill of joy, had noticed his tender, protecting watchfulness over the boy, and how Jean's big eyes would gaze up at the young man with a gleam in their depths like that of some adoring dog, who yearns for the hand of his master in silent caress!

“There is not much to tell,” returned Philip after a pause, with the hesitancy of one who dislikes to talk about himself, “for you must know I am no hero.” He smiled at the girlish faces so eagerly watching him. Suddenly he sat bolt upright, unconsciously pushing Jean from him. “I am an American,” he exclaimed abruptly, “for my father came of good old New England stock, although I was born in the South. But my heart has been strangely stirred since I came over here, for the Americans are asleep,— they do not sense what

they are up against in this war of the nations.” His dark gray eyes flashed into flame. “ Sometimes I feel I would like to be another Paul Revere, and ride like the wind, knocking on doors and windows, shouting to the slumberers, ‘ The Huns are coming ! ’ *They must* be roused to the truth that this war is their war, and that they have not buckled to their job.”

He paused a moment, the fire dying out of his eyes as he continued, “ I was feeling in unusually good spirits that summer of 1914, for I had just formed a partnership with a well-known architect, and business gave assurance of giving me a very comfortable income, and place me in a position to repay my mother, who had denied herself in order to put me through college.

“ Into this mood of complacent satisfaction with myself and world in general, came a jar one day in June when the newspapers announced, in glaring headlines, the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand. And, almost before we had digested its portent, came Austria’s ultimatum to little Serbia. People began to grow restive, alarm-fired, keyed to a tense state of expectancy that something was in the air, but — what? Then tongues were loosened and eyes flashed fire as the Prime Minister’s scathing denunciation of Germany’s ‘ infamous proposal ’ was bandied from mouth to mouth, followed by Great Britain’s ultimatum that Belgium’s neutrality must be respected.

“ Then came hours of anxious suspense, a harrowing waiting-time, with every one’s heart aquiver, while a little group of men in Downing Street held their watches in their hands as they awaited Germany’s reply. It came. The deep-toned clang of Big Ben told to English hearts that the world’s decades of peace had been shattered, and that the Prussian barbarians had struck their first blow at civilization.

“ From every corner and window now glared forth, ‘Your King and your Country need you.’ Those words seared my heart like fire, but no, I argued, I must make good with mother. But no matter how I tried to cajole myself, the words seemed to follow me around like an accusing finger. No, he wasn’t my king. I was an American by right of birth, but still they blazoned at me until I could see them with my eyes shut. They starred the darkness of night; why, even in my sleep they clutched me in a ghostly dream. The next day and for many days I saw them aflame on the pavement, they were written on the sky in white letters, but still I fought.

“ When England’s young manhood sprang, as it were, from the earth, armed to the teeth, and marched shoulder to shoulder in regular beat,— it seemed like the pulsation of my own heart — as they swung along through the streets of London, my head swam, my throat tightened, and — But when I read of heroic little Belgium so nobly holding out against the ruth-

less destroyer of justice and honor, I gave in and became one of Kitchener's mob.

“ Those were not pleasant hours,” continued Philip, “ waiting at the Horse Guard Parade to read when I must report at the regimental depot at Hounslow, for I felt I was a misfit, in with a lot of men that, to my inexperienced eyes, seemed the scum of England, and I sickened of my job.

“ But when the news continued to pour in that Liège had fallen, that the Germans had entered Brussels, that the British Expeditionary Forces were retreating, heroically fighting, that Namur, Louvain, and other towns were being ruthlessly seized and devastated by the enemy, and their hellish atrocities began to be rumored about, the past, together with all hopes and desires for the future, were wiped out as clean as a slate in a spirit of forgetfulness. I lived in the moment, buoyed by the grim determination to fight like hell to down the oppressor of men's rights, to lose my life if need be, in order to give freedom to those who were to come after.

“ My spirits took a leap when I registered at the Hounslow Barracks as a Royal Fusileer, although I grinned humorously, for if I had felt like a misfit in London I was a guy now, appareled like a bloomin' lay-figure in the cast-off rags of some old-clothes shop, and had sensed that I was only a steel rivet in a big machine. I was no duck either, taking to the drills

like water, for I would stand hopelessly bewildered at the sharp orders, 'Form fours! One-one-two! Platoon! Form Fours!' and similar commands, that were like kicks on a befuddled brain. But I gritted my teeth and stuck to my guns.

"As soon as my rawness wore off and I began to get the hang of it, the martial spirit asserted itself. I began to be obsessed by the desire to show that I was the right stuff, that the heroism of my American ancestors, the spirit of '76, was in me. Through all my intensive training I was feverishly eager to know every detail of company and battalion drill, musketry and target-practice, and all the daily grind of the other sundry factors in military discipline.

"When I began to 'matey' my comrades, I soon understood why a Tommy Atkins is not like an American, who is born with a fine sense of personal independence, and who feels that he is as good as any Lord or Duke; or like a volatile Frenchman, with his easy grace of manner and buoyant spirit. I realized that although there may be a 'Sentimental Tommy' here and there, the average Tommy Atkins is a stolid chap, humdrum and prosaic, but with as kind a heart as any rookie in the world.

"As spring came along, after months of soldiering in many different quarters, which meant roughing it in leaky tents where cold, rain, and mud played a large part, and poor equipment a larger, we were no longer

raw rookies, parading or drilling before an unadmiring public,— a target for pretty girls’ laughter, or the ire of a berating sergeant,— for our battalion had acquired a high degree of efficiency.

“ Our arms were one with us, we had done with squad, platoon formation, and company drills, had shown our metal at the rifle-range at Aldershot, taken part in field maneuvers, bayonet charges, and mimic battles. We had become experts at trench-digging, bomb-throwing, and sniping, while the machine-gunners were quite up to the mark in that important weapon; in fact, we had become familiar with all branches of the army service.

“ Then when every man was ‘in the pink’ the marching orders came, and we assembled on the barrack-square at Aldershot. Not only were we physically fit, fine specimens of the trained soldier, but we were completely equipped, even to the identification tag, which registered your name, regimental number, regiment, and religion; besides, we carried the first-aid field dressing,— an antiseptic gauze pad and bandage, and a small bottle of iodine. Also, each soldier carried a copy of Lord Kitchener’s letter, as to what was expected of every British soldier. The words ‘Do your duty bravely. Fear God. Honor your King,’ meant much to me, although I was an American.

“ And then we were off, merry and blithe, no matter what our hearts registered, cheering like fiends when

some of the boys in khaki chalked the gun-carriages 'at Berlin,' a new challenge to each Tommy to do his stunt in making the Huns pay. Then came a drifting period when we were herded like cattle from one train to another, or made long, weary marches in the blind,—for nobody seemed to know our destination. But at last we were in the shadow of the great battle, down in the earth, in one sector of a long line of a serpentine trench, zigzagging from the sea to the Alps.

“This burrowing underground like a mole, digging trenches, or holes, in No Man’s Land, to string up barbed wire entanglements, or to pile sand-bags on the parapet, or to clean out the wreckage of a trench that had been battered by German gunners, or a trench-mortar — sometimes to gather up the pieces of some ‘matey’ whom you had chummed with,—all meant new activities. They were experiences and sounds — the sounds of hell — and sights that cut deep, with an impelling remembrance haunting you like grewsome shadows.

“Yes, it was a strange new life,” the young soldier paused musingly, “for this kind of fighting is no battlefield with glittering helmets and bayonets, the furling of colors, the prancing of horses, the roll of gun-carriages, but stinging eyelids and a choking in thick gray smoke, with the roar of cannonading, the sharp screech of shrapnel, the bursting of star-shells, or the whir of strange, queer monsters above your head.

“ There was the turning of night into day,”— Philip’s face had a weary expression,—“ the daily mental strain, the danger constantly facing you, the learning to know the sounds of the different shells and in what direction they were going to fall. Involuntarily, with stilled breath, you waited, and then came the sinking of your heart when you sensed that it was *your turn now*, and then to find yourself still there, but to realize that some of your mates had ‘ gone West.’

“ And the gas. Oh, the horror of the great, greenish balls that came rolling towards you, close to the earth, the celerity of getting into your gas-masks, and the *horrible thing* that a comrade became if he failed to accomplish this job on time, and lay writhing in an ugly, venomous atmosphere of green.

“ Then there were the cooties, the parasites that feed *on you*, and with whom you maintain a constant warfare,” Philip smiled as he saw the girls squirm; “ and the rats, as big as cats, with sharp, ferret-like eyes, darting from some dark crevice, or playing leap-frog over your legs at night, or mistaking your head for their nest. Ugh! But the dead-and-gone feeling — exhausted nature asserting her rights — which assailed you at some critical moment, perhaps when you were trying to be a man at your job, just got you through and through.

“ Ah, there was the first ‘ over-the-top ’ experience, when you stood on the fire-step with gun in hand, pale-

faced, but with clenched teeth, in an oppressive silence, waiting to hear the command come down the line,—whispered from mouth to mouth. Then you leaped wildly over into long-anticipated perils, to become entangled in barbed wire, or perhaps to get your first shock, as the man next you dropped like lead at the first ‘ptt’ of a German sharpshooter’s bullet.

“But on you rush in a mad frenzy with red-misted eyes, in the face of a heavy artillery fire and a pitiless gale of shrapnel, through a dense smoke-screen, split with lurid flashes of flame, over a ground pitted with shell-holes — to stumble over some dead Tommy, whose glazed eyes stare up at you as if in mockery of your determination to play the man in this crusade for humanity.

“Then *my adventure* came,—a raid on a German trench, an undertaking attended with great peril. With blackened faces, each man, with his bag of bombs and automatic, at the flicker of a white light crawled stealthily into the sable blackness of ‘dead man’s yard,’ and, in a downpour of drenching rain, crept on hands and knees, sometimes wiggling on his stomach,—quickly rolling into a shell-hole if a sound was heard,—until the German trench loomed menacingly only a few feet beyond.

“Everything was deadly still. Then the signal came, and with a rush we clambered stealthily up and peeped over, to see a yellow-haired Heinie asleep in the

little alcove back of his gun-emplacment, the head of the sentry-on-post tipsily nodding on his chest, and two big fellows snoring like porpoises on the floor near. In just one minute we had slid into that trench and had our men with hands up. Sure it was a surprise-party for Fritz, for the Germans came running out of their dug-outs, wrapped in blankets, noisily demanding to know what was up. They soon knew, and then came a riot of a time as we let our hand-grenades fly, and our bayonets too, aided by a lively fire from our machine-guns. And then we were out, making a quick run for our own trenches with our trophies, and several of the surprised ones, with the German guns thundering in our rear.

“ Yes, I had captured my first Hun, and mighty proud I was of my achievement, and pictured my delight-to-be when retailing my adventure to my comrades, when Zipp! and I was downed by the pieces of a bursting shell that got me in the hand and foot. And the prisoner? Oh, the dirty Boche saw his chance. I saw his hand go up,— he must have had a stiletto hidden somewhere,— but I was too quick for him, for I let fly a hand-grenade, and — well, he bothered me no more.

“ For hours I crawled, or wiggled, along, dropping into a chalk-pit or a shell-hole every few moments, for it was like hell under that liquid fire, Fritzie’s aërial bombs and the machine-gun fire; in fact, it seemed as

if every kind of projectile had been let loose, for now the Germans were mad clean through. Finally, being too exhausted to make any further headway, I crept into a shell-hole, where I lay for a day and a night, lying on my face most of the time, playing dead, for the German fiends would sneak out into No Man's Land at night after a bombardment, and kill every wounded enemy soldier they could find.

“What did I think about, you ask, Miss Nathalie, while lying in that shell-hole?” Philip smiled a little sadly. “Well, at first I was crazed with thirst and hunger, and the cold — oh, it was something fierce. And then the doubts and misgivings that had assailed me at times, as to whether there was a God in heaven, returned with renewed force. I dumbly felt that my faith was leaving me, for why this useless slaughter of men's bodies, this agonizing devil's gas, this torturing of the aged and weak, this violating of womanhood, this maiming of little, innocent children? Ah, the agony of body was nothing compared to the agony of my soul, as I lay in that hole.

“Then that night — there was no moon, and everything was a dead calm, for a lull had come in fighting — I turned over, face upward, to ease the aching that racked my body. As I lie gazing up at the stars, — they seemed unusually bright, — something white suddenly flashed before me, and then I saw a face bend down and gaze at me. It was a marvelously beauti-

ful face, with such calm serenity of expression as the eyes smiled into mine, that a strange peace came into my soul, my pains were eased, I was filled with a wonderful joy, and — then I knew; — it was the face of the Great White Comrade,— the face of Christ!

“ It may have been a delusion from overwrought nerves,— I may have been dreaming,— I don't know, for there had been great talk among the soldiers of seeing the white apparition of Christ on the battlefield. He was said to have appeared to the soldiers, showed them His bleeding side and hands, and then the suffering ones had felt a wonderful peace come into their souls, and their very agonies had made them triumphant in the thought that as He had died to make men holy, so He had given them the great privilege of suffering and dying to make men free. No, I didn't see any bleeding side, or the nail-prints on the hands, but I saw Christ's face, and, oh, it was Heaven!

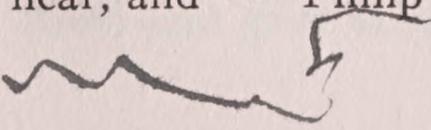
“ Then my brain cleared. I realized that I had been groping in a great darkness, but that a wonderful light had come, and I knew God was in His Heaven. That smile had brought revelation. It had told me that we were no better than Christ, and He had suffered,— He, an innocent soul. And as He had agonized on the cross, and God had suffered with Him, so every moan, sob, and cry had reached His ears in this great wail from humanity. It told me that this bruising of bodies, this rending of women's hearts, this wringing

of men's souls, had wrung *His* heart with a suffering greater than men could know.

"It told me that it was all the working-out of God's great plan for the good of mankind. It told me that the men, women, and children, who had passed through these seas of blood were to come forth with white garments, to be a great host led by the Angel of His Presence, and that their deeds were to live after them, to bring light into the dark places in men's souls. It told me that these blood-soaked battlefields were to become gardens, where flowers would spring, the glorious flowers of freedom, and that every tear shed was to become great waters, to flow like a river of peace to all nations."

As Philip ceased speaking, the faces of his young listeners became very grave, and for a moment there was an impressive stillness, as if each one had been hushed to a reverent silence. "Well, after that, I was strangely happy," continued the young man slowly. "I think I must have fallen asleep, for I was suddenly aroused by the cold snout of a dog nosing into my face. He was a little beast, not much bigger than Tige here," softly stroking the refugee's yellow dog as he spoke, at which Jean's eyes grew soft and bright, for with the lad it was "Love me, love my dog."

"Yes, it was a Red Cross dog, whose beautiful eyes seemed almost human as they told me that help was near, and —" Philip stopped abruptly. He had had a



weary, tired look for some time, but now a sudden pallor overspread his face, and Janet, who had been watching him nervously, stepped quickly to his side, crying, “ And now you *must* stop talking, Mr. de Brie, for you are overdoing.”

Philip smiled into her blue eyes, but waved her aside as he cried, sitting up with sudden resolution, “ But no, you must let me finish my story.”

“ Oh, yes, do let him finish his story!” came a chorus of eager voices.

But at this moment Nathalie, whose face had suddenly brightened, cried, “ Oh, no; let’s wait, for a big idea has suddenly come to me, and,” the girl’s eyes sparkled, “ if it turns out all right it will add to our enjoyment if we wait to hear Mr. de Brie’s story some other time.”

“ A big idea,” cried Nita, all aquiver with curiosity. “ Oh, Nathalie, do tell us what it is!”

“ No, not now,” answered the girl. “ It will keep; but in the meantime let us have a story from Mr. Darrell. You know he promised to tell us about Lovewell, the Ranger, and now is his chance, and we are not going to let him off.”

CHAPTER XX

THE LIBERTY TEA

AS Nathalie was ably seconded by the rest of the Liberty Cheerers, Van — he claimed he was a chump at story-telling — began the story of Lovewell, the Ranger, by saying that it was like one of the old Norse *Sagas*, for it had been told and retold by the mountaineer's fireside for many generations.

“When the white settlers were being harassed in the early times by marauding bands from the neighboring tribe of Sokoki Indians,” said the young soldier, “John Lovewell, a hardy ranger, set out from the Indian village of Pigswacket, now Fryeburg, near North Conway, and made his way, with forty-five of his followers, to Ossipee. Here they built a fort, and his scouts having found Indian tracks, they pushed farther on to a lake by whose shores they encamped for the night. The following morning, while trailing an Indian in the woods, Paugas, an Indian chieftain, whose name was a terror to every white settler on the frontier, stole up behind the rangers, to their encampment, which unfortunately they had left unguarded, and counted their packs. Finding that they were only thirty-four in

number, the Indians placed themselves in ambush in the woods near, and when the rangers returned it was to be surrounded by the redmen, while the air was filled with their deadly fire and hideous warwhoops.

“ Here, by this little lake, under the very shadow of Mount Kearsarge, fifty miles from any settlement, was fought one of the bloodiest battles in Indian warfare, as the loyal rangers fought for their lives. They finally compelled the Indians to flee, but not before Lovewell and many of his men had been killed. The survivors made their way back to the fort at Ossipee, only to find it empty, for the guard, on hearing that Lovewell and his band had been killed, had deserted it.

“ After many incredible hardships,” continued Van, “ twenty emaciated men finally reached the white settlement, many of them only to fall dead from wounds, or from hunger and exhaustion. But, practically, Lovewell’s band had won a great victory, for Paugas had been killed, and the remainder of the tribe forsook their strongholds among the foothills, and the white settlers were molested no more.”

Van also related how a ranger, the only remaining one of three brothers who had set forth with Lovewell, when one of his brothers fell dead at his feet from the wounds inflicted by the savages, had started for their village, only to find his other brother’s body riddled with bullets.

“ Determined to be revenged, he pursued the Indians

to the mountain fastnesses, where the defeated tribe, under the chief Chocorua, still lingered. He finally sighted the chieftain, who had ascended a high mountain to see if the white men had departed. As he started to descend he was confronted by the ranger, who, with his gun in hand, slowly forced the Indian back, step by step, until he stood on the verge of the precipice where he had been standing. As the chieftain saw that his end had come,— as he had no alternative between the precipitous cliff and the white man's weapon,— with a cry of bitter defiance he leaped from the pinnacle, to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. Hence the name, Chocorua Mountain."

A mountain romance was now told by Janet, in the story of Nancy Stairs, a native of Jefferson, who had fallen in love, and become engaged to a farm-hand. On the eve of the wedding the girl's lover disappeared, carrying with him a small sum of money, her *dot*. How Nancy set forth, to overtake him at a camp many miles away, walking at night through the dark woods, clambering over rocks and fording the Saco, finally to reach the place where he had encamped, to find it deserted, aroused the sympathies of all. "Finally," continued Janet, "the girl sank exhausted on the banks of a brook, to be found some time later in the calm repose of a deathless sleep, almost buried under the snow, under a canopy of friendly evergreen that stretched above her.

“But Nancy had her revenge,” smiled the storyteller, “for when the farm-hand heard of her fate he lost his reason, and tradition tells us that, on the anniversary of her death, the mountain-passes through which she pushed, in her weary pursuit of her lover, resound to his cries of grief.”

Nita's contribution to the Liberty Cheer was a little tale of an Indian maiden, who was so beautiful that no hunter was found worthy of her. Suddenly she disappeared, and was never seen again, until one day an Indian chief, on returning from the chase, told how he had seen her disporting in the limpid waters of the river Ellis, with a youth as peerless as she. When the bathers saw the chieftain they had immediately vanished from sight, thus showing the girl's parents that her companion must have been a mountain-spirit. From now on they would go into the wilds and call upon him for a moose, a deer, or whatever animal they chose, and lo! it would immediately appear, running towards them.

Danny's story was about some white settlers captured by the Indians on their way to Canada. When they came to the banks of a beautiful stream, one of the captives, a mother with several children, from a babe in arms to a girl of sixteen, gathered her little ones about her in dumb despair. She had toiled through trackless forests, forded swollen streams, climbed rocky heights, slept on the cold, bare earth, and

then, when she had refused to obey the commands of an Indian chieftain, from lack of strength, she had been goaded with blows, or the gory scalps of two of her children, which still hung from his belt, had been flourished menacingly before her eyes.

As she stood on the banks of the river, feeling that her reason would forsake her from anguish, she suddenly heard one of the Indians ask her oldest daughter to sing. The girl stood speechless with amazement, not knowing what to do for a moment, and then there floated out through the vast solitudes of these lonely mountains a curiously fresh young voice, as the girl chanted the sublime words of the psalmist in the plaintive river-song.

There was a slight pause, and then Danny's voice, sweet and clear, to the accompaniment of the soft strains of Tony's violin, was heard as he chanted:

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

"We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

"For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth."

Tony's hands lovingly fingered his bow, and the music, like the rippling flow of the river Ellis, continued its sweet low murmur, as the little newsie told how the magic charm of these beautiful words must have touched some chord in the savage breasts, for, as the girl ceased, the fiercest Indian caught the babe gently

from the mother's arms and carried it across the river. One of his companions also softened, and, picking up another child, bore it safely over the stream.

Nathalie chose the familiar Willey story, about the family who lived in an inn on the side of Mount Willey, at the entrance to the great Notch. "In 1826," said the girl, "one evening in June they heard a queer, rumbling noise, and hurried out to see an avalanche of stones and uprooted trees making its way with great speed down the mountain. Fortunately, before it reached the house it swerved one side, and the Willeys, believing it quite safe, returned to the house, and, as time passed on, carelessly forgot the warning that had been given them.

"In August a severe storm occurred, which raged with indescribable fury for a day and a night, the rain falling in sheets, while the Saco overflowed its banks, thus creating a state of general upheaval. Two days later, a tourist traveling through the Notch arrived at the inn, to find it uninjured, but deserted, with the exception of a half-starved dog who was whining dismally. He made his way to Bartlett, and the mountaineers, hurrying to the scene, finally discovered the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Willey and two hired men, who were buried in a mass of wreckage not far from the inn. The bodies of the children were never discovered.

"It is supposed," explained Nathalie, "that they had

all rushed out on again hearing the rumbling noises, and had evidently tried to seek the shelter of a cave near. But they were too late," she ended with a pathetic sigh, "for the avalanche was upon them before they reached it. If they had only remained in the house they would have been saved."

A little later, as Philip and Van became engaged in a conversation about the war, a topic of which they never seemed to weary, Nathalie and Nita, with arms intertwined in long-cemented *camaraderie*, wandered to the high, jutting rock which Nathalie called "Heaven's window." Here in awed silence they gazed at the far-away, scintillating blue peaks, huge escarpments, and yawning mountain crevasses towering above the alpine meadow, that, rich in many shades of verdure, darkened with cloud-shadows, and cut with ribbon-like trails of forest foliage, were a

"Wondrous woof of various greens."

In the sun-dyed splendor it was like a cloth of gold, a wondrous tapestry woven by Nature in her most majestic mood, a picture that held them with the calm of its infinite beauty.

Suddenly Nita, who never was quiet very long, cried: "Oh, Nathalie, you must tell us what you meant when you said that you had a big idea. Don't you remember, it was when Janet made Philip stop his story?"

"I don't know as it is a very big idea," replied her

companion, "for its bigness depends, as Dick says, on whether we make a go of it or not. I spoke of it then, not only because I had just thought of it, but because I wanted to second Janet, for Philip was as white as a ghost.

"You know," she continued slowly, "the afternoon teas at the Sweet Pea Tea-House have not been very well attended lately. I presume the minds of the people have been diverted by some new form of amusement. I'm awfully sorry, too, for I think my dear Sweet-Pea ladies need the money. Now what do you think of having Philip tell the rest of his story some afternoon at the Tea-House? We'll get Jean to tell his story, too, and the boys can sing patriotic songs; and then, there's Tony, with his violin. I think we can get up a real good entertainment, and we can call it a Liberty Tea."

"Oh, Nathalie, that's a peach of an idea!" Nita's blue eyes glowed enthusiastically.

"You see," returned her friend, "it would attract the people to the Tea-House again, and also bring Philip into notice. I think his story would interest every one, and it might get him a few more pupils."

As the little party wended their way down the trail, they were busy making plans and devising ways to make Nathalie's "big idea" feasible. They had broached the subject to Philip,—Nathalie being careful not to make it appear as if he would gain by the

performance,— and he had readily consented to do his part. Janet, too, was won over, and as for the children, they were in a beatific state at the idea of appearing on a platform, and “speaking a piece,” as Sheila called it.

Miss Whipple, when the idea was suggested to her, Nathalie making it appear that Philip would derive great benefit from it, heartily favored the plan. So, for the next two days Nita and Nathalie were as busy as bees, drilling the children, making posters to feature the event at the different hotels, and then motoring to each one, and tacking them up, after getting the desired permission, so that the affair would be well advertised.

The boys and Van Darrell, with the help of some friends of Nita's at the Sunset Hill House, the morning of the event decorated the Tea-House with greens, goldenrod, and flags. Sam assisted by erecting a small platform so gaudily festooned with red, blue, and white bunting that Nita said it was a regular “call to the colors,” as she stood off and surveyed his work. Chairs, rustic seats, in fact, everything that could be used for a seat was now brought into the room, while the veranda was not only decorated with bunting and Japanese lanterns, the posts being twined with the national colors in crêpe paper, but filled with small tea-tables and chairs.

At the hour designated for the performance to begin — to the girls' delight, the room was crowded — Janet

began to play softly on the piano, suddenly breaking into "Hail Columbia," then a patriotic march, following these selections with "The Royal March of Italy," the "Lorraine March" and several other well-known favorites either of the Americans or the Allies, ending with France's adored march, "Sambre et Meuse."

The boys, in their khaki suits, each one carrying his gun, now marched before the audience. They were headed by Sheila, who, as a little Goddess of Liberty, acted as the color-bearer. As she stepped to one side of the stage and stood at attention, the boys saluted the flag and then repeated the oath of allegiance.

Sheila now fell in line, and they went through a manual-of-arms, and then, amid loud applause, broke into the "Red, White, and Blue." This was followed by a number of patriotic airs, and the national anthem, when all rose to their feet and joined in the singing with patriotic fervor. After a short pause Danny started to whistle "La Marseillaise"—Janet playing the accompaniment on the piano very softly—as the children joined in, coming out with startling effect with the words:

"To arms! Ye warriors all!
Your bold battalions call!
March on, ye free!
Death shall be ours,
Or glorious victory!"

Van Darrell now appeared in front of the little platform—he had modestly refused to ascend it—and

introduced Mr. Philip de Brie as a British soldier, a member of "Kitchener's mob," known as the greatest volunteer army in the world. As Philip stepped forward in response to an enthusiastic ovation he bowed courteously, but with a certain diffidence of manner that showed that this was a more trying ordeal than being under fire at the front.

The personal part of Philip's story was quickly told, — how he came to join the army, — the audience cheering lustily when he claimed he was an American, while a tenseness seized them as he related his strange experience while lying in a shell-hole, and the revelation the apparition of the White Comrade had brought to him.

Their interest continued as he told how, in the British offensive south of the Somme, he and his company, with four machine-guns, had cleaned out a Prussian machine-gun nest that had been making havoc with their men. They peppered the enemy so severely, he asserted, while playing a crisscross game with their guns, that the only remaining German gunner was captured, surrounded by his dead comrades.

When their ammunition failed, and they attempted to return to their lines under a fierce artillery fire, with bursting shells and shrapnel flying around them, they were compelled to take refuge under a bridge, where they remained for four hours under a fierce gas attack. He was again cheered as he told how, in another attempt to regain the firing-line, a bomb exploded, kill-

ing several of their men, and how, when their lieutenant was missed, noted for his bravery and daring, he started out to find him.

This recital was made graphic as he told of crawling on his stomach to dodge a bomb, or wiggling along to peer into shell-pits, and how, when a flare was thrown up by the enemy, illuminating the battlefield like some big electric show, he suddenly found himself, as it were, back to the wall,— for he had no ammunition,— desperately fighting a big, husky German who was fumbling in his pocket, evidently for a hand-grenade. Another cheer, and then almost a groan went through the room as Philip continued, and told how, as he tried to get him by the throat, he made a lunge at him and thrust his bayonet through his arm. The German finished off his work by knocking him on the head with his rifle, finally leading him, dazed and blinded, behind the German lines, a prisoner.

The neglect he received in the field and base hospital, and the horrible treatment he was compelled to witness, as endured by the wounded prisoners, was received with a storm of hisses. How he was pronounced cured, although he had been rendered dumb, either from nerve-shock or the force of the blow on the head, and then taken to a German prison-camp, and crowded in with hundreds of men in a wooden shed, with a flooring of mud four inches thick, aroused renewed indignation. Here, with no blankets, no ventilation,

overcoat, or personal belongings, he slept on a straw tick, with insufficient food, and that of such a horrible quality that he grew emaciated and covered with boils.

When some of the prisoners were transferred to another camp Philip told how he had the good luck to be one of them, and how, when the train was struck by a bursting bomb, crashing in the roof when going at a speed of thirty miles an hour, he, with two other prisoners, climbed up and jumped to the ground, one man being killed.

This was the beginning of his race for life, in which he dodged guards and sentries, cut his way through barbed wire, and hid in a forest for three days, and, after many other thrilling adventures, finally came to a field within a few miles of the British lines.

“Here,” Philip continued, “as we lay concealed in a dugout under a bank, we heard a familiar whirr, and looked up to see an air-battle taking place between a French and Boche plane. With taut breath I watched the planes circle round and round in the air, while keeping up a steady fire at one another, until the French plane began to drive its enemy back and back, until they were directly over the British entrenchments. Then we heard the rat-tat-tat, and knew that one of the planes had been fired upon from below. Suddenly it burst into flames, lunged to one side, and then, in a long sweep through the air, began to circle downward like a great flash of fire, sending forth a shower of

sparks as it fell. And then I screamed from sheer joy, for I recognized that it was the Boche plane that had fallen. It is needless to say that my speech had returned."

After telling how they had regained the British lines, and how he had finally reached a hospital in London, where he remained for some weeks in a miserably depressed state of mind, on learning that his mother had died during his absence, Philip finished his story by telling how he came to sail for America. He told of his search for his grandmother, and how he came to live in the little cabin on the mountain. From the plaudits that greeted him, as he bowed and retired from the platform, it was evident that his story had been greatly enjoyed by his listeners.

When Tony a moment or so later, in his old velvet vest, with his violin under his arm, and his velvety black eyes aglow in a beatific smile, bobbed a funny little bow to his audience, he was warmly received. But a sudden hush succeeded as the little violinist, with his instrument tucked under his chubby chin, fingered the bow lovingly as he moved it over the strings, evoking such sweet, rich music that the violin seemed like some enchanted thing.

Surely this little slum lad, with no training to guide him, of his own volition could not have produced such ravishing melody as floated through the room. As he played his face lost its smile, and there came a play of

expression, now tender and sad, now dreamy or grave, in accord with the varied moods of the music, as he played on and on with a passion, a rich tenderness, every note in tune, that seemed almost marvelous. When he ended with a vehement little shake of his head — that sent his waving hair flying about — in much the same manner that great musicians affect, it brought down the house in loud applause.

As an encore he played several Italian airs, weird, dreamy music, finally ending with "Traumerei," Schumann's "Dream Song." No, he didn't play it all, only snatches, and these were not always rendered according to the score, but he held his audience in a hushed stillness, until, with a little shake of his bow, and a low bow, he turned and ran quickly from the platform.

Sheila hid her face in Nathalie's skirt when her turn came to ascend the platform and speak her "liberty piece." Nathalie was in the throes of despair, for fear that she was going to fail her, when Tony leaned forward and teasingly whispered, "Oh, Boy!" This reminiscent remark caused the little lady's head to go up, and her chin, too, and in angry defiance she marched up on the platform. As Nathalie, who was sitting down in the front row of chairs, gave her the cue, her little treble was heard repeating James Whitcomb Riley's poem "Liberty," her voice ringing out loud and clear when she came to the stanza:

“Sing for the arms that fling
Their fetters in the dust
And lift their hands in higher trust,
Unto the one Great King;
Sing for the patriot home and land,
Sing for the country they have planned;
Sing that the world may understand
This is Freedom's land!”

It was pathetic to see the little empty-sleeved Jean, as he straightened up his slender form, and, in an attempt at bravery, hurried on the platform. Without waiting for the accompanist,— forgetting to greet his audience in his fright,— he burst into the words of Belgium's national anthem, “Brabanconne,” singing it with a verve and spirit,— as he stood, with his one hand nervously clinched in front of him and his eyes uplifted,— that showed that the soul of Belgium was not dead.

This impassioned appeal from the boy as he ended, and stood in mute bewilderment, his eyes again haunted by that look of hopeless terror, aroused the audience to prolonged applause. Philip now stepped to his side, and, as he laid his hand reassuringly on the little shoulder, the refugee began his pitiful tale.

His arm had been cut off, he told, by a German soldier, who had made his mother cry, when he had rushed up and pounded him with his fists to make him desist. The soldier had dragged his mother away, and then he had been told that she had died. There was a quiver

to the lad's voice as he related this sorrowful incident, but he winked his eyes together to keep back the tears.

Two days later, with his aged grandparents, he had been driven to the town square, and there a soldier had shot his grandfather because the old man had rebuked him for dragging the boy's grandmother roughly about. She had shrieked and fallen, to be trampled in the crush, for when they picked her up she was very white, and had never opened her eyes again. When all the women and children were herded together like cows, and driven along a road, with a big German soldier pointing his gun at them, Jean had suddenly run away, as fast as he could, and he had run and run with his eyes shut, for he was afraid of the bullets that came whistling on all sides of him.

Finally he had fallen from exhaustion, and then he had crawled into the dark cellar of a shelled house. Here he had remained for a long time, going out at night to a battlefield near and taking what food he could find from the knapsacks of the dead soldiers. At last he could find no more food, and then he had wandered on, walking wearily along for miles and miles, until he had become part of those fleeing throngs of refugees that blocked the roads for many long miles, sleeping on the roadside at night. Sometimes he would have a little bread, or a piece of cheese given to him, and then for days he went hungry. Finally he reached a town, where a lady with a red cross on her

white cap had cared for him in a hospital. But the Germans shelled the hospital, and they said the lady was killed, and then — Well, he had gone on again, walking at night, alone, from place to place, when no one could see him, while hiding in the woods by day.

On learning that he was not far from the French army, he had struggled on until he was within a short distance of their lines, where he hid in a forest. When a dark still night came, he stealthily crept into No Man's Land, and, on his hands and knees, worked his way from hole to hole, quickly wiggling into one if he heard the slightest sound, until he reached the French sentry, who pointed his gun at him and told him to halt.

He was so frightened when he saw that gun aimed at him that he burst into tears, but a moment later attempted to sing "La Marseillaise," so as to let the soldier know that he was not a German. The soldier took him behind the front, where a regiment of artillery not only fed and cared for him, but adopted him as their "kid mascot," as Philip interpreted it, when it was learned that his father, who was fighting in the Belgian army, had been captured and carried a prisoner to Germany. When the regiment had left for service at the front he was delivered into the hands of Father Belloy, a French priest, who finally gave him to a kind lady, who had brought him, with a number of other children, to America. As the little lad fin-

ished his story, he turned to rush from the stage, and then, as if inspired by a sudden thought, he threw up his one hand and lustily cried, "Vive la Belgique!"

A second more and the audience, caught by the contagion of this cry, and the appeal to their sympathies by the Belgian's story, broke into enthusiastic clapping and cheering, mingled with loud hurrahs for Belgium. It was at this point that a guest from the Sunset Hill House jumped to his feet, and proposed that a silver collection be taken up, to be divided between the American-British soldier, the little Sons of Liberty, and the ladies of the Tea-House, who had so kindly given it for the entertainment of the guests.

This suggestion was heartily seconded, and while Van and the gentleman were passing the hat, into which flowed a goodly collection of silver coins, the little Sons of Liberty appeared, and, as a finish to the entertainment, gave them a sing-song. The old, sweet songs, the songs that lie very near to the heart of every Anglo-Saxon, were sung by these clear childish voices, Danny either singing or whistling, while Tony accompanied them on his violin, with Janet, Nathalie, and Nita,— even the audience at times,— proving good seconds in this musical song-feast. "Annie Laurie," "The Blue Bells of Scotland," "Wearing of the Green," "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," "Mother Machree," "Dixie," were given, followed by the new war-songs, as, "Keep the Home Fires Burning,"

“Pack up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag,” “There’s a Long, Long Trail,” “Over There,” and, as a grand finale, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” when the audience rose and joined in with patriotic fervor.

And then Miss Mona, Janet, Nathalie, Nita, the two soldiers, and even the little “Sons of Liberty” were all busy serving tea, out on the veranda, to the many guests, who all declared that they had not only enjoyed Philip’s and Jean’s stories, but the children’s singing.

Two days later, Nathalie was darning her boys’ socks on the veranda, when Nita drove up in her car. She was so excited that she began to shout that she had good news to tell, as soon as she caught sight of Nathalie’s brown head.

“Oh, Nathalie,” she continued, all out of breath, as her friend hurried to meet her, “what do you think? The manager up at the Sunset Hill House,— you know he is a dear — has asked Mr. de Brie and the whole crowd who took part at the Liberty Tea, to come to the hotel next Saturday night and repeat the performance. And he says there will be another silver collection. And, oh, isn’t it just the dandiest thing that lots of the girls want to join the French class!” And then the young lady, in the exuberance of her joy, fell upon the neck of her friend and began to kiss her with hearty unction.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FUNNIES

NATHALIE, with a limpid brightness in her eyes, and a deep pink in her cheeks, was whirling about — doing a one-step — with her soldier friend, Van Darrell, who she had discovered was “a love of a dancer.” It was the night of the second Liberty Tea, this time held at the Sunset Hill House. The affair had not only proved a glorious success, each one of the performers doing his or her part even better than at the Tea-House, but it had also netted quite a pile of silver coins, to the delight of the children, and added several new pupils to Philip’s French class at the hotel, besides giving him a few private ones.

The informal little hop at the end of the performance contributed to the pleasure of the evening, proving a real joy-time to Nathalie, who loved dancing. The girl had laughingly asserted to Nita that she had fairly worn her slippers to a thread.

Compelled from sheer fatigue to rest, the young couple, in order to escape from the heat of the ball-room, had sought refuge in one of the little card-rooms opening from the long corridor. It was here, as they happily chatted, that Van suddenly made the announce-

ment, somewhat regretfully, "Do you know, Miss Blue Robin, that this is my last evening with you and the mountains, for I leave for Camp Mills to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," exclaimed the girl with a note of disappointment in her voice, for she was *disappointed* as well as surprised, for, somehow, she had taken a liking to this soldier-boy, with the frank, open gaze, who could be very merry at times, and then again unusually silent and grave. "We shall miss you at our Liberty Cheers, and Mr. de Brie, I know, will be lonely without his soldier 'matey.'"

"I shall miss you all," rejoined Van slowly, "for you girls have given me the joy-time of the summer, and I shall be sorry to say good-by to you all, especially you." Van looked appealingly into the girl's brown eyes, as if he wanted her to assure him that she would miss him.

Nathalie flushed a little, as she replied, "Well, it has been a great pleasure to meet you. I can assure you, however, that I never thought of meeting one of Uncle Sam's soldiers when I came up here to these White Hills."

"I would like to tell you," continued Van,— he gave his companion an odd look as he spoke,— "that I know a girl by the name of Blue Robin. She's an awfully good sort,—" again that funny little gleam in his eyes. "I had a letter from her a short time ago. It was the

kind of a letter to set a fellow thinking. I would like to show it to you sometime," he added hesitatingly.

"Why, isn't that funny! Are you sure her name is like mine?" questioned Nathalie in a whirl of amazement. Van nodded and smiled with some amusement, as he assured Nathalie that he was quite positive her name was Blue Robin. But, as the girl continued to ply him with questions about this girl, who, he insisted, bore her name, his answers grew evasive, until finally Nathalie desisted from her questions, in a maze of mystery.

Presently they were in the ballroom again, and while taking another turn Van asked his partner if she would answer his letter if he wrote to her. Nathalie grew red with embarrassment at this direct question, for, as she had been whirling about, it had suddenly occurred to her what a queer thing it was for Van to say he would show her another girl's letter.

Somehow the thought jarred her serenity, and, not knowing what reply to make, she finally settled the doubt in her mind by saying that if he wrote to her she would answer him if her mother thought best. For, happily, Nathalie was a real mother-girl, and, when in doubt about anything, always went to her for advice.

On the way home — Mrs. Van Vorst had sent them in her car — she had a disappointed feeling. She wished Van had not asked her to write to him, or told her about that other Blue Robin, for — O

dear! she had heard of boys who would coax a girl to write to them, and then show their letters and make a boast of them. Ah, well, she sighed regretfully, she had not supposed he was that kind.

A few days later Nathalie was sitting under the trees before a small sewing-table, writing a letter to Helen. Presently she laid down her pen, and glanced over at her mother, who, while resting in the hammock near, had fallen asleep. Then, so as not to awaken her, almost in a whisper, she read:

“DEAR HELEN:

“I am going to call this letter ‘The Funnies,’ for I have some awfully funny things I want you to know, but first, I must tell you about my liberty kids, as I have promised to do many times. Danny is fourteen, a regular street-gamin, steeped and double-dyed in the ways of the slums and the habits of a newsie. There is an alert sharpness about him at times that baffles me, and yet his freckled, peanut face, with its twinkling blue eyes, has an open, merry expression that assures me he has the makings of a splendid man in him. I call him my handy man, for he not only does all the laundering for the children, but can cook, and wait on the table in fine style.

“He is a loyal little chap, so watchful of Sheila, and always tells the truth. He used to belong to the Junior Police Force,—he’s awfully proud of that,—and I think that has kept him on the square. I have an idea that his parents must have been refined people, for, when cleaning his room one day, his bag flew open—it was standing in a corner—and a little blue book fell out, scattering a lot of letters about, and a picture.

The picture was a miniature of a young woman. She had a lovely face, it reminded me of Sheila, and her eyes had the same laughing glints in them that Danny has in his. The blue book seemed to be a diary, for on it in gilt letters was the name, Sheila Gloom.

“ I have told you how quaint and interesting Sheila is, and lots about Jean, so I am going to tell you about Tony. He reminds me of one of Raphael’s cherubs, with his soft, liquid brown eyes, his red lips and ivory-tinted skin, and his wavy black hair that is always in a frowse. He adores me, and has an odd, sweet little trick of taking my hand, and then bending down and kissing it, in such a gallant way that he makes me think of the knights of mediæval days, who knelt to their ladies fair. And I love to hear him say, ‘ I love you, Mees Natta,’ for his voice is so soft and musical. But alas, he is not as open as Danny, and will tell *teeny, teeny* white lies, while looking right up into your face with such a cherubic, innocent expression, that you have the feeling that you are the guilty one, and not he.

“ Did I tell you in my last letter what good friends the little old lady in the red house and I have become? I run in there quite often. Sometimes I read to her, or hold her yarn, and for two days I nursed her when she was ill. I am a great chatterbox, for, O dear! I just talk about everything to her, but she says my chats cheer her up. But, you see, she keeps asking me questions, first about one person of our household, and then another. She loves to have me tell her about Janet, but she doesn’t seem to like Cynthia very much.

“ I am getting used to her queer ways now, and can tell, by the gleam in her gray eyes,— sometimes they snap with humor,— the mood she is in, for, frankly speaking, at times she is most cantankerous. I feel sorry for her then, for I imagine that some great

sorrow has come into her life and soured the sweetness of it. She is always greatly interested in Mr. de Brie, and I have promised to take him in sometime to see her.

“ Oh, I must not forget to tell you that Dick is with us for a few days — on a furlough. And mother, — well, she goes about like a glorified saint. Now come the funnies. Cynthia Loretto's young man is here. His name is Buddie, but he looks anything but a bud, although Cyn always speaks of him as if he had just gone into long trousers.

“ He is queerly interesting, for he sits and looks at Cynthia in a meek, adoring way, while his big solemn blue eyes keep up a blinking that have made the kiddies — you know boys always feature peculiarities — dub him, ‘The Blink.’ As to other details, he's insignificant-looking, with a shock of yellow hair that gives him an unkempt, Hunnish appearance, and a sharp, ferret-like nose with an inquisitive tip on it that is sunburned to a bright red. Imagine!

“ Now for funny number one. The Blink — we all unconsciously call him that — and the make-believe lady — that's the boys' name for Cynthia — have monopolized the hammock on the veranda ever since the gentleman's arrival. It has been annoying, for they — Well, they spoon, and it gets on one's nerves, and after a while these lovers are the star performers on the stage.

“ The other morning I caught Danny and Tony fooling with the hammock. They said they were fixing it so it wouldn't slip down. That evening every one had disappeared but your lonesome and the lovers, who were in the hammock with arms intertwined, with the usual turtle-dove cooing.

“ All at once I heard a queer sound, and looked in the direction from which it proceeded, to see two pairs

of legs sweeping through the air with a wild, frantic clawing, while shrill cries and a swear-word informed me that the hammock had turned over, and that the pair of love-makers were standing on their heads. I tried not to laugh, but a wee little giggle slipped out, and then I flew to the rescue and turned down, or turned up, Cynthia's skirts, and then gave a helping hand to The Blink, who rose to his feet with a wild, bewildered stare in his blinking eyes. Then I flew, for if I hadn't, I should have collapsed with merriment, for, as it was, I was stuffing my handkerchief in my mouth to keep in my laughter.

"As I flew through the hall queer sounds arrested my flight, and there, on the floor, were those two kids, Danny and Tony, rolling about in exultant joy, while emitting squeals of delighted glee. And then I knew *why* they had been fooling with the hammock that morning. I was smothering with laughter, but grabbed each one by an ear and marched them to mother, with appropriate explanations, leaving her to administer the punishment they deserved. Naturally Cynthia blamed me, insisting that I had encouraged the boys in their mischief, and hasn't spoken to me since.

"Funny number two. I have told you of Cynthia's obsession for searching for the valuable thing. Well, evidently she has imparted her obsession to her lover, for we find him poking around into all sorts of out-of-the-way places, that annoys mother extremely. The other morning Mrs. Van Vorst sent me to the studio with a message for Cynthia. The door was open, and, to my amazement, I saw the lady in question hoisted up on a ladder,—The Blink was holding it,—poking about among the rafters of the attic.

"As I stood wondering what she was doing, I saw her suddenly duck her head, and then, to my stupefac-

tion, the Make-believe Lady was perched up there on that ladder like a poll-parrot, for her head was as bare as a billiard-ball, while her hair that was, was swaying gracefully on a nail some distance above.

“Suddenly discovering her nudity, she made a frenzied grab, not at the suspended wig, but at her skirts, hurriedly throwing them over her head, as if to hide its bareness, and then made frantic attempts to unhitch the black hairy thing that wiggled and wobbled just out of reach of her arm. At this moment Mr. Buddie — patience was written in his drooping pose, as he clung to that ladder — raised his head. His face immediately became the hue of his nose, for, alas, Cynthia, in her hurried endeavor to cover her denuded poll, had raised not only her dress-skirt but her under-skirts, and two black-hosed legs, lean and lank, stood forth from beneath her short, beruffled skirt. I waited to see no more, but hastily made my exit, to explode my mirth in the depths of my pillow on the bed in my room.

“Funny number three. My bedroom was next to the mystery-room, and then comes Cynthia’s,— she and Janet room together. There is a door between, which is generally closed, unless it is very warm. The other evening we were just getting ready for bed, when I suddenly remembered something I wanted to tell Janet, so stepped to the door, which was open. The room was dimly lighted by a single candle, and Cynthia, who likes to undress in the dark, was on her knees by the bed, saying her prayers, while Janet sat near, taking off her shoes.

“As I turned away so as not to disturb Cynthia at her devotions, I suddenly spied a man’s face peering in the transom over the door. Before I could cry out, Cynthia arose, and, carelessly glancing up, saw

the face. With a wild scream she seized one of Janet's shoes lying on the floor, and sent it flying at the head peeping over the door.

"I gasped, for it struck the man square on the nose. Then I heard a suppressed expletive, followed by a jarring crash, a general smashing sound, and then a dead silence. I gave one prolonged scream and rushed to the door. You can guess the rest, for Dick, mother, and even the boys had heard the racket, and a moment later, when they appeared on the scene, it was to find me trying to extricate the figure of a man, in a bath-robe, with a somewhat dazed expression on his meek, bewildered face,—that would have been pitiful if it had not been so ludicrous—from the débris of broken chairs and a turned-over table.

"And his eye, well, it was already beginning to swell; for Cynthia had been game, Dick said, and had not only given her lover a swelled nose, but a swelled eye as well. O dear! it was comical to see the way she glared at the poor creature, meekly trying to explain that he was only trying to peer into the mystery-room, for he seems to think that the valuable thing is hidden in that room, and had gotten as far as he could get—into the wrong room. Mother says she is glad it happened and hopes he will now stop his prowling.

"Now for funny number four. After the excitement caused by Mr. Buddie's efforts to peep into the mystery-room quietness reigned for a while, until the other night. I was terribly tired, for I had been doing the kids' ironing, and my feet ached so that I carried a pail of hot water to my room to soak them. I am on the upper floor now, near the boys, for Cynthia insisted that they made such a noise at night that they kept her awake. But everything that goes wrong she lays on their little shoulders, so I have mounted guard, to avoid any future unpleasantness. As I sat there,

trying to make up my mind to plunge my feet in that hot water, I heard a queer sound.

“There has been a report lately that burglars are in the neighborhood, for several of the ladies at the Sunset Hill House have missed articles of jewelry. Somehow that noise brought it to my mind, and I jumped up,—I was in my bare feet,—quickly turned off the light, stepped to the window, and poked my head out, and—if there wasn't a man on the roof of the veranda, creeping stealthily towards the mystery-room, directly under mine. O dear! and its two windows were both unlatched,—one of the boys had discovered that,—but no one had dared to break the rule and go in to fasten them. In a moment he had begun to work at the shutters, very cautiously,—he had a flashlight in his hand,—stopping every moment or so to listen, to see if any one had heard him.

“My heart bounded into my throat, but while I was making up my mind what to do, there came a wrench, and I knew that in a moment or so that man would be in the room! Desperate with fright, I flung about, and then my glance fell on that pail of water. Without further ado I seized it, pushed it softly out of the window, hurriedly turned it upside down, and then hurled the pail after the water. There came a smothered sound, a half-cry and groan, and then a funny, swishy noise.

“As I peered down through the darkness I saw a black object slipping down the roof, and heard a sudden imprecation, as it rolled over the edge. There came a splashy sound, a deep groan, and then I knew that the thief had fallen off the roof, and landed in a hogshead of water that always stood under the veranda by the kitchen porch.

“Now came a fierce barking, mingled with growls, and I realized that Jean's little dog, Tige, was chewing

up the thief. The next instant I made a mad rush for the door, to see Dick flying down the stairs in his bath-robe, followed by mother and the boys!

“ I plunged blindly forward, managed to grab him by the arm, and, between hysterical gasps, explained what I had seen, and begged him not to go out for fear the man would shoot him. But Dick shook me off like a feather, and, although mother tearfully seconded my plea, he was about to dash into the darkness when Cynthia rushed up and handed him her revolver,— Janet says she always sleeps with one under her pillow. The boys — each little chap, even Jean, was armed to the teeth, Danny with his policeman’s club, Tony with an iron bar, and Jean with a mountain-staff — lost no time in following him, with mother close behind.

“ I grabbed a chair — it could fell a man, at least — and followed mother, while Janet, Cynthia, and Sheila alternately yelled and wept as they sat huddled on the stairs, each one expecting to be shot. But by the time I reached the veranda Dick appeared, dragging a miserable-looking little object by the collar of his pajamas,— for his trousers had been about chewed off by Tige,— with rivulets of water oozing over his face, who was abjectly pleading and howling that he was no thief.

“ But Dick was obdurate, and as we all stared with bulging eyes, he marched him up to Cynthia. As he shook him fiercely by the collar, as one would shake a dog, he cried, ‘ Here, Miss Cynthia, here’s the thief, your estimable friend and lover, Mr. Buddie!’ I leave the rest for you to imagine. Mr. Buddie left the next morning.

“ Now good-by. Be sure and tell me more about yourself and your work when you write again, for I am anxious to know everything that happens to you,

girl of my heart, for you are a brave dear, and I miss you more than I can express.

“ Again with love,

“ NATHALIE PAGE.”

CHAPTER XXII

THE MAN IN THE WOODS

“OH, Nathalie, what do you think? They have sent for a detective up at the hotel!” The speaker was Nita, who, with her friend, was sitting on the veranda of Seven Pillars, a few afternoons subsequent to Nathalie’s sending her letter to Helen.

“A detective?” echoed Nathalie, looking at Nita in surprise. “What for?”

“Why, about those robberies. I told you some time ago how the guests were missing jewelry and other small articles of value. It has been kept very quiet, but mother heard this morning that the manager is getting worried as to who is the thief, and has sent for a secret-service man to come up and ferret out the mystery. But, Blue Robin,” she added, with a more serious expression, “those school friends of yours are not going to take any more French lessons.”

“And pray, why not?” demanded Nathalie. Then she ejaculated, “Dear me, what have we done to offend them now?”

“I don’t know. But, Nathalie, did you notice the night of the Liberty Tea at the hotel, how they sat in a corner, whispering most of the time? I had an uncanny feeling that they were making unkind remarks about us, not that *I care*, for I don’t like them anyway,” added Nita disgustedly.

“I’m sorry,” said Nathalie regretfully, “for I hate to have Mr. de Brie lose any pupils. I imagine they were angry at the last Liberty Cheer, for, you remember, when they joined us we all grew very quiet. Not that any one meant to be rude, but they are so snobby that they cast a cloud over one’s fun.”

“Well, I guess Philip can get along without them,” returned Nita confidently. “Did you notice that he was quite the lion the other evening? He cast the Count quite into the shade, for every one fell in love with him.”

“Yes, he can be very charming,” acquiesced Nathalie, “for he is so distinguished-looking in his uniform of a British lieutenant. Mother says that in his manners he combines the fineness of an American gentleman with the courtesy and charm of a Frenchman. I am sorry about his arm, for the doctor says he will always have to carry it stiffly.

“But, Nita,” continued Nathalie, “I just adore that big doctor friend of yours. What do you think? I was worrying about his calling so many times on Philip, for I was afraid that my ‘drop in the bucket’

would not be enough to pay the bill, and of course Philip wouldn't have enough from his earnings to pay it. Finally I wrote the doctor to send his bill to me. And oh, Nita, he wrote me a love of a letter, in which he said that he never charged girls anything. And as for Mr. de Brie, he considered it his great privilege to be allowed to give his services to a man who had given the best of himself to give liberty to the world. Oh, I think he is just the dearest old thing!" ended the girl enthusiastically.

"Oh, I knew he would do *that*," answered Nita, with a wise little smile, "for he has the best heart in the world."

"But listen," went on her companion earnestly. "Janet told Philip about it, excusing herself by saying that he was worrying over the bill, and that she wanted to relieve his mind."

"Of course she did," giggled Nita, "for one can see with half an eye what is going on in that direction, for it is a clear case of 'spoons,' all right."

"Do you really think so?" cried Nathalie with sudden animation. "Why, I suggested something of that kind to mother, and she said I was a silly. Well, they were made for one another. Why, Philip just adores the ground she walks on, and as for Janet, it's just a guessing game as to how she feels. But, to go on with my tale," continued the girl. "As soon as Philip heard what Janet had to tell, he came straight to me,

and, with a voice that fairly shook with emotion, said that my kindness to him would be one of the unforgettable things in his life. Of course I had to make light of the matter, for I saw the poor fellow was terribly affected over it. Oh, I do hope things will brighten for him this fall, for he is going to the city, to make an attempt to get some pupils to tutor until his health is better. You know," she added, dropping her voice, "I think there must have been some mystery about his grandmother, or his family, for although he loves to come down here and be one of us,— he says it is so homey with us,— he never says a word about her or his family."

Nita had been reading to Miss Whipple, and Nathalie had been tying up sweet peas, one morning a few days after Nita's news about the detective, and the two girls were on their homeward way, when Nathalie suddenly exclaimed with a little burst of laughter, "Oh, Nita, I have something funny to tell you."

"Well, tell it to me then," rejoined her companion somewhat dolefully, "for although I have something to tell you, alas, it is anything but funny."

"Oh, is it about Philip?" cried Nathalie, a sudden premonition of evil darkening the golden lights of her eyes. "Or are any more of the girls going to give up taking French lessons?"

"It is worse than *that*," answered Nita, with such grave import in her voice that Nathalie stared at her

with big eyes as she cried, "Oh, Nita! do hurry and tell me. Have those girls —"

"Yes, those girls, your friends —"

"Please don't call them my friends," pleaded poor Nathalie tremulously, "for they are anything but friends."

"So it seems," nodded Nita dryly, "for they have told — well, just about every one in the house — that they suspect that Mr. de Brie is the thief who has been robbing the hotel. You know he has been giving them private lessons. Nelda declares that she believes Philip took her watch,— it was lying on the table when she left the room to answer a 'phone call from the office. Justine was out riding with the Count. When Nelda returned the watch was gone. Five other girls came to me this morning and told me that they were not going to take any more lessons.

"These girls have circulated all over the house," continued Nita gloomily, "that Philip is an impostor; that you picked him up without knowing anything about him, and that he is not a British soldier at all. O dear! how hateful people can act! And the clerk of the hotel — Well, he informed me this morning that the Profile House had sent word that they did not care to have Philip speak to their guests, as people were tired of hearing about the war."

"Nita, this is terrible! Oh, I know Philip is not an impostor," protested Nathalie with a dismayed face.

“Why, Nita, he showed me a letter written to him by a soldier at the front, and he called him Lieutenant de Brie. And where could he have gotten his uniform if he is an impostor? Oh, I just believe those horrid, hateful girls have made the whole thing up.” Nathalie stopped, suddenly remembering that she was not speaking kindly, and not living up to her motto. She gave a long sigh, and then asked, “But, Nita, have you heard anything more about the detective coming up from the city?”

“Yes. Oh! there he is now, coming down the walk,” cried Nita, lowering her voice. Then she added, with a laugh, “Talk of the angels and you’ll hear the flutter of their wings.”

“Well, he doesn’t look much like an angel,” answered Nathalie, her eyes lighting humorously, as she watched a stout, red-faced man with a sandy moustache coming down the path towards them.

As the gentleman under discussion approached the girls he lifted his hat courteously, as he said, “I beg your pardon, but could you tell me how I can reach the top of Garnet? I understand that there are several trails up the mountain, but could you tell me which one would be the best one to ascend?”

The girls made no reply for a moment, assailed by the miserable fear that the man was going up the mountain to trail Philip. Then Nathalie, with an effort, turned and pointed down the road, explaining in

a few words that one of the trails started in near the Grand View road.

As the man thanked her and walked slowly on, Nathalie drew a deep breath, while a troubled light shone in Nita's eyes, as she cried, "Oh, do you suppose he is going to arrest Philip?" She spoke in a half-whisper.

"Arrest Philip? Why, the idea of such a thing! No, of course not," Nathalie answered determinedly, as if she was not going to allow herself to become frightened. "Philip has committed no crime. That man can't arrest him unless he has some evidence, and where is he going to get it?"

Nita made no reply, and the two girls, depressed by the unpleasant occurrence, and the vague fear that trouble was brewing for their friend, sat down in one of the summer-houses near the board-walk. Here they sat in silence for a few moments, and then Nathalie, as if determined to throw off the depression that assailed her, cried, "Oh, Nita, I have not told you the funny thing."

"Well, tell it to me, then; for I think it will take something real comical to get me out of the blues."

"It is about Tony," explained Nathalie. "You know the child is obsessed with the desire to have me find the mystery thing. Well, the other day Danny came running to tell me that Tony was rolling on the floor with the colic. I was alarmed, for I immediately

thought he had been eating green apples, the way Sheila did the other day, and mother had to poultice her with mustard.

“ I flew to his room and there was the little fellow moaning and squirming about, apparently in great pain. When he saw me he immediately begged me to put a mustard plaster on his stomach. I was surprised, for generally children will suffer quite a little before they will have one on. I found some old linen, — mother was out, — hurried down to the kitchen closet, and got the mustard-box.

“ But when I opened it, imbedded in the yellow, powdery stuff, was something that glittered strangely. I shook the box, and out rolled a little gold coin. I carefully examined it, and immediately saw that it was an ancient Roman coin, for although one side was so blurred and worn with age that I could not decipher anything on it, the other side bore the name and head of Cæsar within a circle of fine gold beading.

“ Something immediately told me that the coin belonged to Tony, and that he had placed it there so I would find it, for, not long ago he lost something from his vest-pocket, — he keeps all of his treasures sewed up in that old vest. Danny had helped him look for it, — it had slipped out of a hole, — and after it had been found he came and told me about it, describing it as a little round piece of gold, the kind that you see, he said, up in the museum at Central Park.

“I made the plaster and carried it, with the coin, up to Tony, but before I put on the poultice I showed him the gold piece and asked if it was not his. But the little chap, with a bland and innocent expression, vowed that he had never seen it. No amount of coaxing or persuasion could make him confess to the truth. You know that is the great trouble I have with Tony, he will tell *teeny little stories*.” Nathalie sighed dolefully.

“Although I was sure that he didn’t have any colic, and that ~~the whole~~ thing was just a trick to get me to look in the mustard-box to find the coin, I put the plaster on, and made him stay in bed, thinking that when it got to burning that he would ‘fess up.’ But he didn’t, and although he howled and writhed with the sting of it,— while I was reading him a lecture on the sin of lying,— I told the story of Ananias and Sapphira,— he stuck it out. Then, finally, my conscience wouldn’t let me torture the boy any longer, and I took the plaster off. That night while he was asleep I found his old vest, and after putting the coin in the pocket, sewed it up.”

After the girls had laughed over the incident, Nathalie started homeward, her mind full of dismal forebodings in regard to Philip. “Oh, I wish I could prove in some way that he is not an impostor. But suppose he should be?” The girl came to a sudden halt. Then, with her eyes full of a strange bright

light, she went on. No, she just knew that Philip was good and true.

“But I must do something,” she half moaned. “For how dreadfully he will feel if he thinks that people believe him a thief; and he will soon know something is wrong, when all the girls stop taking lessons. But Nita and I will have to pretend that the season is drawing to a close,—as it is. But, O dear! he does need the money so much. And Janet,—how it will hurt her, for I am sure she cares —” the girl halted at the thought, for it seemed too sacred a thing even to whisper to herself. Then she was busy again, trying to think how she could prove that her friend was what he claimed to be.

As she unconsciously uttered her thoughts aloud, by some mysterious process of thought, or strange correlation between mind and matter, before her mental vision flashed the picture of a dark wood, lighted by gleams of moonlight that filtered through the tall tree-tops. In the foreground of a forest-gloomed retreat, in front of a high rock, a man was digging in the ground, plainly seen by the yellow flickerings from a burning torch that had been stuck upright in the ground, a few feet away.

Although the girl reasoned and tried to convince herself that there was no possible connection between that man and the thief at the hotel, she could not drive the impression from her mind. On going home she

questioned Jean, and found that he, too, still vividly remembered the incident.

That night Nathalie could not sleep, for she was haunted by the picture of the man in the woods, although she hurled every name she could think of at herself for being so foolish. The next night again found her sleepless, but when morning dawned, as if pursued and driven by the haunting vision, she called the boys together, and stated the circumstances to them. She did not tell her mother, as *she* would say that she was losing her reason, and, well, she was determined to find out — *something*.

Early the following morning, before any one had gone through the woods, Nathalie and the boys met Nita at the Red Trail; she had been taken into their confidence, and accordingly was weirdly and thrillingly excited. They soon reached the seat-tree, and then, after locating the big rock, they all began to dig.

They had dug for almost an hour, by Nita's wrist-watch, and then, feeling tired, and on the verge of absolute despair, were talking about giving the whole thing up, when all at once Jean's little terrier began to scratch in the ground on one side of the rock, and partly under it. Jean gave a queer little cry as he watched Tige, and the next moment had driven the dog away, and had begun to dig as furiously as he could with his one hand, in the place where the dog had been scratching up the earth.

Nathalie watched him listlessly, for she had abandoned all hope, and felt utterly weary, too, after her two sleepless nights. Suddenly Jean gave a loud shout, and then a moment later they had all rushed to his side, and presently were boring down into the earth under the rock as quickly as they could, to unearth in a few moments a gold chain. Nita gave a loud scream as she snatched it from Danny, for she immediately recognized it as belonging to an old lady at the hotel, who had been bemoaning its loss. A few moments' digging, and then, with pale faces, in repressed excitement, they replaced the chain in the hole, covered it with dirt, so as to make it appear that the spot had not been disturbed, and then they started home, stopping to rest on the stone ledge of Liberty Fort, while discussing their discovery. It was enough to excite any one, and might mean a great deal to Philip.

Nita was quite insistent at first that they should immediately tell the manager of the hotel what they had seen. But Nathalie demurred, convinced, on second thought, that if the jewelry was found hidden up in the woods, because Philip lived up on the mountain, every one would say that that was sure proof that he was the thief. "No," declared the girl determinedly, "we can't do that; but we will have to come up here and watch for the man so we can identify him." This plan was finally decided upon, and the little party, seething with suppressed excitement un-

der the weight of their momentous secret, returned home.

That night Nathalie, Danny, and Jean stole up the trail. Strange to say, it was again a moonlight night, the same as a month ago, when the man had been seen by Nathalie and Jean. After finding the seat-tree they all sat down and waited, alternately dozing and waking, but although they remained until the first streaks of gray dawn appeared, nothing happened.

The following night, Jean — Nathalie had put the boy to bed for the day, letting her mother think that he had one of his headaches to which he was subject — and Tony accompanied the girl to the tree. But alas, for the second time nothing came to pass. Nathalie began to be discouraged. Fortunately it rained that night, and, as they could not venture out, they all had a good night's rest.

The fourth night again found the girl with the boys at her post, oppressed and miserable, for by this time she began to fear that the man in the woods was a snare and a delusion,— something she had dreamed, or else he had gone. But why did he leave that jewelry behind? — for the children had discovered that there were other pieces hidden in that hole, or very near it.

All at once — Nathalie had fallen quite sound asleep — Jean gave her a pinch; he was snuggling up against her, seated on her lap. The girl opened her eyes

sleepily, rubbed them drowsily, and then stretched them wide, caught by the gleam of a light over by the rock. Yes, the man was there! Her heart leaped excitedly, for he was digging under the rock, just where they had found the jewelry!

With stilled breath, the three figures, hidden by the tree, watched him, Nathalie's mind keeping up an incessant query as to how she could steal around behind the rock to get a view of his face. Ah, that queer shaking of the head! Who was it that she had seen who had that peculiar nervous affliction? And then, in a sudden revelation, she knew! It was the man who had stared at her so rudely in the post-office, the man who had repaired her automobile. Why, it was the man known as *the Count*!

CHAPTER XXIII

A MYSTERY SOLVED

SEVERAL hours later, Nathalie, Nita, Sheila, the three boys, and Mrs. Van Vorst were seated in that lady's sitting-room on the second floor of the Sunset Hill House, overlooking the roof of the front veranda. Nathalie was nervously tapping the floor with her foot, as, with a perplexed, uneasy expression in her eyes, she watched Mr. Grenoble, the secret-service man, who had been employed to fathom the strange mystery of the many jewelry thefts that had occurred at the hotel within the last few weeks.

She had told her story, not only to the detective, but to the manager of the hotel, explaining how she had come to discover the man digging in the woods the night that Sheila had wandered away. She had told also how they had all dug under the rock, to find the pieces of missing jewelry, and how she and the boys had hid in the woods, and finally had seen the man again digging by the rock. She had verified her story in its details, and, although sharply questioned by the detective and the manager, she had stoutly maintained that the man whom she had seen was Mr. Keating, known as the Count. But her intuition immediately

revealed to her that they were not inclined to accept her theory as to the identification of the thief.

The manager immediately protested that she *must be* mistaken, that his guest was too well known, his position too assured, to identify him in any way with the man at the rock. As the girl realized that her story was doubted, a strange numbness seized her, and she had a paralyzing premonition that not only would her well-founded suspicions prove futile, as well as her long, watchful hours, and her many efforts to clear Philip, but that possibly these things would increase the circumstantial suspicions already directed towards him.

Seeing the apparent uselessness of further conversation the girl rose, oppressed by the dread that if she remained in that room a moment longer she would burst into tears. But no, *she would not give up!* She would go somewhere and think it all over, to see if there was not some way of ascertaining who the man was. Perhaps she could go again to the woods,—she would try and get behind that rock,—and make sure —

At this moment Sheila, who was standing with Jean by the window, watching the automobiles constantly coming and going in front of the hotel, uttered a sharp cry. As Nathalie turned towards the child as if to still her, she heard her exclaim: “Oh, Jean, there’s the funny ’phone man! See, there he is! Don’t you

remember, he's the man who put the black trumpet on top of his head when he was in the 'phone-box?" Sheila always called the receiver a "black trumpet."

Nathalie, aroused by the remark, mechanically allowed her glance to follow the direction of the child's finger, as she pointed towards Mr. Keating, who was coming up the walk leading to the hotel. Unconsciously she bent forward, and with alert eyes watched the man, for she had again seen that peculiar motion of the head that had identified him as the man whom she had seen digging in the woods.

But Sheila's exclamation had been overheard by the detective, who stepped quickly to the child's side, crying: "What was that you said, little girl, about a funny 'phone man? Tell me about him."

The man's manner was so abrupt and commanding, that Sheila shrank back against Nathalie, and shyly hid her face. But the girl, startled also by Mr. Grenoble's abruptness, with a quick glance at his face, cried, "Yes, Sheila, tell the gentleman what you saw." Oh, yes, she remembered now that the two children had told her about this "funny 'phone man" whom they had seen at the hotel one day, but she had paid no attention to their prattle at the time.

Sheila, with a quick upward glance into the girl's face, as if instantly divining the seriousness of the situation, answered, "Why, that's the man I saw in the 'phone-box," again pointing towards the Count,

who had stopped to chat with a lady on the walk. "He put the black trumpet right up on top of his head, like this,"—she imitated the man's motion,—“when he was talking through the 'phone.”

“Did you see him, too?” questioned the detective, turning towards Jean, his eyes suddenly illumined with an odd gleam. Jean nodded silently, and then, seeing that further confirmation was needed, in his odd, hesitating English, repeated the same words, accompanied by the same motion, as the little girl.

The detective nodded absently, still with that odd gleam in his eyes, and then walked hastily towards the door. As he reached it, as if suddenly remembering their former conversation, he turned towards the occupants of the room and, with slow deliberation, said, “Well, ladies, I think our problem is still unsolved; however, I will look into the matter and let you know the result in a few days.” With an abrupt nod he motioned to the manager, whose kindly face was strangely perturbed, as he quickly followed him from the room.

Nathalie and the children, a few mornings after the conference at the Sunset Hill House, were standing in front of the big white Roslinwood barn watching Teddy and Billy, two little black pigs that were the delight of Sheila's heart. But they were tantalizing joys, for as soon as they caught sight of their admirer, as they peered out of the big barn-door, with

their bright, bead-like eyes, they would scurry away as quickly as their round, shiny black bodies would permit; greatly to that young lady's disappointment.

As Sheila ran to gather a roadside nosegay, and the boys hurried homeward, for Philip had promised to teach them some new military tactics in their soldier-drill at the Liberty Fort, Nathalie, beguiled by the calm stillness of the woods, sat down on the seat under the trees where the sign, "Hit the Trail," showed that was where the path started that led through Lovers' Lane.

The woods, aglow with the yellow and reds of the maples, were strangely still that beautiful September morning, save for the occasional chirp of some belated songster, or the loud caw of a crow as he signaled to his mates, who were making a noisy clatter in some leafy retreat of the greenwood.

To Nathalie, the crimson branches of the reddening maples, showing vividly bright from among the green leaves of the spruce, fir, oak, or beech, softened with the glow from the silver poplars as they quivered in the wind, seemed like red banners. As they swayed in undulating motion, to her they were flags, curling and beating the air for that which is every man's right, liberty.

The girl felt a little depressed at the thought that the summer was over, for the crumpled and autumn-hued leaves, as they fell from the trees, or swept by on

the wings of the wind in their dying splendor, seemed to be calling a sad and mournful farewell. Oh, how she would hate to leave these rocky heights that rose in such statuesque grandeur before her, the splendors of the sky with its glory of sunset, the forest gnomes in their crooked and gnarled ugliness, and the green fields, now starred with the yellow beauty of our national flower, the goldenrod!

What an odd summer it had been! So different from what she had expected. How she would miss her beautiful companions on her morning walks, the blue-hazed mountains! And yet she had made friends. Ah, there was the soldier-boy. She wondered if he would write to her. Then there was Janet. Well, she was never going to let her go out of her life, for she was to visit them next winter.

Her eyes saddened as she thought of the Sweet-Pea ladies. Oh, how sorry she would be to bid them good-by, for Miss Whipple seemed to grow frailer every day, and then what would become of poor Miss Mona? And her queer little old friend in the red house? Well, she didn't suppose that she would ever see her again, for she said that she never wrote to people. Yes, it was depressing to think that you had to meet people you liked, and then go away and just have to forget them, because they passed out of your life.

And the kiddies? She hated to think of their go-

ing back to that slum life again. She wondered if any of the country people up in the mountains would like to take them to live with them, for, yes, Tony and Danny could learn to be very useful. But poor Jean — and Sheila! Then she wondered if her trying to make them Sons of Liberty would help them to be good and honorable men. Sometimes it seemed as if she hadn't accomplished much, and then again she could see how different they were from what they had been when they came to her. O dear! they *were* problems.

And Philip de Brie? Surely she had made a friend of him, at least he was more than a friend to Janet, who — the perverse thing! — was so careful not to let her know if she really cared for him or not. Perhaps it was on account of Cynthia, for she had overheard that young lady telling Janet that Philip was an impostor, and that he had fooled her the way he had Nathalie Page and her mother. The story of his being a British soldier, and that story, too, about his grandmother, was all folderol.

And poor Janet had meekly made no reply to this tirade, but Nathalie, in imagination, saw the red mount into her cheeks, and knew how humiliated she felt. Well, he was better than that funny little Mr. Buddie anyway. She believed it was *just* jealousy on Cynthia's part, for she herself had tried to be very nice to Philip, but somehow he didn't seem to understand

her,— no sensible person could,— and although he had always been very courteous to her, he had never made a friend of her.

Well, she had done her best to clear him of the horrible suspicion that had lost him his pupils; but, alas, she seemed to have made the matter worse, or, at least, she had not done him any good, for when his cabin on the mountain had been burned one night, people had declared that he had set it afire himself to destroy evidences of his guilt.

And then, when the manager of the hotel had the ground dug up, where she and the children had discovered those pieces of jewelry, nothing had been found. And Mr. Keating, alias the Count, had gone, called to Chicago, he claimed, the very night before they dug up around the rock,— the very night, too, that the cabin had been burned. No, Philip had not been arrested, for certainly the evidence was not strong enough to warrant such action. And then the detective had disappeared, although Nathalie had a feeling at times that he was hanging around somewhere near the place, in disguise, perhaps, watching Philip.

And the people who had been so nice to Philip, now acted very queerly whenever they saw him, and Philip, the poor fellow, had said nothing, although Nathalie was afraid that he suspected that something was wrong. Her mother had persuaded him to come down to Seven Pillars after the burning of the cabin, and

although he had accepted their kind hospitality for the time being, he chafed under the favors showered upon him, and showed that he was inwardly suffering to have to be placed in such a position, for Janet said he resented charity. Yes, and ten days had passed, and Nathalie had not heard one word from the detective. O dear! the world was a queer place to live in, anyway.

Just after luncheon, as Nathalie and her mother sat knitting on the veranda, a loud "Honk! Honk!" announced the arrival of Nita, who, with her cheeks red with excitement, burst upon the group like a young whirlwind.

"Oh, Blue Robin," she cried, as she caught sight of Nathalie, "I have the most wonderful news for you." And then, without waiting to be questioned by her friend, who had risen to her feet in nervous expectancy, she added excitedly, "Philip has been cleared!"

"Oh, Nita, how do you know?" cried Nathalie, her face turning white, as she nervously clutched at her chair.

"The news came this morning from the detective, and the manager told mother. He said Mr. Grenoble got his clew from Sheila. You just come right here, little girl," broke off Nita abruptly, as she beckoned for Sheila to come to her, "so I can kiss you for a blessed dear." She seized the somewhat astonished

child and began to hug her with excited exuberance.

“But who is the thief?” exclaimed Nathalie breathlessly. “Oh, do tell us!”

“The thief? Why, Mr. Keating, the Count, of course,” laughed Nita gleefully; “and he was caught all through Sheila’s crying out about the funny ’phone man. When she spoke of the man in the booth placing the receiver on his head when telephoning, it gave Mr. Grenoble a big clew. It seems that the detective-bureau had been on the lookout for some time for a gentleman burglar who had the peculiar eccentricity of holding the receiver on the top of his head, as Sheila stated. He was born without any folds to his ears,—no, that isn’t the word; I guess it was ganglion cells. No, *that* isn’t right— Well, anyway he had something the matter with his auditory nerve, so that his hearing was defective. By placing the receiver on the top of his head, as he had very good bone-conduction,—yes, that’s right,—he could hear better.

“As soon as the detective heard what Sheila said he began to shadow our friend, the Count. He saw him do the same thing that Sheila told about, and *that*, with certain other clews, led to his arrest. He was not *the* Mr. Keating from Chicago that he claimed to be, whom the manager asserted had spent a summer at the hotel two years ago. That gentleman died this spring, and this ‘count’ fellow impersonated him, so as to gain a social standing in the hotel.

“The manager now admits that at times he had been puzzled by certain changes in Mr. Keating’s appearance, but he attributed it to the fact that he was older, and was now clean-shaven, when two years ago he wore a mustache. The detective thinks that the Count burned the cabin up in the woods so as to deepen the suspicion already fostered in regard to Philip.”

“But he got away with the jewelry,” exclaimed that young gentleman, who, with Janet, had just stepped up to the edge of the veranda, while Nita had been talking.

“But he did not get far,” rejoined Nita, “for when he walked into the New York station a few days ago,—that was just a ruse, talking about being called to Chicago,—he simply walked into the net that the detectives had spread for him, and he is now in jail.”

“I saw that the detective doubted my story,” remarked Nathalie, “and it made me feel unpleasant. But, oh, I am so glad the thief has been caught—and—”

“That Philip is cleared,” interrupted that young man. “Yes, Miss Nathalie, you have added to the store of kind things that you have done for me. But wait,” Philip’s eyes glowed, “some day,—well, perhaps I can repay every one. And little Blue Robin,” he continued, laughingly, “I knew that I was the suspected one, although you were all so careful not to let anything slip out that would tell me, so as to save my

sensitiveness, but as I was innocent I knew that things would clear up somehow."

And then he and Janet returned to their seats under the trees, where Philip had been reading to her, while Nathalie, with a glad light in her eyes, continued to discuss the many details of the affair. As Nita rose to go she suddenly exclaimed: "Oh, there, I forgot to tell you that we are going home in a couple of days. Mother is anxious to get back to the city."

"Oh, I shall miss you terribly," cried her friend, as she placed her arm affectionately around the little hunchback; "but then I presume we shall be going soon ourselves. But, Nita," she added abruptly, "I came very near forgetting to tell you that we have all handed our diaries to Mr. Banker, and I am so glad that irksome task is over, for I hated to have to write in it every day. We are to meet Mr. Banker in the mystery-room to-morrow afternoon. It all sounds very thrilling, doesn't it? We are all very curious to know what is hidden there."

"Oh, I am just dying to know, too," cried Nita.

"Well, come over to tea to-morrow, and then perhaps the mystery will be a mystery no longer."

"But have you selected the *valuable thing*?" asked the girl laughingly, after she assured her friend that she would surely accept her invitation.

"Why, no, not as yet," returned Nathalie, "for I

am swayed by two loves. But it is all nonsense anyway, so I don't think it will make much difference what any of us select. Cynthia will probably win the prize, as the kiddies say, for she has chosen a very valuable painting. Janet has selected a most curious thing,— a necklace. It came from China, and has a series or chain of heads; they say every one is a likeness of some old mummified mandarin. When you touch a spring — Janet didn't know this until mother showed it to her, for she saw this necklace years ago, when Mrs. Renwick brought it home with her from one of her Oriental trips — each one of these mummified Chinamen sticks out his tongue."

"Well, good-by until to-morrow," cried Nita, and then she was in her car and a moment later went whizzing along the road towards Sugar Hill village.

Nathalie had just finished putting her boys through their morning drill the following day, and seen them hurry away with Janet to do some weeding and hoeing for her in her garden, when she was joined by Philip. As he finished telling her a bit of war news,— she was industriously trying to finish a sweater for Dick,— his glance was arrested by the little Bible lying on the chair by her side, for Nathalie had continued her Scripture readings to the children.

Picking the book up, he began to turn over its leaves carelessly, almost mechanically, as if his mind was occupied with some other matter, when suddenly Nathalie

heard a surprised exclamation, and looked up to see Philip staring at the fly-leaf of the Bible, with an odd, curious expression on his face.

“Where did you get this Bible?” he asked hurriedly, turning towards the girl.

“In one of the upper rooms of the house. I think it must have belonged to Mrs. Renwick’s son, Philip. Why, your name is Philip, too,” she cried smilingly. “Why, I never thought of that before.”

“Yes, my name is Philip, and this Bible belonged to my father —”

“Your father?” repeated the dazed girl. But before Philip could answer her, in a quick revelation she cried, “Why, is your name Renwick?” staring at him with wide-open eyes.

“Yes, Philip de Brie Renwick.”

“And Mrs. Renwick, who used to live here?”

“Was my grandmother!”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WINNER OF THE PRIZE

AS Nathalie sat in dazed surprise upon hearing Philip's announcement, he went on and told her of the early life of his father, of his going to Europe, of his marriage with Marie de Brie, a French girl, of his return to America, and of his subsequent quarrel with his mother, who had refused to receive his wife, a story that the girl had already heard, but not in detail, from Mrs. Page.

When his father left his grandmother, Philip stated, he was in a mood of mingled anger and humiliation, while his heart had been deeply seared with disillusioned love. He could not realize that the mother who had made him her idol, the mother whom he adored, could, from mere motives of false pride, wound him so deeply by refusing to receive the girl to whom he had given the affections of his young manhood.

On leaving his mother, Philip Renwick had remained at the hotel for a time, vainly hoping that she would attempt a reconciliation, but when no word came from her, he took his wife to a southern town, where, a few

months later, he, Philip the second, had been born. A couple of years later the young couple had returned to England, where they had lived until his father's death. Shortly after losing her husband, young Mrs. Renwick had returned to France, and had become the home-keeper for a bachelor brother. On his death she was left a small annuity on the condition that she retain her maiden name of de Brie; hence the reason that Philip had become known by his mother's maiden name.

"But did you know that it was *here*, at Seven Pillars, that your grandmother used to live?" asked Nathalie, as Philip finished.

"Yes, and that was why I felt that I could not refuse your mother's kind invitation to spend a short time here as her guest, for the house had so many associations for me, for my father, as well as my grandmother, were very fond of this old place up here in these mountains.

"The night you found me in the cabin, Miss Nathalie," resumed the young man, "I had become tired of life, for it seemed as if there was nothing for me to live for, for I hadn't enough ambition to try to better my condition. I could only face the fact that mother was gone, that I had not a cent in the world, as my mother's annuity ceased with her life, and my soldier's pension was only a few dollars a week. I realized that I would probably lose my arm, for I knew that it

should have a surgeon's care and I had no money to pay one. And it is right here, Miss Nathalie, that I want you to understand my deep appreciation of, and my hearty thanks for, what you have done for me; also the kindness of Miss Janet," a sudden light flamed in the young man's eyes, "and the thoughtfulness of your mother, and your friends, Mrs. Van Vorst and Miss Nita.

"The companionship of you all, even of the kiddies, your Liberty boys, has put new life into me. I did become a little discouraged, it is true, when I began to lose my French pupils, and surmised the reason, from various hints that were dropped by some of the people, who were the victims of the thief, for it is not an enlivening thought to fear that your *only* and very best friends might grow to think you a rascal.

"But you all proved so true to me, especially *you*, little Blue Robin, I call you that name, as the bluebird is a bird of cheer, and certainly you have inspired me with the ambition for a new career-to-be, as you have proved yourself such a loyal little comrade in my time of need. Remember, Nathalie, I shall never forget you, or what you have done for me."

Nathalie, her face a wave of color from the unexpected warmth of Philip's praise, in hasty confusion, as if to change the subject to another one than herself, cried, "But why did you not go, when you were in Boston, to Mrs. Renwick's trustees, and make your-

self known to them? For, if you are her grandson, you are entitled to some of her money."

"For two reasons," replied Philip slowly. "One was that, in my hasty departure from England it slipped my mind to bring my credentials with me. And then, again,—perhaps my grandmother's pride has descended to me,—I felt that if she did not love my father,—she had let him go so easily,—that I could have pride, too, and did not care to accept her money. If I could have met her when alive, and had learned that she did have some love for my father, why, then I would have revealed myself to her, and naturally would have felt differently in regard to accepting her money. But I have one thing by which I could have proved my identity to her if she had been still alive. See, it is this little ring. She gave it to my father, who always wore it, as I have done, ever since it came into my possession."

Philip took from one of his little fingers an odd, peculiar-looking seal ring. After showing his father's and his grandmother's initials and the date of its presentation, he touched a tiny spring back of the stone, and Nathalie saw a miniature picture of Mrs. Renwick. She knew it immediately from its resemblance to several pictures of her that were scattered about the house.

At this moment there was a loud wail from Sheila, who, in picking flowers in the meadow where Sam was

mowing, had been injured by the mower. It was some time before her cries were stilled, and her wound properly bandaged, so that, for the time being, the wonderful news that Philip had told was forgotten.

When it finally came to mind, Nathalie was tempted to run and claim him as her cousin, to tell him about Mrs. Renwick's peculiar letter, and what was expected to take place there that afternoon. But after some thought she wisely concluded to remain silent until after she had talked with Mr. Banker and her mother. Not but that she had faith in Philip's story, but because it seemed the most prudent thing to do.

These thoughts were hasty ones, for the girl had suddenly remembered that she had not selected the valuable thing as yet, and that it was almost four o'clock, the hour of Mr. Banker's arrival. She had partly decided to select a set of rubies,— a necklace and pair of bracelets,— and then a Russian curio had made its appeal, but somehow she bordered upon a state of indecision that was becoming intolerable.

As she turned to enter the house, her eyes fell on the little Bible that, in her hasty rush to Sheila, when she appeared with her bleeding foot, she had left lying on the chair under the trees. She ran hastily across the lawn and picked it up. As she did so, the book flew open, and her attention was arrested by the name, *Philip Renwick*, on the fly-leaf, and its connection with what Philip had just told her. And then, she stood a

minute, pondering. Why had not she thought of that before? and then, with a dimpling face, she closed the book and hurried back to the veranda, almost knocking down Tony, who stood wistfully regarding her.

“Pleass, scusa, Mees Natta, haf you gotta da theeng for de preez? — Mister Banka, hees com’ bimeby to looka for eet.” Tony’s big, velvety eyes were mutely pleading as he looked up at Nathalie.

The girl laughingly mimicked the boy as she patted him on the head, understanding that he was worried because she had not selected the thing that the children were so anxious should “win the prize,” as they called it, for her. Then her eyes sobered, and, drawing the little lad to her, she showed him the Bible she held in her hand, explaining that she had selected it, as it told about Christ the Savior, and contained God’s wonderful message to His people, telling them how to love Him and be good. “Yes, Tony,” she added solemnly, “the Bible is the most precious thing to everybody in the world. And then, as *this* little Bible used to belong to Mrs. Renwick’s only son, I am sure that it would be the most valuable thing to her, so I am going to select it.”

As the girl saw the child’s eyes light up, as if he comprehended what she meant, she laid the Bible on a chair and ran hastily up to her room to hunt for some white paper and blue ribbon. In a moment or so she was back, wrapping up the book, and then, to Tony’s in-

finite delight, she slipped her card under the blue ribbon and gave the book to him, to place at the door of the mystery-room with the other packages.

Some time later, Nathalie, in company with her mother, Janet, Cynthia, and Mr. Banker, entered the mystery-room, no one perceiving as they entered that the children had slyly followed them, and were staring about with wondering, curious eyes. Ah, so this was the room they had all been so curious about; and Nathalie smiled as she saw that it was a homey, cozy room, suggestive of feminine tastes and occupations, but, after all, it was just nothing but Mrs. Renwick's sitting-room, the room where she had sewed, read, and wrote her letters.

The low book-cases lining the wall, the hardwood floor with its costly Persian rug, the open fireplace set with fagots ready to light on a cool morning, the desk in one corner, with the Victrola near, and the antique furniture, all of solid mahogany, certainly did not savor of a mystery or anything uncanny. In fact, the little table in the center of the room, with its shaded lamp, books, and magazines, and the little upright work-basket near, rather intimated that the owner of the room had just left it for a moment or so.

But Mr. Banker was speaking. He stood by the little center-table on which lay the three valuable things. He held up Cynthia's selection as he said: "I have here a picture, a most valuable painting, as it is a Van

Dyke. It has been selected by Miss Cynthia Loretto Stillwell, as I see by the name on the card. This little box bears the name of Miss Janet Page, and is a curio from China. And here is a Bible," the gentleman's voice deepened as he held up Nathalie's selection. The girl's heart, notwithstanding her indifference to the outcome of the selection, was beating against her side in a very annoying way.

"It is a curious selection," continued Mr. Banker, "and — oh, what is this?" as something round and glittering fell from the book. "A gold coin," he commented with some surprise; "yes, a Roman coin, for it bears the head of Cæsar, and I should imagine," he turned the coin over as it lay in his palm, "that it was of considerable value, as, from what I can decipher between the obliterations, it has a very ancient date. But I do not understand," he glanced up inquiringly, "which is the article that has been selected as the valuable thing, the coin or the Bible? The card on the letter bears the name of Nathalie Page," turning, as he spoke, and looking at the girl, who was staring at him with mystified, bewildered eyes. "A coin!" she finally managed to gasp. "Why, I didn't see —"

"Pleass 'scusa, Mister Banka," cried Tony's soft, musical voice at this point, "da coin eet belona to Mees Natta,— she fina eet wan day een a box." The liquid black eyes of the boy were brilliant with a strange glow of joy.

“ Oh, no, Tonio, the coin is not Miss Natta’s,” cried Nathalie, a sudden light breaking in upon her bewilderment. “ It is your coin. Don’t you remember, I found it in the mustard-box the day you were ill? But it is yours, Tony; you placed it there for Miss Natta to find.” The girl, strangely amused, smiled down at the lad.

“ You bet my life, Mees Natta, Tonio, no, hees neva hada coin. Eet verra old, da coin, eet com’ f’om a beeg keeng wat liva een da Roma lan’. Ees belonga to Mees Natta,” the boy ended persistently.

“ Oh, Tony, you are in the wrong,” pleaded the girl, suddenly feeling that she wanted to cry, as she saw that the child was determined to persist in his untruth. “ *You know it is your coin, for Danny found it one day for you when it had dropped from your embroidered vest. Didn’t you, Danny?* ”

And Danny, with a troubled look in his blue eyes,— he, too, wanted Miss Natta to have that prize,— mutely nodded in confirmation of her word. But Tony, with a sudden tightening of his red lips, again protested in a sullen tone, “ No, eet ees no Tonio’s coin. Eet belonga to Mees Natta.”

“ Oh, Tony,” exclaimed the girl, as the tears swelled up into her eyes, “ you hurt ‘ Mees Natta.’ ‘ Mees Natta ’ rather not have the prize than have Tonio tell what is not so.”

Tony’s eyes fell, as he shifted uneasily from one foot

to the other, and then, glancing up, still with that stubborn look on his face, and seeing the tears in the girl's eyes, he dropped his face into the curve of his arm. Not a sound came from him, but the long, convulsive shivers of the slim little body told that the lad was crying.

Nathalie turned towards Mr. Banker, distress depicted on her face, as she cried, "Oh, Mr. Banker, I am so sorry, but *I* selected the Bible."

Mr. Banker hesitated a moment, and then his sharp eyes softened, as he saw the mute anguish of the little Italian lad and realized his keen disappointment, for he had often commented upon the boy's affection for the girl. Stepping to his side, he patted him on the head, as he said cheerily: "Never mind, son; don't cry. Who knows, perhaps 'Mees Natta' may win the prize, as you call it, even without the coin. Here, lad, take what belongs to you, and mind you," he added in a sterner tone, "never again be tempted to tell an untruth, even for 'Mees Natta.'" With another pat on the bowed head he stepped back beside the table, where he had been standing.

"I have gone over these diaries," said the gentleman, as he picked up one of the three books that lay on the table, "and I find that Miss Cynthia Loretto Stillwell has not passed a day in this house, within the last two months in which she has not searched for the valuable thing. Certainly her diligence should be re-

warded," ended the gentleman, as he bowed ceremoniously to that lady, whose eyes radiated with triumphant joy.

"Miss Janet, I find," his eyes gleamed pleasantly at that winsome young woman, "has been somewhat of a delinquent at times, for there are several entries missing in her diary. But as its reading shows that her heart is a kindly one, as shown by her careful nursing of the young British soldier, I certainly think that she should be well favored.

"Miss Nathalie, I am afraid, has not done her duty as faithfully as she might have, in looking for the valuable thing"; he spoke somewhat severely as he peered over his glasses at the girl, whose cheeks flushed, their red deepening, as she caught a gleam of satisfaction emanating from Cynthia's eyes.

"But her negligence has been more than compensated for,"—there was a queer note in the gentleman's voice, "as this record of two months is so filled with kind acts for others, that— Well, ladies, possibly you have begun to sense that it is not the finding of the valuable thing that is to win out, but the acts it typifies. Each day has been conscientiously noted in Miss Nathalie's diary, and almost every day bears a record of some good work done for others. I think—well—I am inclined to believe that the young lady—"

Mr. Banker paused abruptly, for at this moment a loud knocking sounded on the door. Cynthia, who

was standing near it, with a frown on her face, stepped impatiently forward, and with a hasty movement threw it open.

On the threshold stood Mrs. Carney, who, the next moment, with her sharp gray eyes peering defiantly out from under the queer poke-bonnet, while the basket on her arm stuck out aggressively, brushed quickly past Cynthia and into the room. But that lady, with two red spots on her cheeks, seized her by the arm, crying, "You can't come in here now; we have company," turning the old lady, as she spoke, and roughly shoving her towards the door.

"Oh, Cynthia, don't be rude to Mrs. Carney!" pleaded distressed Nathalie, as she sprang to the side of her queer little friend. "How are you, Mrs. Carney?" she asked gently, smiling at the face under the bonnet. "We are very glad to see you. You don't mind Mrs. Carney joining us, do you?" continued the girl, looking at Mr. Banker. "If you do," she added quickly, "and will excuse me, I will go down-stairs with her, so we can have a little chat."

"No, Miss Nathalie, we do not mind Mrs. Carney joining us; in fact," again that queer little note in Mr. Banker's voice, "I was just about to ask you to go and bring her here." He advanced as he spoke and cordially shook the hand of the old lady, who pressed his warmly, but said nothing.

"Ah, here is your favorite seat," continued the gen-

tleman; "perhaps you would like to sit down in it. But I forgot, ladies; perhaps you have not met Mrs. John Renwick," he had turned towards the occupants of the room smilingly, "the lady who has allowed you the privilege of summering in her house for the last two months, your neighbor of the little red house. As you see, Mrs. Renwick is alive, and I will ask her to take charge of her own letter of instruction, and see that the reward is given to the right one — and —"

The gentleman paused, for Mrs. Page, with a glad light in her eyes, was already at the lady's side, crying, "Oh, sister Mary, it was kind of you to take this way of giving us such a lovely summer. And I am so glad that you are alive and well." She kissed Mrs. Renwick with warm cordiality. "Do you know," she continued smilingly, "I was rather suspicious that you were up to one of your —"

"Eccentricities," interrupted the old lady pleasantly, with an odd twinkle in her eyes. "Well, I was anxious to know these young ladies. Yes, I guess I know them now, one of them at least." She glanced wrathfully at Cynthia, who stood with down-cast eyes, her face as crimson as a poppy, and her heart in a strange tumult of amazement, anger, and regret.

But Nathalie, in her quick, impulsive way, had thrown her arms around Mrs. Renwick's neck and was giving her a good hug, as she cried, "Oh! my dear little lady of the red house, I am so glad you are Aunt

Mary, for now you will *have to be my friend*, and answer my letters whether you want to or not."

The old lady's gray eyes softened, as she bent forward and kissed the girl softly on each cheek as she answered gently, "Nathalie, you are just like your father,— he was my favorite brother,— but it is for yourself, child," she added gravely, "that I have learned to love you. But who has won the prize?" she inquired abruptly, smiling down at the children who were staring at her uncomprehendingly, recognizing her as the inmate of the red house, who seemed to have suddenly assumed a new character.

"Come over here and look them over,— I mean the valuable things," advised Mr. Banker, at this moment, as he led Mrs. Renwick to the table, "for the diaries you saw last night." And then he pointed out in quick succession the three articles of value that were grouped on the table.

Mrs. Renwick glanced carelessly at the picture. "Yes, it is most valuable," she assented quietly, "a Van Dyke. And so is this"; she fingered Janet's choice. "But what is this?" she added suddenly, as her eyes fell on the little Bible that lay at her elbow.

"This is Philip's Bible," said the gentleman, "and it was selected by Miss Nathalie —"

"Why, Nathalie, my child, did you select my dear son's Bible?" As Nathalie mutely assented, Mrs. Renwick motioned for her to come and tell her why she

had made this choice. With some embarrassment the girl gave her reasons. As she finished, her aunt said: "Yes, my dear child, there is nothing in the house I value as highly as Philip's Bible. Nathalie, you have won the prize, and you deserve it, my dear, for you have not only selected the most valuable thing, but you have learned what is the most valuable thing in life." The old lady drew Nathalie close to her, as she again kissed her on both of her flushed cheeks.

But Nathalie drew quickly away, for a sudden thought had come to her. "Oh, wait a moment!" she exclaimed hurriedly. "I'll be back presently," and then, without waiting to be excused, she flew from the room.

"Oh, Philip!" screamed the girl a moment or so later, as she rushed up to her friend, who was reading in the hammock, "I want you to come with me — quick! Oh — I —" she paused as if at a loss to explain, and then added hurriedly, "Oh, do come! I have something to show you!"

Philip looked up at the girl in surprise, but, instantly perceiving from her bright, shining eyes, that she was more than usually excited, he jumped from the hammock crying, "All right, Blue Robin, you look very happy, so I suppose it is something very good to see, or good to eat."

Two minutes later the girl had pushed open the door of the mystery-room, and was trying to pull Philip in



"OH, IT IS PHILIP, MY SON!" — Page 377.

with her, but that gentleman, on seeing that strangers were present, had stepped back.

“No, no, you *must come in*,” cried the girl in happy excitement. The young man, seeing the determination on his companion’s face, somewhat puzzled, silently followed her into the room. And then Nathalie swirled him about so that he faced Mr. Banker, crying, “Mr. Banker, this is Philip de Brie Renwick!” And then, without waiting for that gentleman to acknowledge the introduction, she took Philip’s hand and led him towards Mrs. Renwick, who, as she saw the young man approaching, tremblingly arose, and, with clasped hands, cried, “Oh, it is Philip, my son!”

“No, it is not Philip, your son,” quickly answered the young man, who had instantly divined who the old lady was, “but Philip’s son, your grandson, Philip de Brie Renwick.”

The next moment Philip was holding the old lady in his arms, while he quietly tried to soothe her sobs, as she wept in happy joy on his breast. As her sobs subsided somewhat, Philip said gently, “Mother Mine,” — it used to be his father’s pet name for his mother, — “here is the ring you gave father when at college.” He drew the seal ring from his finger and held it up before his grandmother, who, with one look at it, cried, “Yes, grandson, I know *he* has gone, for he promised me —” there was a quiver in her voice — “that the ring should never be removed until —” she drew a deep

breath that threatened to turn into a sob — “until he was no more. But he has given me — you, his son. Oh, my dear boy, my own grandson!”

Nathalie sat by her little sewing-table under the trees, gazing off at her grand old friends, the purple-misted mountains. It had seemed hard to do anything, this her last day at Seven Pillars, but gaze at the lofty heights that stood forth so calm and beautiful in their mystical splendor on this gloriously White Mountain day. But she *must* read over that letter to see if it was all right, so, in soft, low tone she read slowly,

“DEAR HELEN:

“I have such good news to tell you that I can hardly write,— for, oh, Helen! the little old lady who lived in the red house is Mrs. Renwick, and Philip de Brie, the British soldier whom we found up in the cabin on the mountain, is her grandson! And I have won the prize. No, of course, it is not really a prize, but the good-will and affectionate regard of Aunt Mary, because — well — I made her happy by selecting her son’s Bible as the most valuable thing in the house. And now I have dandy news to tell. She is going to send me to college. I have just lived in a dream ever since I heard the good news. Yes, and I have one hundred dollars for my *very own*, to do just as I like with — no restrictions, reparations, or indemnities, but just for *wee little me*. I think that blessed sum was given to me, because the boys, when told I had won the prize, could not understand anything as vague as going to college, but they did finger that crisp bank-note with eager, curious little fingers when I showed it to them. Sometimes I

feel a little guilty, for *really* Cynthia's selection, a Van Dyke painting, was the most valuable from a certain point of view.

"And, oh, what I told you would happen about Philip and Janet is true, for they are engaged, and go about looking into each other's eyes in a state of beatific happiness. Now she will be a grand lady, for she is to live with her new husband, and mother, in a beautiful mansion in Boston. And Cynthia. Well, Mrs. Renwick was quite angry with her, but finally, after mother and I had talked to her, and told her the disadvantages she labored under, and how she wanted to marry Mr. Buddie, why she partly relented, for she is to set Cynthia up in a studio in Boston, and try to get her friends to buy her pictures, for she insists that Cynthia is a real artist.

"And Mrs. Renwick — mother says I must learn to call her Aunt Mary — wanted Sheila to live with her, and as there was no question of separating her from Danny, he goes to Boston with her and is to be educated, and I know he will grow to be just a splendid man. Mrs. Van Vorst has taken another one of my kids, Tony. She has always been in love with those black eyes of his, and she insists that he is going to be a great musician. Then there was dear little Jean. Yes, he had to have something good come into his life, too, so mother and I have decided to take him to live with us.

"And now for another bit of news. I had a nice, long letter from the soldier-boy, Van Darrell, and isn't it too funny, but that Blue Robin girl of his was just *me* all the time. Now for the fairy-tale part of my story. Do you remember my telling you about writing a letter to a soldier-boy, and slipping it into a comfort-kit that, with a lot of others, was to be given to the boys at Camp Mills?

“ Well, Van got it. He says that it set him to thinking, and made him realize that we were not only going into this war of wars to get even with the Huns, but because it is our duty to give the liberty that we enjoy in our country to all the nations in the world. And he has been ordered overseas. Yes, and he says he’s going, ready to make the sacrifice if necessary, and to give his life that all men may be free. Oh, I’m so glad I wrote that letter, and to think it has done some one some good. Yes, and I’m going to pray as hard as I can that the soldier-boy will come back to his mother, and to his friend, Blue Robin. Yes, indeed, I am glad that he is not just a conceited boy, as I at one time feared.

“ So good-by, you dear little maid, serving the Lord so faithfully with those busy fingers of yours. I think of you every day, and pray for you every night, so, with a bushel of love, I am, as ever,

“ Your own

“ BLUE ROBIN.”

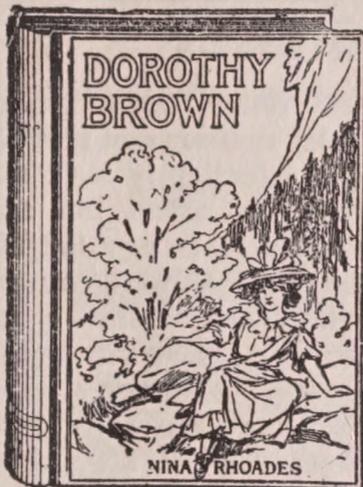
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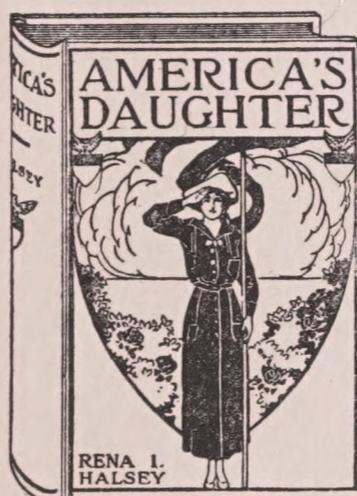
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