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OR

RECOLLECTIONS

OF

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE WEST

SECOND SERIES.

BY ALICE CAREY.



REDFIELD,

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RECOLLECTIONS
OF
OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE WEST.

THE PAST.

WE do not suffer our minds to dwell sufficiently on the past. Though now and then there is one who thinks it wise to talk with the hours that are gone, and ask them what report they bore to Heaven, this sort of communion is for the most part imposed as a duty and not felt to be a delight.

The sun sets, and our thoughts bathe themselves in the freshness of the morning that is to come, and fancy busies herself in shaping some great or good thing that is waiting just beyond the night; and though, time after time, we discover that Fancy is a cheat and lies away our hearts into unsubstantial realms, we trust her anew without question or hesitancy; and so the last sun sets, too often, ere we look back and seriously consider our ways.

I have met with some writer, I think Hazlitt, in his "Table Talk," with whom my estimate of the past harmonizes perfectly: "Am I mocked with a lie when I venture to think of it?" he asks, "or do I not drink in and breathe again the air of heavenly truth, when I but retrace its footsteps, and its skirts far off

adore?" And, in continuation, he says, "It is the past that gives me most delight, and most assurance of reality." For him the great charm of the Confessions, of Rousseau, is their turning so much on this feeling—his gathering up the departed moments of his being, like drops of honey-dew, to distil a precious liquor from them—his making of alternate pleasures and pains the bead-roll that he tells over and piously worships; and he ends by inquiring, "Was all that had happened to him, all that he had thought and felt, to be accounted nothing? Was that long and faded retrospect of years, happy or miserable, a blank that was to make his eyes fail and his heart faint within him in trying to grasp all that had once vanished, because it was not a prospect into futurity?"

Yesterday has been, and is, a bright or dark layer in the time that makes up the ages; we are certain of it, with its joys or sorrows; to-morrow we may never see, or if we do, how shall it be better than the days that are gone—the times when our feet were stronger for the race, and our hearts fuller of hope—when, perchance, our "eyes looked love to eyes that spake again, and all went merry?" Why should we look forward so eagerly, where the way grows more dusty and weary all the time, and is never smooth till it strikes across the level floor of the grave, when, a little way back, we may gather handful of fresh flowers? Whatever evils are about us, is it not very comforting to *have been* blessed, and to sit alone with our hearts and woo back the visions of departed joys? And who of us all has had so barren and isolate a life that it is gladdened by no times and seasons which it pleases us to think eternity cannot make dim nor quite sweep into forgetfulness?

For myself, when I move in the twilight or the hearthlight, thought, in spite of the interest that attaches to uncertainty, travels oftener to the days that have been, than to those that are to come. With the dear playmate who has been asleep so many years, I am walking again, pulling from the decayed logs mosses that make for us brighter carpets than the most ingenious looms of men may weave; I am treading on the May grass and breathing its fragrance anew; I am glad because of a bird's nest in the bush, and feel a tearful joyousness when the

cedar pail brims up with warm milk, or the breath of the heifer, sweet as the airs that come creeping over the clover field, is close upon my cheek while I pat her sleek neck, praising her bounty. Then there are such bright plans to plan over! what though so many of them have failed? they had not failed then, but seemed very good and beautiful, and it is as easy to go down to the bases of our dreams, as to think of their tottering and falling. True, as I am putting flowers among the locks over which the dust lies now, I must needs sometimes think of the dust, but that I can cover with flowers also, and feel that there is no moaning in the sleep which is beneath them. There is another too, not a playmate, for whom, as the evening star climbs over the western tree-tops, I watch, joyfully, for hope has as yet never been chilled by disappointment. And sure enough, the red twilight has not burned itself out, nor the insects ceased to make their ado, before the music of the familiar footstep sounds along the hush of a close-listening, and

“ One single spot is all the world to me.”

Blow on, oh, wild wind, and stir the woods that are divided from me now by distance and by time, for in your murmurs there is a voice that makes my heart young again; clouds of the April, travel softly and rain sweetly till the meadows are speckled with lilies, and the swollen streams flow over their banks, for I seem to see on the sprouting grass the sheets of the bridal bed bleaching white. Death came first to the marriage feast, and she whose hopes I made mine and with whose eyes I watched, is wrapt daintily in the shroud of snow.

And yet, not alone for its beauty, not even for its solemn eloquence, do I look and listen to the past. It makes me feel life's reality; it makes me know its responsibility, and put down the hasty word that might rankle deeply and long, and hold undropt the pebble that might stir the whole sea of life; it makes me reverent of others, and distrustful of myself. I remember silences where kind words might have been, and what is worse, impetuous and inconsiderate behavior for which I cannot be penitent enough. But aside from its rebuking spirit—outside of any good or evil that is in it—the past is loved by me, and my pleasantest pastime is to take up the threads of the lives

that have crossed mine and weave their histories anew, mingling in the light and shadow of destiny till I lose them in the distance, or find them sinking in the valley where there is "rest to the labor and peace to the pain."

MRS. WETHERBE'S QUILTING PARTY.

I.

LONGER than I can remember, my father, who is an old man now, has been in the habit of driving every Friday morning from his home, seven miles away, to this goodly city in which I now live. I may well say goodly city, from the view which presents itself as I look out from the window under which I have placed my table for the writing of this history, for my home is in the "hilly country" that overlooks this Western Queen, whose gracious sovereignty I am proud to acknowledge, and within whose fair dominions this hilly country lies.

I cannot choose but pause and survey the picture: the Kentucky shore is all hidden with mist, so that I try in vain to see the young cities of which the sloping suburbs are washed by the Ohio, river of beauty! except here and there the gleam of a white wall, or a dense column of smoke that rises through the silver mist from hot furnaces where swart labor drives the thrifty trades, speeding the march to elegance and wealth. I cannot see the blue green nor the golden green of the oat and wheat fields, that lie beyond these infant cities, nor the dark ridge of woods that folds its hem of shadows along their borders, for all day yesterday fell one of those rains that would seem to exhaust the clouds of the deepest skies, and the soaked earth this morning sends up its coal-scented and unwholesome fogs, obscuring the lovely picture that would else present itself.

I can only guess where the garrison is. I could not hear

"The sullen cry of the sentinel,"

even if the time of challenge were not passed—though long before the sunrise I woke to the music of the reveille, that

comes morn after morn floating over the waters and through the crimson daybreak, to chase the dream from my pillow. Faintly I discern the observatory crowning the summit of the mount above me, and see more distinctly at its base the red bricks of St. Philomena, and more plainly still the brown iron and glittering brass of its uplifted spire, with the sorrowful beauty of the cross over all ; while midway between me and the white shining of the tower of the cathedral, away toward the evening star, I catch the dark outline of St. Xavier.

Beautiful ! As I said, I cannot choose but pause and gaze. And now, the mists are lifting more and more, and the sunshine comes dropping down through their sombre folds to the damp ground.

Growing, on the view, into familiar shapes, comes out point after point of the landscape—towers and temples, and forest and orchard trees, and meadow-land—the marts of traffic and the homes of men ; and among these last there is one, very pretty, and whose inmates, as you guess from the cream-white walls, overrun with clematis and jasmine, and the clambering stalks of roses, are not devoid of some simple refinement of taste from which an inference of their happiness may be drawn—for the things we feel are exhibited in the things we do.

The white-pebbled walk, leading from the gate to the doorway, is edged with close miniature pyramids of box, and the smoothly-shaven sward is shadowed by various bushes and flowers, and the gold velvet of the dandelion shines wherever it will, from the fence close beneath the window sending up its bitter fragrance out of dew, while sheaves of green phlox stand here and there, which in their time will be topped with crimson blossoms.

The windows are hung with snowy curtains, and in one that fronts the sun, is hung a bird-cage, with an inmate chattering as wildly as though his wings were free. A blue wreath of smoke, pleasantly suggestive, is curling upward just now, and drifting southward from the tall kitchen chimney, and Jenny Mitchel, the young housewife, as I guess, is baking pies. Nothing becomes her chubby hands so well as the moulding of pastry, and her cheerful singing, if we were near enough to

hear it, would attest that nothing makes her more happy. And well may she sing and be happy, for the rosy-faced baby sits up in his white willow cradle, and crows back to her lullaby; and by and by the honest husband will come from healthful labor, and her handiwork in flour and fruit and sugar and spice, will be sure of due appreciation and praise.

Nowhere among all the suburban gardens of this basin rimmed with hills, peeps from beneath its sheltering trees a cozier home. They are plain and common-sense people who dwell here, vexed with no indistinct yearnings for the far off and the unattained—weighed down with no false appreciation, blind to all good that is not best—oppressed with no misanthropic fancies about the world—nor yet affected with spasmodic decisions that their great enemy should not wholly baffle them; no! the great world cares nothing about them, and they as little for the great world, which has no power by its indifference to wound the heart of either, even for a moment. Help. Randall, the sturdy blacksmith, whose forge is aglow before the sunrise, and rosy-cheeked Jenny, his blue-eyed wife, though she sometimes remembers the shamrock and sighs, have no such pains concealed.

But were they always thus contented? Did they cross that mysterious river, whose course never yet run smooth, without any trial and tribulation, such as most voyagers on its bosom have encountered since the world began—certainly since Jacob served seven years for Rachel and was then put off with Leah, and obliged to serve other seven for his first love? We shall see: and this brings me back to one of those many Fridays I have spoken of. I am not sure but I must turn another leaf and begin with Thursday—yes, I have the time now, it was a Thursday. It was as bright an afternoon as ever turned the green swaths into gray, or twinkled against the shadows stretching eastward from the thick-rising haycocks.

II.

It was early in July, when the bitter of the apples began to grow sweet, and their sunward sides a little russet; when the chickens ceased from peeping and following the parent hen, and began to scratch hollows in garden beds, and to fly suddenly upon fences or into trees, and to crow and cackle with unpractised throats, as though they were well used to it, and cared not who heard them, for which disagreeable habits their heads were now and then brought to the block. Blackberries were ripening in the hedges, and the soft silk was swaying beneath the tassels of the corn.

Such was the season when, one day, just after dinner, Mrs. Wetherbe came to pass the afternoon, and, as she said, to kill two birds with one stone, by securing a passage to the city on the morrow in my father's wagon—for many were the old ladies, and young ones too, who availed themselves of a like privilege. Of course it was a pleasure for us to accommodate her, and not the less, perhaps, that it was a favor she had never asked before, and was not likely to ask again.

She was a plain old lady, whom to look at was to know—good and simple-hearted as a child. She was born and had been bred in the country, and was thoroughly a country woman; her high heeled and creaking calf-skin shoes had never trodden beyond the grass of her own door-yard more than once or twice, for even a friendly tea-drinking with a neighbor was to her a matter of not more than biennial occurrence. And on the day I speak of she seemed to feel mortified that she should spend two consecutive days like a gad-about—in view of which necessity feeling bound in all self-respect to offer apologies.

In the first place, she had not for six years been to visit her niece, Mrs. Emeline Randall, who came to her house more or less every summer, and really felt slighted and grieved that her visits were never returned. So Mrs. Randall expressed herself, and so Mrs. Wetherbe thought, honest old lady as she was! and so it seemed now as though she must go and see

Emeline, notwithstanding she would just as soon, she said, put her head in a hornet's nest, any time, as go to town; for she regarded its gayeties and fashions—and all city people, in her opinion, were gay and fashionable—as leading directly toward the kingdom of the Evil One. Therefore it was, as I conceive, quite doubtful, whether for the mere pleasure of visiting her amiable niece, Mrs. Wetherbe would have entered the city limits.

She wanted some cap stuff and some home-made linen, if such things were to be procured in these degenerate days, though if she only had the flax she could spin and weave the linen herself, old as she was, and would not be caught running about town to buy it; for, if she did say it, she was worth more than half the girls now at work; and no one who saw how fast her brown withered fingers flew round the stocking she was knitting, would have doubted it at all.

“Nothing is fit for the harvest-field but home-spun linen,” said Mrs. Wetherbe, “and if Wetherbe don't have it he'll be nigh about sick, and I may jest as well go fust as last, for he won't hear to my spinning, sence I am sixty odd; he says he don't like the buz of the wheel, but to me there's no nicer music.”

The last trowsers of her own making were worn out, and along for several days past her good man had then been obliged to wear cloth ones; which fact was real scandalous in the good woman's estimation, and in this view it certainly was time she should bestir herself, as she proposed.

Moreover, she had one or two other errands that especially induced her to go to town. A black calico dress she must have, as she had worn the old one five years, and now wanted to cut it up and put it in a quilt, for she always intended it to jine some patchwork she'd had on hand a long time, and now she was going to do it, and make a quilting party, and have the work all done at once. I, of course, received then and there the earliest invitation.

This was years ago, and the fashion of such parties has long since passed away, but in due time I will tell you about this,

as you may never have an opportunity of participating in such a proceeding.

Perhaps you may have seen persons, certainly I have, who seem to feel called on, from some feeling of obligation I do not understand, to offer continual apologies for whatever they do, or propose to do. It was so with good Mrs. Wetherbe, and after the announcement of this prospective frolic, she talked a long chapter of whys and wherefores, after this wise.

William Helphenstein Randall, Emeline's oldest son, had been living at her house three or four years, and he had teased, month in and month out, to have a wood-chopping and quilting, some afternoon, and a regular play party in the evening; and he had done so many good turns for her, that it seemed as if a body could hardly get round it without seeming reel disobleegin'; and though she didn't approve much of such worldly carryings on, she thought for once she would humor Helph; and then, too, they would get wood prepared for winter, and more or less quilting done—for "though on pleasure she was bent, she was of frugal mind."

I remarked that I was under an impression that Mr. Randall was a man of property, and asked if Helph was out of college.

"Why, bless your heart, no," said Mrs. Wetherbe, "he was never in a college, more'n I be this minute; his father is as rich as *Cresus*, but his children got all their larin' in free schools, pretty much; Helph hasn't been to school this ten years a'most, I guess. Let me see: he was in a blacksmith's shop sartainly two or three years before he come to my house, and he isn't but nineteen now, so he must have been tuck from school airy. The long and short on't is," continued the old lady, making her knitting-needles fly again, "Emeline, poor gal, has got a man that is reel clos't, and the last time I was there I most thought he begrudged me my victuals; but I was keerful to take butter and garden-sass, and so on, enough to pay for all I got." And she dropped her work, she was so exasperated, for though economical and saving in all ways, she was not meanly stingy. She had chanced to glide into a communicative mood, by no means habitual to her, and the perspiration stood in drops on her forehead, and her little black

eyes winked with great rapidity for a minute, before she added, "And that ain't the worst on't neither, he is often in drink, and sich times he gits the Old Clooty in him as big as a yearlin' heifer!"

"Ay, I understand," I said, "and that is why Helph happens to live with you."

"Yes," said Mrs. Wetherbe, resuming her knitting, "that's why, and it's the why of a good many other things; I don't know as I ought to talk of things that are none of my business, as you may say, but my temper gits riled and a'most biles over the pot, when I think of some things Jinny Mitchel has telled me: she's their adopted darter, you know; but that speaking of the pot reminds me that I broke my little dinner pot last week, and if there will be room for it I want to kerry it along and get a new leg put in. And so you see," she concluded, "I have arrants enough to take me to town;" and she wiped her spectacles, preparatory to going home, saying the glasses were too young for her, and she must get older ones tomorrow, and that was one of the most urgent things, in fact, that took her to the city. Having promised that I would accompany her, to select the new dress, and dine with Mrs. Randall, she took leave, with an assurance of being ready at six o'clock in the morning, so as not to detain us a grain or morsel.

III.

WHEN morning began to redden over the eastern stars, our household was astir, and while we partook of an early breakfast, the light wagon, which was drawn by two smart young bays, was brought to the door. Baskets, jugs, and other things, were imbedded among the straw, with which our carriage was plentifully supplied, and a chair was placed behind the one seat, for my accommodation, as Mrs. Wetherbe was to occupy the place beside my father. I have always regarded the occupancy of the chair, on that occasion, as an example of self-sacrifice which I should not like to repeat, however beautiful in theory may be the idea of self-abnegation. But I cannot hope that

others will appreciate this little benevolence of mine, unless they have ridden eight or more miles, in an open wagon, and on a chair slipping from side to side, and jolting up and down, behind two coltish trotters, and over roads that for a part of the time kept one wheel in the gutter and one in the air.

But I must leave to the imagination the ups and downs of this particular epoch of my life. Still one star stood, large and white, above the hills, but the ground of crimson began to be dashed with gold when we set forward.

Notwithstanding the "rough, uneven ways, which drew out the miles, and made them wearisome," these goings to the city are among the most delightful recollections of my life. They were to my young vision openings of the brightness of the world; and after the passage of a few years, with their experiences, the new sensations that freshen and widen the atmosphere of thought are very few and never so bright as I had then.

Distinctly fixed in my mind is every house—its color and size, and the garden walks and trees with which it was surrounded, and by which the roadsides between our homestead and that dim speck we called the city, were adorned; and nothing would probably seem to me now so fine as did the white walls, and smooth lawns, and round-headed gate-posts, which then astonished my unpractised eyes.

Early as we were, we found Mrs. Wetherbe in waiting at her gate, long before reaching which the fluttering of her scarlet merino shawl, looking like the rising of another morning, apprised us of our approach to it.

She had been nigh about an hour watching for us, she said, and was just going into the house to take off her things, when she saw the heads of the horses before a great cloud of dust; and though she couldn't see the color of the wagon, nor a sign of the critters, to tell whether they were black or white, she knew right-a-way that it was our team, for no body else druv such fine horses.

"Here, Mrs. Witherbe, get right in," said my father, who was fond of horses, and felt the compliment as much as if it had been to himself; and it was owing entirely to this that

he said Mrs. Witherbe instead of Mrs. Wetherbe, though I am not sufficiently a metaphysician to explain why such cause should have produced such an effect.

Helphenstein, who was chopping wood at the door, called out, as we were leaving, "Don't forget to ask Jenny to come to the quilting;" and Mr. Wetherbe paused from his churning, beneath a cherry-tree, to say, "Good-bye, mother; be careful, and not lose any money, for it's a hard thing to slip into a pus, and it's easy to slip out."

The good woman held up her purse—a little linen bag tied at one end with a tow string, and pretty well distended at the other—to assure the frugal husband she had not lost it in climbing into the wagon; and having deposited it for safe keeping where old ladies sometimes stow away thread, thimble, beeswax, and the like, she proceeded to give us particular accounts of all the moneys, lost or found, of which she ever knew any thing, and at last concluded by saying she had sometimes thought her old man a leetle more keerful than there was any need of; but, after all, she didn't know as he was; and this was just the conclusion any other loving and true-hearted wife would have arrived at in reference to any idiosyncrasy pertaining to her "old man," no matter what might, could, would or should be urged on the contrary.

One little circumstance of recent occurrence operated greatly in favor of the carefulness of Mr. Wetherbe, in the mind of his very excellent and prudent wife. Helph had lately, in a most mysterious and unaccountable manner, lost two shillings out of his trowsers pocket.

"It was the strangest thing ever could have happened," she said: "he was coming home from town—Helph was—and he said, when he paid toll, he just had two shillings left; and he put it in the left pocket of his trowsers, he said; he said he knew he had it then, for just as he rode up the bank of the creek, his horse stumbled, and he heard the money jingle, just as plain as could be; and when he got home, and went up stairs, and went to hang up his trowsers before he went to go to bed, he just thought he would feel in his pocket, and the money wasn't there! He said then, he thought he might have been

mistaken, and so he felt in the other pocket, he said, and behold, it was clean gone! And such things make a body feel as if they could not be too keeferful," observed Mrs. Wetherbe, "for you might as well look for a needle in a haystack, as for a dollar once lost. Helph," she added, "rode back the next morning as far as the toll-house, and though he kept his eyes bent on the ground, the search wasn't of no use." And she suddenly started, and clapped her hand, not in her pocket, but where she had deposited her own purse, exclaiming, as she did so, "Mercy on us! I thought at fust it was gone; and I declare for it, I am just as weak as a cat, now, and I shall not get over my fright this whole blessed day."

"You are a very nervous person," said my father, and with him this was equivalent to saying, you are a very foolish woman; for he had little patience with men or women who make much-ado-about-nothing; and, venting his irritation by a sudden use of the whip, the horses started forward, and threw me quite out of my chair; but the straw prevented me from receiving any injury, and I gained my former position, while the hands of Mrs. Wetherbe were yet in consternation in the air.

This feat of mine, and the laughter which rewarded it, brought back more than the first good-humor of my father, and he reined in the horses, saying, "They get over the ground pretty smartly, don't they, Mrs. Wetherbe?"

"Gracious sakes!" she replied, "how they do whiz by things; it appears like they fairly fly." The conversation then turned on the march of improvement; for we had come to the turn-pike, and the rattling of the wheels, and the sharp striking of the hoofs on the stones, were reminders of the higher civilization we were attaining, as well as serious impediments to any colloquial enjoyment.

"A number of buildings have gone up since you were here," said my father, addressing the old lady.

"What has gone up where?" she answered, bending her ear towards him. But failing to notice that she did not reply correctly, he continued: "That is the old place Squire Gates used to own; it don't look much as it used to, does it?"

"Yes, la me! what a nice place it is! Somewhere near old Squire Gates's, isn't it?"

"Yes, he was an old man," said my father, "when he owned that place; and near sixty when he married his last wife, Polly Weaver, that was."

"Dear me, neighbor, how we get old and pass away! but I never heard of the old man's death. What kind of fever did you say he died with?"

"He is dead, then, is he? Well, I believe he was a pretty good sort of man. I have nothing laid up against him. Do you know whether he made a will?"

"Who did he leave it to?" inquired the lady, still misapprehending. "Jeems, I believe, was his favorite, though I always thought Danel the best of the two."

"Well, I am glad Jeems has fared the best," replied my father; "he was the likeliest son the old man had."

"Yes," she said, vaguely, for she had not heard a word this time.

"What did you say?" asked my father, who liked to have his remarks answered in some sort.

The old lady looked puzzled, and said she didn't say any thing; and after a moment my father resumed: "Well, do you know where the old man died?" And in a tone that seemed to indicate that she didn't know much of any thing, she inquired, "What?" and then continued, in a tone of irritation, "I never saw a wagon make such a terrible rattletabang in my born days."

"I asked if you knew where he died?" repeated my father, speaking very loud.

"Oh no, we did hear once that he had separated from his wife, and gone back to the old place; folks said she wasn't any better than she should be; I don't pretend to know; and I don't know whether he died there, or where he died. I don't go about much to hear any thing, and I didn't know he was dead till you told me."

"Who told you?" asked my father, looking as though she would not repeat the assertion the second time.

"I said I didn't know it till you told me," she answered, innocently; "and I was just about to ask where he died."

"The devil!" said my father, losing not only all civility, but all patience too; "I never told you any such thing, Mrs. Wetherbe. I have not seen you to talk with you any for a number of years till this morning, when you told me yourself that the old man was dead; and if I had ever told such a story, I should remember it."

"Why," she interposed, "you will surely remember, when you think of it. It was just after we passed Squire Gates's house; and the fever he died with you mentioned too."

"Good heavens! it was just there you told me; and I had not heard till that minute of his death. I will leave it to my daughter here," he continued, turning to me, who, laughing at these blunders, was shaken and jolted from side to side, and backward and forward, and up and down, all the time.

At this juncture, a smart little chaise, drawn by a high-headed black horse, with a short tail, approached from the opposite direction. Within sat a white-haired old gentleman, wearing gloves and ruffles; and beside him, a more youthful and rather gayly dressed lady. Both looked smiling and happy; and as they passed, the gentleman bowed low to Mrs. Wetherbe and my father.

"That is Squire Gates and his wife now!" exclaimed both at once; and each continued, "It's strange how you happened to tell me he was dead."

"Both are right, and both are wrong," said I, and thereupon I explained their mutual misunderstanding, and the slightly irritable feelings in which both had indulged subsided, and ended in hearty good-humor.

The slant rays of the sun began to struggle through the black smoke that blew against our faces, for the candle and soap factories of the suburbs began to thicken, and the bleating of lambs and calves from the long, low slaughter-houses which ran up the hollows opposite the factories, made the head sick and the heart ache as we entered city limits.

Fat and red-faced butchers, carrying long whips, and reining in the gay horses they bestrode, met us, one after another,

driving back from the market great droves of cattle, that, tired and half maddened, galloped hither and thither, lashing their tails furiously, and now and then sharply striking their horns against each other, till they were forced through narrow passages into the hot and close pens—no breath of fresh air, nor a draught of water between them and their doom.

Now and then a little market-cart, with empty boxes and barrels that had lately been filled with onions, turnips, or radishes, went briskly by us: the two occupants, who sat on a board across the front of it, having thus early disposed of their cargo, and being now returning home to their gardens. Very happy they looked, with the proceeds of their sales in the pockets of their white aprons, and not unfrequently also a calf's head or beef's liver, half-a-dozen pigs' feet, or some similar delicacy, to be served up with garlies for dinner.

Countrymen who had ridden to market on horseback, were likewise already returning to their farms. The basket which had so lately been filled with the yellow rolls of butter, and covered with the green broad leaves of the plantain, was filled now, instead, with tea and sugar, with perhaps some rice and raisins, and possibly a new calico gown for the wife at home. What a pleasant surprise when the contents of the basket shall be made known!

After all, the independent yeoman, with his simple rusticity and healthful habits, is the happiest man in the world. And as I saw these specimens of the class returning home, with joyous faces and full baskets, I could not help saying what all the world should know, if it be true, from its having been pretty frequently repeated, "When ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

"What is it, darter?" said Mrs. Wetherbe, bending towards me, for her apprehensions were not very quick.

"I was saying," I replied, "that the farmers are the happiest people in the world."

"Yes, yes, they are the happiest,"—her predilections, of course, being in favor of her own way of living; "it stands to reason that it hardens the heart to live in cities, and makes folks selfish too. Look there, what a dreadful sight!" and she

pointed to a cart filled with sheep and lambs, on the top of which were thrown two or three calves, with their feet tied together, and reaching upwards, their heads stretched back, and their tongues hanging out. "Really, the law should punish such wicked and useless cruelty," she said; and I thought and still think that Mrs. Wetherbe was not altogether wrong.

Men, and the signs of affairs, began to thicken; blacksmiths were beating iron over their glowing forges, carpenters showing the plane, and the trowel of the mason ringing against the bricks. Men, women, and children hurried to and fro, and all languages were heard, and all costumes were seen, as if after a thousand generations, the races were returning to be again united at Babel.

"What a perfect bedlam!" said Mrs. Wetherbe; "I wish to mercy I was ready to go home. Here, maybe, you had better wait a little," she added, seizing the rein, and pointing in the direction of a grocery and variety shop, where some crockery appeared at the window, and a strip of red flannel at the door.

"Don't you want to go down town?" said my father, reining up.

"Yes," she replied, "but I see some red flannel here, and I want to get a few yards for a pettikit."

Having assured her she could get it anywhere else as well, she consented to go on, fixing the place in her mind, so that she could find it again, if necessary; and we shortly found ourselves at Mr. Randall's door.

IV.

"WE will just go in the back way," said Mrs. Wetherbe; "I don't like to ring the bell, and wait an hour;" and accordingly she opened a side door, and we found ourselves in the breakfast-room, where the family were assembled.

"Why, if it isn't Auntie Wetherbe!" exclaimed a tall, pale-faced woman, coming forward and shaking hands. "Have you brought me something good?" she added quickly, at the same time relieving the old lady of the basket of nice butter, the jug of milk, the eggs, and the loaf of home-made bread, which she

had brought—partly from the kindness of her heart, partly to secure her welcome. Thus relieved of her burdens, she went forward to the table—for Mr. Randall did not rise—and offered her hand.

“Lord-a-mighty, woman, I didn’t know you,” he said, in a blustering way; but he evidently didn’t wish to know her. “Who the devil have you brought with you?” referring to me, with a nod of the head, and bending a pair of grayish blue eyes on me.

This salutation was not particularly calculated to make me feel happy, or at home, for I was young and timid; but removing myself from the range of his glance, I deliberately surveyed the group, with each of whom I felt myself acquainted, in a moment, as well as I wished to be in my life time.

Mr. Randall, having inquired who I was, in the peculiarly civil manner I have stated, remarked to his relation, that half the town was on his shoulders, and he must be off; he supposed also she had enough to do in her little sphere, and would probably have gone home before his return to dinner; so, having wrung her hand, and told her she must come and stay six months at his house some time, he departed, or rather went in to the adjoining room, whence after a rattling of glasses and a deep-drawn breath or two, he returned, wiping his lips, and said to the old lady in a quick, trembling, querulous tone, and as though his heart were really stirred with anxiety, “Satan help us, woman! I almost forgot to ask about my son—how is Helph? how is my son, Helph?”

His paternal feelings were soon quieted, and turning to his wife, who had resumed her seat at the table, with hair in papers, and dressed in a petticoat and short-gown, he said, “Emeline, don’t hurry up the cakes too fast; I don’t want dinner a minute before three o’clock,” and this time he really left the house. Besides Mrs. Randall, there were at the table two little boys, of ten and eight, perhaps; two big boys of about fourteen and sixteen: and a girl of fifteen, or thereabouts. “Oh,” said one of the larger boys, as if now first aware of the presence of his aunt, and speaking with his mouth full of food, “Oh, Miss Malinda Hoe-the-corn, how do you do? I didn’t see you before.”

Of course the good woman was disconcerted, and blushed, as perhaps she had not done since her worthy husband asked her if she had any liking for his name—more years ago than she could now remember.

Observing this, the rude fellow continued, "Beg pardon: I thought it was Malinda Hoe-the-corn, but it's my sweetheart, Dolly Anne Matilda Steerhorn, and she's blushing, head and ears, to see me." And approaching the astonished and bewildered woman, he began to unpin her shawl, which was of an old fashion, saying, as he attempted to pass his arm around her waist, "Get up, my love, and let's have a waltz; come, take off your hoss-blanket."

But she held her shawl tightly with one hand, thrusting the impudent fellow away with the other, as she exclaimed, "Get along with you, you sassy scrub!"

"That is right, Aunty Wetherbe," said the mother, "he is a great lubbersides, and that is just what he is;" but she laughed heartily, and all the group, with the exception of the little girl, seemed to think he was behaving very funnily; and in his own estimation he was evidently displaying some very brilliant qualities, and had quite confounded a simple-minded old woman with his abundant humor, and unembarrassed manners. "Well," he continued, no whit disconcerted by the displeasure of his aunt, "I am a business man, and must leave you, my dear, but I'll bring my wedding coat and the parson to-night, and an orange flower for you."

There was now an opportunity for the older brother to exhibit some of his accomplishments, and the occasion was not to be slighted; so, after having inquired what news was in the country, how the crops were, &c., he said, "I am sorry, aunt, that I have such a complication of affairs on hand that I can't stay and entertain you, but so it is: you must come round to my house and see my wife before you return home."

"Mercy sakes!" she cried, adjusting her spectacles to survey the youth, "you can't be married?"

"Why, yes," he replied, "haven't you heard of it? and I have a boy six munts old!"

"Well, I'd never have thought it; but you have grown all

out of my knowledge, and I can hardly tell which one you be ; in fact, I would not have known you if I had met you any place else ; and yet I can see Emeline's looks in you."

"That is what everybody says," replied the youth ; " I look just like my mammy ;" for, fancying it would seem boyish to say mother, he addressed her in a half mock, half serious way, as " mammy."

"And so you have to go away to your work, do you ?" resumed the credulous woman : " what kind of business are you doing here ?"

" I am a chicken fancier," he replied : " Got any Polands or Shanghais out your way ?"

" I don't know," answered Aunt Wetherbe, unobservant of the tittering about the table.

" I'd like to get some white bantams for my wife and baby ;" and the facetious nephew closed one eye and fixed the other on me.

" What do you call the baby ?"

" My wife wants to call him for me, but I don't like my own name, and think of calling him Jim Crow."

" Now just get along with you," the mother said, " and no more of your nonsense."

He then began teasing his mammy, as he called her, for some money to buy white kid gloves, saying he wanted to take his girl to a ball. " Then you have just been imposing upon me," said Mrs. Wetherbe ; to which the scapegrace replied, that he hadn't been doing nothing shorter ; and, approaching the girl, who was quietly eating her breakfast, he continued, taking her ear between his thumb and finger, and turning her head to one side, " I want you to iron my ruffled shirt fust rate and particular, do you hear that, nigger waiter ?"

After these feats he visited the sideboard, after the example of his father, and having asked his mother if she knew where in thunder the old man kept the dimes, adjusted a jaunty cap of shining leather to one side and left the house.

" I am glad you are gone," said the girl, looking after him and speaking for the first time.

" Come, come, you just tend to your own affairs, Miss Jenny,

and finish your breakfast some time before noon," said Mrs. Randall, putting on a severe look.

"I had to wait on the children all the time you were eating," she replied, rising from the table with glowing cheeks.

"Oh, you had to wait on great things!" the woman said, tartly: "big eaters always want some excuse."

Not till the two little boys had demolished the last remnants of what seemed to have been but a "spare feast" in the first place, was the bell rung for Aunt Kitty, the colored woman who presided over the kitchen. She was one of those dear old creatures whom you feel like petting and calling "mammy" at once. She was quiet, and a good heart shone out over her yellow face, and a cheerful piety pervaded her conversation. She retained still the softness of manner and cordial warmth of feeling peculiar to the South; and added to this was the patient submission that never thought of opposition.

She had lived nearly fifty years, and most of them had been passed in hard labor; but notwithstanding incessant toil, it seemed to me that she was still pretty. True, she possessed few of the attributes which, in the popular estimation, make up beauty; neither symmetry of proportions, fairness of complexion, nor that crowning grace of womanhood, long, heavy, and silken tresses. No, her face was of a bright olive, and her hair was concealed by a gorgeous turban, and I suspect more beautiful thus concealed, but her teeth were sound, and of sparkling whiteness, and her eyes black as night, and large, but instead of an arrowy, of a kind of tearful and reproachful expression; indeed, in all her face there was that which would have seemed reproachful, but for the sweetly-subduing smile that played over it. She was short and thick-set, and as for her dress, I can only say it was cleanly, for in other respects it was like that of the celebrated priest who figures in the nursery rhyme, "all tattered and torn." As for her slippers, they had evidently never been made for her, and in all probability were worn out before they came into her possession; but her feet were generally concealed by the long skirt of her dress, a morning wrapper of thin white muslin, past the uses of her mistress, who, be it known, gave nothing away which by any

possibility could be of service to herself. To adapt it to her work, Aunt Kitty had shortened the sleeves and tucked up the skirt with pins; but the thinness of the fabric revealed the bright red and blue plaids of the worsted petticoat, making her appearance somewhat fantastic. Courtesying to us gracefully, as she entered the breakfast-room, she proceeded to remove the dishes.

"Why don't you take a bite first yourself?" asked Mrs. Randall.

"No matter about me," she said; "I want to giv these ladies a cup of coffee—they are come away from the country, and must feel holler-like—thank de Lord, we can 'suscitate 'em;" and with a monument of dishes in her hands she was leaving the room, when Mrs. Randall asked, in no very mild tones, if she considered herself mistress of the house; and if not, directed her to wait till she had directions before she went to wasting things by preparing a breakfast that nobody wanted; when turning to us, she said, a little more mildly, but in a way that precluded our acceptance, "You breakfasted at home, I suppose?"

Poor Aunt Kitty was sadly disappointed, but consoled herself with the hope that we should return to dinner. Mrs. Randall, however, said nothing about it.

Jenny, a pretty rosy-faced Irish girl, Mrs. Randall told us was her adopted daughter; and certainly we should never have guessed it, had she failed of this intimation.

"I do by her just as I would by my own child," said the lady; "and for her encouragement, I give her three shillings in money every week to buy what she likes."

"You can well afford it, she must be a great deal of help to you," Mrs. Wetherbe said.

But Mrs. Randall affirmed that she was little assistance to her, though she admitted that Jenny did all the sewing for the family, the chamber-work, tending at the door, and errands.

From my own observation, in a single hour, I felt assured that the girl's situation was any thing but desirable: called on constantly by all the members of the family to do this thing or that,—for having no set tasks, it was thought she should do

every thing, and be responsible for all the accidents of all the departments. "Here, Jenny," called one of the little boys, who were no less accomplished in their way than the older brothers, "black my shoes, and do it quick, too,"—at the same time throwing a pair of coarse brogans roughly against her.

"I haven't time," she answered "you must do it yourself."

"That's a great big lie," said the boy; and prostrating himself on the floor, he caught her skirts and held her fast, while he informed us that her father was nobody but an old drunkard, and her mother was a washerwoman, and that Jenny had better look at home before she got too proud to black shoes.

"Let me go," said she; "if my father is a drunkard, yours is no better,"—and she vainly tried to pull her dress away from him, her face burning with shame and anger for the exposure.

"Jenny!" called Mrs. Randall from the head of the stairs, "Come along with you and do your chamber-work."

"Franklin is holding me, and won't let me come," she answered; but the woman repeated her order, saying she would hear no such stories.

"It's pretty much so!" called out Mrs. Wetherbe, "it's pretty much so, Emeline." But as she descended, the boy loosened his hold, and of course received no blame, and the poor girl had a slap on the ear with an admonition to see now if she could do her work.

"Sissy," said Aunt Kitty, putting her head in the door, "can't you just run, honey, and get me a cent's worth of yeast?"

Meantime Mrs. Wetherbe had asked Jenny to pass a week at her house, assist in preparations for the quilting party and enjoy it; but she feared to ask liberty, and the kind old woman broke the matter to Mrs. Randall, and I seconded the appeal.

"She has no dress to wear," urged the mistress.

"Then she ought to have," responded the old lady, with spirit.

"I have money enough to get one," said Jenny, bashfully; "can't I go with these ladies and get it?"

But Mrs. Randall said she had been idling away too much time to ask for more, and she enumerated a dozen things that should be done. However, Mrs. Wetherbe and I combated the decision, and volunteered our assistance, so that reluctant per-

mission to go out with us was granted. Gratitude opened Jenny's heart, and as we hastened our work she confided to me many of her trials and sorrows, and I soon perceived that the three shillings per week made all her compensation, with the exception of now and then an old pair of gloves or a faded ribbon, cast off by her mistress. It was true her father was a drunkard, and her mother, a poor weakly woman, had six children to provide for. Jenny gave almost all her own earnings for their support. "They have pretended to adopt me as a child," she said, "that they may seem liberal to me; but I am, as you see, an underling and a drudge."

My heart was pained for her as I saw the hardness and hopelessness of her fate; and when at last she was ready to go with us, the poor attempt she made to look smart really had the effect of rendering her less presentable than before; but between her palm and her torn glove she had slipped two dollars in small change, and she was quite happy. Then, too, the new dress should be made in womanly fashion, for she was in her fifteenth year.

We were just about setting out when, with more exultation than regret in her tone, Mrs. Randall called Jenny to come back, for that her little brother wanted to see her.

"Oh dear!" she said, turning away with tears in her eyes; and in that exclamation there was the death of all her hopes.

We soon saw how it was: the miserable little wretch was come for money, and without a word, Jenny removed the glove and gave him all.

"Don't wait to blubber," said the mistress; "you have lost time enough for one day;" and the girl retired to exchange her best dress and renew her work.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Randall had belonged to the poorest class of people, and the possession of wealth had increased or given scope to their natural meanness, without in the least diminishing their vulgarity.

If there be any condition with whom I really dislike to come in contact, it is the constitutionally mean and base-mannered who, accidentally or by miserly plodding, become rich. You need but a glimpse of such persons, or of their homes, to know them. No

expenditures in laces, silks, jewelry, costly carpets, or rare woods, can remove them one hand's breadth from their proper position; and the proper position of the Randalls was that of the menials over whom their money alone gave them supremacy.

We were a long time in getting through our many errands, for Mrs. Wetherbe was detained not a little in surprise or admiration at this or that novelty. When a funeral passed, she could not think who could be dead, and essayed all her powers to get a glimpse of the coffin, that she might know whether it were a child or an adult; or if a horseman cantered past, she gazed after him, wondering if he was not going for the doctor, and if he was, who in the world could be sick; and then, she selected little samples of goods she wished to purchase, and carried them up to Emeline's, to determine whether they would wash well; but notwithstanding her frugality and cautiousness, she was not mean; and she lightened her purse on Jenny's behalf to the amount of the stuff for a pretty new dress. But she could not be spared for a week, and it was agreed that Help should be sent to bring her on the day of the quilting; and so, between smiles and tears, we left her.

Alas for Aunt Kitty! nothing could alleviate her disappointment: she had prepared dinner with special reference to us, and we had not been there to partake of it, or to praise her. "Poor souls! de Lord help you," she said; you will be starved a'most!"

Mrs. Randall was sorry dinner was over, but she never thought of getting hungry when she was busy.

It was long after nightfall when, having left our friend and her various luggage at her own home, we arrived at ours; and we had earned excellent appetites for the supper that waited us.

V.

THAT going to town by Mrs. Wetherbe, as I have intimated, was chiefly with a view to purchases in preparation for the proposed quilting party and wood-chopping. Not only did we select calico for the border of the quilt, with cotton batting and spool thread, but we also procured sundry niceties for the supper,

among which I remember a jug of Orleans molasses, half a pound of ground ginger, five pounds of cheese, and as many pounds of raisins. Mrs. Wetherbe had never made a "frolic" before, she said, and now she wouldn't have the name of being *near* about it, let it cost what it would. And great excitement ran through all the neighborhood so soon as it was known what she had been about, and rumor speedily exaggerated the gallon of molasses into a dozen gallons, the raisins into a keg, and so on. Many thought it was not very creditable in a "professor" to have such carryings on; some wondered where she would find any body in Clovernook good enough to ask; others supposed she would have all her company from the city; and all agreed that if she was going to have her "big-bug" relations, and do her "great gaul," she might, for all of them. The wonder was that she didn't make a party of "whole cloth," and not stick her quilt in at all.

There was a great deal of surmising and debating likewise as to the quilt itself; and some hoped it was a little nicer than any patchwork they had seen of Mrs. Wetherbe's making. But this unamiable disposition gradually gave way when it was known that the frolic would embrace a wood-chopping as well as a quilting—"for surely," said they, "she don't expect chaps from town to cut wood!"

The speculation concerning the quilt began to decline; what matter whether it were to be composed of stars or stripes, "rising suns," or "crescents?" Mrs. Wetherbe knew her own business of course, and those who had at first hoped they would not be invited, because they were sure they would not go if they were, wavered visibly in their stout resolves.

From one or two families in which the greatest curiosity reigned, were sent little girls and boys, whose ostensible objects were the borrowing of a darning-needle or a peck measure from the harmless family who had become the centre of interest, but their real errands were to see what they could see. So the feeling of asperity was gradually mollified, as reports thus obtained circulation favoring the neighborly and democratic character hitherto borne by the Wetherbes. At one time the good old lady was found with her sleeves rolled back, mixing bread,

as she used to do; and invariably she inquired of the little spies how affairs were going forward at their homes. After all, the neighbors began to think the quilting was not going to be any such great things more than other quiltings. For myself, I understood the whole subject pretty well from the beginning.

One morning as I looked up from the window where I sat, I saw Helphenstein Randall approaching, and at once divined his errand. He was mounted on Mr. Wetherbe's old roan mare, and riding a side-saddle; and he was in excellent spirits too, as I judged from his having the ragged rim of his hat turned up jauntily in front, and from his goading the beast with heels and bridle-rein; but not a whit cared the ancient mare; with youth she had lost her ambition, and now she moved in slow and graceless way, her neck bent downward, and her nose greatly in advance of her ears. Half an hour afterwards I was on the way to assist in preparations for the approaching festivities. But I was only a kind of secondary maid of honor, for foremost on all occasions of this kind was Ellen Blake, and in this present instance she had preceded me, and with hair in papers, and sleeves and skirt tucked up, she came forth in an at-home-attire, mistress-of-the-house fashion, to welcome me—a privilege she always assumed toward every guest on such occasions.

In truth, Ellen really had a genius for managing the affairs of other people, and for the time being she felt almost always the same interest in whatever was being done as though it were altogether an affair of her own. She was also thought, in her neighborhood, which was a sort of suburb of Clovernook, a full quarter of the way to the city, to be very good company, and it is no wonder that her services were much in demand. Very ambitious about her work was Ellen, and few persons could get through with more in a day than she; in fact there are few more faultless in nearly every respect; nevertheless, there was one objection which some of the most old-fashioned people urged against her—she was dressy, and it was rumored just now that she had got a new "flat," trimmed as full as it could stick of blue ribbons and red artificial flowers, and also a white dress, flounced half way up to the skirt.

Already the quilt was in the frames and laid out, as the marking was called, the chamber was ready for the guests, and Ellen said she thought she had been pretty smart—if she did say it herself.

“I wanted to take the bed out of my front room and have the quilting there,” Mrs. Wetherbe observed, “but this headstrong piece (pointing to Ellen) wouldn’t hear of it.”

“No, indeed,” replied the girl; “it would have been the greatest piece of presumption in the world; la, me! if we young folks cut up as we do sometimes, we’d have that nice carpet in doll-rags, and then the work of taking down and putting up the bedstead—all for nothing, as you may say.”

I fully agreed that Ellen had made the wisest arrangement. The chamber was large, covering an area occupied by three rooms on the ground floor; and being next to the roof, the quilt could be conveniently attached to the rafters by ropes, and thus drawn up out of the way in case it were not finished before nightfall. The ceilings were unplastered, and on either side sloped within a few feet of the floor, but the gable windows admitted a sufficiency of light, and there was neither carpet nor furniture in the way, except, indeed, the furnishing which Ellen had contrived for the occasion, consisting chiefly of divans, formed of boards and blocks, which were cushioned with quilts and the like. Besides these, there were two or three barrels covered over with tablecloths and designed to serve as hat-stands. There was no other furniture, unless the draperies, formed of petticoats and trowsers, here and there suspended from pegs, might be regarded as entitled to be so distinguished.

The rafters were variously garnished, with bags of seeds, bunches of dried herbs, and hanks of yarn, with some fine specimens of extra large corn, having the husks turned back from the yellow ears and twisted into braids, by which it was hung for preservation and exhibition. One more touch our combined ingenuity gave the place, on the morning of the day guests were expected, and this consisted of festoons of green boughs and of flowers.

While we were busy with preparations in the kitchen, the day following my arrival, Mrs. Randall suddenly made her appear-

ance, wearing a faded dress, an old straw bonnet, and bearing in one hand a satchel, and in the other an empty basket.

"Hi ho! what brought you, mother?" exclaimed Helph, who was watching our progress in beating eggs, weighing sugar, crushing spices, &c.; and this question was followed with "Where is Jenny?" and "How did you come?"

We soon learned that she had arrived in a market wagon, for the sake of economy; that her basket was to carry home eggs, butter, apples, and whatever she could get; and that, though she proposed to assist us, she would in fact disconcert our arrangements, and mar our happiness. Jenny was left at home to attend the house, while she herself recruited and enjoyed a little pleasuring.

No sooner had she tied on one of Mrs. Wetherbe's checked aprons and turned back her sleeves, than our troubles began; of course she knew better than we how to manage every thing, and the supper would not do at all, unless prepared under her direction. We were glad when Mrs. Wetherbe said, "Too many cooks spoil the broth, and I guess the girls better have it their own way." But Mrs. Randall was not to be dissuaded; she had come to help, and she was sure she would rather be doing a little than not. She gave accounts of all the balls, dinners, and suppers, at which she had been, and tried to impress us with the necessity of having our country quilting as much in the style of them as we could.

"We must graduate our ginger-cakes," she said, "and so form a pyramid for the central ornament of the table; the butter must be in the shape of pineapples, and we must either have no meats, or else call it a dinner, and after it was eaten, serve round coffee, on little salvers, for which purpose we should have pretty china cups."

I knew right well how ludicrous it would be to attempt the twisting of Aunt Wetherbe's quilting and wood-chopping into a fashionable party, but I had little eloquence or argument at command with which to combat the city dame's positive assertions and impertinent suggestions.

"Have you sent your notes of invitation yet?" she asked.

"No, nor I don't mean to send no notes nor nothing," said

the aunt, a little indignant; "it ain't like as if the queen was going to make a quilting, I reckon."

But without heeding this pretty decisive answer Mrs. Randall proceeded to remark that she had brought out some gilt-edged paper and several specimen cards, among which she thought perhaps the most elegant would be, "Mr. and Mrs. Wetherbe at home," specifying the time, and addressed to whoever should be invited. But in vain this point was urged; the old-fashioned aunt said she would have no such mess written; that Helph might get on his horse and ride through the neighborhood and ask the young people to come to the quilting and wood-chopping, and that was enough.

There was but one thing more to vex us, while anticipating the result of our efforts—a rumor that Mrs. Wetherbe had hired a "nigger waiter" for a week. Many did not and could not believe it, but others testified to the fact of having seen the said waiter with their own eyes.

With all our combined forces, preparations went actively forward, and before the appointed day every thing was in readiness—coffee ground, tea ready for steeping, chickens prepared for broiling, cakes and puddings baked, and all the extra saucers filled with custards or preserves.

Ellen stoutly maintained her office as mistress of the ceremonies; and Mrs. Randall took her place as assistant, so that mine became quite a subordinate position, for which I was not sorry, as I did not feel competent to grace the elevated position at first assigned me.

Helph had once or twice been warned by his mother that Jenny would not come, and that he need not trouble himself to go for her; but he persisted in a determination to bring her; in fact his heart was set on it; and the aunt seconded his decision in the matter, as it was chiefly for Helph and Jenny she had designed the merry-making, and she could not and would not be cheated of her darling purpose.

"Well, have your own way and live the longer," said the mother; to which the son answered that such was his intention; and accordingly, having procured the best buggy the neighborhood afforded, and brushed his coat and hat with extra care, he

set out for the city, before sunrise, on the long anticipated day. Dinner was served earlier than usual, and at one o'clock we were all prepared—Mrs. Wetherbe in the black silk she had had for twenty years, and Ellen in her white flounced dress, with a comb of enormous size, and a wreath of flowers above her curls; but when "Emeline" made her appearance, neither our surprise nor a feeling of indignant disappointment could be concealed: she had appropriated to her own use Jenny's new dress, which Mrs. Wetherbe had bought expressly for this occasion.

"Now you need n't scold, Aunt Wetherbe," she said; "it was really too pretty a thing for that child; and besides, I intend to get her another before long."

"Humph!" said the old lady, "every bit and grain of my comfort's gone," and removing her spectacles she continued silently rubbing them with her apron, till Ellen, who was standing at the window, on tip toe, announced that Jane Stillman was coming "with her changeable silk on."

And Jane Stillman had scarcely taken off her things when Polly Harris was announced. She wore a thin white muslin, and a broad-rimmed Leghorn hat, set off with a profusion of gay ribbons and flowers, though she had ridden on horseback; but in those days riding-dresses were not much in vogue, at least in the neighborhood of Clovernook.

Amid jesting and laughter we took our places at the quilt, while Ellen kept watch at the window and brought up the new comers—sometimes two or three at once.

Mrs. Wetherbe had not been at all exclusive, and her invitations included all, rich and poor, maid and mistress, as far as she was acquainted. So, while some came in calico gowns, with handkerchiefs tied over their heads, walking across the fields, others were attired in silks and satins, and rode on horseback, or were brought in market wagons by their fathers or brothers.

Along the yard fence hung rows of side-saddles, and old work horses and sleek fillies were here and there tied to the branches of the trees, to enjoy the shade, and nibble the grass, while the long-legged colts responded to calls of their dams, capering as they would.

Nimbly ran fingers up and down and across the quilt, and

tongues moved no less nimbly ; and though now and then glances strayed away from the work to the fields, and suppressed titters broke into loud laughter, as, one after another, the young men were seen with axes over their shoulders wending towards the woods, the work went on bravely, and Polly Harris soon called out, clapping her hands in triumph, " Our side is ready to ' roll.' "

Ellen was very busy and very happy, now overseeing the rolling of the quilt, now examining the stitching of some young quilter, and now serving round cakes and cider, and giving to every one kind words and smiles.

" Oh, Ellen," called a young mischief-loving girl, " please let me and Susan Milford go out and play ;" and forthwith they ran down stairs, and it was not till they were presently seen skipping across the field with a basket of cakes and a jug of cider, that their motive was suspected, and then, for the first time that day, gossip found a vent.

" I'd be sorry," said Mehitable Worthington, a tall, oldish girl, " to be seen running after the boys, as some do."

" La, me, Mehitable," answered Ellen, who always had a good word for everybody, " it ain't every one who is exemplary like you, but they are just in fun, you know ; young wild girls, you know."

" I don't know how young they be," answered the spinster, tartly, not much relishing any allusion to age, " but ' birds of a feather flock together,' and them that likes the boys can talk in favor of others that likes them."

" Why, don't you like them ?" asked Hetty Martin, looking up archly.

" Yes, I like them out of my sight," answered Mehitable, stitching fast.

Upon hearing this, the dimples deepened in Hetty's cheeks, and the smile was as visible in her black eyes as on her lips.

" I suppose you wish you had gone along," said Mehitable maliciously, " but I can tell you the young doctor is not there ; he was called away to the country about twelve o'clock, to a man that took sick yesterday." Hetty's face crimsoned a little, but otherwise she manifested no annoyance, and she replied, laughingly, that she hoped he would get back before night.

Mehitable was not thus to be baffled, however ; her heart was overflowing with bitterness, for he whom she called the *young* doctor was, in her estimation, old enough to be a more fitting mate for herself than for Hetty, her successful rival ; and no sooner was she foiled in one direction than she turned in another, revolving still in her mind such sweet and bitter fancies. " I guess he is no such great things of a doctor after all," she said ; and elevating her voice and addressing a maiden on the opposite side of the quilt, she continued, " Did you hear, Elizabeth, about his going to visit Mrs. Mercer, and supposing her attacked with cholera, when in a day or two the disease fell in her arms ?"

This effervescence was followed by a general laughter, during which Hetty went to the window, apparently to disentangle her thread ; but Ellen speedily relieved her by inviting her to go with her below and see about the supper.

" I should think," said Elizabeth, who cordially sympathized with her friend, " the little upstart would be glad to get out of sight ;" and then came a long account of the miserable way in which Hetty's family lived ; " every one knows," they said, " her father drinks up every thing, and for all she looks so fine in her white dress, most likely her mother has earned it by washing or sewing : they say she wants to marry off her young beauty, but I guess it will be hard to do."

When Hetty returned to the garret, her eyes were not so bright as they had been, but her subdued manner made her only the prettier, and all, save the two ancient maidens alluded to, were ready to say or do something for her pleasure. Those uncomfortable persons, however, were not yet satisfied, and tipping their tongues with the unkindest venom of all, they began to talk of a wealthy and accomplished young lady, somewhere, whom it was rumored the doctor was shortly to marry, in spite of little flirtations at home, that some people thought meant something. Very coolly they talked of the mysterious belle's superior position and advantages, as though no humble and loving heart shook under their words as under a storm of arrows.

The young girls came back from the woods, and hearing their reports of the number of choppers, and how many trees were

felled, and cut and corded, the interrupted mirthfulness was restored, though Hetty laughed less joyously, and her elderly rivals maintained a dignified reserve.

Aside from this little episode, all went merry, and from the west window a golden streak of sunshine stretched further and further, till it began to climb the opposite wall, when the quilt was rolled to so narrow a width that but few could work on it to advantage, and Ellen, selecting the most expeditious to complete the task, took with her the rest to assist in preparing the supper, which was done to the music of vigorous strokes echoing and re-echoing from the adjacent woods.

VI.

BENEATH the glimmer of more candles than Mrs. Wetherbe had previously burned at once, the supper was spread, and it was very nice and plentiful; for, more mindful of the wood-chopper's appetites than of Mrs. Randall's notions of propriety, there were at least a dozen broiled chickens, besides other substantial dishes, on the table. I need not attempt a full enumeration of the preserves, cakes, pies, puddings, and other such luxuries, displayed on Mrs. Wetherbe's table, and which it is usual for country housewives to provide with liberal hands on occasions of this sort.

Ellen was very proud, as she took the last survey before sounding the horn for the men-folks; and well she might be so, for it was chiefly through her ingenuity and active agency that every thing was so tastefully and successfully prepared.

Mrs. Randall still made herself officious, but with less assurance than at first. Ellen was in nowise inclined to yield her authority, and indeed almost the entire responsibility rested on her, for poor Mrs. Wetherbe was sadly out of spirits in consequence of the non-appearance of Helph and Jenny. All possible chances of evil were exaggerated by her, and in her simple apprehension there were a thousand dangers which did not in reality exist. In spite of the festivities about her, she sometimes found it impossible to restrain her tears. Likely enough,

she said, the dear boy had got into the canal, or the river, and was drowned, or his critter might have become frightened—there were so many skeerry things in town—and so run away with him, and broke every thing to pieces.

Once or twice she walked to the neighboring hill, in the hope of seeing him in the distance, but in vain—he did not come; the supper could be delayed no longer, and, sitting by the window that overlooked the highway, she continued her anxious watching. Not so the mother; she gave herself little trouble as to whether any accident had befallen her son; perhaps she guessed the cause of his delay, but, so or not, none were gayer than she.

Her beauty had once been of a showy order; she was not yet very much faded; and on this occasion, though her gown was of calico, her hair was tastefully arranged, and she was really the best dressed woman in the assembly. Of this she seemed aware, and she glided into flirtations with the country beaux, in a free and easy way which greatly surprised some of us unsophisticated girls; in fact, one or two elderly bachelors were sorely disappointed, as well as amazed, when they understood that the lady from town was none other than Help's mother! I cannot remember a time when my spirits had much of the careless buoyancy which makes youth so blessed, and at this time I was little more than a passive observer, for which reason, perhaps, I remember more correctly the incidents of the evening.

The table was spread among the trees in the door-yard, which was illuminated with tallow candles, in very simple paper lanterns; the snowy linen waved in the breeze, and the fragrance of tea and coffee was, for the time, pleasanter than that of flowers; but flowers were in requisition, and such as were in bloom, large or small, bright or pale, were gathered to adorn tresses of every hue, curled and braided with the most elaborate care. At a later hour, some of them were transferred to the buttonholes of favored admirers.

What an outbreak of merriment there was, when, at twilight, down the hill that sloped against the woods, came the gay band of choppers, with coats swung on their arms, and axes gleam-

ing over their shoulders. Every thing became irresistibly provocative of enjoyment, and from every window and every nook that could be occupied by the quilters, went mingled jests and laughter.

The quilt was finished, but Mehitable and Elizabeth remained close within the chamber, whether to contemplate the completed work, or to regale themselves with each other's accumulations of scandal, I shall not attempt to guess.

A large tin lantern was placed on the top of the pump, and beside it was a wash-tub filled with water, which was intended as a general resort for the ablutions of the young men. Besides the usual roller-towel, which hung by the kitchen door, there were two or three extra ones attached to the boughs of the apple-tree, by the well; and the bar of yellow soap, procured for the occasion, lay on a shingle, conveniently near, while a paper comb-case dangled from a bough betwixt the towels.

These toilet facilities were deemed by some of the party altogether superfluous, and their wooden pocket-combs and handkerchiefs were modestly preferred. During the fixing up the general gayety found vent in a liberal plashing and dashing of water on each other, as also in wrestling bouts, and contests of mere words, at the conclusion of which the more aristocratic of the gentlemen resumed their coats, while others, disdainng ceremony, remained, not only at the supper but during the entire evening, in their shirt sleeves, and with silk handkerchiefs bound around their waists, as is the custom with reapers.

"Come, boys!" called Ellen, who assumed a sort of motherly tone and manner toward all the company, "what *does* make you stay away so?"

The laughter among the girls subsided, as they arranged themselves in a demure row along one side of the table, and the jests fell at once to a murmur as the boys found their places opposite. "Now, don't all speak at once," said Ellen: "how will you have your coffee, Quincy?"

Mr. Quincy Adams Claverel said he was not particular: he would take a little sugar and a little cream if she had them handy, if not, it made no difference.

"Tea or coffee, Mehitable?" she said next; but the young

woman addressed did not drink either—coffee made her drowsy-like, and if she should drink a cup of tea, she should not sleep a wink all night.

Elizabeth said, Mehitt was just like herself—she drank a great deal, and strong. The jesting caused much laughter, and indeed the mirth was quite irrepressible—on the part of the girls, because of the joyous occasion, and their greater excitability, and on that of the young men, because of the green and yellow twisted bottles that had glistened that afternoon in the ivy which grew along the woods: even more for this, perhaps, than for the bright eyes before them.

One said she drank her tea “naked;” another, that Ellen might give her half a cup first rate—she would rather have a little and have it good, than have a great deal and not have it good. And in this she meant not the slightest offence or insinuation.

“I hope,” said Mr. Wetherbe, speaking in a diffident voice, and pushing back his thin gray hair, “I hope you will none of you think hard of my woman for not coming to sarve you herself—she is in the shadder of trouble, but she as well as myself thanks you all for the good turn you have done us, and wishes you to make yourselves at home, and frolic as long as you are a mind to;” and the good man retired to the house to give his wife such comfort as he could.

The shadow of their sorrow did not rest long on the group at the table, and the laughter, for its temporary suppression, was louder than before. There were one or two exceptions, however, among the gay company. Poor Hetty Martin, as her eyes ran along the line of smiling faces and failed of the object of their search, felt them droop heavily, and her smiles and words were alike forced. Between her and all the pleasures of the night stood the vision of a fair lady, conjured by the evil words of Mehitable and Elizabeth, and scarcely would the tears stay back any longer, when her light-hearted neighbors rallied her as to the cause of her dejection. At the sound of a hoofstroke on the highway, her quick and deep attention betrayed the interest she felt in the absent doctor.

“Why hast thou no music on thy tongue, fair maiden?” asked a pale, slender young man, sitting near by; and looking

up, her eyes encountered the blue and melancholy ones of a young cooper, who had lately neglected the adze for the pen, in the use of which he was not likely to obtain much facility. His flaxen hair hung in curls down his shoulders; he wore his collar reversed, and a sprig of cedar in the buttonhole of his vest, which was of red and yellow colors; otherwise his dress was not fantastical, though he presented the appearance of one whose inclinations outstripped his means, perhaps. A gold chain attached to a silver watch, and a bracelet of hair on the left wrist, fastened with a small tinsel clasp, evinced that his tastes had not been cultivated with much care, though his face attested some natural refinement. He had recently published in the "Ladies' Garland," two poems, entitled and opening in this way :

"ALONE.

"For every one on earth but me
 There is some sweet, sweet low tone;
 Death and the grave are all I see,
 I am alone, alone, alone!"

"ON THE DEATH OF AN INFANT.

"A little while the lovely flower
 To cheer our earthly home was given,
 But oh, it withered in an hour,
 And death transplanted it to heaven."

These very original and ingenious verses he took from his pocket and submitted to the critical acumen of Hetty, saying he should really take it as a great favor if she would tell him frankly what her opinion was of the repetitions in the last line of the first stanza, as also what she thought of the idea of comparing a child to a flower, and of Death's transplanting it from earth to heaven.

Hetty knew nothing of poetry, but she possessed an instinctive sense of politeness, and something of tact, as indeed most women do, and shaped her answer to conceal her ignorance, and at the same time flatter her auditor. This so inflated his vanity, that he informed her confidentially that he was just then busily engaged in the collection of his old letters, for nobody knew, he said, what publicity they might come to, from his distinguished position as a literary man.

In his apprehensions and cautious endeavors the lady concurred, and he resolved at once to put in the "Ladies' Garland" an advertisement, requesting all persons who might have any letters or other writings of his, to return them to the address of P. Joel Springer, forthwith. High above the praises of his simple listener, he heard sounding the blessed award of the future time, and the echoes of his unrequited sorrows went moaning through the farther parts of the world.

Who of us are much wiser? for on bases as unsubstantial have we not at one time or another rested some gorgeous fabric whose turrets were to darken among the stars. Time soon enough strips the future of its fantastic beauty, drives aside the softening mists, and reveals to us the hard and sharp realities of things.

But the guests were generally merry, and they did ample justice to the viands before them, partly because they had excellent appetites, and partly in answer to the urgent entreaties of Ellen, though she constantly depreciated her culinary skill, and reiterated again and again that she had nothing very inviting. But her praises were on every tongue, and her hands were more than busy with the much service required of them, which nevertheless added to her happiness; and as she glided up and down the long table, dispensing the tea and coffee, snuffing the candles, or urging the most bashful to be served with a little of this or that, just to please her, she was the very personification of old-fashioned country hospitality.

Every one liked Ellen, for she was one of those who always forget themselves when there is any thing to remember for others.

At length, one of the young men who had been in communication with the bottles, mentioned as lying cool among the ivy during the afternoon, protested that he would bring a rail to serve as a pry, unless his companions desisted from further eating of their own free will.

"That is right, Bill," called out one kindred in bluntness and coarseness, "here is a fellow wants choking off."

"I own up to that," said another, "I have eaten about a bushel, I guess."

"If I had a dollar for every mouthful you have eaten," said one, "I wouldn't thank nobody for being kin to me."

"Well," answered the person thus addressed, "if I have busted a couple of buttons off my vest, I don't think you are a fellow that will be likely to let much bread mould."

"La, how you young men do run on," interposed Ellen, neither surprised nor offended at the coarse freedom of the jests; and amid obstreperous laughter the party arose, and many of the young men resorted again to the whiskey bottles, for the sake of keeping up their spirits, as they said, after which, with lighted cigars in their mouths, they locked arms with the ladies, and talked sentiment in the moonlight as they strolled, in separate pairs, preparatory to assembling in the garret for the usual order of exercises prescribed for such occasions.

Meantime the candles were mostly carried thither by certain forlorn maidens, who declared themselves afraid of the night air, and from the open windows rung out old hymns, which, if not altogether in keeping with the general feeling and conduct of the occasion, constituted the only musical resources of the party, and afforded as much enjoyment perhaps as the rarest songs to beauties flecked with diamonds, when met for gayety or for display in marble halls.

Hidden by shadows, and sitting with folded arms on a top-most fence-rail, P. Joel Springer listened alone to the dirge-like sighing of the wind, and the dismal hootings of the owl. And our good hostess, the while, could be prevailed on neither to eat nor sleep, even though her excellent spouse assured her that Helph was safe enough, and that she knew right well how often he had spent the night from home in his young days, without meeting any accident or misfortune; but the dear old lady refused to be comforted; and every unusual noise, to her fancy, was somebody bringing Helph home dead. Mr. Wetherbe had, the previous autumn, "missed a land" in the sowing of his wheat field, and that, she had always heard say, was a sure sign of death.

In couples, already engaged for the first play, the strollers came in at last, and there was a tempest of laughter and frolic, which fairly shook the house. The customs which prevailed,

even a dozen years ago, in Clovernook and other rural neighborhoods of the west, are now obsolete; but I do not in any degree overdraw the manners of the period in which this quilting occurred at Mrs. Wetherbe's. Some embarrassment followed the assembling in the garret under the blaze of so many candles, but when it was whispered that Jo Allen, the most genial and true-hearted of them all, had just been taken home on horseback, and that Abner Gibbs, for his better security, had ridden behind him, there were renewed peals of laughter, and no one seemed to doubt that such indulgence and misfortune were a legitimate subject of merriment. Others, it was more privately suggested, had also taken a drop too much, and would not be in condition to see the girls "safe home" that night.

"Come," said Ellen, as she entered the room, last of all, having been detained after the fulfilment of her other duties by kindly endeavoring to induce Jo Allen to drink some new milk, as an antidote to the Monongahela, "come, why don't some of you start a play?" But all protested they didn't know a single thing, and insisted that Ellen should herself lead the amusements.

Hunting the Key being proposed, the whole party was formed into a circle, with hands joined to hands, and directed to move rapidly round and round, during which process, a key was attached to the coat of some unsuspecting individual, who was then selected to find it, being informed that it was in the keeping of one of the party. The circle resumed its gyrations, and the search commenced by examining pockets and forcing apart interlocked hands, a procedure relished infinitely—all except the inquirer after the key well knowing where it might be found.

Soon all diffidence vanished, and

"O, sister Phœbe, how merry were we,
The night we sat under the juniper-tree,"

rung across the meadows, and was followed by other rude rhymes, sung as accompaniments to the playing.

"Uncle Johnny's sick a-bed—
For his blisses, send him, misses,
Three good wishes, three good kisses,
And a loaf of gingerbread,"

was received with every evidence of admiration—an exchange

of kisses being required, of course. Then came the *Selling of Pawns*, and the *Paying of Penalties*, with requisitions no less agreeable to all parties.

“My love and I will go,
And my love and I will go,
And we'll settle on the banks
Of the pleasant O-hi-ô,”

was enacted by each beau's choosing a partner, and promenading “to the tune of a slight flirtation.” And *Blind Man's Buff*, and *Hold Fast all I Give You*, and half a dozen other winter evening's entertainments, then regarded as not undeserving the best skill of country gentlemen and ladies, though now for the most part resigned everywhere to the younger boys and girls, were played with the most genuine enjoyment.

The night wore on to the largest hours, and for a concluding sport was proposed *Love and War*. In the centre of the room, two chairs were placed, some three feet apart, over which a quilt was carefully spread, so as seemingly to form a divan, and when a lady was seated on each chair, the gentlemen withdrew to the lower apartments, to be separately suffered to enter again when all should be in order. A rap on the door announced an applicant for admission, who was immediately conducted by the master of ceremonies to the treacherous divan, and presented to the ladies, being asked at the same time whether he preferred love or war? and, no matter which was his choice, he was requested to sit between the two, when they rose, and by so doing, caused their innocent admirer to be precipitated to the floor—a *denouement* which was sure to be followed by the most boisterous applause.

“I guess,” said Mehitable, whispering in a congratulatory way to Elizabeth, “that Hetty will have to get home the best way she can: I haven't seen anybody ask her for her company.” But just then there was a little bustle at the door, and a murmur of congratulations and regrets, over which was heard the exclamation, “Just in time to see the cat die!” Mehitable raised herself on tiptoe, and discovered that the doctor had at length arrived. A moment afterwards he stood beside Hetty, who was blushing and smiling with the most unfeigned satis-

faction; but in answer to some whispered words of his she shook her head, a little sadly, as it seemed, and the doctor's brow darkened with a frown. Of this, Mr. P. Joel Springer was not unobservant, and coming forward, reluctantly, as he said, relinquished the pleasure he had expected—concluding his poetical and gallant speech with, “Adieu, fair maiden, alone I take my solitary way, communing with the stars.”

Hetty and the doctor were the next to go, and then came a general breaking up; horses were saddled, and sleepy colts, leaving the places they had warmed in the grass, followed slowly the gallants, who walked beside the ladies as they rode. There were some, too, who took their way across the fields, and others through the dusty highway, all mated as pleased them, except Mehitable and Elizabeth, who were both mounted on one horse, comforting each other with assurances that the young men were very great fools.

And so, in separate pairs, they wended their ways homeward, each gentlemen with the slippers of his lady-love in his pocket, and her mammoth comb in his hat.

VII.

WE will now return to Helphenstein, and give some particulars of the night as it passed with him. It was near noon when he drew the reins before the house of his father, with a heart full of happy anticipations for the afternoon and evening; but his bright dream was destined quickly to darken away to the soberest reality of his life. His father met him in the hall with a flushed face, and taking his hand with some pretence of cordiality, said in an irritable tone, as though he had not the slightest idea of the nature of his errand, “Why, my son, what in the devil's name has brought you home?”

He then gave a doleful narrative of the discomforts and privations he had endured in the few days of the absence of Mrs. Randall, for whom he either felt, or affected to feel, the greatest love and admiration, whenever she was separated from him; though his manner towards her, except during these spasmodic affections, was extremely neglectful and harsh.

“What is a man to do, my son Helph?” he said; “your poor father has n’t had a meal of victuals fit for a dog to eat, since your mother went into the country: how is she, poor woman? I think I’ll just get into your buggy, and run out and bring your mother home; things will all go to ruin in two days more—old black Kitty aint worth a cuss, and Jenny aint worth another.”

And this last hit he seemed to regard as most especially happy, in its bearing upon Helph, whose opinions of Jenny by no means coincided with his own; but his coarse allusion to her, so far from warping his judgment against the poor girl, made him for the time oblivious of every thing else, and he hastened in search of her.

“Lord, honey, I is glad to see you!” exclaimed Aunt Kitty, looking up from her work in the kitchen: for she was kneading bread, with the tray in her lap, in consequence of rheumatic pains which prevented her from standing much on her feet.

“What in the world is the matter?” asked Helph, anxiously, as he saw her disability.

“Noffin much,” she said, smiling; “my feet are like to bust wid the inflammations rheumatis—dat’s all. But I’s a poor sinful critter,” she continued, “and de flesh pulls mighty hard on de sperrit, sometimes, when I ought to be thinkin’ ob de mornin’ ober Jordan.”

And having assured him that she would move her old bones as fast as she could, and prepare the dinner, she directed him where to find Jenny, saying, “Go ’long wid you, and you ’ll find her a seamsterin’ up stairs, and never mind de ’stress of an old darkie like me.”

As he obeyed, he heard her calling on the Lord to bless him, for that he was the best young master of them all. Poor kind-hearted creature! she did not then or ever, as others heard, ask any blessing for herself.

In one end of the long low garret, unplastered, and comfortless, from the heat in summer and the cold in winter, there was a cot bed, a dilapidated old trunk, a broken work-stand, a small cracked looking-glass, and a strip of faded carpet. By courtesy, this was called Jenny’s room; and here, seated on a chair with-

out any back, sat the maiden, stitching shirts for her adopted brothers, when the one who, from some cause or other, never called her sister, appeared suddenly before her. Smiling, she ran forward to meet him, but suddenly checking herself, she blushed deeply, and the exclamation, "Dear Helph!" that rose to her lips, was subdued and formalized to simple "Helphenstein." The cheek that was smooth when she saw him last, was darkened into manhood now, and her arm remained passive, that had always been thrown lovingly about his neck; but in this new timidity she appeared only the more beautiful, in the eyes of her admirer, and if she declined the old expressions of fondness, he did not.

The first feeling of pleasure and surprise quickly subsided, on her part, into one of pain and embarrassment, when she remembered her torn and faded dress, and the disappointment that awaited him.

"Well, Jenny," he said, when the first greeting was over, "I have come for you—and you must get ready as soon as possible."

Poor child! she turned away her face to hide the tears that would not be kept down, as she answered, "I cannot go—I have nothing to get ready."

And then inquiries were made about the new dress of which he had been informed, and though for a time Jenny hesitated, he drew from her at last the confession that it had been appropriated by his mother, under a promise of procuring for her another when she should have made a dozen shirts to pay for it. An exclamation that evinced little filial reverence fell from his lips, and then as he soothed her grief, and sympathized with her, his boyish affection was deepened more and more by pity.

"Never mind, Jenny," he said, in tones of simple and truthful earnestness, "wear any thing to-day, but go—for my sake go; I like you just as well in an old dress as in a new one."

Jenny had been little used to kindness, and from her lonely and sad heart, gratitude found expression in hot and thick-coming tears.

Certainly, she would like of all things to go to the quilting, and the more, perhaps, that Helph was come for her; but in no

time of her life had poverty seemed so painful a thing. During the past week she had examined her scanty wardrobe repeatedly; her shoes, too, were down at the heels, and out at the toes; to go decently was quite impossible, and yet, she could not suppress the desire, nor refrain from thinking, over and over, if this dress were not quite so much faded, or if that were not so short and outgrown—and then, if she had money to buy a pair of shoes, and could borrow a neck-ribbon and collar!—in short, if things were a little better than they were she might go, and perhaps, in the night, her deficiencies would be less noticeable.

But in the way of all her thinking and planning lay the forbidding *if*; and in answer to the young man's entreaties, she could only cry and shake her head.

She half wished he would go away, and at the same time feared he would go; she avoided looking at the old run-down slippers she was wearing, as well as at her patched gown, in the vain hope that thus he would be prevented from seeing them; and so, half sorry and half glad, half ashamed and half honestly indignant, she sat—the work fallen into her lap, and the tears now and then dropping, despite her frequent winking, and vain efforts to smile.

At length Helph remembered that his horse had not been cared for; and looking down from the little window, he found, to his further annoyance, that both horse and buggy were gone, and so his return home indefinitely delayed.

“I wish to Heaven,” he angrily said, turning towards Jenny, “you and I had a home somewhere beyond the reach of the impositions practised on us by Mr. and Mrs. Randall!”

The last words were in a bitter but subdued tone; and it was thus, in resentment and sorrow, that the love-making of Helph and Jenny began.

VIII.

Down the thinly-wooded hills, west of the great city, reached the long shadows of the sunset. The streets were crowded with mechanics seeking their firesides—in one hand the little

tin pail in which dinner had been carried, and in the other a toy for the baby, perhaps, or a pound of tea or of meat for the good wife.

The smoke curled upward from the chimneys of the suburban districts, and little rustic girls and boys were seen in all directions, hurrying homeward with their arms full of shavings; old women, too, with their bags of rags, betook themselves somewhere—Heaven only knows whether they had any homes, or where they went—but at any rate, with backs bending under their awful burdens, they turned into lanes and alleys, and disappeared; the tired dray-horses walked faster and nimbler as they smelled the oats in the manger; and here and there, in the less frequented streets, bands of school-boys and girls drove their hoops, or linked their arms and skipped joyously up and down the pavement; while now and then a pair of older children strolled, in happiness, for that they dreamed of still more blessed times to come. The reflections of beautiful things in the future, make the present bright, and it is well for us, since the splendor fades from our approach, and it is only in reveries of hope that we find ourselves in rest, or crowned with beauty.

We have need to thank thee, oh our Father, that thou hast given us the power of seeing visions and dreaming dreams! Earth, with all the glory of its grass and all the splendor of its flowers, were dreary and barren and desolate, but for that divine insanity which shapes deformity into grace, and darkness into light. How the low roof is lifted up on the airy pillars of thought, and the close dark walls expanded and made enchanting with the pictures of the imagination! And best of all, by this blessed power the cheeks that are colorless, and the foreheads that are wrinkled by time, retain in our eyes the freshness and the smoothness of primal years; to us they cannot grow old, for we see

“Poured upon the locks of age,
The beauty of immortal youth.”

Life's sharp realities press us sore, sometimes, and but for the unsubstantial bases on which we build some new anticipations, we should often rush headlong to the dark.

IX.

THEY were sitting together, Help and Jenny, with the twilight deepening around them, speaking little, thinking much, and gazing through the long vistas open to the sunshine, and brighter than the western clouds. But they did not think of the night that was falling, they did not hear the wind soughing among the hot walls and roofs, and prophesying storm and darkness.

Suddenly appeared before them a miserably clad little boy, the one mentioned in a previous chapter as coming for money, and now, after a moment's hesitation, on seeing a stranger, he laid his head in the lap of Jenny, and cried aloud. Stooping over him, she smoothed back his hair and kissed his forehead; and in choked and broken utterances he made known his mournful errand: little Willie was very sick, and Jenny was wanted at home.

Few preparations were required. Help would not hear of her going alone; and in the new and terrible fear awakened by the message of the child, all her pride vanished, and she did not remonstrate, though she knew the wretchedness of poverty that would be bared before him. Folding close in hers the hand of her little brother, and with tears dimming her eyes, she silently led the way to the miserable place occupied by her family.

It was night, and the light of a hundred windows shone down upon them, when, turning to her young protector, she said, in a voice trembling with both shame and sorrow, perhaps, "This is the place." It was a large dingy building, five stories high and nearly a hundred feet long, very roughly but substantially built of brick. It was situated in the meanest suburb of the city, on an unpaved alley, and opposite a ruinous graveyard, and it had been erected on the cheapest possible plan, with especial reference to the poorest class of the community. Scarcely had the wealthy proprietor an opportunity of posting

bills announcing rooms to let, before it was all occupied; and with its miserable accommodations, and crowded with people who were almost paupers, it was a perfect hive of misery. Porch above porch, opening out on the alley, served as door-yards to the different apartments—places for the drying of miserable rags—play grounds for the children—and look-outs, for the decrepit old women, on sunny afternoons.

Dish-water, washing suds, and every thing else, from tea and coffee grounds to all manner of picked bones and other refuse, were dashed down from these tiers of balconies to the ground below, so that a more filthy and in all ways unendurable spectacle can scarcely be imagined, than was presented in the vicinity of this money-making device, this miserable house refuge.

Leaning against the balusters, smoking and jesting, or quarreling and swearing, were groups of men, who might be counted by tens and twenties; and the feeble and querulous tones of woman, now and then, were heard among them, or from within the wretched chambers. A little apart from one of these groups of ignorant disputants sat an old crone combing her gray hair by the light of a tallow candle, other females were ironing or washing dishes, while others lolled listlessly and gracelessly about, listening to, and sometimes taking part in, the vile or savage or pitiable conversations.

Children, half naked, were playing in pools of stagnant water, and now and then pelting each other with heads of fishes, and with slimy bones, caught up at random; and one group, more vicious than the others, were diverting themselves by throwing stones at an old cat that lay half in and half out of a puddle, responding, by feeble struggles, as the rough missiles struck against her, and here and there were going on such fierce contests of brutish force as every day illustrate the melancholy truth that the poor owe so much of their misery to the indulgence of their basest passions, rather than to any causes necessarily connected with poverty.

Depravity, as well as poverty, had joined itself to that miserable congregation. Smoke issued thick from some of the chimneys, full of the odors of mutton and coffee, and as these mixed with the vile stenches that thickened the atmosphere

near the scene, Helph, who had been accustomed to the free air of the country, fresh with the scents of the hay-fields and orchards, found it hard to suppress the exclamation of disgust and loathing that rose to his lips, when he turned with Jenny into the alley, and his senses apprehended in a twinkling what I have been so long in describing.

Up the steep and narrow wooden stairs, flight after flight, they passed, catching through the open doors of the different apartments glimpses of the same squalid character—greasy smoking stoves, dirty beds, ragged women and children, with here and there dozing dogs, or men prostrate on the bare floors—either from weariness or drunkenness—and meagerly-spread tables, and cradles, and creeping, and crying, and sleeping babies, all in close proximity.

From the third landing they turned into a side door, and such a picture presented itself as the young man had never seen hitherto: the windows were open, but the atmosphere was close, and had a disagreeable smell of herbs and medicines; a single candle was lighted, and though the shapes of things were not distinctly brought out, enough was visible to indicate the extreme poverty and wretchedness of the family.

It was very still in the room, for the children, with instinctive fear, were huddled together in the darkest corner, and spoke in whispers when they spoke at all; and the mother, patient and pale and wan, sat silent by the bed, holding the chubby sunburned hands of her dying little boy.

“Oh, mother,” said Jenny, treading softly and speaking low. Tears filled the poor woman’s mild blue eyes, and her lips trembled as she answered, “It is almost over—he does not know me any more.”

And forgetting, in the blind fondness of the mother, the darkness and the sorrow and the pain, and worst of all, the contagion of evil example, from which he was about to be free, she buried her face in her hands, and shook with convulsive agony. All the deprivation and weariness and despair, that had sometimes made her, with scarce a consciousness of what she was doing, implore the coming of death, or annihilation, were in this new sorrow as nothing: with her baby laughing in her

arms, as he had been but the last week, she would be strong to front the most miserable fate.

Tie after tie may be unbound from the heart, while our steps climb the rough steep that goes up to power, for the sweet household affections unwind themselves more and more as the distance widens between aspiration and contentment, and over the tide that sweeps into the shining haven of ambition there is no crossing back. The brow that has felt the shadow of the laurel, will not be comforted by the familiar kisses of love; and struggling to the heights of fame, the rumble of clods against the coffin of some mate of long ago, comes softened of its awfulest terror; but where the heart, unwarped from its natural yearnings, presses close, till its throbbings bring up echoes from the stony bottom of the grave, and when, from the heaped mound, reaches a shadow that darkens the world for the humble eyes that may never look up any more—these keep the bleeding affections, these stay the mourning that the great cannot understand. Where the wave is narrow, the dropping of even a pebble of hope sends up the swelling circles till the whole bosom of the stream is agitated; but in the broader sea, they lessen and lessen till they lose themselves in a border of light. And over that little life, moaning itself away in the dim obscurity of its birth-chamber, fell bitterer tears, and bowed hearts aching with sharper pains, than they may ever know whose joys are not alike as simple and as few. "Oh, Willie, dear little Willie," sobbed Jenny, folding her arms about him and kissing him over and over, "speak to me once, only once more!" Her tears were hot on his whitening face, but he did not lift his heavily-drooping eyes, nor turn towards her on the pillow. The children fell asleep, one on another, where they sat. In the presence of the strong healthy man they were less afraid, and nestling close together, gradually forgot that little Willie was not among them—and so came the good gift which God giveth his beloved in nights of sorrow.

In some chink of the wall the cricket chirped to itself the same quick short sound, over and over, and about the candle circled and fluttered the gray-winged moths, heedless of their perished fellows, and on the table stood a painted bucket half

filled with tepid water, and beside it a brown jug and broken glass.

Now and then the mother and daughter exchanged anxious looks, as a footstep was heard on the stairs, but when it turned aside to some one of the adjoining chambers, they resumed their watching, not speaking their hopes or fears, if either had been awakened.

From the white dome of St. Peter's sounded the silvery chime of the midnight ; the sick child had fallen asleep an hour before, but now his eyes opened full on his mother, and his white lips worked faintly ; "Jenny," she said, in a tone of low but fearful distinctness—for with her head on the bedside she was fast dozing into forgetfulness—"he is going—going home."

"Home," he repeated, sweetly, and that was the last word he ever said.

The young man came forward hastily—the soft light of a setting star drifted across the pillow, and in its pale radiance he laid the hands together, and smoothed the death-dampened curls.

X.

"OH, my children!" cried Mrs. Mitchel, bending over the huddled sleepers, and calling them one by one to awake, "your poor little brother is dead—he will never play with you any more."

"Let them sleep," said Jenny, whose grief was less passionate, "they cannot do him any good now, and the time will come soon enough that they cannot sleep."

"I know it, oh, I know it!" she sobbed, "but this silence seems so terrible ; I want them to wake and speak to me, and yet," she added, after a moment, "I know not what I want. I only know that my little darling will not wake in the morning. Oh," she continued, "he was the loveliest and the best of all—he never cried when he was hurt, like other children, nor gave me trouble in any way ;" and she then recounted, feeding her sorrow with the memory, all his endearing little ways, from

his first conscious smiling to the last word he had spoken; numbered over the little coats he had worn, and the color of them, saying how pretty he had thought the blue one, and how proud he had been of the pink one with the ruffled sleeves, and how often she had lifted him up to the broken looking-glass to see the baby, as he called himself, for that he always wanted to see the curls she made for him. Sometimes she had crossed him; she wished now she had never done so; and sometimes she had neglected him when she had thought herself too busy to attend to his little wants; but now that was all irreparable, she blamed herself harshly, and thought how much better she might have done.

The first day of his sickness she had scolded him for being fretful, and put him roughly aside when he clung about her knees, and hindered the work on which their bread depended; she might have known that he was ailing, she said, for that he was always good when well, and so should have neglected every thing else for him; if she had done so in time, if she had tried this medicine or that, if she had kept his head bathed, one night, when she chanced to fall asleep, and waked with his calling her "mother," and saying the fire was burning him; in short, if she had done any thing she had not done, it might have been better, her darling Willie might have got well.

"The dear baby," she said, taking his cold, stiffening feet in her hand, "he never had any shoes, and I promised so often to get them."

"He does not need them now," interposed Jenny.

"I know it, I know it," she answered, and yet she could not subdue this grief that her boy was dead, and had never had the shoes that he thought it would be so fine to have.

"Oh, mother, do not cry so," Jenny said; "I will come home and we will love each other better, we who are left, and work together and try to live till God takes us where he has taken the baby—home, home!" but in repeating his dying words, her voice faltered, and hiding her face in the lap of her mother, she gave way to agony that till then she had kept down.

But, alas, it was not even their poor privilege to weep uninterruptedly, and, shuddering, they grew still when, slowly and

heavily climbing the narrow and dark stairs, sounded the well-known step of the drunken husband and father. A minute the numb and clumsy hand fumbled about the door-latch, and then with a hiccup, and a half articulate oath, the man, if man he should be called, staggered and stumbled into the room.

His dull brain apprehended the case but imperfectly, and seeing his wife, he supposed her to be waiting for him, as he had found her a thousand times before ; and mixing something of old fondness with a coarse and brutal familiarity, he put his arm about her neck, saying, " Why the hell are you waiting for me, Nancy, when you know them fellers won't never let me come home ? Daughter," he continued, addressing Jenny, " just hand me that jug, that's a good girl, I feel faint like," and putting his hand to his temple, where the blood was oozing from a recent cut, he finished his speech with an oath.

" Hush, father, hush," beseechingly said the girl, pointing to the bed ; but probably supposing she meant to indicate it as a resting-place for him, he reeled towards and half fell upon it, one arm thrown across the dead child, and the blood dripping from his bruised and distorted face, muttering curses and threatening revenge against the comrades who, he said deprecatingly, made him drink when he told them he wanted to go home, d—n them ! In such imprecations and excuses he fell into a dreadful unconsciousness.

Not knowing whom else to call, Helphenstein summoned Aunt Kitty, and with the aid of his arm and a crutch, but more than all leaning on her own zeal to do good, she came, and in her kindly but rude fashion comforted the mourners, partly by pictures of the glory " ober Jordan," and partly by narratives of the terriblest sufferings she had known, as taking the child on her knees she dressed it for the grave, decently as might be.

" She had lost a baby, too," she said, " and when her breasts were aching with the milk, she felt as if she wanted to be gwine to it wharever it were, for that she couldn't 'xist without it no ways, but she did, and arter a while she got over it. Another son," she said, " was spared to grow up and do a heap of hard work ; he was away from her a piece down the river, and kep a liberty stable, and at last, when he had saved a'most

money enough, to buy himself, a vile-tempered critter kicked out his brains, and dat ar was his last. And so," said Aunt Kitty, "it was wust for de one dat growed up, arter all."

The stars grew motionless, the heavy clouds loomed in sombre and far-reaching masses, and the night went by drearily, wearily, painfully, till gray began to divide the heavy darkness, and through the gaps of the thick woods away over the eastern hills, the chilly river of morning light came pouring in.

XI.

THE funeral was over, and it was almost night when Mr. Randall returned from the country, having availed himself more largely of the horse and buggy than he at first intended, by taking several widely separate points, where errands called him, in his route. Mrs. Randall came too, and with her the great basket, but not empty, as she had taken it.

The poor animal had been driven mercilessly, and, dripping with sweat, and breathing hard, gladly turned to his young master and rubbed his face against his caressing hand.

It was no very cordial greeting which the son gave the parents, and they in turn were little pleased with him, for any special liking is not to be concealed even from the commonest apprehension, and the attachment of Helph and Jenny had lately become an unquestionable fact.

"What in the devil's name are we to do with that girl, mother? she don't earn her salt," said Mr. Randall.

Their first inquiries on entering the house had been for Jenny, and Helph, with provoking purpose, had simply said she was not at home. Words followed words, sharper and faster, until Mr. Randall, with an affirmation that need not be repeated, said he would suffer his house to be her home no longer; if she could not be trusted with the care of it for a day, she was not worthy to have any better place than the pig-sty in which her parents lived.

"I always told you," interposed the wife, "that girl was a mean, low-lived thing; and it was none of my doings, the taking

her from the washing-tub, where she belongs, and making her as good as any of us. I tell you them kind of folks must be kept down, and I always told you so."

"You always told me great things," said the husband, coloring with rage; "what in the devil's name is there you don't tell me, or you don't know, I wonder!"

"Well, sir," she answered, speaking with a subdued sullenness, "there is one thing I did not know till it was too late."

With all his blustering, Mr. Randall was a coward and craven at heart, and turning to the sideboard he imbibed a deeper draught of brandy than usual, diverting his indignation to Jenny, whom he called a poor creep-louse, that had infested his home long enough.

"If you were not my father," answered Helph, who had inherited a temper capable of being ungovernably aroused, "I'd beat you with as good a will as I ever beat iron to a horse-shoe."

"What in the devil's name is the girl to you, I'd like to know?"

"Before you are a month older you will find out what she is to me," replied the youth, drawing himself up to his full height, and passing his hand proudly across his beard.

"My son, your father has a great deal to irritate him, and he is hasty sometimes, but let bygones be bygones; but what business had the girl away?"

And with a trembling hand, Mr. Randall presented a glass of brandy as a kind of peace-offering to his son. But, for the first time in his life, the young man refused; he had seen its brutalizing effects the previous night, saw them then, and had determined to be warned in time. In answer to the question respecting Jenny, however, he related briefly and simply the melancholy event which had called and still detained her from her usual employments.

"A good thing," said Mr. Randall; "one brat less to be taken care of; but that's no reason the girl should stay away; if the young one is dead, she can't bring it to life, nor dig a hole to put it in, either."

Mrs. Randall, having adjusted her lace cap, and ordered

Aunt Kitty to keep the basket out of the reach of the big boys, and to remember and not eat all there was in it herself, ascended the stairs to ascertain how Jenny had progressed with her shirt-making.

Such family altercations, it is to be hoped, are exceedingly rare; but I have not exaggerated the common experience of these specimens of the "self-made aristocracy." Ignorant, passionate, vulgar—nothing elevated them from the lowest grade of society but money, and this was in most cases an irresistible influence in their favor.

In all public meetings, especially those having any reference to the poor, Mr. Randall was apt to be a prominent personage; on more occasions than one he had set down large figures for charitable purposes; in short, his position was that of an eminently liberal and honorable citizen, when, in fact, a man guilty of more little meannesses and knaveries, a man in all ways so debased, could scarcely anywhere be found. The drunkard whom he affected to despise had often a less depraved appetite than his own, and though he did not reel and stagger and lie in the gutter, it was only an habitual indulgence in strong drinks which rendered him superior to their more debilitating effects. He lay on the sofa at home, and swore and grumbled and hiccuped, and drank, and drank, and drank. His children did not respect him, and how could they, when the whole course of his conduct was calculated to inspire disgust and loathing in every heart endowed with any natural ideas of right. The two bullying and beardless sons who had grown up under his immediate influence, were precociously wicked, and possessed scarcely a redeeming quality, and the younger ones were treading close in their footsteps.

Helph, however, had some of the more ennobling attributes of manhood. He was blunt and plain and rustic to be sure, but he was frank and honest and sincere, industrious, sober, and affectionate, alike averse to the exactions and impositions of his mother, and the pitiful penuriousness of his father. He was neither ashamed of the toil-hardened hands that earned his daily bread, nor proud because his mother's earrings dangled to her shoulders, or that her dress was gay and expensive,

or that his father was president of a bank, and lived in a fine house. Independent and straightforward, and for the most part saving enough, so that he might give himself some trouble to find a lost shilling, yet where he saw actual need, he would give it, with as much pleasure as he had in finding it.

Toward evening Jenny returned home, pale and sad and suffering, but there were no little kindnesses, nor any softness of word or manner to greet her ; she was required at once to resume her work, and admonished to retrieve lost time, for that crying would only make her sick, and do no good ; Helph, however, subdued his bluff gentleness into tenderness never manifested for her before, and his occasional smile, through tears, was an over payment for the cruelty of the rest.

Mr. Randall and his wife began to be seriously alarmed, lest a hasty marriage of the parties should bring on themselves irretrievable disgrace. A long consultation was held, therefore, and it was resolved to postpone, by pretended acquiescence, any clandestine movement, until time could be gained to frustrate hopelessly the design which was evidently meditated by the son.

“ We have been talking of our own love,” said they ; “ how hard we should have thought it to be parted ; and seeing that you really are attached to each other, we oppose no obstacle ; a little delay is all we ask : Jenny shall go to school for a year, and you, Helph, will have, by-and-by, more experience, and more means, perhaps, at your command.”

Much more they said, in this conciliatory way ; the dishonesty was successful ; and that night, instead of stealing away together as they had proposed, Helph slept soundly in his country home, and Jenny dreamed bright dreams of coming years.

XII.

MIDNIGHT overspread the city ; the clouds hung low and gloomy, and the atmosphere was close and oppressive, when a man past the prime of life, miserably clad, might have been seen stealthily threading through by-ways and alleys, now

stopping and looking noiselessly backward and forward, and then, with trembling and unsteady steps, gliding forward. He wore no hat, his gray hair was matted, and over one eye was a purple and ghastly cut, from which he seemed to have torn the bandage, for in one hand he held a cloth spotted with blood. He apparently thought himself followed by an enemy, from whom he was endeavoring to escape, and now and then he huddled in some dark nook whence his eyes, bright with insanity, peered vigilantly about. So, by fits and starts, he made his way to the old graveyard where the poor are buried. The trees stood still together, for there was scarcely a breath of air, and he proceeded noiselessly among the monuments and crosses and low headstones, never pausing, till he came to a little new grave, the rounded mound of which was smooth and fresh as if it had been raised but a single hour.

“Here,” he said, squatting on the ground and digging madly but feebly into the earth with his hands, “here is the very place they put him, d—n them! but his mother shall have him back; I ain’t so drunk that I can’t dig him up;” and pausing now and then to listen, he soon levelled the heap of earth above his child.

“In God’s name, what are you doing?” exclaimed an authoritative voice, and a club was struck forcibly against the board fence hard by. Howling an impious imprecation, the frightened wretch rushed blindly and headlong across the graves, leaped the fence like a tiger, and disappeared in the hollow beyond. An hour afterwards he had gained the valley which lies a mile or two northwest of the city, and along which a creek, sometimes slow and sluggish, and sometimes deep and turbulent, drags and hurries itself toward the brighter waters of the Ohio.

The white-trunked sycamores leaned toward each other across the stream, the broad faded leaves dropping slowly slantwise to the ground, as the wind slipped damp and silent from bough to bough. Here and there the surface of the water was darkened by rifts of foliage that, lodged among brushwood, gave shelter to the checky blacksnake and the white-bellied toad. Huge logs that had drifted together in the spring freshet, lay

black and rotting in the current, with noxious weeds springing rank from their decay.

Toward the deepest water the wretched creature seemed irresistibly drawn, and holding with one hand to a sapling that grew in the bank, he leaned far out and tried the depth with a slender pole. He then retreated, and seemed struggling as with a fierce temptation, but drew near again and with his foot broke off shelving weights of earth, and watched their plashing and sinking; a moment he lifted his eyes to heaven—there was a heavier plunge—and he was gone from the bank. A wild cry rose piercing through the darkness; the crimson top of a clump of iron weeds that grew low in the bank was drawn suddenly under the water, as if the hand reached for help, then the cry and the plashing were still, and the waves closed together. A week afterwards the swollen corpse of Jenny's father was drawn from the stream.

XIII.

ALL the boyish habits of Helph were at once thrown aside, and much Aunt Wetherbe marveled when she saw him a day or two after his return from the city, bring forth from the cellar a little sled on which, in all previous winters, he had been accustomed (out of the view of the highway, it is true), to ride down hill.

“What on airth now?” she said, placing her hands on either hip, and eyeing him in sorrowful amazement. A great deal of pains had been lavished on the making of the sled, the runners were shod with iron, and it was nicely painted; indeed, Helph had considered it a specimen of the best art, in its way, and now, as he dragged it forth to light, dusting it with his handkerchief, and brushing the spider-webs from among its slender beams, he found it hard to suppress the old admiration for his beautiful handiwork. Nevertheless, when he found himself observed, he gave it a rough throw, which lodged it, broken and ruined, among some rubbish, and drawing his hat over his eyes to conceal from them the wreck, he strode away without at all noticing his aunt, who immediately went in search of her

good man, who, in her estimation at least, knew almost every thing, to ask an explanation of the boy's unaccountable conduct.

But the strange freaks of the young man were not yet at an end, and on returning to the house he took from a nail beneath the looking-glass, where they had long hung, the admiration of all visitors, a string of speckled birds' eggs and the long silvery skin of a snake, and threw them carelessly into the fire, thereby sending a sharp pang through the heart of Aunt Wetherbe, if not through his own. He next took from the joist a bundle of arrows and darts, the latter cut in fanciful shapes, which he had made at various times to amuse his leisure, and crushed them together in a box of kindlings, saying, in answer to the remonstrance of his relation, that was all they were good for.

From the pockets of coats and trousers he was observed at various times to make sundry ejections, embracing all such trinkets as one is apt to accumulate during boyish years, together with bits of twine, brass-headed nails, and other treasures that are prized by youths disposed to be industrious and provident. But when he brought from an out-house a squirrel's cage, where many a captive had been civilized into tricks never dreamed of in his wild swingings from bough to bough, Aunt Wetherbe took it from his hands, just as she would have done when he was a wayward child, exclaiming with real displeasure, "Lord-a-mercy, child! has the old boy himself got into you?" But Helph soon proved that he was not possessed of the evil one, by the manliness with which he talked of the coming election, discussing shrewdly the merits of candidates and parties, and of such other subjects as he seemed to think deserving of a manly consideration. All the implements necessary to shaving operations were shortly procured, and Helph was observed to spend much of his time in their examination and careful preparation, though no special necessity for their use was observable, and hitherto the old razor of his uncle had only now and then been brought into requisition by him.

When the first flush of conscious manhood had subsided, a thoughtful and almost sorrowful feeling pervaded the dreams of the young man; he was much alone, knit his brows, and

answered vaguely when questioned. At last he abruptly announced his intention of beginning the world for himself. He would sell his horse, and the various farming implements he possessed, together with the pair of young oxen which he had played with and petted, and taught to plow and draw the cart, and with the means thus acquired he would procure a small shop in the vicinity of the city, and there resume his blacksmithing.

"Tut, tut," said the aunt, "I'd rather you would steal away from the splitting of oven-wood and the churning of a morning, just as you used to do, to set quail traps and shoot at a mark, than to be talking in this way. Your uncle and me can't get along without you: no, no, my child, you must n't think of going."

Helph brushed his hand across his eyes, appealing to the authority which had always been absolute; and removing his spectacles, the good old man rubbed them carefully through the corner of his handkerchief as he said, sadly but decidedly, "Yes, my son, you have made a wise resolve: you are almost a man now (here the youth's face colored), and it's time you were beginning to work for yourself and be a man amongst men;" and approaching an old-fashioned walnut desk in which were kept all manner of yellow and musty receipts and letters, he unlocked it slowly, and pouring from a stout linen bag a quantity of silver, counted the dollars to the number of a hundred, and placing them in the hand of the young man, he said, "A little present to help you on in the world; make good use of it, my boy; but above all things, continue in the honest, straight path in which you have always kept, and my word for it, prosperity will come to you, even though you have but a small beginning. I have lived to be an old man," he continued, "and I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

Boyishly, Helph began drawing figures rapidly on the table with his finger, for he felt the tears coming, but it would not do, and looking rather than speaking his thanks, he hurried from the house, and for an hour chopped vigorously at the wood-pile.

It was soon concluded to hurry the preparations for his departure, so that he might get fairly settled before the coming on of cold weather, and a list of goods and chattels to be sold at public vendue, on a specified day, was made out, and bills posted on the school-house, at the cross-roads, and in the bar-room of the tavern, stating the time and place of sale. Ellen Blake was sent for in haste to come right away and make up half a dozen shirts, and the provident old lady briskly plied the knitting-needles, that her nephew might lack for nothing. All talked gayly of the new project, but the gayety was assumed, and Ellen herself, with all her powers of making sombre things take cheerful aspects, felt that in this instance she did not succeed.

Now that he was about to part with them, the gay young horse that had eaten so often from his hand, and the two gentle steers that had bowed their necks beneath the heavy yoke at his bidding, seemed to the young master almost humanly endeared, and he fed and caressed them morning and evening with unusual solicitude, tossing them oat sheaves and emptying measures of corn very liberally.

"Any calves or beef cattle to sell," called a coarse, loud voice to Helph, as he lingered near the stall of his oxen, the evening preceding the day of sale.

"No," answered the young man, seeing that it was a butcher who asked the question.

"I saw an advertisement of oxen to be sold here to-morrow," said the man, striking his spurred heel against his horse, and reining him in with a jerk.

"I prefer selling to a farmer," said Helph, as he leaned against the broad shoulders of one of the steers, and took in his hand its horn of greenish white.

"My money is as good as any man's," said the butcher, and throwing himself from the saddle he approached the stall, and after walking once or twice around the unconsciously doomed animals, and pinching their hides with his fingers, he offered for them a larger sum than Helph expected; he however shut his eyes to the proposed advantage, saying he hoped

to sell them to some neighbor who would keep them and be kind to them.

A half contemptuous laugh answered, in part, as the butcher turned away, saying he was going further into the country, and would call on his return—they might not be sold.

Thus far, Helph had not advised with Jenny relative to the new movement he was about making, but when all arrangements were made, and it was quite too late to retract, he resolved to ask her advice; and I suspect in this conduct he was not acting without a precedent.

From among a bunch of quills that had remained in the old desk from time immemorial, he selected one, with great care, and having rubbed his pocket-knife across the end of his boot for an hour or more, next began a search for ink, of which his uncle told him there was a good bottle full on the upper shelf of the cupboard. But the said bottle was not to be found, and after a good deal of rummaging and some questioning of Aunt Wetherbe, it was finally ascertained that the ink alluded to must have been bought ten or twelve years previously, and that only some dry powder remained of it now in the bottom of a broken inkstand: yet to this a little vinegar was added, and having shaken it thoroughly, the young man concluded it would answer. More than once during all this preparation, he had been asked what he was going to do, for writing was not done in the family except on eventful occasions; but the question elicited no response more direct than "Nothing much," and so, at last, with a sheet of foolscap, ink, and a quill, he retired to his own room—Aunt Wetherbe having first stuck a pin in the candle, indicating the portion he was privileged to burn.

Whether more or less candle were consumed, I am not advised, but that a letter was written, I have good authority for believing. Murder will out, there is no doubt about that, and the day following the writing, Aunt Wetherbe chanced to have occasion to untie a bundle of herbs that, in a pillow-case, had been suspended from the ceiling of Helph's room for a long time, and what should she find but a letter addressed to Jenny Mitchel, fantastically folded and sealed with four red wafers; it had evidently been placed there to await a secret opportunity

of conveyance to the post-office. Long was the whispered conference between the old lady and Ellen, that followed this discovery; very indignant was the aunt, at first, for old people are too apt to think of love and marriage in the young as highly improper; but Ellen, whose regard for matrimony was certainly more lenient, exerted her liveliest influence in behalf of the young people, nor were her efforts unsuccessful, and an unobtrusive silence on the subject was resolved upon.

During this little excitement in doors, there was much noise and bustle without; Helph's young horse was gayly caparisoned, and bearing proudly various riders up and down the space, where, among plows, harrows, scythes, and other agricultural implements, a number of farmers were gathered, discussing politics, smoking, and shrewdly calculating how much they could afford to bid for this or that article. Yoked together, and chewing their cuds very contentedly, stood the plump young oxen, but no one admired them with the design of purchasing. The vendue was soon over, and all else had been sold, readily and well. The sleek bay was gone, proudly arching his neck to the hand of a new master, and the neighbors brought their teams to carry home whatever they had purchased, and Helph half sighed as one after another put into his hand the money for which he had bargained away the familiar treasures which had been a part of his existence.

As he lingered at the style, he saw approaching a large flock of sheep, closely huddled together, and with red chalk marks on their sides indicating their destiny; while behind came a mingled group of oxen, cows and calves, all driven by the sanguinary butcher with whom he had refused to treat for his favorites.

"Well, neighbor," he said, thrusting his hand in his pocket and drawing thence a greasy leathern pouch, "I see you have kept the cattle for me after all."

At first Helph positively declined selling them, but he did not want them; it was very uncertain when there would be an opportunity of disposing of them as he wished, and when the butcher added something to his first liberal offer, he replied, "I suppose, sir, you will have to take them." Riding into the

yard, he drove them roughly forth with whip and voice, from the manger of hay and the deep bed of straw. They were free from the yoke, and yet they came side by side, and with their heads bowed close together, just as they had been accustomed to work. Passing their young master, they turned towards him their great mournful eyes, reproachfully, he thought, and crushing the price of them in his hand, he walked hastily in the direction of the house.

"The bad, old wretch," exclaimed Ellen, looking after the butcher, as she stood on the porch, wiping her eyes with the sleeve of the shirt she was making; and just within the door sat Aunt Wetherbe, her face half concealed within a towel, and crying like a child.

A week more, and Helph was gone, Ellen still remaining with the old people, till they should get a little accustomed to their desolate home. The tears shed over his departure were not yet dry, for he had left in the morning and it was now dusky evening, when, as the little family assembled round the tea-table, he entered, with a hurried and anxious manner that seemed to preface some dismal tidings.

Poor youth! his heart was almost breaking. He had no concealments now, and very frankly told the story of his love, and what had been his purposes for the future. Mr. and Mrs. Randall had suddenly given up their house, gone abroad, and taken Jenny with them, under pretext of giving her a thorough education in England. But the young lover felt instinctively that she was separated from him for a widely different purpose. And poor faithful Aunt Kitty, she had been dismissed without a shilling above her scanty earnings, to work, old and disabled as she was, or die like a beggar. After much inquiry, he had learned that she had obtained an engagement at an asylum, as an attendant on the sick.

"Dear old soul!" said Aunt Wetherbe, "you must go right away in the morning and bring her here; she shan't be left to suffer, and I know of it."

"Never mind—all will come out bright," said Ellen, as Helph sat that night on the porch, alone and sorrowful.

But he would not be comforted: Jenny had not left a single

line to give him assurance and hope, and even if she thought of him now, she would forget him in the new life that was before her. All this was plausible, but Ellen's efforts were not entirely without effect; and when she offered to go with him to the city and see Aunt Kitty, who perhaps might throw some light on the sudden movement, he began to feel hopeful and cheerful almost: for of all eyes, those of a lover are the quickest to see light or darkness.

Some chance prevented the fulfilment of Ellen's promise, and I was commissioned by her to perform the task she had proposed for herself. "It will help to keep him up, like," she said, "if you go along." A day or two intervened before I could conveniently leave home, but at last we set out, on a clear frosty morning of the late autumn. Behind the one seat of the little wagon in which we rode, was placed an easy chair for Aunt Kitty. A brisk drive of an hour brought us to the hospital; and pleasing ourselves with thoughts of the happy surprise we were bringing to the poor forlorn creature, we entered the parlor, and on inquiry were told we had come too late—she had died half an hour before our arrival, in consequence of a fall received the previous evening in returning from the dead-house, whither she had assisted in conveying a body. "I have ordered her to be decently dressed," said the superintendent, "from my own things; she was so good, I thought that little enough to do for her;" and she led the way to the sick ward, where Aunt Kitty awaited to be claimed and buried by her friends. It was a room fifty or sixty feet long, and twenty perhaps in width, lined on either side with a long row of narrow dirty beds, some of them empty, but most of which were filled with pale and miserable wretches—some near dying, some groaning, some propped on pillows and seeming stolidly to regard the fate of others and of themselves. The sun streamed hot through the uncurtained windows, and the atmosphere was pervaded with offensive smells.

As my eye glanced down the long tiers of beds where there was so much suffering, it was arrested by the corpse of the poor old woman—gone at last to that land where there are no more masters, no more servants. I shuddered and stood still

as the two shrivelled and haglike women wrapped and pinned the sheet about the stiffening limbs, with as much glee, imbecile almost, but frightful, as they apparently were capable of feeling or expressing. "What in Heaven's name are you laughing at?" said Helph, approaching them. "Just to think of sarving a dead nigger!" said one, with a revolting simper; but looking in his face, she grew respectful with a sudden recollection, and drew from her pocket a sealed letter, saying, "May be you can tell who this is for—we found it in her bosom when we went to dress her." It was a letter from Jenny to himself: poor Aunt Kitty had been faithful to the last.

Not till I was turning from that terriblest shelter of woe I ever saw, did I notice a young and pale-cheeked girl, sitting near the door, on a low and rude rocking-chair, and holding close to her bosom an infant but a few days old: not with a mother's pride, I fancied, for her eyes drooped before the glance of mine, and a blush burned in her cheek, as though shame and not honor covered her young maternity. I paused a moment, praised the baby, and spoke some kindly words to her; but she bowed her head lower and lower on her bosom, speaking not a word; and seeing that I only gave her pain, I passed on, with a spirit more saddened for the living than for the dead, who had died in such wretchedness.

Jenny's letter proved a wonderful comfort to Helph, and cheerfulness and elasticity gradually came back to him; but when, at the expiration of a year, his parents returned without her, and bringing a report of her marriage, all courage, all ambition, deserted him, and many a summer and winter went by, during which he lived in melancholy isolation.

I shall not attempt to write the history of Jenny Mitchel, except thus much, which had some relation to our life at Clovernook; and therefore pass abruptly into the future of my good friend Randall. Nearly fifteen years were gone since his sweetheart crossed the sea, and country belles had bloomed and faded before his eyes, without winning from him special regard: when, as he sat before a blazing hickory fire one evening, waiting for Aunt Wetherbe, who still enjoyed a green old

age, to bring to the table the tea and short-cake, there was a quick, lively tap on the door, and the next moment, in the full maturity of womanhood, but blushing and laughing like the girl of years ago, Jenny stood in the midst of the startled group—Jenny Mitchel still! Helph had become a prosperous man in the world, and had been envied for the good fortune which his patient bravery so much deserved. The waves of the sea of human life had reached out gradually from the city until they surrounded his blacksmith's shop, and covered all his lots as if with silver; and he had been building, all the previous year, a house so beautiful, and with such fair accessories, as to astonish all the neighborhood acquainted in any degree with his habits or reputed temper. "What does the anchorite mean to do with such a place? he never speaks to a woman more than he would to a ghost," they said; "so he won't get married; and nobody is so particular about a house to sell, and it can't be he's going to stay in it all alone." But Helph knew very well what he was about, and was content to keep his own counsel. If he had mailed certain letters out at Clover-nook, our postmaster would have guessed at once his secret; but though Mr. Helphenstein Randall was very well known in town, there were so many objects there to interest the common attention that it was never observed when, every once in a while, he bought a small draft on England, nor that he more frequently sent letters east for the Atlantic steamers, nor that he received as frequently as there was foreign news in the papers, missives, every month more neatly folded and with finer superscriptions. He had been thought something of a philosopher, by Ellen Blake and I, and others were convinced, perhaps by justifying reasons, that he was as little impressible by woman's charms as the cattle in his stalls. But there are not so many philosophers in the world as some pretend, and his heart was all aglow with pictures of one on whom he looked in dreams and in the distant perfumed gardens of his hope. Jenny, deserted, and struggling with all the adversities that throned the way of a poor girl alone in so great a city, had written at length from London all the story of her treatment by her lover's parents, and having time for reflection

before he could answer her letter—provoking all his nature to joy and scorn—he had decided that she should not come back until she could do so with such graces and accomplishments as should make her the wonder and him the envy of all who had contrived or wished their separation. He had trusted her, educated her, and at last had all the happiness of which his generous heart was capable.

Ellen Blake of course presided at the wedding, and the quilts quilted that night at Aunt Wetherbe's had been kept unused for a present to Helph's wife on her bridal night. When I am down in the city I always visit the Randalls, and there is not in the Valley of the West another home so pleasant, so harmonious, so much like what I trust to share in heaven.

ZEBULON SANDS

I.

“A CAPITAL fellow,” everybody said when speaking of Zeb, for no one ever called him Zebulon—not even his brothers and sisters: if you had called him Zebulon, he would have laughed in your face. Poor fellow! I can see him now, in fancy, just as I used to see him about the old farm-house when I was going to school—always busy, and always cheerful, doing some good thing or other, and laughing and whistling as he did so. Let me describe him as I remember him, when he was perhaps sixteen, and I quite a little girl. He was not handsome, but no one thought whether he were or not, so good-humored and genial was the expression of his countenance. He was a little below the ordinary height, and stout rather than graceful, yet he was always perfectly self-possessed, and so never awkward. His hair hung in half curls of soft brown along a low white forehead, and a pair of hazel eyes twinkled with laughter beneath. His face was full, with the fresh glow of health breaking through the tan, for he was a farmer’s boy, and used to exposure and hard work; but notwithstanding this, his hands and feet were delicately moulded and beautiful.

At an early age he was fond of all manly exercises, and while still a child would brave the severest cold with the fortitude of a soldier. Many a time I have seen him chopping wood in the mid-winter, without coat or hat, and standing knee-deep in the snow: his hair tossing in the north wind, and his cheeks ruddy as the air and exercise could make them. He was never too busy to see me as I passed, or to whistle me a gay “good morning” if I were near enough to hear it, and had often a pleasant word or two beside. And I never forgot to look for him: children are more fond of attentions than is apt to be imagined, and I per-

haps had the weakness in even an unusual degree. Commonly he was chopping at the woodpile, but not always; sometimes I would see him driving the oxen toward the woods, seated on the cart-side, his great dog, Watcher, sitting beside him: he would not see me, and straightway the distance before me seemed to lengthen, and the winter wind to have a keener edge. Sometimes he was about the barn, feeding the horses and cattle; and I remember seeing him once on a distant hill, dispensing bundles of oats to the sheep: he saw me, however, far as he was away, and waved a bundle of the grain oats in friendly recognition.

Everybody in the neighborhood knew Zeb, and had a kind word to say when they met him, for men and women, boys and girls, were alike fond of his good nature; there was no distrust in his brain: he never walked with an irresolute step, or rapped at the proudest door with a misgiving heart, or doubted of the cordial reception that waited him, wherever he might go. But his confidence in the world was greater than its goodness warranted: he did not recognize the weakness that is in humanity, nor the weakness that was in himself, till too late. When he was a little boy, he said often, "I will never be sick, and never die—I will go out in the woods and sing." And this was his spirit till he grew into manhood.

Zeb had an only sister—Ruth, or Ruthy, as he always called her, and the two children lived in the old farm-house with their father, a querulous gray-headed man, who had long forgotten he was ever young. He did not perhaps mean to be a hard master, nevertheless he was so sometimes. "Use doth breed a habit in a man," and Mr. Sands, I suppose, became accustomed by little and little to the much, to the all, his son did for him; so that at last his expectations in regard to him could scarcely be equalled. Sometimes Zeb would come in at night, weary and dusty with the day's hard work, and, for his father's comfort, and perhaps in the hope of a little praise, tell over what he had done; how he had felled and chopped to firewood the most stubborn tree in the forest, or, it might be, had plowed more ground than he had expected, and so had unyoked the oxen before the sunlight was quite gone. But never was he rejoiced by one word of congratulation. If he had felled a tree, "Why, there was another knotty thing

close by—could he not have got that down too?" If he had plowed more than another would have done, "He could have plowed on yet for an hour—there was light enough." This was discouraging, but Zeb kept his patience through all, and tended the farm year after year—giving all the profits that accrued into the old man's hand, and keeping nothing for himself.

Ruth was as good as most persons, but less thoughtful of her brother's pleasure than her own. "Zeb, I want to go to town to-morrow, or next week," she was accustomed to say, and before the appointed time Zeb would haul the little wagon to the creek, and wash the old paint to look as fresh as new. The corn was left ungathered or the mowing undone, and Ruth went to town and bought a new dress, and bonnet too, if she chose; and Zeb said, "How pretty you will look when you wear them! you will be ashamed to go with me in my threadbare coat and old hat: I am rather behind the fashion, ain't I, Ruthy?" He laughed gaily all the while, and Ruth laughed too—never thinking how many new hats she had had since Zeb had once indulged in such a luxury.

The grass was whitening in the hazy days of October; the orchards were bright with ripe fruit, and the corn was rustling and dry; it was the autumn that made Zeb twenty years old. His lip was darkening a little from its boyish glow, and now and then soberer moods came to him than he had known before. Across a dry ridge of stubble land, overgrown with briars, he had been plowing all the windy day; the oxen bent their heads low to the ground as the dust blew in their faces, and Zeb took off his torn-brimmed straw hat now and then, and shook out his curls, heavy with sweat, and fell behind the team, as though thinking of other things than his plowing. One side of the field was bordered by a lane leading from the main road to an obscure neighborhood. It was quite dusky where the lane struck into the woods, when a lady came riding thence on a gay black horse, and seeing Zeb at his plowing, tightened her rein, and, waiting for him to approach, gave the salutation of the evening in a sweet, good-humored tone. She was not dressed in the costume which ladies now-a-days think indispensable for riding, but wore instead a straw hat with red ribbons and a dress of sky-blue muslin—not trailing low, but so

short that her feet peeped now and then from beneath it. She sat her horse gracefully, and her cheeks were deeply flushed, perhaps from the proximity of the young farmer, perhaps merely from exercise; and her black hair hung in curls down her shoulders, and her black eyes sparkled with healthful happiness. So, altogether, she made as pretty a finishing to the rural picture as one could imagine. Certainly Zeb thought so, as leaning against the fence he caressed the glossy neck of the horse, champing the bit and pawing the dust impatiently; and as he stood there it might have been noticed that he removed his hat, and so rolled the brim in his hand as to conceal how badly it was torn. It was observable too that he talked in a subdued tone and with downcast eyes—very unlike his usual manner. After a brief delay, and a little restrained conversation, the young woman rode forward, putting her horse at once into a canter.

For five minutes or more Zeb lingered where she left him—not looking after her, nor seeming to see anything, as he idly cut letters in the fence-rail with his knife. Directly, however, he took up his hat from the ground, upon which it had fallen, replaced his knife in his pocket, drew a sigh, and began to unyoke his team. But before he had quite freed the weary oxen he looked up: the blue dress and red ribbons were yet visible in the distance: he hesitated, and after a moment resumed his plowing, whistling a merry tune, but so plaintively and with such variations as made it sad almost as a dirge.

The pretty girl just riding out of sight is Molly Blake, a young person who lives a mile or so beyond the woods that stand against the field in which the youth is at work. Zeb and Molly once stood together at spelling school, and Zeb spelled for her all the hard words, in whispers; and on a time, while picking berries, they chanced to meet, and it so happened that Zeb went home with an empty basket, while Molly's was heaped full. The cause of their seeing each other to-day is, that Molly is going to make an apple-cutting in a night or two, and has given the earliest invitation to Zeb. As he carved letters in the fence he was debating whether he would go or not; and as he unyoked the oxen, he was saying to himself, "I will go home and rest, I am tired; and I can't go to the apple-cutting, at any rate, in my old clothes

and hat." Still he hesitated, and as he did so, saw the blue dress and red ribbons in the distance; then came the thought that he might plow an hour or two more, and so gain time to go to town with some oats or potatoes, and bring home such articles as the frolic seemed to demand. And at this thought he resumed his work.

It not unfrequently happens that a young man is not regarded by his sisters as he is regarded by other women; such was the case with Zeb; and on this special occasion Ruth never once thought whether her brother had been invited to the party or not, so engaged was she with her own plans and pleasures. It chanced this evening, as such things will chance sometimes, that supper was prepared an hour earlier than usual; and, until it was too late for her to see, Ruth stood at the window, watching for her brother to come home.

Meantime the fire burned out and the tea grew cold; and then came impatience, and then petulance, so that Ruth said at last, "Come, father, we will eat without him, and let him come when he gets ready."

But Zeb came pretty soon, wearied, but with a brain full of pleasant thoughts, which shone out upon his manly countenance. "Well, Ruthy, I am sorry I have kept you waiting," he said, as he drew water for his oxen at the well.

"I am sorry too," she answered in a calm, decided tone, that indicated a frigid state of feeling.

"Come, Ruthy, do n't be vexed," said Zeb, laughing after the old fashion, "but get my supper, while I turn the oxen into the meadow—(you do n't know how tired and hungry I am)—and I will tell you what detained me."

"You need n't trouble yourself to do that," she answered, tossing her head, "it's of no importance to me."

Zeb pulled his old hat over his eyes, and walked soberly away with his oxen, quite forgetting that he was either tired or hungry. If Ruth felt any misgivings, pride kept them down; and, to justify herself, she said, half aloud, "Well, I do n't care! he had no business to stay away till midnight." Nevertheless, she arranged the supper as nicely as might be; but Zeb did not come—his appetite had quite deserted him. Across the

meadow, near where the oxen were feeding, he lay on the grass, the moonlight, flecked by the apple-boughs, falling over and around him.

A day or two of unhappy reserve went by, Zeb remaining little about the house, and saying little when he was there, but plowing early and late, grieved rather than vexed. When he spoke to Ruth, it was with words and in a manner studiously kind, and with her duller sense she did not see that he was changed, but a crisis had been reached at length in the young farmer's life and nature.

The evening of so many happy anticipations was near at hand. The morning was bright, and Zeb rose early, and was busy with preparations for a little project he had in his mind, when Ruth came out, and assisting him to lift a bag of potatoes into the wagon, inquired whether he were going to town that day : she would like to go, she said, if he could make room for her. "I am invited to Molly Blake's to-morrow night," she continued, "and that is the reason I wish to go to town this morning." She did not ask Zeb if he also were invited : she never thought of the possibility.

It was after noon before they reached the city, and leaving his sister at the house of a cousin, in the suburbs, with a promise of meeting her at an appointed hour, he drove away in search of a market for his oats and potatoes. The grocers with whom he was in the habit of dealing were all supplied ; the few offers he received were greatly below his expectations, and hours were spent in driving from street to street, before he was able to dispose of his produce at any reasonable price. He had found no time to dine—no time to feed his horses—and the heads of the tired animals drooped sadly, as he turned them toward the place where he was to meet Ruth.

The show at the window of a hatter attracted him ; he had never had a fur hat, and checking his team close against the sidewalk, he looked at the tempting display, and had mentally selected one which he thought would please him—at the same time putting his hand in his pocket to ascertain whether he could afford one so fine—when his attention was arrested by the sudden appearance of his sister. "Why, Zeb!" she said

pettishly, "are you charmed with a hatter's window? I waited and waited till I was tired to death, and then set out in search of you." Zeb laughed, and answered, that if she looked at his old hat she would see why he was charmed, and assured her of his regret that she was alarmed about him.

It was not fear for his safety that induced her to look for him, but need of money. The youth averted his face from the window, and a disappointed expression passed across it, as he answered, "How much do you want, Ruthy?"

"Oh, I do n't know," she said carelessly, "all you've got."

He turned away, as if to take up the reins—perhaps even his dull sister, could she have seen it, would have been able to read something of what was at the moment written on his countenance—and reaching backward all the money he had, and climbing into the wagon, began to rub the mud from his trowsers with a wisp of straw. Away went Ruth—her thoughts full of new ribbons and shining shoes, and more than all, of the gold ring that was to sparkle on her finger the next evening.

While these little purchases were being made, the horses stamped their feet, and switched their tails restlessly; and Zeb, feeling that he had no very present purpose, nor any sympathy to lessen his half-surlly and half-tearful mood, turned his back to the hatter's window, and, seated in the front corner of the wagon, brushed the flies from the tired animals with his old hat. The sun was near setting when Ruth returned, her hands full of little packages and parcels, and her face beaming with joy. So they went home together, and when Ruth rode to town in the little wagon again, Zeb was not sitting beside her.

The next day was a busy one, but before night the new white apron was made, the pink ribbon knotted up, and the ring glittering where Ruth had long desired to see it. "Well, Zeb," she said, as she turned down the lane to go to Molly Blake's, "I want you to make me a flower-pot to-night—sawed in notches at the top, you know—it's time to take up my myrtle." All day he had been thinking she would say something about his going with her—disclose some regret, perhaps, when he should tell her he could not go; but now the poor satisfaction of giving any expression to his disappointment was denied him, and

making pictures in the air, of gayeties in which he could have no part, he set to work about the flower-pot. He thought hard, and wrought as hard as he thought, and the little box was soon completed—notched round at the top, just as had been desired. It was not yet dark when the work was done, and Zeb held it up admiringly when he had filled it with fresh earth, and arranged the long myrtle vines to drop gracefully through the notches. He placed it in the window of Ruth's room, and, the task accomplished, there came a feeling of restlessness that he could not banish, try as he would. The full moon was reddening among the clouds, and the yellow leaves raining down with every wind, as, folding his arms, he walked up and down among the flowers that he had planted in May.

II.

“ Ah, Zeb, is that you ?” said a good-natured voice, in a familiar tone ; and a young man, driving in a rattling cart, drew up before the gate, and followed the salutation with an oath and an inquiry as to Zeb's being at home, when there was “ such almighty attraction abroad.”

Zeb came indolently forward, remarking that his friend was insensible to that great attraction as well as himself.

“ Oh, Jehu !” answered the young man, laughing boisterously, “ I hope you do n't think I was invited. Gracious me ! you do n't expect a wood-chopper like me could get into such a place as Molly Blake's house ?” And he laughed again, saying, “ Zeb, my dear boy, how very verdant you are !”

The man in the cart was, as he said, a wood-chopper—a most genial and amiable fellow, notwithstanding some buffetings of adverse fortune—for he had been cast loose on the world at an early age, and had faced scorn and hunger, laughing all the time. “ Come, come, Zeb,” he said, seeing the moping mood of the young farmer—“ climb into my coach, and allow me to give you an airing by the light of the moon. In with you ! I can fight down the bluest devils that ever got hold of a chap.”

We are apt to imbibe the spirit of whomever we associate with, and Zeb affected a liveliness at first which he presently

felt, and joined in the wild chorus which the chopper every now and then pealed out :

“ Never candles at night
 Made so pretty a light
 As the moon shining over our cabin, my dear ;
 Never home was so sweet
 As our woodland retreat,
 So where could we ever be happy but here !”

They drove rapidly, and talked mirthfully, and soon reached their destination, the ball-room of the Clovernook tavern, in which that night a political speech was to be made. It was late and raining when the meeting broke up, and a portion of the assemblage adjourned to the bar-room, to wait for the rain to slack, and to talk off their excitement and prejudice.

“ Well, boys,” said our Jehu, who was moved to the highest pitch of his best humor by the politician’s speech, which chanced to “ meet his ideas exactly,” “ I feel as if a little drop of something would do me good ; and besides I want you to jine me in drinking the health of the apple-cutters. Here !” he continued, exhibiting a bottle to the circle about him, “ who of you will take off the head of this ‘ Lady Anne ? ’ ”

But one bottle did not suffice, nor two, nor three ; the spirits of the company rose higher and higher ; strong and stronger drinks were called for—the wood-chopper protesting that he could stand a treat as well as another, and especially urging the liquor upon his friend Zeb, topping off each proffer with, “ Darn the expense, old feller ; drink, and forget your sorrows, and Molly into the bargain.” Zeb declined at first, replying that he did n’t care anything about Molly : but it would not do ; he was asked if he feared to vex the proudy, and had so soon surrendered his manhood to her caprice. At last he yielded to the current so strongly set against him, and, swearing a great oath, drank off more brandy than might safely be taken by the most habitual tippler. But it is not necessary that I linger on that dreadful night. Alas, for poor Zeb ! it was a night that for him had never any ending.

The sun was struggling up, and the mists were rising out of the ground like hot steam, when the wood-chopper again drew up

his cart before the old farm-house ; and arousing his companion from the straw in which he lay in a fevered and maddened sleep, assisted him to the ground, balancing him on his feet as one might a little child, and steadying him as he tried to walk—for he staggered feebly one way and the other, telling the chopper he did n't care a damn who saw him, that he was just as good as any man, and that Molly Blake was the prettiest girl in the world, and he would fight anybody who said she was not.

“Come, Zeb,” said his companion, “have more pluck ; do n't talk so like a fool ;” and passing his arm around him, he continued, “be like me—be a man !” And with such encouragement, he brought his friend as near the house as he dared, and left him to make his entrance alone.

“Zebulon Sands,” said his father, meeting him at the door, and giving the severest expression to a naturally severe countenance, “are you not ashamed to show your face to me ? I wish you had died before I saw this day. I do n't want to see nor speak to you,” he continued, “till you can behave yourself better.” Ruth stood by, speaking not a word, but looking her contempt and indignation, while Zeb staggered against the wall, and with downcast eyes picked the straws out of his hair and from off his coat. He heard her laugh derisively, saw her turn away, and when he called her, she did not come—perhaps she did not hear him. In a moment all the imbecility of drunkenness was gone—he knew what he had done, and felt a self-condemnation bitterer than a thousand curses.

The rain came on again after an hour or two, and continued throughout the day, and Zeb, creeping into the barn, listened to its falling on the roof, half wishing that some dread accident would come upon him, whereby a reconciliation with his father and sister might be brought about. But hour after hour went by, and the dull and dreary beating of the rain was all he heard ; no gleam of sunshine broke the gloom that was about him ; no voice but the still, reproving one of conscience, met his listening ; so the day faded, and the night fell. At last, worn down physically, and exhausted mentally, he slept, waking not till the break of day. The rain had ceased, and the wind was whistling chillily from the north. He remembered what his father had said to

him, and the contemptuous laugh of his sister rang in his ears. If they had looked kindly on him, his heart would have been melted; he would have asked their forgiveness, and perhaps would never again have yielded to temptation, made even stronger by his transient weakness. But they had met him with no kindly admonitions, and he had too much pride to seek an opportunity of humbling himself; so giving one sorrowful look to the old farmhouse, he pulled the torn hat over his eyes, thrust his hands in his pockets, and in a few minutes the hills of home were lost to him forever.

Zeb whistled as he went, not for want of thought, but to drown it, and he walked fast, in a vain effort to get away from himself. The sun was scarcely risen when he found himself in the suburbs of the city, friendless and penniless. I need not describe his efforts to find employment: of course he understood nothing but the work to which he had been used, and his rustic manners and anxious credulity made him liable to constant impositions.

III.

“Well, Ruthy, I wonder if Zeb has found a better place?” said Mr. Sands one evening about a fortnight after the young man had gone to seek his fortune.

“I do n’t know,” she answered, laying the embers together, for it was cold enough for fire now; “I do n’t know—I *do* wonder where he is—but he will take care of himself, I ’ll warrant that.”

“I hope he will,” said Mr. Sands; “but I do n’t know. He was always a good boy—I wish I had not been quite so hard with him.”

The silence that followed was broken by a rap on the door. “Come in,” said Mr. Sands, and the cousin mentioned as living in the city suburb entered. Zeb was at his house, and very sick. The physicians had pronounced his disease small-pox of the most virulent nature.

With the suspense, some softness had gathered about the hearts of father and sister; but when this intelligence came, more than the old hardness returned.

“If he had staid at home and minded his business,” said the

father, "he would have been well; as it is, he must get along the best he can. It would be an awful thing to bring him into the neighborhood."

"Dear me, I can't go to see him," said Ruth, rolling up her sleeve, to examine the scar of vaccination. "It was too bad in Zeb to act so. I hope when he gets well he'll behave himself."

"He is very good, all at once," said the father. "Is he broke out in the face?"

So the cousin rode back again, little profited by his journey.

Two or three days went by without any further tidings of Zeb, and then a neighbor chanced to hear in town that he was very bad; still it was not definitely known that his case was desperate.

"Very bad!" said Mr. Sands, when he heard this news—"every body is very bad who has the small-pox: like enough he'll be marked for life." But though he was uneasy, he neither sent a messenger nor went himself to visit his unhappy son. For three days nothing further was heard. Ruth said she thought he must be better, else they would hear; and the father said he guessed so too, or they would certainly get some news from him.

The day was one of those deliciously genial ones which sometimes gladden the autumn; and the father and daughter, well and strong, could not realize that Zeb was dying. In the afternoon Ruth went to pass an hour or two and drink tea with a friend. There were many new things to be seen, and many interesting matters to be talked about; so her thoughts were quite drawn away from her brother; or, if now and then they returned to him, it was less fearfully than they had done before. It was nightfall when she set out for home, and though the distance was not long, star after star came out, as, slowly walking, she recounted all that she had seen and heard that afternoon; how such an one had made her a new dress, and whether it were probable that such another were to be married, as reported; and so, musing, she reached the hill that overlooked the homestead. All was dark: involuntarily she quickened her step, and in a moment recognized her father walking backward and forward in the road before her. His form seemed more

than usually bent, and his hands were crossed behind him—according to his habit in times of trouble—and his gray hair was uncovered, and blown about in the wind. He was waiting for her she knew, and why he was waiting she felt. “Oh, father,” she said, seeing he did not speak, “have you heard from Zeb?”

“I wish I had gone to see him, Ruth,” he answered, covering his face with his hands.

“Is he dead?” she asked in a low tone—for the awful fear kept her heart still.

“I do n’t know,” he answered trembling, “but I’m afraid we shall never see him alive. He has not spoken, since last night at midnight—then he said he should not get well, and that he should like to see me and you, Ruthy; yet he told them not to send for us, saying we could do no good, and that our lives must not be endangered for him.”

“Oh, poor Zeb!” sobbed out the girl, “let us go and see him. Can’t we go to-night?”

“Dear child, he does not know anybody to-day,” answered the father, “and has not spoken since sunrise. Poor Zeb! it is all our fault.”

So, talking and weeping together, they entered the old house. How lonesome it was! the wind had never been so mournful before. Ruth remembered when she and Zeb had listened to it in the autumns that were gone, but it was not dirge-like, as now. The drifting of the yellow leaves in the moonlight seemed to have a sorrowful significance; and, years after, Ruth could not see them fall without recalling something of the feeling that came upon her that night.

It is a long time since they sat together, father and daughter, listening to the winds and to the reproaches of their own hearts, as they remembered their harsh words and hard behavior. It is a long time since Ruth took from the notched flower-pot Zeb had made for her the greenest and freshest vines of the myrtle, and set them over his grave. And once or twice in every year the wood-chopper may be seen mending the mound, and pulling the weeds from among the flowers. He has never been known to “stand a treat” since the night he tempted his friend to ruin.

LEARNING CONTENT.

I.

“WHAT on earth am I to do now? I’d just like to know—here you are crying out ‘Mother, mother, mother!’ a half a dozen at a time—may be if I could make myself into two or three women I might get along.”

So exclaimed Mrs. Polly Williams, throwing down a garment, on which she had been resolutely and silently stitching, and her air and manner indicating complete mental and physical exhaustion. The children, who had caused this violent outbreak and the more ominous relapse, stood back in affright for a moment, and then recommenced the gambols and frolicsome quarreling in which they had been previously engaged.

“I say, Billy, you and Jim pretend to be my horses, and turn down the red chair and pretend it’s a stage, and get me on the top and pretend I’m the driver!” shouted John Williams, a bright-eyed little fellow, not yet out of petticoats, and his round rosy cheeks seemed shining with pleasure as he seized the tongs for a whip.

“Eh, why! that’s a great whip—we won’t be horses if you are going to strike with that,” sung out both boys at once; upon which the child began making so rapid and terrible a stampede on the floor as to mollify their prejudices at once.

“Oh, yes, Johnny may drive us with the tongs,” they said, “just as much as he wants to; we can pretend it’s a whip with two stocks and no lash—a new-fashioned whip that cost fourteen hundred million dollars;” and turning down the red chair, they put themselves in the traces, a feat that was accomplished in a summary way, and by merely taking hold of the chair posts—after which they trotted off in rather coltish style, looking

askance at Johny, who stood sniveling on one side of the room quite regardless of his team.

In vain they capered and made divers snorts and pitches at him as they passed; all for some time proved ineffectual; but ere long his hands slipped from over his eyes, and a slantwise glance now and then betokened an increasing interest. The pretended horses, at this juncture, began kicking up their heels and dashing forward furiously, at the same time crying out at the top of their voices, "Oh, Johny's team is running away—they will break the stage all to pieces, and Johny can't check them—he is a little coward—Johny is!"

"No, I ain't," said the young Jehu, indignantly; and uplifting his two-stocked whip before the brothers, he brought them to a sudden stand-still, on which he began pulling their hair right viciously.

"Bubby must n't pull the mane of his colts so hard," remonstrated the boys, "or they will get mad and bite." Then they opened their mouths to the widest extent and closed them again with a snap that was in fact rather fearful to see, while Johny, with laughter on his lips, and the tears in his eyes, climbed upon the prostrate chair and indicated his wishes by sundry kicks and thrusts of the tongs.

A few rounds over the carpet, and one or two hair breadth escapes in crossing the sunken hearth, which the talkative horses pretended was a new stone-bridge over the Ohio, without protecting railings, and consequently very dangerous, especially with skittish colts, had a tendency to bring the little driver into a phrenzy of good humor, and he began with almost unintelligible earnestness to announce his progress. "Now we are just going by the school-house," said he, "and all the scholars are trying to look at us: Ab Long will get whipt for shaking his fist at me, and Rachel Day is running after me to get a ride: run fast, horses, and get away from her! now we are away a hundred miles past her, and I expect she is crying like a good fellow. Whoa! horses, here's the green tavern"—and he brought up before a dining-table covered with a green shining oil-cloth, and dismounting, threw the reins, consisting of a string of white rags, which passed for fair leather, on the ground, in

true professional style; and seizing a small tin bucket, in which the boys carried their dinner to school, he vigorously beat the air with one arm while he held the bucket beneath the door-knob, under pretence of pumping water, after which he held the empty bucket before the faces of the boys, whose noisy inhalations of air passed for copiously refreshing draughts.

“The looking-glass is the sign—don’t you see, Bill? don’t you see it, Jim?” said John, pointing to a small square glass, in a cherry frame, which was hung with some attempt at style between the ceiling and the table, having for a back-ground some two yards of bluish-colored paper, embellished with figures of chickens and roosters of a bright pink color, decidedly well to do, an almost defiant aspect, and tails outspread like the huge fans with which fat old ladies in the country revive themselves on Sunday afternoons, and also with little black demure hens having yellow streaks, close at the neck, and widening out into gores between the wings. This was, in fact, the genteel part of the house, for closely neighboring the glass was the skeleton of a clock, standing out from another strip of highly-colored paper, with nothing but its square white face to screen from view its curious mechanism of pegs, wires, and wheels, while the pendulum ticked off the time below, and from hour to hour the two great iron weights dangled lower and lower, with a creaky, scraping sound, resembling the thunder of a caty-did—if such a thing might be—till at length they almost touched the floor, when the eldest daughter, Maria, whose honorary privilege it was, climbed upon a little workstand, and with slow and regular turning of the key, wound the aforesaid weights quite out of view behind the great white face. But to return to my young traveler: “Gee up, Bill; gee up, Jim!” said Johny, taking up the fair leather reins, and snapping the tongs together by way of cracking his whip; “now I’m going by the store; now I’m going by the flour-mill; now I’m going away through the woods; now you must pretend all the chairs are trees, and that you run against them and break the stage and kill yourselves!”

“Oh, no, Johny, that’s no way at all,” said Jim, looking back in a dissatisfied way; “you don’t know how to travel—I’ve

studied geography—let me tell you where to go, something like.”

John remained sullenly silent a moment, and then urging his team forward, said, “If you know such great things, tell them.”

“Now, Bill, do just as I do,” said Jim, in an earnestly admonishing way, on which the two boys gave a jump, as sudden, and over as much distance, as they could, cumbered as they were with stage-coach and passengers. “Now,” said Jim, “we are at Cincinnati”—here followed another spring; “now we are at New York!”—then came a quick succession of springs and announcements, which took in the world in a few minutes, and brought them back in front of the green tavern, when the loud stamping of the mother’s foot caused a momentary silence.

“Do you mean to tear the house down?” she exclaimed, in a very loud and angry tone; “I do think I’ve got the worst boys of anybody in this world; I don’t know what to do with you; it’s no use to try to make you mind; I might as well speak to the wind—bad, good for nothing boys that you are! What would you think to see your father and me act as you do?” The idea was so ludicrous that the boys laughed outright, in spite of the solemnity of the occasion, and Johny, the least and most timid, ran under the table, that he might the more freely indulge his mirthful inclinations.

“Oh, Johny is a rabbit now, that we have burrowed,” said the boys, dropping on their hands and knees, and barking at him as much after the manner of dogs, as frequent practice had enabled them to do.

At this juncture Mrs. Williams arose, and, taking down a switch that depended menacingly from the ceiling, she brought it to bear, much as a dexterous thresher would a flail, on so many bundles of oats. John presently came out, with his plump little fists in his eyes and a great blue spot on his forehead, crying as if his heart would break. The older boys made sundry dives and plunges, in which one of the clock weights was pulled down and the table set askew, but all efforts to escape were circumvented, and they soon gave up and joined in the crying.

“Now,” said Mrs. Williams, with a good deal of exultation

in her angry tone, "you have got something to make a noise for!"

But as their loud clamor subsided into reproachful moans, the violence of the mother's wrath subsided too, and she began pouring out lamentations as though she were doomed to all the suffering in the world. Johnny she took up in her arms and rocked, with many essays, not altogether ineffectual, to kiss his forehead well—under which treatment the little fellow, forgetting his team and his bruises, sobbed into sleep. The older boys picked their nails and turned their faces to their chair-backs, while a sermon on this wise was inflicted by the matron: "Ain't you ashamed, James and William, great boys, big enough to be men, to act as you do, and give your poor mother so much trouble! Here she sits, making and mending and cooking for you all day, and you don't care—no, not a bit, you don't care for your poor mother!" "You don't take the right means to make us care," they might have replied, but they said nothing, and she went on: "Poor old mother! one of these days she'll get sick and die, and have to be buried in the ground, and then what will become of you, and poor father too—at work all day to get shoes, and bread, and everything—you will be sorry then you did n't mind mother, and be good little boys." Quite overcome with the desolate picture which poor father and his little orphans made in her imagination, she drew the corner of her apron before her eyes, and indulged in melancholy reflections much longer than, under the circumstances, she should have done, for it was nearly night, and Mrs. Polly Williams was a farmer's wife, and the evening should have been a busy time—the tea-kettle should have been filled, the milk skimmed, the room set in order, and many other things done, the while her checked apron was being moistened with tears, that she said nobody cared for.

Meantime, Jonathan Williams, whose shadow, as he plowed, stretched half way across the field behind him, looked anxiously towards the house, for he was tired and not sorry to see the sun descending so near the western tree-tops. "What can be the matter with Polly?" he thought, as he came over the ridge and saw the house looking still and desolate, while all the

neighboring homes were enveloped with wreaths of smoke, pleasantly indicative of approaching supper. "It is time, too, the boys were coming for the cows; I wonder if our folks are all dead, or what on earth they are about!" After another moment's hesitation, he concluded to plow one more round, before leaving off work for the day. The field in which he was engaged joined that of his neighbor, Thomas Giles, who chanced also to be plowing; and it further happened that the two teams drew up to the dividing fence together.

"Well, Mr. Williams," said Mr. Giles, "how does plowing go—ground in pretty good order?"

"So so," answered Williams, too much disturbed in mind to appreciate correctly his neighbor's question, perhaps.

"A nice colt that bay of yours: how many hands high is he?" asked Giles, leaning over the fence and patting his arched neck caressingly.

"Nice-looking enough," answered Williams; "but his sight, you see," ———

"Humph!—pity—but he has the eye of a kind critter;" and Giles combed the long mane of the proud-looking animal, with his fingers, as though he thought him a pretty good colt after all. "Trade him," he added, after a moment, "if a fellow would give you boot enough?"

"No, sir! I have no idea of selling or trading him," and Mr. Williams looked toward his house, which was now out of view, saying, "I must be getting along home."

"Time for me, too," said Giles; "I see by the smoke that supper is ready, and I only meant to stop long enough to send a message from my wife to yours, which is nothing more nor less than an invitation from my wife to your wife to come to our house to-morrow afternoon. 'Early,' my wife told me to say, and that she would be disappointed if your wife did n't come."

"I'll tell her," said Williams; and loosening the traces, he sent his horses homeward alone, and set out himself in search of the cows; while Giles plodded along, wondering whether his neighbor had a touch of the rheumatism, (the weather had been damp) or what made him so down-hearted. As he drew

near home, his wife came forth, with her milk-pail, and a deep sun-bonnet pulled down over her face. Little Daniel Giles stood beneath a cherry-tree, varying his idleness by throwing stones at the chickens which were going to roost in the boughs; the mother paused, gave him a silent shake, boxed his ears, right and left, and passed on, without so much as glancing at Tommy.

“Why, Emeline, what sends *you* out to milk to-night?” said the husband, kindly, as tucking up her skirts she placed herself beside a little kicking heifer, with brindled hide, and horns bent close together, switching her tail in the woman’s face by way of salutation.

“What sends me? why, it’s time somebody was milking, I’m sure.” Scarcely had she finished the sentence, when away went the pail, with a deep indention in one side, and the little cow was seen running and tossing her head in an opposite direction.

“Don’t try to milk the ugly brute, Emeline,” said Mr. Giles, consolingly; “it’s as much as I can do.”

But Mrs. Giles, after shaking the milk from her apron, took up the pail in silence, and resolutely resumed her milking. Directly, however, she was left beside her overturned pail, alone, and the tears, in spite of her winking and pulling down the bonnet, dropped one after another down her cheeks.

“If you had minded me, that would not have happened,” was the first exclamation of the husband; but when he saw her tears, his tone changed to one of kind commiseration, and reaching for the pail, to which she firmly held, he said, “Do n’t, Emeline; do n’t be so stubborn; go in and prepare the supper while I milk; come, Emeline, come—I expect Polly Williams will come to see you to-morrow.”

“I do n’t care for Polly Williams; I’m sorry she is coming,” sobbed Mrs. Giles; but her heart was softened a little, evidently, for she loosened her hold on the pail, which Mr. Giles took, as he continued, “To be sure, Emeline, Polly Williams is n’t you, but I guess she is a good clever woman, for you know she comes into our house if any of us is ailing, just as though it was her own; she seems to know just where and how to take hold.”

"She ought to have some good about her, the dear knows," persisted Mrs. Giles, the fires of whose anger were not yet all burned down; "but I suppose if she is coming there is no help for it."

"Why, you told me this very noon-time," answered the husband, "just as I was dipping a tin of water from the pine bucket—with your own lips you told me to try and get word to Polly to come over here a visiting to-morrow afternoon."

"Well, what if I did?"

"Nothing: only I supposed you wanted her to come."

"Oh, you suppose great things, sometimes."

"Well, well, never mind," said Mr. Giles; "I don't want to quarrel, and I do want my supper."

"You are always finding fault with me," said Mrs. Giles, petulantly, "when I try to do everything;" and then came out one cause, at least, of the vexation—supper had been waiting half an hour.

When the supper had been eaten by the husband, in silence, (Mrs. Giles did n't want any, she had a headache,) and removed suddenly, and the children were all asleep, happy in dreams of new hen's nests, perhaps, Mr. Giles drew his chair up to that of his wife, where she sat in a streak of moonlight, leaning her head on her hand.

"Emeline," he said, pressing between both his toil-hardened hands one of hers, "don't you remember one night, when we were walking down the lane, and you blushed that I called you Mrs. Giles—for your name was not Mrs. Giles then—we saw riding home from market Mr. and Mrs. Griffith, looking as though none the happier for being together, and I said to you, 'Emeline, is that the way we shall do, by-and-by?' and you said, 'If I ever look so cross, Tommy, I shall not expect you to love me.' Then," he added, half sorrowfully, half reproachfully, "I did n't think you ever would."

Poor Mrs. Giles—over all her worn and faded and chilling experiences, came a wave from that fountain that is always fresh—she did n't look cross any more.

The next morning she went about preparations for Mrs. Williams, cheerfully, though she said it was troublesome to

have visitors; but she should never be any more ready than she was then, she supposed. And so, with sweating and toiling and some scolding, she prepared custards and cakes, and such other delicacies as farmhouses afford, arranging the dinner meantime, that all might be in readiness at an early hour.

The children, who were frolicsome and noisy and not too obedient, were called together from tree-tops and mud-puddles, and from under the barn—their faces and hands reduced to a natural color by soap and water applications, their heads, which Mrs. Giles said looked like so many brush-heaps, combed and curled, and their torn and soiled garments exchanged for neat and clean ones—and they were told they must see how pretty they could act, for that Mrs. Williams was going to bring her three nice little boys, who would be frightened to death if they behaved as they were accustomed to. A dozen whippings would not have been so effectual, and, tying on bonnets and hats, they walked down the lane and settled themselves in the shade of a tree to greet the coming of their visitors. They did not have long to wait, for the shadows were only slanting a little from noon when Mrs. Williams, with three accompaniments, whom she called at home the torments of her life, and abroad her troublesome comforts, was seen coming over the hill, in a dress, of a stiff woollen stuff, which she had worn from time immemorial, and holding before her face the faded green parasol which she had carried just about as long.

“I’ll declare,” said Mrs. Giles, slipping out of one dress and into another, “she might as well have come before dinner, and be done with it; what on earth can I find to say all this long afternoon?” The new cap was hardly tied when the creaking of the gate announced the near approach of her neighbor, and as Mrs. Giles opened the door her face broke into the happiest smile. “Really, Polly,” she said, violently shaking hands, “it does a body good to see you once more.”

“I am sure,” answered Mrs. Williams, “I ain’t much to see, and if I look happy it’s because I’ve come to your house, where everything is so nice;” and the two ladies, mutually pleased, and, laughing as though they never did anything else, walked into the house together.

II.

When, the previous evening, Mr. Williams brought home the cows, with some misgivings he approached the house, for he yet saw no indication of life thereabouts. "Why, Polly, what in the world has happened?" he said, placing his hands on either side of the door, and looking anxiously within; but Polly neither looked up nor made any reply. "Heard any bad news, any way?" he said, after a pause. Mrs. Williams shook her head; and after a moment of bewildered silence, and seeing his boys lopping over the backs of their chairs, with swollen eyes and red noses, he renewed his efforts to ascertain what manner of calamity could have overtaken his household. "Sick, any of you?" he said, in a tone between petulance and tenderness.

Mrs. Williams partly removed the apron from her eyes, and looked askance at her husband, revealing a face reddened with tears, but she only shook her head, this time more mournfully than before.

"Then what *is* the matter? seems to me you act strangely, for nothing."

After lingering in vain anxiety a little while longer, he proceeded to kindle a fire, and fill the tea-kettle; and Mrs. Williams, laying her baby in the cradle, presently went about preparations for supper. No farther explanation was asked or given, and a night's sleep operated to restore things to their usual tenor.

"I had a little talk with Mr. Giles, last evening," said Mr. Williams, at breakfast.

"Did you?" said Mrs. Williams; "well, what did he have to say?"

"Oh, not much—he liked our bay colt pretty well, and he said his wife said she wanted you to come over there this afternoon—airly, he said she said."

"I have quite as much as I can get along with, at home," said Mrs. Williams; and she looked as though she endured a great many hardships that nobody cared anything about.

"Well, do as you like, Polly," said Mr. Williams, as he

went out to his day's labor; "but he said, Emeline said she wanted you to come, and bring the children, he said, she said."

"I am sure I do n't care much about visiting anywhere, and least of all about visiting Mrs. Giles."

"Why, what have you against Mrs. Giles? she is a nice woman, I am sure—beautiful day, I guess it will turn out."

"Oh, I have nothing particular against her—I don't lay up hard thoughts against anybody," said the wife; "but it seems to me it would be hard work to talk to Mrs. Giles to-day."

Notwithstanding all Mrs. Williams said, and half believed, she went more briskly about her work than usual, though, when the children asked if she was going, she replied, vaguely, that she would "see about it."

"Toot-to-to-to-o-o!" went the dinner-horn, at half-past eleven, and Mr. Williams hastened home, for he well knew that visiting was to be done. "And so you have concluded to go, have you, Polly?" he said, as he sat down to dinner.

"I suppose I may as well go, and be done with it," she replied, "if I have it to do; and the children are all crazy to go; the day is pleasant, and there is nothing more than there always is to prevent; and so I must put on the old black dress that everybody is tired of seeing, and trot along in the sun—I'll be glad when it's over."

An hour thereafter the happy meeting took place.

"I was so afraid you would not come," said Mrs. Giles, untying the bonnet-strings of her friend, "for I had the queerest dream last night, and it has seemed to me that something bad was going to happen."

"I do hate to be plagued with ugly dreams," said Mrs. Williams; "but what was it about?"

"Why," said Mrs. Giles, "I dreamed that you were sick, and it did not seem precisely as if you were sick, either, but you were blind, and I thought your face was white as a cloth, and I tried to get where you were, for I saw you walking about in your own yard, but I kept falling as I tried to walk, and could n't get along, and when at last I was nearly there, I found that I had no shoes on; still I thought I must go on, and just

as I opened the gate a great dog sprung at me and took me right in the wrist, and I fairly jumped out of my skin and waked right up—wide awake as I am now. A good little bit it seemed to me as if it was the truth, for I could see just how you looked, and the thought of the cross beast made me almost tremble; all I could do I could n't get to sleep again, and as soon as the first roosters crowed for daylight I got up, and it appeared like I could have no peace till I saw you."

"Some people think," said Mrs. Williams, "that the state of the mind, or the supper we eat, or something or other, influences our dreams, but I don't think any such thing."

"No, nor I," answered Mrs. Giles, though she thought of retiring supperless, and of some unpleasant words and feelings previously; she did not speak of them, however. "I am sure I have had dreams that were omens-like," resumed Mrs. Giles, sadly; "along before my poor little Emeline died, I dreamed one night that a strange woman, dressed in white, came to the door and asked me to see the baby, and though I did n't know who she was, it seemed to me that I must do as she bid, and I put little Emeline in her arms and she carried her away—walking right through the air, I thought. It was only a little while till she took sick and died."

At this recital the eyes of both the ladies filled with tears, and their hearts flowed right together. The children stood in silent wonder and fear, that seemed to say, "Why do you cry, mother?" Mrs. Giles gave them some cakes and told them to go out to some shady place and play, for that they were seeing their best days. They did not believe that, though they obeyed, and presently their merry shouts and laughter indicated that their days were very good ones, whether their best or not.

How easily we are acted upon by outward influences! the lively carol of a bird, a merry peal of laughter, or a smiling face, gives tone and color to our feelings, and unconsciously we begin to look at the cheerful side of things; and so, as the two ladies heard the pleasant sport of their children, their thoughts flowed into pleasant channels; and as they rocked by the vine-curtained window, they chattered like two magpies—now of the garden, now of the children and the school, now of what

they had got, and now of what they proposed to get, all of which subjects were spiced occasionally with a little harmless gossip.

“How well that dress does wear,” said Mrs. Giles, rubbing the sleeve of her friend’s gown between her fingers; “and it looks just as good as new, yet—I wish I could get such a thing.”

“I always thought it was a good black,” replied Mrs. Williams, “and it does seem as if there was no wear out to it, and it’s the handiest kind of a dress, for, being worsted, I can wear it in winter, and yet it is so stiff and cool that I can wear it in summer just as well as if it were lawn.”

“I’ll dare say,” said Mrs. Giles; “where did you get the piece? I must have one just like it the first time I go to town.”

To have heard the conversation of the women, their little confidences, and sly inuendoes, about Mr. Smith and Mrs. Hill, and the way they managed things, you would have supposed them two of the best friends in the world, and withal very amiable. And so in fact they were, as friends and amiability go; neither, as she had anticipated, felt at any loss for something to say, and the hours glided swiftly by.

“La, bless me!” exclaimed Mrs. Giles, suddenly throwing down her work; “just look at that shadder—why, the afternoon don’t seem to me to have been a minute long”—

“Did you ever! who would have thought it?” said Mrs. Williams; but there they were, the long sunset shadows stretching across the yard, and it was time for Mrs. Giles to make her biscuits. “I guess, Polly,” she said, “you will have to move your chair into the kitchen, for I don’t like to leave you long enough to get supper, and it’s getting so late that I must spring about.” So they adjourned together, and Mrs. Giles, tying on a checked apron and rolling back her sleeves, kneaded the flour vigorously, and the tea-kettle was presently steaming like an engine, and an extra large “drawing of tea” was steeping on the hearth.

“Now, Emeline,” said Mrs. Williams, lifting the tea-table into the middle of the floor, “you need n’t say one word, for I am going to set the table for you.”

“No, Polly, you are not going to do any such a thing; it’s a pretty story if you must go to work when you come to visit; now just sit down and make yourself comfortable.”

“I shall do no such a thing,” said Polly, “that is, I won’t sit in my laziness when you are at work; it will make me a good deal more comfortable to help; I’d be ashamed,” she continued, laughing, “to tell you what you should n’t do, if you were at my house.”

“Well, have your own way, and live the longer,” replied Emeline, playfully tossing the table-cloth toward her friend, who proceeded to arrange the tea-things with as much ease and grace as if she were at home.

The new dishes were admired; the quality of the sugar examined, both ladies agreeing that it was the whitest brown sugar they had ever seen, and so cheap; the knives and forks were thought by Mrs. Williams perfect loves—so small and highly finished; and Mrs. Giles thought them so too, though she said she did n’t know as they were anything more than common.

“I will have a set just like them before I am a month older,” said Mrs. Polly Williams.

“And I will have a dress just like yours,” replied Mrs. Giles, “and I must borrow the pattern too—it fits so beautifully.” So, it was agreed that they should go to town together—Mrs. Giles for the dress, and Mrs. Williams for the knives and forks. Only the previous evening Mrs. Giles had said she hoped to have some new knives and forks before Mrs. Williams came again, though she supposed the old ones would have to do.

What a pleasant time they had, drinking tea together! the cake had not one heavy streak, or if it had, neither of them saw it; and the custard was baked just enough, the biscuits were as light and white as new fallen snow, and the butter and the honey, all the supper, in fact, was unexceptionable; of course Mrs. Williams praised everything, and of course Mrs. Giles was pleased; and as for the children, they were perfectly happy, till the time of parting. “Now you must come right soon, and bring all the children,” said Mrs. Williams, when they separated at the end of the lane.

“Oh, yes, I shall come soon, but don't wait for me; whenever you can, take your work and run over.”

And after much lingering, and invitations iterated and reiterated, and promises made over and over, each to the other, that she would be more sociable, they parted. And certainly there was no affectation of interest they did not feel; the crust of selfishness that gathered over their hearts, in isolation, was rubbed off by contact, and the hard feeling, engendered by too frequent contemplation of the darkest side of things, was changed into kindness under the influence of genial looks and words—so much in this journey of life do little things discourage, or help us on.

When Mrs. Polly Williams opened the gate at home, she saw her husband sitting by the open door, waiting and looking for her; the milking was done, and the kettle boiling, and it seemed no trouble at all to prepare supper for him; and the less, perhaps, that he said, “Do n't give yourself trouble, Polly; just set out anything that's convenient, and never mind changing your dress and cooking for me.”

“It will only require a minute,” replied the wife, unslipping the hooks, for the old black dress had acquired a new value, and, turning it wrong side out, she hung it away more carefully than she had done for a year.

“Well, how did you like your visit?” asked the husband, drawing his chair inside the door, as the dishes began to rattle down on to the table.

“Oh, it was the best visit I ever had; Emeline had everything so nice, and was so glad to see me.” Then she related many little particulars, only interesting to them—sipping tea, the while, not that she wanted any, but merely for company's sake; and saying, in conclusion, that if her children were only like Emeline's, she would be so glad!

Meantime, Mrs. Giles returned, and began washing her dishes, and singing as she did so, while Mr. Giles sat by, looking pleased and happy. “Just step into the pantry, my dear,” said Mrs. Giles, (she had not said “my dear,” previously, for a long time) “and get me a nice piece of brown paper to wrap these knives

and forks in," and she looked at them admiringly, as she rubbed them through the tea-towel.

"And did you find the afternoon as tedious as you expected?" inquired the husband, bringing the paper; but the wife was so busy in praising the children of Mrs. Williams, that she did not seem to hear him, though perhaps she did, and meant it a reply when she said, "La, me! everybody has their little faults, and little troubles, too, I expect—we are none of us perfect. Just put the knives and forks on the upper shelf."

TWO VISITS.

I.

Two very excellent families were the Knights and Lytles, neighbors of ours years ago. But they were most unlike each other in disposition and character. Mrs. Knight was imbedded in old-fashioned notions, out of which she could not be lifted by any sort of modern invention, however skillfully contrived; she was so meek that she considered herself unworthy of the earnings of her own hands; she was also gloomy and despondent; but her friend Mrs. Lytle was altogether different. Mrs. Knight had consolation for all the ills of life, in the comforting reflection that it would soon be over, though she sometimes said she would be happy in it if she had anything to make her so. As to whether Mrs. Knight would have been very cheerful under any circumstances, seems to me a little doubtful, for no one but herself could see anything very adverse in her fortune. She was really a kind woman at heart, but she had no sight except for the dark side of things, and this, linked with extreme modesty, amounting frequently to a painful diffidence, made her singularly, and, as far as others could perceive, needlessly wretched. She was the wife of what is termed a well-to-do farmer, a man whose energy and upright dealing had won for him the respect of all his acquaintances. When a young man he had earned with his own hands the land on which he lived, clearing off the timber, burning the brush, rolling the logs together, and going through the various privations and hardships, of which we know so little, except from the reminiscences of pioneers. When a portion of the land had been cleared, and fences made, a young orchard planted,

and ground broken for the first crops, in the interval between sowing and harvesting he set about building a house; and when the wheat was stacked and the cornstocks rustling in the autumn wind, the smoke from as snug a cabin as was to be found in all the neighborhood, blew across the hills, pleasantly reminding him of the young and pretty girl whom he had scarcely learned to call his wife; and so he wrought with more hope and energy than before. Of course, prosperity mated herself with him, and the fields grew broader and wider, and the shadows of the orchard trees covered all the ground, while flocks of cattle and sheep dotted the pastures. But with these years I have little to do, only as the light reflected from them shows that Mrs. Knight had at least a provident husband.

At the time of which I write, they were in the maturity of life—old people I thought them, for I was not so old as I am now, and as we grow older we do not look on years as we do in childhood and youth. How long are the days then, and the years! it seems as if they would never end; but they pass more and more fleetly, dropping one after another into the strangely mingled sea that is behind us, and before we are aware the shadows are lengthening from the sunset.

There was a sprinkle of gray among the yet thick locks of Mr. Knight, and the smooth brown hair of the wife and mother was now under a plain cap, though you might see a few betraying lines of silver. Their home was no longer in the cabin in which their first wedded years were passed, for there came more to dwell in it than there was room for, and, with larger means, an ampler and more convenient habitation had been provided. They occupied a plain substantial brick house when I knew them, having about them all the conveniences of comfort, if not of elegance, and as I said "daughters and sons of beauty" to gladden with the freshness of youth the worn experiences and common realities of life.

"As the husband is, the wife is," Tennyson says, and though generally this may be true, it is not always so, and Mrs. Knight was an exception to the rule. Had she evinced in the management of her house and children the spirit and tact of her husband in the management of his affairs, home would not

have been the uninviting place it was. The little arts which beautify and adorn and make comfortable the humblest cabin, she knew nothing about. True, she had been in early life accustomed to privations, for rigid economy was then necessary, and nothing beyond actual wants was thought of. But with more liberal means there came to her no desires transcending any strict necessity.

The fashion of the times had changed, and the requirements of people "in society" were greatly enlarged, but Mrs. Knight remained far behind everybody else, partly that she thought herself unworthy to fare better than her grandmother, and partly that life seemed to her too sorrowful a thing to bedeck with any ornaments, for, as I said before, she had a wonderfully quick apprehension for what was evil; and perhaps, too, she was over frugal.

It is a great while—I scarcely dare suggest how long—since I first visited her, but all that then occurred is as fresh in my memory as if it were an incident of yesterday. The chimney tops were in view of my own home, and as Mr. Knight often passed our house on his way to market, I knew him very well, and he had often invited me to visit his wife, which I had never felt at liberty, from her retiring manners, to do. At length, however, I resolved, at least to show myself friendly, for perhaps, thought I, the fault has not been all on her side. So, one pleasant afternoon in October, I arrayed myself in a gingham dress, which had been washed and ironed, and with the stoutest pair of shoes and the oldest bonnet I had—selecting my costume with a view to the prejudices of the woman I was to visit—speedily after dinner, which was at one o'clock, set out, carrying a bundle of sewing which would have served me at home for a week. I soon reached the farm, and, as I was passing through the fennel that fringed the roadside, came to an opening in the fence, where, seated on rails that slanted to the ground, were two little black-eyed girls, whom I recognized as the youngest children of Mr. and Mrs. Knight.

"What are you doing here, my little friends?" I said, pausing a moment; but neither answered a word, and the youngest—ten years old, perhaps—seized a rough club which lay beside

her, and ran violently in the direction of a drove of cattle, mostly fine milch cows, peaceably feeding in the pasture which bordered the roadside.

The older sister, after picking the briars from her toes with a brass pin, turned her blushing face half toward me, as I repeated the question, and added, "I am just going to your house," and she told me, biting the hem of her sleeve, that they were "tending the gap," for that papa and mamma were both gathering apples in the orchard beyond the meadow, and the fence was down for them to drive home. As I spoke, I saw the team approaching, and, leaning on the fence, waited its coming near us, resolved to tell Mr. Knight of my good intentions, and await a more opportune season for my visit. But the good man would not hear a word of my returning home, and forcing a dozen apples of different kinds into my hands, he said, "A pretty piece of work, to-be-sure, that we should be disappointed of seeing you. Rachel happens to be in the orchard, but there is no need of it—Jane Anne!" he cried to the little girls, "leave off your chasing them are critters, and run and tell your mammy that company is at the house—clicket, you good-for-nothings!" This last piece of advice I thought quite gratuitous, for they set off at such a rate that one might have said,

"The tempest itself lags behind,
And the swift-winged arrows of light."

Thus encouraged, I went forward, and was soon at the house.

II.

Mr. KNIGHT informed me as he opened the gate, that he should be at the cider-press till supper time, but that Rachel and the girls would entertain me; and he added an expression of regret that he was not himself more at leisure. As I entered the yard, I saw that there were no walks cut through the sod, and that the grass was trampled away as it chanced, and beneath the tree (there was but one near the house) trodden quite bare; and torn pieces of calico, bits of boards, and broken china, spoke of a demolished play-house. There were no

flowers, nor shrubs to be seen, except a spindling "Jacob's Ladder" which grew in a broken teapot, beneath the parlor window.

I rapt smartly at the front door, but received no answer. Indeed, after listening a moment, I was satisfied I should not be able to make myself heard, for from a chamber window came a sound like small thunder. The young ladies were spinning wool, and running races, as it seemed by the whurr, buzz and tumult, that came to my ears; so, after a little reflection, I concluded to sit down on the steps and wait the coming of Mrs. Knight, but the husband, seeing this, called to me to go right in and make myself at home, and feeling that my delay would annoy him, I did so. But as he leaned back over the three bundles of rye through which the gleam of the red apples shone, I could see that he was not smiling. The door opened immediately into the parlor, and seating myself there, I had some leisure for a survey of the style in which our neighbors were living. The walls were bare, but white-washed; the floor was covered with a home-made carpet, striped alternately with green and red and yellow; six black windsor chairs stood in a straight line against the wall; a bed with a white muslin tester was in one corner; and an old-fashioned bureau, on which lay a Bible and hymn-book, and a breakfast table, covered with a green and red oil-cloth, completed the furniture, except that the windows were shaded with highly-colored wall-paper. On one side of the chimney was a cupboard with glazed doors, originally designed for china, but filled with a variety of coverlids, varying in color from the faintest blue to the deepest red that could be dyed with pokeberries and pumpkin rinds. All was stiff and angular, and a smell of paint pervaded the atmosphere.

Many times I fancied I heard the creak of the gate; and at last, weary of waiting, I went to the window, assured that I detected steps and voices. Nor was I mistaken, for beneath the window, wringing a fleece of wool from the dye, and spreading it out on the grass, was Mrs. Knight. I was about tapping on the window, to inform her of my presence, when she spoke so harshly to the children, who were getting their play-house to

rights, that I resumed my seat, resolved to await her leisure ; and when her work was completed, with hands the color of an indigo bag, I perceived that she bent her steps in the direction of the kitchen.

The time I deemed sufficient for any little preparation she might wish to make went by, and I began to find my position rather awkward, especially as I could hear her, apparently engaged in household duties, as though altogether unadvised of my being in the house. The children now began to climb up at the window, and looked in at me, laughing and hiding their heads alternately.

“Is your mother at home?” I asked, thinking still she was ignorant of my being there. It was some time before I could get an intelligible response, and then I was told that she was making bread in the kitchen.

I was half inclined to return home, but remembering Mr. Knight’s efforts toward sociability, I determined to press still further, and, retreating from my position, I stepped to the door of the kitchen, and made a sort of half apologetic observation in answer to the unsmiling face which presented itself ; and on helping myself to a chair, as I was bidden, I followed my uneasy salutation with some deprecatory remarks, in a subdued tone, on the circumstances of our meeting, and of the pleasures of agreeable neighborhood.

The day was warm, the sun streamed against uncurtained windows, the wood blazed in the deep fire-place, and the numberless flies blackened the air ; but the woman wrought on unmoved.

I drew my chair to the open door, and, unfolding my work, began to stitch, with great energy, talking the while of such things as I supposed would interest her. She said little, however, and that, as it were, by compulsion.

“Are the young ladies well?” I said, after a long silence, during which I had been examining the array of pots and skillets she was bringing about the hearth.

“The gals, if you mean them, are well enough,” she answered.

“I have not seen them for a long while,” I remarked.

"No, I guess you havn't," she replied; "they are no gadabouts."

I felt rebuked, but added that I was not often abroad myself, and so should not be likely to meet them.

"They are spinning, probably?" I continued, after a moment.

She did not reply directly, but wiping her face with her apron, exclaimed, 'Marcysakes on us! I wish I was in Joppa—it's so hot here!'

"Yes, it is very warm," I said, "but you have cooler rooms?"

"I have no time to sit in them," she said, adding presently, "I don't know as it is any difference about me—I am not fit for anything but to work, as I know of."

I attempted a smile, and suggested that she was fit for anything proper for a woman, I supposed. She took her chin in her hand and remained silent, looking as though she might be musing of the dead.

At this point the youngest child, whose timidity was fast vanishing, and who felt, no doubt, some desire to amuse me, sprang upon the table, and seizing a newspaper, from among a number that were strung over a cord attached to the wall near the ceiling, began showing me a picture of the president, with which it was embellished.

"Is that the way you sarve your father's papers!" exclaimed Mrs. Knight; "I'll president you, if you don't put that up."

Mr. Knight was a man of some intelligence, took a political newspaper, which he read, and was pretty well versed in affairs generally, but to the rest of the family, the paper might as well have been written in Greek, for all they knew about it. It was not thought possible, indeed, that they could read or understand anything contained in it, and as soon as it was read by the man of the house, it was hung above the reach of the children, who learned to regard it as something especially designed for old men in spectacles to look at on Sundays. I felt in part to blame for the misdemeanor of the child, if misdemeanor it were, as it was on my account she had violated what seemed to be the law here. Therefore I was not sorry when, taking a skimmer in her hand, Mrs. Knight went into the

cellar to attend to some necessary duty, as I supposed, for she made no explanation or apology. There was thus presented a fine opportunity for the little girls to display the juvenile spirit which paternal authority generally kept subdued within them. They were perhaps a little ambitious too, for the exhibition of some of their various accomplishments before a visitor. So, concealing themselves from observation, though not from hearing, they began.

"It rains, but it don't wet; it's night, but it's not dark; and if I was at your house I'd go home," said the youngest evidently designing that I should make the application.

"Oh, Jane Anne, ain't you ashamed!" exclaimed the eldest, and then, by way of diverting my thoughts, perhaps, she repeated a puzzling enigma, which she defied anybody and everybody to guess: "Four stiff-standers, four down-hangers, two crook-about, two look-about, and a whisk-about."

"Eh! who couldn't guess that?—it's nothing but a cow," replied Jane Anne; "I can tell one that's harder: now listen;" and though probably the sister had heard the riddle a hundred times before, she was as attentive as if it were the most startling novelty:

"Through a riddle and through a reel,
Through an ancient spinning wheel—
Through the grass and in the skies,
If you guess this you'll be wise."

"Well, then, I am wise, for it's frost," replied Sally; but I doubt whether she could have come to this conclusion so readily from any meaning of the words. "Now I'll tell one you can't guess:

' Long legs, short thighs,
Little head, and no eyes.'

"Tongs, tongs!" shouted Jane Anne, and continued:

"Round as an apple, deep as a cup,
And all the king's oxen can't draw it up."

"Who don't know that!" said Sally, disdainfully refusing to guess.

I need not repeat more of the original and ingenious rhymes, with which they tested each other's wit, further than to state

that they were just breaking up what they termed their riddle party, in the ceremonial of—

“Oneary, oreary, kittery Kay,
English minglish Jonathan Day—
One, two, three—out goes she !”

“Out goes she, I think !” exclaimed the mother, suddenly appearing, with a great basin of milk in her hands, which, having disposed of, she took the children, one at a time, by the ear, and leading them directly before me, in order to make them the more ashamed, imprisoned one in the pantry, and the other in the smoke-house, where for the present I leave them.

“Dear me, I don’t know what will become of us all,” said the outraged mother, speaking rather to herself than to me, as the excitement of the arrest subsided a little.

“Children will be children,” said I, by way of consolation, and supposing she alluded to them.

She was seated on a low door step, near me but not facing me, and, with her head dropt on her bosom, continued talking to the air, something after this wise : “Massy on us ! I don’t know what to do, nor what will become of us—all will go to rack and ruin ! Chasing the cows and one thing and another—strange the child had no more consideration—her new frock—she has torn a great three-cornered place in the skirt, and I don’t see how we are to make any money—apples don’t bring anything—nothing ever does that we have to sell—butter is down to a quarter, and we eat half we make—if it wasn’t, I can’t begin to count my troubles.”

“I suppose,” I interrupted, “we could all recollect some troubles if we were to try ; but if we look round, we may commonly see people worse off ;” and, to divert her thoughts, I spoke of the widow Day, a poor woman with two little boys, one of whom was lying sick.

“Yes,” she answered, “there are people even worse off than we—but we’ll all be done with life pretty soon : it won’t be long.”

“It seems only a little time to those who stay here longest,” I said ; “but while we are here, it is best to avail ourselves of every harmless means of enjoyment in our power, and you have as much to make you happy as most persons.”

"I can work hard and fare hard, and yet no thanks," she replied, looking mournfully on the ground, her thin face full of untimely wrinkles.

There was no need, that I could see, of her working hard or faring hard. She seemed to like privation, to feel that sacrifice was not only a duty, but a privilege.

While I was deliberating what I would say next, a man who was carrying earthen pumps about the country, presented himself, and asked whether her husband would not like to procure one; saying, as he glanced at the well, "I see you use the hard old-fashioned sweep?"

"Yes, and I expect to use it a good while longer," she replied: "we don't want any pump, and if we did, we are not able to get it."

"You own this farm, I suppose?" the man said, glancing over the broad, well-cultivated fields.

"Yes, but money don't grow on bushes," rejoined Mrs. Knight, "and we have our taxes to pay, and the children will all be wanting shoes, the first thing, you know—the frosts come so airy of late years."

"I sold one at the white house, yonder, and they are delighted with it. You have no idea of the ease and comfort and beauty of the thing; and, so far from adulterating the water, I think it rather has purifying qualities."

"The folks in the white house are rich," said the unhappy woman, "and able to get a gold pump if they wanted it; but I told you we had no money to spend for pumps, and I shouldn't want it if we had, for we once had one that fairly made the water blue."

The man assured her his patent stone-ware pump was quite unexceptionable, and saying he would call when her husband was in, asked the privilege of lighting a cigar, which he had been twirling in his fingers during the conversation. As he stooped over the row of skillets, spiders, Dutch ovens, and the like, in which bread was rising, before fire, hot enough to roast an ox, he remarked that he was an agent for one of the most celebrated cooking-stoves in use.

"Well," said Mrs. Knight, seeing that he paused for a

reply, "keep them, for all me ; I don't like your stoves nor the smell of your tobaccar."

Though the pump had been far better than represented, she would have had nothing to do with it. The old way, she said, was good enough for her—she should not want anything long. She seemed to think whatever lessened labor was a grievous wrong ; and whatever tended to pleasure, was something with which she or her family by no possibility could have anything to do.

Modern fashions were also prohibited ; the cut of her gown and the shape of her bonnet had been common ten or fifteen years before—it required that length of time for the sinfulness to get out of their cut, I suppose.

There are people, and Mrs. Knight was of them, who stand aloof and seem to feel themselves fated to stand aloof from the general interests and enjoyments of life.

If her husband prevailed on her to go and hear a Fourth of July oration, she dressed her children like miniature men and women, in long narrow skirt and fur hats, kept them sitting stiff and upright close beside her during the blessed intermission, when other children bought beer and gingercakes, and returned home before the dinner was served under the long green arbor ; and while other girls marched in procession, with white dresses, and roses in their hair, to partake of the roast pigs and green peas, her daughters, in dark calico frocks and winter bonnets, marched to their usual fried pork and sprouted potatoes.

If they were permitted to go to a quilting, they were instructed to come home in time to milk, and thus were deprived of all the real enjoyment of the occasion. It was not for them to remain to the "play-party," when the quilt was swung up to the ceiling, and the young men came in, with candy and cinnamon in their pockets. Many a time had the young women gone to bed with aching hearts to hear in dreams the music of—

"We are marching forward to Quebec
And the drums are loudly beating,
America has gained the day
And the British are retreating.
The wars are o'er and we'll turn back,
And never more be parted ;

So open the ring and choose another in
That you think will prove true-hearted."

They might both have been dreaming and spinning in the old chamber to this day, as indeed one of them is, but for a little stratagem, in which I had some share. But I am getting before my story. The prisons of the little girls were opened at last, and they came forth—each

" With an unquiet drooping of the eye,
As if its lid were charged with unshed tears ;"

but their spirits were elastic, and the excitement of running down and catching a couple of chickens for supper, soon produced the wildest gayety.

" Now go long with you and wring off their heads," said the mother, " while I grind my butcher-knife."

And with streaming hair, flushed faces, and dresses torn, they bore off their captives to execution as jocosely as they would have fed them. The fun was presently over, however ; one of the party, in racing, had bruised her naked foot on a stone, and sitting on the ground she took it in her lap and bathed the injured place with her tears. " If mother would let me wear shoes," she said, " I would not have done it," and half in anger, half in sorrow she cried aloud.

" Not another word out of your head," exclaimed the mother ; " ain't you warm enough without your feet bundled up ?"

" Yes ; but Mary Whitfield wears shoes and stockings too, all the time."

" You can't be Mary Whitfield," replied the mother ; " so twist up your hair and go out and help your sister hoe the currant bushes."

" Dingnation on it all !" cried the child, as the mother adjourned to the vicinity of the pig-pen to pick the feathers from her chickens, " I wish I had hurt myself so bad that I could not work."

" Come on, Sal," said Jane, bringing two hoes from the smoke house, " come on and cut your toe off ;" and wiping her face, bloody with her late murderous work, on her sleeves, she gave a series of jumps beside the long hoe handles, calling it riding on horseback, and disappeared in the garden. Sally prepared to follow, hobbling on her heel to keep the bruised portion of

her foot off the ground ; but the tears were yet on her face ; and I called to her to wait a moment. It was not much, but I did what I could ; and when her foot had been bathed and bandaged, her face washed, and her head combed, the grateful smile that lit up her countenance made her almost beautiful. I could not help feeling what a pity and shame it was that all refinement must be drilled out of her nature, and all its graces blunted and dimmed, by the drudgery of unwomanly tasks. She was a much prettier and more sprightly girl than Mary Whitfield ; but so far from having her natural attractions heightened by education and any familiarity with refined society, as hers were, she was growing into womanhood, not merely in rusticity, but so encrusted with actual vulgarity, that she would not be able to break out of it by any efforts of maturer years. Sally Knight sounded as well as Mary Whitfield, for ought I could see, and with the same advantages the former would have been vastly superior to the latter ; but in her mother's opinion she was proscribed. True, she was a farmer's daughter, and would probably be a farmer's wife ; but for that reason must she be debarred all the little accomplishments which chiefly distinguish civilized from savage life ? I thought not. In this democratic country, where the humblest girl may, under possible circumstances, aspire to the highest positions, it is a wickedness for parents, or any one in authority, to fasten a brand of ignominy on a child, as it were, crippling her energies and circumscribing her movements for life. If the complexion must be scorched and roughened, the joints stiffened and enlarged by overtasks, the mind vulgarized by epithets required or continually used in coarse employments, let it be at the demand of inevitable misfortune, not at that of a misguided will.

Mrs. Knight had been mortified when she found her daughters indulging in the jargon I have reported, and so imprisoned them, as I have described ; but if she had accustomed herself to spend some portion of the day devoted to scolding the children, in their cultivation, few punishments of any kind would have been required. If they had known anything sensible, they would probably not have been repeating the nonsense which seemed to please them so. But they had no books

suiting to their years, and consequently they thought books only designed for wise old men and preachers; as for the newspaper, they supposed it was all one long president's message, or something of that sort, for none of its lighter articles did they ever hear, and it was no wonder they grew tired and fell asleep when required to sit still through the reading of a congressional speech; and of course they never touched the paper except to hang it against the ceiling. When I told Mrs. Knight that I had some prettily illustrated stories at home which might please her little girls, she said she had something else for them to do; and when I asked if they were to go to the new academy, she replied that they had as much education now as ever their mother had, and besides, they had not the money to spare, and their troubles were not to be lessened in any way that she knew of; but if they were, academies were not built for the like of her girls. She kept so busy during all the afternoon, that I felt sadly intrusive, but she told me I could never have been less troublesome than then, if I had waited twenty years, and with this comforting assurance I remained to tea.

III.

THE sunshine was streaming across the porch where I was sitting, and Mrs. Knight was spreading her table, when the children came galloping breathlessly in, informing her that Mr. Sisco was coming. Suddenly the wheels ceased their rumbling, and a rap sounded on the front door.

"Mammy, mammy, shall I go?" asked the girls.

"No; if he want's to see folks, let him come where folks are; go up-stairs and tell your sisters to get on with their spinning;" and presently the wheels began to rumble, and the young man came back to the kitchen.

He was evidently returning from a military muster, for a dashing cockade ornamented his hat, strips of red tape covered the outer seams of his trowsers, and a blue sash formed his girdle, and hung in long floats over the scabbard of his sword. He seemed from his flushed countenance and the bloody spurs attached to his boots, to have been "pricking hard." In his

hand he held a small switch, of which some harmless bough had recently been deprived, and with this he inflicted a series of sharp quick blows on his lower limbs, which, from their shrinking and trembling, I could not help believing were quite undeserving of such treatment. He perhaps intended it as a penance for the sin he was committing in calling on the young ladies in a busy week-day afternoon, for doubtless the visit was designed for them, though he did not mention their names.

Mrs. Knight continued her preparations for supper, neither making me acquainted with the stranger, nor saying anything to him herself. His ostensible object was to procure a glass of water, but from his wistful and embarrassed look I inferred another motive, and so essayed my powers of detaining and entertaining him, till Jemima and Hetty should come down. "A very warm day, sir, for the season," I said.

"Yes 'am, 'tis very warm."

"It is time for us to expect the long autumn rains," I continued, "but I see no clouds."

"No, mem."

I was at a loss what to say, but his regalia suggested: "Training day, it has been with you, I see."

"Yes, mem."

"There is some falling off of interest in these exercises of late years?"

He made no immediate reply, but soon looked more directly toward me, and said, "What did you observe?"

"Musters are not so attractive as they used to be."

"No, mem."

"I have been inclined to think the most undisciplined soldiers fight as well as you who are skilled in arms," I said; but the compliment disconcerted him, and he abruptly said "Good evening, mem," and turned toward the door.

"What is your hurry?" asked Mr. Knight, just returned home from the cider-press. "Sit down, sit down, and let me take your hat." So saying, he carried it off, cockade and all, into the front room, where, when the windows were thrown open, we were invited to sit.

"Mother," he said, when, having performed his ablutions, he

withdrew to the middle of the dooryard to comb his hair, "why in the world did n't you open the big room before?"

She made no reply; and the good man, having sent Jane Anne above stairs to tell her sisters to come below, joined us in the parlor.

"How is the potato crop with you?" he inquired, tipping his chair against the bed, the starry counterpane of which was surmounted by the young man's hat.

"Our late potatoes are spilt with the rot, and our airy ones were pretty much eat up with bugs—little yaller and black fellers. Mammy took a bresh one morning and breshed them out of the garden patch; it appeared like the whole kentry would be overrun with them, there was so many, she said, when they buzzed up."

"The moles have been at work in mine pretty badly," said the farmer; "I wish I knew how to get rid of them."

"If some dogs were as good to ketch moles as they be to ketch sheep, you might get shut of them."

"Why—any disturbance among the folds hereabouts?"

"Ourn was disturbed night-afore last a little, I should think; we only lost fifteen!" And Mr. Sisco took a large bandanna from one pocket and placed it in another.

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Mr. Knight; "and you knew nothing of it?"

"I," replied the military youth, "slep as sound as a roach, but mammy said she was awake along in the night, and she heard Towser bark as cross as he could be, and thought the fence rattled too, she said; but she was dozy-like, and went to sleep again, and in the mornin' she alowed how if she had got up she might have seen the dogs, for like enough they had one of the old ewes down then."

"Humph!" said Mr. Knight, and really I don't know what better he could have said; and rising, he brought in a pitcher of sweet cider, and a small basket of very fine apples.

Meantime the wheels stood still; and from the frequent and lively snappings of the reel, it appeared that the yarn was being wound from the spindles. Then came a creaking and squeaking of the floor, as the bare feet pattered briskly across

it; then openings and closings of drawers and doors; and the young ladies were evidently preparing to descend. In this opinion I was confirmed when Sally hobbled past the steps with her bib full of fresh-gathered mullen leaves. Cheeks were to be made red—there was no doubt about it. Half an hour later, when the sun burned faintly through the tree tops, Mrs. Knight took from the nail where it hung, a long tin horn, and blew as though she meant to be heard half through the country.

“Now run right along for the cows,” she said; and “forth limped, with slow and crippled pace,” poor Sally, preceded by the more nimble and light-hearted Jane. They did n’t leave the warm precincts of the supper, however, without casting “many a longing, lingering look behind.”

“Go ’long,” called the mother; “who do you think wants you?”

Thus depreciated and warned, they skulked by the fence-side as though they were scarcely privileged to walk directly and upright, even to drive home the cows. Poor children—their mother was quite too meek. Unless she taught them to show in action that they respected themselves, how could she hope for others to respect them!

Shaming the sunset, were the fiery spots, with jagged edges, that burned in the cheeks of the young women, as they curtsied, and shook hands across the plate of chicken; for they had hurried past the parlor without making any salutation.

The arrangement of their hair was without any regard to modern fashion; their dresses were neither new nor clean; they were without stockings, and their shoes were of thick calfskin.

Though naturally intelligent enough, and pretty enough, under their accumulated disadvantages, the woods certainly seemed to be the fittest place for them, and when they had said “How do you do, Mr. Francisco?” and he had replied, “Hearty as a buck—how do you do yourselves?” there seemed to be nothing further to say—especially in the terribly restraining presence of the mother. When she had served the tea, and while the large-bladed knives were going from hand to mouth, and indiscriminately from dish to dish, she removed her chair half a yard from

the table and partook only of a crust of bread, looking the while on the dozen pins that were stuck in the upper part of her sleeve.

“What part of the chicken will you have, mother?” said the husband, raising a piece on his fork, and looking toward her.

She shook her head, still looking at the pins.

“Don’t eat the crust,” he said, passing a fresh slice of bread, “it must hurt your teeth.”

“It’s no difference,” she answered.

He next offered her a piece of apple-pie, baked on a red earthen dish about as large as the full moon; but this she refused, as also the dough-nuts. “Why, mother, ain’t you going to eat any supper?” he said, really distressed.

“I don’t know as it would do any good, any way,” replied the wife mournfully; and with lips pursed up, she continued to work at the crust with her two or three front teeth. “Now, girls, go right along and milk,” she said, as soon as we had risen from the table.

And, mounting on his steed, the young man went his way, while the girls, from the milk yard, waved their adieus to him; and this was all the humanizing intercourse on which they ventured during the gallant’s visit.

I smiled as Hetty began to milk on the left-hand side of her cow, but my attention was speedily arrested by the stepping on to the porch of Mrs. Lytle. She looked tidy, brisk and smiling, and was bearing on her arm a large basket of apples which she had just gathered; for she was the tenant of Mr. Knight and lived in the old cabin, with her two daughters, Kitty and Ady. I could not help contrasting her dress, cheerful demeanor, and the living interest she seemed to feel in the world, with the meek despondency of Mrs. Knight, and when she insisted that I should visit her the day after the next, I readily assented.

The reader must not suppose the Knights representatives of country people generally—at least, they are not fair specimens of such as I have known; but I am sorry to say there are some such unhappy exceptions to the general character of the rural population in all the farming states in which I have any acquaintance. The young man I have introduced, is a species of bumpkin found no where but in the country; nevertheless, it

finds a counterpart in cities, in a more sophisticated and a great deal more despicable order of being. Naturally simple-minded, and with only the blood of a hundred generations of yeomen in his veins, his thoughts seldom traveled beyond the market town and the woods where the sun seemed to set, except when he went to the election, and voted for the ticket which had been supported by his father.

The lines which divide rusticity from the affluent life in country places, or the experience of the middle classes in towns, are very sharply defined; but there are a thousand little redeeming graces belonging to all humanity alike, though uneducated persons are hard to be persuaded that every thing pertaining to gentle pleasures and courtesy, does not necessarily attach only to the "rich and well-born." Flowers are God's beautiful and free gift, and they expand as purely white or as deeply scarlet under the window of the poor man's cottage as in the gardens of kings.

IV.

ON the day appointed I prepared for my visit to Mrs. Lytle, with no very accurately defined expectations of pleasure or pain. Memories of my late discomfiture kept down any of that pleasing excitement so common at the prospect of a country visit, which I might otherwise have felt awaking at the prospect of enlarging my acquaintance in this part of our neighborhood. In this work-day world new sensations are exceedingly precious, and this more especially as the fast-coming shadows of years give all the groundwork of life a sombre tinge. The circle that rises from our first plunge in the sea of life is bright and bounding; but as it widens, the sparkle becomes dull and the motion heavy and sluggish, till at last it breaks on the shore of eternity. We learn too soon the sorrowful wisdom that—

"The past is nothing, and at last
The future can but be the past;"

and so the dew fades off from the flowers, and the dust and the mildew take its place. One after another of our dear ones go from us, either into new spheres of love and labor, or into that darkness "where the eye cannot follow them," and with our feet stumbling among graves, the golden summer sunshine seems

only to bleach white our hair, and not to be heaven's loving baptism for the just and the unjust. And pain knits itself with pain, and complaint joins itself to complaint, till a thankless, if not reproachful, undertone runs through the world. Mourning for the lost or the unattainable, our hearts are insensible of the blessings we have; listening to the low earth for some comfort yet, we turn a deaf ear to the music from above. The cloud rises and we forget the eternal splendor of the stars. We have need of all thy mercy, Oh our Father, for daily and hourly forgetfulness of thy goodness, for the world is full of beauty, and life, though never so much vexed with adverse fortune; and this being is a great thing—great, not only in its final results, and as it grows to its perfect glory, or dwarfs in the fires of ultimate wrath, but in its present capacities and powers—only below Omnipotence. Shall we look abroad on the fashioning of the Creator—we, the perfectest work of his hands, and unsay the benediction, "It is very good." They are wrong who estimate this wonderful and beautiful existence either as a mere chance and vapor that the winds may scatter and the grave undo, or as a hard trial and temptation that it were good to have past; even taking the saddest view of its narrowness and darkness and burdens—even, if you will, limiting its duration to the borders of the tomb, "this sensible, warm being," is a good thing. If we do not find it so, the fault is in ourselves, for in our own perverse hearts is our greatest enemy. We will not recognize the angels that sit at our hearthstones while their wings are folding themselves about our bosoms, but when they are lessening in the azure overhead we exclaim, How beautiful! and reach forth our longing arms in vain.

We tread on the flowers at our feet; and sigh for the gardens of paradise. We put from us the heart that is throbbing with love, and go through the world tracking for receding steps. Life is good, and I am glad to live, despite the pain and the temptation and the sorrow; these must be about it, and there is need that we oppose to them all that within us which is loftiest and best. The basis of every great fabric rests in the dark; so, even though the light of love be gone out, and the star of hope shorn of its first warm splendors,

we have not only the greatest need but the greatest encouragement to work. There are plants hardy enough for the brown baked earth by the cabin door, and birds to sing on the low eaves as well as in the beautiful groves that environ palaces.

But all this is a digression.

I selected my toilet with more scrupulous care than on the occasion of my visit to Mrs. Knight. I knew even my new bonnet and best silk gown would not be deemed unpardonable offences against propriety in the estimation of Mrs. Lytle, who always, despite her disadvantages, looked tidy and smart.

Her daughters, too, Kitty and Ady, whom I had often remarked at the village church, were in appearance no whit behind the squire's or the deacon's daughters, except in years; they were but just coming out, having lately made their *debut* at an apple-cutting, where their pretty pink gingham dresses, white aprons, and quietly agreeable manners, had been themes of common admiration. True, some people, among whom was Mrs. Knight, thought "such flirts of girls" were better kept in tow frocks, and in the kitchen, or at the spinning-wheel; but the general verdict, and especially that of the young men, was in their favor. The house in which the Knights now lived, was substantially built of brick, but with intelligent regard neither for convenience nor taste; no trees grew about it, and standing right up in the sun, with its surrounding pigstyes, henroosts, stables, &c., in full view, it looked comfortless, though sufficiently thrifty.

The windows of the chamber facing the sun were open as I passed, and within the young women were pacing to and fro rapidly, for their wheels sung invariably to the tune of "sixteen cuts" per day. Hung over the window sills, in the sunshine, were several small divisions of "rolls," blue and gray, and in the side yard, her cap border flying, and smoke blowing in her face, appeared the mother, raking chips beneath a soap-kettle. "All work and no play," was still the order of her life.

In the hollow beyond this scene of rude bustle and hard strife, I opened a gate, and, following a narrow and deeply worn path, beside a clear deep brook, I soon found myself in view of the tenant house—a cabin of two rooms, originally, but

with a recently added kitchen, of rough boards. It stood in a little nook, at the head of the hollow traversed by the stream, which had its source beneath the grassy mound, joined to the hill on one side, and extending a little way over the stone wall and door of slabs, on the other. A rude, irregular fence ran round the base of the ascent, enclosing a small plot of ground, with the cabin, and milk-house—the last still and cool, beneath the mound of turf, and the first covered with vines and hedged about with trees. How cosy and even pretty it looked, with the boughs full of red apples close against the wall, and clusters of black grapes depending from the eaves! The great flaunting flowers of the trumpet-vine were gone, and the leaves on the rose-withes beneath the window looked rusty and dull, for the time of bright blossoms was long past, but the plenteous fruits atoned for the lost flowers, and the waxen snow-berries, and the scarlet buds of the jasmine, shining through the fading leaves, helped to make the aspect of everything beautiful, even in a forbidding season.

The fence about the yard was rude enough, but currant bushes grew thick along its side, and over the golden ridge they made, in crimson curves and tangles glistened the smooth vines of the raspberry. There was no gate, and, standing on the stile, by which there was admittance to the yard, I paused a moment, in admiration of the pleasant sight before me. The grass was level and pretty, save where it was broken up for flower-beds—of pinks and hollihocks and poppies—and over a stump that defied all present arts of removal, trailed the “old man’s beard,” so that what would else have been a deformity added to the beauty of the scene.

The door of the parlor—as I judged it to be from the pots of flowers in the windows, and the white curtains—was standing open, and I could see the bright plaided carpet on the floor and the snowy coverlid of the bed—for everybody who has been in western country houses, knows that the parlor is also the spare bedroom, in such places. It looked snug and homelike, and I could not help comparing it with the naked and rude style of things so lately under my observation. Turning in the direction of my thoughts I saw the little girls, Sally and Jane,

in a field, midway between the house, digging potatoes. Seeing me, they struck up a ditty, which was doubtless meant for my benefit, and the day being still, and the wind blowing toward me, I caught the whole distinctly: "Solomon Grundy, born on Monday, christened on Tuesday, married on Wednesday, sick on Thursday, worse on Friday, died on Saturday, buried on Sunday—and that was the end of Solomon Grundy!"

My attention thus diverted, I did not hear the light steps of the young women who had come forth to meet me, till their voices spoke cordial welcomes, which seemed to come from their merry hearts, while the smiles that glowed in their faces made the atmosphere genial as spring.

The outward index had not been too favorable a voucher, and that cabin parlor with its flowers and books, scrupulous cleanliness, and tasteful arrangement, contrasted well with the showy vulgarity of many more pretending houses, where the furnishing speaks wealth, and nothing but wealth. The walls and ceiling were white-washed, green boughs filled the deep wide fire-place, the open cupboard, with its shining britannia and pink-specked china, and the table with its basket of apples, pears, and grapes—how nice it all was, and how suggestive of comfort! But after all, the chief charm of the place was its living occupants. The mother was not yet home, having the previous night gone to market with her landlord—for it must be remembered that Mrs. Lytle was poor, and did not even own the cabin which was indebted for all its attractiveness to her pains. Butter and eggs, and fruits and berries, beside various things manufactured in the house, the provident woman carried weekly to town, for which business Mr. Knight kindly gave her room in his market-wagon; and while she generally returned with her basket as full as she carried it away, he returned with his empty. But notwithstanding these expenditures Mrs. Lytle owed nothing, and though her purse was not so heavy as her neighbor's, neither was her heart. Her children had been kept at school for the most part, and she had even managed to send them two quarters to the new academy, and to dress them in a style, if less expensive, as neat and pretty as anybody in the neighborhood. I can see them now as I saw

them on the day of my visit—Ady in a blue gingham dress and white apron, with bare neck and arms, and Kitty in a pink dress and black apron, till she tied over it a checked one to assist about the preparation of supper.

“And that is the reason I am so late home to-day,” Mrs. Lytle said, beginning at the close of her story. “You see I got out of the wagon just the other side of the school-house, and walked across to Hathaway’s, to see how little Henry was, for I heard in market that the doctor had given him up. Poor child, he seemed so sensible, and told me to tell his mother not to cry!” and wiping her tears, she added, “Mrs. Knight was there, and you know her way: so they all felt worse than they would have done. As soon as she looked at Henry, she said he would not live till morning, and then calling his brother, she told him that Henry would never work or play with him again; and having told them two or three times, that all their tears would not make the child well, she went home to tend her soap-kettle, leaving directions in reference to being sent for in case she was needed.”

It was certainly characteristic that at such a time she should bring forward her hard, dark realities, and needlessly torture breaking hearts by allusions to the awful necessities of death. I spoke of my visit at her house, and related some particulars which tended to restore the cheerful tone of the conversation; in fact we laughed outright, in view of the restraint and painful embarrassment which the young women felt in consequence of the visit of Mr. Francisco in open daylight.

“I hope, mother,” Kitty said, laughing and blushing, “you will not be so cross when I have a beau, for poor Hetty will never have a chance to get married I am sure.”

“I hope she will be cross,” said the sister, “if you have such a clodhopper as he.”

“Come, come, girls,” answered the mother, “Mr. Francisco is a good worthy young man, and though not given to match-making, I feel inclined to help them forward—can’t we facilitate their happiness in some way?”

The appeal was to me, and I entered at once into the conspiracy. Mr. Francisco was to plow a field for Mrs. Lytle the com-

ing week, and it was arranged that I should be the bearer of an invitation to the girls whose opportunities were so restricted, to assist in cutting apples at the cottage on a specified afternoon. The extent of this service cannot be estimated by those who have never seen or felt the cold straits of division thrown between themselves and some dear object, by the strict discipline of parents or guardians, forgetting that they were ever lovers themselves. But perhaps now and then a modern Hero and Leander will appreciate it, and even if not, my conscience does not condemn me, for I verily believe they might never have told their love but through my harmless stratagem.

But I am lingering too long. With small talk of one kind and another, and a little harmless gossip, as I have confessed, the time passed rapidly, and through the vine-shaded window we saw the heavy mist of red gold hanging over the withering woods, and black forks of the walnuts darkening or the blood-red top of the oaks shining through.

The girls were very happy, and chattering like birds, as they prepared the supper, and great credit it did to their housewifery when prepared. The broiled chicken bore slight resemblance to Mrs. Knight's stewed roosters, and the clear, fresh jelly as little to the candied and crumby fragments which the good woman called preserves. The bread could not have been whiter, nor the butter more golden; the cake was just done to a charm, and the table linen was as white as snow. How well and how pleasantly I remember it all, though so long ago! the pretty pink china sparkling in the light of the candles—the two brass candlesticks scoured, so that they looked like freshly wrought gold, and our pleasant conversation as we sipped the delicious tea, and my promise to visit them often.

According to the kindly custom of country people, Ady and Kitty went "a piece of the way home with me," telling me some little secret hopes and fears they had not ventured upon in the day. It is wonderful what an influence twilight and night exert upon us; we draw closer to those we like, and sometimes, almost unawares, give our hearts to their keeping; while from those we hate or fear, we are a thousand times more repelled than in the noon. Passion, of whatever nature, strengthens in

the dark. Many a sweet confession and sweeter kiss that have knit destinies together, owe their expression to the friendly stars. And many a blow has been struck that would not have been given, if the sunlight had shown the murderer clearly where to do his work.

As we stood beneath the deeply crimson cone of a stunted ash that grew by the roadside, making our adieus, the stage-coach, its plethoric sides swinging one way and the other, rumbled past, hurrying to their various destinations a motley crowd of dust-covered passengers, and among them I noticed a slight and fair-faced youth, looking back from the window. "The schoolmaster," I said, addressing myself to Kitty, who blushed to find herself detected in returning his earnest gaze, and hastily tied on the white hood she had previously held in her hand. "I rather think," I continued, laughing, "he is all your fancy painted him; and from the attention with which he regarded us, perhaps we have, some of us, found favor in his eyes; but I will be generous, having, as I shall, the advantage of first acquaintance, and you shall know him as soon as may be." So, jesting, we parted, as the first star, large and white, came out above the tree tops.

The doors of the farm-houses stood open, the tables were spread, and I could see the shirt sleeves busy, as hands were moving from dish to dish, and the patient mother trying to still the fretful baby, while she poured the tea. About the barn-yards stood the cows chewing their food, and waiting to be milked.

V.

ON my arrival home, I found that my anticipation had been correct—the young schoolmaster had preceded me, and sat at the parlor window deep in the mysteries and merits of—

"It is an ancient mariner
And he stoppeth one of three!"

His manner and salutation were civil enough, and very graceful withal, and I was struck at once with his beauty, which was such as imagination gives the poet; but there was an indefinable something in his manner which made me feel myself an interruption to his pleasure, even before he resumed

his book, which, however, he presently did, after a little commonplace talk about the beauty of the sunset. This, to confess the truth, was vexatious, for most young ladies are pleased with but that demeanor which seems to say they are the only women in the world. The relations in which we stood involved no obligation on the part of either of us farther than that of common courtesy; and though, as I said, the young man silently resumed his book, I felt it my privilege as it was my pleasure to remain in the parlor, as his own apartment awaited his occupation when he pleased. Moreover, he interested me, and perhaps I was not without hope, that when the twilight deepened a little more, he would begin some conversation. I wish that with any word painting I could bring his picture before you, but my poor skill is insufficient, and I cannot hope to give the faintest idea of that dreamy and spiritual expression which chiefly made him what he was, the most beautiful person I had ever seen.

He was a little above the medium height, straight as an arrow, and of faultless proportions. His hair was of a perfect and glossy black, and hanging in wavy half curls down his neck and temples, gave to his face a look almost girlish. His eyes were very large and dark, but soft and melancholy, and along the delicate whiteness of his cheek the color ran blushing whenever he spoke. His hands too evinced his gentle origin. Closer and closer to the page he bent his head, as ebbcd away the crimson tide in which, an hour ago, the sun had drifted out of view, and not till star after star came sharpening its edges of jagged gold in the blue, did he close the volume.

He did not speak, however, when this was done, but locking his hands together like a child, watched the ashy and sombre clouds which in the south were mingling into one, for a few minutes, and then, absorbed, as it seemed, with his own thoughts, walked slowly in the direction of the wood, that held in its rough arms the waning splendor that rained off with every sigh of wind.

Every moment the atmosphere grew more sluggish and oppressive, and the broad dim leaves of the sycamore, that shadowed the well, drifted slowly slantwise to the ground.

The summer had shaken from her hot lap the fierce thunderbolts, and there was no broken rumble nor quick sharp rattle to lend terrible grandeur to the autumn's dismal and pitiless storms, for one of which the night was preparing.

The time was very still, and as I sat on the low mossy doorstep, I could hear the voices of neighbors half a mile away, as they hurried the milking, and the rattle of the dry boards where the apple-sheds were being covered. Distinctly down the clayey hill, a mile to the south, I heard the clatter of fast-falling hoof-strokes, then it was lost in the damp hollow and up the long dusty slope, but I pleased myself with guessing at what points the horseman had arrived at such and such times, till almost at the expected moment he appeared on the neighboring hill, darkening through the lessening light. Holding the ragged rim of his chip-hat with one hand, he reined in his fiery sorrel at the gate of our house, and beckoned me to approach. Before I reached him, or even recognized him, for he was the young man I had met at Mrs. Knight's, I divined from the straight rod balancing on the arched neck of his impatient horse, the melancholy nature of his errand: little Henry Hathaway was dead. Scarce any preparation was requisite, and, wrapt in my shawl and hood, I was soon on the way.

Mr. Hathaway's house was nearly a mile south of ours, and half that distance off the main road, to the west, so that to reach it most conveniently I struck across the fields. From the duty before me I shrank somewhat, not from any unwillingness to lend my aid, but I was young, unused to death, and half afraid; and when I reached the woods through which my way led, the rustling leaves beneath my feet seemed to give out the mournfulest sound I had ever heard. A few steps aside from my path, sitting on a mossy log, beneath an arbor of wild grapes, I beheld some vision of mortality, and suddenly stopping, gazed with intensity of fear. That any sane person should be in such place at such time, was not very probable, for at that period our neighborhood was free from those troubled wanderers who people the dreariest solitudes with the white-browed children of the imagination, and soften the dull and dead realities with atmospheres of song. I think, however, it

was by no process of reasoning that I likened the dimly-outlined shape before me with that son of the morning, of whom heaven disburthened itself so long ago. A shower of wet leaves rained down on me, for the fine drops were already drizzling and pattering on the interlocked branches overhead, as I stood, more from inability to fly, than from courage, before the object which my fancy alone made terrible—

“Stand there, vision of a lady—
Stand there silent, stand there steady,”

spoke a voice, so musical that fear vanished, though it was not till another moment that I recognized the schoolmaster. When I did so, flushing in the wake of fear came anger, and I replied, “If you intend to enact fantastic tricks of this sort, I pray you will choose an auditor next time who can fitly repay you—for myself, I must remain your debtor.” Having spoken thus, I swept along the rustling leaves, with an air that might have done credit to an injured princess, as I fancied. Thoughtless and ungentle as my manner was, it was productive of a maturity of acquaintance, which greater civility would probably not have induced; for immediately the young man joined me, and so sweetly apologized that I could not but forgive him. Of course he did not at first recognize me more than I him, and so for a time remained silent under my scrutiny.

Though no longer afraid of shadows, having found one apparition so harmless, I was not sorry to have the lonesome way enlivened by the cheerful influence of my new friend's company. I think, however, neither of us felt any real pleasure in the other's society, and I may say, neither then nor ever after. Upon this encounter, we had each felt bound to manifest cordial feeling, but kept all the while a belligerent reserve force to fall back on at any moment.

There was about Mr. Spencer—for that was his name—a distant and measured formality, which I mistook for pride and self-sufficiency; the sentences came from his thin lips with cold regularity, as though chiseled in marble; I felt then and always the disagreeable sensation of an utter impossibility of saying or doing anything which could in the least interest him.

He was young, as I said, and perhaps he seemed more youthful than he was. Had we both been some years older, I might have recognized, under the blind and statue-like beauty that could "view the ripened rose, nor seek to wear it," the signs of a passion that had burned itself to ashes.

In interchanges of words, and not of thoughts, we climbed the fences, walked the logs over the runs, crossed the stubble land, and struck into the lane where the yellow dust was dimpling more and more with the steady and increasing rain. As we drew near the house we became silent, for all about it seemed an atmosphere of death. Our footsteps, on the moist earth, did not break the hush; even the watch-dog seemed consciously still, and, having turned his red eyes on us as we passed, pressed his huge freckled nose close to the ground again, whining low and piteously. A few sticks were burning on the hearth—for the rain had chilled the air—the flames flickering up, wan and bluish for a moment, and then dropping down into a quivering and uncertain blaze; there was no crackling and sparkling, no cheerfulness in it; and seated before it was the mother, rocking to and fro, her tears falling silently among the brown curls of the mateless little boy who rested his head on her knees.

Two women, in very plain caps, and with sleeves turned back from their wrists, were busying themselves about the house, and in the intervals of work officiously comforting the mourner. I could only take her hand in mine; I had no words to illumine the steep black sides of the grave; in all the world there was nothing that could fill her empty arms; why should I essay it? One of the women directed us in a whisper to the adjoining room. Little Henry was already dressed for the coffin, and, kneeling beside the hard bed on which he lay, was Kitty Lytle, combing and curling his hair, that he might appear to his mother as life-like as possible. Her own rippling lengths of golden yellow fell forward, half veiling her face, which, in its expression of earnest tenderness, made her perfectly beautiful. The young man stepped hurriedly toward the dead, but his eyes rested on the girl.

On the mantle stood half a dozen empty phials, with small

packages, cups, and teaspoons, and in one corner of the room the death-bed—the impression of his face still fresh in the pillow. A napkin was pinned over the small looking-glass, and the table was draped in white.

I wondered to see Kitty do her sad work so calmly, for she was younger than I, who trembled even to touch the shroud, but in thought and feeling, as I afterward learned, she had far outgrown her years, and never lingered from the most painful duty. While Ady timidly remained with her mother, she had come through the night and the storm, and in her gentle ministries of love seemed first to have entered into her proper sphere.

The sash rattled in the window as the winds went and came, and across the panes trailed darkly the leafless vines of the wild rose, but little Henry slept very quietly all the while.

Silent for the most part, and conversing in low tones, when speaking at all, we sat—young watchers with the dead. Hetty Knight, who had also preceded me, kept in the dimmest corner, too bashful to speak in the presence of a stranger, and Mr. Spencer persisted in remaining, though I had twice informed him that it was not at all needful, inasmuch as Mr. Francisco was expected to sit with us. So, stormy and mournful, the night wore on.

“*Miss Hathaway*,” spoke a coarse voice—a rough discord to the time—“he says the coffin will be here by sunrise,” and, dripping and streaming from the rain, Mr. Francisco entered the apartment consecrated to silence by that awful shadow that must ever make heavy the heart, with the shuffling step and unquiet manner with which he would have gone into his father’s barn. Having thrown himself in a seat, in a graceless fashion which left his legs drifting off to one side, as though hinged at the knees very loosely, he asked, in a jocular tone, if we were all skeert. There was an exchange of smiles and glances between Kitty and the schoolmaster, as Hetty replied, that for one, she was never scared before she was hurt. Destitute of those common instincts of refinement, which are better and more correct than all teachings, these two young persons fraternized that night in a way that was visibly annoying to the

stranger. Mr. Francisco probably feared that a subdued manner would be attributed to cowardice, and, therefore, in mistaken pride of manhood, was unusually brusque. After some pretending conversation between himself and Hetty—for they evidently talked of what they were not thinking—they gradually relapsed into silence. Leaning her head on the table Kitty had fallen asleep, and, under pretence of chilliness, the schoolmaster withdrew to the adjoining room, having first carefully wrapt my shawl about the pretty plump shoulders of the sleeping girl: I don't know why he should never have thought that I might need it, but he did not.

I as heartily wished myself out of the way of the young lovers as they could wish me, and more especially when, taking an ear of corn from his pocket, the young man began shelling off the grains and throwing them, two or three at a time, in the face of Hetty, whose laughing reproofs were so gentle they did not correct the offence, and probably were not designed to do so. I could not make myself into thin air, but I did the best for them which the circumstances permitted. Taking up a torn newspaper, the only readable thing I could find, I turned my face away, and read and re-read a pathetic article of that sort which seems to have been invented for the first pages of the country journals. I was not so absorbed, however, as not to hear the facetious youth address his lady love with, "Did you ever see a cob that was half red?"

"No," was the reply; and thereupon, of course, he drew his chair near Hetty's, as if to exhibit the phenomenon, but to her surprise he said, "'T other half is red, too!"

"Oh, if you ain't the greatest torment!" said Hetty; and the jostling of the chairs told of their closer proximity.

"'T is half red, any how," said the beau; "red as your cheek, and I could make that redder an what it is!"

Whether the boasted ability was vindicated by experiment, I do not know; a rustling of capes and collars, and a sort of playful warfare, were my only means of inference. Presently the whispers became inaudible, and having read in the paper how a queen's sumptuous breakfast was removed untasted on the morning after her divorce, how the plumes failed to hide the

pallor of her discrowned brow, sadder perhaps for the lost love-light than the vanishing glory—with other interesting particulars of the mournful story—I nestled beside Kitty and feigned the sleep which had so softly wooed her, from pain and all the world of love that fancy may have painted, to the golden sphere of dreams; and though this pretence of sleep did not much refresh me, it was all the same to the lovers, and but for my accommodating artifice they might never have made our clergyman the promises they did a year thereafter.

Toward morning, listening to the winds as they cried about the lonesome homestead, and the vines, creaking against the window pane, where the rain pattered and plashed, I passed over the borders of consciousness, and woke, not till the lamp was struggling with the day, that was breaking whitely through the crimson—the clouds lifting and drifting away, and the rain done.

In the dimmest corner the two most wakeful watchers still kept their places, and by the mingling light the schoolmaster was reading to Kitty, in a softly, eloquent tone, that most beautiful creation, beginning—

“All thoughts, all feelings, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All but ministers of love,
And feed his sacred flame.”

Was the voice with which he told another's love interpreting his own? or why ran the blushes so often along his cheek, and why beneath his dark eyes burned those of the listener?

From the cherry tree came the cock, not flapping his wings and crowing proudly, but with the water dripping from his tail, drenched into one drooping feather; in the milk-yard were dry and dusty spots, where the cattle had slept; the doves came down in flocks, pecking, now themselves and now their scanty breakfasts; and warm and yellow across the hills came the sunshine, to comfort the desolate earth for her lost leaves and flowers. But no one bent over the white bed of little Henry, saying, “Wake, it is day;” and silently the mother laid her hand on his forehead, in placid repose under its golden crown of curls; silently her quivering lips pressed his—and that was all.

VI.

BUT I am lingering too long. Often while the soft hazy autumn was stretching away to the dreary and chill winter, the schoolmaster's walk was along the sheltering hollow where, from the westward, as twilight fell, brightened the lights of Mrs. Lytle's cabin. Often, too, when the cheery blaze reddened across the drifted snow without, he smiled among the happy group at the hearth-stone. And Kitty—"already had his wild eyes unlocked her heart's springs." But, though drawn toward her, I could never believe his heart was much touched; rather to escape from some haunting phantom than to embrace a new hope, it seemed to me he sought her. Alas for her, she could not see, for her own blind love, that it was no rapturous glow that burned in his cheek; she could not hear, for her own trembling tones, that there was no fervor in his. If such things even were, I saw them not. We can scarcely imagine a young and timid girl, giving from its close folding, the treasure of her affection into the hands of indifference—but I seek not to uncover from the dust the heart that was once bright with the insanity of a dream. And for the living, whether guilty or guiltless, I judge him not. Between ourselves, the acquaintance never ripened into any sort of confidence. Sometimes, in the midst of our most earnest conversations, he would break off abruptly and seek solitude in his chamber or with the stars; at other times he would answer so vaguely that I knew he received no meaning from my words. He often amused his leisure with making sketches in pencil—sometimes of scenery about the neighborhood, sometimes of the faces of his pupils; and more than one drawing of Mrs. Lytle's cottage graced his portfolio; but there was one picture which he seemed to prize more than all others, returning to it again and again, and working at it with the most patient and elaborate care. When I rallied him about it, he said I should see it when completed, but that time never came; and when I guessed, one day, it was the portrait of Kitty, he blushed, but in the end shook his head sadly, and left me alone. The favorite picture was never left on the table with the others.

When that rough hunter of the young hardy flowers, March,

filled the budding woods with his wild laughter, I went from home with an invalid relation, in the hope that restoration, in some other clime, would "hang its medicine upon her lips." Previously to leaving I visited Mrs. Lytle's cabin. How busy and cheerful they all were—the girls pruning the lilacs and roses, and planning the new flower-bed, and the mother arranging a bed of oat-straw for the tall, awkwardly walking calf, white, and with a pinkish nose and red specks along its sides, which the dove-colored heifer, "Beauty," had just brought home.

We talked gayly at first, partly to conceal our sadness; and I remember telling Kitty it made no difference about her flowers—she could not be there to see them bloom; little thinking how sadly my prophecy would be fulfilled. She and I were become fast friends, and when I had said good-bye, to the mother and sister, she tied on her bonnet, as her custom was, to walk part of the way home with me. We chose an indirect path through the woods, to protract the sweet sorrow of parting, and had nearly reached the spot where the last sad word must be said, when, sitting where the shadows of the naked boughs and the sunshine flecked the greenly sprouting grass, we saw the schoolmaster. He was leaning against the trunk of a tree, and on his knee rested his portfolio. "Let us steal a march on him," I said, "and get a glimpse of the cherished picture;" and repressing our laughter, and on tip-toe, we drew near, and peeping over his shoulder the secret was revealed. Pained and startled, I retreated as lightly as I had approached, while, pale and trembling, Kitty remained transfixed. The schoolmaster was fast asleep, and the pleasant surprise we meant for him terminated in our own discomfiture. Without the least intention of doing so, we had broken over a charmed circle sacred to private sorrow—the drawing was of a mountain side, with pines and hemlocks stretching bearded boughs above a grave, beside which the artist himself was kneeling, and beneath which was written—

"Oh! lost and buried love of mine,
 Though doomed a little while to part,
 Thy grave, God knoweth, is the shrine
 Of all the worship of my heart."

By what strange impulse prompted, or by what authority

warranted, I know not, but Kitty remained till her dizzied vision had deciphered all.

I pushed back the curls that had fallen over her face, kissed her forehead, white and damp now, and left her without speaking a word; love's goldenest dream was breaking and fading in her heart; though she smiled, it was a smile that brought tears to my eyes. So we parted.

The fields were checked with furrows, and the corn planted; the winds chased the waves over the grain fields; the sheep were plunged in the full-flowing streams of the early summer, and, shorn thin of their fleeces, bleated along the hills; nature went on with her work, and was bringing home the autumn to the music of threshing flails and the dancing of bright leaves along the woodland, when from my searching for the lost waters of health, I came back to the shelter of the homestead.

For my summer absence, I regarded every thing with fresh interest; the shutters of the schoolhouse were closed, and the rusty padlock hung at the door; just beyond was the graveyard, and in the corner beneath the willow where the elders had long grown thick, offering vainly their snowy blossoms and shining berries to the schoolboys, a little space was cleared away, and the dark pit was waiting for the victim. Two men leaned over the stone wall, looking weary and impatient toward the north; they were evidently expecting a funeral, while their spades, sticking upright in the fresh-heaped earth, waited to do their work.

I would have asked who was dead, but just then between me and the grave swept a gay train of twenty or thirty equestrians, with low, clumsy old horses, and tall, gaunt colts already bearing marks of collars and traces, with stubborn ponies and slim-limbed pacers—all prancing and trotting and galloping together.

A confused glimpse of the blue and crimson and green velvet of the side-saddles met my eyes, with smiling faces beneath the broad-rimmed flats, flapping up and down, and with veils streaming back, and white dresses gathered up and falling over the left arm, showing liberally the pretty petticoats of dimities, and scollops and ruffles. And further, I had some notion of a dozen or more trimly dressed youths, with bronzed faces newly

shaved, and shining with their late ablutions—all this I faintly apprehended, before the cavalcade disappeared, in a cloud of dust.

Darkening out of it in the distance came a slow-moving train. The two impatient men would not be required to wait much longer. The road was narrow, and on a hill beneath an old oak, we waited for the procession to pass. It drew nearer and nearer, and as the foremost wagon stopped in the hollow, I saw plainly the long slender coffin, from which had slipped partly aside the folding-sheet. Next came the clergyman's carriage, and beside the venerable man, his good wife, her loving eyes shrouded from view; and the carriage held, also, two more comfortless mourners than they; and as they passed, I trembled to recognize beneath their black veils Ady Lytle and her mother—Kitty was gone before.

They were not many who followed her; she was but a young girl, and the daughter of a poor widow; a few of the near neighbors were all. The mother, pale and patient, held her baby close, as the wagon jolted and rattled by, and the young girl riding on horseback, looked thoughtfully on the sturdy brother at her side. Behind the rest walked a dozen little boys, now and then pausing to make curious prints in the dust with their bare feet, by way of diverting their thoughts. So from the hill we saw cross each other, the bridal train of Hetty Knight and the funeral of Kitty Lytle.

UNCLE WILLIAM'S.

I.

No matter how ingeniously probabilities may be woven, how cunning are plots, or effective situations, the fictitious narrative has rarely the attractive interest of a simple statement of facts; and every one seems to have that quick instinct which detects the most elaborate imitations of truth, so that all the skill of the novelist fails to win a single tribute not due merely to his art. I cannot tell what I might be tempted to essay if I possessed more imagination or fancy, but with a brain so unfruitful of invention, and a heart bound as with spells to the past, I should find myself, even if attempting a flight in the realms of fancy, but recalling some half forgotten experience, and making Puck or Titania discourse after the manner of our landlord at the Clovernook Hotel, or the young women whose histories I began to mark when we were girls together in the district school.

It is, perhaps, seven or eight years ago—ah me, how soon we grow old enough to look back to seven, and eight, and ten years, as to yesterday!—since I went to spend the winter with my cousins, Delia and Jane Peters. They lived in the neighborhood of Elm Ridge. It is an obscure and was to me a lonesome place, though they said they had society enough all around them; and indeed the village meeting-house and tavern-sign were within view, and the window lights of Abner Widdleton, the nearest neighbor, shone across the door-yard.

The happiest occasions, if they bring change with them, are sad; and I remember that I could not sleep well the night previous to my setting out, though I had been for weeks talking

of the pleasure I should have in visiting uncle William's family. The last collar was ruffled, the last strings and hooks and eyes adjusted, my trunk packed, and my bonnet, with the green veil pinned fast, laid on the bed, and but a night lay between me and my little journey. Then it was, when all was ready, that a sorrowful, half-regretful feeling came over me. I stood at the window and looked on the way the stage-coach would come in the morning; watched the cows as they crouched with petty rifts of snow along their backs, and their faces from the wind; and the chickens, as they flew into the cherry-tree, cackling their discomfort as they settled themselves on the smoothly worn boughs; for it was a blustery night, and these common-places seemed to have in them a solemn import, all because I was to be a dozen miles away for a few weeks!

A dozen times I said to little Dillie, with whom I slept, "Are you awake?" before I could sleep. But I was wearied out at last, and but imperfectly heard the speckled cock telling his mates of midnight when a blessed wave of oblivion came between me and Elm Ridge, and I woke not till a hand rested lightly on my shoulder, and a familiar voice said, "I guess it's time." I needed no second call, but was dressed and waiting in a few minutes. It did not require much time for breakfast, I think. There seemed nothing for us to say as we watched the coming of the coach, while my baggage was carried toward the gate that I might occasion no detention. A few repetitions of what had been already said, a few exchanges of smiles that faded into sighs, and the well-known rumble of the approaching vehicle arrested our make-believe conversation.

My little baggage was hoisted to the top. I was afraid I should never see it again. A portly gentleman, having a round red face and pale blue eyes, reached out one hand—it was freckled and fat, I remember—to assist me in; "All ready?" cried the driver, and we were off. I looked back presently, and saw them all standing just as I had left them, except little Dillie, who had climbed on the fence, and was gazing after us very earnestly. The coach jolted and rolled from side to side, for the road was rough and frozen; and the plethoric individual, who wore a tightly buttoned brown overcoat,

leaned his double chin on his round hands, which were crossed over the gold head of a crooked but highly polished walking-stick, and conversed with the gentleman opposite, in an easy and complacent way that indicated a state of satisfaction with the world and with himself. His companion was exceedingly diminutive, having the delicate hands and feet of a child; a mouth in which a shilling might scarcely be slipped; a little long head, bald about the crown, and with thin brown hair hanging far over his coat-collar, which was glazed with such contact to the depth of half an inch, as it seemed. I soon learned their respective homes and avocations: the fat man proved to be a pork merchant, homeward bound from a profitable sale; and his little fellow traveller a tailor and small merchant of one of the western states. "There," said he, smiling, and pointing to a huge wagon of several tons burden, drawn by six stout horses, wearing bells on their collars, "there goes a little buggy that's got a budget or two of mine aboard."

The fat man smiled, and every one else smiled, as they saw the six horses straining with all their ability, slowly to drag along the ponderous load; for the great wagon-body was heaped and overheaped with bags, bales, and baskets, crocks, cradles, and calicoes, in fact with all sorts of family and household utensils, from a plow to a teapot, and with wearing apparel from buckram and ducks to cambrics and laces.

"Two or three times a year I buy up such a little bunch as that," he said; and he smiled again, and so did every body else.

"That bay cretur on the off' side," he resumed, letting down the window and looking back, "is fallen lame, I believe my heart. Polly will be as mad as a hornet about it; it's her riding nag, d' ye see—that ere bay." And as long as we could hear the bells he continued to gaze back, tying a silk handkerchief over his head as he did so, to protect it from the cold. Whether the aforesaid Polly was his wife, and, if she was, whether she was mad as a hornet, are matters of which to this day I am profoundly ignorant; but I have hoped that if Polly were wife to the little merchant, she was pacified with a new dress, and that the poor beast soon got the better of the lameness.

The fat man pointed out all the places in which the hogs he had just sold had rested of nights, and each time he concluded with, "Well, they 'll never root any more." It would be hard to tell why, but all the coach passengers looked with interest at the various fields, and woods, and pens, where the drover's hogs had rested on their fatal journey toward the city. "Just on this knoll, or that rise," he would say, "a fat fellow gave out, and we let him have a ride the rest of the way, or treated him to a hot bath." He occupied more than his share of room, to the very evident annoyance of the woman who was on the seat with him; for she had much less than half for herself and her child, a deformed and forlorn-looking little boy of perhaps six years of age. He was scantily, even meanly dressed, his bare feet hanging quite below his cotton frock, and his stiff fur hat so large as to fall over his eyes, which were remarkably black and large. I could not but notice that the mother, as I supposed her to be, wrapped her shawl more carefully about herself than the child, who kept all the time moaning and fretting, sometimes crying out bitterly. She made no effort to soothe him, except that she now and then turned his face from one direction to another. Once or twice she held it close against her—I thought not fondly, but crushingly—and more than once or twice she dashed his head against the fat man's side, partly by way of jostling him, as I thought, and partly to punish the child for crying. He rubbed his eyes till his little hands were wet with tears; but never did she warm them in her bosom or dry them with kisses. Indeed, she seemed no more concerned than as if she had held on her lap a bundle of sticks. A sudden cry of evident pain drew all eyes to her. In one of the dabs at the fat man she had scratched the boy's face with a pin sticking in his sleeve.

"Poor little beauty!" whispered a pale, lady-like looking woman to the person beside her, a black-whiskered, well-fed sort of man: "poor little beauty! I wish I had it."

"Really, Nelly," he answered, in a half kind, half mocking way, "you *are* benevolent;" and in a lower voice he added, "considering the circumstances."

I occupied the middle seat, with the merchant, and she who

had spoken so kindly sat directly behind me, but I turned involuntarily when I heard her voice, and saw, as I have said, that she looked pale and delicate, and that she dropped her veil and blushed at the gentle reproof of her companion.

With this couple sat a rosy-cheeked, middle-aged woman, who had hitherto kept her lips compressed, but, as it appeared to me, with difficulty. She now leaned across the lap of the gentleman, and asked the invalid traveller if she had any children of her own, and if she was married or single; saying she wondered she should feel such sympathy for that "ornary child," for that nobody but a mother could have the feelings of a mother. "Now I," she added, "have left a little one at home—six months old it was the fourteenth of last month—and I'm just fairly crazy, though I have n't been gone a day, as you may say, for it was three o'clock yesterday when I started; the baby was asleep then; I expect maybe he cried when he waked up and missed me, but it seemed necessary for me to go away. I had to go, in fact, as you may say. Nobody drove me to be sure, but then we wanted a good many things about the house that, as you may say, nobody could get but myself, and I thought I might as well go now as ever. I knew the baby would be taken good care of by Liddy—that 's my oldest girl; but it seemed like I could n't get my own consent, and I went without it at last, as you may say. Do you live in town?" she inquired; and, without pausing for a reply, continued, "A body sees a heap of pretty things that a body would like to have, do n't they, if they only had plenty of money? This is a tea-pot," she said, holding up a carefully wrapped parcel; "it 's a new fashion, they told me; but I think it 's a new-fashioned old fashion; for I remember, when I was a girl, we used to have one just a'most like it." And she kindly tore off a bit of the envelope, telling the lady she could see the color, and that she had a set of things in a basket on the top of the coach, the same color, and the make of the same man, she supposed. Dear sakes! I hope none of them will get broken, and won't I be glad to see my baby!" Having settled herself in her place, she leaned forward again to say, "Just hear that

fat man ! he talks about his affairs as if he thought every body as much interested in them as himself."

I could not help but smile at her innocent simplicity. How quick we are to detect the faults of others—how slow to "see ourselves as others see us."

"Do you see that old tree with the fork split off and hanging down?" It was the fat man who asked this question—of nobody in particular—but every body tried to see, and most of us did see. "One of my fellows hung himself there last week. He was well the day before. At supper—we slept at a tavern not half a mile away—I noticed that he did n't eat, and seemed down-hearted like ; but I did n't say nothing to him ; I wish now I had ; and in the morning he could n't be found, high nor low. Finally, we gave up the search, and got our drovers started-along later than common. I stopped a bit after the rest, settling with the landlord, who said to me, in a joking way like, that he guessed he 'd have to charge me for his wife's clothes-line ; that she said she was as certain as she was alive that it hung on a particular peg the last night, and she thought the missing drover knew something about it ; he looked wild out of his eyes, she said. Just that way he spoke about it ; and I laughs at him, mounts my horse, and rides away. I had just come in sight of the drove when one of my fellers—that 's the one whose legs you see," and he pointed to a pair of muddy boots hanging against the window from the outside of the coach,—“came toward me running on the full jump, and told me they had discovered Jake hung on a tree, and swinging in the wind, stiff as a poker."

"Good gracious me !" exclaimed the woman with the sick child, and giving the fat man as much room as possible, "how did he look, and what did you do with him ?"

"Look ! he looked like a dead man ; and as for doing with him, we cut him down, and put him under ground by the side of an old black log."

"I wish I could see the one that discovered him," the woman said, trying to pull down the window ; "is he any kin to the man that hung himself, and had he taken the clothes-line ?"

"He had taken the clothes-line, but the landlady on its being

returned to her, said it would bring bad luck to the house, and so threw it in the fire."

The poor child was not thrust against him any more ; but it kept crying and moaning, and rubbing its eyes and the scratch on its face, which smarted as the tears rolled over it.

"What ails your child?" asked the fat man, who seemed not to have noticed its crying till he turned to answer the nurse's question.

"Nothing, only he's ugly and cross," she answered.

"I guess any of us would feel bad," said the rosy-cheeked woman with the new tea-pot, "if our bare feet hung dangling about like his'n, to say nothing of that scratch on his face. Wont you be good enough, sir, to take that pin out of your sleeve?"

"Certainly, ma'am ; I was not aware"—he did n't finish the sentence to her, for she had leaned across the coach, and was saying to the pale lady that she never could see what a man wanted to have pins sticking about him for.

"Naughty pin, was n't it!" said the fat man to the baby, taking from his sleeve the offending instrument and throwing it from the window ; and he continued, putting the child's feet in one of his mittens, "Tell him murrur she must wrap him in her shawl."

"You need n't look at me," she replied ; "I am not his mother by a great sight ; she's in a mad-house ; they just took her this morning. It was a dreadful sight—she a raving, and the children screaming and carrying on at a dreadful rate. They say she is past all cure, and I s'pose she is. She liked to have pulled all the hair out of my head when she saw I was going to take the baby. I am only a distant relation, but it's not always near of kin that are the best to orphans. Sit up!" she exclaimed, giving the child a rough jerk ; "do n't lean against the gentleman as heavy as a bag of mush." The fat man had become a lion in her estimation since she learned that one of his drovers had hanged himself.

"He does n't disturb me in the least," said he ; and taking off the child's hat, he smoothed its hair with his great hand.

"I guess he is a right nice man," said the rosy-cheeked wo-

man, leaning toward her of the pale cheek, who was untying a fur cape from her neck. "Put it round the little boy, my good woman," she said, reaching it toward her.

"Really, Nelly," said the gentleman beside her, and he looked at her with evident displeasure.

But the woman returned the cape, saying, "He's got to take the world as he can get it; there is no use of wrapping him in a fine fur cape for an hour."

"That fellow up there," said the fat man, "could give more particulars than I can about the wretched suicide I was telling of."

"Wretched what?" inquired the woman.

"The fellow that was so fond of swinging;" and as he spoke he lifted the child from her knees, unbuttoned his brown coat, and folded him warmly beneath it, resting his chin on the boy's hair, informing him that at home he had a little boy just about his size, and asking him if he would like to go home with him and be his little boy.

The coach now rattled along at a lively rate, and, soothed by the warmth and the kindness of the drover's tone, the poor little fellow was soon fast asleep.

I noticed that the lady in the corner looked weary; and that once when she laid her head on the shoulder of the man beside her, he moved uneasily, as if the weight burdened him, and that she lifted herself up again, though she seemed scarcely able to do so.

"That's my house," said the rosy-cheeked woman, "right fernent William Peters's; and I guess I am as glad to get home as they will be to see me—the dear knows I did n't want to go. I would have paid anybody, and been very much obliged to them besides, if they could have done my errands for me."

At the gate of her house an obedient-looking man stood in waiting for her; and as the crockery was handed down, the good-natured owner gathered her sundry little parcels together; shook hands with the pale lady, saying she hoped she would soon get the better of the ill turn she seemed to have; uncovered the baby's face, and kissed it, dropping a tear on its

clasped hands, as she did so, and saying "Just to think if it was mine!" I suppose by way of apology for what the world considers a weakness; and, smiling a sort of benediction on us all, she descended the side of the coach. I followed, for my destination was also reached.

"*You* going to stop here? Well now, if that do n't beat all! I suppose you are Mr. Peters's niece that I've heard so much tell of. And as I am alive, if there aint Delia, just going away! Poor girl, I guess she leaves her heart behind her." This suspicion she imparted in a whisper; and having said I must come in and see her, she flew rather than walked toward the house, for Jane was coming to meet her with the baby. I could only shake hands an instant with my cousin Delia, who seemed to anticipate little happiness from her journey, as I judged from tear-blind eyes and quivering lips. I thought she whispered to her father something about remaining at home, now that I was come.

"Oh, no, Dillie, I do n't think it's worth while," he said; "she will stay here all winter, and you will be back in a month, at furthest."

The companion of the pale lady assisted Delia into the coach with much gallantry; the driver's whip-lash made a circuit in the air; the jaded horses sprang forward as though fresh for the race; and the poor little child, with its bare feet and red hands, was lost to me forever. May the good Shepherd have tempered the winds to its needs, and strengthened it against temptations, in all its career in this hard and so often uncharitable world

II.

"How glad I am you have come," said uncle William, when we were in the house; "but it seems kind a lonesome for all."

Jane was ten years older than Delia—not so pretty nor stylish, but very good, motherly, and considerate. They had no mother, and lived with their father in the old house where they were brought up. Delia was about sixteen at the time of my

visit; handsome, captivating, and considered quite the belle of the village and neighborhood.

We were a small and quiet family at uncle William's. He himself did little but tend the parlor fire, read the newspaper, and consult the almanac and his watch, which things made up his world. He knew all the phases of the moon, and what the weather would be likely to be for a month in advance; he knew what his favorite editor said, and believed it; in fact, there was no other paper; its contents seemed designed more especially for him than for anybody else; and to this day I can not rid myself of the impression that uncle William's newspaper was altogether the most excellent thing of its kind in the world. When the sun came up, he took from beneath the parlor looking-glass, where it hung of nights, the great silver chronometer that had been his father's and his grandfather's, turned the key a few times, held it to his ear, consulted the almanac, and compared the sunrise with his time, as if to see that the sun were punctual to its appointment. He then mended the fire, and took up the "Republican," and when it was read through once he began again, more studiously to examine, and thoughtfully to digest its most noticeable contents. It always had something good in it, he said, and it would do him no harm to read some of the pieces a dozen times. When the sunlight slanted through the south window, he carefully folded the paper, and again consulted his watch. At sunset another comparison was made of time authorities, and the almanac again resorted to, and then began the evening reading.

Uncle William never indulged in what is termed frivolous conversation; the only thing in the way of fun I ever heard him say was that the editor of his paper was a man that had a head. But he was less morose, and far more genial, than another of my relations, uncle Christopher, with whom he held no intercourse whatever, but of whom I shall have something to relate in these reminiscences of Clovernook history.

Jane had little more to say than her father. She never read, and had never been from home; and so, of course, she was not very wise; and as she never talked of things that did not concern her, there was not much for her to discuss. In all ways

she was strictly proper; so much so that ordinary mortals found it more difficult to love her than they would have done had she possessed more of the common human infirmities. Our conversation was mostly of the weather, with which, however, she was always contented; so that if the storm beat never so tempestuously, I scarcely dared yawn, or say even that "I wish it would clear off."

I should have been happier if the house had been left in some disorder on Delia's departure, so that we might have employed ourselves by setting it to rights; but everything was in its place; so we of necessity sat down by the fire, and the little we did say was in whispers, that we might not disturb uncle William, who forever sat by, reading in a monotonous mutter, neither aloud nor in silence. Sometimes he would invite me to read, for the benefit of himself, who had read it twenty times previously, Jane, who did n't care a straw for reading, and the sixteen cats that dozed about the hearth, some "piece" which he thought of remarkable interest or beauty.

"Will Delia be gone long?" I inquired after my arrival; for I had previously learned that she was gone two or three hundred miles from Elm Ridge, to a small city which I had never known uncle William's folks to visit, and I was curious to know the why and wherefore. Jane stitched a little faster, I thought; the twilight was deepening so much that I could not have seen to stitch at all; but she only answered that her sister's stay was uncertain.

"I did n't know you had friends there," I said, for I did not like to ask more directly.

"Did n't you?" answered Jane, stitching as before.

I was not discouraged, and remembering what the rosy-cheeked woman had said about Delia's having left her heart behind her, I continued, "She has grown very pretty since I saw her; she must be very much admired."

"Our preacher's wife gave her a book," she said, "at Christmas, and our singing master—old Mr. White—offered to teach her for nothing." And these were all the evidences of the admiration she received which Propriety Jane thought fit to disclose for me.

"Who lives opposite?" I asked; for the house looked so cheerful, with its lights moving about, the chimneys sending up their blue smoke, and the bustling in and out of doors, that I could not help wishing myself there, since not a candle was lighted in our house, and there was no supper in preparation, nor any cheerful talk to enliven the time.

"Mr. Widdleton's folks," replied Jane, and rising from her chair, she stood close against the window, that she might see to stitch a little longer.

"What sort of people are they?"

"Oh, very nice people."

"It must have been Mrs. Widdleton with whom I came up in the coach: a rosy-cheeked, good-natured woman, who seems fond of talking."

"Yes, it was she."

"Well," said I, "she bought a new teapot, with a variety of other things, as she was good enough to inform us all."

Jane made no reply whatever, nor by smile or gesture indicated that Mrs. Widdleton had been communicative in any unusual degree.

The snow was falling dismally, the fire was low, and the coming on of night seemed gloomy enough. Uncle William was splitting pine boards into kindling, and though all day I had wished he would afford us by his absence a little opportunity for conversation, I now heartily wished he would return, and tell us when the moon would change.

As I listened to the winds, and wondered what kept my uncle and cousin alive, there was a low and what seemed to me a very timid rap at the door. Jane opened it; and though her tone evinced neither surprise nor pleasure, it was not uncivil, as she received the visitor. He seemed—for he was a young man—not to feel at liberty to sit down, though Jane invited him so to do; but, having made some commonplace observations relative to the weather, he inquired whether Miss Delia were at home.

"No," answered Jane; and she gave no intimation as to where her sister was gone, or when she would return, or whether she would ever do so.

"I will then bid you good evening," he said, "and do myself the pleasure of calling again."

When he was gone, Jane left the room, having made no reply to the young gentleman's intimation.

On his entrance, I had stirred the coals to make a little light, but it was so faint that I saw him but imperfectly, though with enough distinctness to warrant me in believing him a very handsome man, of not more than twenty-two or three years of age. Besides, his voice was so soft and musical as, together with his fair looks, to leave a most agreeable impression. Who he was or whence he came I could not know, but somehow I was interested in him, and pressing my face to the window, looked eagerly through the snow to see in what direction he went. At the gate he paused, thrust his hands into his pockets, and seemed to muse for a moment, looking one way and then another, as if in doubt what to do; but presently he lighted a cigar with a match, and, turning in the direction of a tavern, was quickly lost from my observation.

"Who was that young person?" I asked, when Jane returned to the parlor.

"Edward Courtney."

"Does he live in the village?"

"No."

"I noticed that he went in that direction."

Jane lighted the candle and took up her work.

"Very handsome, is n't he?" I said.

"Yes."

"What is his occupation?"

"His father, with whom he lives, is a farmer, but lately come to our neighborhood."

"Well, I wish he had passed the evening with us, and not been so exclusively devoted to Miss Delia."

Jane said nothing, and I inquired when he would be likely to come again.

"I do n't know."

"Really, Jane," I said, "you are provoking; for once in your life tell me something I wish to find out. What is it, that his name is Edward Courtney, and that his father is a farmer;

he may be a scapegrace for all that. Pray, what do you know about him, and why do you not like him? for I am sure you do not."

"Why, yes, I like him well enough," she answered; "but I know nothing about him to tell; he is rather a wild young man, I think."

"What wild thing has he done?"

"Oh, I do n't know: I do n't know as he is wild."

And holding out one foot, she asked me how I liked her shoes, saying they were made out of dog-skin; she thought they were as pretty as morocco, and her father said he thought they would last all winter.

"S'cat!" exclaimed uncle William, at this moment making his way through a dozen of the feline tribe; and having mended the fire, he said he believed the moon quartered that night, and proceeded to examine the almanac.

To me the evening seemed setting in very lonesomely, and it was a most agreeable surprise when one of Mrs. Widdleton's children came in to ask cousin Jane and myself to pass it with her. To my disappointment, however, Jane did not feel like going; she was afraid of getting the toothache, and believed she could not go very well.

"You go, any how," said the boy who had asked us; "Mother says if you ain't acquainted, come and get acquainted."

I hesitated, for it seemed awkward to go alone into a stranger's house, but the urgency of the lad and my own inclination prevailed; and I was already aware that the social customs of Elm Ridge were not trammelled by oppressive conventional restrictions.

On my arrival, I saw, to my surprise, the whiskered gentleman whom I have mentioned as the companion of the pale lady in the coach.

"Really, madam," he said, "I do hope, if it will not be a serious inconvenience, that I can prevail upon you—not so much on my own account as for my wife's sake. She is *pious*, and does n't like being at the hotel, where Sunday is pretty nearly as good as any other day."

“And are you not pious?” asked Mrs. Widdleton, looking at him in innocent astonishment.

He smiled and shook his head, but made no other answer.

“Well, I do n’t know what to say. I liked the little woman”—

“Yes, I like her too,” interrupted the man, with a peculiar smile, intended perhaps as an expression of humor.

“Did you ever!” exclaimed Mrs. Widdleton, and she went on to say that she feared their plain way of living would not suit a fine lady, who had been used to servants, and like enough never had to wet her hands. She would see what Abner thought.

“By all means.”

And the gentleman seated himself, and caressed one leg, while she withdrew, for a consultation, to the kitchen, where a hammering seemed to indicate the going forward of some active business.

“Just have it your own way, mother,” I heard him say. “If you are a mind to do more and have more, why you can; but seems to me you have enough to do; though I do n’t care. Do just as you please; but I hate to have you make a slave of yourself, mother.”

“Well, Abner,” she answered, “one or two more in the family do n’t seem to make much difference; and if they are not suited, why they can find another place, may be.”

When the gentleman had taken leave, which he did very politely, Mrs. Widdleton informed me that his name was Hevelyn; that he was a southern man, lately married, and had come north for the sake of his wife’s health. This she had learned during her late interview with him. She also informed me she was going to board them awhile; that she wanted to get a few things for Liddy, more than she could spare the money to buy—not that Abner would be unwilling to give it to her, but then he had so many uses for his money.

Mrs. Widdleton was one of those bustling, active women, who never seem in their right sphere except with hands full and overflowing. Everybody was active about her—Mr. Widdleton mending her washing-tub, Liddy making a new gown, one

of the children rocking the cradle, and all at something. As for what she did during the evening in the way of mending and making, I can not recount it, but the cradle was heaped, and so were all the chairs about her, with the work she did. We had cakes, and apples, and cider, and nuts, besides a constant flow of talking, in which Mr. Widdleton, having finished his tub, participated. I felt, I remember, a wish that everybody might be just as contented as they, and have just as bright a fire.

But Mrs. Widdleton—ah me, I do n't like to write that "*but*"—was a little given to talking of things that did not concern her, as well as of things that did; and when the children were gone to bed, and while Abner had ground the coffee for breakfast—"he is so handy about the house," said Mrs. Widdleton—we drew close to the embers, and the good woman glided naturally from her own tea-set to the tea-sets of her neighbors, and thence the transition to her neighbors themselves was almost imperceptible. A number of interesting little family affairs came to my knowledge that night; but I will not attempt a report of all her disclosures—only of some intimations that more immediately interested me. Uncle William and Jane had put their heads together, she said, and sent off Delia, the dear knows where, to prevent her keeping the company of Edward Courtney; and for her part she thought, though she did n't want to say anything one way or the other, and it was very seldom she did speak at all, that Delia or any other girl might go further and fare worse, for Edward Courtney was just as nice a young man, apparently, as ever she set eyes on, and she would just as soon a daughter of hers married him as to marry some persons that some persons thought a good deal better, or to live at home till she was forty years old, and nurse the cats. Jane, she confessed, was just as good a girl as ever was, and uncle William was just as good a man as ever was, but they would think it very hard to be made to marry somebody they did n't like; and, for her part, she thought it was just as bad to be kept from marrying whom you did like. "It's one thing to marry," said Mrs. Widdleton, "and another thing to love the man you marry; and, for my

part, I would have Abner or I would have nobody. I was always averse to match-making, but I have a great mind as ever I had in my life"—she suddenly paused, and added, "No, I do n't know as I will, either; but I hate to see folks as cool as a cucumber about such things, and think nobody has any feeling more than themselves. Poor Delia! Yes, I have the greatest mind—no—I do n't know as I will—I might reflect on myself if it did n't all come out right." And she vigorously trotted her baby, long after he was asleep; and I have always thought that then and there she settled the knotty point, for she said at last, with a smile, that if she should tell Edward where Delia was, it would n't be telling him to go there and marry her; but even if she should give him a piece of her mind to that effect, she did n't know as they could take her up and hang her. Before I returned to uncle William's that night, she concluded she would call on Mrs. Courtney in a day or two; she wanted to borrow a dress pattern of her; perhaps she would see Edward, and perhaps not; and she did n't know as she would say anything about Delia if she did see him; it was the pattern she wanted. But notwithstanding this conclusion, I felt assured that she would give Edward the "piece of her mind" with which she had first proposed to endow him.

The following day I related to Jane the incidents of the evening: how Mr. Widdleton had mended a tub, and his wife had darned and mended; in fact, whatever had been done or said that could interest her, not omitting the conversation about Edward and Delia—for I was determined to find out something in reference to the affair, as I persuaded myself I had a perfect right to do, considering our relationship; and Delia's pale face haunted me; her supplicating appeal for permission to remain at home I felt assured was not on my account; I saw pots of her flowers standing about, dying from neglect, and I could not help thinking her thoughts had been elsewhere. So, as I said, I told Jane that Mrs. Widdleton thought Delia and Edward would make a fine match, and that she was sorry it was likely not to take place; for I did not choose to repeat her precise words. My very proper cousin colored slightly,

and said, that if Mrs. Widdleton had not so many excellent qualities, she would be a busybody. This was the only reproach of any one I ever heard from her. I confess to greater imperfection; the affairs of other people interest me, and I am apt sometimes to say what I think of their conduct and character.

I used to take my seat at the window, and there being neither conversation nor reading within, I naturally looked out for amusement, and found it in the movements of our neighbors; for humanity is more to us than everything else, as those who have passed a winter in an isolated country place can very easily believe. The evening after this visit, I saw a light in the front chamber of Mr. Widdleton's house, where I had never seen a light before, and supposed the Hevelyns were there. The following morning I saw Mrs. Widdleton set out, bright and early, in the direction of Mr. Courtney's house. She walked against the north wind with a straightforward and energetic step, and I wondered whether there were any purpose in her movements that did not concern the pattern. It was nearly noon when she returned, accompanied by young Mr. Courtney. They paused at the gate, and seemed in earnest conversation for a long time. Liddy came to the door and looked earnestly toward her mother several times; the baby was fretting, I knew; but as often as they seemed about to separate they drew nearer again, till it seemed their conversation would never have an end. Seated on the outside of the evening coach that day I noticed a young man who, I thought, resembled Courtney, and I was the more convinced of its being him from the graceful way in which he recognized Mrs. Widdleton, as he passed. A red scarf about his neck concealed, in part, his face, so that I could not be positive it was he. "But if it is," thought I, "he may have a thousand objects in view besides Delia. I have no right to think anything about it." Still I did think about it.

Often in the courses of the days I saw Mrs. Hevelyn, wrapt in a shawl which seemed of a very rich and costly pattern, standing or sitting by the chamber window. Sometimes I ob-

served her wipe her eyes, and always her movements indicated sadness and dejection. Occasionally when the sun shone in the middle of the day, she walked about the yard, examined the dead flowers, and looked up and down the lonesome road, returning again to the house with a languid and heavy step. When the evening coach came rattling over the near hill, I saw her either raise the sash or step out into the yard, and watch it eagerly, as though in expectation of some one; and when it passed she would sometimes return with her handkerchief to her eyes, and sometimes, sinking at once on the frozen ground, sit, as though powerless to go in, for an hour or more. One sunshiny day I went out into the yard to see if the flags were sprouting or the daffodils coming through the grass, for I had seen a blue-bird twittering in the lilac and picking its feathers that morning. "How d' you do?" called a voice that seemed not altogether unfamiliar, and looking up, I saw Mrs. Widdleton leaning over her yard-fence, with the evident intention of having a little chat.

"What is the news," she asked, "at your house?"

"Oh nothing; what is the news with you?"

"How does uncle William (for she called Mr. Peters uncle William when she spoke to me of him) seem to take it?"

"Take what?" said I.

"Why, about Edward and Delia."

"And what about them?"

"Why, they say he's gone off to B——." Here she lowered her voice, and, saying that walls had ears sometimes, crossed from her yard-fence to ours. "He's gone off to B——," she continued, "and they say it's to get married."

"Is it possible!"

"Yes; and old Mr. Courtney is going back to the city to live, and they say Edward and Delia are going right into the old house; and from the way things seem to begin and go on, I think they will do well."

I said I thought so too, though what things she had seen beginning and going on I was not in the least advised, however shrewdly I might guess.

If they should be married, and come and live in the old place, and do right well, as she hoped and believed they would, she thought Miss Jane and "uncle William" would be ashamed of themselves.

III.

As often as I met the ever busy and good natured Mrs. Widdleton, she had much to say about poor Mrs. Hevelyn. Her husband went away, she said, the very day he brought her there and right among strangers so, it seemed as if the poor thing would cry her eyes out. "Often of evenings," said Mrs. Widdleton, "I go up into her room to have a cheerful chat. You know a body must talk or they won't say anything—and I find her lying on the bed, her face all smothered in the pillow, and her heart ready to break." She informed me further, that Mr. Hevelyn had written only once, and then barely a few lines, since he went away.

Two or three days went by, when, at nightfall, I observed an unusual stir about Mr. Widdleton's house; lights moved busily from cellar to chamber; a strange woman, in a high, white cap, appeared from time to time; and presently the two little girls came over to pass the evening, saying their mother had given them leave to stay all night if they wished to. The next morning the chamber-windows were closed, and Mrs. Widdleton herself came in soon after breakfast to take her children home, and informed them that somebody had brought Mrs. Hevelyn "the sweetest little baby!" Tidings were despatched to the absent husband, and day after day the young mother exerted herself beyond her ability to make her little darling look pretty, that the heart of the expected father might be rejoiced the more; and day after day the coach went by, and the sun went down, and he did not come. At length, one day, in answer to Mrs. Widdleton's urgent entreaties, and with a hope of giving the poor lady some comfort, I went in to sit for an hour with her, taking my sewing. I found her a sweet and lovable creature, indeed—not possessed

of very strong mind or marked characteristics, but gentle, confiding, and amiable. She had put back her curls in motherly fashion, and her cheek was thin and pale; but she was beautiful, and her large eyes had in them a pathos and power which drew one toward her, as if by a spell. She seemed pleased with my praise of the child; said she had named him John, for his father; and added, "He wants to see the darling so much! and nothing but the most pressing necessity keeps him away—poor John!" It was a new illustration of the difficulty of dispossessing a faithful heart of its confidence: she would be the last to learn how little that father merited her affection.

"Do you think my little beauty is going to have red hair?" she said, pressing her lips against his head. Her own was a deep auburn. She looked at me, as if she wanted me to say no; but I could not, conscientiously, and so replied evasively, "Why, do n't you like that color?"

"I do n't care," she said; "it would be pretty to me, no matter what color it was; but John thinks red hair so ugly."

"Perhaps it will be the color of yours, and that will please him."

"He used to call mine pretty," she said; and, taking it down, laid it on the baby's head, and compared it, with the greatest apparent interest. While thus engaged, the coach drew up at the gate. "Oh, it is he!—it is he!" she cried; and, placing the baby in my arms, wound back her long hair, and flew to meet him, as though the heavens were opening before her.

"Why, Nell," I heard him say, as he assisted her up stairs, "you have grown old and ugly since I left."

The tone was playful, but she replied, "Oh, John!" in a reproachful accent that indicated a deeply felt meaning.

"And where did you learn this style of arranging your hair? Is it by good mother Widdleton's suggestion? Really, it is not becoming—it is positively shocking; and red hair requires the most careful dressing to make it enduring."

She tried to laugh as she entered the room, and said to me, "Do n't you think John is finding fault with me already! but, never mind, I'll find fault with him one of these days."

"I dare say, my dear, you will have cause," he answered, half seriously, half laughingly; and, putting her arms about his neck, she kissed him as fondly as though he had said she was looking young and beautiful. "Oh, the baby!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Why, John, you have n't seen him!"

"Do n't, my dear, make yourself ridiculous," he whispered, "but introduce the lady, and then go and arrange your hair: there is time enough to see the baby."

I rose to go, as I would have done sooner but for my little charge; but the Hevelyns insisted so much on my remaining, that I was forced to sit down. The mother kept smiling, but tears seemed ready to fall; and I placed the child in the father's arms, and said, "See, how like you he is!"

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, turning away his eyes, "you do n't mean to say I look like this thing!"

"No, not quite," I said, laughing; "not so well."

"And you call this boy mine, do you?" he said to his wife; "red hair, and blue eyes, and ugly in every way. Why, his hand is as big as a wood-chopper's." And he held up his own, which was delicate and beautiful.

"Now, John, dear, he does look like you, and Mrs. Widdleton, too, says he does." And to prove the resemblance she brought a picture of her husband, saying I might trace the resemblance more readily from that.

"Ah, Nelly," he said, putting it aside, "that never looked like me." And to me he added, "You see it was painted when I found that I had to marry Nell; and no wonder I looked woe-begone!"

I took up a book of engravings, and, laying down the child, he turned over the leaves for me.

"I am so faint!" said the wife, putting her hand to her forehead. "What shall I do, John?"

"Oh, I do n't know," he answered, without looking toward her; "get some water, or lie down, or something."

I gave her some water, and, seating her in the arm-chair, returned to the book, that I might not appear to notice her emotion. She turned her back toward us with a pretence of rocking the

cradle, but, in reality, to conceal inevitable tears. Mr. Hevelyn saw it, his conscience smote him, and, stooping over her, he kissed her forehead, and smoothed her hair, saying, with real or affected fondness, "You know, dear, I was only jesting." And she was pacified, and smiled again. The next morning the strange gentleman took the coach; he could not stay longer, the wife said; and other lonesome days came and went.

One wild March morning, when the snow blew blindingly against the windows, little Peter Widdleton came running in with great haste. Mrs. Hevelyn's baby was very sick, and she wanted me to come. I found, on arriving at her room, that it had not seemed well for several days, and that the previous night it had grown seriously worse, and that then the most alarming symptoms were visible. She had written every day to her husband, she told me, and as he neither came nor wrote, she was terrified on his account, though it was possible her letters might have been miscarried. Dear, credulous soul! The morning coach went by, and the evening coach went by, and he came not; and all the while the child grew worse. Mrs. Widdleton's skill was baffled; and as the mother rocked the little sufferer on her bosom, and said, "What shall I do! oh, what shall I do!" I forgot all the words of comfort I had ever known.

Poor baby! its little hands clinging tightly to the mother's, it lay all day; but at nightfall it sunk into slumber, and, though its mother kissed it a thousand times, it did not wake any more. It was piteous to see her grief when we put it down in the snow, and left it with the March winds making its lullaby.

After the burial, Mrs. Hevelyn lost the little energy that had kept her up before, and sat without speaking all the day. She seemed to have lost every interest in life.

We were sitting around the fire one night, eight or ten days after the baby died, when Mrs. Widdleton came bustling in to tell us that Mrs. Hevelyn was gone; that her husband had written her to join him without a moment's delay; that he had not sent her one cent of money, nor in any way made provision for her to go. "But for all that," said our neighbor, "she was nearly crazy to go, and the letter really made her a deal better

She gave my Liddy most of her clothes, partly by way of paying, I suppose—for you see she had no money—all but her wedding-dress; that, she said, she should need before long;” and the kind woman, taking up one of the cats, hugged it close by way of keeping down her emotion. Ah well,” she added, presently, “she has n’t much to care to live for, I am afraid.”

IV.

When our excellent neighbor had completed the narrative respecting her late guest, and bestowed fit tributes on the respective characters of the wife and the husband, she sat a moment in profound silence, and then, as if she had said *Be gone!* to all gloomy recollections, her face resumed its wonted glow, and her eyes sparkled with secrets until now suppressed, and at the thoughts of surprise and consternation she was likely to introduce into my uncle’s family—surprise and consternation in no degree associated with real evil, or the good woman would have been the last being in the world to feel a satisfaction in their creation or anticipation. Suddenly interrupting the third perusal of the leading article in the week’s “*Republican*,” she said, “Did you know, Old Mr. and Mrs. Courtney move to town to-day.”

“Do tell,” said uncle William, looking very much pleased, “I wonder what they are going to do with their house?”

“Well, I hardly know,” replied Mrs. Widdleton, looking slyly at me; “some say one thing and some say another; but I have my own thoughts. I do n’t think Edward Courtney went to B—— for nothing; and I do n’t think he will come back without a certain little woman, whose name begins with Delia, for a wife.”

Cousin Jane dropped half the stitches off one needle, and uncle William opened the paper so suddenly that he tore it, which he said he would not have done for a fip; and he forgot what quarter the moon was in, and, on being questioned, said he did n’t know as he cared.

Mrs. Widdleton was right; for the next evening I went with her to call on the bride, my friend carrying with her a custard-pie and a loaf of plum-cake. We found the happy pair taking

tea at a little table, with their faces glowing with sympathetic devotion; and when last I saw them they were as happy as then—lovers yet, though they had been married a dozen years.

A year after my visit I heard, by chance, that Mrs. Hevelyn was dead, and the fragment of her life and love that I have written, is all I know.

UNCLE CHRISTOPHER'S.

I.

THE night was intensely cold, but not dismal, for all the hills and meadows, all the steep roofs of the farm-houses, and the black roofs of the barns, were white as snow could make them. The haystacks looked like high, smooth heaps of snow, and the fences, in their zigzag course across the fields, seemed made of snow too, and half the trees had their limbs encrusted with the pure white.

Through the middle of the road, and between banks out of which it seemed to have been cut, ran a path, hard and blue and icy, and so narrow that only two horses could move in it abreast; and almost all the while I could hear the merry music of bells, or the clear and joyous voices of sleigh riders, exultant in the frosty and sparkling air.

With his head pushed under the curtain of the window next the road, so that his face touched the glass, stood my father, watching with as much interest, the things without, as I the pictures in the fire. His hands were thrust deep in his pockets; both his vest and coat hung loosely open; and so for a half hour he had stood, dividing my musings with joyous exclamations as the gay riders went by, singly, or in companies. Now it was a sled running over with children that he told me of; now an old man and woman wrapt in a coverlid and driving one poor horse; and now a bright sleigh with fine horses, jingling bells, and a troop of merry young folks. Then again he called out, "There goes a spider-legged thing that I would n't ride in," and this remark I knew referred to one of those contrivances which are gotten up on the spur of a moment, and generally after the snow begins to fall, consisting of two limber saplings

on which a seat is fixed, and which serve for runners, fills, and all.

It was not often we had such a deep snow as this, and it carried the thoughts of my father away back to his boyhood, for he had lived among the mountains then, and been used to the hardy winters which keep their empire nearly half the year. Turning from the window, he remarked, at length, "This is a nice time to go to Uncle Christopher's, or some where."

"Yes," I said, "it would be a nice time;" but I did not think so, all the while, for the snow and I were never good friends. I knew, however, that my father would like above all things to visit Uncle Christopher, and that, better still, though he did not like to own it, he would enjoy the sleighing.

"I want to see Uncle Christopher directly," he continued, "about getting some spring wheat to sow."

"It is very cold," I said, "is n't it?" I really could n't help the question.

"Just comfortably so," he answered, moving back from the fire.

Two or three times I tried to say, "Suppose we go," but the words were difficult, and not till he had said, "Nobody ever wants to go with me to Uncle Christopher's, nor anywhere," did I respond, heartily, "Oh, yes, father, I want to go."

In a minute afterwards, I heard him giving directions about the sleigh and horses.

"I am afraid, sir, you'll find it pretty cold," replied Billy, as he rose to obey.

"I don't care about going myself," continued my father, apologetically, "but my daughter has taken a fancy to a ride, and so I must oblige her."

A few minutes, and a pair of handsome, well-kept horses were champing the bit, and pawing the snow at the door, while shawls, mittens, &c., were warmed at the fire. It was hard to see the bright coals smothered under the ashes, and the chairs set away; but I forced a smile to my lips, and as my father said "Ready?" I answered "Ready," and the door closed on the genial atmosphere—the horses stepped forward and backward, flung their heads up and down, curved their necks to the

tightening rein, and we were off. The fates be praised, it is not to do again. All the shawls and muffs in Christendom could not avail against such a night—so still, clear, and intensely cold. The very stars seemed sharpened against the ice, and the white moonbeams slanted earthward, and pierced our faces like thorns—I think they had substance that night, and were stiff; and the thickest veil, doubled twice or thrice, was less than gossamer, and yet the wind did not blow, even so much as to stir one flake of snow from the bent boughs.

At first we talked with some attempts at mirth, but sobered presently and said little, as we glided almost noiselessly along the hard and smooth road. We had gone, perhaps, five miles to the northward, when we turned from the paved and level way into a narrow lane, or neighborhood road, as it was called, seeming to me hilly and winding and wild, for I had never been there before. The track was not so well worn, but my father pronounced it better than that we had left, and among the stumps and logs, and between hills and over hills, now through thick woods, and now through openings, we went crushing along. We passed a few cabins and old-fashioned houses, but not many, and the distances between them grew greater and greater, and there were many fields and many dark patches of woods between the lights. Every successive habitation I hoped would terminate our journey—our pleasure, I should have said—yet still we went on, and on.

“Is it much farther?” I asked, at length.

“Oh, no—only four or five miles,” replied my father; and he added, “Why, are you getting cold?”

“Not much,” I said, putting my hand to my face to ascertain that it was not frozen.

At last we turned into a lane, narrower, darker, and more lonesome still—edged with woods on either side, and leading up and up and up farther than I could see. No path had been previously broken, and the horses sunk knee deep at every step, their harness tightening as they strained forward, and their steamy breath drifting back, and freezing stiff my veil. At the summit the way was interrupted by a cross fence, and a gate was to be opened—a heavy thing, painted red, and fastened

with a chain. It had been well secured, for after half an hour's attempts to open it, we found ourselves defied.

"I guess we'll have to leave the horses and walk to the house," said my father; "it's only a little step."

I felt terrible misgivings; the gate opened into an orchard; I could see no house, and the deep snow lay all unbroken; but there was no help; I must go forward as best I could, or remain and freeze. It was difficult to choose, but I decided to go on. In some places the snow was blown aside, and we walked a few steps on ground almost bare, but in the end high drifts met us, through which we could scarcely press our way. In a little while we began to descend, and soon, abruptly, in a nook sheltered by trees, and higher hills, I saw a curious combination of houses—brick, wood, and stone—and a great gray barn, looking desolate enough in the moonlight, though about it stood half a dozen of inferior size. But another and a more cheerful indication of humanity attracted me. On the brink of the hill stood two persons with a small hand-sled between them, which they seemed to have just drawn up; in the imperfect light, they appeared to be mere youths, the youngest not more than ten or twelve years of age. Their laughter rang on the cold air, and our approach, instead of checking, seemed to increase their mirth.

"Laugh, Mark, laugh," said the taller of the two, as we drew near, "so they will see our path—they're going right through the deep snow."

But in stead, the little fellow stepped manfully forward, and directed us into the track broken by their sleds.

At the foot of the hill we came upon the medley of buildings, so incongruous that they might have been blown together by chance. Light appeared in the windows of that portion which was built of stone, but we heard no sound, and the snow about the door had not been disturbed since its fall. "And this," said I, "is where Uncle Christopher Wright lives?"

A black dog, with yellow spots under his eyes, stood suddenly before us, and growled so forbiddingly that we drew back.

"He will not bite," said the little boy; for the merry

makers had landed on their sled at the foot of the hill, and followed us to the door; and in a moment the larger youth dashed past us, seized the dog by the fore paws, and dragged him violently aside, snarling and whimpering all the time. "Haven't you got no more sense," he exclaimed, "than to bark so at a gentleman and ladies?"

II.

In answer to our quick rap, the door opened at once, and the circle about the great blazing log fire was broken by a general rising. The group consisted of eight persons—one man and seven women; the women so closely resembling each other, that one could not tell them apart; not even the mother from the daughters—for she appeared as young as the oldest of them—except by her cap and spectacles. All the seven were very slender, very straight, and very tall; all had dark complexions, black eyes, low foreheads, straight noses, and projecting teeth; and all were dressed precisely alike, in gowns of brown flannel, and coarse leather boots, with blue woollen stockings, and small capes, of red and yellow calico. The six daughters were all marriageable; at least the youngest of them was. They had staid, almost severe, expressions of countenances, and scarcely spoke during the evening. By one corner of the great fireplace they huddled together, each busy with knitting, and all occupied with long blue stockings, advanced in nearly similar degrees toward completion. Now and then they said "Yes, ma'm," or "No ma'm," when I spoke to them, but never or very rarely any thing more. As I said, Mrs. Wright differed from her daughters in appearance, only in that she wore a cap and spectacles; but she was neither silent nor ill at ease as they were; on the contrary, she industriously filled up all the little spaces unoccupied by her good man in the conversation; she set off his excellencies, as a frame does a picture; and before we were even seated, she expressed her delight that we had come when "Christopher" was at home, as, owing to his *gift*, he was much abroad.

Uncle Christopher was a tall muscular man of sixty or thereabouts, dressed in what might be termed stylish homespun

coat, trowsers and waistcoat, of snuff-colored cloth. His cravat was of red-and-white-checked gingham, but it was quite hidden under his long grizzly beard, which he wore in full, this peculiarity being a part of his religion. His hair was of the same color, combed straight from his forehead, and turned over in one even curl on the back of the neck. Heavy gray eyebrows met over a hooked nose, and deep in his head twinkled two little blue eyes, which seemed to say, "I am delighted with myself, and, of course, you are with me." Between his knees he held a stout hickory stick, on which, occasionally, when he had settled something beyond the shadow of doubt, he rested his chin for a moment, and enjoyed the triumph. He rose on our entrance, for he had been seated beside a small table, where he monopolized a good portion of the light, and all the warmth, and having shaken hands with my father and welcomed him in a long and pompous speech, during which the good wife bowed her head, and listened as to an oracle, he greeted me in the same way, saying, "This, I suppose, is the virgin who abideth still in the house with you. She is not given, I hope, to gadding overmuch, nor to vain and foolish decorations of her person with ear-rings and finger-rings, and cringing-pins: for such are unprofitable, yea, abominable. My daughter, consider it well, and look upon it, and receive instruction." I was about replying, I don't know what, when he checked me by saying, "Much speech in a woman is as the crackling of thorns under a pot. Open rebuke," he continued, "is better than secret love." Then pointing with his cane in the direction of the six girls, he said, "Rise, maidens, and salute your kinswoman;" and as they stood up, pointing to each with his stick, he called their names, beginning with Abigail, eldest of the daughters of Rachael Wright and Christopher Wright, and ending with Lucinda, youngest born of Rachael Wright and Christopher Wright. Each, as she was referred to, made a quick ungraceful curtsy, and resumed her seat and her knitting.

A half hour afterward, seeing that we remained silent, the father said, by way of a gracious permission of conversation, I suppose, "A little talk of flax and wool, and of household dili-

gence, would not ill become the daughters of our house." Upon hearing this, Lucinda, who, her mother remarked, had the "liveliest turn" of any of the girls, asked me if I liked to knit; to which I answered, "Yes," and added, "Is it a favorite occupation with you?" she replied, "Yes ma'm," and after a long silence, inquired how many cows we milked, and at the end of another pause, whether we had colored our flannel brown or blue; if we had gathered many hickory nuts; if our apples were keeping well, etc.

The room in which we sat was large, with a low ceiling, and bare floor, and so open about the windows and doors, that the slightest movement of the air without would keep the candle flame in motion, and chill those who were not sitting nearest the fire, which blazed and crackled and roared in the chimney. Uncle Christopher, as my father had always called him (though he was uncle so many degrees removed that I never exactly knew the relationship), laid aside the old volume from which he had been reading, removed the two pairs of spectacles he had previously worn, and hung them, by leather strings connecting their bows, on a nail in the stone jamb by which he sat, and talked, and talked; and talked, and I soon discovered by his conversation, aided by the occasional explanatory whispers of his wife, that he was one of those infatuated men who fancy themselves "called" to be teachers of religion, though he had neither talents, education, nor anything else to warrant such a notion, except a faculty for joining pompous and half scriptural phrases, from January to December.

That inward purity must be manifested by a public washing of the feet, that it was a sin to shave the beard, and an abomination for a man to be hired to preach, were his doctrines, I believe, and much time and some money he spent in their vindication. From neighborhood to neighborhood he traveled, now entering a blacksmith's shop and delivering a homily, now debating with the boys in the cornfield, and now obtruding into some church, where peaceable worshippers were assembled, with intimations that they had "broken teeth, and feet out of joint," that they were "like cold and snow in the time of harvest, yea, worse, even as pot-sheds covered with silver dross." And such ex-

hortations he often concluded by quoting the passage: "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat, with a postle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."

More than half an hour elapsed before the youths whose sliding down the hill had been interrupted by us, entered the house. Their hands and faces were red and stiffened with the cold, yet they kept shyly away from the fire, and no one noticed or made room for them. Both interested me at once, and partly, perhaps, that they seemed to interest nobody else. The taller was not so young as I at first imagined; he was ungraceful, shambling, awkward, and possessed one of those clean, pinky complexions which look so youthful; his hair was yellow, his eyes small and blue, with an unquiet expression, and his hands and feet inordinately large; and when he spoke, it was to the boy who sat on a low stool beside him, in a whisper, which he evidently meant to be inaudible to others, but which was, nevertheless, quite distinct to me. He seemed to exercise a kind of brotherly care over the boy, but he did not speak, nor move, nor look up, nor look down, nor turn aside, nor sit still, without an air of the most wretched embarrassment. I should not have written "sit still," for he changed his position continually, and each time his face grew crimson, and, to cover his confusion, as it were, he drew from his pocket a large silk handkerchief, rubbed his lips, and replaced it, at the same time moving and screwing and twisting the toe of his boot in every direction.

I felt glad of his attention to the boy, for he seemed silent and thoughtful beyond his years; perhaps he was lonesome, I thought; certainly he was not happy, for he leaned his chin on his hand, which was cracked and bleeding, and now and then when his companion ceased to speak, the tears gathered to his eyes; but he seemed willing to be pleased, and brushed the tears off his face and smiled, when the young man laid his great hand on his head, and, shaking it roughly, said, "Mark, Mark, Marky!"

"I can't help thinking about the money," said the boy, at last, "and how many new things it would have bought: just think of it, Andrew!"

"How Towser did bark at them people, did n't he, Mark?" said Andrew, not heeding what had been said to him.

"All new things!" murmured the boy, sorrowfully, glancing at his patched trousers and ragged shoes.

"In three days it wil be New-Year's; and then, Mark, won't we have fun!" and Andrew rubbed his huge hands together, in glee, at the prospect.

"It won't be no fun as I know of," replied the boy.

"May be the girls will bake some cakes," said Andrew, turning red, and looking sideways at the young women.

Mark laughed, and, looking up, he recognized the interested look with which I regarded him, and from that moment we were friends.

At the sound of laughter, Uncle Christopher struck his cane on the floor, and looking sternly toward the offenders, said, "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back!" leaving to them the application, which they made, I suppose, for they became silent—the younger dropping his chin in his hands again, and the elder twisting the toe of his boot, and using his handkerchief very freely.

I thought we should never go home, for I soon tired of Uncle Christopher's conversation, and of Aunt Rachael's continual allusions to his "gift;" he was evidently regarded by her as not only the man of the house, but also as the man of all the world. The six young women had knitted their six blue stockings from the heel to the toe, and had begun precisely at the same time to taper them off, with six little white balls of yarn.

The clock struck eleven, and I ventured, timidly, to suggest my wish to return home. Mark, who sat drowsily in his chair, looked at me beseechingly, and when Aunt Rachael said, "Tut, tut! you are not going home to-night!" he laughed again, despite the late admonition. All the six young women also said, "You can stay just as well as not;" and I felt as if I were to be imprisoned, and began urging the impossibility of doing so, when Uncle Christopher put an end to remonstrance by exclaiming, "It is better to dwell in the corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman, and in a wide house." It

was soon determined that I should remain, not only for the night, but till the weather grew warmer; and I can feel now something of the pang I experienced when I heard the horses snorting on their homeward way, after the door had closed upon me.

"I am glad you did n't get to go!" whispered Mark, close to me, favored by a slight confusion induced by the climbing of the six young ladies upon six chairs, to hang over six lines, attached to the rafters, the six stockings.

There was no variableness in the order of things at Uncle Christopher's, but all went regularly forward without even a casual observation, and to see one day, was to see the entire experience in the family.

"He has a great gift in prayer," said Aunt Rachael, pulling my sleeve, as the hour for worship arrived.

I did not then, nor can I to this day, agree with her. I would not treat such matters with levity, and will not repeat the formula which this "gifted man" went over morning and evening, but he did not fail on each occasion to make known to the All-Wise the condition in which matters stood, and to assure him, that he himself was doing a great deal for their better management in the future. It was not so much a prayer as an announcement of the latest intelligence, even to "the visit of his kinswoman who was still detained by the severity of the elements."

It was through the exercise of his wonderful gift, that I first learned the histories of Andrew and Mark; that the former was a relation from the interior of Indiana, who, for feeding and milking Uncle Christopher's cows morning and evening, and the general oversight of affairs, when the great man was abroad, enjoyed the privilege of attending the district school in the neighborhood; and that the latter was the "son of his son," a "wicked and troublesome boy, for the present subjected to the chastening influences of a righteous discipline."

As a mere matter of form, Uncle Christopher always said, I will do so or so, "Providence permitting;" but he felt competent to do anything and everything on his own account, to "the drawing out of the Leviathan with an hook, or his tongue with

a cord—to the putting a hook into his nose, or the boring his jaw through with a thorn.”

“I believe it’s getting colder,” said Andrew, as he opened the door of the stairway, darkly winding over the great oven, to a low chamber; and, chuckling, he disappeared. He was pleased, as a child would be, with the novelty of a visitor, and perhaps half believed it was colder, because he hoped it was so. Mark gave me a smile as he sidled past his grandfather, and disappeared within the smoky avenue. We had scarcely spoken together, but somehow he had recognized the kindly disposition I felt toward him.

As I lay awake, among bags of meal and flour, boxes of hickory nuts and apples, with heaps of seed, wheat, oats, and barley, that filled the chamber into which I had been shown—cold, despite the twenty coverlids heaped over me—I kept thinking of little Mark, and wondering what was the story of the money he had referred to. I could not reconcile myself to the assumption of Uncle Christopher that he was a wicked boy; and, falling asleep at last, I dreamed the hard old man was beating him with his walking-stick, because the child was not big enough to fill his own snuff-colored coat and trowsers. And certainly this would have been little more absurd than his real effort to change the boy into a man.

There was yet no sign of daylight, when the stir of the family awoke me, and, knowing they would think very badly of me should I further indulge my disposition for sleep, I began to feel in the darkness for the various articles of my dress. At length, half awake, I made my way through and over the obstructions in the chamber, to the room below, which the blazing logs filled with light. The table was spread, and in the genial warmth sat Uncle Christopher, doing nothing. He turned his blue eyes upon me as I entered, and said, “Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than she who crieth, A little more sleep, and a little more slumber.”

“Did he say anything to you?” asked Aunt Rachael, as I entered the kitchen in search of a wash-bowl. “It must have been just to the purpose,” she continued; “Christopher always says something to the purpose.”

There was no bowl, no accommodations, for one's toilet: Uncle Christopher did not approve of useless expenditures. I was advised to make an application of snow to my hands and face, and while I was doing so, I saw a light moving about the stables, and heard Andrew say, in a chuckling, pleased tone, "B'lieve it's colder, Mark—she can't go home to-day; and if she is only here till New-Years, maybe they will kill the big turkey." I felt, while melting on my cheeks the snow, that it was no warmer, and, perhaps, a little flattered with the evident liking of the young man and the boy, I resolved to make the best of my detention. I could see nothing to do, for seven women were already moving about by the light of a single tallow candle; the pork was frying, and the coffee boiling; the bread and butter were on the table, and there was nothing more, apparently, to be accomplished. I dared not sit down, however, and so remained in the comfortless kitchen, as some atonement for my involuntary idleness. At length the tin-horn was sounded, and shortly after Andrew and Mark came in, and breakfast was announced; in other words, Aunt Rachael placed her hand on her good man's chair, and said, "Come."

To the coarse fare before us we all helped ourselves in silence, except of the bread, and that was placed under the management of Uncle Christopher, and with the same knife he used in eating, slices were cut as they were required. The little courage I summoned while alone in the snow—thinking I might make myself useful, and do something to occupy my time, and oblige the family—flagged and failed during that comfortless meal. My poor attempts at cheerfulness fell like moonbeams on ice, except, indeed, that Andrew and Mark looked grateful.

Several times, before we left the table, I noticed the cry of a kitten, seeming to come from the kitchen, and that when Uncle Christopher turned his ear in that direction, Mark looked at Andrew, who rubbed his lips more earnestly than I had seen him before.

When the breakfast, at last, was ended, the old man proceeded to search out the harmless offender, with the instincts of some animal hungry for blood. I knew its doom, when it was discovered, clinging so tightly to the old hat, in which Mark

had hidden it, dry and warm, by the kitchen fire ; it had been better left in the cold snow, for I saw that the sharp little eyes which looked on it grew hard as stone.

“ Mark,” said Uncle Christopher, “ into your hands I deliver this unclean beast : there is an old well digged by my father, and which lieth easterly a rod or more from the great barn—uncover the mouth thereof, and when you have borne the creature thither, cast it down !”

Mark looked as if he were suffering torture, and when, with the victim, he had reached the door, he turned, as if constrained by pity, and said, “ Can't it stay in the barn ?”

“ No,” answered Uncle Christopher, bringing down his great stick on the floor ; “ but you can stay in the barn, till you learn better than to gainsay my judgment.” Rising, he pointed in the direction of the well, and followed, as I inferred, to see that his order was executed, deigning to offer neither reason nor explanation.

Andrew looked wistfully after, but dared not follow, and, taking from the mantle-shelf Walker's Dictionary, he began to study a column of definitions, in a whisper sufficiently loud for every one in the house to hear.

I inquired if that were one of his studies at school ; but so painful was the embarrassment occasioned by the question, though he simply answered, “ B'lieve it is,” that I repented, and perhaps the more, as it failed of its purpose of inducing a somewhat lower whisper, in his mechanical repetitions of the words, which he resumed with the same annoying distinctness.

With the first appearance of daylight the single candle was snuffed out, and it now stood filling the room with smoke from its long limber wick, while the seven women removed the dishes, and I changed from place to place that I might seem to have some employment ; and Andrew, his head and face heated in the blaze from the fireplace, studied the Dictionary. In half an hour Uncle Christopher returned, with stern satisfaction depicted in his face : the kitten was in the well, and Mark was in the barn ; I felt that, and was miserable.

I asked for something to do, as the old man, resuming his seat, and, folding his hands over his staff, began a homily on

the beauty of industry, and was given some patch-work; "There are fifty blocks in the quilt," said Aunt Rachael, "and each of them contains three hundred pieces."

I wrought diligently all the day, though I failed to see the use or beauty of the work on which I was engaged.

At last Andrew, putting his Dictionary in his pocket, saying, "I b'lieve I have my lesson by heart," and, a piece of bread and butter in the top of his hat, tucked the ends of his green woolen trowsers in his cowhide boots, and, without a word of kindness or encouragement, left the house for the school.

By this time the seven women had untwisted seven skeins of blue yarn, which they wound into seven blue balls, and each at the same time began the knitting of seven blue stockings.

That was a very long day to me, and as the hours went by I grew restless, and then wretched. Was little Mark all this time in the cold barn? Scratching the frost from the window pane, I looked in the direction from which I expected him to come, but he was nowhere to be seen.

The quick clicking of the knitting-needles grew hateful, the shut mouths and narrow foreheads of the seven women grew hateful, and hatefulest of all grew the small blue shining eyes of Uncle Christopher, as they bent on the yellow worm-eaten page of the old book he read. He was warm and comfortable, and had forgotten the existence of the little boy he had driven out into the cold.

I put down my work at last, and cold as it was, ventured out. There were narrow paths leading to the many barns and cribs, and entering one after another, I called to Mark, but in vain. Calves started up, and, placing their fore feet in the troughs from which they usually fed, looked at me, half in wonder and half in fear; the horses—and there seemed to be dozens of them—stamped, and whinnied, and, thrusting their noses through their mangers, pressed them into a thousand wrinkles, snuffing the air instead of expected oats. It was so intensely cold I began to fear the boy was dead, and turned over bundles of hay and straw, half expecting to find his stiffened corpse beneath them, but I did not, and was about

leaving the green walls of hay that rose smoothly on each side of me, the great dusty beams and black cobwebs swaying here and there in the wind, when a thought struck me: the well—he might have fallen in! Having gone “a rod or more, easterly from the barn,” directed by great footprints and little footprints, I discovered the place, and to my joy, the boy also. There was no curb about the well, and, with his hands resting on a decayed strip of plank that lay across its mouth, the boy was kneeling beside it, and looking in. He had not heard my approach, and, stooping, I drew him carefully back, showed him how the plank was decayed, and warned him against such fearful hazards.

“But,” he said, half laughing, and half crying, “just see!” and he pulled me toward the well. The opening was small and dark, and seemed very deep, and as I looked more intently my vision gradually penetrated to the bottom; I could see the still pool there, and a little above it, crouching on a loose stone or other projection of the wall, the kitten, turning her shining eyes upward now and then, and mewling piteously.

“Do you think she will get any of it?” said Mark, the tears coming into his eyes; “and if she does, how long will she live there?” The kind-hearted child had been dropping down bits of bread for the prisoner.

He was afraid to go to the house, but when I told him Uncle Christopher might scold me if he scolded any one, and that I would tell him so, he was prevailed upon to accompany me. The hard man was evidently ashamed when he saw the child hiding behind my skirts for fear, and at first said nothing. But directly Mark began to cry—there was such an aching and stinging in his fingers and toes, he could not help it.

“Boo, hoo, hoo!” said the old man, making three times as much noise as the boy—“what’s the matter now?”

“I suppose his hands and feet are frozen,” said I, as though I knew it, and would maintain it in spite of him, and I confess I felt a secret satisfaction in showing him his cruelty.

“Oh, I guess not,” Aunt Rachael said, quickly, alarmed for my cool assertion as well as for the child: “only a leetle frosted, I reckon. Whereabouts does it hurt you, my son?” she con-

tinued, stooping over him with a human sympathy and fondness I had not previously seen in any of the family.

"Frosted a leetle—that's all, Christopher," she said, by way of soothing her lord's compunction, and, at the same time, taking in her hands the feet of the boy, which he flung about for pain, crying bitterly. "Hush, little honey," she said, kissing him, and afraid the good man would be vexed at the crying; and as she sat there holding his feet, and tenderly soothing him, I at first could not believe she was the same dark and sedate matron who had been knitting the blue stocking.

"Woman, fret not thy gizzard!" said Christopher, slapping his book on the table, and hanging his spectacles on the jamb. The transient beauty all dropt away, the old expression of obsequious servility was back, and she resumed her seat and her knitting.

"There, let me doctor you," he continued, drawing the child's stocking off. The feet were covered with blisters, and presented the appearance of having been scalded. "Why, boy alive," said he, as he saw the blisters, "these are nothing—they will make you grow." He was forgetting his old pomposity, and, as if aware of it, resumed, "Thou hast been chastised according to thy deserts—go forth in the face of the wind, even the north wind, and, as the ox treadeth the mortar, tread thou the snow."

"You see, Markey," interposed Mrs. Wright, whose heart was really kind,—“you see your feet are a leetle frosted, and that will make them well.”

The little fellow wiped his tears with his hand, which was cracked and bleeding from the cold; and, between laughing and crying, ran manfully out into the snow.

It was almost night, and the red clouds about the sunset began to cast their shadows along the hills. The seven women went into the kitchen for the preparation of dinner, (we ate but two meals in the day) and I went to the window to watch Mark as he trod the snow “even as an ox treadeth the mortar.” There he was, running hither and thither, and up and down, but, to my surprise, not alone. Andrew, who had returned from school, and found his little friend in such a sorry plight,

had, for the sake of giving him courage, bared his own feet, and was chasing after him in generously well-feigned enjoyment. Towser, too, had come forth from his kennel of straw, and a gay frolic they made of it, all together.

I need not describe the dinner—it differed only from the breakfast, in that it had potatoes added to the bread and pork.

I remember never days so long, before nor since; and that night, as the women resumed their knitting, and Uncle Christopher his old book, I could hardly keep from crying like a child, I was so lonesome and homesick. The wind roared in the neighboring woods, the frozen branches rattled against the stone wall, and sometimes the blaze was blown quite out of the fire-place. I could not see to make my patch-work, for Uncle Christopher monopolized the one candle, and no one questioned his right to do so; and, at last, conscious of the displeasure that would follow me, I put by the patches, and joined Mark and Andrew, who were shelling corn in the kitchen. They were not permitted to burn a candle, but the great fire-place was full of blazing logs, and, on seeing me, their faces kindled into smiles, which helped to light the room, I thought. The floor was covered with red and white cobs, and there were sacks of ripe corn, and tubs of shelled corn, about the floor, and, taking a stool, I joined them at their work. At first, Andrew was so much confused, and rubbed his mouth so much with his handkerchief, that he shelled but little; gradually, however, he overcame his diffidence, and seemed to enjoy the privilege of conversation, which he did not often have, poor fellow. Little Mark made slow progress; his tender hands shrank from contact with the rough ears, and when I took his place, and asked him where he lived, and how old he was, his heart was quite won, and he found delight in communicating to me his little joys and sorrows. He was not pretty, certainly—his eyes were gray and large, his hair red, his expression surly, his voice querulous, and his manner unamiable, except, indeed, when talking with Andrew or myself.

I have been mistaken, I thought; he is really amiable and sweet-tempered; and, as I observed him very closely, his more habitual expression came to his face, and he said, abruptly,

"I don't like grandfather!" "Why?" I said, smoothing back his hair, for I liked him the better for saying so. "Because," he replied, "he don't like me;" and, in a moment, he continued, while his eyes moistened, "nobody likes me—everybody says I'm bad and ugly." "Oh, Mark!" exclaimed Andrew, "I like you, but I know somebody I don't like—somebody that wears spectaclesses, and a long beard—I don't say it's Uncle Christopher, and I don't say it ain't." Mark laughed, partly at the peculiar manner in which Andrew expressed himself; and when I told him I liked him too, and did n't think him either bad or ugly, he pulled at the hem of my apron as he remarked, that he should like to live with Andrew and me, always.

I answered that I would very gladly take him with me when I went home, and his face shone with pleasure, as he told me he had never yet ridden in a sleigh. But the pleasure lasted only a moment, and, with an altered and pained expression, he said, "I can't go—these things are all I have got," and he pointed to his homely and ill-conditioned clothes.

"Never mind, I will mend them," I said; and, wiping his eyes, he told me that once he had enough money to buy ever so many clothes, that he earned it by doing errands, sawing wood, and other services, for the man who lived next door to his father in the city, and that one Saturday night, when he had done something that pleased his employer, he paid him all he owed, and a little more, for being a good boy. "As I was running home," said he, "I met two boys that I knew; so I stopped to show them how much money I had, and when they told me to put it on the pavement in three little heaps, so we could see how much it made, I did so, and they, each one of them, seized a heap and ran away, and that," said Mark, "is just the truth."

"And what did you do then?" I asked.

"I told father," he answered, "and he said I was a simpleton, and it was good enough for me—that he would send me out here, and grandfather would straighten me."

"Never mind, Markey," said Andrew, "it will be New-Year's, day after to-morrow."

And so, sitting in the light of the cob-fire, and guessing what they would get in their stockings, I left them for the night.

I did not dampen their expectations of a good time, but I saw little cause to believe any pleasant dreams of their's would be realized, as I had seen no indications of preparation for the holidays, even to the degree of a plumb cake, or mince-pie. But I was certain of one thing—whatever Mark was, they would not make him any better. As he said, nobody loved him, nobody spoke to him, from morning till night, unless to correct or order him, in some way; and so, perhaps, he sometimes did things he ought not to do, merely to amuse his idleness. In all ways he was expected to have the wisdom of a man—to rise as early, and sit up as late, endure the heat and cold as well, and perform nearly as much labor. So, to say the truth, he was, for the most part, sulky and sullen, and did reluctantly that which he had to do, and no more, except, indeed, at the suggestion of Andrew, or while I was at the house, because I at my request, and then work seemed only play to him.

The following morning was precisely like the morning that preceded it; the family rose before the daylight, and moved about by the tallow candle, and prepared breakfast, while Uncle Christopher sat in the great arm-chair, and Mark and Andrew fed the cattle by the light of a lantern.

“To-morrow will be New-Year's,” said Mark, when breakfast was concluded, and Andrew took down the old Dictionary. No one noticed him, and he presently repeated it.

“Well, and what of it?” replied the old man, giving him a severe look.

“Nothing of it, as I know of,” said the boy; “only I thought, maybe we would have something nice.”

“Something nice!” echoed the grandfather; “don't we have something nice every day?”

“Well, but I want to do something,” urged Mark, sure that he wished to have the dull routine broken in some way.

“Boys will be boys,” said Aunt Rachael, in her most conciliatory tone, and addressing nobody in particular; and presently she asked Mark what had become of the potatoes he gleaned. He replied that they were in a barrel in the cellar.

"Eaten up by the rats," added Uncle Christopher.

"No, sir," said Mark, "they are as good as ever—may I sell them?"

"It's a great wonder you did n't let the rats eat them; but, I suppose, it's from no oversight of yours," Uncle Christopher said.

"Yes, sir, I covered them," replied the boy; "and now, may I sell them?—you said I might."

"Sell them—yes, you may sell them," replied the grandfather, in a mocking tone; "why don't you run along and sell them?"

Of course, the boy did not feel that he could sell his little crop, nor did the grandfather intend to grant any such permission.

"Uncle Christopher," said Andrew, looking up from his Dictionary, "do them ere potatoes belong to you, or do they belong to Markey?"

The old man did not reply directly, but said something about busy bodies and meddlers, which caused Andrew to study very earnestly, while Mark withdrew to the kitchen and cried, alone. Toward noon, however, his grandfather asked him if he could ride the old sorrel horse to the blacksmith's, three miles away, and get new shoes set on him, "because," said he, "if you can, you can carry a bag of the potatoes, and sell them."

Mark forgot how cold it was, forgot his ragged trowsers, forgot everything, except that the next day was New-Year's, and that he should have some money; and, mounting the old horse, with a bag of potatoes for a saddle, he was soon facing the north wind. He had no warm cap to turn against his ears, and no mittens for his hands, but he had something pleasant to think about, and so did not feel the cold so much.

When Andrew came from school, and found that Mark was gone to sell his potatoes, he was greatly pleased, and went out early to feed the cattle, first carrying the bundles of oats over the hill to the sheep—a portion of the work belonging to Mark; and he also made a blazing fire, and watched his coming at the window; but no one else seemed to think of him—the supper was served and removed, and not even the tea was kept by the

fire for him. It was long after dark when he came, cold and hungry—but nobody made room at the hearth, and nobody inquired the result of his speculation, or what he had seen or heard during the day.

“You will find bread and butter in the cupboard,” said Aunt Rachael, after a while, and that was all.

But he had received a dollar for the potatoes; that was fortune enough for one day, and he was careless and thoughtless of their indifference.

There was not light for my patch-work, and Aunt Rachael gave me instead a fine linen sheet to hem. “Isn't it fine and pretty?” said Mark, coming close to me before he went to bed; “I wish I could have it over me.”

“Thoughtless child,” said the grandfather, “you will have it over you soon enough, and nothing else about you, but your coffin-boards.” And, with this benediction, he was dismissed for the night.

I awoke in the morning early, and heard the laughter of Andrew and Mark—it was New-Year's—and, in defiance of the gloomy prospect, they were merry; but when I descended the grandson looked grave—he had found nothing in his stockings.

“Put your feet in them,” said Uncle Christopher, “and that will be something.”

Fresh snow had fallen in the night, and the weather was milder than it had been, but within the house, the day began as usual.

“Grandfather,” said Mark, “shall we not have the fat turkey-hen for dinner, to-day? I could run her down in the snow so easy!”

“So could I run you down in the snow, if I tried,” he responded, with a surly quickness.

“New-Year's day,” said Aunt Rachael, “is no better than any other, that I know of; and if you get very hungry, you can eat good bread and milk.”

So, as in other mornings, Andrew whispered over the Dictionary, the old man sat in the corner, and the seven women began to knit.

Toward the noon, a happy thought came into the mind of

Uncle Christopher : there would be wine-bibbers and mirth-makers at the village, three miles away—he would ride thither, and discourse to them of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. Mark was directed to bring his horse to the door, and, having combed his long beard with great care, and slipped over his head a knitted woollen cap, he departed on his errand, but not without having taken from little Mark the dollar he had received for his potatoes. “It may save a soul,” he said, “and shall a wayward boy have his will, and a soul be lost?”

The child, however, was not likely in this way to be infused with religious feeling, whatever Uncle Christopher might think of the subject, and it was easy to see that a sense of the injustice he suffered had induced a change in his heart that no good angel would have joy to see. I tried to appease his anger, but he recounted, with the exactest particularity, all the history of the wrong he had suffered, and would not believe there was the slightest justification possible for robbing him of what was his own, instead of making him, as his grandfather should have done, a handsome present. About the middle of the afternoon Andrew came home from school, having been dismissed at so early an hour because it was a holiday, and to prepare for a spelling match to be held at the school-house in the evening. The chores were done long before sundown, and Andrew was in high spirits, partly in anticipation of the night's triumphs, and partly at the prospect of bringing some happiness to the heart of Mark, with whom he several times read over the lesson, impressing on his memory with all the skill he had the harder words which might come to him. Andrew went early, having in charge the school-house fire, and Mark did not accompany him, but I supposed he would follow presently, and so was not uneasy about him.

As the twilight darkened, Uncle Christopher came in, and, recounting his pious labors, with a conceited cant that was now become disgusting to me, he inquired for Mark, that the “brand” might hear and rejoice at the good accomplished with the money thus applied for the regeneration of the gentiles; but Mark was not to be found, and Aunt Rachael meekly hinted

that from what she had overheard, she suspected he had gone with Andrew to the spelling match.

"Gone to the spelling match—and without asking me!" said the good man; "the rod has been spared too long." And taking from his pocket his knife, he opened it with deliberate satisfaction, and left the house.

I thought of the words of Mark, "I don't like my grandfather;" and I felt that he was not to blame. All the long evening the lithe sapling lay over the mantel, while Uncle Christopher kitted his brows, and the seven women knitted their seven stockings. I could not use my needle, nor think of what was being done about me; all the family practised their monotonous tasks in gloomy silence; the wind shrieked in the trees, whose branches were flung violently sometimes against the windows; Towser came scratching and whining at the door, without attracting the notice of any one; and Uncle Christopher sat in his easy-chair, in the most comfortable corner, seeming almost as if he were in an ecstasy with intense self-satisfaction, or, once in a while, looking joyously grim and stern as his eye rested on the instrument of torture he had prepared for poor Mark, for whose protection I found myself praying silently, as I half dreamed that he was in the hands of a pitiless monster.

The old clock struck eleven, from a distant part of the house, and we all counted the strokes, it was so still; the sheet I had finished lay on the settee beneath the window, where the rose-vine creaked, and the mice peered out of the gnawed holes, and the rats ran through the mouldy cellar. There was a stamping at the door, in the moist snow; I listened, but could hear no voices; the door opened, and Andrew came in alone.

"Where is Mark?" asked the stern voice of the disciplinarian.

"I do not know," replied Andrew; "is n't he here?"

"No," said Aunt Rachael, throwing down her knitting, "nor has n't been these many hours. Mercy on us, where can he be?"

"Fallen asleep somewhere about the house, likely," replied the old man; and taking up the candle, he began the search.

"And he hasn't been with you, Andrew?" asked Aunt Rachael again, in the faint hope that he would contradict his previous assertion.

"No ma'm, as true as I live and breathe," he replied, with childish simplicity and earnestness.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed again.

We could hear doors opening and shutting, and floors creaking in distant parts of the house; but nothing more.

"It's very strange," said the old man. "Don't be afraid, girls;" but he was evidently alarmed, and his hand shook as he lighted the lantern, saying, "he must be in the barn!"

Aunt Rachael would go, and I would go, too—I could not stay away. Andrew climbed along the scaffolds, stooping and reaching the lantern before him, and now and then we called to know if he had found him, as if he would not tell it when he did. So all the places we could think of had been searched, and we had began to call and listen, and call again.

"Hark," said Andrew, "I heard something."

We were all so still that it seemed as if we might hear the falling of flakes of snow.

"Only the howl of a dog," said Uncle Christopher.

"It's Towser's," suggested Andrew, fearfully; and with an anxious look he lowered the lantern to see what indications were in the way. Going toward the well were seen small footprints, and there were none returning. Even Uncle Christopher was evidently disturbed. Seeing the light, the dog began to yelp and whine, looking earnestly at us, and then suddenly down in the well, and when we came to the place every one felt a sinking of the heart, and no one dared to speak. The plank, on which I had seen him resting, was broken, and a part of it had fallen in. Towser whined, and his eyes shone as if he were in agony for words, and trying to throw all his intelligence into each piteous look he gave us.

"Get a rope, and lower the light," said one of the sisters; but the loose stones of the well were already rattling to the touch of Andrew, who, planting hands and feet on either side, was rapidly but cautiously descending. In a moment he was out of sight, but still we heard him, and soon there was a

pause, then the sound of a hand, plashing the water, then a groan, sounding hollow and awful through the damp, dark opening, and a dragging, soughing movement, as if something were drawn up from the water. Presently we heard hands and feet once more against the sides of the well, and then, shining through the blackness into the light, two fiery eyes, and quickly after, as the bent head and shoulders of Andrew came nearer the surface, the kitten leaped from them, and dashed blindly past the old man, who was kneeling and looking down, pale with remorseful fear. Approaching the top, Andrew said, "I've got him!" and the grandfather reached down and lifted the lifeless form of the boy into his arms, where he had never reposed before. He was laid on the settee, by the window; the fine white sheet that I had hemmed, was placed over him; the stern and hard master walked backward and forward in the room, softened and contrite, though silent, except when occasional irrepressible groans disclosed the terrible action of his conscience; and Towser, who had been Mark's dearest play-mate, nearly all the while kept his face, from without, against the window pane.

"Oh, if it were yesterday!" murmured Uncle Christopher, when the morning came; "Andrew," he said, and his voice faltered, as the young man took from the mantel the long, limber rod, and measured the shrouded form from the head to the feet, "get the coffin as good as you can—I do n't care what it costs—get the best."

The Dictionary was not opened that day; Andrew was digging through the snow, on a lonesome hill-side, pausing now and then to wipe his eyes on his sleeve. Upright on the grave's edge, his only companion, sat the black dog.

Poor little Mark!—we dressed him very carefully, more prettily, too, than he had ever been in his life, and as he lay on the white pillow, all who saw him said, "How beautiful he is!" The day after the funeral, I saw Andrew, previously to his setting out for school, cutting from the sweet-brier such of the limbs as were reddest with berries, and he placed them over the heaped earth, as the best offering he could bring to beautify the last home of his companion. In the afternoon I went home,

and have never seen him since, but, ignorant and graceless as he was, he had a heart full of sympathy and love, and Mark had owed to him the happiest hours of his life.

Perhaps, meditating of the injustice he himself was suffering, the unhappy boy, whose terrible death had brought sadness and perhaps repentance to the house of Uncle Christopher, had thought of the victim consigned by the same harsh master to the well, and determined, before starting for the school-house, to go out and drop some food for it over the decayed plank on which I had seen him resting, and by its breaking had been precipitated down its uneven sides to the bottom, and so killed. But whether the result was by such accident, or by voluntary violence, his story is equally instructive to those straight and ungenial natures which see no beauty in childhood, and would drive before its time all childishness from life.

MY VISIT TO RANDOLPH

I.

“There is some force, I know not what to call it,
Pulls me irresistibly, and drags me
On to his grave.”

THEKLA.

WE are driving through the storm, always with bright islands ahead, where the sunshine is showering through green boughs, where the dew lies all day in the grass, and the birds sing and sing, and are never tired of music. Sometimes we drift against these spots of loveliness, and have, to quote Thekla again, “two hours of heaven.” But alas, it is only sometimes that we cross these glittering borders of Paradise, for there are other islands to which we come often, islands of hot creeping winds, and flat sands, wherein we may plant ourselves, but never grow much: islands of barren rocks, against which we find no homeliest vine climbing, though in search of such we go up and down till the sun sets, and the day fades out, on the wave that is very dark and very turbulent. It is therefore needful that our voyaging be skillful as may be, and that we watch for the good islands with everlasting vigilance. We may not fail to see the dreary places, but we must have an eye that the bright ones do not elude our sight; and so, though they be few, they will satisfy our hearts. It is needful that we be charitable, limiting as much as we can our distrusts to our own natures. We may find enough there that we would shrink from having the kindest eyes look in upon; in the living sea we shall be at rest, if we are anxious only to discover beauty and truth.

Some years ago, (I do n't much like to number them, for as one after another leaves me, I see how the bloom of life has

faded and is fading,) I passed a month, perhaps—I do n't remember precisely how long a time—in one of the towns of the interior—in Randolph. Perhaps the name is altered now in the geographies. I had grown up in the woods—had never been from home before, except occasionally to go down to the city for a day or two, and knew nothing of the conventional usages even of such a quiet and unheard of place as Randolph. Full of hope and sympathy, credulous and artless, I did not know at the time, and it is well I did not, how wholly unprepared I was to be placed in the midst of a family of the “double refined.” I was ignorant enough then, to like nature, to suppose the highest cultivation was only an enlarging of our appreciation of nature—a conceit of which we are soon cured, most of us.

It was at the close of one of the mildest of the September days that I found myself in the village, the visitor of a family there named Hamersly. I was dusty, tired, and a little homesick. Mrs. Hamersly, a widow of “sixty odd,” as she called herself, I had never seen till that evening; with Matilda Hamersly, a young lady of forty, or thereabouts, I had previously some slight acquaintance: Til and Tilda they called her at home, and these names pleased her much better than that they gave her in baptism: they had a sort of little-girlish sound that became her well, she seemed to think; and Frances, or Frank, a young woman of nineteen, with whom I had been at school, and knew well—that is, as well as I could know her, separated from home influences. These three comprised the family whose guest I was to be.

Frank laughed heartily on seeing me, ran out to meet me, shook both my hands, and fairly dragged me into the house; and when she had shown me into the best room, and given me the best chair, she sat down herself on the carpet at my feet, tossed back her heavy brown curls, and with her blue eyes full of laughter and tears, looked in my face, saying only, “How glad I am!” She never once thought that she was “not dressed”—that is, that she had on a faded muslin, fitting close to the neck, and having long sleeves; or that her little white feet were stockingless, and thrust into slippers somewhat the worse for

wear—she did n't think, for the truth must be told, her pink gingham apron bore evidences of acquaintance with sundry kitchen utensils, the names of which are not poetical; she was unfeignedly glad, and quite unconscious of being unrepresentable.

The house wherein my friends dwelt was old and small, containing in truth only one decent apartment—it being but a story and a half in height, and only large enough for a “square room” and hall on the ground floor. Up stairs was a general store room, a “spare room,” hardly large enough for a lady of Lilliput, and a sleeping place for the young women. Mrs. Hamersly, being sixty-odd, disposed herself on a sofa bedstead in the parlor, at precisely half past nine, at which hour, every night, by one means or another, the room was cleared of all occupants. Two or three pots of common flowers adorned the front window, and they were a great ornament and relief, for the house stood immediately on the street, so that nothing green was in sight except the little grass that grew between the pavement stones. The furniture of this main room was scanty and old, but was arranged, nevertheless, with some pretensions to style and effect; I need not describe it—we have all seen things that in vulgar parlance, “tried to be and could n't;” I may mention, however, that amongst the furniture was a dilapidated chair, which had been ornamental in its day, perhaps, but that was a long time ago, and was “kept wisely for show;” it was placed conspicuously of course, and its infirmity concealed as much as might be by means of tidies and cushions, but it was wholly unfit for use, and whoever attempted to sit in it was led off by Tilda, with the whispered information that it was a bad old chair, and played naughty tricks sometimes. Beside this room and the kitchen, there were about the premises three other places of which honorable mention was very frequently made—the kitchen, the refectory, and the court. The first was a small building of logs, standing some fifteen feet in the rear of the principal edifice, and which had been built probably long before the tavern on the corner of Maine and Washington streets was thought of. It contained a small pantry, on one side, and on the other a large fireplace, and be-

sides the necessary kitchen furniture, a rude wooden desk, over which hung a shelf containing a curious combination of well-worn books, and yet another shelf, which held combs, brushes, curling tongs, a pink paper box filled with Chinese powder, and articles belonging to the toilet. A circular looking-glass hung against the wall beside the first mentioned shelf, ingeniously fixed in its place by means of a brass pin; and the shelf held, beside the books, a razor, a box of buttons, a spool of cotton-thread, a pair of scissors, and bits of tape and other strings, and in a tin candlestick was part of a tallow candle. Beside the desk was a chair, the original bottom of which had been supplied by strips of hickory bark, woven very curiously. The court was an open space between this and the porch leading into the main building—a little plot of ground which might have been with small care rendered pretty, but which in reality was the receptacle of all the refuse of the house. The grass, if it ever produced any, had been long trodden into the earth, the water from the kitchen had been dashed down there till the clay was blue, and planks, and bricks, and stones, served to make a road across it. It had once been adorned with a common rose bush and a lilac, but as they stood now, untrimmed and sprawling, with muddy leaves, and limbs broken and hanging down, and bits of rags and old paper, and other unseemly things lodging among them, they were scarcely ornamental, to say the least. Broken crockery, and all the various accumulations of such humble housekeeping, lay in this place, denominated the court, in eye-vexing confusion. Nor was it without living inhabitants; not a slab nor a dry stone but was occupied; for here dwelt, or rather came to take the air, six cats and a small red-nosed and woolly dog, the former lean, and soiled with soot from pots and kettles, and their ears either notched or quite gone, from the worrying assaults of the dog, whose natural snappishness was perhaps aggravated by his scanty feeding. The refectory was a porch in the rear of the front house, inclosed at the ends with various sorts of patchwork, and containing a table and several chairs. Here, in summer, the family meals were taken.

But to go back to the time of my sitting in the parlor, with

Frank at my feet : for this information which I have given was a fruit of subsequent observation. There was a good deal of creaking of the boards overhead, which I took little notice of at the time, so engaged were we with each other, when the stairway door opened, and Mrs. Hamersly entered, leaning on the arm of her daughter Tilda, both in "full dress."

"And this is the darling young lady Frank has made us all in love with," said the elder of the ladies ; "excuse me, my dear, I am sixty odd," and she lifted my hand to her lips, which were white and cold, I thought, and kissed it.

I said, "Certainly, madam," but whether she wished to be excused for being sixty odd, or for not kissing my cheek, I was not quite positive.

"This is my mamma," said Tilda, in an affected tone, and giving the old woman a hug, as though she had first met her after years of separation ; then, to me again, "You must love my mamma, and mind every thing she says, like a good little girl."

Mrs. Hamersly, during this speech, seated herself next the chair that was a chair, and Tilda left off patting my cheek and smoothing my hair, to put the cushion under her mamma's feet, the mamma again repeating to me that she was sixty-odd. Not till she had adjusted her skirts to the widest breadth, and once or twice slipt the gray curls that she wore through her delicate fingers, did she observe that Frank was seated on the carpet.

"Oh my child, my child !" she exclaimed, "do you desire to kill me ?" And she fanned herself violently with her embroidered handkerchief.

"Mamma, do n't give way so," drawled Tilda, helping to fan, "Frank is bad as she can be."

"Oh Tild, if it were not for you ; do reprove her as she deserves : you know I cannot."

Then turning to me, she said, "The girl would shock me—so thoughtless—and I am sixty-odd."

Tilda administered the requisite reproof in a series of little boxes upon the ear of Frank, saying, "To think ! when you know so well what is proper ! to think, Oh, I can't express my

feelings! but I am as nervous as a little fool: to think, that Ence might have come in and found you in that improper position! oh dear, dear! Not that I care for Ence; he is nobody; I do n't care for him more than I care for an old stick of a weed that grows in the court; but Ence is of the male sex, you know, and propriety must be observed. Now, mamma, do n't take on, and we children will all be so good."

Having said this, she sat down, pulled her skirts out either side half way across the room, crossed her hands in a proper way, and opened a conversation in a sort of high-flown oratorical style, beginning with, "There has been a gwate quwantity of doost floying to-day."

Miss Matilda Hamersly was never for a moment free from affectations. Sometimes she talked wisely and with style and flourish; this was her method mostly with women and married and very elderly men, but with marriageable gentlemen of any age or condition, she talked babyishly, and affected to pout like a little girl. It was decidedly unbecoming, in view of the gray hairs and the deep lines below them. In dress, too, she assumed great juvenility, wearing frocks of the same material and style as her sister, who was twenty years younger. She would only admit that she was older in a larger knowledge of the proprieties of life.

I remember now, that I looked at them, mother and daughter, sitting there together, as curiously as if they had just come down from the moon. Mrs. Hamersly wore a gray silk peculiarly shaded, I thought that night, but I afterwards discovered that the shading was of only soiling, for she carried always in her pocket pieces of burnt and greasy cake, which she occasionally nibbled; she never ate at the table; "My dear," she would say, "I am sixty-odd: just give me a cup of tea on my lap."

All her ribbons, and she wore as many as could be any way attached to her, were faded, dirty, or in strings; the lace of her cap—and it was real lace—was as yellow as dust and smoke and the sweat of years could make it. From her waist an eye-glass dangled down, which she sometimes used, because she thought it looked pretty—always at half past

nine o'clock, apparently to ascertain the time, but in reality to scare away any visitors, for, merely from caprice, she would not abide one after that hour.

When she had surveyed me with her glass, she closed her eyes and leaned back in her chair. She never talked much, in fact she never did anything, never even moved her chair from one part of the room to another. She seemed to regard herself as free of all duty and all responsibility, by limitation of the law, or elevation above it. Her better life seemed to have given way before an habitual indolence, till there appeared scarcely any vitality about her; her face and hands were colorless, and a fresh corpse, dressed in ribbons and flounces, would have looked as life-like as she, after composing her skirts and assuming her fixed smile—not unlike that which comes out sometimes on the faces of the dead.

Matilda was an overgrown and plain looking old woman, with a fair share of common sense, but without the discretion to use it. Unfortunately she wished to appear something she was not, and so assumed the style of a girl of sixteen, and varied her conversation from an ambitious rhetoric and elocution to the pouting and pettishness of a child: in the last making herself irresistible. Her neck and shoulders she was obliged to cover; it must have cost her a hard struggle, but when she had formed the judicious resolution, she maligned everybody who had not the same necessity; indeed she was quite shocked that Frank and I could be so indelicate as to appear, especially before gentlemen, with exposed necks and arms.

I said I was a little homesick on the night of my arrival, and I am inclined to think, as I recall my visit now, that I was more than a little so. How long the twilight was in deepening into night! It seemed to me that the cadaverous white face of the old woman would never lose any of its sharp outlines in the shadows, that the great pink flowers in the skirt of Matilda's dress would never become indistinct in the darkness; that long and lonesome period betwixt day and night had never till then seemed so long and so lonesome.

I had been accustomed at Clovernook to go out to a hill that overlooked the village, a mile away, watching the clouds and

waiting for the stars: reading poetry either in the world about me or the book on my knees—and I could not help thinking of the field which lay between that hill and the lights of home, of the cows and the sheep that were sinking to rest in the dewy grass—in spite of Miss Matilda's efforts to entertain me.

"You are thinking," she said, and for once she guessed my thoughts, "of the cullover fields all sperinkled with caattle, and of the burooks, and the berriers, and the belossoms—you will find such gereat resthrait here!"

I said, "Oh no," for I did not know what else to say, and Matilda lifted up both hands and observed that "You have no idea, I suppose of the maanner in which young ladies are expected to conduct themselves in a place like Randolph."

For a moment I forgot my dusty and uncomfortable traveling dress in the music Frank was making with the tea-things—for after the reprimand she had received, she betook herself to the kitchen, and now sent me the pleasant tidings of her occupation.

"Tilda, my darling," said the mamma, opening her eyes, "restrain that creature, restrain her," and thereupon Tilda withdrew, and such parts of the conversation between the sisters as came to my ears were not calculated to dispel the home-sickness that had previously made me count the bows in Mrs. Hamersly's cap, and the panes of glass in the window, and twice to change my position, ostensibly to examine the portrait of a young man, which, veiled with green gauze, hung in a very bad light. I need not repeat their words: enough that Frank had kept in mind the appetite that was likely to succeed a day of stage-coach travelling, and was preparing with a liberal hand.

"Do you suppose she is a bear, starved for a month?" said Matilda.

"There is Clarence, too: he has not been home to-night you know," urged Frank.

"Ence—I'll warrant you would not forget Ence—he knows our tea-time, and we do n't keep tavern;" and I thought Matilda seemed to be removing some of the tea furniture. The

door opened, and a young man whom I could see very imperfectly by the light of the moon, entered, and having politely saluted Mrs. Hamersly, who did not open her eyes, passed back to where the young women were engaged about the supper.

“Just an hour and a half too late,” exclaimed Matilda, very haughtily, I thought.

“I am very sorry,” replied the young man; “Mr. Kipp detained me in the office.”

“How impertinent,” said the lady, coming into the room where I was: “Just to think, you know, of the airs which that fellow assumes—a mere boy pretending to be a man, you know.”

Here she explained that he was nothing nor nobody but a printer's boy, that his name was Clarence Howard, and that he was engaged in the office of her particular friend, Josephus Kipp, the publisher of the *Illuminator*; that for the sake of accommodating said friend, Mr. Josephus Kipp, and also for that they were lone women—the mamma sixty odd—they had consented to furnish him with breakfast and tea; but the boy was beginning to take such advantages of their kindness as would render some assumption of dignity, on her part, necessary; for Frank had no *maaner*, and mamma was sixty-odd. Here she went into a senseless medley that I need not repeat, composed mostly of ahs and ohs, and dear-mes, with an intermixture of lamentations over the frailty of womankind, herself excepted.

Frank, who had been singing during the early part of her preparations, ceased, and after a little low-voiced talk with the young man, appeared, and invited me to drink the tea she had made for me, but the smile she wore could not conceal the redness of her eyes.

She wisely limited her invitation to tea, for the table afforded nothing beside, except three or four mouldy crackers, which tasted of tallow, and a little preserved quince, which seemed to have been made a year or two. The little appetite I might have had for such fare was reduced to nothing, when I saw the supperless Clarence seated at the desk before-mentioned, read-

ing, and eating of the crackers spoken of as being in the paper with candles.

I could not help looking at him, nor could Frank, as it seemed; at any rate she did look at him, though of what nature her interest was I was not at the time quite certain.

He was good looking, yet it was not for that that he interested me, I think. His dress was poor, meaner than that of many common laborers, but the effect of a peculiar beauty he had seemed little impaired by it. I cannot describe him; for if I said he had great black melancholy eyes, with a bright spot in either pale cheek, and brown wavy hair; that he was slight, and had the sweetest smile and smallest hands I ever saw, you could not make a correct picture. It may be that the interest and belief of his beauty were in part owing to the circumstances. I had never seen a handsome youth making a supper of mouldy crackers before, and I am not ashamed to say that I felt some tenderness for him when he divided the last one between the dog that sat at his feet, looking beseechingly into his face, and the big gray cat that sprang to his shoulder and locked his long sleek tail about his neck.

Very poor and very proud were the Hamerslys, and they preferred stinting their meals to using their hands much.

Miss Matilda gave lessons in drawing for two hours in the day, and Frank was maid of all work. As for Mrs. Hamersly, she might as well have been a wooden machine in petticoats as what she was; in the morning she was dressed and at night she was undressed, and two or three times in the day her chair was moved from one place to another, and sometimes her snuff-box required filling, and her pocket to be replenished with the burnt pound-cake, which Frank possessed an art of making and baking always in the same style—heavy and deeply, darkly brown. Aside from these things she had no needs that I ever knew of.

During my tea drinking, and I lingered over it somewhat in order to facilitate an acquaintance with Clarence, Matilda appeared once or twice at the door, as though matters required her inspection. At length she informed me that a gentleman was in the parlor and very impatient to see me; of course I

affected to credit her assertion, and was presented to her friend Mr. Josephus Kipp, publisher of *The Illuminator*—a rotund little personage, wearing a white waistcoat, and having a face of pretty much the same color; a little flaxen hair on the back of his head, which was bald in front; blue eyes, with streaks beneath them bluer than they; no teeth, and hands and feet inordinately large.

He probably ate, and drank, and slept, and bought a new coat when his old one wore out, but he appeared the most utterly devoid of character of all persons it was ever my fortune to meet, reflecting the opinions of whomever he conversed with as a certain lizard does the color of the substance over which it crawls.

“Well, Miss Matilda,” he said, after some common-place observation to me—“Well, Miss Matilda!”

“Mr. Kipp, well, ah well.”

And Miss Matilda adjusted her skirts and bent forward her head to an attitude of the most devoted attention.

“Well, Miss Matilda.”

“Ah, yes, well, Mr. Kipp.”

“Well, Miss Matilda, it’s been a very warm day—yes, it’s been a very warm day, Miss Matilda—it has so, yes, it has.”

“Yes, Mr. Kipp, it’s been a warm day.”

“Yes, a very warm day, Miss Matilda.”

“Yes, Mr. Kipp.”

“Mrs. Hamersly, I was saying to your daughter that it’s been a warm day.”

“Yes,” replied the lady, without opening her eyes.

“But Mrs. Hamersly, it’s been a very warm day.”

“Tilda, speak for me, dear—be so good as to remember, Mr. Kipp, that I am sixty-odd.”

And she took snuff, to refresh herself after so unusual an exertion.

“I am very thoughtless, Miss Matilda,” said Mr. Kipp, touched with remorse at having shocked by a too familiar approach the sensibility and dignity of the venerable and distinguished lady. “Really, I am very thoughtless.”

“Ah no, Mr. Kipp, you are too severe upon yourself—you

are not thoughtless—but my mamma you know, she is very—she is sixty odd, and she feels so much, you know.”

“But Miss Matilda, I am so thoughtless.”

“No, Mr. Kipp, I’ll just get behind the door and cry if you say that again—now I just will.”

“No, Miss Matilda, I ain’t thoughtless—no, I ain’t.”

Mr. Kipp not only liked to agree with everybody he conversed with, but with himself too; and generally when he said a thing once he repeated it, to assure himself that he agreed with himself.

“The change we may shortly expect in the weather will be a great shock to your mother,” he said presently.

“No, Mr. Kipp, I think it will do her good—the warm weather is so elevating!”

“Yes, Miss Matilda, it will do her good—yes, it will so, it will do her good. But I am afraid of that shock I gave her, Miss Matilda, I am afraid of that.”

“Now Mr. Kipp, you bad, naughty person—I’ll just be as unhappy now as I can.” And putting her handkerchief before her eyes, she affected to execute her purpose.

Here Mr. Kipp asked me if I knew the reason of Miss Matilda’s proposing to get behind the door.

I said no, and he informed me that there was a great attraction there. Whereupon I remembered the portrait of the gentleman I had noticed early in the evening.

“Now, Mr. Kipp, it’s too bad!” exclaimed Miss Matilda, affecting to strike him with her hand, and hiding some make-believe blushes for a moment, and then explaining to me that the original of the picture was only a friend.

“Miss Matilda, they are coming in—every day they are coming in—subscribers, you know. The Illuminator is going to be a great paper—yes, it’s going to drive ahead. And I tell you Miss Matilda, we are going to throw cold water on some of the scamps that object to the new bridge—for that will be the making of our town.”

“Mr. Kipp, I do n’t like to say, you know—being a woman! you know what I think, you know—it seems so out of place, and I do n’t know hardly—my mamma knows a great many

things, and she is opposed to the new bridge—she thinks it will bring rough fellows, you know, into town, and corrupt our society—especially the female portion of it; for my own part, ah, oh!”—Here her voice was lost in the rustling of her skirts, and what Miss Matilda thought on this momentous subject will probably never be known.

“And so your mother thinks, Miss Matilda, the proposed bridge will do more harm than good?”

“My mamma, you know, is decided—she is a woman, you know, Mr. Kipp, of a great deal of, of a great deal, you know—and, and when you see her, Mr. Kipp, you know her most secret sentiments: she is opposed to the bridge.”

“Yes. Well, Miss Matilda, so am I. If them fellows gets it, they will have to fight hard against me and the Illuminator. Yes, Miss Matilda, they will have to fight hard.”

At this point I lost some of the profound discussion, so important to the village—for through the window, against which I sat, I could see Frank and Clarence walking across and across the plank that bridged the blue mud—the youth appearing wofully dispirited; and though the girl seemed trying to comfort him, she evidently succeeded but ill.

“I wish I was dead,” I heard him say repeatedly; “there is nothing for me to live for.”

“Oh no, Clarence, that is wrong. One of these days it will rain porridge, and then, if your dish is right side up, how pleasant it will be!”

“Nobody cares for me,” he replied, “and I do n’t care for myself any more.”

“Well, I do n’t know as any body cares for me,” said the girl, and her laughter indicated that it gave her small trouble if they did not.

“Just look at these rags!” he said—and turning toward her, he surveyed himself from head to foot, as if in contempt.

“And what of it?” she asked; “you will get more some way. I have only one dress beside this; but may be the two will last me as long as I shall live to want them, and if they do n’t, why I shall get more, no doubt of it.” And she laughed again more heartily than before.

The young man removed his hat, which was of straw, though it was quite past the season for straw hats, and pressed his small hand against his forehead.

"Are you dizzy, Clarence?" she asked.

"No," he answered; and replacing the hat on his head, and drawing it over his brows, he locked his hands behind him, and crossed and recrossed the plank which formed his little promenade, with a hurried and irregular step, while the girl seated herself on the edge of the porch, and leaned her head on her hand, musingly.

There was a long silence, but at last the youth paused before her abruptly, and said, in a voice low and almost tremulous, for he seemed naturally enough to suppose himself the subject of her thoughts, "What are you thinking about, Frank?"

"Oh, I was n't thinking at all, I was half a sleep;" and shaking back her curls, she arose, and went into the house.

He looked after her for a moment, and opening a side gate, disappeared.

I only perceived that he was restless and unhappy—only knew that she did not and could not understand him—but I was disquieted when I saw them go their separate ways—he alone into the night, to wrestle with an ambitious and embittered soul, and she to careless sleep.

I was recalled by an unusual rustling of Miss Matilda's skirts, together with an unusual prudishness of manner and affectation of tone.

"Mr. Kipp," she said at last, "I have been wanting to ask you something, so much!"

"Yes, well, Miss Matilda, you want to ask me something—yes, well, Miss Matilda, a great many ask me questions, a great many that want advice, Miss Matilda, and a great many that do n't want advice. The Illuminator, Miss Matilda, the Illuminator—I tell you, Miss Matilda, you must write an article for it. I think dialogue would be best; an article of about three columns and a quarter in length.

"I think I should prefer the essay," said Miss Matilda.

"Yes, the essay—that's what I meant—that would do—yes, yes, one of your essays."

“But, Mr. Kipp.”

“Well, Miss Matilda, I’m at your service, and I’m just as much at the service of every one. Yes, Miss Matilda, yes, I’m a serviceable man.”

Mr. Kipp could generally express a wonderful deal of nothing with astonishing volubility; he had now said something positive, which came near wounding Miss Matilda.

“If you are at the service of every one, Mr. Kipp, I shall not—Oh, I do n’t know, but I’ll not feel the same, you know.”

“At the service of others, through the Illuminator, and at your service, through the Illuminator, too. I met Judge Morton in the street this morning—you know Judge Morton—he is a man of immense property. Well, I met him this morning, right the next block to my office, and says he, ‘Good morning, Kipp;’ and says I, ‘Good morning, Judge;’ and says he, ‘It’s a fair day, Kipp;’ and I says, ‘Yes, Judge, it’s a fair day;’ and then, says he, ‘Kipp,’ says he, ‘when you established the Illuminator, there were no buildings about here like these’—and he pointed in particular to Metcalf’s new house; and Metcalf—Senator Metcalf, you know—well, he came to the door while we stood there, and says he, ‘Good morning, Kipp;’ and says I, ‘Good morning, Metcalf;’ and after standing a minute, he went in. He wears blue trowsers generally, but to-day he had on black. Well, he went in.

“After Morton and I had talked sometime about national affairs, says he, ‘Kipp,’ and says I, ‘Morton,’ (I always omit the *judge* in conversing with him, we’re so familiar;) ‘Well,’ says he, ‘Kipp, here’s a little notice of me that I want you to put in the Illuminator as editorial.’ And says I, ‘Morton, at your service.’ Just what I said to you, Miss Matilda. And he says to me, says he, ‘Come and dine with me, Kipp,’ says he; ‘we have always pork and beans, or less’—and he went along down street.”

“Quite a little adventure, was n’t it?” said Matilda.

“Yes, Miss Matilda, Judge Morton is a man that lives here right amongst us, and he makes himself so agreeable and so notorious; and we all know him, Miss Matilda, that’s the point. Yes, Miss Matilda, decidedly an adventure.”

“But, Mr. Kipp—you know—I—you know—in short, Mr. Kipp, you never said a wiser thehing.”

It is difficult to represent with letters Miss Matilda's elegant and peculiar pronunciation, and so for the most part it is left to the reader's imagination.

“Yes, Miss Matilda, yes, I agree with you, I never said a wiser thing.”

“Oh no, Mr. Kipp, I made a borroard assertion—you have said things that manifested more depth of feeling, more metaphysical perspicacity, you know.”

“Well, yes, Miss Matilda, you are right—I have said some smart things, and yet not so smart either as they were radical. I met Governor Latham at the Springs last summer. Miss Matilda, did you go to the Springs? Well, Miss Matilda, there were a good many there; and as I was saying, I met Governor Latham there—a little imaginative looking man he is, and he wore a white waistcoat at the Springs. ‘Well’—says he to me one day—we had just finished a segar—I do n't know whether we had been talking about the Illuminator or not, but says he to me, ‘Kipp,’ and says I, ‘Latham;’ and says he, ‘Kipp,’ says he, ‘you're a rascally radical!’ And I laughed, and Latham laughed.”

He paused, to enjoy his elevation, and then said, “Miss Matilda!”

“Yes, Mr. Kipp!”

“There were a good many at the Springs.”

There was another season of fidgeting—a good deal of affected embarrassment on the part of the lady—when she said, “You know Mr. Kipp, I said, I said—oh, it's so awkward, you know, for a woman to approach a delicate matter; one you know, that—that—but I have an affection, Mr. Kipp, that mamma thinks requires medical treatment.”

“An affection of the heart?”

And Mr. Kipp laughed; he had no doubt that he had said a witty thing.

“No, Mr. Kipp,” said Matilda, affecting innocent unconsciousness—“Mamma thinks it is not the heart.”

“I wish, Miss Matilda, it was the heart, and that its affection was for me!”

“Oh, you bad man!” she exclaimed. And this time she really went behind the door, and pouted for a time, letting us see her all the while. The movement did not become Miss Matilda Hamersly very well.

She was at length brought forth by the repentant Mr. Kipp, pulling away from his hand much as I have seen a calf drawing back from the farmer who would have put it into a stable: but she presently wiped her eyes and smiled again, saying, “I believe I will just ask you as if you were my brother—we are so unprotected, and have no one to ask things, you know.”

“Do, Miss Matilda.”

“And you won’t think anything?”

“If I do, Miss Matilda, may I be shot.”

“Just pretend you are my brother, you know. I do n’t know what’s right for me to do. I wish mamma would tell me.”

“You do n’t know, Tilda; well, I do n’t believe you do.”

“Well, Mr. Kipp, if I was to say anything, and if it was to be wrong—knowing how lonely and unprotected we are—would you think anything?”

“No, Tilda—’pon my soul, I never think anything.” And the editor of the Illuminator hitched his chair a whole width of carpet nearer to the diffident and excessively proper young woman.

“Well then, you are my brother, you know”—here she looked at him beseechingly, and as though she hesitated yet.

“Anything, Tilda, I’ll be anything.”

“Well then, do you—how foolish—how awkward!”—

“Yes, Tilda, it is.”

“Do you, Mr. Kipp?”

“Call me Josephus, Tilda.”

“How foolish I am—all in a tremor—just feel!”

And she extended her hand to Josephus, who, having given another hitch, retained it.

“Now I am just going to be as bold as other girls—may n’t I be, Mr.—Josephus—and you won’t think anything?”

Mr. Kipp seemed to answer by a pressure of the hand, for he said nothing.

“Do you know folks in Henry-street? Tell me true now.”

“Why yes, Tilda, I know a good many there—I have six subscribers in that street. I met one of them as I was coming here to-night—Rev. Dr. Chandler, it was—and he said, ‘How are you Kipp?’ and I said ‘How are you?’ and he passed up street, and I came here.”

“Do you know a family there of the name of Brown? Now you know you promised not to think anything.”

“Brown, that was commissioner of the peace? Yes, I published a didactic piece on the canal basin from his pen a week or two ago. Yes, Tilda, I published a poem from him. An epic, it was.”

“Well Josephus—brother, do you know Mrs. Brown?”

“Yes, Tilda—not to say well, however—I have met her under peculiar circumstances, and I know her as well as I know Governor Latham’s wife—that is to say, I consider myself well acquainted.”

“Is she well?”

“As to that, Tilda, I can’t be positive. The last time I met Brown, says I, ‘How are you, and how is Mrs. Brown?’ and says he, ‘Thank you, Kipp;’ and I do n’t remember, as to her health, what he said.”

“Do you ever visit in the family, or, I mean, have you lately?”

“No, I have n’t—yes, I have too—yes, I was there—I can’t say the day.”

“How many children have they? Now you must n’t think anything queer.”

“They have six, or seven, or eight; I can’t say precisely.”

At this point of the conversation Matilda covered up her face, and after two or three unsuccessful essays, actually inquired how old was the youngest.

It might be a year old, or it might be six months, or it might be three—the Illuminator could not enlighten her more nearly.

“I cannot say more now,” said Matilda. “Perhaps I had best consult a female friend. I’ll ask my mamma, and do just what she says. I have had some doubts about the propriety of something that it seems necessary for me to do. Don’t ask me to explain.”

Mrs. Hamersly here took a long survey of the clock through her glass, and Mr. Kipp arose to go—Miss Matilda saying, “Now do n’t teaze me, and do n’t think anything;” and he replying, as he pressed her hand to his heart, that he would n’t teaze her, and would n’t think anything; and that he would teaze her and would think something.

And so they parted—Matilda saying, from the door, that she was afraid she had done something wrong; she had talked so, she did n’t know how; and that she believed she would cry herself to death.

The sensation induced by the editor’s departure over, both parties recurred to my friend Frank.

“Frank! Where is my child?” exclaimed Mrs. Hamersly, as if for the first time aware that the girl was not present.

“Oh, heavenly Father!” ejaculated Matilda, “I quite lost sight of her in my agitation on that—that theme that no woman of delicacy could approach without a shock to her modesty”—and she floundered out of the room, saying, “do n’t give way, mamma; she cannot be keeping company with that dreadful Enee—she cannot so have forgotten propriety—and after such examples! Saints and angels help us!”

“I’ll tell Mr. Kipp, see if I do n’t, and that ungrateful boy shall be punished—and he has been like a father to him, and I have been like a sister—I’ll tell Mr. Kipp how ungrateful the wretch is.”

Frank was presently discovered, fast asleep in the kitchen, but Matilda had become so alarmed by the terrible apprehension that she was talking with the wretch, Clarence, that it was a long while before she could be quieted. Young girls were so reckless and improper—she was astonished that all the gentlemen were not disgusted—it was shocking—it was too bad to talk about. She knew a young lady, one that was called respectable, too, that had been seen in the street, so it was reported, wearing a low-necked dress—she could n’t hardly believe it, and yet she knew several persons, whose veracity she could not doubt, who had told her they had seen this certain person in the street, without a bit of a thing on her neck.

A great many scandals she repeated, telling me over and over that such things were very repulsive to her, and that she often wished she could live in some cave, away in a desert or a wilderness, where she could be secure from the vile gossip that now so much afflicted her.

When Frank had been asleep an hour, she was wide awake, and talking, apparently with the greatest zest, about the improprieties of which she had known various persons to be guilty; and when Frank had been asleep two hours, she was talking with still greater animation than before. Midnight came and went, and she seemed as fresh and earnest as ever. At last she asked me if I had thought anything of what she said to Mr. Kipp. She was afraid she had overstepped the bounds of propriety. She was alarmed, when she thought of it. She would tell me all about it, and ask my advice. So, sometime between the hours of twelve and two, I came to the knowledge of Matilda's peculiar difficulty.

Did I think it would be proper and prudent for her, a maiden lady as she was, to call in the doctor, for advice in reference to her own ailments, when he passed by on his visit to Mrs. Brown, whose babe she was sure could not be more than two months old! This most difficult and profoundly cogitated question she propounded in a whisper.

Of course I saw no impropriety in seeing her physician, if ill; but all at once the lady remembered I was a country girl, and of course did not and could not know what rigid scrutiny must accompany every action of woman in a place like Randolph.

It must have been near daylight when I felt myself being lifted into the "litter of close-curtained sleep," and the sounds of "propriety," "female delicacy," "virgin modesty," and the like, gradually growing more indistinct.

At the end of ten days, my acquaintance with Clarence had ripened but little. I had met him every day at breakfast and tea; but though we sometimes exchanged glances of recognition, Matilda's presence completely interdicted any conversation.

IV.

I noticed one evening that Clarence was unusually dejected. I heard him speak to Frank in a low tone, and heard her answer, "Oh never mind, Clarence—there are four little kittens in a barrel in the refectory, come and see them." But he lighted the tallow candle, and took up a book.

While I was wishing that I could comfort and encourage him in some way, there was a rap at the door. "Miss Matilda, you are looking well, yes you are so; you are looking exceed-well;" I heard a voice say. "Ah," she replied, "I do n't know how it can be—I have such cares—to keep two young girls, you know, within the bounds of female propriety, is a task that is wearing me down. Do n't I look pale?"

"Yes, Miss Matilda, you look pale"—and then to be quite assured that he agreed with himself, he repeated, "Yes, you do look pale, and it is so."

Here was a blessed opportunity to escape; Matilda would not think of me while Mr. Kipp remained; and as for the mamma, she sat in state, and with her eyes closed, as usual: that is, she had the largest number of soiled ribbons about her, and a snuff-box and piece of burnt pound-cake in her hands. And Frank was busy in an obscure corner, trying to pull down her stockings, so as to conceal the holes in the heels. Under such a combination of circumstances, I actually eluded an arrest in my passage from the parlor to the kitchen. A part of the afternoon and all the evening the rain had been falling, and as neither roof nor windows of the kitchen were water-proof, the old place looked more dismal than common. There were damp patches in the wall, and puddles standing in the floor, and the little fire was dying out under the gradual dropping.

Clarence sat at the desk where I had left him, the book open before him; but he seemed not to be reading, nor yet to be aware that the gathering rain was falling on him where he sat. At first he was shy and incommunicative, but I was interested in him, and more than willing to do him service, so, after a while I won my way to his confidence.

I laid the embers together, and we drew our chairs to the

hearth, and while the rain pattered its lullaby, he told me the story of his life.

His mother, whom he scarcely remembered, was dead; his father, a profligate and thriftless man, hired him about in one place and another, while he was yet a boy, and now that he was grown to manhood, still lived mainly upon his wages.

Kept always at servile employment, and deprived of the little compensation he should have received, his spirit had been gradually broken, and his ambition lost. No one cared enough for him to say do this, or that, or why do you thus or so? He had drifted about, doing what chance threw in his way; and was now standing on the verge of manhood, aimless and hopeless. He liked books, and read, but without system or object; to work, or "draw water in a sieve," were all one to him; "It matters not what I undertake," he said, "I can't get along."

"Your heart is not in your duties," I answered.

"No—how can it be? look at me; I have no clothes but these."

"You can easily get others."

"No: whether I earn much or little it is taken from me Saturday night—all except, indeed, enough to clothe me as I am, and to pay for the miserable pittance I have here."

"And where do you sleep?"

"On the waste paper in the printing office."

A sorry enough prospect, I felt, but there was hope yet. I could not advise him to abandon his parent, altogether, though I thought it would not be wrong for him to do so; but I urged him to retain for himself a portion of all he earned, and to obtain somewhere else meals that would be a little more substantial.

At this suggestion he hesitated and blushed; there was no need of a confession—he was more than half in love with Frank.

What a mystery, I thought; she is so unlike him; but on consideration the riddle was revealed—she had been as kind to him as she knew how to be. I am but an indifferent comforter and counsellor, I fear, and yet it was astonishing to see

how the youth rallied; it must have been a sense of sympathy that helped him: nothing else.

At ten o'clock, or thereabouts, our conference was broken off by the abrupt entrance of Matilda. Her astonishment, on seeing us both seated on one hearth, though the hearth was ample enough to accommodate a dozen persons, was so great that she fainted, or at least fell into the arms of Clarence, and said she swooned.

The lecture I received for this indiscretion I need not repeat, but I may say that I never discovered any unwillingness on the part of Miss Matilda Hamersly to converse with Clarence Howard or any other man, old or young, wise or witless. It was a disagreeable duty, she said, that of entertaining gentlemen—Frank being a mere child, and mamma sixty-odd. "Oh, I wish you girls were old enough to take the responsibility," she was in the habit of saying, when visitors came, "I am so averse to gentlemen's society."

This awful outrage of propriety, that is, the confidential conference which Clarence and I had in the kitchen, resulted, in a day or two, in the dismissal of Clarence from the house.

"And yet," said Matilda, "there is one thing I like the boy for—he never speaks to me."

This ejection was painful to Clarence, I knew, but he endured it better than I had hoped; he had now a prospect of a few shillings ahead, and there is no influence that stays up the hands like this.

"You must not forget me, Frank," he said in a voice that was a little unsteady, and holding her hand close in his.

"Oh no," she replied ingenuously; "our milk-man was gone once two years, and when he came back I knew him; but do n't squeeze my hand so, Clarence."

He left his books on the shelf till he should find a new home, he said; but rather, I suspected, as a sort of link that bound him to the cottage.

In the course of Miss Matilda's perigrinations about town, she became acquainted with an impish youth, who interested her, she said, for reasons—in fact—in short—really, she did n't know—he had one great fault—he liked the ladies—a disposi-

tion that should be curbed by somebody—and who could do it but she. They were so unprotected—only females in the house—for their safety, it was necessary to have a man about, of nights. She wished she was like other women—less timid, and less averse to—but she could n't help it.

All this Miss Matilda conveyed to the knowledge of Mr. Kipp; and also hinted, that the new man would more than supply the place of Clarence in the office of the Illuminator, and at the same time he could take tea and breakfast with them, and so afford the protection that woman must have, however averse her feelings were to so much as the touch of a gentleman's finger, even, to her apron string.

“But does he know anything of types?”

“Oh, I forgot to say I heard he was half a printer.”

“Well, Miss Matilda,” said Mr. Kipp, “your advice is always good, and I should not be surprised if I saw the person you speak of as I was coming here to-night—tall, was he, Miss Matilda?”

“No, Mr. Kipp, he was short.”

“My name is Josephus, Tilda. And you say he is short?”

“Yes, Josephus.”

“And has he black hair?”

“No, Josephus, red.”

“And his face is pale, ain't it?”

“No, Josephus, red and brown.”

“Well, I've seen him—at the Springs, or Governor Latham's, or somewhere. Yes, I have seen him—yes, I know I have seen him. Miss Matilda!”

“Josephus.”

“I've seen him, Miss Matilda.”

The night following, the impish young man sat in the parlor, conversing with all the wisdom of gray hairs, with Miss Matilda. She was no doubt trying to wean him from his liking for the ladies. And poor Clarence—under the weight of his new discouragement, was heavy enough at heart.

We were gathering berries, Frank and I, in the woods adjoining Randolph, when we discovered Clarence sitting on a decayed log, his eyes bent on the ground, and his cheek hollow and

pale. When he saw us, he did not approach, as we expected, but turned instead into the thicker woods.

We playfully rallied him, for thus abandoning two unprotected females, and finally succeeded in making him laugh.

He had been idling about for several days, not knowing and scarcely caring what was to become of him. I encouraged him to new efforts, and he grew cheerful and hopeful, and promised when we parted from him at night, that he would try once more. But I am now inclined to think it was Frank, who had said nothing, rather than I, who had said much, who induced the brave resolution. He found difficulty in executing it, however. There were opportunities enough for other lads, who seemed to have nothing special to recommend them, but when he applied, employers hesitated.

"You are the boy who was with Kipp, they said. "Why, he is a good fellow, could n't you get along with him?"

Of course, Clarence could only say Mr. Kipp had always been kind and generous to him; thus taking on himself all the fault of his discharge from the editor's service.

The employers then said they would think of his proposal, or that they had partly engaged another lad, or they made some other excuse, that sent him sorrowful away.

At last his quest was successful; he obtained in the Randolph post-office a situation as clerk.

For a fortnight or so all went on well. Clarence looked smiling and happy; a new hat and new pair of boots took the places of the old ones; his cheek was growing rounder, and his eyes losing something of their melancholy.

The postmaster said, so it was reported, that he never wanted a better boy in his employ than Clarence; the young women smiled when they met him, and the sun to his vision was a great deal bigger and brighter than it had ever been before. That was the little heyday of his life.

There was great excitement in the town of Randolph one morning. Groups of men were seen talking at the corners of the streets and before the doors of groceries; at first in whispers, but gradually louder and louder, till there was one general hum. Young lads, who had never been known to smoke,

bought cigars, which they both gave away and used freely themselves: they felt suddenly lifted up into the importance of manhood, and bitter denunciations fell from many a beardless lip.

A dozen or more women might have been seen leaning from the windows of their homes, half way into the street, and one of them was Miss Matilda Hamersly.

And among the lads who were smoking, and throwing more stones at the stray dogs than usual, was Miss Malinda's protégé, Ebenezer Rakes—"Neeze," as the patroness called him. At length, in answer to the beckoning of her lily hand, he approaches, and as she leans still lower from the window, informs her that Clar Howard has been took up and shot up in jail, for abstracting a thousand dollars from a letter, which was lying in the Randolph post-office.

"Good heavens!" exclaims Matilda; "I always expected as much—he had such a bad look in his eyes! Did you see the constable take him?"

"Yes, I seen him took, but he was n't took by the constable; he was took by the sheriff's warrant; they tied his hands with a rope, and he tried to hide 'em under his coat as he went along, but he could n't come it."

"Did he seem to feel bad?" asked Matilda.

"He shed some crokadile tears, I b'leeve," said "Neeze," "but them as took him would n't ontie him for that. If I had had my way, I'd a strung him up on the nearest tree, and made an example of him."

"It's a wonder," says Matilda, "that he never took anything here; he was among us just as one of the family, just as you are, Neeze."

Neeze says he would advise an examination of the valuables belonging to the house, and Matilda hopes he will be home early at night—they are so unprotected—she shall be afraid if a little mouse stirs. And with this appeal, in her tenderest tone, she withdraws that portion of her person into the house which has previously been in the street, counts the teaspoons, and repeats the news; after which she runs across the garden,

and by the back way enters the domicile of Mrs. Lowe, who is still looking and listening.

“Frank, my child, move my chair a bit nearer the wall,” says Mrs. Hamersly; and this is her only demonstration of interest in the matter.

“I wonder if it’s dark, where he is?” says Frank, “and what Mr. Kipp will say?”

Mr. Kipp, as publisher of the *Illuminator*, is the one man of all the world, to her; there will be a paragraph in his journal; she will read it with more interest than she feels in similar paragraphs generally, for that Clarence used to live with them. So, having wondered what Mr. Kipp will say, she takes the milk pan to the “court,” and the lean cats breakfast from it.

In the course of the day, Matilda took the books which belonged to Clarence from the accustomed shelf, with the express intention of burning them. It required all my efforts to dissuade her, but I did so at length, though she would not listen to my assurance that he would reclaim them before long; for I could not be persuaded of his guilt.

Agreeably to the promise obtained of his patroness, Neeze came home early that night, and it seemed that the two would never have done talking of the robbery.

Half past nine came, and Mrs. Hamersly, as usual, eyed the clock through her glass; but Matilda would not see it; ten came, and still they talked—five, ten, fifteen minutes more.

“My child, I shall go into convulsions,” said the mamma, in her customary passionless tone.

“The saints protect us!” cried Matilda, and she held up her apron as a screen.

From this night forward, the wrinkled face of Matilda was often seen near the downy cheek of the boy, Neeze. There was evidently a great and growing interest between them, partly based upon the accusation of poor Clarence, and partly on the rumor that Mr. Kipp was suddenly enamored of a rich and beautiful girl of twenty.

This last report, if true, was fatal to all the lady’s hopes, though she often said she could not believe it, inasmuch as he

had ever seemed to sympathize so perfectly with all her feelings, especially with her aversion to the marriage state.

But facts are truly stubborn things, and will make head against a great many probabilities and possibilities, and Miss Matilda's faith in Mr. Kipp's celibate intentions was broken at last—utterly dissipated, under the following circumstances.

After a cessation of visits for a time, Mr. Kipp once more honored Mrs. Hamersly's house with his presence.

"You must have been very happy of late—I hope you have been, I am sure;" said Matilda, seating herself further from the illuminated gentleman than she was wont, and speaking without her usual affectations—she was too much in earnest.

"Well, yes, Miss Matilda; I met my friend Doane this morning, one of the richest men in town here. Do you know Doane?"

"I do not."

"Well, Miss Matilda, I'd been writing letters before I set out: one to Mr. Johnson, of Massachusetts, and one to somebody, I forget who. Well, I met Doane, and he is a good-natured fellow, Doane is; and says he, 'How are you Kipp?' and says I, 'Doane I'm glad to see you;' and says he—no, says I, then—no, I forget what I said; and then says he, 'You look happy, Kipp.' And I laughed, and Doane laughed. Doane is a shrewd fellow, Miss Matilda—he's independent."

"Ah!" said Miss Matilda.

"Yes, he is a cunning fellow; yes, he is so."

A long silence.

"Miss Matilda," says Mr. Kipp, at last.

"Well, sir," she answers, biting her lip.

"Miss Matilda."

"Well, sir," more decidedly.

"I think there will be rain, Miss Matilda."

"I do not, sir."

"Well, nor I, Miss Matilda; I would n't be surprised if it did n't rain for a month: No, I would n't. Miss Matilda."

"Say on sir," she said, with a voice and look, into which were thrown all the dignity of the Hamerslys.

"I would n't be surprised."

“What would surprise you, Mr. Kipp?”

“Why, for instance, Miss Matilda, it would surprise me if you were to get married!”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Why, Miss Matilda, I mean—in fact, I mean, it would not surprise me in the least.”

“I suppose you think you could get married?” said Matilda, “and I am sure I do n’t care how soon you do so.”

“No, Miss Matilda, I could n’t get married if I wanted to.”

“What, Mr. Kipp?” in tones slightly softened.

“I could n’t Miss Matilda—nobody would have me.”

“How strange you do talk,” said the lady, a little tenderness thrown suddenly into her voice.

“It’s a fact.”

“Now, Mr. Kipp, you know better!” in quavers positively sweet.

It’s a fact, Miss Matilda.”

“Mamma, wake up, and look at naughty Mr. Kipp, and see if he ain’t crazy. I do believe you are out of your head.” And she stooped over him gracefully, and laid her hands on his forehead.

“Well, Miss Matilda, what do you think?”

“Really, Josephus, I do n’t know—it seems so queer—I wish mamma would wake up—I can’t tell whether men are in their head or not; mamma’s sixty-odd, and she—oh, she knows a great many things: but Josephus, look right in my eyes, and tell me why you can’t get married.” And she bent down very fondly, and very closely.

One moment of blessed expectancy, and the last venture was wrecked. Mr. Kipp could n’t marry, because he had already taken the pretty and rich young lady “to hold and to keep.”

“I am sure I wish you well,” Matilda said, with her former asperity of manner—“I would n’t lay a straw in the girl’s way if I could.”

Her hands dropt from the forehead of Mr. Josephus Kipp, as she made this benevolent declaration; and she all at once remembered that Mr. Rakes had not yet had supper!

“I am sure,” she said an hour afterwards, to that wise young

person, "Mrs. Kipp, as I suppose she calls herself, ought to have money ; she had n't much else to recommend her."

That night the gossiping was more bitter, and of longer continuance than before. Matilda believed, she said, there was not a single woman in Randolph but who would get married if she could, and that was all she wanted to know about them ; for herself, she wished all the men had to live one side of the town and all the women the other ; and she appealed to Neeze, to know if it would not be nice ; upon which Neeze threw the cigar from his mouth, and drew his chair up to Miss Matilda, in order to favor her with the expression of his opinions on this interesting topic.

Mrs. Hamersly was again outraged. She did n't care, she said, if they sat up all night, and kept the house in an uproar, when she was dead ; they need only wait till she was decently buried ; that was all she asked.

At last Mrs. Hamersly chanced to open her eyes one night, and see the hand of Matilda, that pattern of propriety, around the neck of Ebenezer Rakes ! The lady's spirit was now fully roused, the dignity of the house must be maintained, and she would maintain it at some little cost. Mr. Rakes was summarily dismissed from the premises, and Matilda's clothing carefully locked away, and the door of her chamber nailed up every night.

I need not linger over details ; a night or two of this imprisonment, and Frank and I awoke from sleep one morning, to find the bed-cord dangling from the window, and Matilda gone. Mr. Rakes was found missing too. That, "with an unthrift love they had run from Randolph," there could be no doubt.

Frank wondered what Mr. Kipp would say when he heard of it, and stepped into Matilda's place in giving drawing lessons ; and said she thought there would be some way to get along.

Clarence was soon at liberty, for there was no proof of his guilt discovered, but he could not be free from the stigma that attached to him.

The town's folks were distrustful, and looked upon him curiously as he went abroad ; few would employ him, and those

who did, watched him narrowly. He could not live so, and formed the resolution, which, under the circumstances, was a very brave one, of going into a strange place, to seek his fortune.

When he told us, Frank and I, she said it would be a nice thing, and I could not dissuade him, nor encourage, more than to say "the world was all before him, where to choose," and I wished him heartily success and happiness.

It was useless to say there were other places as good as Randolph, and that he would make other and better friends: he knew no other world, and all he loved was there.

A mile to the south of the village stood the stump of an elm tree, white as silver, for the bark was gone, and it had been bleaching there many years.

"Go with me to the elm stump," he said, when he was ready to set out. It was night—for he had waited, that no one might remark his going—damp and cloudy, nor moon, nor star in sight. Over his shoulder he carried a budget, containing a few books and all the clothes he had. The road was dusty, and we walked on in silence, for there seemed nothing more to say; so the tree was reached before we had exchanged half a dozen words.

He looked toward the next hill, as we paused, as if he would ask us to proceed, but presently said, "No, it's no use, I would never be ready to go on alone."

While we stood there a beggar passed, looking lean and hollow-eyed. He reached his hand toward us, and Clarence seeing his rags, sadly said to us, "I shall look that way one of these days."

Before we separated, he untied the bundle spoken of, and taking out two old and worn volumes, gave each of us one, saying, as he wiped them with his hand, "They will remind you of me sometimes, maybe."

With many of the best qualities of the heart, and the finest instincts of intelligence, poor Clarence, it was easy to see, had little of that bravery of nature which is indispensable to success in the world; and observing with what spirit he set out on his quest for fortune, it was easy to perceive that there was

really no brightness before him, so that this twilight parting which he had arranged with my friend Frank and myself, was indescribably sad to me, who felt far more anxious for the youth's happiness than Frank had ever felt, or was capable of feeling.

Poor Clarence! there was a defect in his nature—a very common defect—fatal to all growth, and destructive of every element of success, or even of nobleness in aspiration or in conduct. Like many young men encountered every day, lagging behind ambitious crowds, he had some fine instincts, with vague perceptions of beauty, and generous affections; but of one thing he was lacking still, and always, Will, the parent of faith and energy. How frequent are the instances in which a single brave and persistent effort would raise one's life from all the quicksands and shoals which environ the youth of so great a majority, into the clear sea, over which blow forever prosperous gales! Cowardice, despondency, inertia, were never startled from their ascendancy in Clarence's soul by even a half-trial of his powers; and it might have been foretold, therefore, that his going out into the world would be in vain. When, in emergencies which most demand it, we see evinced no will—such as has that power the Master said belonged to faith—it is well to put on our mourning: it were quite as well with the poor, if, instead, there were an end of life.

Long after Frank was asleep that night, I lay thinking of Clarence—wondering how far he had got now, and now; and saying, now, that he might come back, and be with us again in the morning. But he never came back.

Though I so perfectly understood his infirmities, which forbade any reasonable expectation of a happy future for him, his better qualities so deeply interested my feelings, that in fancy I still shaped out a bright future for him—of his sometime coming home to Randolph, a great man, whom the people could not praise and honor enough.

It was one day in the following spring, that, tired of working in the flower-beds, I stopped to rest in the faint shadow of the newly budding lilac. A scrap of newspaper held my flower-seeds; I emptied them in my lap, and, as my habit is, read,

to amuse my idleness, whatever the fragment contained; and thus, by such chance, I learned all I have ever learned of Clarence's fate: he had died months before in one of the southern cities.

As I planted my flowers, I wished that I might plant them on his grave; but their frail leaves could not have sheltered him better than he was, and is.

The postmaster of Randolph was ultimately convicted of the theft attributed to his clerk, whose name, too late, was freed from a blot.

WHY MOLLY ROOT GOT MARRIED.

I.

SOME years ago there lived in Clovernook a family of the name of Trowbridge—very worthy people, but not without some of the infirmities which belong to human nature. There was scarcely a woman about the village better known than Mrs. Trowbridge, though I have not before had occasion to mention her. And she was as well liked as she was well known—every body saying, What a dear good woman she is! and I among the rest. I had often said I would like to live with her, for she seemed the most amiable and agreeable person in the world. It was always a good day when she made us a visit. She laughed, when asking if we were well, and laughed when saying she herself was well. She laughed if a common friend were married, and laughed if a common friend were dead; she laughed if her baby was getting teeth, and laughed if her baby was not getting teeth; if her new dress was right pretty she laughed, if it was right ugly she laughed all the same. When she came, she laughed heartily, and when she went she laughed heartily—it was the way she made herself agreeable.

Many a time I had said I should like to live with Mrs. Trowbridge, for she never had anything to fret or worry about, and I liked best of all things an atmosphere of rest. I was delighted therefore when some changes going on in our old homestead led to a decision that I should for a while reside in her family.

But good Mrs. Trowbridge is not to be so much the heroine of this chapter as Molly Root, a relation of her husband. Molly had been driven about the world, poor and homeless, until lodged, at last, in what most of us thought the very bo-

som of domestic felicity—the domestic circle of this best-natured woman in our society.

For the first two days after my domestication, I was relieved of all suspicion of the real state of things, by one continual flow of laughter. My occupancy of the best room in the house, and of the warmest place at the table, were apparently the most agreeable things that had ever befallen the good Mrs. Trowbridge.

She was a good housekeeper and cook, when she chose to exercise her abilities in that way, but I soon learned that it was only for visitors that she put those admirable accomplishments in requisition, and that for the most part the household duties fell to the girls, Molly, and Catharine, whom they called Kate—her eldest daughter. When I took my first breakfast, she said she was afraid I could not eat *their* breakfast, and she laughed very much; at dinner she said the same thing, and laughed again; at supper she repeated the remark and the laughter; and all these meals were ample and excellent. As they diminished in these respects, the laughter and apologies diminished too.

My fire was burning brightly and mingling its red shadows with the sunset that slanted through the west window—the wind blew the black wintry boughs against the wall, and now and then a snowflake dropt, silently enhancing the in-door comfort, as I sat rocking to and fro, taking soundings as it were of the sea of love, on which I had lately embarked.

All the past week had seen “the girls” busy and cheerful, up with the dawn, and going through all the duties of the day with as much interest and earnestness as though each had been mistress of the family. When the housework was done they sat down to their sewing—Molly sometimes withdrawing to the privacy of her own apartment, an upper chamber, wherein were deposited the accumulations and inheritances of her life: to-wit, an old old-fashioned bedstead and feather bed, a home-made carpet, four or five crippled chairs, an ancient-looking bureau, which contained the wardrobe of her long-deceased and respected grandmother, from her yellow silk wedding dress to the cambric night-cap in which she died; with

two barrels of kitchen and table furniture—pots, skillets and gridirons, knives and forks, teapots, and the like; and there was bed-clothing deposited in stacks and heaps of all sizes, spinning-wheels and reels, a side-saddle, and various other articles no less curious than numerous. There, as I said, Molly occasionally retired, to collect her thoughts, or open her band-boxes, perhaps, or bureau drawers—as what woman does not, two or three times in the course of every week, merely to see how things are getting on.

She had gone to this museum on the aforesaid evening, and had been followed, as she usually was, first by Kate with the baby in her arms, next by Hiram, the oldest boy, with a piece of bread and butter, and then by Alexander Pope, also with a similar portion of his evening meal. This last-mentioned son was denominated by the family the preacher, in consequence of an almost miraculous gift of “speaking pieces,” which he was supposed to possess.

From the hasty shutting and opening of drawers, I inferred that Miss Molly was making her toilet, for it was Sunday evening, and girls in the country do not always dress for dinner; on the contrary they sometimes delay that duty till after the evening milking.

The creaking of the gate diverted my attention, both from Molly and the conclusion at which I had just arrived, that we may visit and be visited a good while, and not learn much of each other; and looking out, I saw riding towards the house—for he had unlatched the gate without dismounting—a rosy-faced young man, whose chin dropt on his bosom, perhaps to keep it warm. His boots were spurred, and the little sorrel horse he bestrode capered and curvetted to the touch of his heels in a way that was ludicrous to witness; and the more, as the strong wind drifted the mane and tail of the animal strongly in the direction in which he was going. There was a general rushing down stairs—Kate and the baby first, and the two boys, with their bread and butter, following.

“Oh mother, mother, mother! somebody is coming to our house—somebody with a black coat on, somebody on a sorrel horse!”

"Mother, make them hush," said Kate. "I know who it is; it's Will Pell, and he is coming to see Molly."

"Why, Kate, do say Mr. Pell," replied Mrs. Trowbridge; and she added, "I wonder what there is you do n't know?"

"Not much of anything," answered the girl, complacently.

Meantime the two boys kept watch at the window, and reported the progress made by Mr. Pell in his preparations to come in. "Now he is hitching his horse," they said; "Now he is coming this way;" "Now he is brushing his boots with his handkerchief;" "Now he is pulling down his waistcoat;" "Now he is going to rap."

"I see, he's got the crape off, already," said Kate, "and it's just a year and two months and three days since his wife died: it was Sunday, about two hours before this very time, that she was buried."

"What a girl you are!" interposed the mother—"I wonder if you could n't tell how many dresses she had."

"Yes," said Kate; "she had her white wedding dress, and she had an old black silk dress, and she had a blue gingham dress that she had only worn twice—once a visiting at Mrs. Whitfield's, and once at meeting; and she had a"—Here the catalogue was interrupted by the rapping of Mr. Pell.

Kate was a curious combination of shrewdness and vulgarity, of wisdom in little things, and pertinacity of opinion. She was about fourteen years of age, ill-shapen and unshapen—partly grown and partly growing. Her eyes, sparkling and intelligent, were black as the night, and her hair, of the same dye, was combed so low over her forehead and cheeks that they were always in part concealed. Her shoulders were bent down, for that when not engaged in some household drudgery, she was doomed to carry the baby about—it was her relaxation, her amusement. Molly Root was a quiet little woman, who for a considerable number of years had looked pretty much as she did then: I do not know precisely how old she was, but everybody told her she looked young; and when one begins to receive compliments of that sort they are to be understood as delicate intimations that they have once been a good deal younger than they are at present. In dress she was

tidy, and now and then she made little attempts at style. Her manner, to speak truth, was what is called affected, so was her conversation—faults which arose from a desire on her part to appear well. She was amiable and good in all ways; the everlasting smile on her face did not belie her heart. In person she was short—chubby, as we say; her arms were short, her neck was short, and her face was short—her forehead being the largest part of it. Her eyes were of a pale blue, gentle, but dull, with scarce an arrow to be shot at any one, however exciting the emergency. Her hair was of a soft brown, and was worn in part in a small knot on the back of her neck, and in part so drawn across the forehead and turned toward the ears as to make an oblong square. She had from time to time received offers, as perhaps most young women do, and everybody wondered why she did not get married. At length that happy event was brought about, and then everybody wondered why Molly did get married: “She had such a nice home—just like her own father’s house—and Mrs. Trowbridge is so good-natured, anybody could live with her.” It was my peculiar fortune to learn, both why Molly did not get married and why she did.

When any especial good luck occurs to our fellow creatures we are apt to balance it with their little faults and infirmities. Now Mr. Pell was rich; that he had come to see Molly there could be no doubt—Kate said he had, and Kate knew; and besides, Molly had put on her best gown, and an extra smile, and straws show which way the wind blows. On the strength of these considerations Mrs. Trowbridge came presently into my room. She held up one finger by way of keeping down the exclamation she evidently expected, as she announced in a whisper that Will Pell was in the other room. “Indeed!” said I, for I felt that it would be a pity to disappoint her altogether, by evincing no surprise.

“Yes, and he is all fixed up, ever so fine spurs on his boots, and a gold chain, as big as Samuel’s log-chain, hanging out of his pocket; and he says to Molly, says he, ‘I’m pretty well I thank you,’ when she had not asked him a blessed word about it; and for my part I think such things mean something.”

"That was funny," I said.

"Yes, and Samuel saw how confused he was too: he could hardly keep his face straight."

Samuel was Mr. Trowbridge; and I may say here, that for the most part he kept his face very straight. But of this hereafter.

"I do n't pretend to be a prophet," she went on, "but this day a twelve-month they will be married—mark my words!"

"I do n't see how you are to get along," I said.

"I am very willing to try!" she answered, in a way to indicate that Molly's services were of very little importance.

"She seems very industrious, and so motherly to the children."

"Sometimes," said Mrs. Trowbridge; "you see we give her a home. She has the best room in the house, and does what she pleases and when she pleases, and nothing if she pleases. If she takes a notion, she goes away for weeks at a time—and right in the busiest time, as like as any way."

Here the children, provided with fresh slices of bread and butter, came after their mother. "Molly pushed me off," said one; "I do n't care for old Molly," cried another. "Well," said the injured mother, "she is dressed too fine for you to touch her—I would n't go near her again for a week." And she put her arm about the little fellow's neck and kissed him. Presently she said, "If a certain person that you know should tie herself up with a certain other person, what should you think of it?"

"Who, mother—who is going to be tied up?" said the children.

"Oh, I do n't know—the man in the moon," she replied. Of course I did not think much about it, and she proceeded to say, if it *was* going to be, she hoped it would be soon—that was all: that some folks drove others out of their own house, and that she felt as if she did n't know where to put her head.

"Why mother! Where do you want to put your head?" asked the boys.

"Oh, I do n't know: in a bumble-bee's nest, may be." And after a pause—"If Miss you-know-who were to jump into a

feather-bed after all this time, it would be right down funny, would n't it?"

"Who is Miss you-know-who?" asked the children, "and what is she going to jump into a feather-bed for? Is it our bed, mother?—say!"

"Little folks must not have big ears," she replied; "do run away and play; go, get your father's knife, and cut sticks in the kitchen; I saw some pretty shingles there—go and cut them up."

Away they ran, at this inducement, and Mrs. Trowbridge was enabled to drop the disguise and speak plainly again. There is no need to repeat all she said: Molly was not perfect, of course; Mrs. Trowbridge and her children were; consequently every unpleasant occurrence in the family was attributable to but one person. She did not say this precisely, but such was a necessary inference from what she did say. Just then, for instance, Molly and her beau were in the way of getting tea. What should she do? She believed she would not have any tea.

I obviated the difficulty by inviting the lovers into my room; and Mrs. Trowbridge no sooner found herself in the presence of Mr. Pell than she resumed her laughter, suspended during the confidential conference with me. As I have said, it was her way of entertaining people, and making herself agreeable.

Mr. Pell, as the reader is informed, was a widower—an exceedingly active and sprightly man, and his natural vivacity was heightened, no doubt, by the general complaisance of the ladies and the prosperous state of his affairs.

"Don't you think," said Molly, dropping her head on one shoulder, in her best style, and addressing me—"dont you think it has been communicated to me that Mr. Pell is going to take a partner for life?" She liked to use good words.

"Pray, who is the happy lady?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! tell us that!" said Mr. Pell, making two series of little taps, the one on the carpet with his foot, and the other on the table with his hand.

"Oh, a little bird told me—a dear little bird!" And the cheek of Molly almost touched her shoulder.

"A love-bird, was n't it?" And Mr. Pell gave her cheek a light brush with the finger tips of his glove.

"Oh dear, that is too bad!"

"Did you mean that 'oh dear' for me?" asked Mr. Pell, laughing and hitching his chair toward her.

"You provoking fellow!" she replied, tapping his ear with her fan.

"Miss Molly, Miss Molly, Miss Molly!" he exclaimed, putting his hand to his ear, as if it were stung—"have you such a temper?"

"The sky is all obscured—I apprehend a tempestuous night," Molly observed, and turned her eyes away.

"Just see! She can't look at me because she feels so guilty—temper, temper, temper! Oh dear, dear, dear! I should dread to have such a wife!"

"I am just going to run away!" answered Molly—her head reclining lower than before: but she made no attempt to execute her threat.

"I do n't think I shall let you," said Mr. Pell, hitching his chair still closer, and taking her hand as if forcibly to detain her.

"Oh you naughty man! Let me go. Please let me go."

"No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no!"

"Well then, give me my hand."

"No, no. I'll keep it, I'll keep it, I'll keep it, for always and ever, and ever and ever!"

"Oh, bad Mr. Pell, what shall I do without a hand?"

"I'll give you mine, I'll give you mine, I'll give you mine; how will that do? how will that do? how will it do, do, do?"

"Oh, your wit is inexhaustible!"

"You flatter me, I have no wit—not a bit, not a bit, not a bit! It's you that are witty and pretty, and pretty and witty."

"I wish I could speak charmingly like you."

"Oh, Miss Molly, Miss Polly Molly, you have charming speech and charming cheeks, and in both respects I am only an admirer; an admirer of your cheeks and speech."

During this conversation, he had kept a constant hitching and rocking about, striking his feet together, curling and un-

curling his beard, with other motions that indicated a restless state of mind: and perceiving his condition, I excused myself, on a pretence of assisting Mrs. Trowbridge. To my surprise, I saw no preparations for tea, but instead, she and Samuel, seated in opposite corners of the fireplace, watching the fading of the embers with the greatest apparent interest. She was smiling a slow smile, as Mrs. Browning says, but nevertheless it was a smile that I could see through. She had expected Molly to attend to the tea, as usual; Molly had not proposed so to do: she had made the necessary preparations during the day, and naturally enough supposed she could be excused from service in the evening. Kate was carrying the baby about, and computing the probable cost of Mr. Pell's boots, coat, and hat, and the two boys lay folded up and asleep on the carpet, having, in consequence of not receiving any of the pound-cake which Molly had baked the day previous, cried themselves into forgetfulness of their misfortune.

Mr. Trowbridge never said much in his wife's presence; if he had done so, he would not have had much said in return; her pleasant things were for others. She was not a scold—her sins were rather of omission of speech, when alone with her spouse, or with but her home audience, than commission. No matter what he had done or what he had failed to do, her reply was always a fretful and querulous "well." He might chop wood all day in the snow, and she never thought to have the fire warmer when he should come in half frozen; and if he said, "you have let the fire get low," or anything of that sort, she would merely answer "well." If she baked buckwheat cakes, though her husband—the uncivilized creature—could not eat them, she never put any other bread on the table. If Kate said, "I think you are smart, mother: you know father don't like these," she only answered "well!" Poor man, a cup of weak tea has served him for supper many a time, after a hard day's work. If his coat grew old-fashioned, he had to wear it so, for Mrs. Trowbridge only said "well," fancying, as it seemed, that her gowns were many enough and bright enough to cover all deficiencies in both their wardrobes. From his youth till he was far beyond middle age, he had been indus-

trious and laborious, in years in and out of season, but he never acquired anything beyond the necessities of the day, and he moved about from place to place, always hoping to improve the state of his affairs, but never doing so.

On this evening I remember that he seemed unusually sensible of his condition, and that his wife said "well" an unusual number of times.

The hours went slowly by till nine o'clock; the cat lay on the hearth seemingly very comfortable, and she was the only one that was so. Mr. Trowbridge was looking in the fire, and Mrs. Trowbridge was looking in the fire, and I was looking at them, when Molly, opening the door, inquired whether we were to have any supper.

"Sure enough," said Mrs. Trowbridge, "are we to have any?"

Molly understood the reproof, and said she would have prepared tea as she always did, but that the children had destroyed her kindling, and she thought whoever allowed the mischief might repair it. In an under-tone she said something further, about being excused once in her life, and withdrew rather petulantly.

II.

The old clock had struck twelve, the embers were deep under the ashes; where the heads of the household had been sitting an hour before; the children had been duly taken up, and duly scolded, and compelled to walk to bed half asleep, as they were, in punishment for being so naughty—when Molly and I, alone by the parlor fire—Mr. Pell having said, half an hour before, "Good bye, good bye, good bye!"—entered on a "private session."

Night, whether moon-light or star-light, summer night or spring night, is favorable to confessions; we feel a confidence and security as we draw together, and the darkness shuts out all the great world. Almost any two persons, under such circumstances, will be more communicative than they would be in the open noonday, and more especially if they feel mutually aggrieved, as did Molly and I on this particular occasion; for, be it remembered, we had not had our supper.

"It is too bad," she said at length; "I have done enough for Mrs. Trowbridge, I am sure, to merit a little favor once in a year or two—have n't I helpt her, week in and week out, from year's end to year's end? I was with her, with Hiram and the *Preacher* and all, and I have helpt to move ten times if I have once, and done time and again what no money would hire me to do, and you see what thanks I get?" She was silent for a moment, and then said abruptly, "Well, I shall not move grandmother's old pots more than once more!"

"Ah, Mrs. Pell," I said, laughing, and taking her hand, "allow me to congratulate you!"

Molly did not smile as I had expected, but hid her face in her hands and burst into tears. When the first tumult had subsided, "I calmed her fears and she was calm," and then she "told her love with virgin pride."

"When I was younger than now," she began; "let me see, it must be fif—, no, I don't know how long it is—well, it's no matter"—she could not make up her mind to say it was even more than fifteen years ago—"I lived with my grandmother; it was in a lonesome old house, away from everybody else; from our highest window we could see the smoke of one dwelling and that was all; and living there at the same time was a young man of the name of Philip Heaton. I have always thought Philip the prettiest name in the world, but no matter about that; I thought Philip Heaton the prettiest fellow I had ever seen, as you can guess: he was so good to me, leaving his own work to spade the garden beds, and milking the cows that were refractory, and doing a thousand things that it will not interest you to hear about. When the circuit preacher came once a month, and there was a meeting in the old log school-house, a mile and a half away, we never failed to go, and what pleasant times they were! I think I remember distinctly all the walks and rides we ever had together. Once I call to mind he gathered me three speckled lilies—I know just where they grew in the edge of a pond, where the grass was coarse and heavy, and over which we walked on a log—I have the withered things somewhere yet—the meadow we crossed, and where we climbed the fences, the long strip of

woods with its crooked path among decayed leaves and sticks. Oh, I remember all, as though I had been there yesterday; and just where we were when we said so and so: I could go back and recount everything. Well, as I said, I thought Philip was handsome—I thought he was good—in fact I loved him, and I still think he loved me then. When grandmother was dead, and the funeral was over, we first talked seriously of affection and marriage. I was sitting alone in the great old-fashioned parlor, thinking of one of our neighbors, a poor old woman, who had told me I must not keep the sheet that had been over the corpse—that it would bring ill-luck to me; and I suspected she wished me to give it to her, as I afterwards did; I was alone, thinking of this, and weighed down with a thousand melancholy thoughts connected with the event that had deprived me not only of a home but of the only real friend I had in the world, when Philip joined me; for it was evening, and his work was done. The November winds rattled the sash against which I sat; I saw the vacant chair, and thought of the new grave; and covering my face, I cried a long time; but it was not altogether for the dead that my tears fell: Philip was going into a distant city to make his fortune, I was to live with a distant relative, and we should not see each other for a long time. The cows we had petted and milked together were to be sold, and the garden flowers would not be ours any more. ‘Maybe we shall buy back the cows,’ said Philip, ‘and get roots and seeds of the same flowers,’ for he was young and sanguine, and love sees its way through all things; and when he kissed me, and said it should be so, I thought it would. So I packed up the old things that had fallen to me, and went to my new home, with a world of sweet hopes and promises shut close in my heart. It was a hard and lonesome life I led, but when from that home I went to another and a worse one, I was kept up with the old memory and the new hope.

“Philip prospered beyond all his expectations, and there began to be prospects of buying the cows, sure enough, when there came a few tremulous lines to inform me he was very ill. I cannot tell, and it would be useless to do so if I could, what were my sufferings; there never came another word nor sign;

I tried to be cheerful and to live on in some way, but the dear charm of life was gone; no new lover ever displaced the old one from my heart; but to-night—what do you think I heard to-night! Why, that Philip Heaton is a rich man, and has been married these—these—oh, a good while! Mr. Pell saw him last summer, and he inquired about me—if I was married—said I deserved to be—I was a good sort of a girl—and a good deal more he said of me in the same way.” Alas, for Molly! then and there vanished the last and only romance of her existence.

I have not given the story in her precise language, for I cannot remember that, but I have retained the spirit and the essential facts of her not unparalleled experience. It needed no subsequent observation for me to see how things stood, and how they would end; how in the estimation of Mrs. Trowbridge Molly did what she pleased, and when she pleased, and nothing if she pleased; how she had all the advantages of a home and a mother’s care, and how she could get along better without her. And I saw, too, how Molly thought she did herself a thousand things no money would hire her to do; how she took an interest in the house, as though it were all hers—getting small thanks after all; how she sewed for others to earn her scanty clothing; and how she had moved her heirlooms about till she was tired, and had begun to take less romantic and more practical views of things. She never said so precisely, but I saw that a good home and an estimable man to care for her were weighing heavily against an old dream; so that I was not surprised when on entering her room one day I found her standing before her grandmother’s narrow looking-glass, carefully dividing hair from hair, and now and then plucking one that had a questionable hue; nor was it any surprise when Kate told me, in a whisper, that in just seventeen days and three hours and ten minutes Molly would become Mrs. Pell. She had made accurate calculation, for the wedding day was in her little life a great day indeed, as in fact it was to Mrs. Trowbridge; whose laughter, for those intervening seventeen days, I think had scarcely a cessation.

Mr. Pell, meantime, became unusually nimble, hopping and

balancing about like a spring bird, and more than ever repeating his words in a musical trill;—"wify, wify, wify!" he would say sometimes, assuming the conjugal address before the conjugal ceremony, and he was observed to wear his hat awry, and to go abroad in a red boyish waistcoat which he probably had not worn for years: and Molly I think was even more nice in her choice of words than was her wont.

The night before the marriage, as we sat together before the fire, she took from the shelf, and unfolded from a dozen careful wrappers, an old volume, and shook into the ashes from betwixt the leaves some broken remnants of flowers. She sighed as she did so—they may have been the three lilies; in a moment she smiled again, and twirling the marriage ring, and looking from the window, observed that she could not think of anything but the splendor of the queen of night! I thought it was very likely.

All the preceding day Kate was in the seventh heaven; she wore new calf-skin shoes and a new calico dress, and why should she not be happy? Mrs. Trowbridge said a wedding seemed to her one of the solemnest things in the world, but she laughed all the while; she did not even say "well," that Mr. Trowbridge bought a new hat for the occasion, which he did not once all that day move from his head.

I will not attempt a description of the wedding festivities. It seemed to me half the folks in Clovernook were there. Sally Blake came first, pleasant and useful as ever, and afterward Miss Claverel, Miss Whitfield, poor Mrs. Troost with her ill-omened gossip, and excellent Mrs. Hill, our old friend, with kindlier prophecies of happiness, and Dr. Hayward, the family physician, and a great many others, living in the neighborhood, besides two or three smartish young grocers and produce dealers from the city, with whom Mr. Pell had transactions "agreeable and profitable all round." Mrs. Trowbridge's children were as noisy and ill-mannered as ever, the good woman laughed at every observation made by herself, or the bride and groom, or the guests, and Mr. Pell was smartly dressed and looked unutterable and said incomprehensible things, all with an air of self-satisfaction which gave ample assurance that he

was blessed as ever bridegroom should wish to be. As for Molly, she was attired very prettily, and seemed, or tried to seem, the happiest woman in the house ; but I could see once in a while an involuntary seriousness in her eyes ; and once, after she had suddenly quitted the room for a moment, I thought I saw signs of tears, driven back with a strong will—tears that had come with unbidden memories from scenes where she had walked in summer nights, so long ago—where beautiful hopes were born, and buried, buried forever. As she entered the room, her hand upon her breast, the angels might have heard her say, “ Be still, be still, oh turbulent heart ! ” and when she led off a dance with Mr. Pell, she looked as if she had quite forgot all the dreams ever dreamed by Molly Root.

These marriages of convenience are sad affairs, even among the humble, with whom so many cares divide authority in the heart. It is well when they are contracted by brave natures, with unfaltering wills, looking backward for darkness and forward for light, and never suffering the past to prevent the clutching of every possible good in the present, or to cloud the future so that its farthest joys shall fail of inspiring continual hope and strength.

Mr. and Mrs. Pell are well-to-do in the world ; the “ rise of property,” indeed, has made them rich, and Molly sometimes sends her carriage to bring Mrs. Trowbridge to tea, and gives to Kate occasionally some cast-off dress or last year’s finery, which, made over, is to her as good as new. The reader will understand why she remained so long unmarried, why at length she became a wife ; and those accustomed much to the conversations of married ladies perhaps might hear without surprise her frequent declaration, that “ dear Mr. Pell ” was her “ first and only love ! ”

—There they go ! How those spanking grays, with their shining harness, and the bright green and yellow barouche, make the dust fly as they whirl by the Clovernook Hotel ! Mr. Pell says “ It is the thing, *the* thing, precisely the thing ! Is n’t it Molly, Molly, Molly ! ”

CHARLOTTE RYAN.

I.

As there is in every neighborhood a first family, so there is a last family—a family a little behind everybody else—and in Clovernook this family was named Ryan. They did not indeed live very near the village, but rather on the very verge of our neighborhood. A little dingy house, off the main road, and situated in a hollow, was their habitation, and, though they were intelligent, they had no ideas of the elegancies of life, and but meagre ones, indeed, of its comforts.

Charlotte, the eldest daughter, inherited all the cleverness of her parents, with few of their prejudices against modern improvements, so that, now and then, her notions ran out into a sort of flowery border along the narrow way in which she had been taught to walk. Small opportunities had she for the indulgence of refined or elegant tastes, but sometimes, as she brought home the cows at night, she lingered to make a “wreath of roses,” or to twist the crimson tops of the iron-weeds with her long black hair; and once I remember seeing her, while she was yet a little girl, with a row of maple leaves pinned to the bottom of her skirt; she was pretending they were the golden fringe of her petticoat.

Clovernook boasted of one or two select schools even at that time, to which most of the people, who were not very poor, contrived to send their daughters: but little Charlotte went down the hollow, across a strip of woods, to the old schoolmaster, who taught in a log house and in an obscure neighborhood for the summer, and made shoes in the winter, and I suspect he was but imperfectly skilled in either vocation, for I remem-

ber it used to be said that he had "taken up both trades out of his own head." The girls of the "high school" were in her eyes "privileged beyond the common run—quite on the verge of heaven." And no wonder she regarded them so: the ribbons that tied their braids, were prettier than the two or three teeth of horn comb that fastened her own hair, and her long checked-apron compared unfavorably with their white ones. But with this period of her life I have little to do, as the story I am going to relate is limited to the circle of a few days, when Charlotte had ceased to pin maple leaves on her petticoat, and wore instead ornaments of glass and pinchbeck.

"Here is a letter for Miss Ryan: it will not be much out of your way, if you will be so kind," said the post-master to me one evening, as I received my own missives, for at that time the postmaster of Clovernook knew all the persons in the habit of receiving letters, and as one for Miss Ryan had never been there before, I, as well as he, naturally supposed it would be a surprise, probably an agreeable one to her, and I therefore gladly took charge of it, choosing instead of the dusty highway, a path through the meadows, and close under the shadow of the woods, which brought the home of Charlotte directly in my way, though the duty I undertook added more than a mile to my walk homeward. It was in the late autumn, and one of those dry, windy, uncomfortable days which brings thought from its wanderings to hover down about one's home; so, as the night fell, I quickened my steps, pausing now and then to listen to the roar down deep in the woods, which seemed like the moan of the sea—which I had heard only in imagination then—or to mark the cabin homes, peering out of the forest, and calculate the amount of comfort or discomfort in them or about; and I remember to this day some particular facts from which inferences were drawn. Before one door, a dozen dun and speckled pigs were feeding from a trough, and sunken in mud knee deep, and near them, barefooted, and wearing a red flannel shirt, stood a ragged urchin, whose shouts of delight would have been pleasant to hear, but for the harsh, scolding voice that half drowned them. Both the joy and the anger

were a mystery at first, but I presently saw by what they were caused.

"I'll come out and settle with you, my boy, if you do n't quit that—mind I tell you!" screamed an old woman, leaning over the low rail fence of the door-yard, her cap-border flapping like a flag of war, and with one foot on the ground and one in the air, as she bent eagerly forward, gesticulating vehemently, but chiefly in the direction of an old cat, which the boy had put in a slender harness of twine—his own ingenious workmanship, I suspect. He laughed heartily, in spite of the threatened settlement, calling out in high glee, as pussy ran up a tree to escape him, "Jementallies! how she goes it!"

"I'll go you," continued the monitor, "as sure as you're born, if you do 'nt ungear the poor serpent before you're a minute older!" And so I passed out of hearing and out of sight, and I have never since been enlightened as to the adjustment of the pending difficulty.

It was quite night, and the candle-light streamed bright through the dead morning-glory vines which still hung at the window, when my rap at the door of Mr. Ryan was answered by a loud and clear "Come in!" so earnest that it seemed half angry.

Homely, but still home-like, was the scene that presented itself—the hickory logs were blazing in the deep wide fire-place, the children were seated quietly on the trundle-bed, for their number had grown faster than that of the chairs, and talking in an under-tone about "choosing sides" at school, and what boys and girls were "first-rate and particular" as choosers, and what ones were big dumb-heads: they presently changed their tone from a low key to a sharp whisper, much more distinct, but my entrance did not interrupt their discussion.

Mr. Ryan, wearing a coat and trowsers with patches at elbow and knee of a dissimilar color, was seated on a low stool in the corner, engaged in softening with melted tallow the hard last year's shoes of the children, which had been put aside during the summer season.

"A young winter," he said, by way of welcoming me, and then continued apologetically, and as though it was almost a

disgrace to wear shoes, "the wind to-day makes a body feel like drawing their feet in their feathers."

I said the winter brought its needs, or something of that sort, implying that we regarded things in the same way, and he resumed and continued the mollifying process without speaking another word.

Golden rings of dried pumpkins hung along the ceiling, bags of dried apples and peaches, bunches of herbs, and the like, and here and there from projections of framework, hung stockings, by dozens, and other garments suited to the times. A limb of bright red apples, withering in the warmth and smoke, beautified the jamb, beneath the great "bake oven," and such were all the ornaments of which the room could boast, I think.

Mrs. Ryan was busy at the kneading trough, making short-cakes for breakfast—silent mostly, and wearing a look of severity, as though she knew her duty and did it. Only Charlotte came forward to meet me, and smiled her welcome. The Methodist "Advocate" lay open on the table, and some sewing work dropped from her lap as she rose. She politely offered me the chair with the leather bottom, and added to the sticks on the fire, manifesting her good will and courtesy in the only ways possible.

She had grown beautifully into womanhood, and though her dress was neither of choice material, nor so made as to set off her person very advantageously, it was easy to perceive that under the hands of an artist in waists, skirts, &c., her form would seem admirable for its contour and fine proportion, while her face should be a signal for envy or for admiration to youthful women and men, if she were "in society." And she had in some way acquired, too, quite an agreeable manner of her own, only wanting a freedom from restraining influences to become really graceful and captivating; and I could not help wishing, as I looked on her, that she could find a position better suited to her capacities and inclinations. A foolish wish.

The letter elicited expressions of surprise and curiosity from all members of the family, except Charlotte, who suppressed her interest for the time. "Let me see it, let me see it," exclaimed the children, but the stamp of the father's foot brought

silence into the room, on which he arose, and wiping his hands on his hair, prepared to read the letter, for Charlotte did not think of breaking the seal herself.

"It 's from down the river I reckon," said the mother, "and tells us all about Peter's folks." Charlotte blushed and looked annoyed. "I'll just bet!" said one of the boys, a bright-looking lad of nine or ten years, "that a queen gets letters every day; yes, and written on gold paper, likely enough," he continued, after a moment, and in response to himself as it were.

"I wish I was there," said a younger sister, smiling at the pleasant fancy, "and I'd climb away up on her throne some time when she was gone to meeting, and steal some of her things."

"And you would get caught and have your head chopped off with a great big axe," replied the brother.

The little girl continued musingly, "I expect Charlotte's new Sunday dress is no finer than a queen wears every day."

"Every day!" exclaimed the mother in lofty contempt, "she wears as good washing-day in the kitchen." In the midst of these speculations I took leave. A day or two afterwards, I learned that Charlotte was gone to pass a month or two with some relations near the city.

II.

These relatives were but recently established in a country home, having belonged originally to one of the northern seaport towns. The family embraced but three persons, the father, whose life had in some capacity been passed mostly at sea, and two daughters—all unfitted by education and habit for their new position.

Of course Charlotte had heard much of her uncle, Captain Bailey, and his daughters, and in childish simplicity supposed them to be not only the grandest but also the most excellent people in the world. They dwelt in her thoughts on a plane of being so much above her, that she involuntarily looked up to them and revered them as if they were of a fairer and purer world.

Through all her childhood it had been a frequent wish that some of uncle John's folks would come, but uncle John's folks never came, and so she grew into womanhood without being much disenchanted. Nobody about Clovernook was at all comparable to them in any respect, as they lived in the beautiful region of her dreams.

Mrs. Ryan and Mrs. Bailey were sisters, who in early life were all in all to each other. Marriage had separated them, by distance much, by circumstances more. Mrs. Bailey went to an establishment in town, and after a round of dissipations and gaieties, became a small link in the chain of fashion, having married out of, and above her previous and fit position. Mrs. Ryan, who as a girl was the less dashing and spirited of the two, became a farmer's wife, and with the energy and determination which characterized her always, struck at once into the wilderness in search of a new home.

Sad enough was the parting of the sisters, and many the promises to write often, and to visit each other as soon as might be; but these promises were never kept, and perhaps it was well they never were, for far outside of the blessed oneness of thought and feeling in which they parted, would have been their meeting! Absence, separate interests, different ways of life, soon did their work.

As I said, they never met, and so never knew that they had grown apart, but each lived in the memory of the other, best and most beautiful to the last. But though each mother taught her children to love and reverence the good aunt that lived far away, and whom possibly they would see some time, the young Baileys failed to be impressed with that respect and admiration for their country relations, which the country relations felt for them.

After a series of successes came adverse fortune to the Baileys, then the death of the wife and mother, and so, partly in the hope of bettering their condition, and partly to escape mortification, the broken and helpless family removed from their statelier home and settled in the neighborhood of our beautiful city in the west. For they fancied, as many other people do who know nothing about it, that the farmer's is a sort of holi-

day life ; that after planting the crop he may sleep or play till the harvest time ; that then the labor of a day or two fills the barn with bright sheaves and sweet hay ; and that all the while, and without any effort, cattle and sheep and horses are growing and fattening, and plenty flowing in. A little experience sufficed to cure the Baileys of this pleasant conceit. In truth, they did n't go to work in the right way, with an honest determination that compels success. Farming and housekeeping were begun as delightful experiments, and when the novelty was lost, they fell back into lamentations and repinings for the opulence they had lost. Briers made sorry work with Captain Bailey's ruffles, and the morning dew was unfavorable to the polish of his boots ; the corn did n't fall into baskets of itself, nor the apples come home without having been first shaken from the trees, and picked up, one by one. Weeds and burs ran over the garden and choked the small vegetables ; the cows grew lean, and their milk dried away, to the astonishment of all parties—for nobody suspected they were not milked regularly and rightly, or that their wants were not attended to, and some fearful distemper was supposed to have attacked them, as day after day flocks of buzzards and crows were seen settling in hollows where the poor creatures had died. But Captain Bailey's troubles were trifles compared with the afflictions of his daughters, who not only sighed and cried, but wished themselves dead, a dozen times a day. The hard, yellow balls of butter, which they fancied would be so nice, required more labor and care in the making than they were willing to bestow ; bread was taken from the oven black and heavy ; and, in fact, the few things that were done at all were not done well, and general weariness and dissatisfaction was the consequence.

"I wish I was in heaven!" exclaimed Miss Sally Bailey, one day, more wrathfully than piously, turning at the same time from the churn and hiding her eyes from the great splash of cream that soiled the front of her lavender colored silk.

"It's no use for us to try to live like anybody," answered Kate, "and we might as well give up first as last, and put on linsey, and work, and work, and work till we die!"

And both girls sat down and bent their eyes on the floor,

either not seeing, or affecting not to see, the discomfort in which their father was; poor man, he had come in from the field with a thorn in his hand, and with the blood oozing from the wound, was vainly searching under chairs and tables, and shoving his hand one way and the other across the carpet, for the needle lost in his endeavor to perform with it a surgical operation.

"*I do* wish," he said at last, a little petulantly, "I could ever have any body to do any thing for me."

"I am sure I am sorry for the accident," said one of the girls, "if that will do you any good."

"I do n't think it will," was the reply; and the other sister offered assistance, assuring her father, and as though he were responsible for it, that she could feel nothing less than the broomstick in her clumsy fingers, so it was useless to try to handle a needle.

Having survived the operation, Captain Bailey, who was really disposed to do the best he could, pinned a towel against his vest, and took hold of the churn, saying, "Now, my dears, I'll make the butter, while you arrange the dinner."

"I would like to know what we are to arrange," said Kate, tossing her head, "there is nothing in the house that I know of."

"Surely there is something," the father said, working the dasher most energetically; "there is pork, and flour, and apples, and cream, and butter, and potatoes, and coffee, and tea, and sugar"—there the girls interrupted him with something about a meal suitable for wood-choppers.

Captain Bailey was now seriously discouraged, and without speaking again, continued to churn for two hours, but the cream was cold and thin, and at the end of that time looked no more likely to "come" than at first, so giving the churn a jostle to one side, with something that sounded very like an oath, the gentleman removed the towel which had served him for an apron, and taking down his gun from the wall, walked hurriedly in the direction of the woods. But he was one of those men who are called good-hearted, and though he managed badly, never doing either himself or anybody else any good, still,

every one said, "he means well," and "what a good-hearted fellow he is." So, of course, his amiability soon returned, and having brought down two squirrels and a wood-cock, whistling out the hope and good-nature that were in his heart. "Well, Sally," he said, throwing down the game, "here is something for dinner."

"Very well," she replied, but without looking up, or ceasing from her work of rubbing chalk on the cream-spot of her dress.

Kate, since her father's departure, had bestirred herself so much as to pin a towel about the churn, set it one side, and fill the tea-kettle, after which she seated herself with the last new novel.

"Well my dear, what is the news with you?" asked the captain, punching the fire at the same time, in an anxious way.

"The news is," she answered, "that two chickens have drowned themselves in a pail of dish-water, and the pig you bought at the vendue is choked to death with a loaf of burnt bread—when I found it, it was in the last agonies," she continued, laughing, "and I don't see what we *are* to do."

"An idea strikes me," answered the father, in no wise discouraged. "Write to your cousin—what's her name? who lives out in Clovernook—she's a housekeeper, I'll warrant you; write to her to come and visit you for a month or two, and initiate you in the ways of the woods."

"A good notion," said Kate, throwing down her book, and the dinner went forward better than any one had done since the housekeeping began.

The farm selected by Captain Bailey, was east of the Queen City—not so far, however, but that some of the spires, and it is a city of spires, were clearly visible from its higher elevations. Both house and grounds were seriously out of repair, having been abandoned by the person who purchased and fitted them up, and sold ultimately at a sacrifice. They were well suited for the present proprietor; the spirit of broken-down assumption reigned supreme everywhere: you might see it perched on the leaning posts of the gateway, and peering from under the broken mullions of the great windows. It had been

a fine place, when the forest land was first trimmed up and cleared, when pebbles and flowers bordered the rivulets, and the eminence on which stood the house was terraced into green stairs. The tall red chimneys were some of them fallen partly down now, and the avenue leading from the gate to the hall was lost in weeds and grass, through which only a wagon-track was broken.

One or two trellised summer-houses stood pitching down the hill, and here and there a rose-bush or lilac lopped aside devoid of beauty, except the silver seives woven amongst them by the black and yellow spiders.

III.

The little cart in which Charlotte Ryan rode with her father rattled terribly ; it seemed never to have made so much noise till then ; it would betray their poverty, but if her father would only drive softly and leave the cart at the gate, it doubtless would be supposed that they had come in a more stylish way. Mr. Ryan, however, was a plain blunt farmer, and would have driven his little cart up to the White House, and elbowed his way through the Cabinet without a fear or a blush for his home-spun dress or country breeding, if he had felt inclined to pay his respects to the President—and why indeed should he not? He was a yeoman, and not ashamed of being a yeoman—what cause had he to be? But a pride of despising all innovation, all elegance, were peculiarities that stood in his light. So, as I said, he dashed forward at a rapid and noisy rate, feeling much, honest man, as though the sound of his wagon wheels would be the gladdest one his friends ever heard. Nor did he slacken rein till the feet of his work horses struck on the pavement before the main entrance of the house, and with their sides panting against the wide bands of faded leather composing their harness, stood champing the bit, and foaming as though they had run a race.

Poor Charlotte ! she could scarcely rise out of the straw in which she was imbedded, when the hall-door opened, and Captain Bailey, followed by his two daughters, came forward to meet her and her father, with self-possession and well-bred cor-

diality. The young women not only kissed her, but imposed a similar infliction on the dear uncle, making many tender inquiries about the aunt and sweet little cousins at home; but when Captain Bailey offered his arm, saying, "This way, my dear," the discomfiture of the niece was completed, and slipping two fingers over his elbow, and at arm's length from him, she entered the hall, trying her best not to hear her father say—"Bless your souls, gals, I don't want your sarvent man," as he went lustily to unharness his horses, just as he would have done at home.

"We are so glad you are come," said the cousins; "we want you to teach us so many things;" but Charlotte felt that though the last part of the sentence might be true, the first was not—for we instinctively recognize the difference between formal politeness and real heartiness. Partly because she thought she ought to do so, and partly because her conflicting emotions could find vent in no other way, she began to cry.

"Are you sick?" asked the girls, really concerned, for their sense of propriety would not have allowed of such an ebullition of feeling on any occasion, much less on one so trivial. They could not imagine why she cried—models of propriety that they were—unless indeed, she were in great bodily pain.

Presently Mr. Ryan, having attended to the duties of the groom, came in, bearing in each hand a small budget, containing presents of his choicest apples, saying as he presented them, "These apples my daughter here helped me to gather, and we have a hundred bushels as fine at home."

The father was now appealed to for an explanation of Charlotte's conduct, for she had covered her face with her hands, and sat in an obscure corner, sobbing to herself.

"She sees so many strange, new, and fine things that she is not used to," he said, for he could understand her; "they make her feel kind of bad and home-sick like. Charlotte," he continued, speaking as he would to a child, "wipe up your eyes, and let's see how much better your uncle's stock is than ours."

Glad of any excuse to escape from the cold speculation of the eyes that were on her, the daughter obeyed, making neither

excuse nor apology for the abrupt and somewhat inquisitive procedure.

The sunshine soon dried up her tears, for her spirit was healthful, and though she had given way to a brief impulse of sorrow, it was not an expression of habitual sickliness of feeling. Her father's repeated exclamations of surprise and contempt for the bad culture and bad stock, helped, too, to reassure her, and she returned at length to the house, her crushed self esteem built up in part, at least; but contrasts unfavorable to herself would present themselves, in spite of efforts to keep them down, whenever her brown hands touched the lily ones of her cousins, or when the noise of her coarse shoes reminded her of their delicate slippers; and when toward sunset the horses were brought out, feeling smart, for they had had a visitor's portion of oats, she half wished she was to go back, especially when she remembered the contents of the little bundle she had brought with her, containing what she considered the choice portion of her wardrobe.

But I need not dwell longer on this phase of her experience. In education, in knowledge of the world, in the fashionable modes of dress, the Misses Bailey were in the advance of her, as much as she, in good sense, natural refinement, and instinctive perceptions of fitness, was superior to them. But unfortunately she could see much more clearly their advantages than her own. Falling back on the deficiencies of which she was so painfully aware, she could not think it possible that she possessed any advantage whatever, much less any personal charms.

All the while the envied cousins were envious of her roseate complexion, elasticity of movement, and black heavy braids of hair, arranged, though they were, something ungracefully. The books which they kept, to be admired rather than read, afforded her much delight, and alone with these or with her uncle, the homesick and restless feeling was sometimes almost forgotten; for Captain Bailey was kind from the impulses of his nature, and not because he thought it duty or policy. The cheerful and natural aspect which things assumed under the transforming hands of Charlotte gave him excessive delight,

and then when her work was done, she would tie on her sun-bonnet, and accompany him in his walks through the fields and woods, making plans with him for the next year's culture and improvements. In the evenings she read to him, or listened to stories of the sea, which it gave him pleasure to relate; while the young ladies mourned at one side of the room over their hapless fate—wishing themselves back in their old home, or that Mrs. so, or so, would come out to the West, and give such parties as she used.

“But then,” said they, “there is nobody here that is anybody,” and so the mere supposition that a fashionable lady might come West and give parties, hops, re-unions, &c., was but a new source of discontent.

Sometimes they recounted, partly for the pleasure of hearing themselves, and partly to astonish and dazzle their country cousin, the various elegant costumes they had worn, on what, to them, were the most interesting occasions of their lives; and after all, they were not so much to blame—it was natural that they should pine for their native air, and for the gaieties to which they had been accustomed. But to Charlotte, whose notions of filial respect were almost reverent, it was a matter of painful surprise that they never mentioned their mother, or in any way alluded to her, except in complaints of the mourning clothes, which compelled them to be so plain. Neither brain nor heart of either was ample enough for a great sorrow.

At first Charlotte had lent her aid in the management and completion of household affairs with hearty good will, but the more she did the more seemed to be expected of her—the ladies could n't learn because they paid no attention to her teaching, and took no interest in it, though never was there a more painstaking instructor. All persons are not gifted alike, they said, “it seems so easy for you to work.” But in what their own gifts consisted it were hard to tell.

“Really, cousin Charlotte is quite companionable sometimes,” said Sally, one day—laying emphasis on the word cousin—after partaking of some of her fresh-baked pumpkin pies.

“But it’s a pity,” replied Kate, “that she only appears to advantage in the kitchen. Now what in the *world* would you do if Dr. Opdike, or Lawyer Dingley, or any of that set were to come?”

“Why,” said Sally, laughing, “I always think it’s as well to tell the truth, when there is no particular advantage to be gained by telling anything else, so I should simply say—‘A country cousin, whom father has taken a fancy to patronize.’”

Kate laughed, and taking with them some light romance, fit suited to wile the way into dreamland, they retired to their chamber.

“Suppose we steal a march on the girls,” said Captain Bailey, entering the room where Charlotte was engaged in idle endeavors to make her hair curl—“what say you to riding into town?”

Charlotte hesitated, for nothing called her to town except the search for pleasure, and she had been unaccustomed to go out of her way for that; but directly yielding to persuasion, she was tying on her bonnet, when the Captain, desirous of improving her toilet, suggested that she should not wear her best hat, but the old hack of Kate or Sally. The little straw bonnet, which looked smart enough at the prayer meetings and “circuit preachings” of the log school-house, became suddenly hateful, and the plain white ribbon, crossed about the crown, only in keeping with summer, and seventy years. Her cheeks flushed as her trembling hands removed her favorite bonnet, and the uncle continued—“just bring along Kate’s white cashmere, while you are about it—yours will be too warm to-day, I think.”

The shawl which Charlotte proposed to wear was a coarse black woolen one, which had already been worn by her mother for twenty years, or thereabouts, and though she had never looked so well in her life, as in the old bonnet and shawl belonging to Kate, still she felt ill at ease, and could not suppress a wish that she had at once declined the invitation. Captain Bailey, who was really a kind-hearted man, exerted himself to dissipate the cloud which weighed down her spirit, but ever

and anon she turned aside to wipe the tears away. My wish was being fulfilled—Charlotte had attained a new position.

“Now, my dear,” said the uncle, as he assisted Charlotte out of the carriage, before the most fashionable dry-goods shop of the city, “you must favor me by accepting a new gown and hat, and whatever other trifles you may fancy to have.”

“Oh, no, no!” she said, blushing, but dissent was not to be listened to—she was merely desired to select one from among the many varieties of silks thrown on the counter.

Now the purchasing of a silk dress was in the estimation of Charlotte, a proceeding of very grave importance, not to be thus hastily gone into. She would consent to accept of a calico—positively of nothing more—and on being assured by the clerks, as they brought forward some highly colored prints, that they were the patterns most in vogue, she selected one of mingled red and yellow, declined to receive anything further, and returned home, saddened and injured, rather than glad and grateful. She could not help wishing she had remained in her old haunts instead of going where people were ashamed of her—and then would come the more crushing and bitter thoughts which justified the feelings with which they regarded her; and so, in alternate emotions of self-contempt and honest and indignant pride, she continued to think and think—sometimes disregarding and sometimes answering briefly and coldly the various remarks of her kind relative. The sun had set an hour when the white walls of his house appeared in the distance, and as they approached nearer, it was evident from the lights and laughter within, that the occasion with the inmates was an unusually joyous one.

At the sound of footsteps in the hall, Kate came hurriedly forth to communicate the intelligence of the arrival of a friend, “Mr. Sully Dinsmore, a young author of rising eminence, and a man whose acquaintance was worth having”—and she continued, as her father observed—“glad to have you know him, Charlotte”—“Of course you will like to make some change in your toilet—the dress you have on affects your complexion shockingly.”

Charlotte assented, not knowing how she was to improve her

appearance, inasmuch as she then wore the best clothes she possessed.

Once in the dressing room, she threw indignantly aside what appeared to her but borrowed finery, and gave way to such a passion of tears as never before had dimmed her beautiful eyes.

She was disturbed at length by a light tap at the door, followed by an inquiry of her uncle whether she were not ready to go below. "Thank you, I do n't wish to go," she replied, with as much steadiness of voice as she could command; but her sorrow betrayed itself, and the kindly entreaties which should have soothed, only aggravated it.

"Well, my dear," said the uncle, as if satisfied, seeing that she was really unpresentable, "if you will come down and make a cup of tea, you and I will have the pleasure of partaking of it by ourselves."

This little stratagem succeeded in part, and in the bustling preparation of supper, the smile of resignation, if not of gaiety, came back; for Charlotte's heart was good and pure, and her hands quick always in the service of another. The benevolent uncle prudently forbore any reference to guest or drawing-room for the evening, and leading the conversation into unlooked-for channels, only betrayed by unusual kindness of manner a remembrance of the unhappy incidents of the day. A practiced observer, however, might have detected the tenor of his thoughts, in the liberal amount of cream and sugar—twice as much as she desired—infused into the tea of the gentle niece, whose pained heart throbbed sensitively, while her lips smiled thanks.

IV.

The orange light of the coming sunrise was widening among the eastern clouds, and the grass that had till then kept green, stood stiff in the white frost, when the quick step of Charlotte broke rather than bent it down, for she had risen early to milk the spotted heifer ere any one should be astir. She tripped gracefully along, unconscious that earnest eyes were on her, singing snatches of rural songs, and drinking the beauty of the

sunrise with the eyes of a poet. Half playfully, and half angrily, the heifer shook her horns of pearly green for such untimely rousing from the warm grassy hollow in which she lay, but the white pine pail was soon brimming with milk.

The wind blew aside Charlotte's little hood, and with cheeks, flushed with the air, and the exercise, gleaming through the tangles of her black hair, she really presented a picture refreshing to look on, especially to eyes wearied with artificial complexions and curls. As she arose the hues deepened, and she drew the hood quickly forward—for standing midway in the crooked path leading from the door-yard to the cow-yard, and shelling corn to a flock of chickens gathered about him, was Mr. Sully Dinsmore—a rather good looking, pleasant-faced young man of thirty or thereabout. He bowed with graceful ease as the girl approached, and followed his salutation by some jest about the fowl proceeding in which he had been detected, and at the same time took from her hand the pail with an air and manner which seemed to say he had been used to carrying milk-pails all his life—there was nothing he liked so well, in fact. Charlotte had no time for embarrassment—deference was so blended with familiarity—and beside, the gentleman apologized so sweetly and sadly for the informal introduction he had given himself: the young lady looked so like one—he hesitated—like his own dear wife—and he continued with a sigh, “she sleeps now among the mountains.” He was silent a moment, and then went on as if forcibly rallying, “This is a delightful way to live, is it not? We always intended, poor Florence and I, to come to the West, buy a farm, and pass the evening of our days in quiet independence; but,” in a more subdued tone, “I had never money enough till dear Florence died, and since that I have cared little about my way of life—little about life at all.”

Charlotte's sympathies were aroused. Poor man, his cheek did look pale, and doubtless it was to dissipate his grief that he was there; and with simple earnestness she expressed a hope, that the bright hills and broad forests of the West might restore something of the old healthiness of feeling in his heart.

His thanks were given with the tone and manner of one sin-

cerely grateful; the gay worldlings, he said, with whom he had been fated mostly to mingle, could not appreciate his feelings. All this required much less time than I have taken to record it, for the gentleman made the most of the brief walk.

At the door Captain Bailey met them, and with a look of mingled surprise and curiosity, was beginning a formal presentation, when Mr. Dinsmore assured him such ceremony was quite unnecessary—each had recognized a friend in the other, he said, and they were already progressing toward very intimate relations. No sooner had Charlotte disappeared, with her pail and strainer, than, abruptly changing tone and manner, he exclaimed, “Dev’lish pretty girl—I hope she remains here as long as I do!”

The Captain, who was displeased, affected ignorance of what had been said, and bent his steps in rather a hurried way toward the barn.

“Propose to fodder the stock, eh?” called out Mr. Dinsmore: “allow me to join you—just the business I was brought up to do.” And coming forward, he linked his arm through that of the stout Captain, and brought him to a sudden standstill, saying, with the delightful enthusiasm of a voyager come to the beautiful shore of a new country, “What a wonderful scene—forest and meadow, and orchards and wheat-fields! why, Captain, you are a rich man; if I owned this place I should n’t want anything beside—no other place half so good about here, I suppose?—in fact, it seems to me, in all my travels, I never saw such a farm—just enough of it—let’s see, what’s its extent? Yes, I thought you must have just about that much; and, if I had never seen it, I could have sworn it was the best farm in the country, because I know the soundness of your judgment, you see!”

The Captain drew himself up, and surveyed the prospect more proudly than he had done before, saying he ought to know something of good land, and favorable localities—he had seen something of the world.

“Why,” answered Mr. Sully Dinsmore, as though his host had not done half justice to himself, “I guess there is not much

of the world worth seeing that you have not seen; you have been a *great* traveler, Captain; and you know what you see; too," he added in a tone acceptably insinuating.

"Yes, yes, that is true: few men know better what they see than Captain Bailey," and he began pointing out the various excellencies and attractions of his place which the young man did not seem to have observed.

"No wonder," Mr. Dinsmore proceeded, "my vision was too much dazzled to take all in at once; you must remember, I am only used to rugged hills and bleak rocks, where the farmers fasten the grain down with stones, lest being indignant at the poor soil, it should *scrabble* out, you see." This word was coined with special reference to the Captain, who sometimes found himself reduced to such necessities. An approving peal of laughter rewarded his pains, and he repeated it, "Yes, the grain would actually scrabble out but for the stones; so you see it's natural my eyes failed to perceive all those waves of beauty and plenty." Where he saw the waves referred to, only himself could have told, for the stubble land looked bleak enough, and the November woods dark and withered to dreariness. "Well, Captain," he said at last, as though the scene were a continual delight to his eyes, "it's of no use—I could stand gazing all day—so let us fodder those fine cattle of yours."

With good will he entered upon the work—seizing bundles of oats and corn-blades, and dusty hay, regardless of broadcloths and linen; now patting the neck of some clumsy-horned, long-legged steer, calling to the Captain to know if he were not of the full blood; and now, as he scattered the bushel of oats among the little flock of thin and dirty sheep, inquiring, with the deepest interest apparently, if they were not something superior to the southdowns or merinos—for the wool was as fine as could be.

The "chores" completed, they returned to the house, but Mr. Dinsmore found so many things to admire by the way that their progress was slow; now he paused at the gateway to remark what nice strong posts they were—he believed they were of cedar; and now he turned in admiration of the smoke-house

—a ruinous and exceedingly diminutive building of bricks, of which the walls were overgrown with moss, the roof sunken, and the door off its hinges: they seemed to him about the best bricks he ever saw—moss would n't gather over them if they were not solid as a rock—"what a pleasing effect it has," he said.

"A little out of repair," said the Captain, "and too small—too small! I think of enlarging," and he attempted to urge his companion forward.

"But," interposed the guest, still gazing at the smoke-house, "that is one of your few errors of judgment: I would n't have it an inch bigger, nor an inch less; and besides, the moss is prettier than any paint."

"I must put up the door, at least," interrupted the Captain.

"Ay, no sir, let me advise you to the contrary. Governor Patterson, of New Jersey, smokes all his meat, and has for twenty years, in a house without a door—it makes the flavor finer—I thought it was built so on purpose—if ever I have a farm I should make your smoke-house a model."

This morning all the household tasks had fallen on Charlotte. "She went to bed early," said the cousins, "and can afford to get up early—besides, she has no toilet to make, as we have."

But though they gave her the trouble of delaying the breakfast, after she had prepared it, Charlotte was amply repaid for all, in the praises bestowed on her coffee and toast by Mr. Sully Dinsmore. Her uncle, too, said she had never looked so pretty, that her hair was arranged in most becoming style, and that her dress suited her complexion.

"Really, Lotty, I am growing jealous," said Kate, tossing her head in a way meant to be at once irresistibly captivating, and patronizing.

Kate had never said "Lotty" before, but seeing that Mr. Dinsmore was not shocked with the rural cousin, she thought it politic to make the most of her, and from that moment glided into the most loving behavior. Lotty was a dear little creature, in her way, quite pretty—and she was such a house-keeper! Finally, it was concluded to make a "virtue of necessity," and acknowledge that they were learning to keep house

themselves—in truth, they thought it fine fun, and preferred to have as few troublesome servants about as possible.

So a few days glided swiftly and pleasantly to Charlotte, notwithstanding that most of the household labor—all its drudgery—devolved on her. What cared she for this, while the sunrise of a paradisaal morning was glorifying the world. Kate and Sally offered their assistance in making the new dress, and contrived various little articles, which they said would relieve the high colors, and have a stylish effect. These arts, to the simple-minded country girl, were altogether novel—at home she had never heard of “becoming dress.” She, as well as all the girls whom she knew, had been in the habit of going to town once or twice a year, when the butter brought the best price, or when a load of hay or a cow was sold, and purchasing a dress, bonnet, &c., without regard to color or fashion. A new thing was supposed to look well, and to their unpractised eyes always did look well.

“Come here, Lotty,” said Kate, one evening, surveying her cousin, as she hooked the accustomed old black silk. “Just slip off that old-womanish thing,” she continued, as Charlotte approached—and ere the young girl was aware, the *silk* dress that had been regarded with so much reverence was deprived of both its sleeves. “Oh mercy! what will mother say?” was her first exclamation; but Kate was in no wise affected by the amputation she had effected, and coolly surveying her work, said “Yes, you look a thousand dollars better.” And she continued, as Charlotte was pinning on the large cape she had been used to wear, “Have you the rheumatism in the shoulders, or anything of that sort, or why do you wrap up like a grandmother at a woods-meeting?”

Charlotte could only say, “Just because”—it was, however, that she desired to conceal as much of her bare arms as possible; and it was not without many entreaties and persuasions that she was induced to appear with arms uncovered and a simple white frill about her neck.

“What a pity,” said the cousins, as they made up the red calico, “that she had not consulted us, and spent her money

the other day for ruffles and ribbons instead of this fantastic thing !”

They regarded her in a half-pitying, half-friendly light, and, perhaps, under the circumstances, did the best they could ; for though Charlotte had many of the instincts of refinement, she had been accustomed to a rude way of living, and a first contact with educated society will not rub off the crust of rusticity which has been years in gathering.

“ I have been too sensitive,” thought Charlotte, or she tried to think so, and if her heart ever throbbed wildly against some delicate insinuation or implied rebuke, she crushed it down again, blaming her own awkwardness and ignorance rather than the fine relations who had stood pre-eminent in her childish imagination. She might not so readily have reconciled herself to the many mortifications she endured, but for the sustaining influence of Mr. Dinsmore’s smiles and encouraging words. Ever ready to praise, and with never a word of blame, he would say to the other ladies, “ you are looking shocking to-night,” and they could afford to bear it—they never did look so ; but whatever Charlotte wore was in exquisite taste—at least he said so. And yet Mr. Dinsmore was not really and at heart a hypocrite, except indeed in the continued and ostentatious display of private griefs. Constitutionally, he was a flatterer, so that he could not pass the veriest mendicant without pausing to say, “ Really, you are as fine a looking old beggar-man as I have met this many a day !” Whether he was disinterested and desired only to confer pleasure upon others, or whether he wished to win hearts to himself, I know not—I only know, no opportunity of speaking gracious words ever escaped him.

However or whatever this disposition was, Charlotte interpreted all his speeches kindly. “ She had eyes only for what was good,” he said, and the sombre shadow of affliction in which he stood, certainly gave him an appearance of sincerity. When the Misses Bailey were thrown, or rather when they threw themselves in his way, he said his delight could not be expressed—they seemed to have the air of the mountain maids about them that made him feel at home in their presence.

But when he praised one, generally, he disparaged another, and he not unfrequently said on these occasions, "I have been sacrificing an hour to that country cousin of yours," or, "I have been benevolently engaged," pointing toward Charlotte. Then came exchanges of smiles and glances, which seemed to say, "We understand each other perfectly—and nobody else understands us." One day, while thus engaged in playing the agreeable, Charlotte having finished her dish-washing, came in, her hands red and shining from the suds. Mr. Dinsmore smiled, and, with meaning, added, "Do you remember where Elizabeth tells some clodhopper, the reputed husband of Amy Robsart, I think, that his boots well nigh overcame my Lord of Leicester's perfumery!" and in the burst of laughter which followed, the diplomatist rose and joined the unsuspecting girl, saying, as he seated himself beside her, and playfully took two of her fingers in his, "You have been using yellow soap, and the fragrance attracted me at once—there is no perfume I like half so well. Why, you might spend hundreds of dollars for essential oils, and nice extracts, and after all, if I could get it, I would prefer the aroma of common yellow soap—it's better than that of violets."

"I have been talking to those frivolous girls," he continued, after a moment, and with the manner of one who had been acting a part and was really glad to be himself again: "rather pretty," in a soliloquising sort of way, "but their beauty is not of the fresh, healthful style I admire."

"I thought," said Charlotte, half pettishly, "you admired them very much!"

"Yes, as I would a butterfly," he said, "but they have not the thrifty and industrious habits that could ever win my serious regard—my love;" and his earnest tone and admiring look were more flattering than the meaning of his words. Charlotte crushed her handkerchief with one hand and smoothed her heavy black hair with the other, to conceal the red burning of her cheek. Mr. Dinsmore continued, "Yes, I have been thinking since I came here, that this is the best way in the world to obtain health and happiness—this rural way of life, I mean. Just see what a glorious scene presents itself!" and he drew the

young girl to the recess of a window, and talked of the cattle and sheep, the meadow and woodland, with the enthusiasm of a devoted practical farmer.

“Of course,” said Charlotte, “my predilections are all in favor of the habits to which I have been used.”

“Another proof of your genuine good sense,” and Mr. Dinsmore folded close both the little red hands of Charlotte within his own soft white ones, but with less of gallantry than sincere appreciation of her sweet simplicity and domestic excellencies. And he presently went on to say, that if he ever found any happiness again, it must be with some such dear angel as herself, and in the healthful, inspiriting occupation of a farmer. True, he did not say in so many simple words, “I should like to marry you, Charlotte,” but the nameless things words cannot interpret, said it very plainly to the unsophisticated, simple-minded, true-hearted Charlotte. Poor man, he seemed to her so melancholy, so shut out from sympathy, it was almost a duty to lighten the weary load that oppressed him.

But I cannot record all the sentiment mingled in the recess of that window. I am ignorant of some particulars; and if I were not, such things are interesting only to lovers. But I know a shadow swept suddenly across the sweetest light that for Charlotte had ever brightened the world. The window, beside which these lovers sat, if we may call them lovers, overlooked the highway for half a mile or more; and as they sat there it chanced that a funeral procession came winding through the dust and under the windy trees far down the hill. It was preceded by no hearse or other special carriage for the dead, for in country places the coffin is usually placed in an open wagon, and beneath a sheet, carried to the grave-yard. So, from their elevated position, they could see, far off, the white shape in the bottom of the wagon. Mr. Dinsmore’s attentions became suddenly abstracted from the lady beside him, and the painful consciousness of bereavement, from which he had almost escaped, weighed on him with tenfold violence. “Hush, hush,” he said, in subdued and reproachful accents, as she made attempts to talk of something besides shrouds. “Florence,” he continued, burying his face in his hands, and as though swept

by a sudden passion from the consciousness of a living presence, "why was I spared when you were taken, and why am I not permitted to go voluntarily"—he abruptly broke off the sentence, and, rising, rushed from the house. Charlotte arose, too, her heart troubled and trembling, and followed him with her eyes, as he staggered blindly forward to obtain a nearer view of the procession, every now and then raising himself on tiptoe, that he might see the coffin more distinctly.

In the suburbs of the city, and adjoining the grounds of Captain Bailey, lay the old grave-yard termed the Potter's Field, and across the sloping stubble land, toward this desolate place, Charlotte bent her steps, and seated on the roots of a blasted tree, on a hill-side, waited for the procession. Gloomy enough was the scene, not relieved by one human figure, as perhaps she had hoped to find it. To the South hung clouds of smoke over crowded walls, with here and there white spires shooting upward, and in one opening among the withered trees, she caught a glimpse of the Ohio, and over all and through all sounded the din of busy multitudes. In the opposite direction were scattered farm-houses, and meadows, and orchards, with sheep grazing and cattle pasturing, and blue cheerful columns of smoke drifted and lifted on the wind. And just at her feet, and dividing the two pictures, lay this strip of desolated and desecrated ground, the Potter's Field. It was inclosed by no fence, and troops of pigs and cows eked out a scanty sustenance about the place. One of these starved creatures, having one horn dangling loosely about her ear—in consequence of some recent quarrel about the scanty grass perhaps—drew slowly toward the hollow nearest the place where Charlotte sat, and drank from a little grave which seemed to have been recently opened. The soil was marshy—so much so that the slightest pit soon filled with water. The higher ground was thickly furrowed with rows of graves, and two or three, beside this open one, had been made in the very bottom of the hollow. Nearer and nearer came the funeral train. It consisted of but few persons—men, and women, and children—the last looking fearfully and wonderingly about, as led by the hands of their parents they trod the narrow path between the long lines of

mounds. Forward walked a strong stalwart middle-aged man, bearing in his arms the coffin—that of a little child; and Charlotte shuddered to think of the cold damp bed which was waiting for it. There seemed to be no clergyman in attendance; and without hymn or prayer, the body that had slept always in its mother's arms till now, was laid in the earth, and in the obscurest and loneliest corner of the loneliest of all burial places, left alone. Closer than the rest, even pressing to the edge of the grave, was a pale woman, whose eyes looked down more earnestly than the eyes of the others; and that it was, and not the black ribbon crossed plainly about the straw bonnet—which indicated the mother. Hard by, but not so near the grave, stood a man holding in his arms a child of some two years, very tightly, as though the grave should not get that; and once he put his hand to his eyes; but he turned away before the woman, and as he did so, kissed the cheek of the little child in his arms—she thought only of the dead.

The sun sunk lower and lower, and was gone; the windy evening came dimly out of the woods, shaking the trees and rustling the long grass; the last lengths of light drew themselves from the little damp heap, and presently the small grey headstones were lost from view. And, scarcely disturbing the stillness, the funeral people returned to their several homes—for the way was dusty and they moved slowly—almost as slowly as they came. There were no songs of birds in the twilight—not even a hum of insects; the first were gone, and the last, or such of them as still lived, were crept under fallen leaves, and were quietly drowsing into nothingness. No snakes slipt noiselessly along the dust-path, hollowing their slow ways. They too were gone—some dropping into the frosty cracks of the ground, and others, pressed flat, lay coiled under decaying logs and loose stones. So, at such a time and in such a place, the poor little baby was left alone, and the parents went to their darkened cottage, the mother to try to smile upon the child that was left, while her eyes are tearful and she sees only the vacant cradle,—and the father to make the fire warm and cheerful, and essay with soft words to win the heavy-hearted wife from their common sorrow. They are poor, and have no

time to sit mourning, and as the mother prepares the scanty meal, the father will deal out to the impatient cows hay and corn, more liberally than his garnerers can well afford, for to-night he feels like doing good to everything.

Something in this way ran the thoughts of Charlotte, as slowly and sadly she retraced her steps, trying to make herself believe she would have felt no less lonely at any other time if she had witnessed so mournful a scene. And in part she deceived herself: not quite, however, for her eyes were wandering searchingly from side to side of the path, and now and then wistfully back, though she could scarcely distinguish the patches of fading fennel from the thick mounds of clay. Perhaps she fancied Mr. Sully Dinsmore still lingered among the shadows to muse of the dead.

Nothing like justice can here be done to the variously accomplished Sully Dinsmore. Charlotte requires no elaborate painting; a young and pretty country girl—with a heart, except in its credulity, like most other human hearts, yearning and hopeful—as yet she had distilled from no keen disappointment a bitter wisdom. Little joys and sorrows made up the past; her present seemed portentous of great events.

“Where is Kate?” she asked one day, in the hope of learning what she did not dare to ask; and Sally replied in a way that she meant to be kindly, and certainly thought to be wise, by saying, “She is in some recess, I suppose, comforting poor Mr. Dinsmore, who seems to distribute his attentions most liberally. It was only this morning,” she added, “that against a lament for the dead Florence, he patched the story of his love for me.”

Charlotte joined in the laugh, but with an ill grace, and still more reluctantly followed when Sally led the way toward the absentees, saying in a whisper, “Let us reconnoitre—all stratagems fair in war, you know.”

But whether the stratagem was fair or not, it failed of the success which Sally had expected, for they no sooner came within hearing of voices than Mr. Dinsmore was heard descanting in a half melancholy, half enthusiastic tone, of the superiority of all western products. “Why, Captain Bailey,” said

he, speaking more earnestly than before, "I would not live east of the mountains for anything I can think of—not for hardly anything in the world!" Such childish simplicity of speech made it difficult to think him insincere; and Charlotte, at least did not, but was the more confirmed in her previous notions, that he was a weary, broken-hearted man, sick of the world and pining for some solitude, "with one sweet spirit for his minister."

Whether Sally's good intentions sprang from envy and jealousy, it might be difficult to decide; but Charlotte attributed only these feelings to her, as she petulantly turned away with the exclamation—"Pshaw! Kate has left him, and he is trying to make father believe the moon is made of green cheese!"

From that day the cousins began to be more and more apart; the slight disposition to please and be pleased, which had on both sides been struggling for an existence, died, and did not revive again.

It was perhaps a week after this little scene, and in the mean time Mr. Dinsmore had been no unsuccessful wooer; in truth, Charlotte began to feel a regret that she had not selected a white instead of a red dress; all the world looked brighter to her than it had ever done before, dreary as the season was.

The distance between the cousins and herself widened every day; but what cared she for this, so long as Mr. Dinsmore said they were envious, selfish, frivolous, and unable to appreciate her. I cannot tell what sweet visions came to her heart; but whatever they were, she found converse with them pleasanter than friends—pleasanter than the most honeyed rhymes poet ever syllabled. And so she kept much alone, busy with dreams—only dreams.

V.

It was one of the mildest and loveliest of all the days that make our western autumns so beautiful. The meadow sides, indeed, were brown and flowerless; the lush weeds of summer lopped down, black and wilted, along the white dry dust of the roadside; the yellow mossy hearts of the fennel were faded dry; the long, shriveled iron-weeds had given their red bushy

tops for a thin greyish down, and the trees had lost their summer garments; still, the day was lovely, and all its beauties had commended themselves with an unwonted degree of accuracy to the eyes of Charlotte—Mr. Dinsmore had asked her to join him in an autumn ramble and search for the last hardy flowers. All the morning she was singing to herself,

“ Meet me by moonlight alone,
And then I will tell thee a tale.”

It had been stipulated by Mr. Dinsmore, “so as not to excite observation,” he said, that they should leave the house separately, and meet at an appointed place, secure from observation. Why a ramble in search of flowers should be clandestine, the young lady did not pause to inquire, but she went forth at the time appointed, with a cheek bright almost as the calico she wore.

On the grassy slope of a hollow that ran in one direction through a strip of partly cleared woodland, and in the other toward an old orchard of low heavy-topped trees, she seated herself, fronting the sun, which was not shining, but seemed only a soft yellow spot in the thick haze that covered all the sky. A child might have looked on it, for scarcely had it more brightness than the moon. The air was soft and loving, as though the autumn was wooing back the summer. The grass was sprouting through the stubble, and only the clear blue sky was wanting to make the time spring-like, and a bird or two to sing of “April purposes.” It was full May-time in the heart of Charlotte, and for a time, no bird could sing more gaily than she, as she sat arranging and disarranging the scarlet buds she had twined among her hair; now placing them on one side, now on the other: now stripping off a leaf or two, and now adding a bud or blades of grass.

So an hour was wiled away; but though it seemed long, Charlotte thought perhaps it was not an hour after all; it could not be, or surely Mr. Dinsmore would have joined her. The day was very still, and she knew the time seemed longer when there were no noises. And yet when she became aware of sounds, for a cider-mill was creaking and grating in the edge

of the orchard, they seemed only to make the hours more long and lonesome.

Round and round moved the horse, but she could not hear the crushing and grinding of the apples—only the creaking of the mill. Two or three little boys were there, whistling and hopping about—now riding the horse, and now bending over the tub and imbibing cider with a straw. An old man was moving briskly among bundles and barrels, more from a habit of industry, it seemed, than because there was anything to do. But, try as she would, Charlotte could not interest herself in their movements. An uneasy sensation oppressed her—she could not deceive herself any longer—it was time, and long past the time appointed. At first she looked back on the way she had come, long and earnestly; then she arose and walked backward and forward in the path, with a quick step at first, then more irresolutely and slowly. The yellow spot in the clouds had sunken very low and was widening and deepening into orange, when she resumed the old seat, folded her hands listlessly in her lap, and looked toward the cider-mill. The creaking was still, the horses harnessed, and barrels, and bundles of straw, and boys, all in the wagon. The busy farmer was making his last round, to be sure that nothing was amiss, and this done he climbed before the barrels and bundles and boys, cracked his whip, and drove away toward the orange light in the clouds. Mr. Dinsmore was not coming—of that she was confident, and anger, mortification, and disappointment, all mingled in her bosom, producing a degree of misery she had never before experienced.

Not till night had spread one dull leaden color all over the sky, did she turn her steps homeward, in her thoughts bitterly revolving all Mr. Dinsmore had said, and the much more he had suggested. And, as she thus walked, a warm bright light dried up the tears, and she quickened her step—she had fallen back on that last weakness—some unforeseen, perhaps terrible event, had detained him, and all the reproaches she had framed were turned upon herself; she had harshly blamed him, when it was possible, even probable, that he could not come. The world was full of accidents, dangers, and deaths—some of these

might have overtaken him, and he perhaps had been watching as anxiously for her as she for him. At this thought she quickened her steps, and was soon at the house. The parlor was but dimly lighted, and, with a trembling and anxious heart, she entered, and recognizing Mr. Dinsmore in one of the recesses of the windows, she obeyed the first impulse, hurried toward him, and parting the heavy and obscuring draperies, said, in an earnest whisper, "Why did you not come?"

"Come—where?" he replied, indolently; and added, in a moment, "Ay, yes, really, I forgot it."

A half sigh reached her, and turning, she became aware that a young and pretty lady occupied the corner of the window opposite. No further explanation was needed.

With feelings never known before, pent in her heart, Charlotte sought the chamber in which she was used to sleep—the lamp was faintly burning, and the bright carpet and the snowy counterpane and curtains, and low cushioned seats, looked very comfortable; and as Charlotte contrasted all with the homely garret in which she had slept at home, the contrast made it luxury.

In her heart, she wished she had never slept any where else but under the naked rafters of her father's house. "I should have known better than to come," she thought; "it is no wonder they think the woods the best place for me." Now, no one had said this, but she attributed it and many such thoughts to her *rich* friends, as she called them, and then set herself as resentfully against them as though they had said they despised her.

Her eyes turned toward the night; she was sitting very still, with all bitter and resentful and sorrowful feelings running through her heart, when a soft tap on the door summoned her to answer. With a haughty step and repellent manner she went forward; and when, opening the door, she saw before her the pleasant-faced little lady she had seen in the window, below, she said, very coldly, "You have mistaken the apartment, I think," and was turning away, when the intruder eagerly but artlessly caught up both her hands, saying, in a tone of mingled sweetness and heartiness, "No, I am not mis-

taken; I know you, if you do not know me—I could not wait for a formal introduction, but commissioned myself to bring you down to tea. My name,” she added, “is Louise—Louise Herbert.”

Charlotte bowed stiffly, and saying, “You are very obliging, but I do n’t want any tea,” closed the door abruptly, and resumed her old seat, looking out into the night as before.

“I suppose it was mere curiosity that brought her here,” she said, by way of justifying her rudeness; “of course, she could feel no interest in me.” And further, she even tried to approve of herself by saying she always hated pretence, and for a fine lady like Miss Herbert, who had evidently been accustomed to all the refinements of wealth, to affect any liking for a poor ignorant country girl, as she chose to call herself, was absurd. In truth, she was glad she had shown independence at least, and let the proud creature know she would not cringe because of her silk dress, or white hands, or pretty face. She did n’t want anything of her—she could live without her, and she would. And rising and pacing the room, she made what she thought a very wise and dignified resolve. When they were all asleep she would tie in a bundle what few things she had, and walk home; she would not ask her uncle to take her—she would not tell him she was going—he might find it out the best way he could. This decision made, she undressed and went to bed, as usual, and tried to compose herself to sleep by thinking that she was about as ugly and ill-bred, and unfortunate in every way, as she could be; that everybody disliked and despised her, and that all who were connected with her were ashamed of her. Nor was this any wonder—she was ashamed of herself. There was one thing she could do, nevertheless, and that she would do—go back and remain where she belonged. Thus she lay tossing and tumbling, and frightening the drowsy god quite from the neighborhood of her pillow, when Kate entered, accompanied by the agreeable looking little woman, who, being introduced, begged in a jocular way, that she would afford her sleeping-room for only one night. “I could not,” she added very sweetly, “give my friends the

trouble of making an extra bed, if you would allow me to share yours."

Charlotte answered, coldly and concisely, that she was ready to do anything to oblige, and placing herself close against the wall, buried her face in the pillow, and lay stiff and straight and still. But Miss Herbert, singularly oblivious of the young woman's uncivil behavior, prepared for sleep,

"And lay down in her loveliness."

"How cold you are," she said, creeping close to her companion, and putting her arm about her. Charlotte said nothing, and gave a hitch, which she meant to be from, but, somehow, it was toward the little woman. "Oh, you are quite in a chill," she added, giving her an embrace, and in a moment she had hopped from the bed, and in her clean, white, night dress, was fluttering out of the room.

"I never had such a night-gown," thought Charlotte, "with its ruffles and lace trimming—I never had any at all," and she resumed her old position, which, however, she had scarcely gained, when the guest came fluttering back, and folding off the counterpane, wrapt, as though she were a baby, her own nicely warmed woollen petticoat about her feet, and having tucked the clothing down, slipped under it and nestled Charlotte in her arms, as before, saying, "There, is n't that better?"

"Yes—thank you," and her voice trembled, as she yielded to this determined kindness.

"Another night we must have an additional blanket," said the lady; "that is, if I succeed in keeping you from freezing to-night," and pressing the chilly hands of Charlotte close in her bosom, she fell asleep. And Charlotte, thinking she would be at home the next night, fell asleep too, and woke not till along the counterpane ran the shadows of the red clouds of morning.

But I am lingering, and must hasten to say, that Louise Herbert was one of the most lovable, generous, and excellent of women; that she had been accustomed to affluence was true, and that she could not know the feelings of Charlotte, who had been born and bred in comparative poverty, was not

her fault; from her position in life, she had naturally fallen into certain agreeing habits and ways of thinking, but her soul was large, her heart warm, and her apprehensions quick; and when she saw Charlotte, and heard the trembling inquiry, and the answer of indifference, she read the little history, which to the young girl was so much, and appreciating, so far as she might, her sorrows, determined to win her love; for at once her heart went out toward her—for she was unsuspecting and unhesitating, always ready to find something good in every one.

Even Charlotte found it impossible not to love her. She did n't know why, but she could get on a stool at her feet, lay her head on her lap, and forget that Louise was not as poor and humble as herself; or, if she remembered it, the silks and plumes and jewelry worn by her, did n't make her envious or jealous—it gave her pleasure to see Louise look pretty.

Mr. Dinsmore, after some vain attempts to coquette and flirt with Miss Herbert, who had too much tact, or was too indifferent to him, to pay much regard to his overtures, departed rather abruptly, merely sending his adieus to Charlotte, who was engaged in the kitchen at the time, and who had been in the shade since the coming of Miss Herbert.

And after a month of eating and sleeping, talking and laughing, baking and making and mending, Louise was joined by her party, who had left her with her friends, the Baileys, while they continued a ruralizing tour through the West, and Charlotte's heart grew desolate at the thought of separation from her. But such a misfortune was not yet to be; for before the departure of the young lady, she persuaded the parents of Charlotte (who could not help liking, though they regarded her very much as they would a being from another sphere) to allow their daughter to accompany her home.

With a heart full of curious joy, but with tears in her eyes, Charlotte took leave of the old home that she had so despised, and yet loved so well.

VI.

A year or two afterwards, changes and chances brought me for a moment within the circle in which she moved as the admired star. The rooms were brilliant with lights and flowers, and gaiety and beauty, and intellect; and the lately shrinking country girl was the cynosure of all eyes—the most envied, the most dreaded, the most admired, the most loved.

When my attention was drawn first toward her, there were some voices that had sounded at least through the length and breadth of their own country, softened to the most dulcet of tones, for her sake; and she seemed to listen indifferently, as though her thoughts were elsewhere.

I naturally recalled the humble life she had led—my walk to her house along the autumn woods—the letter which had been the key opening a new life to her—and while I was thus musing, I heard a voice which seemed not altogether unfamiliar—so low, and soft, and oily,—“Really, Miss Herbert, I was never so proud as to-night—that *you* should have remembered me on such an occasion as this! I cannot express the honor I feel, the obligations you have placed me under.”

And then, as if constrained to throw aside all formality, and express himself with simple sincerity, he continued—“Why, how in the world did you get all these great folks together! I don’t believe there is a house in the United States, except yours, that ever held at once so many celebrities.”

Before my eye fell on him, I recognized Mr. Dinsmore, and observed him with increasing interest as he made his way to Miss Ryan, who appeared not to see him, till having pushed and elbowed his way, he addressed her with the familiarity of an old and intimate friend, and as though he were not only delighted himself, but felt assured that she must be much more so. But she hesitated—looked at him inquiringly—and seemed to say by her manner, as plainly as possible, “What impudent fellow are you—and what do you want?”

“Surely, you remember meeting with me,” the gentleman said, a little discomfited, but in his most insinuating tone.

“When—where?” she asked, as if she would remember him if she could.

“Don’t you remember,” he said, “a month with Sulley Dinsmore at Captain Bailey’s?”

“Ah, yes,” she replied, quoting his own words on a former occasion; “Really, I had forgotten it.”

He shrunk a head and shoulders in stature, and slipt aside like a detected dog; and after one or two ineffectual attempts to rally, took leave in modest and becoming silence.

An hour afterward we sat alone—Charlotte and I—in the dim corner of a withdrawing room; and as I was congratulating her on her new position, especially on the beauty of her appearance that night, she buried her face in my lap, and burst into tears; and when I tried to soothe her, but wept the more. At length, lifting herself up, and drying her eyes, she said: “What would mother think, if she saw me here, and thus?”—And she scanned her gay dress, as though it were something neither right nor proper for her to wear. “And dear little Willie and sturdy Jonathan,” she continued: “I suppose they sleep in their little narrow bed under the rafters yet, and I—I—would I not feel more shame than joy if they were to come in here to-night! Oh, I wish I had staid at home and helped mother spin, and read the sermon to father when the weekly paper came. His hair is getting white, is n’t it?” she asked, pulling the flowers out of her own, and throwing them on the ground.

My wish was fulfilled—Charlotte had attained the position I had thought her so fitted to adorn; but was she happier? In the little gain was there not much loss—the fresh young feeling, the capacity to enjoy, the hope, the heart, which, once gone, never come back.

I cannot trace her biography all out: since that night of triumph and defeat, our paths have never crossed each other.

THE SUICIDE.

WHAT a great thing it is to live a true life—true to ourselves, true to God! And I am not sure but that the one truth always includes the other. Here and there, treading along the dusty by-paths and climbing over the barren heaths of life, we see, elevating our faith in humanity, and throwing about our own weak resolves the excellent beauty of a good example, men and women whose lives are a continual praise and prayer.

As I look back on the way I have come, I see along the darkness many faces shining with the glory and beauty which is away above and beyond this world. Oh, Thou, whose best name is Love, forgive me, that I have seen, and yet been so little instructed; that I have heard, and yet trodden so falteringly!

A little way from the centre of Clovernook stands a lonesome old house, supposed to be haunted. I know not as to that; but if unquiet spirits are ever permitted, as some respite of their ill, to slip from the shroud, or the deeper darkness that is below the shroud, I remember no place which would seem a more fitting habitation for them. Spiders have made nests in the bushes, and nettles have covered up the grass; the rose-vines are half living and half dead, half clinging to the moss on the wall, and half choked together on the ground; the wind, blowing as it listeth, has from time to time lopped away the branches of the trees, and, with no hand to remove them, they remain dangling earthward like skeletons: among their dry forks are the nests of birds that would not build near any other house.

And yet the house is not without an inhabitant; sometimes through the cracked panes you may see the sweet face of a little child, looking like a flower leaning from some cranny toward the light; for whole hours together you may see it, the

pale cheeks, and the melancholy eyes, and the hair, black as night, giving to the child's face a thoughtful maturity of expression quite beyond her years. You would feel, I think, that a strange if not a fearful history was involved in that little life; it seems as if you saw away down the depths of the steadfast eyes full fountains of tears. The dress of the little one is simple, even rustic, and sometimes sadly unsuited to the season, betraying that the careful hands of the mother have been folded far away from its wants.

Ofteneest when the twilight falls the child is at the window, watching for the bats, as they turn blindly hither and thither, or cling silently to the decaying trunks of giant trees; and at that hour sometimes, but never at any other, the hand of an old man rests on the locks of the orphan, and the head bows down as beneath a weight; the prattle which it has been making to itself is still, and the light of laughter grows dim in the drooped eyes turning from the eyes which look down upon it.

It is a very sad thing to see them thus together—the baby brow as if shrinking consciously from the crown of gray hairs. I know not how it was, but some invisible and living thing seemed standing between them. Often, as I passed the place, I have lingered and dreamed, till of the whole scene my shut eyes make pictures. I remember when the moonlight threw less sombre shadows on the wall; I remember when the grass was cut smoothly from the edges of the walks, overgrown now till but a narrow and irregular path is left; and I remember when among the flowers there was one fairer than they.

Poor Isabel! the grass about her grave is not trodden down by feet that cannot stay away; and the low headstone is nameless, but beside it the blue thistle blooms and dies, summer after summer; for nature, at least, is never neglectful, and never partial. The old man I have written of is her father; and small wonder it is that he is weary and broken-hearted, for he can only say,

Two comforts yet are mine to keep—
Betwixt her and her faithless lover
Bright grass will spread a flowery cover,
And Isabel is well asleep.

Poor comfort enough for a desolate old man to keep about his heart.

The smile of the little child who sits at his hearth cannot shine into his heart ; or if it does, it will never thaw the chill cast there by the death of the mother—her loss by her more than death.

It is only the old story.

On the mossy steps that come down among the lilacs she used to sit, years ago, her pious father beside her, and as the gray ashes gathered on the red embers of the sunset, she

“Lent to the rhyme of the poet
The music of her voice.”

Then there came a time when another sat between the father and daughter ; then she and the other, not the father, sat alone—sometimes late into the unfriendly night. And all this while the roses were not so bright as the cheek of Isabel, nor the birds so gay as her songs. Ah me, that the sparkle on the surface of the fountain should ever hide the coil of the serpent at the bottom !

The summer waned and faded, and the chill rains broke up the flowers ; the insects crept under the falling leaves, and the cattle stood all day near the stalls ; and Isabel, as the night came down, lingered restless and anxious at the window, her eyes aching as they gazed into vacancy. So the days came and went, and the nights, darker, and darker, and darker, settled down over the world. The maple forest along the hill was like a ridge of gold against the bottom of the sky, and the oaks came out of the sharp frosts as if dipped in blood, and plenty and glory contended in the orchards and the cornfields ; but Isabel did not sing as she had sung in other days. All her household tasks were done as before, even more promptly and perfectly, perhaps ; but her step had lost its elasticity, and as you looked on her you thought that she also should sing—

“My head is like to rend, Willie,
My heart is like to break—
I'm wearing off my feet, Willie,
I'm dying for your sake.”

And here comes a dark chapter that I cannot write. Enough that when the red fire-light shone through snow that drifted on the pane, the house was very still—the step and voice and smile and blithe laugh of Isabel were gone, all and forever.

The grief that was in the father's heart spoke not in words or sighs, but it consumed his spirit and whitened his hair. It seemed as if remorse were gnawing his passage to the grave; for he had dealt hardly and harshly with his child; and when his dim eyes lost trace of her wanderings, visions of her shaped themselves very darkly; but he only listened to the winds, and turned to the darkness for comfort, and not to the eyes or the voice of another.

The world was the same, but the stars were swept out of heaven. Wild blew the winds of the March morning, thawing paths among the snow along the southern slopes, and nurturing and wooing out of gloom the hardiest flowers; the red-bird and the black-bird whistled among the yet bare boughs, for the clouds that rain down beauty had not yet traveled along the meadows; Winter was lingering in the lap of Spring. And the old homestead looked sad. The little brown-bird that had built in the lilac bush, summer after summer, for successive years, twittered and chirped in melancholy sort about the old nest for a few days, now flitting undeterminedly hither and thither, picking fine moss and shreds, and now dropping them again, and chanting a note of sorrow ill-suited to the time and the work. With the first rain the old nest was beaten down quite past repairing, and after an unusually mournful crying, the beautiful favorite disappeared. The very smoke of the chimney seemed to come up from a hearth where there was no cheerfulness—not drifting off in graceful wreaths of blue, but black and heavy, hanging on the hill-sides or settling to the ground. There was no step about the flower-beds or in the garden, and no linen bleaching white on the first grass.

The sunshine grows warmer, day by day, but the windows of Isabel's chamber are fast shut, the fringe of the counterpane is heavy with dust, and the pillow has been unprest for a long while. Poor Isabel!

Sometimes the door opens, stealthily, as it were, and a gray-

headed man comes out, and sits down in the sun, or looks earnestly about, as though for something or for some one he does not see. If he walks by the wheat-fields, the blast of the mildew is all the same as their beauty, for the light in his old eyes is dim; and his step falls heavy, as though it were near the last.

“Lingering he raised his latch at eve,
Though tired in heart and limb;
He loved no other place, and yet
Home was no home to him.”

In all the world there is no soft voice to comfort him as he goes chilled and wearied down into the grave. Why should the waving harvest make him glad, or the spring rouse his pulses to hope? All the beauty of this world, which God so pronounced good, shines and blossoms in vain for that heart from which the flowers of love have been beaten down till they have no longer any life.

I said it was a March morning, that the winds were wild, and that Isabel was gone—wherefore and whither there were busy and reproachful tongues enough to tell. She has heard her father say, with less of sorrow than of indignant passion, “I am childless in my old age, for thou art but as a thorn in my flesh!” And from all kindness and all pity, through the moonless midnight, her steps have gone drearily and wearily. And each is alone—father and child; and only the light of eternity can dry up the great sea that has come in between them.

Midway between the woodland and his house, walked the father, musing of his daughter, and listening to the stirring of the black-thorn boughs a little distance away—listening to their stirring, but not once turning his eyes from the ground, else he had seen the pale face and haggard form of a woman, crouching from the sharp wind; not to shelter herself—there is no chill, not even the terriblest of all, that she would shrink from; but close in her bosom, and playing with the tangled hair that falls down from her forehead, nestles a baby that has never felt a March wind till now. “You, poor darling, at least, are innocent,” she says; “surely he will love you and keep you.” And

her arms reach forward, and her voice says, "Father!" Brightly over the world breaks the sunshine, and her sin seems darker than it did among clouds; her arms fall helpless, and her lips are hushed. So, under the boughs of the black-thorn, she waits for the evening.

Toward sunset the air became more bitterly cold, and the child moaned often, and looked up to its mother with a hungry and appealing expression. And stilling the tumult of its sorrow and pain with a voice low and earnest, but scarcely fond, the woman waited and watched till the forked boughs of the woodland seemed like dead brands among the fires of the descending night; and the winds softened themselves, and came down and mixed with her lullaby; and so the baby fell asleep—for the last time in a mother's arms.

There seemed no twilight, but the day was gone at once, and from under the muffling wings of night peered the stars, and the moon, chilly and white, climbed among them, dropping her icy splendors toward the earth. From the gable of the homestead fell the dark-pointed shadow, and the hearth-light glimmered through the window, soft and warm.

Folding close the sleeping child, toward the dark shadow and the warm light the forlorn young mother bent her steps, and struck presently in a deep path, or what had once been one—for the grass had grown over its edges till it seemed little more than a crack in the sod—when, pausing, she looked backward and forward—forward toward the homestead, backward to the woods, dismal as they should be if planted but to screen the gates of that black world in which there is no hope. In other days the path, so narrow now, had been wide enough for two. After a little pause, she goes on again, slowly, and stooping often to kiss the forehead of the little one sleeping in her arms.

At last she is in the shadow of the gable, and just before her glimmers the light of the curtainless window. The night lies cold and bleak around her; and stealthily as if she were a murderess, she approaches, and peers, hesitating, through the pane.

All the old familiar things meet her eye: so still she is, so hushed the very beating of her heart, that she hears the chirp

of the cricket answer the ticking of the clock; the embers make red shadows on the wall, and she sees the desolate father, sitting sad and stern. Suddenly across his face there passes a softer expression, and her heart throbs quick. His eyes turn toward a picture of herself that hangs opposite the window, and her eyes follow his. "He thinks of me piteously, at least," she says. "I will go in, and say I have sinned against Heaven and in his sight." Closer and closer, obeying the wild sad impulse, she presses her face to the glass, when, all at once, her reviving energies are paralyzed, and her fluttering hopes struck dead. A steady hand reverses the fair, girlish face of the picture, toward the wall; then the man turns, and for a moment the eyes of the two meet; and eagerly, yearningly, the child bends forward; but the father shrinks away. It was but for a moment, yet that was all too much. The overstrung nerves gave way; and, laying the baby at her feet, with a moan, that had in it, "My God, I am forsaken!" she walked blindly and deafly back the path which she had come; for she did not hear the voice that called after her, again and again, "Isabel, Isabel!"

How often, in our impetuous anxiety, we fail of the good which a little calmness and patience would have won! The day after Chatterton terminated his miserable life, there came a man into the city inquiring for him, with all he had prayed for.

In the heart of the woods the path I have spoken of terminated beside a deep and sluggish pool, fringed now with jagged and sharp splinters and points of ice, but the middle waters were unfrozen, and bore up little islands of moss and dead leaves; and across these black waters, in the wild winds of the days and the nights that followed, streamed over the white face, that, after a time, came up, as if still pressing toward the light, the long tresses of the woman who had been so wretched.

Now, beneath the mossy mound hard by, she is decently asleep, nor turns for the moaning of the night wind, nor for the step of the little child that sometimes, in summer, walks there, gathering flowers and singing to herself.

If there be one prayer more than another that we need

always in our hearts, it is the one He taught us, "Lead us not into temptation." How many, treading in as straight a path, and with as firm a step, perhaps, as ourselves, worn and weary with the toils of the long and hard way, beckoned aside into what seemed some cool and sheltered place of rest, have been lost forever. Vain, henceforth, are all their struggles; darkly between them and the confidence of the world, between them and all friendships and sympathies, and most of all, between them and their own self-respect, rises evermore the shadow of the tempter they have followed.

Is not this a retribution terrible enough—that men and women should pause from their own vocations, and, with haughty words and withering looks, measure the distance between themselves and the fallen, even when their own way has been kept with feeble and faltering steps, and when the very error they so despise, has shone up like a light revealing the hideous darkness into which they else would have gone? It is of the erring I speak, now, and not of the criminal. The soul may be darkened from its original beauty, yet still it is precious, else in heaven there would not be such joy over sinners that repent.

If we have kept our robes from the dust, and our hands and our hearts clean, surely we can afford to be charitable and merciful towards those who have not; but even if so, we are ever subject to vanity, and the best and worthiest man or woman has reason to cry, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!" before the Searcher of hearts. Mercifulest of all, when the wicked woman was brought before him, was he who was without sin, saying, "Neither do I condemn thee."

One little act of kindness, which says to a degenerate brother, "I am also a man," and, consequently, no less exposed to temptation, will do more for the building up of a ruinous humanity, than all the fiery-tipped arrows that ever went hissing from indignant hands.

I have little charity for that self-righteousness which mingles with its abhorrence of error no pity for the erring. Breathings of denunciation fill the world, chilling "that best warmth that radiates from the heart, where Love sits brooding over: an

honest purpose," and darkening the great light that is continually round about us. We leave the wretched to "uncomforted and friendless solitude," where, within the fiery circle of evil thought, "the soul emmoulds its essence, hopelessly deformed by sights of evermore deformity."

With other ministrations, thou, O Nature !
 Healest thy wandering and distempered child ;
 Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
 Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,
 Thy melodies of words and winds and waters !
 Till he relent and can no more endure
 To be a jarring and a dissonant thing
 Amid this general dance and minstrelsy ;
 But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
 His angry spirit healed and harmonized
 By the benignant touch of love and beauty.

There is less depravity in the world than we are apt to imagine, and I doubt not but there is something good in almost every nature, which the leaves of kindness might reach, and so the whole man be regenerated.

I began this chapter by allusion to the beauty of true lives ; and if she of whom I have written had died ere the flowers of love were ever made heavy with tears, her life would have been an example of loveliness. God over all, blessed forever ! grant that one wild shadow swept not into nothingness all the light.

THE COLLEGIAN'S MISTAKE.

I.

It was about the middle of the month of July, and intensely hot; scarcely a breeze stirred the russet gold of the wheat-field, in which two men were at work—the one pausing now and then to wipe great drops of sweat from his forehead, and push back his gray hair, as he surveyed the heavy swaths that lay drying in the sun; while the other kept right on, the steady rush of his cradle sending up from the falling grain a thin dust; and bending under the burning heat, and laying swath after swath of the ripe wheat beside him, he moved around the field, hour after hour, never whistling, nor singing, nor surveying the work that was done, nor the work that was to do.

“Willard,” called the old man, as for the third time the youth passed him in his round—and there was something more impatient than kindly in his tone—“Willard, what in the name of sense possesses you to-day? I can generally swing my cradle about as fast as you, old as I am. Leave working for a half-hour; you will gain in the end; and let us cross over by way of the spring, and rest in the shade of the locust for a while.”

“I am not very tired,” answered the boy, without pausing from his work; “go on, and I will join you when I come round again.”

The old man hesitated, cut a few vigorous strokes, threw down his cradle in the middle of the field, and turned back. And well he might; he had need of rest; the grasshoppers could not hum, it was so hot, and the black beetles crept beneath the leaves and under the edges of the loose clods, and the birds hid in the bushes, and dropped their wings and were

still ; only the cold, clammy snakes crawled from their places into the full warmth.

One side of the field lay the public road, heaped with hot dust, fetlock deep ; and now and then a heavy wagon plowed along, drawn by five or six horses, their necks ornamented with bear skins and brass bells, the latter sending tinkling music far across the fields, and cheering the teamster's heart, as beneath his broad-rimmed straw-hat he trod through the dry fennel beside his stout horses. All day the narrow foot-path kept the print of naked feet, left by the school children as they went to and came from their tasks. Bordering the field's edge, opposite this dusty way, was a wooded hill, at the base of which, beneath a clump of trees, burst out, clear and cool, a spring of the purest water. To the north lay other harvest-fields, and the white walls of cottages and homesteads glimmered among the trees ; and to the south, nestled in the midst of a little cherry-orchard, were discernible the brown walls and mossy roof of an old farm-house. A cool, quiet, shady place it looked, and most inviting to the tired laborers ; but it was toward the spring, and not the house, that the old man bent his steps when he left off work.

Having drank, from a cup of leaves, the tired man stretched himself in the thick shadow that ran up the hillside from a cluster of sassafras and elms that grew in the hollow. But he seemed not to rest well ; for every now and then he lifted his head from its pillow of grass, and looked toward the field, where the young man was still at his labor. More than an hour had elapsed, when, for the third time nearing the shadows, and seeing, perhaps, the anxious look directed toward him, he threw down his cradle, and staggered, rather than walked, along the hollow toward the spring, and, throwing himself flat on the ground, he drew in long draughts of water from the cool, mossy stones. As he rose, his cheeks were pale from exhaustion, and his long black hair hung in heavy wet masses down his neck and forehead.

“ Well, my son,” said the older man, rousing from his slumberous reverie, “ you have come at last.” The youth made no reply, and he continued, “ If I had been as smart, we should

have had the field down by sunset ; but I can't work as I used—I am getting old." And his blue eyes grew moist, as, drooping them on the ground, he silently pulled the grass and white clover blossoms that grew at his feet, and scattered them about.

"Oh, no, father, you are not so very old," replied Willard, anxiously and earnestly ; "and I have fewer years before me than you, though I have not lived quite so long."

"It may be so," said the father, "if you continue to work so hard ; your constitution cannot endure as much as mine. See how your hands are trembling, from exhaustion, now."

"That is nothing ; I shall get over it soon, and for the time to come I shall be more prudent ; indeed, I have been thinking that to rise an hour or two earlier, and rest for an hour or two in the heat of the day, would be a wiser disposition of the time." The father made no reply, and he added, "In that way I shall be able to do almost everything, and you need only work for recreation."

"And so, Willard," said the old man, at length, "you have been tasking yourself so heavily to-day on my account?"

The son did not reply directly ; in fact, he had been influenced by far other than kindly feelings toward anybody in the energetic prosecution of his work ; farming was not to his taste ; the excessive heat that day had made him irritable ; and to be revenged on fate, and in defiance of his failing strength, he had labored with all his might. But his sullenness subsided at the first word of kindness ; and he felt that his father was indeed getting old, and that what he said about doing all the work in future was perfectly sincere.

There was a long silence, broken at last by the elder of the two. "You have always had a great notion of books, Willard ; and I have been thinking that if I could send you to college, you might live more easily than I have done."

"If I could go, father, I should be very glad ; but if you were able to send me, I could not be spared very well ;" and in a moment he added, "Could I?" in the hope of hearing something further urged in favor of his wishes.

"There is 'Brock' we might sell," the father remarked,

musingly ; "and then I should be able to spare some hay and oats this fall. Yes, I think we can manage ; that is, if you have a mind to let Brock go."

"I should not mind parting with him ; he is six years old, and will never be worth more than now ; besides, I can buy plenty of horses, good as he, if I ever want them."

An hour was consumed in speculations of one sort and another, and the shadows had crept far up the hill when they arose to resume their occupation.

"But how," said Willard, as they walked toward the field, "will you get along at home ?" for it was now almost a settled point that he should go to college.

"Do n't be troubled about us ; our hearts are here, and that makes work go much easier ; besides, we have lived our day—your mother and I—it is little matter about us ; but you, Willard, you are young and ambitious, and so smart. Linney," he added, after a moment, "will miss you."

The young man seemed not to hear this remark, and taking up their cradles, the father and the son worked and talked together till set of sun. The grain was all down ; and as they swung their cradles over their shoulders to go home, the old man sighed, and, looking on the sparkling eyes and flushed face of the youth, he said, "Perhaps we may never reap this field together again."

Willard had always thought it would make him very happy to know he should not have to swing the cradle any more ; but somehow his father's words made his heart heavy ; and, in spite of the fast-coming beard, he turned away and brushed the tears from his browned cheek with the back of his hand. He tried to count the outside passengers of the stage-coach, as it rattled past, filling all the road with clouds of dust, in vain—he was thinking of something else ; the old farm, that he had sometimes almost hated, looked beautiful now : the ripe standing harvests, and the yellow stubble-fields, stretching away toward the woodland, and the red and orange shadows trembling along the hill-sides and among the green leaves. A little and a little more he lingered, till, finally, where the birds chirped in the hedge which divided the meadow from the

wheat-field, he stopped still. Twitters and trills, and long melancholy cries, and quick gushing songs, all mingled and blended together, and the stir of leaves and the whirr of wings sounded through and over all. The blue morning-glories had puckered up their bells, but looked pretty yet, and the open trumpet-flowers hung bright and flaunting everywhere.

Many a time he had come out to the hedge with Linney Carpenter in the summer twilights. Now he might not come any more; and if he went away, she would forget him—perhaps love some one else.

There was a crashing and cracking of the boughs in the hedge, and Brock, pressing as near as he could, leaned his slender head upon the shoulder of the young man. "No, no, I will not sell you!" he exclaimed, parting away the boughs which divided them; "a thousand dollars would not buy you!" and for a half hour he caressed and talked to the beautiful animal, as though he had been a reasoning creature. At the end of that time he was pretty nearly resolved to think no more of the college; and, dismissing the horse, with an abrupt promise to keep him always, he bent his steps hurriedly homeward. But Brock had either a sudden fit of fondness, or else some premonition of the hard things meditated against him, and he followed his young master at a little distance, droopingly and noiselessly. Willard had just reached the boundary of the cherry-orchard, bending wearily under his cradle, and with his face begrimed with dust and sweat, when a wave of sweet perfumes came against him; and, looking up, he beheld in the path directly before him a graduate of the most celebrated institution of learning then in the west. "Ay, how are you, Hulbert?" he said, approaching, and stripping the kid-glove off his delicate hand.

Willard recognized him as a former school-fellow and play-mate, but his greeting was cold and formal, expressing nothing of the cordial surprise which a sometime absent friend might have expected. Having addressed him as Mr. Welden, he set his cradle on the ground beside him, dashed back his heavy, wet hair, and seemed to wait for the young man to make known

his errand, which, however, he did not at once do, but said instead, something of the heat of the day.

"I should scarcely have expected you to know anything about it," Willard replied, drily.

"Why, I have been making hay, and think I should know," answered Welden; "just look here," and he showed two blisters on the palm of his hand.

But Willard was in one of those dissatisfied moods which an angel could not soften, and, simply saying, "Is it possible?" he took up the cradle again. He felt as if the blistered hands had offered a terrible insult to his own, which were too much accustomed to toil to be affected in that way.

"Will you go to the house, Mr. Welden?" he said, after he had advanced a step or two. The habitual, or, it may be, well-bred amiability of Mr. Welden, seemed not at all disturbed, and, politely assenting, he followed rather than accompanied the moody young farmer to the house, replying for the most part to his own observations.

"He accepts my invitation in the hope of seeing Linney," thought Willard, "and not that he cares anything about me;" but, to his equal surprise and displeasure, the gentleman seemed not to notice Linney at all. "Perhaps he thinks her beneath his notice," said Willard to himself. "If he does, he is mistaken; she is as good as he, or any one like him."

Reaching the house, there was still no perceptible improvement in the youth's temper, despite many kindly advances on the part of his guest.

"And so you are going to college?" Mr. Welden said.

"Ay, indeed am I," he answered, petulantly, and without looking up.

"Willard, Willard!" interposed Mr. Hulbert, with a reproving look, that sent blood mantling into his cheek and forehead; for such correction from his father implied that he was still a boy, and it was that, joined to the knowledge that he merited a more severe rebuke, which stung him.

The family were at tea, and but for the coming pride of manhood, he could have risen from the table, and gone out into the night, and cried. That privilege was denied him, however, and,

trying to feel that he was the injured and unoffending party, he sat sullenly silent till the meal was concluded.

Mr. Welden then said, apologetically, "As I was passing here, Willard, I chanced to meet your father, who informed me you were going to college, and that, having no further use for him, you would dispose of a fine horse you have."

"I am obliged to you for so politely suggesting my necessities. I cannot afford to leave home for this purpose unless I sell the horse—that is the amount."

"Then there is no obstacle in your way; for, unless your terms are exorbitant, I can find a purchaser; in fact, I would like to get him myself." But that he was afraid to do, as he would have said he wanted the horse, and would have him at any price. "I will come to-morrow morning," he concluded, as he took leave, after some further conversation, "and then we shall both have determined what we can afford to do. Good-night!"

"Good-night—and the devil go with you!" muttered Willard; and, sitting down against an old apple-tree, he threw his hat on the grass beside him, folded his arms, about which hung gracefully the full shirt-sleeves, and gave way to the mingled feelings which had been gathering in his heart—feelings which could be repressed only with tears. The harvest moon came up round and full, the dew gathered on the grass, and dropped heavily now and then from the apple-tree boughs; and far away hooted and called the owl; but all beside was still.

And here, lost in bitter musings, we will leave the young man for a little while, to speak of Linney, who does not see the pride and ambition that darken between her and her hopes. Her history may be comprised in a few words. A poor man, living a short distance from Clovernook, died, leaving a large family, who, as fast as they were old enough, must needs be sent from home, to earn something for themselves. One of these was Linney, who fortunately fell into the care of Mrs. Hulbert, a plain, good, quiet woman, with a pale face, full of benevolence, and blue eyes, beaming with love. She had never considered the girl as a servant, but in all ways treated her kindly as she did her own child. It was, indeed, for the good

of the orphan, and not for her own, that she first received her beneath her roof. She and Willard, who was four years older, had been playmates, and workmates, too, for the Hulberts were far from rich, and, though they owned the farm on which they lived, it required thrift and economy and continual labor, to keep the fences in repair, pay the taxes, and supply the household wants. They had made the garden, edging the vegetable beds with rows of hollyhocks and prince's feathers; they had gathered the eggs, and fed the broods of young chickens, and shook down and gathered up the ripe apples; they had hunted the silver-white hickory-nuts along the brown, windy woods of November, gathered the small black-frost grapes from the long tangling vines that ran over the stunted red trees, making pyramids of their tops; and in these sometimes they had climbed, and as they sat fronting the sun, and rocking merrily, Linney had listened to the first ambitious dreams that brightened the humble way of her companion. "When I am a man, Linney, I am going to be rich. I will have a house as big as two of father's, all painted red, and with corner cupboards in the parlor, full of honey-jars and roast turkey. Then I mean to have a fine coach, that will move along more softly than these vines move now; and I will ride outside and drive the horses, and you shall be a lady, and ride within; and if George Welden happens to be anywhere about, we'll run right over him."

Of such sort were the dreams of the boy, and whatever good fortune he pictured for himself, it was forever to be shared by his playmate; and always the crowning of his delights was to be a triumph in some way over George Welden—a lad whose only crime was that he was the son of a man of fortune, that he wore fashionable clothes, and rode to the academy on a pony of his own; while Willard's garments were patched, and he walked barefooted to the free-school. True, George was an amiable boy, and often came to play with him; but Willard said he only pretended to be very good, for, in fact, he was selfish and ugly as he could be."

As he grew older, and as they walked in the orchard, or sat in the shade of some favorite tree, his dreams took other shapes; or if he still thought he should be rich, and ride in a coach with

Linney, he no longer said so ; nor did he now talk of running over George Welden. Still he dreamed of a great world that was somewhere—he had no definite notion where—but outside the little circle in which he lived—a world where sorrow was scarcely sorrow, but only a less degree of happiness, and where everything was loftier and grander than the things with which he was familiar. And how to get out of the one world and into the other, was the subject that occupied his thoughts mostly, as he grew into maturer boyhood. He became more thoughtful, less communicative, and often, when he strayed into the orchard, or sat in the shade, it was alone. George Welden was gone to college.

Linney was fifteen, and a pretty girl, quiet and amiable ; and if she had any ambition, it was for Willard, and not for herself. It was little she could do, but all that seemed possible to do, she did quietly, joyously. The long winter evenings she employed in knitting, and all she could earn in that way, was her own ; and in the summer she picked berries sometimes, which Mr. Hulbert sold for her in the market. The little money thus accumulated was carefully put by for Willard. She had amassed at length nine dollars ; and when she should get ten, she had resolved to reveal to him the precious secret, and perhaps they would go to town together and buy books ; for she had heard him relate some stories he had read, and she smiled, thinking how many he would have to tell when he should read all the new books they would buy.

Willard was now nearly twenty. His life had been all passed at home, and mostly in working on the farm. Sundays he had gone to church with Linney, and in the longer evenings he had read some of the few books they possessed, while she employed herself with knitting or sewing. So, sharing the same toils, and hopes, and fears, they had grown very dear to each other—more dear than they were aware till the parting came. They had never spoken of love, but whatever Linney's feelings or dreams, Willard regarded her as one of whom no one but himself had a right to think at all.

“Where in the world can Willard be so long ?” said his

mother, anxiously, as she sat with her husband and Linney on the low porch, in the yellow moonlight.

"I don't know," answered Linney, after a pause; and Mrs. Hulbert continued, "He did not seem well at supper, poor boy!"

"True," answered Mr. Hulbert, significantly; in a moment adding, "I think he needs to go to college, or somewhere else."

"Seems to me the air is chilly," said the mother, not heeding the suggestion of the father; and, with a shiver, she arose, and went into the house.

It was lonesome to Linney, as she sat there with the old man; a cricket chirped under the doorstep, early as it was in the season, and the heavy breathing of the cows, as they lay together in the near yard, was heard now and then. The view was closely shut in by a thick grove of cherry-trees—only the gray gable of the barn was to be seen over their black shadows. Linney rose, and, wrapping a shawl about her, for the evening, as Mrs. Hulbert had said, was cool, she walked out into the moonlight. She had not, perhaps, very clearly apprehended her motive, though it would very readily have suggested itself to another.

She had not long pursued her lonely walk, when she encountered the object of her thoughts, sitting, moody and silent, under a tree. He looked up as she approached, but did not speak; Linney, however, cared little for this—she could have found excuses for him had he been twice as morose; and, seating herself on a tuft of clover, a little way from him, she talked cheerfully and hopefully of the future. Not till she had disclosed the long-cherished secret about the money she had saved for him, did his stubborn humor bend at all. Taking from his pocket a large red silk handkerchief, he spread it on the grass beside him, saying, "Won't you sit here, Linney?" and when she did so, he said, by way of apology for his rudeness, "That George Welden has been the curse of my life!"

"Never mind him, Willard; you need not be envious of any one, now!"

He laughed, because he thought there was something amusing in her limited notions of position and independence; but, in

truth, he felt more elevated and self-sufficient than she could think him, now that he was to go to school, and have nine dollars, all his own, to do with as he pleased. And as he was reconciled to himself, and George Welden forgotten, they were very happy. A long time they lingered under the apple-tree, the yellow harvest moonlight falling quietly through, and though neither said to the other, "I love you," it was felt that it was so.

They might sit under that apple-tree now, as then, but through the yellow moonlight each would look upon how different a world! And would they be happier?

At last they returned to the house, and Willard said, "When at the close of the session I come home, what a joyous time it will be! And you, Linney, will be as glad to see me as I you?"

"Oh, Willard! can you ask? I shall pass all the days we are parted in thinking of the time when we are to meet. But you will be so wise, then," she continued, half sadly, "I shall not be a fit companion for you."

"Linney!" he said, quickly, looking reproachfully; and perhaps he felt at the same time that her fear was unkind.

"Oh! no," she answered, as though he had assured her of his truth, "you will not forget me—I know you will not; and how happy we shall be, and how much you will know, to tell me!"

A week afterwards Brock was pacing proudly to the guidance of a fairer hand than Willard's; the old man was at work alone, making shocks of the wheat; Mrs. Hulbert sat on the porch sewing, and thinking what would be nice for her good man's supper; and Linney was in the shadow of the apple-tree, her heart fluttering, and her hands unwrapping from its brown paper envelop a small parcel, which she had that day discovered on the table of her own room, addressed to herself in the round and careful but not yet very graceful hand of Willard. He had meant it as a pleasant surprise for her, she knew; but he could not have fancied it would be so pleasant as it was—it seemed like a new tie between them. And if it seemed so while she knew not yet what it was, how much

stronger seemed the tie when the wrapper was removed, and she saw within it a small bible, bound in red morocco and gilt. She opened it, and, on the blank leaf, read—

“Steal not this book, for fear of shame,
For here you find the owner's name.

“MALINDA HULBERT.”

She blushed, though no one saw her, to see, with the couplet gracing the books of so many school boys—the name which had never been whispered—even to herself—written clearly out.

Kissing the book, she pressed it close to her bosom, while she recounted the hours and the days that Willard had been gone, saying—“In six days more he will have been gone two weeks ; and then another week will soon go, and then another, and he will have been gone a month ; then I shall get a letter, and in four months after that he will come home.” Further than this she did not suffer her thoughts to go, but, concealing the book, she returned to the house very happy ; yet there was one sad reflection : Willard had appropriated two dollars of the money, especially designed for his own use, to the getting of the Bible.

II.

The days seemed longer and the tasks heavier, now that Willard came not at sunset from the field ; and somehow or other the walks through the orchard and the grove lost their charm ; but what with work and hope, the time went by, and the day of the expected letter arrived. With the earliest dawn, and long ere the harmless fires of sunrise ran along the faded summits of the hills, Linney was astir. The wood seemed to kindle of itself, and when she brought in her pail of milk, the kettle was singing about coffee. All day she watched the clouds with unusual interest ; and once or twice walked to the road, and looked anxiously in the direction of the post-office ; and when toward evening she saw the deep gray dust dimpled with heavy drops of rain, her heart misgave her sadly. As many clouds were white, however, as black, and as they chased each other swiftly by, the sun shone through now and then, and

the wind came roughly along sometimes, and dried the dust and grass, so the girl took hope again.

Before the dinner hour, the house was set in order; the Saturday's work was done; and Linney, long in advance of the coming of the coach which should bring the mail, made preparations for her walk, and seated herself at the window to watch for the distant cloud of dust that would indicate its approach. It seemed as if the sun would never set; but when it did, still the coach did not come. "It is always the way," said Linney; "I might have known it would not be here till midnight;" and, going to her own room, she unfolded the Bible from its careful envelop, and gazed earnestly for a few minutes on the name written there, and kissed it, for the dear hand that had traced it; then, closing the volume, resumed her watching. At last, the heads of the gray horses were seen coming over the hill; in a moment her little cottage-bonnet was on, and her gray shawl wrapped about her, and, with a beating heart and quick step, she was on her way toward the Clovernook post-office.

"I know there will be no letter for me," she said, to strengthen herself against disappointment, as she drew near the grocery—in one corner of which, on a few shelves, the letters and papers that found their way to our neighborhood, were kept.

Her heart beat eagerly as the post-master slipped letter after letter through his hands; but at last her eyes fell on the long-expected treasure; it was from Willard; and there was another for Mr. Hulbert, from Willard, too, but Linney looked not so anxiously on that. I need not repeat the contents of either—they may readily be guessed. The one to his parents related chiefly to the neighborhood and its inhabitants, the teachers and students, his own prospects and hopes for the future, with an earnest wish that he might repay them for all they had done and were doing for him. But to Linney he did not write of these things, nor of other things or persons, but as though they themselves and their hopes made up all the world.

And so Linney performed her tasks, with renewed energy, and knitted with fresh courage, even when not occupied with the

comparatively easy tasks imposed on her by Mrs. Hulbert; she would earn a new dress and hat by the time Willard could come home; and what a pleasant surprise they would be to him! A sweet vision it was, that made beautiful many an evening, as she sat by the stone-hearth of the old homestead. At her feet chirped the crickets, before her blazed the logs, and beside her good Mrs. Hulbert talked of the sickness and deaths and merry-makings of the neighborhood, and made occasional observations on the condition of the weather, which was one of her favorite subjects. "Twenty years ago," she was apt to say, "we had an early fall; the apples froze on the trees, and the late turnips were not worth a cent." Every day and every week she compared or contrasted with some other day or week, five, ten, or twenty years ago. So, Linney was no longer interested in any of the warm spells that had ever thawed the frosts of January and brought forward the untimely fruit, nor in the great freshets that had swept off fences and bridges, and drowned a lamb or two, perhaps, nor yet in the wicked frosts that blackened the peach blossoms and wilted the young cucumber vines, some time long ago.

The winter evenings, as I have said, must have been tedious, but for the bright dream of Linney. It was only a dream; and the boughs were bare of the roses, the next summer, that she kept blooming about her all the winter.

In the evenings when the village gossip had been discussed, the business of the farm reviewed, and the weather considered, Mrs. Hulbert never failed, as she arose to wind the clock, to speak of Willard; and then, at least, Linney was an attentive listener. "I wish he was here, poor boy," she was apt to say, as though he suffered continual privation, while enjoying books and pleasant society and good dinners, and she fared frugally and worked hard. Any one else could see that there was at least a partnership of sacrifice in this separation; but how should Mrs. Hulbert? She was Willard's mother.

And night after night the crickets hopped across the hearth familiarly, and told their old story; and Linney worked by the firelight, and thought and dreamed. And this was the crowning of her visions—a little white cottage, with blue morn-

ing-glories all over the porch, trumpet-flowers and sweet-briers veiling the windows, a cool, deep well at the door, herself making tea there, and sometimes parting away the vines, to see, across the fields, if Willard was coming from his fields; forever, in her most ambitious musings, Willard was but a farmer, looking and talking just as he did when they parted, and not a man of books and leisure; she could not fancy how anything could change him; she knew she did not wish him to be different. Sometimes she found recreation in fancies of what would be in his next letter; for she soon grew so familiar with the contents of the first one, that there was no need to remove it any more from the lids of the Bible. At length the time came round again; and now the road was frozen, and the trees were all bare. The stage-coach did not arrive till after nightfall; but Linney would not stay away. All the day she had been singing at her work, so blithely, that Mrs. Hulbert more than once said, "I have not seen you so gay since Willard left us—poor boy!"

Linney did not feel the frozen ground beneath her feet as she walked, nor the bitter air as it blew against her face and bosom. She went fast, and was soon at the end of her little journey. About the red-hot stove were gathered a dozen men, chewing and smoking, and debating their various and trifling interests in tones as loud and earnest as though they were discussing the affairs of the nation. With eyes modestly downcast from the earthen jars and shining delf and gay prints that adorned the shop, she made her way to the corner occupied by the post-master, and received a letter. Of course, it was from Willard, and she retired without so much as glancing at it; nor did she do so till she was passing the tavern lamp, a quarter of a mile, perhaps, on her way homeward. What was her surprise, her disappointment, on seeing, that though it was indeed from Willard, it was not for her, but for his father. For a moment all was blank and chill; but hope will flutter long before it dies, and in a moment she had turned and was retracing her steps: there must be a letter for her, which had been overlooked. She did not go back, however, without hesitancy and shame, for in her childish simplicity she fancied all would know the

thoughts and hopes that were in her heart. "Will you please look again, sir!" she said, and her voice was tremulous; "I expected a letter for myself to-night!"

The man turned the letters hastily, very carelessly, she thought, and said, as he replaced them, "We don't always get all we expect, as you will find, if you live long enough."

When she reached the door, tears blinded her eyes so much that she did not see who the gentleman was who passed in at the same moment, but she knew the light and elegant carriage, and the sleek and proud animal that stamped on the hard ground so impatiently. She had only proceeded a short distance, when the sound of approaching wheels and the snorting of a horse, admonished her to turn aside. "I suppose he would run over me if I did not," she thought, and though she continued, "I would not much care if he did," she approached the edge of the road, and as she did so, a low, kindly voice gave her the salutation of the evening, the impatient Brock curved his neck to the tightening rein, and George Welden was offering his hand to assist her into his carriage.

"Thank you, Mr. Welden," she replied, coldly, "but I prefer walking."

"Will you not oblige me by accepting part of the seat?" he said, deferentially and earnestly; "I am going directly by your house."

She could no longer decline without rudeness, and so complied, but rather ungraciously. She could not but feel her prejudices against Mr. Welden melting under the warmth of his real kindness; and as he carefully wrapt the buffalo robe about her feet, and drove slowly, lest she might be timid about fast driving, she wished in her heart that Willard could see her; and though she did not care a straw about riding in George Welden's carriage, he would be piqued, she knew. When Mr. Welden spoke of him, it was so kindly and generously, that she could not but remember how differently he had always spoken of him.

Warm and red shone the lights through the homestead windows; the supper table was spread, and Mrs. Hulbert was bustling about, that all might be nice when Linney returned.

Mr. Hulbert put on his spectacles, snuffed the candle, and opened the letter, though the wife declared she could not have the biscuits wait another minute, in proof of which she continued, "Fill the tea, Malinda." The girl's face glowed as she obeyed, for not twice before, in as many years, had the good woman called her Malinda, and it troubled the fountain that pride had well nigh stilled. In a moment, Mrs. Hulbert had added a dish of preserves to the previous preparations, and Mr. Welden was disburthening himself of furs and overcoats, in compliance with an invitation to join the family at the table.

"Come, come, father," said Mrs. Hulbert, as the rest were seated; but he only snuffed the candle, and resumed his attention to the letter. "Well, if you will read," she continued, with some asperity in her tone, "do tell us whether he is dead or alive."

Mr. Hulbert placed the candle between himself and the letter, and read aloud, spelling his way, and pausing between every word: "Be so kind as to present my dutiful regards to my mother; and say to Linney, dear girl, that I have so many calls on my time for the few leisure moments I get from study, that I could not write her this month, though I very much wished to do so. I shall hope to hear from her as usual; and ask her, if you please, to tell me if she devotes much time to the book I gave her." "And that is all," said Mr. Hulbert, looking proud and pleased, "he says to you women folks"——

"Tut, tut," answered the wife, "that is enough, without it was better."

Linney's face grew damp and pale, and George Welden bit his lip, and made some observation, not at all pertinent, about shooting, of which he was very fond. The efforts to rally were ineffectual, all round; and after some awkward and constrained conversation on commonplace subjects, Mr. Welden took leave, saying to Linney as he did so, "You are fond of game, you say?"

"Yes," she answered, though she had not previously said anything to suggest his question.

And she added, "I will have pleasure in presenting the first brace of woodcocks I can bring down."

Linney thanked him formally, and, as though she expected the polite offer to be forgotten before he reached home. He prefaced his "Good evening" with a smile, that seemed to say, "You are incredulous, but I shall remember my promise."

"I thought," said Mrs. Hulbert, when he was gone, "that young Welden was a common simpleton!"

"What made you think that?" answered Linney, looking as though the matron had been grievously mistaken.

"Oh, I don't know what made me think so;" and in a moment she added, "Yes I do, too: what made me say that? It was because Willard always called him 'pumpkin-head,' and all such names."

"Humph!" said Linney, "I should be sorry to see through his eyes."

Mrs. Hulbert rose, stirred the fire, and wound the clock; this was the hour she had always said something kindly about Willard; now she simply remarked, "I wish he had staid at home;" and, seating herself, she took up her apron, as if to screen her eyes from the fire; but Linney saw that her heart was sad, and came involuntarily toward her, then hesitated, and said, as if unaware of her emotion, "Don't get up in the morning till I call you." And so they parted for the night, each feeling as she had never felt before.

It was difficult for the girl to resist the temptation of re-opening the old letter, before she retired, though she said, repeatedly, "If Willard is inclined to be such a fool, I don't care—I can live without him—and he is not the only man who has been to college, either."

And with such strengthening of her weakness, she sought her bed, with as much alacrity as if there had been no heaviness on her heart; but sleep would not be wooed in this brave way, and there had only been an occasional restless forgetfulness, when the cold, gray morning glanced through the window.

Mrs. Hulbert was already briskly astir. "I wonder," she said, as she turned the smoking ham,— "I wonder how it would do to brile woodcocks?" Linney answered that she guessed it would do well enough, but that she did n't suppose they would ever have any to be cooked. And so they were friends again.

The irritation and pride which she at first leaned on, gradually gave way, and she found herself more dependent on habitual hopes and habits of feeling than she at first imagined. In musing of him, she was apt to forget that he had not written to her ; or, if she remembered it, it was to think very leniently of the omission. What did she know about the life he led, or the tasks and duties required of him ? He would have written if he had found opportunity—of course he would. And in this mood she one day indited for him a long and kind letter, communicating all the trivial gossip of the neighborhood, and concluding with, “You will be glad to hear from me, I know, though you have not written me as you promised.”

Credulous child ! she had quite forgotten the familiar way in which he had called her “dear girl,” in the letter to his father, and his careless mention of the bible, as though the giving of it were not the precious secret she herself had always felt it to be.

The nicest stockings she had knitted were taken from the bundle designed for the purchase of a new dress, and placed in the wardrobe of Willard’s room. He had been away three months ; surely he would write to her soon ; and in two more, at farthest, she would see him.

III.

It was a rough, windy night in December ; the stiff, bare boughs rattled against each other ; the ruffled cock made an unnatural and untimely cackle among his silent mates ; the sheep, despite their woolly coats, bleated piteously ; and sometimes the oxen’s low sounded mournfully across the hills. The snow, which had fallen a day or two before, drifted no longer as the wind went and came, but, with a frozen crust shining under the moon, lay hard and cold. Linney was in her chamber, a small, cheerless room, containing only a few old-fashioned articles of furniture ; a heap of snow lay in the open fire-place ; the uncurtained window was white with the fantastic figures of the frost, and immediately above it a shelf was suspended, on which were a few dusty volumes, together with the copy-books which she had used at school. On this winter night, the place

was lonesome and cheerless enough, and yet she had been there an hour; she was seated on a low stool, beside her burned a tallow candle, on the wooden chair on which it stood lay the bible, open where her name was written, and in her hands she held the dear letter he had written at the end of the first month of their parting. As she read, a coming step crushed through the snow, and she hurried to the window, and looked forth, or tried to do so, for the frost prevented her from seeing distinctly. Mr. Hulbert had been gone to the village since an hour before night; doubtless he was now coming home, and had brought, perhaps, news from Willard. She hastily placed the letter and book beneath her pillow; to say truth, it was not the first time they had lain there; and this done, she hurried below, and saw the door closing on Mr. George Welden.

The visitor bowed gracefully, as though entering the most elegant drawing-room; and his sleepy blue eyes, as they encountered hers, had in them a sparkle of pleasure not habitual to them, and about the good-natured mouth, as he spoke, there was a sweetness which most women would have found winning. "You see my memory is less treacherous than you thought," he said, addressing Linney, who stood blushing and smiling before him, and at the same time presenting, not a brace of woodcocks, but only a common gray rabbit.

"Why, Linney!" exclaimed Mrs. Hulbert, reprovingly, as she apprehended the cause of the laughter, which the girl turned her face away to conceal.

"What funny red eyes it has," she answered, ingenuously, not heeding the implied reproof.

"I don't know," interposed George Welden; and, taking the rabbit from her hands, he added, "the fellow is too heavy for you to hold."

Ordinarily there would be nothing interesting or provocative of merriment in the dulled eyes of a dead rabbit; but somehow it chanced that the sportsman and she to whom he brought his tribute, found an almost exhaustless fund of speculation and mirth as they stood together, turning the creature from side to side, examining his form and the texture of his fur. Certainly no one would have supposed that either of them had fright-

ened one or more such creatures from their paths on almost every morning of their lives, when they had walked in the fields. But the veriest trifles hold us spell-bound, sometimes; a single withered rose may be sweeter than whole fields of fresh flowers; and on one occasion, at least, a harmless rabbit that had been dislodged from the place where he had burrowed under the winter snow, in which the drops of his life-blood were yet fresh, served for what seemed the gayest amusement.

"Look there!" exclaimed Mrs. Hulbert, as a fresh crimson drop trickled over the neck and plashed on the white apron of Linney: "Oh, dear! and my hands, too!" she said, holding them up.

"It was all my fault," said Mr. Welden, looking as if grievously annoyed. Linney's cheek grew as red as the spot in her apron. It was not so much the words as the tone of tenderness with which they were uttered, and the really distressing look that accompanied them. Both felt it a relief when Mr. Hulbert entered, and the good wife's attention was diverted from them, to prepare the arm-chair, and stir the fire.

"But, Linney, you don't know how to cook it, do you?" resumed the young man, with his former self-possession, and a familiar manner he had never used before.

"Why, I suppose we shall fry it."

He laughed, as if the idea were preposterous, and said he knew more about the culinary art than half the women, as half the men are apt to say when they have opportunity. She did not seem to heed him, and he continued, "You must dine with us to-morrow; we are to have one, too;" and in a moment, seeing that she did not answer, he said, "Will you come?"

She made some vague reply, which her admirer construed into an acceptance. But the truth is, she had heard nothing that he said; and now, as she sunk into a chair, her cheek assumed a pallor, and her black eyes, naturally brilliant with joyous feeling, assumed a steadfast and earnest expression, which was never quite forgotten by him who saw it. She had been listening to the Hulberts, as they talked of their son.

"What!" said the mother, in a surprised whisper, as she leaned over the shoulder of her husband, who answered, "He

says nothing that you will be glad to hear of; the letter is filled with stuff about Euclid, freshmen, alumni, and all that which we don't know nothing about; besides, he wants me to send money, and tells me to sell the hay if I can't get it without." The old man continued, in a tremulous voice, "I expect he has been running me in debt—twenty or thirty dollars, like enough."

"Had he got Linney's letter?" asked the mother, as if willing to divert his thoughts.

"He received it a week ago," was replied, "but had not yet had time to read it when he wrote."

This it was which brought the pallor to the cheek of Linney, and the wild and fixed expression to her eyes.

That night, as Mrs. Hulbert wound the clock, she said, "Do you think you could keep house, Linney, for a day or two?"

"Yes—why?" she replied, looking more curiosity than she spoke.

"Oh, I do n't know, child;" but she quickly added, "yes I do, too. May be we will go away in a week or so, father and me."

"Is Willard sick?" she asked, her heart beating strongly.

"No, we don't know that he is;" and Mrs. Hulbert looked anxiously into the fire.

"Because," continued Linney, seeing that there was no prospect of an explanation, "I thought it strange you should go to see him when the session will close so soon." She did not venture to say, "When Willard is coming home so soon."

But Mrs. Hulbert, who understood her meaning, replied, "He is not coming home; he says he shall have plenty of business and pleasure for the vacation; and, besides, he don't want to get his mind in its old trains of thought, he says."

"Well," answered Linney, and in that little word there was a bitterness of meaning which the longest sentences could hardly have expressed.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Hulbert, presently, "if George has nothing better to do than hunt rabbits—the poor, harmless critters?"

"Such sports have been relished by wiser men than he," answered Linney, "and I see no particular harm in them."

"Nor I, as I know of;" and Mrs. Hulbert grew thoughtful and silent again.

So for an hour the two women sat together. The effect of Willard's letter was reflected in the minds of both; and how differently, in the estimate formed by each of George.

Before she retired that night, Linney visited Willard's room, and, taking from the drawer the stockings designed for him, replaced them with the bundle prepared for market. Then, removing the pillow, she took the letter and the Bible and placed them on the shelf above the window. By such processes are shaped destinies.

The following day, while preparations for Mrs. Hulbert's visit to the town where the college was were going briskly forward, George Welden made his appearance, looking fresh, and smiling, and happy. "I am come to carry Linney home with me to dine," he said, by way of apology to Mrs. Hulbert, who, perhaps, looked something of the astonishment she felt. "And," he added, turning to the girl, "mother sends her compliments, and says you must not disappoint her. I have myself superintended the cooking of the rabbit."

Linney was faltering some excuse, when Mrs. Hulbert interposed, with an intimation that she could go just as well as not, if she chose. The horse and sleigh waited at the door, the young man seriously desired her company, and Mrs. Hulbert evidently favored his inclinations.

"But I am not ready," urged Linney, surveying her dress with evident concern, and well aware that she possessed nothing in which she would appear to better advantage.

"It is strange," said Mrs. Hulbert, soliloquizing, "how particular girls are now-a-days. That plaided flannel of Linney's I could have worn to a wedding in my day."

"And Linney can, too, if she has a mind to," replied George, laughing, and looking with admiration on the plaids of green, and red, and blue, so smoothly ironed. In truth, it became the rustic girl wonderfully well and when she had tied on the

white frilled apron, and smoothed her chestnut curls a little, nothing was needed to complete her toilet.

She felt a tremulous shrinking when, for the first time in her life, she found herself in an elegantly-furnished apartment; but Mrs. Welden, a sweet, motherly lady of sixty, soon put her quite at ease, for Linney was a sunshiny and good-tempered girl, little disposed to quarrel with circumstances. If there were a little condescension in the lady's cordiality, a little patronage in the equality she assumed, she did not stop to think of it, and Mrs. Welden's heart was soon won entirely by her artless and joyous manner. No wonder they were mutually pleased; that each found in the other what she herself lacked—the one, freshness, and sunshine, and hope; and the other, experience, wisdom, and refinement.

George, habitually good-natured, indolent, careless, was on that day restless, almost fretful. Now he boxed the ears of some favorite hunter, for caressing his hand too familiarly; now he found fault with the fire, which was either too hot or too cold; and now he was irritated that Linney should be monopolized, and, apparently, with so much willingness on her part, by even his mother. Sometimes he tried to be amiable, and he more than once ventured on a compliment to Linney, but she neither blushed nor looked down, but only laughed, and replied in the same vein, though her tone and manner said very plainly there was little meaning in her words. He felt that he had no power over her, and consequently became vexed with himself more and more.

So pleased and delighted was Linney, that she remained long after dinner; and the great cold moon made the snow sparkle again as they drove homeward.

“Oh, what a beautiful home you have!” she said, looking back admiringly, where the many lights of the great house streamed across the snow.

“Would you like to live there always?” asked George, tightening the rein.

“Oh, above all things!” she answered, ingenuously.

And the whip was brought in requisition, and Brock suffered to go forward as fast as he would.

“How kind of you,” said Linney, patting the horse’s neck, when they alighted at the door, “to bring us home so soon.” And she continued, turning to George, “I wish you were home, too.”

The young man bit his lip, and resumed his seat in the sleigh. He had hoped for an invitation to go in.

Mrs. Hulbert opened the door, and George drew in the rein to say, “Tell Willard, if you please, I shall take as good care of Linney as he would himself.”

Mrs. Hulbert thanked him, and Linney thought, “I am glad you happened to say that—it will be so provoking to Willard.” But neither understood that George remembered the slights he had formerly received, and that he could not now deny himself the pleasure of such a taunt. If Willard had been away chopping wood for a month, Mr. George Welden would have been silent; but it needed little sagacity to perceive, that though pique had at first drawn these young persons together, there was danger that the result would be very different from any they themselves expected. Already, on the part of George, there was an awakening affection, as trifles have indicated, which he might find it very difficult ever to repress. In a secluded neighborhood, where neither was likely to find much companionship, it was perfectly natural, that having once met, they should meet again, and that, time and circumstances favoring, the young man should become a wooer, especially when he was free from ambition, and altogether indifferent as to what others should think of the mistress of his house and heart, so that she pleased himself. It was natural, too, that a humble rustic girl should not be wholly averse to the wooing, especially when the wooer was handsome and the fortune ample; and, above all, when she could rise so pre-eminently above a lover who had discarded her.

And the case of Willard is common enough, too, perhaps. Finding himself suddenly and unexpectedly in a circle somewhat superior in cultivation and refinement to that in which his old companion had moved—with girls who perhaps had some prospects of fortune, and who certainly were more at home in the world than she to whom he had so sincerely pledged his

affections, in their first development, before he learned that they should be subjected to the direction of tact, lighting the way for his advancement in society, he set his foot upon her—not that he despised her, so much as that he was blinded by the brilliancy of new hopes, and really did not see nor think about her at all.

Time taught them both the sincerity of that young and irretrievably-slighted love. But, though Willard was for a short time inflated with vanity, and warped from his true nature, he possessed enough of genuine manhood to regain at length a fit estimation of his forgotten duties, of the worth of such a character as Linney's, and of the feelings she had cherished for him, until they were alienated by his own neglect. He could learn, or would learn, only by experience, that the guests of ambition and of love must be forever distinct, or fruitless of rewards to satisfy either the mind or the heart.

When five years were gone, and he returned from college, no dear one met him with words sweeter than any triumphs; Linney had been three years the wife of George Welden, and one, the mother of "the sweetest little cherub," Mrs. Hulbert said, "in all the world." She was living in the family mansion of the Weldens—one of the finest in the vicinity of Clovernook—its mistress, and was one of the most admired as well as most beloved of all the ladies in the neighborhood.

"I wish, mother," said Willard, one morning, "you would fit up the little room that used to be Linney's, for my study." He had commenced a course of reading in the law, and was to pursue it, for the most part, at home, where, whatever haunting memories there might be, there would be little in the present to distract his attention from the frigid and selfish philosophy of expediency, which underlies all the learning and practice of that profession. So the window was opened, and the cobwebs swept down; and this, with the addition of a chair and a table to the furniture, was all that was to be done. With folded arms and thoughtful brow, the disappointed student superintended these little preparations, and when all was completed, he unlocked a small desk, and took from it two old and word letters, which would scarcely bear unfolding; read and re-read

them, wiping his eyes once or twice as he did so; carefully folded them, and, stepping on a chair, took from the shelf above the window a book, and was slipping the letters between its leaves, when his attention was suddenly arrested by the falling of his own first letter to Linney to the floor—from the book in which was written, in his own boyish hand, “Malinda Hulbert.” Book and letter had been forgotten, and the dust of years had gathered over them.

Willard is a bachelor to this day; and that homely room, once Linney’s, has a charm for him which much finer ones have never possessed. When last I was out at Clovernook I drank tea with good old Mrs. Hulbert, and the squire sat with us in the early evening in the modest porch of the farm-house. As I recalled to the mother some reminiscences of my childhood, with which she was familiar, he left us, walking away silently, and with an air of melancholy. I could not help but say, “How changed!”

“I do n’t know,” she answered; but, after a moment’s silence, “Yes, I do—poor Willard, he will never forget little Linney!”

—Sometimes, as he lingers in the autumn under the old grape-vine in the meadow, where they recounted to each other such dreams as arose in childhood, he sees her riding with George Welden in the beautiful coach from which he thought to look contemptuous triumph on his rival.

THE DIFFERENCE, AND WHAT MADE IT?

I.

WHEN I made my first call on Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, they had been married about a year. Theirs had been what is termed a love-match: the bride, who was an heiress in a small way, having stolen from the comfortable and ample roof of her father one tempestuous night, and taken, in the presence of the priest and two or three witnesses, for better or for worse, John Robinson, to cherish and love, in health and sickness, thenceforward.

Matilda Moore, previously to becoming Mrs. Robinson, was a tall, slender, fair-faced woman, with a passionate vein in her nature, which, as she was much indulged and petted, had scarcely been thoroughly aroused. White teeth, flaxen curls, rosy cheeks, and an amiable smile, with an unexceptionable toilette, and graceful manners, gave her the reputation of a beauty with many, though the few might have found in the wide, full chin, and hanging lip, as in the general cast of her countenance, a want of refinement and intellectuality. Be that as it may, she had passed through the regular training of boarding-schools, pianists, and dancing-masters, and in the circle which her father's position, as a well-to-do lumber-merchant, commanded, was quite a belle.

In the valley lying between the city, and the hill-country wherein Clovernook nestles itself, stands a great irregular building, known as the Columbia House. In days gone by, it was a very popular resort of persons and parties in quest of recreation. But the fashion of this world passeth away, and at the time I speak of it was fallen somewhat from its genteel pretensions, the once pretty pleasure-grounds were turned into

yards for cattle and swine, the piazzas had been boxed into dormitories for drovers, and the slender ornamental railing which once encompassed the house was quite broken away by reason of having been used as hitching-posts for the fast trotters of jockeys, whose partiality for the Columbia House was evinced by the fact that from ten to twenty slender-wheeled buggies and high-headed horses might be seen, any summer afternoon, hemming it in. But this is a digression, and what the house is, or was, has nothing to do with my story, farther than that it chanced to be here, at a ball given in celebration of some political triumph, that the first meeting of Mr. John Robinson and Miss Matilda Moore took place.

"A pretty girl, I'll swear, you just danced with," said Mr. Robinson to Uncle Jo, as everybody called the well-known dancing-master: tossing off, as he spoke, a glass of something stronger than it should have been under the circumstances, for he was that night the gallant of as pretty a country girl as one may pick from the meeting-house of a summer morning.

"She dances with infinite grace, Uncle Jo. Won't you take another glass? You haven't moistened your lips, man."

Could Uncle Jo refuse? As he "tossed the rosy," Mr. Robinson continued, "Is there a better dressed lady in the saloon?" And, as if some one dissented, he quickly added, "*No, siree!*" Must have the dimes, eh, Uncle Jo? won't you *produce* me?"

Shortly after this one-sided conversation, Uncle Jo appeared in the saloon, and made his way, with an indolent sort of saunter, as of one conscious of welcome anywhere, toward the nook wherein Miss Moore had seated herself, for a little respite, and the refreshing influence of some light gossip with her cousin Kate. At his side was Mr. Robinson.

Hardly had the lady time for the whisper behind her fan, "Is n't he handsome?" when Uncle Jo presented him as Mr. John Robinson, of —, son of Hon. Judge Robinson; and she hastened to tuck away the white lace that hung in a series of short skirts over her pink-satin petticoat, to make room by her side for the splendid and dashing son of the judge.

"Excuse me, Tild," said the cousin, rising, with a meaning look, that indicated, "Do as much for me some time;" and

linking her arm through that of Uncle Jo, she skipped gayly away for a promenade, rallying her captive coquettishly on not giving himself exclusively to one, if he did not expect all the ladies to claim his service.

"Gad, Uncle Jo," said Mr. Robinson, toward the dawn of the morning, "I'll remember you when I fall heir to the — property. You have made me a happy and an envied man to-night."

"I congratulate you," said the dancing-master, who cared not a whit when young ladies fell in love, nor with whom; "but remember, that belles may coquette on occasion. Do you see anything of that?" He pointed to Miss Moore, who was at the moment looking tenderly in the face of a very fat man with very black whiskers, luxuriant and uncropped, reproaching him in a way that might or might not have meaning in it, for having deserted her wantonly and unprovokedly a whole evening, which seemed to her interminable.

"Is the young woman a fool, that she is going to show a whole ball-room which way her cattle run? No, *sir!* But I'll bet you what you dare, or I'll play three games of eucre with you, and stake my country property, that Miss Matilda Moore will be Mrs. Matilda somebody else before this night twelvemonth."

"Very likely," said Uncle Jo, quietly; and the two gentlemen retired for a social glass at parting.

I need say no more of Mr. Robinson, I think. The reader may form his own idea of what sort of young men drink with the dancing-master, boast of property which is still their father's and of conquests of ladies who have but chanced to chat with them half an hour.

Thereafter Mr. Robinson had, to use his own characteristic phrase, a devilish sight of business in town. He usually drove his father's, horse and chaise, which he described as "mine," and, in company with the rich and accomplished Miss Moore, went off to the fashionable resorts for ices, strawberries, and other such delicacies, which have been, longer than I can remember, the "food of love." At all balls, races, and pic-nics, too, they were the most dashing and noticeable couple.

Miss Moore was proud of being escorted by Mr. Robinson, son of the Judge, and Mr. Robinson of attending the handsome and wealthy Miss Matilda. For a time all went merry, but "the course of true love never did run smooth."

II.

"Where is Tildy to-night? Just shove the lamp this way, my dear," said Mr. Moore, the lumber-merchant, unbuttoning his vest, and extending his rough boots over the elaborately carved foot of the tea-table. Mrs. Moore did as directed, and, as she passed the tea, asked her husband if he thought there were really so much danger in the camphine. Mr. Moore opened the evening paper, and, glancing over the advertisements, said, after a minute, and in a tone which indicated a ruffled temper, "How much do you mean?"

"Why, you know," replied the wife, blandly, and affecting not to see his ill-humor, "a good many people are afraid to burn it, and almost every day we read of accidents from it."

"Then," said Mr. Moore, in no milder tone, "I should think there was danger."

"Well, I suppose there *is* danger; but one must talk, or one 'll not say anything," said Mrs. Moore, half deprecatingly and half in justification.

"So it seems." And Mr. Moore was apparently absorbed in the paper, sipping carelessly now and then of his tea.

"You don't seem to eat," suggested Mrs. Moore, putting more than usual tenderness in her voice.

"If I do n't *seem* to, I suppose I do n't."

"Won't you try a little of the honey? Just see how white and clear it is!" And Mrs. Moore held up the ladle, that her husband might behold and admire; but he neither looked up, nor made any reply.

For a moment she continued to nibble her bread in offended silence. She knew right well she had vexed him, by not replying directly as to the whereabouts of Matilda; and, like the faithful, loving wife she was, she resolved to make amends, and by way of bringing the subject naturally about, asked the

hour. Mr. Moore took the repeater from his pocket, and turned the face toward her, without speaking. Had he spoken one word, or even looked up, she would have said it was time for Tildy to come; but under such painfully repelling circumstances, she could not go on; she ceased even to nibble the crust, sat a moment in silence, and then, hastily removing her chair, left the table, and in the solitude of her own chamber, wept: not "a few tears, brief and soon dried"—no, not so were these many wrongs and slights and silent sufferings to be appeased—she had a regular, sobbing, choking cry—such as have relieved all similar feelings since husbands became petulant, and wives first had "their feelings hurt."

Mr. Moore saw, though he affected not to see, how he had changed the lady's mood, and he felt some misgivings, though he affected not to feel any. He was irritated to a most unhappy degree, vexed with his wife, and vexed with himself—first, for having been in ill-humor with her; and next, for having refused to meet her repeated overtures, as he should have done. He was half resolved to follow her, and say, "Jemima, my dear wife, I was wrong; come down, and let us eat our supper, which you have been at such pains to prepare, as though this little recounter had not chanced." But he was proud, as well as passionate, and though he wished it were done, he would not do it.

Mrs. Moore was accustomed to obey his slightest wishes, though unexpressed; and the little stratagem she used in talking about camphine, when he asked about Tildy, was harmless, and originated, in fact, in love; for she well knew he would be angry if she said "She is out in the country, with Mr. Robinson;" and therefore she meant to divert his attention from the subject, though she should have known she was thereby treasuring wrath against the day of wrath. In her evasion he was sufficiently answered, and, as his indignation must be poured out somewhere, he resolved that Mr. Robinson, whose character he thoroughly disliked, should receive it. So, to wile away the time, he seated himself in the parlor, and, taking up an old English Annual, read poems and love-stories, accounts of shipwrecks, and treatises on the mind, with the same avidity. It

grew late, and later—midnight, one o'clock, two o'clock—but he was neither to be wearied nor softened at all; and at length three o'clock came, and Mr. Robinson with it. I need not describe the scene: Mr. Robinson did not come again.

Of course, Mr. Moore became at once the most unnatural and tyrannical of fathers; but Miss Moore had spirit as well as her father, and was not to be so thwarted. Violent opposition tends always to the growth of whatever is opposed; and the young lady's predilection for Mr. Robinson was speedily strengthened into what she at least believed to be love. Secret meetings were contrived and effected, during which the despair of the young man, his unalterable devotion, and her own softened, it may be slightly perverse heart, worked together for the establishment of a decree of fate, and on a tempestuous night, as before intimated, Miss Matilda Moore became Mrs. John Robinson, and, with her husband, took up her abode at one of the most fashionable and expensive hotels of the city—after the usual bridal tours, receptions, parties, &c.

The disobedience of the lady not only cut her off from any marriage portion, but from any prospects in that way, and the country property of the young man was not available. "Why do'n't you make it so by exchange or sale?" urged the wife; and the truth was forced at last—the country property was his only by a possible and remote contingency.

Judge Robinson and his good wife were pleased with the marriage of their son with the heiress, for they both loved money, though, as is often the case with persons with such affections, they never had much about them. They had begun the world with nothing but their hands and hearts, and, with patient industry and perseverance, had accumulated enough to make them rich, in their own estimation and in that of their neighbors.

On the occasion of their son's nuptials, they had bestowed on him five hundred dollars—a sum that seemed to them sufficient for an entrance into business, and for making all house-keeping arrangements. They also believed that the wife's father would soon become reconciled to the union, and settle on the refractory daughter the handsome portion which she had a

right to look for. In this particular they were mistaken, as well as in the prudent foresight and frugal management they had calculated upon in their children.

Taking from five hundred dollars continually with one hand, and adding nothing thereto with the other, will in the course of time diminish the sum; and of this fact Mr. and Mrs. Robinson became gradually aware, as indeed they well might, when, before the close of the first year, a new claimant for protection lifted its arms toward them from the cradle, and the last penny was gone, and they had incurred obligations by value received to an extent which they had no means of meeting.

III.

Judge Robinson had become discouraged from any further efforts to assist his improvident children; but the little grandchild softened his heart somewhat, and the appeal to his sympathy and aid became irresistible, when, one gusty March morning, as he sat by his ample hearth and read a political essay by a favorite senator, to his wife, who meantime baked custard pies by the glowing wood coals, the daughter-in-law entered, bearing the "precious darling" in her arms.

"And where is John?" inquired the parents, when the bonnets, cloaks, shawls, &c., had been laid on the bureau, and the baby called a pretty little doll, and kissed, time and again, the while it opened its dewy blue eyes and stretched out its chubby arms in terror and wonder, and the mother said, "Don't the baby know what to make of grandpa and grandma, and everyting?" in the tenderest falsetto imaginable.

But before Matilda could answer, the sturdy strokes of the axe sounded from the wood-pile, and, a moment after, John entered, bearing in his arms a quantity of freshly split sticks.

"Did you call the boy to take care of your horse?" asked the judge; and turning to his wife, he continued, "Caty, can't you get your spider out of the corner? It keeps back the warmth so."

John replied that he was boy enough himself, and had cared for his own horse. John was politic, and suspected these little

signs of neither forgetting how to work, nor of disdaining it, would give his father pleasure. In this he was not mistaken, as he knew, by the request for the removal of the spider that he might enjoy the heat.

“Now, is n't that just like the inconsideration of men?” said Mrs. Robinson, appealing to Matilda, as she turned the handle of the spider aside; “or have n't you been married long enough to larn that they think a woman can do anything and everything, without either time or chance? Mr. Robinson, I a'n't going to do no sich a thing. I've got a good custard pie in here, and I sha'n't spile it by taking the spider off the coals, when it's half baked.”

This was said with the utmost good nature, for Mrs. Caty Robinson loved her husband, and thought, as was right and proper, that he was a little cleverer than most men; but her devotion was not of a sort to induce the removal of the spider at his suggestion, spoil her custard, and then pout half a day at the misfortune.

When the custard was baked, the good old lady held it up in triumph. A white linen towel, she herself had spun and woven, prevented the dish from burning her hands, while she advised Matilda to take a lesson from her old mother and begin right, not humoring John in all his whims, but always to use her own wit when she knew she was in the right: urging, that in this particular instance, she had, as fruit of her prudence, the beautifullest pie she ever see, while if she had minded Robinson, she would have had a batch that nobody could eat, and that would have aggravated her whenever she thought of it.

“Well, well, mother,” said the judge, as she brushed the ashes from the corner with the wing of a turkey, “your judgment is generally pretty correct; and while your pie baked, I cooked up a little plan which I want seasoned with your opinion.”

It happened, as is often the case with well-to-do farmers, that Judge Robinson had on an obscure nook of his handsome estate an old house. He had formerly dwelt in it himself; but since his more affluent days, and the building of a more commodious residence, it had been let to a tenant, with a quantity

of land. It was an old-fashioned, irregular sort of building, with mossy roof, steep gables, whitewashed walls, &c. Nevertheless, it was a comfortable-looking tenement, with orchard, barn, crib, smoke-house, and other like conveniences. The plan which he had now cooked up was, to renovate the old house a little, for the occupancy of John and Matilda. As much ground as he could cultivate was placed at the young man's disposal: a garden, in which currant bushes, strawberries, horse-radish and asparagus were beginning to sprout, with a cow, two horses, and the necessary agricultural implements.

This kind of assistance—the means of helping themselves—was not precisely the kind they had hoped for. But “beggars must not be choosers,” said Mrs. John Robinson, disposed, woman-like, to make the best of the best; and, in truth, as she thought more about the plan, she began to like it: it would be so delightful to have the garden, and to learn the art of butter-making, and all the other mysteries of country life. Then, too, the baby would have a nice green yard to play in—the idea was really charming.

Mr. John Robinson soon after told his friends that he should remove to his country property for the summer, that the health of his family required it, and that he proposed to take a house in town another winter: a hotel was a miserable apology for a home, which he continued to describe with the richest and most peculiar selection of adjectives.

Preliminaries arranged, Mr. and Mrs. John Robinson removed to their country seat; in other words, they betook themselves, with their baby, a very excellent trunk (which was Mrs. Robinson's), and a very poor old one (which was Mr. Robinson's), to the ancient tenant-house of Mr. Robinson—because, in brief, they could not do otherwise.

And to that place, as related in the beginning of this chapter, I one evening, toward the close of the following May, crossed the meadows to make my first call. John Robinson had been my school-mate; I had known him in all the devious paths “that led him up to man,” and therefore looked with more leniency, perhaps, on his faults and foibles, than I otherwise should have done. Besides, he had, mixed up with idle

and dissolute habits, and aside from his braggart conversation, and disposition to tyrannize where he had power to do so, some generous and good qualities. His wife, I fancied, must find the old place lonesome, shut from the contemplation of everything but wood and meadow, and would meet with many discouragements, accustomed as she had been to stylish and luxurious habits of life.

I had seen nothing of John for several years; but I had heard reports not altogether favorable to his growth in grace or refinement. The wife I had never seen: and as I walked down the hollow, skipped over the run, (still trickling noisily with the spring thaw,) climbed the next hill, passed the old oak, quickened my steps through a strip of woods, and struck into the lane leading directly to the door, I mused as to what sort of person I should meet.

A thousand stars were out in the blue sky when the old gate creaked on its hinges to admit me; there was sufficient light for an outside observation, and I recognized such signs of thrift and industry as I little expected to see; the picket fence had been mended and whitewashed, the shrubberies trimmed, the raspberry vines tied to supporting stakes, and a deal of rubbish cleared from the yard, where the turf now lay fresh and smooth, save here and there, where little patches had been broken for the planting of flowers. The glimpse I caught of the high garden beds, straight rows of peas, pale shoots of onions, and straggling radish-tops, were no less pleasantly suggestive. From the cow-yard, I heard the rustling of hay, the sharp ringing of the first streams of milk on the bottom of the tin pail, and the hummed fragment of a rural song. The windows of the kitchen were aglow, and the crying of a child, with the voice of one who seemed trying to still it while some other task was being performed, met my ear as I rapped for admission.

The door was opened by a young and pale-looking woman, whom I supposed to be Mrs. Robinson, and to her I introduced myself, as a neighbor, well known to her husband. There was a slight trepidation in her manner, indicating a diffidence I did not expect, though her welcome was full of cordiality, grace, and sweetness. The roses were gone from her cheeks, and the

curls tucked away from their flowing, but she had, instead, that look of patient, motherly meekness, which made her more beautiful; her dress was neat and tasteful, and as she left the tea-kettle steaming on the hearth, the table, with its snowy cloth falling almost to the floor, and the tea things partially arranged, and took the baby on her knees, she presented, with her surroundings, a picture which might have made a painter immortal. Their furniture was neither expensive nor profuse; but the happy disposition of such as they had, gave an air even of elegance to their home. The white muslin curtains at the windows, flowing draperies over the tables, the few books, the guitar, and the flowers, imparted that particular charm to the place which I have known a much larger expenditure fail to produce.

Mr. Robinson's first exclamation, on seeing me, was profanely good-natured; and after his surprise had thus vented itself he gave me a friendly welcome, and taking the baby from his wife's arms, entertained me with accounts of his success as a farmer. Nor did he neglect to praise the aptitude and many excellencies of his wife; telling me she had not only learned to bake bread, pies, puddings, and the like, but that she could wash, iron, and scrub; in fact, understood all the less elegant duties of housekeeping. The lady blushed to hear herself so praised; but she shrunk with mortification from the rough adjectives with which each compliment was confirmed.

After partaking of their delicious tea, and various etceteras, I was quite willing to endorse all commendation of the house-keeper, and as I took leave of my new acquaintance I could not avoid saying something of the pleasure I had enjoyed, as well as expressing a hope that we should meet each other very frequently.

Often of summer evenings, as I sat in the moonlight, I heard the music of the guitar across the hill; and once in a while, when it was very still, I could hear the young wife singing to her baby. We had soon a little path worn through the meadow, and many were the exchanges of ginger-cakes and pies which it facilitated. Sometimes I caught the flutter of the white blanket on the edge of the hill. and ran to meet my friend and

relieve her of her precious burden. There was no very deep or close sympathy between us, but however different the circle of our lives and thoughts, there were points that touched. She could teach me to embroider, and to make various little articles, pretty and useful, while in other ways I was not less useful to her. Though she never heard of the Mask of Comus, or read the Fairie Queen, there were other things to talk about.

So the summer went by, and the fall; and when the fires were kindled on the hearth, the long skirts of the baby were tucked up, and she was toddling from chair to chair, and delighting father and mother by lisping the name of each. Mrs. Robinson was well pleased with her new life, and often expressed surprise that the idle nothings of her former experience could have satisfied her. The autumn tasks, of putting up and down sweetmeats and pickles, were accomplished without difficulty or complaint; and even the winter, which she had always heard was so lonely and comfortless in the country, was to the young wife and mother just as pleasant as any other season. There were knitting and patchwork, sewing and mending, always, to make the days short; then the meat was to be minced for pies, the eggs beaten, or the cakes baked; so that, far from having time hang heavy on her hands, she had scarcely sufficient for all the duties of the day. During the blustering months of snow we saw less of each other than previously; yet we had not a few pleasant chats and rural games in the broad light of the wood fires.

For the most part, the demeanor of Mr. Robinson toward his wife and child was gentle and affectionate: but sometimes, for he was of an arbitrary and irritable temperament, he gave expression to such coarseness and harshness as must have driven a sensitive and refined woman "weeping to her bed." As my presence began to be less a restraint, these unpleasant encounters became of more frequent occurrence; and the wife, instead of the silent endurance practiced at first, learned to retort smartly, then angrily. However, these were episodes useful for the general domestic tranquillity, and were very far from requiring the binding over of either party to keep the peace.

IV.

The following spring, Mr. Moore, who had never forgiven his daughter, died suddenly, and without any will, and Mrs. Robinson became heir to some eight or ten thousand dollars. The humble home in the country, in which they had taken so much interest, and where they had really had much of happiness, lost its attractions. Carpets were torn up, and curtains down, and, with beds, chairs, and tables, disposed of in summary order. The old things were no longer of use. Necessary preparations were soon effected, and early one April morning the fires were put out, the doors locked, and the farm house left alone.

A handsome house was rented in town, stylish furniture bought, and half a dozen servants employed, for with the renewal of old associations and ampler means, more than the old indolence and extravagance were indulged.

For three years, owing partly to chances which I need not explain, I saw nothing of the Robinsons. At the close of that period, I chanced to be in their neighborhood, and, with some mingling of curiosity among kindly remembrances, sought them out.

The exterior of their dwelling had an humble, even a dingy and comfortless appearance. Perhaps, thought I, reports have spoken falsely, but as the door was opened, by a slatternly black girl, the faded remnants of better times which met my eyes spoke for themselves. I was scarcely seated when a child of some four years presented herself, with dress and face indicating a scarcity of water, and looking at me with more sauciness than curiosity, asked me bluntly how long I meant to stay at their house. I confess to the weakness of being disconcerted by such questions from children, and before I had time fully to recover, a boy, who might have been two years younger, and whose white trousers, red jacket, and milky face, indicated a similar want of motherly attention, entered the room, and taking the remnant of a cigar from his mouth, threw his cap against me with as much force as he was master of, by

way of salutation, and then, getting one foot upon the head of a broken cupid that graced a "windowed niche," challenged my admiration of his boots. The little girl, probably wishing me to know she was not without accomplishments, opened a piano, and began drumming on the keys, when, the noise drowning the boy's voice, a lively quarrel ensued, and blows were exchanged with wonderful rapidity.

"A'n't you ashamed?" said the girl, relenting first, and looking at me.

"No," replied the boy, "I do n't care for her. Ma said she did n't want to see her; and pa was gone with all the money, and there was nothing for supper but half a mackerel and two ginger cakes. And," he added, "I am going to eat both of them."

Mrs. Robinson, as she descended, caught the whole or a part of this little piece of conversation, and, calling the black girl from the kitchen, ordered her to bring "them two little plagues out of the parlor by main force." Dinah blustered in, feeling all the dignity of her commission, and dragged them out, as directed, in spite of the triple remonstrances of feet, hands, and voices.

As Mrs. Robinson drew them up stairs by a series of quick jerks, she told them, in a voice neither low nor soft, that she had a sharp knife in her pocket, and that if she ever heard them talk so again, she would cut off their ears; that for the present, she should shut them up in her room, and if they quarreled, or made a bit of noise, a big negro who was in the chimney would come down and eat them up. But the last and awfulest terror she brought to bear on them, was an intimation that she would tell their father.

She presently entered the parlor, with an infant in her arms; and if I had not been in some measure prepared for a metamorphosis, I must have betrayed my surprise at her altered appearance. There was no vestige of beauty remaining; even the expression of her countenance was changed, and she looked the picture of sullen, hard, and dissatisfied endurance. Her pale hair had become thin, and was neither arranged with taste nor care; her eyes were dull and sunken; her nose, al-

ways prominent, looked higher and sharper; and her teeth, once really beautiful, were blackened and decaying. The dress she wore had formerly been pretty and expensive silk, and was still set off with flounces, buttons, and ribbons, which brought out the faded colors, grease-spots, and tatters, in bold relief. The tidy chintz, and the loving and trusting heart she had, when I first saw her in the old house, were both gone.

They had made many moves and removes during three years; and Mrs. Robinson took occasion to tell me of the many fine things she had had, of the places she had visited, &c., so that I could easily fill up the history. Her husband was gone to the races—had a heavy bet on “Lady Devereaux,” and if she won, Mrs. Robinson was to have a new bracelet and satin dress!

“John is very much changed,” said the wife; “the children are as much afraid of him as they are of death, and I am glad of it, for I could not get along with them when he is away, unless I frightened them by threats that I would tell their father on his return. You know,” she continued, “he used to have Helen in his arms half the time when she was a baby, but now he never touches one of the children unless it is to beat them. However, he is never home now-a-days.”

“He must have changed,” I said, “for when you lived in the country he was always at home.”

“Oh, yes; but we were just married then!” replied the wife.

How much that sentence revealed! and I have thought often since, that if men and women would continue to practice the forbearance, the kindness, the politeness, and little acts that first won love, the sunshine of happiness need never be dimmed.

In this case, however, the neglect of these things was not the only misfortune. There are people to whom money is an evil, people who will only learn industry, and moderation, and the best humanities, in the school of necessity. They who sit down and sigh for wealth, who have youth and health, and God’s fair world before them, though never so penniless, are unworthy of wealth, and to such adversity is a good thing.

ELSIE'S GHOST STORY.

I.

WE were sitting by the open window, cousin Elsie and I, for though it was late in November the evening was unusually mild: we were sitting by the window that overlooks one of the crookedest streets of the city, not looking much to the crowds that passed below, nor ladies in plumes and furs, nor gentlemen with slender canes and nicely trimmed whiskers, nor ragged urchins crying the evening papers, nor splendid equipages, nor any of the other various sights that sometimes interest careless observers, but watching the bright clouds that over the distant water wrapt the sun in a golden fleece for his nightly repose. The long reach of woods that is beneath was hidden by dense masses of blue smoke, in which the red basement of the sky seemed to bury itself. A portion of the great forest of masts that borders a part of the city was visible from our window, and now and then a black scow moved slowly over the waves, and a white sail gleamed for a moment, and was gone.

Autumn, especially an autumn twilight, is always to me a melancholy time; even with the ripe nuts dropping at my feet, or with my lap full of bright orchard fruits, I am more lonely than when winter whistles through his numb fingers and the drowsy snow blows in great drifts across the flowers. When the transition is once made, when the fire is once brightly glowing, and the circle, wide or narrow, drawn about it, and the song of the cricket well attuned, the undefinable heaviness that lay on my heart all the fall, is gone, blown away with the mists. I had a playmate whose happiness was dearer to me than my

own. My lost one, my sister—how often from the little sunshine that has been my portion, I have turned aside to think of thee, on whose life the blight of sin had scarcely fallen, ere from the rippled length of thy dark tresses we took the flowers—trusting thy feet to the dark.

The rain was falling when she died,
 The sky was dismal with its gloom
 And Autumn's melancholy blight,
 Shook down the yellow leaves that night,
 And dismally the low winds sighed
 About her tomb.

And when swart November comes round, and the winds moan along the hills, and pluck from the withering woods the last leaves, something of the old sorrow comes back. A shadowy host, born of the fading glories, stands between me and the light, and as I gaze, sweeps in a pale procession toward the tomb.

Looking up from the reverie in which I had fallen, I saw that cousin Elsie was wrapt under the wing of a darker sorrow than mine.

“Arouse thee, dearest, 'tis not well
 To let the spirit brood
 Thus darkly o'er the ills that swell
 Life's current to a flood,”

I said, laying my hand lightly and half-playfully on her's. But as I did so, the tears, which only a strong effort had kept back, dropt hot and fast. I left her for a moment, and affected to busy myself at the fire, for, though the window was open, the grate was well heaped, more for the sake of its genial glow, than because any warmth was needed; and when I returned and seated myself at her side, the tears were gone, and a smile that seemed even sadder than tears, hovered on her lips.

I said something about the chilliness, as I lowered the sash, and pointed to the first star that stood blushing in a rift of faded cloud. My observations required no answer, for I talked rather for than to her. Seeing this, she seated herself on a low stool at my feet, and laying her head on my knees, said in a mannner she intended to be gay—“You need not affect unconsciousness, for you are wondering what I am thinking about, even though you do talk of the stars.”

I acknowledged the truth, and she added,—“ Will it amuse you to hear my thoughts ?”

I replied that it would ; and she gave me a reminiscence of our life at Clovernook, where my heart always wanders from the city, when I am in no cheerful mood.

II.

“ You think me a dull companion sometimes,” she said, “ and I know that I am so ; at this season, especially, I am gloomy, for it was at such a time that some of the flowers of hope died which will never blossom in all my future life. Last year I sat on the doorsteps before our home, watching the sunset, as bright as this to-night. Adeline was with me—for we were always together—dear sister ! she is happier, I hope, than I shall ever be. We sat in open air, partly that we knew its genial mildness must soon be gone before the chill blasts, and partly that it seemed more lonely in the house, for we had been to the funeral of Louisa Hastings that day—you did not know her—one of the sweetest and most amiable tempered girls I ever knew. I would not mention her now, but for what I am going to tell you. She was young and beautiful, rich, and a universal favorite, but consumption was hereditary in her family, and she had scarcely attained the maturity of womanhood when the fatal symptoms manifested themselves. Morning and evening, all the past summer, we had seen the slowly-drawn carriage in which she took the fresh air, and though she knew that her journeying must presently terminate in the dark, a smile of patient serenity was ever on her face. As we sat together on the steps that night, the red sunset clouds away before us, with now and then a star trembling through, we saw before us the new and smoothly shaped mound, about which the yellow leaves were drifting for the first time. Between our home and the great city there is a thickly wooded hill of over a mile in length, which has the reputation of being haunted ; and in truth it is no wonder, for a more gloomy looking place, even in daylight, it would be difficult to imagine. In its whole length there is no house, save a ruinous old cabin, where the

sheep that stray about the hills, seemingly without owner, lodge at night, and in which a murder was once committed, since which it has had no human inhabitant. The road, winding partly around and over this hill, is so narrow that the branches of the trees growing on either side meet overhead and interlace; so that even at noonday a kind of twilight prevails, and at night the gloom is dense, unless the moon be full. Just at the summit, and dividing the woods from the villas that begin to dot the landscape, a stone wall incloses a small lot of ground, known as the Hastings Burial Place, and there the grave of Louisa had been made. One sad event links itself with another always, and we talked of Charley Hall; of the many times we had sat there, gay and happy, because of his presence; and of the last night of our parting, then a year ago. Away across the wild mountains he was going from us to remain a year: a little year, as he said himself—a long year, as it seemed to me. Need I explain why?

“The long absence was nearly over on that evening, and though his letters to me had not been of the character his previous conduct had led me to expect, I could not help looking forward anxiously, hopefully, to the time of his return. Of that time we talked, as we partly reclined against the steps, our feet resting in the cushion of grass, over which crept the wild ivy, which also fastened itself in the crevices of the blue stones, of which the steps were roughly made, and clambered among the rose-bushes that grew under the windows.

“At last, after speaking much of fears, and hopes that kindled fears, we grew gradually still, and as the shadows fell thicker and darker, a childish timidity came over me—the creaking of the boughs against the wall, or a sudden shadow thrown across the moonlight, startled me—I felt a premonition of evil. I could hear the treading of the cattle among the green ridges of sweet scented hay, and across the orchard hill saw the sheep and lambs lie quietly among the yellow sheaves of oats that had been scattered for their evening meal; but rural pictures and sounds failed of soothing; and when far away I heard the beating of hoofs, I listened eagerly and half tremblingly, fixing my eyes on the gray line of dust that stretched

to the south. "I should be glad," I remember saying, "if that horseman, if horseman he be, were well by," and of asking Adeline if she felt no apprehension. "Not the least," she replied; and her manner, for she burst into outright laughter, for a moment reassured me; and especially when she added, "Do you not hear the rattling of wheels? I suspect it is Johnny Gates, coming from market, and fearful lest his wife's supper be cold." I was not well at ease, however, and as the strokes fell heavier and heavier, could not help repeating the wish I had made at first. Presently, dividing the shadows of the next hill, the gay but seemingly tired animal appeared. He was not the sober pony of Johnny Gates, nor did he draw the little market cart, so familiar to us both; for neither the shining little buggy, nor the briskly trotting horse, with slender ears pricked forward, and flanks speckled with foam, had either of us ever seen before; and the full round moon was quite above the eastern tree-tops, large and bright, so that we saw quite distinctly.

"More slowly the driver ascended the hill, looking eagerly toward the house, directly opposite which he drew up the reins, and I could hear the impatient champing of the bit and pawing on the ground, as he alighted, and approaching, inquired if we were sisters of Mrs. Dingley, who, he said, was sick, and desired me to come to her. She was many years older than I, and though I loved her, it was not as I loved Adeline, who had come up the pleasant paths of childhood, into the shadowy borders of womanhood, and the thick sorrows of maturer life, by my side. She had married unfortunately, as you perhaps know, and, in the suburbs of the city, lived in a humble, even a comfortless way. The news of her illness pained but did not surprise me; and remarking that I knew an evil star was in my house of life that night, I set about the little preparations necessary for my departure. In less than an hour I was on my way, and Adeline, the tears in her eyes, was alone.

"In the bustle of preparation, and the sorrow of departure, I had scarcely remarked the man who drove the carriage, but as the lights of home, and those most near to us, faded out, I began to observe him more particularly than I had done be-

fore. He seemed a short thick person, with a round heavy head set close on his shoulders, with a complexion so dark as to throw some doubt upon his origin, though I saw him but imperfectly, as he was enveloped in a rough shaggy coat, the skin of some animal apparently, the collar of which was drawn up, concealing, in part, his head, on which he wore neither cap nor hat, but instead a comforter of woolen, the ends of which hung loose, forming a tassel. The right hand was bandaged with a white cloth, but nevertheless he dexterously managed the fiery animal he drove with the left hand. We had proceeded a mile or two in silence, when thinking, perhaps, his voice would destroy the vague terror suggested by his person, I addressed to him some remark; but his reply was brief, and in a grum and forbidding tone, so that I understood not a word.

“As we drew near the grave-yard in the edge of the lonesome wood, I noticed that the gate, which was of iron, and usually locked, stood a little open, and whether this circumstance quickened my imagination I do not know, but I either heard, or thought I heard, a noise within. My companion seemed to hear it too, for drawing up the reins, he leaned in that direction, and listened closely, though he spoke not. Suddenly the horse, which had been with difficulty restrained, elevated his head, and lowering his back as though to pass under an arch, sped swiftly down the slope and under the tangled boughs of the haunted hill. ‘Don’t be scared at nothing, old boy,’ said my taciturn friend, addressing the refractory horse, and bringing him to a sudden stand, with a jerk so violent that it at first threw him back on his haunches, he leaped out, and throwing the reins on the ground, as if purposely to add to the fear in my heart, which he must have been aware of, he succeeded in quieting the animal by half fond, half rough caresses, bestowed on his glossy neck and head.

“I felt myself trembling, and dared not speak, lest my fear should betray itself. The broad field of moonlight lay on the summit of the hill behind us, and not yet quite out of view, and a little faint and checkered light struggled through the boughs. My strange conductor, after repeatedly listening and looking back, as though in expectation of something, began

fumbling in his pocket, perhaps for a deadly weapon, I thought, and I breathed freely when he only took thence a watch with a heavy chain attached, both of which, by their glittering, seemed gold, and turning it toward the moonlight, endeavored to discover the time of night. It must have been about eleven o'clock, as I judged by the moon. Every thing he did, the hour, the place, were suspicious, else my state of mind rendered them so. We did not remain thus motionless, perhaps, over ten minutes, but it was long enough for me to conjure a thousand shapes of evil. My sister's illness might have been a pretence under which to lure me to death. Once or twice I was near screaming for help, but the consciousness that none was within reach, and the knowledge that I should but hasten my doom if there were really danger, kept me still, and when we again set forward, very slowly, I tried to divert my thoughts from their hideous channel, and had in part succeeded, when a new, but not less terrible fear thrilled the very marrow in my bones.

"We were nearly midway of the lonesome road: on one side was a ridge of high stony hills, and on the other a deep ravine, along which a noisy stream tumbled and dashed toward the river, which swallowed it. The mist hung white above it, and crept lazily up the ascent beyond, and from beneath its folds the whippoorwill was repeating its mournful song. In the bottom of the carriage lay a small coil of rope, which the slightest motion of my feet disturbed, giving me most unpleasant sensations. Once, as I endeavored to shuffle it aside, the man chuckled, and saying ropes were used sometimes for other purposes than hanging, placed it on the seat between us. As he did so, I noticed that he looked back earnestly, and that the gaze was often repeated. I did not dare to look, though I now distinctly heard the rumbling of some light vehicle behind us. Nearer and nearer it came, and thinking, perhaps, it might be Johnny Gates on his way to market—though I had once mistaken a similar sound that night—and that an honest friend might be very near, I turned and saw a small uncovered wagon drawn by one horse, at a distance of but fifty yards. Within it two men were seated, and right between them, upright, and

stiff and stark, seemingly, was what appeared a woman clothed in white. Fears would not permit a continuance of my gaze, nor would it allow me to look steadily in the opposite direction, and so as we descended beneath the dark arching of trees, I often looked back. They did not approach more nearly, and the light was faint, but my first impression would take no other shape.

"It seemed to me the long hill would never have an end, and with that mysterious carriage creeping slowly and softly behind us, the moments were centuries. At last, however, I saw the road emerging into the light, and heard the stage coach rattling over the bridge beyond. Presently I saw the tossing manes of the four gay horses and the glimmer of the lamps. My weak fears were gone, and from my bent and trembling position I drew myself up and looked boldly around. The ghostly equipage was nowhere to be seen.

III.

"It was near midnight when we drew up in the broad area of light that fell from the window of my sister's sick chamber. The moon was high, and so bright that the stars seemed fewer and paler than was their wont. The air had become chilling, and the streets were almost entirely deserted, which heightened my desolate feeling; for my friends, as I have said, lived in the suburbs of the city, and I saw through a row of naked trees that stood a little to the west, the white gleam of high monuments, and low and thickly set tombstones. Glad as I was to be separated from my strange conductor, a dismal home-sick feeling came to trouble me anew.

"It is a sad thing to go into a strange house where there is sickness. We need to be strong and hopeful ourselves, in order to bear with us any of the joy and light of consolation. This residence of my sister was of wood, small and unpainted, and on an obscure street, without pavement or lamps, with on the one side an old graveyard, from which a part of the dead had been removed and on the other a lunatic asylum, from which

proceeded such frightful noises as tended in no wise to quiet my feelings.

“My quick, loud rap, was presently answered by my brother-in-law, whose highly decent and respectable appearance contrasted strangely with the poor and scanty air of things about him. He was one of those peculiarly organized persons who, capable of turning his hand to almost anything, was only goaded by the closest necessity to any sort of exertion. Of the most amiable disposition imaginable, and affectionate to his wife and children—proud of them indeed—he was nevertheless so invulnerably indolent, that the common comforts of life were often wanting to them and to himself. He was a little, stiff, and exceedingly pompous man, both in manners and conversation, and his ‘expectations’ were a theme on which he dwelt delightedly from one year’s end to another. ‘Amanda,’ he was accustomed to say, when he saw his patient and worn wife bending over the miserable remnant of some garment—‘don’t work any more, my dear; I will get new clothes for the children.’ But his promises were the basis of small hopes, and poor Amanda generally darned on as long as the tallow candle gave her any light. She is one of the best and most painstaking women in the world, and in spite of all her many crosses and disappointments, loving and even hopeful still. God knows whether she will ever have the little cottage invested with vines and shrubbery which is her ambition; but at this period everything about her was hopeless.

“The room we entered was small, with low ceiling, curtainless windows, and naked floor. The furniture consisted of a few common chairs, a square pine table, a cupboard in which there was nothing to eat, and a stove in which there was no fire. My brother-in-law kissed my forehead, said he was delighted to see sister *Elsah*, that the prospect looked a little sombre just now—glancing about the room—but that in a day or two things would assume their usually cheerful aspect; and as this was being said he conducted me up a narrow flight of stairs, and into the sick chamber. My sister I found quite ill, but not dangerously so, and the room was as barren of comfortable appliances as the one I first entered. I soon contrived

to arrange things as well as I could, and when the bed and pillow had been carefully spread, and the hands and face of the invalid freely bathed in cold water, she felt refreshed, and after a little toast and some cheerful conversation, fell asleep. The husband, wearied with the watching of previous nights, shortly followed her example, and I was left to wile the remainder of the night away as best I could. Hearing the tossing and turnings of the children in the next room, I looked in to see what disturbed their slumber. Their beds were hard mattresses, laid flat on the floor, and the clothing, even for that early season, was quite too scanty, eked out as it was with old shawls and petticoats.

“There were the two black-eyed little girls, each with arms folded lovingly about the other, but with a half scowl on her face; near by lay their brother, an active and intelligent boy of ten years, his hands locked tightly together above his heavy black hair, and his lips compressed as though conscious of endurance. Piled on the floor at the head of his bed were the two or three dozen books that composed his library. They had been collected from various sources, and were carefully preserved, as appeared from the paper covers in which the most elegantly bound were enveloped. Some of them he had received as prizes at school, a few I had given him, and the remainder were fruits of his labor; for sometimes on Saturdays and other holidays, he did errands for Mr. Mackelvane, a rich merchant and neighbor, who employed his father as clerk, when he would condescend to be employed. A shrewd boy and a good was my nephew Ralph. Depending over the little library, by way of ornamenting his part of the room, I suppose, were two or three graceful plumes of the peacock. I took the shawl from my shoulders, and spread it over his bed as a coverlid, wrapping it warmly about his neck. He did not wake, but his countenance assumed a softened expression, and I was more than repaid for my own deprivation.

“The fire was growing dim, and the light low, and hoping to divert my thoughts from their troubled channel I took up the evening paper, and by chance ran over the list of arrivals, and among them was that of Mr. and Mrs. Charles H——. I

cannot describe to you the terrible sensation which came over me. I knew not till then what hope I had been leaning on—suddenly it was broken away, and I felt too weak and wretched and helpless to stand alone. The past was a mockery and delusion, the present a horrible chaos, and the future all a blank. How was I, faltering and fainting with a bleeding heart, to be a minister of strength and consolation, to speak what I felt not, and feel what I spoke not. I was irritated by every sound: no matter whether it were of the wind moaning through the trees along the grave-yard, or of some belated step on the ground below—it seemed like digging the tomb of peace. The candle burned dim, and flickered and went out; I knew not where to find another, and so, with no other light than that of the dying embers, and the white sheet of moonlight that fell across the darkness, I sat there, in solitude, with a darker sorrow on my spirit than I had ever known before. Beyond the desolate common, with low and mean houses scattered here and there, burned the lamps, rose the luxurious dwellings and shone the towers of the great and wealthy city: no light anywhere in the world burned for me, none of those elegant homes had any word or warmth for me—I was suddenly become an alien from humanity. He, who had made all things beautiful, all situations endurable, was once more near me; the chime of the same bells smote upon our ears, but how different the echoes it awakened. Fate links strange contrasts—the bridal train sweeps by the slow, pale procession of death, and the lights of the birth-chamber grow dim in an atmosphere of woe! It seemed that the long night would never end; but what, in the great universe of things, are our little joys or sorrows, that the wings of time should be stayed or quickened for them! At length the hours wore by, and the sounds of footsteps on the pavement, first at intervals only, began to be heard, and gradually deepened and thickened—the world was astir, and morning was come to every one but me.

“Some little light came into my heart as the children climbed about me, in an ecstasy of gladness. Ralph was more shy than the little girls, and felt a hesitancy about scrutinizing my bonnet and shawl with as much freedom as they, nor could he

exhibit his little collection of books with the complacency they felt in showing me their patchwork and dolls. He, however, at last, half in shame and half in pride, displayed before me not only his books, but another treasure scarcely less prized. The most choice volumes he took from their paper envelopes that I might see how free from any soiling they were, and be gratified with the brightness of the bindings. I praised him for their careful preservation, as well as for the knowledge he had derived from them.

“While he and I were thus engaged, the little girls had constantly interrupted us with, ‘Oh, come aunty, oh come down, Ralph has got something prettier to show you.’ ‘Never mind,’ said Ralph at last, ‘Aunt Elsie has seen a thousand, and prettier ones than mine, I expect,’ though he was evidently as anxious as they, judging from the alacrity with which he ran down stairs before me, when I said, ‘What is it Ralph—a dog?’ He laughed at my mistake, adding, “It is n’t nothing much.”

“In one corner of the hard beaten door-yard grew a small cherry-tree, and from its topmast bough, trailing earthward and shining and sparkling in the light of the lately risen sun, were the plumes of a beautiful peacock. Very proud he looked, and as if unwilling to descend to the common earth. ‘That is all,’ said Ralph, pointing to the bird, but no doubt expecting on my part a delightful surprise. I did feel pleasure, and expressed perhaps more than I felt. ‘Who gave him to you?’ I asked. ‘No one,’ he replied, ‘I bought him with money Mr. Mackelvane gave me for doing errands;’ and more sorrowfully, after a moment he said, ‘I might have spent the money more usefully, mother says, but I wanted something pretty, and we had nothing that was pretty.’

“My praises of the beauty of the bright-plumed bird soon diverted his thoughts to a more agreeable channel, and in conferring happiness, I became at least less miserable. Mr. Dingley, who was always going to do something, making arrangements for some wonderful speculation, instead of actually accomplishing anything, set out on a journey of a hundred miles, a day or two after my arrival, taking with him most of the scanty means the house afforded, and saying as he did so, ‘I should not be

surprised Amanda^h, if I made a thousand dollars by this little trip.'

" 'I should,' said Ralph, who was wise beyond his years; and going close to his mother, he asked, in a whisper, if father had taken all the money. She told him his father always did what he thought was for the best, and, quieted, if not convinced, he left the room. Presently I descended too, and found him sitting on the doorstep of the kitchen, his eyes full of tears, and vainly endeavoring to twist the sleeve of his roundabout in a way that would conceal the ragged elbow. Busying myself, I affected not to see the exhibition of sorrow, and when his eyes were dry, said carelessly, 'I see, Ralph, you have torn the sleeve of your coat—if you will take it off I will mend it.' He took it off, saying as he laid it in my lap, 'It is not torn, aunt Elsie, but worn out;' and while I mended it, telling him I could make it look just as well as when new, he informed me that Washington Mackelvane had a fine blue coat with brass buttons, and that he laughed at his old gray one, calling him a poor boy.

"Mrs. Dingley continued to improve, and at the end of a week was quite well. From the time of my coming, our meals had been growing less and less substantial, till we were finally reduced to almost nothing, and the last cent was expended.

"Poor Ralph, whose sufferings were twice as great because I knew it all, staid from school, and asked Mr. Mackelvane if he could not give him something to do, but that gentleman did n't want anything done; he next took two of his prettiest books to the grocer, and tried to exchange them for something to eat, but the grocer did n't want them, saying he had no time to read; and, discouraged and almost crying, the little fellow came back. 'What shall we do, mother?' he said, in the hope that she might have resources he knew not of; but she could suggest nothing better than the asking Mr. Mackelvane to lend them some money till Mr. Dingley's return. 'No,' said Ralph, resolutely, 'not as long as we can help it,' and away he ran, without giving us any intimation of his intention. When he returned, which was in half an hour, Washington Mackelvane was with him, and going straight to where the peacock was

dropping his long plumes in the sun, seized him by a dexterous movement, and bore him off in triumph, tossing Ralph some money as he did so, as though it were of no importance to him. Ralph came in, and placing the price of his treasure in his mother's hand, ran up to his room, and sitting down on the edge of his low bed, gave way to his emotion—half of vexation at the loss of his favorite, half of joy that he was able by any sacrifice to save his mother and sisters from a part of their unhappiness."

IV.

When Cousin Elsie had finished this story of poor Ralph, drawing our chairs to the fire, for the air was become chilly, I asked whether she heard anything more of her strange escort, or the mysterious pursuit. Nothing farther, she said, than that the person hired to convey her to the city bore the reputation of an honest man; but as to the vision, or whatever it were, on the lonesome hill, no more was learned by her, except that a young man, of strict integrity, who chanced to be returning home late from visiting a sick neighbor, encountered the same strange vehicle with the white occupant. "And Charley H.," I said, "did you meet him?"

"Yes," said cousin Elsie, "and that was the most unkindest cut of all."

"I could not bear to eat Ralph's bread, procured as it was, and not really being needed any longer, I set out to walk home, and with the little parcel in my hand, had reached the lonesome hill, when a handsome equipage overtook and passed me, and looking up, I recognized Mr. H. The lady sitting at his side, who seemed beautiful and very gayly dressed, looked back from the window several times. Oh, I could have called on the trees to crush me!" said Elsie, "for very mortification."

We sat long in silence, looking into the fire. Little Ralph and his beautiful bird would not let me sleep. Many a name illumines the page of history for a less noble heroism than his.

WARD HENDERSON.

I.

THE wild wind swept over the hills, and rocked and rattled the naked boughs of the long strip of woodland, the dead leaves of which sometimes drifted against the door and blew over the windows of the little cottage of Mrs. Henderson. But that night, the last night of the year the crying of the wind and the surging of the fallen leaves seemed less mournfully suggestive to the inhabitants of this humble house, than for a great many previous nights.

The house was small and rude, being constructed of logs on the exterior of which the rough bark was still remaining. The roof was of clap-boards, battened, and so close as to be nearly as impervious as the best shingling. The door was made of slabs, and opened with a wooden latch, and from the small and uncurtained window the light, on the evening I write of, shone out brilliantly, streaming across the frozen ground, just beginning to whiten with the finely sifted snow. From the top of the low chimney, composed of sticks and mortar, showers of red sparks issued, and were scattered by the wind until their quick extinction. A short distance from the house, and fronting it, stood an oak tree, shorter than most of its species, and with an exceedingly heavy top; the gray leaves of this year clinging thickly yet. A little farther down the slope, was a spring of water, bubbling up in spite of the cold, though the snow was beginning to form about it in a sleety rim. In the rear, and meeting the woods, were a few ancient apple trees, which seemed, from their thickly tangled boughs, not to have been pruned for years, and out of them thousands of slim rods grew up straight. There was no barn or other out-house, to give the place an air

of plenteous comfort, with the exception of a small building, made to serve as a cellar, walled and roofed with slabs, and built partly in and partly out of the ground, which was heaped about it, and over all rose a high green mound, green at least in summer, though to-night it resembled a great heap of snow. Her head turned from the driving wind, and her back crouched down, stood a little black cow, with very clear and very crooked horns, and an udder that looked shrivelled, as though it would never yield milk again. But, notwithstanding that, when she shall have had a bundle of hay, from the near stack, encompassed with rails, the bright tin pail, now shining in the dresser, will froth up to the brim. She is so gentle and kind that young Ward Henderson, as well as his mother, may milk her. In the light that falls from the window is a small dog, blacker than the cow; he turns sideways as the wind comes against him, but does not growl; he is crunching a bone quite too large for his mouth, and in his efforts at mastication, turns his head more and more to one side, and nearer and nearer to the ground. The snow falls off from his sleek back, and his eyes glitter like fire. Not every day the cur can get a bone so worth his care.

But let us look within. The logs of hickory and ash are heaped high, and the dry chips between help to send the blaze far up the chimney. The stones that make the broad hearth are blue and clean. Some strips of rag carpet, looking new and bright, cover the greater part of the floor, and the remainder is scoured very white. The room is large, and in the two corners farthest from the great fire-place, are two beds; between them stands a bureau, on which a dozen books are carefully arranged; some common chairs stand against the wall, which is white-washed, as is also the low ceiling. A few sprigs of cedar are festooned about the small looking glass, and in the cupboard, which has no door, pewter platters and delf ware are arranged to the most showy advantage.

But humanity deepens the interest of the picture, no matter whether homely or refined. What could poets glean from the desert, with its hot waste of sands, but for the tinkling bell of the camel, and the cool well under the shrub, and the isolated tent of the Arab. What were the dense forests and rugged

cliffs and billowy prairies that hem the western world, but for the bundles of arrows and crests of plumes and skin-lined lodges of the red man.

In this cottage, sitting upright in an unpainted wooden cradle, looking wide awake, but very sober, is the baby; he may be two years old, with bright black eyes, and hair of the same color, which, thick and parted either way from his forehead, give him an old and wise look. He wears only a simple kilt of calico, and one chubby hand plays with the rounded foot, and the other lies on the patchwork quilt covering his cradle bed. Sitting on a low stool, at one corner of the fireplace, is a boy, ten years old, perhaps; he has a thoughtful, intelligent countenance, and seems quiet and shy. His hands are locked together over one knee and he seems to see neither the baby in the cradle, nor the great blazing fire, nor yet his mother, who, in a tidy apron and with sleeves turned back, is moulding cakes on the white pine table near the window. She looks as though she had known toil and privation and suffering, and yet, above the sorrow is a look of cheerful resignation.

Near the abstracted little boy, closely wrapt in a great shawl, sits a young girl; she is rocking to and fro before the fire, and it seems that the light might almost shine through her thin transparent hands. Her cheek is hollow and pale, and her dark eyes look very large and brilliant, but she seems happy, and talks with animation and gayety, not only of tomorrow but of next month, and next year. There are no shoes on her feet and as they rest on the cushion she often stoops to draw up the stocking which slips down from the wasted and wasting ankle.

"How merrily the wind whistles!" she says, "the old year does not go out without music; but Ward, why do you sit there so sober and still? see, you make the baby look sober too;" and clapping her hands together, she tried to make him laugh, but he pouted his lips instead, half crying. She continued, "Bring some of the nuts we gathered last fall, and let us have a merry evening, and not sit as though we never expected to see another new year."

Ward turned aside to hide tears that came to his eyes and

going to the bureau, took down all the books and re-arranged them precisely as they were before, and presently climbing up to the loft, brought a basket of nuts.

Meantime the baby had fallen back on his pillow asleep, and Mrs. Henderson, as she baked the cakes by the fire, sat with her children, rocking the cradle now and then, and talking more and more cheerfully and hopefully: so much do the moods of those about us influence our own.

"I think, Mary, you are surely better," she said, looking anxiously at her daughter. "You must be careful and not get another bad turn till spring, and then the mild weather will quite restore you."

"I told you I should get well," answered the girl, laughingly; "just see how fat I am getting," and drawing up her sleeve, she exhibited an arm of ghastly thinness. The mother said nothing, and Mary continued, "If I keep on improving, I shall be well enough to begin sewing again in a week." She was interrupted by a severe fit of coughing, but added, when she had recovered a little, "What a nice dinner we shall have to-morrow; I think even Ward, indifferent as he seems, will relish the minced pie; but the chicken—he won't care for that," she added playfully.

"Maybe not," answered Ward, "I don't know how it tastes." Mary said he would know to-morrow, and he too at last began to be interested. Naturally of superior intelligence, and always accustomed to sorrowful privations, he was thoughtful beyond his years. He was always making plans for the happiness of his mother and sister, more than for his own, and proposed to do a thousand things when he should be older. He already rendered them much assistance—driving the cow to and from the pasture, milking her, and making the garden, besides bringing and taking home the sewing which his mother did for neighbors, within three or four miles. These things were all done out of school hours, for he never lost a day from the school room, trudging manfully the long distance, when the winds were too chill for his thin cotton coat, and when the frosts made his feet so cold that he sometimes roused the cattle from their places in the fence corners and warmed them in

their beds. Many, who wore warm comforters and thick coats and shoes, never stood at the head of his class; but this would not repay him any longer for the frequent bitter taunts he received for his poverty. He had never spoken of these things at home, knowing it would only pain his mother, who did for him the best she could. He had usually talked of his studies with more interest than of anything else, and wishing to divert his thoughts from the sad channel in which they seemed to flow, Mrs. Henderson asked him whether he would not soon be wanting new books. But, to her surprise, he answered, "No, I don't want to go to school any more." "Why, my child, what in the world is the matter?" exclaimed the mother, in unfeigned surprise. Ward did not reply, and without "hanging up his stockings," crept into bed, and stifling emotion he could not quite suppress, he fell asleep.

II.

WHEN the cakes were all baked, and the fire began to grow dim, as the mother and daughter also prepared to retire, the little black dog growled harshly, placing himself against the door, and the old cock in the cherry tree cackled as though suddenly awakened. Presently the growl became a bark, and a footstep was heard crushing down the snow. The visitor proved a brother of Mrs. Henderson, a butcher, from the city, miles away from Clovernook. He had been in the country all day, buying sheep and calves, and with a little cart pretty well filled, was now on his way home, and stopped for a moment to see how his sister prospered. He, too, was poor, with seven children of his own, so that he could give her little but counsel and the encouragement of sympathy. To-night, however, he was in fine spirits; the prices of meat had risen, and rents were low, and his oldest boy had just obtained employment as carrier of the News, by which he earned three dollars a week. The publisher wanted another—an intelligent lad from the country would be preferred—and Mr. Dick, or Uncle Job, as his sister called him, urged the expediency of sending Ward. Mrs. Henderson was startled at the idea. How could she part with her child, who had never been from beneath her roof for

a day? But by little and little her scruples were overcome. "There is such necessity," says Uncle Job, looking at Ward's thin cotton trowsers, that hung on the back of a chair by his bedside (Mr. Dick never softened anything); "you'll miss his society, no doubt, but think of the pecuniary advantage;" and he added, glancing at Mary, "there is no telling what expense of doctor bills and the like you will have to defray before spring: this weather goes hard with folks of her complaint. I suppose," he continued, "the disease is hereditary—her father was consumptive always, as you may say. I was here at the burying, but I forget what grave-yard you put him in." Mr. Job Dick never dreamed but that he was talking in the pleasantest vein imaginable, and looked bewildered and surprised when he saw his sister applying the corner of her apron to her eyes. He could not have interpreted aright, for shrugging his shoulders as the wind whistled through the crevices, he said, "A miserable old house; it will tumble down upon you all, one of these days; yes," he continued, making a sort of reply to himself, "it's fall is inevitable."

"Perhaps it will," thought Mrs. Henderson, and she trembled as a stronger gust came by.

"Well, what have you determined?" asked Uncle Job; and rising, he stood before the fire, awaiting her final decision.

"I cannot let him go," faltered the poor widow; "I will keep them all together, as long as I can."

But the sound of a strange voice had broken the light slumbers of Ward; with his elbow resting on his pillow, and his head on his hand, he had heard all the conversation, and as his mother ceased speaking, he replied, in a calm, firm voice, that he would go. He was soon dressed—his uncle saying he liked such energetic movements, and his mother silently and tearfully preparing his scanty clothes. When he took the bundle in his hand, he hesitated; it was hard to leave them all—the baby asleep, and gentle Mary, and his dear kind mother. Once or twice he untied and tied his bundle, and as his mother wrapt a part of a blanket about him, and told him to be always a good boy, the tears quivered through his eyelashes, and without speaking a word he walked straight out of the room, and

presently uncle Job's little cart was heard creaking and crushing through the snow.

How lonesome it was in the little cabin! the dog crouched close against the door, and whined low and mournfully; the empty bed, the old hat on the peg, everything reminded the poor mother of her son, who, in the cold and dark, was going farther and farther away.

And long and lonesome seemed the road to Ward, as he nestled down in the bottom of the cart, among the sheep—the old blanket drawn up over his head, and the snow settling all over him. He had never been to the city but once before, and everything seemed strange to him. He caught glimpses of great houses, and of low dark sheds, whence the lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep came painfully upon his ears. He half wished he was back home again; nor was he much soothed and encouraged, when uncle Job said, "You must not mind trifles, but persevere, and make a man of more efficiency than your father, who was always a trifling, lazy scamp, and a great detriment to your mother, who was better off without him. I should n't wonder," continued uncle Job, in the same consolatory strain, "if you never saw your sister again. Your mother will be lonesome, losing two at once. There is the baby—it will be a long time before he is any help; he looks smart and likely now, but for all that he may be growing up to be hanged."

Ward was half disposed to slip out of the cart and run home, and more especially, when his uncle told him the city to which he was going was full of temptations, and that unless he was mighty resolute, he would get into the house of correction, or on the "chain gang," it might be. It was a long way back, and he was afraid he could not find the road, and so, trembling in fear of the pitfalls he supposed would be laid for him, he remained shrinking from the snow, till, in the dingy suburbs of the city, the little wagon halted.

Uncle Job lived in a small, rickety house: it might have been easily repaired, and made comfortable, but Aunt Dick was one of those women who never permit their husbands to accumulate more than five dollars at one time. She was a large,

easy, good-natured person, with the best intentions, but without any prudent forecast or calculation—a sort of Mrs. Nancy Yancey, toned down, to a degree. Ward thought she must be very kind, for some hot coffee was waiting by the fire, and on the table were spread some crackers and cheese. They were dainties to him; and, after partaking of them and getting warm by the fire, Uncle Job spread down his great-coat and two sheep skins, on which, tired and sleepy from chilliness, he slept till morning, when the voice of Aunt Dick, as she bent over him, exclaiming, by way of expressing her surprise, “High, diddle, diddle,” &c., aroused him to a consciousness of his new position.

Uncle Job had seven children, and a great din and uproar they made when one room contained them. But his amiable help-meet said they must talk and laugh just as much as they pleased, and if Joby did n’t want to hear it, he must go out of the house, which was only for women and children, at any rate. Before Job went, however, he was required to empty his pockets. Sometimes, but rarely, he asked what was wanting now? but the inquiry was useless, as he well knew, for it was always the same story,—the same in kind—Kitty had torn her new frock, on the nail that tore Billy’s coat the other day, and so she must have a new one; and as the good woman received the money, she would say, “Joby, you must drive the nail in, with a piece of brick, or something; the children have lost the hammer.”

“If we had what is wasted here,” thought Ward, as he sat by the fire watching his aunt prepare the breakfast, “I should not have been obliged to come away.”

“Where are the warm cakes, this morning?” asked Uncle Job.

“Why, my griddle got broke in two, and I had n’t anything to bake them on.”

“But you might have baked biscuit in the oven of the stove,” suggested the husband.

The wife said, “The stove has got choked with ashes, so it will not bake any more; a man must be hired for a day to clean it and make it bake. We will soon have to get a new

one ; this has lasted longer now than any one I ever had, and I guess I have had a half a dozen."

Ward had always thought a stove would last a lifetime.

The breakfast was at length ready. Aunt Dick, having arranged the table, and made the coffee, between intervals of rocking before the fire, and telling Job what was worn out and what was lost, and what he must bring home for dinner. But the children were not ready for breakfast : one had lost her shoes, and one had not got her face washed, and one was not out of bed at all ; but Mrs. Dick said those that were ready, must help those that were not ; and she and Job began breakfast as complacently as though all were quiet and in order.

III.

AFTER a day or two, Ward accompanied his cousin John to the office of the News. John was a short, burly boy, a year or two older than Ward ; he had always lived in the city, and was not afraid of man or beast—having been used to both. He not only, in his own estimation, could lift more than any other boy of his years, but he had suffered more, from various causes, with a distinct relation of all which he favored Ward, from time to time. And as they walked the long distance from Uncle Job's to the News office, on the morning alluded to, he related many peculiar and aggravated instances of affliction, beginning with a mad ox of his father's that had once bruised and tossed him in a terrible manner, tearing his trowsers into ribbons, and that, but for his wonderful presence of mind, would doubtless have crippled him for life, or killed him. In the next place, having been sufficiently entertained with the wonder of his cousin, he said he had once had a bee-sting on his hand, causing such inflammation that a peck measure would not have held it, and that he never slept a wink for two weeks—the bee was called a poison bee, or thousand stinger, he said. It was strange, Ward thought, that he had always lived in the country, and never heard of any such insect. Many other equally curious and interesting things the city youth related, which gave him great consequence in his own estimation. And

he dressed in all respects like a man, and smoked, and sometimes drank whisky.

Such was the future companion of Ward. Poor little boy, no wonder he wished he had stayed at home! There were a good many men about the stove in the publisher's office, and, naturally shy, and now frightened, he shrank tremblingly into the obscurest corner; but John went boldly forward, saying, "Gentleman, I have some business with the publisher—make way." And whether they heeded him or not, he soon made way for himself, telling the man of business he had brought him a country boy, such as he thought would suit—"ignorant and awkward, of course," he added, "but that will wear off, sir;" and thrusting both hands in his pockets, he drew himself up, evidently supposing he had acted a very distinguished part. "Where is he from?" inquired the man. John put his hand over his mouth, and in half whisper said, "*The butcher* picked him up with some sheep and calves."

"I should like to have a view of him," said the respectable personage, holding on his spectacles with one hand, and peeping between the shoulders of the men by the stove.

"Ward, this way," called out his exhibitor; and, grasping his well-worn hat tightly with his freezing hands, and looking down, the timid child came forward.

"Do you think we are thieves?" asked the publisher; and as Ward answered, "No, sir," he continued, "What makes you hold your hat so tight, then?"

Ward began to dislike his cousin very much, and to doubt whether there was any such bee as the poison bee or thousand-stinger. That he was a vulgar, ill-bred boy, he knew, and yet he stood silent and abashed before him.

The new arbiter of his fate saw he was just such a boy as he wanted, and felt that as he had no guardian or friend, he could manage him as he chose—make him do a great deal, in fact, and give him little for it. Nevertheless, he said, "I am afraid he will not suit," surveying him from head to foot; "but if you have a mind, you may come with me for a month, and if I find you honest, and of any tolerable capacity, we can perhaps make a bargain."

“What answer do you give the gentleman?” interposed John, getting one foot on the hearth of the stove, and pulling down his vest.

Ward said he would go, for he thought he would rather go anywhere than remain with his precocious relative, who said, as he walked away consequentially, “I’ll tell the butcher I’ve disposed of you.”

IV.

THE new situation was anything but agreeable. Ward was obliged to perform many servile offices, such as tending the bell, carrying in the coal and out the ashes, sweeping pavements, and, in short, was made a sort of boy-of-all-work. His bed was a hard one, and in a cold, empty garret—not by any means so comfortable as the feather-bed with the patch-work counterpane by the great blazing fire at home; and sometimes, as he lay in the cold and dark, he wished he had never gone from the quiet old cottage. Even the cow and the dog drew him toward them with almost a human interest. The food was such as he had not been accustomed to eat, and was less to his taste; the cold and half-cooked beefsteak was less agreeable to him than the potatoes roasted at home in the ashes. But through the hardships and privations of the first month, he cheered himself with the idea of receiving some money at its close, and of going home; when, however, the long time expired, and he ventured to hint his wishes, the publisher coolly told him he had hardly earned his bread and lodging, and that to go home was quite out of the question if he expected to continue in his employ—that boys who could not live away from their mothers were usually good for nothing. If he would stay, nevertheless, till the next New-Years, and gave satisfaction as a carrier, and make himself useful about the house, he would give him fifty dollars.

“But you give John Dick more, a good deal,” urged Ward, timidly.

“What I give other folks has nothing to do with you; and if you wish, you can go further and fare worse—I can get a hundred boys for less money.”

Ward with difficulty refrained from crying as he said he would go and ask his uncle Job, and whatever he decided for him he would do. John was not at home when Ward arrived there, and he was glad of it, and almost hoped another "pison bee" would sting him. Uncle Job had gone out to buy calves, but Aunt Dick was in the kitchen, good-natured as ever, baking pies, and she gave a whole hot one to Ward, telling him he must eat it all. She said she was just trying her new stove by baking twenty or thirty; that the old one had got full of ashes, and almost worn out, for she had had it a year and a half, and so had given it away, and got a new one. Ward felt so much encouraged by her sunshiny face, her genial talk, and warm fire, that the thought of a year seemed less terrible to him, and he secretly resolved to stay. What a wearisome winter it was! and as the little carrier-boy shivered along the street—for his thin clothes and ragged shoes were but slight protection,—no one noticed or pitied him, except myself, but I noticed and pitied him often. Instead of leaving the paper at the gate, as the other boys did, he brought it always and laid it on the window-sill, beside which I sat writing. He never had anything new—the same old cloth cap, pulled down over his eyes, the same linsey roundabout and trowsers, and thick heavy shoes, which gave way and gapped apart more and more every day. I had noticed him all the winter, and while the sleet and snow dripped from the eaves, and the daffodils came up under the window; the old shoes were thrown aside, and the trowsers were darned and patched, but worn still, and could not help a deeper interest in him for a vague recollection of having seen his childish face sometimes at Clovernook.

Now, my window was opened, and I sometimes spoke to the boy; but, though I wished to do so, there was something about the little fellow that prevented my offering him money. As the summer went on, however, our acquaintance ripened slowly, so that when it was raining, he sometimes stopped under the porch, and I gave him apples, or other fruit; but I never talked to him except of his occupation, the weather, or other common-places, though I felt sure of his superior intelligence.

V.

TIME passed along, and away across the city, through openings of roofs, and between spires, I could see the red woods of October; and these faded and withered, and there came the chill, dismal rains of November. A dull, dreary, and monotonous storm had continued all night and all day, and all day and all night again; and now and then one of the great sere leaves of the sycamore that grew in the yard blew against the window. I had chanced to miss seeing my little friend, and I took up my pen on the depressing and comfortless morning, more with the purpose of watching for him than because I felt any inclination to write. I was presently wrapt in meditation, and quite forgot my object, and so softly he came, that it was only by the darkening of the window that I noticed him.

The smile which came to my lips was startled away when I perceived him, haggard and wretched, turning back into the rain, without noticing me. His coat was unbuttoned and blowing wildly open, and he seemed to be buffeted in very sport by all the merciless elements. He had no shoes on his feet, and his cloth cap was drenched and matted close to his head. I called to him, and, as he turned toward me, I perceived that he had been weeping violently. "Come in and get warm by the fire," I said; "I have not seen you for a long time." He would have thanked me, but his lips trembled, and the tears sprang to his eyes, as he silently obeyed, for my invitation was almost a command. I re-arranged his papers, on the table, that he might recover himself a little; but when I turned to speak, he put his hands before his face and cried, and when I inquired what was the matter, it was long before he could answer me that his sister Mary was dead. Then it was that I first learned all his sad history; and if I had been interested in him before, I was doubly so now.

Afterward I had always some words of encouragement when he came; sometimes a piece of pie or cake, for which he was very grateful, for it was not often he had the privilege of going to Aunt Dick's.

I repeated his story to a rich lady who lived near. She had

often noticed, and now wished to aid him. "But how shall I manage?" she said; "I cannot give him clothes or money." At length we decided on a plan; and the next day, when he threw the paper in at the basement, she called and told him that if he would put her paper on a particular window, she would pay him on New-Year's eve. I had also a little project for a present, at the same time, of which I said nothing. The printer whom Ward served was a hard man, but he was honest; that is, he paid what he said he would pay, and people called him Christian.

The many sufferings, hardships, and long hours of homesickness, which Ward endured, it would be useless to enumerate, but as they drew near the close, his heart became light, and his countenance cheerful.

The period was come for the development of my design. I had prepared for Ward a Carrier's Address, for the printing of which he stipulated with the publisher, and the receipts were to be entirely his.

New-Year's morning arrived at last, clear and sharply cold, but Ward minded not that, for the nice suit of clothes the rich lady had given him, kept him warm, and no frost could get through the comfortable boots, and the new cap was altogether better than the old. Such a picture of happiness it did one good to see, as, tapping at my door, he laughingly handed in the Address, neatly printed, with a border, on straw-colored paper. He had disposed of nearly all the copies of it, and the shillings and larger pieces he had received, were more, he thought, than he could count.

He was now going home, and only sorrow came in between him and happiness, as he thought of the new and lonesome grave under the naked winter trees.

Cousin John, who obtained a great deal more money than he, had spent it as fast as he earned it; he could tell larger stories and eat more oysters than he could a year ago; and he still called his father the butcher, which Aunt Dick thought a fine accomplishment. As Ward bade the amiable woman good-bye, she told him to spend his money in part for a fine silk dress for his mother; he might also get her a velvet bonnet with plumes, and

a shawl ; these, she said, would be a nice present, and if he had any money left, he should get some sugar for his mother to make preserves. But Ward had a plan of his own, which he thought better. He was going to give his mother half of his money to do with as she thought best, and the rest should pay for his tuition at the academy.

As the twilight fell I pleased myself with making a picture of the cabin home. I could see the bright hearth, and the table all spread—for the loving mother knew her dear boy was coming—and the baby, toddling about and prattling—all but the returning son forgotten. And I could imagine the joyous, and yet sorrowful, bewilderment, as the good boy should spread his year's gains on the table, saying, "If Mary were here too!"

CONCLUSION.

ALL things are beautiful in their time. Even Death, whom the poets have for ages made hideous, painting him as a skeleton reaper, cutting down tender flowers and ripe grain, and binding them into bundles for his dark garner, heedless of tears and prayers, is sometimes clothed with the wings and the mercy of an angel. It was one of the most beautiful conceptions of Blake, displayed in those illustrations of the Night Thoughts which forever should cause his name to be associated with the poet's, that his countenance who is called the Last Enemy was all sweetness and pitying gentleness; and how many, who have trembled with terror at his approach, have found the dearest rest in his embraces, as a frightened child has forgotten fear in wildest joy on discovering that some frightful being was only its mother, masqued for playing. Through this still messenger "He giveth his beloved sleep." How pleasant to the old and the worn to resign all their burdens in his hands, to lay by the staff, and lie down under canopies of flowers, assured that even through the night of the grave the morning will break! Thrice pleasant to the old, assured of having fought the good fight, and who feel, beneath the touch of Death, their white locks brightening with immortal crowns. They have done their work, and only Death can lead them up to hear from the master, "Well done, good and faithful servant." To the little child who has never sinned, he comes like a light slumber, and the tempter, through the long bright ages, has no power. Only through the narrow and dark path of the grave could the tender feet have escaped the thorns—only to the bed which is low and cold may the delirium of passion and the torture of pain never come; so to the child the foe is the kindest of friends—dearest of friends!

One of the loveliest pictures that ever rises before me—I see it as I write—is that of a fair creature whose life was early rounded by that sleep which had in it the “rapture of repose” nothing could disturb forever. She had lain for days moaning and complaining, and we who loved her most could not help her, though she bent on us her mournfully beseeching eyes never so tenderly or imploringly. But when the writhing of anguish was gone, death gave to her cheek its beauty, and to her lips the old smile, and she was at rest. She had been lovely in her life and now she was transformed into an angel of the beautiful light, the fair soft light of the good and changeless world.

And for the wicked, looking over ruins they have made of life’s beauty, friends they have changed to foes, love they have warped to hatred, one agonized moment of repentance has stretched itself up to the infinite mercy, and through radiance streaming from the cross, has sounded the soul-awakening and inspiring sentence, “Thy sins are forgiven!” What divine beauty covers the darkness that is before and around him! how blest to go with the friend who has come for him down into the grave, away from reproachful eyes—away from haughty and reviling words—away from the gentle rebuking of the injured, hardest of all to bear, and from the murmuring and complaining of a troubled conscience!

Whatever is dreariest in nature or saddest in life may in its time be bright and joyous—winter itself, with its naked boughs and bitter winds, and masses of clouds and snow. Poverty, too, with whom none of us voluntarily mate ourselves, has given birth to the sweetest humanities; its toils and privations have linked hand with hand, joined shoulder to shoulder, knit heart to heart; the armies of the poor are those who fight with the most indomitable courage, and like dust before the tempest are driven the obstacles that oppose their march; is it not the strength of their sinews that shapes the rough iron into axe and sickle? and does not the wheat-field stand smiling behind them and the hearth-light reach out from the cabin to greet their coming at night? Poverty is the pioneer about whose glowing forges and crashing forests burns and rings half

the poetry that has filled the world. Many are the pleasant garlands that would be thrown aside if affluence were universal, and many the gentle oxen going from their plowing that would herd in wild droves but for men's necessities. The burdens of the poor are heavy indeed, and their tasks hard, but it has always seemed to me that in their modest homes and solitary by-paths is a pathos and tenderness in love, a bravery in adversity, a humility in prosperity, very rarely found in those conditions where character is less severely tried, and the virtues, if they make a fairer show, grow less strong than in the tempest, and the summer heat, and the winter cold.

It has been objected by some critics to the former series of these sketches of Western rural life, that they are of too sombre a tone; that a melancholy haze, an unnatural twilight, hangs too continually over every scene; but I think it is not so; if my recollections of "Clovernook" fail to suggest as much happiness as falls to the common lot, my observation has been unfortunate. I have not attempted any descriptions of the gay world; others—nearly all indeed of those writers of my sex who have essayed to amuse or instruct society—have apparently been familiar only with wealth and splendor, and such joys or sorrows as come gracefully to mingle with the refinements of luxury and art; but my days have been passed with the humbler classes, whose manners and experiences I have endeavored to exhibit in their customary lights and shadows, and in limiting myself to that domain to which I was born, it has never been in my thoughts to paint it as less lovely or more exposed to tearful influences than it is. If among those whose attention may be arrested by these unambitious delineations of scenes in "our neighborhood," there be any who have climbed through each gradation of fortune or consideration up to the stateliest distinctions, let them judge whether the "simple annals of the poor" are apt to be more bright, and the sum of enjoyment is greater in even those elevations, to attain to which is so often the most fondly cherished hope of youth and maturity.

In our country, though all men are not "created equal,"

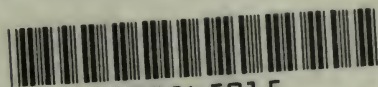
such is the influence of the sentiment of liberty and political equality, that

“All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,”

may with as much probability be supposed to affect conduct and expectation in the log cabin as in the marble mansion; and to illustrate this truth, to dispel that erroneous belief of the necessary baseness of the “common people” which the great masters in literature have in all ages labored to create, is a purpose and an object in our nationality to which the finest and highest genius may wisely be devoted; but which may be effected in a degree by writings as unpretending as these reminiscences of what occurred in and about the little village where I from childhood watched the pulsations of surrounding hearts.



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