FOUNDATIONS;

OR,

CASTLES IN THE AIR.

BY

ROSE PORTER,

AUTHOR OF "SUMMER DRIFTWOOD FOR THE WINTER FIRE."

NEW YORK:

ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & CO.,

770 BROADWAY, COR. 9TH STREET.

EDWARD O. JENKINS.
PRINTER AND STEREOTYPER,
NO. 20 N. WILLIAM STREET, N. Y.

ROBERT RUTTER,
BINDER,
84 BEEKMAN STREET,
N. Y.

PART I.

"For we are hasty builders, incomplete;
Our Master follows after, far more slow
And far more sure than we, for frost, and heat,
And winds that breathe, and waters in their flow,
Work with Him silently."

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CHAPTER I.

THERE had been a shower in the afternoon, but towards sunset the clouds lifted, and a flood of golden light lit up the valley, changing into rosy hues as the sun crept nearer the mountain peaks, behind which it would so soon hide. Every moment, a new glory and power it seemed to catch, sending its rays far over towards the eastern horizon, where the rain clouds still lingered; kissing the falling drops into brightness, till the dark clouds were arched with rainbow promise. Then the sun, it was

gone; only the outline of mountain blue—only the soft and tender light in the western sky, changing all the time into more shadowy tints, were left. And the rainbow, its colors too, had gone out. The clouds were heavy and dark again.

A little group had gathered in the porch of the old stone farm-house, to watch the sunset. Simple country folk they were—a mother and her children; but it is with their lives, chiefly, our story is interwoven; for it is but a simple story—only the old tale that is lived over every day—of a mother's love—patient and steadfast; of home leaving, and home coming—of sorrow and joy—of temptation and victory.

One by one the family separated, as the twilight faded, till only the mother and her son were left, standing alone in the dim light of the ending day. Long they were silent; then the young man spoke (for Alfred Merwin was no longer a boy, the day just past had filled out the number of nineteen years that had come and gone since his

life began): "Don't be afraid to trust me, mother; I will strive to be all you want." Man though he was, the tears choked his words, and the tall youth laid his head on his mother's shoulder, weeping like a child. His mother did not reply for a little while, but gently she took his hand in hers, and mother and son sat down together on the old stone step and mingled their tears.

The step worn by so many passers—the footfall of little children—the tread of weary age—the bounding step of youth—the measured tread of sober middle age—the door-step of the homestead, it sings a low wordless undertone song, that, breathed into sound, would catch something of the pathos of the heart-touching words England's poet uttered, when he tells:

> "The tender grace of a day that is dead
> Will never come back to me."

Such different tears they were! The mother's fell like baptismal drops, for every

tear found birth in a prayer. The son's, from a restless, eager heart.

She was a simple woman, Mrs. Merwin. Her life experience did not stretch far beyond the confines of the village. Mountains to westward, river to eastward, they bounded all of event, all of personal knowledge, she possessed of the outside world. A country girl reared among the hills, loving from childhood Herbert Merwin, the minister's son, with a trustful content in being loved by him. Her courtship days had been as free from excitement as the life behind them. No startling romance could she picture, only in her Bible there lay a faded leaf or two, beginning to be yellow with time now; and sometimes of a quiet Sabbath afternoon she would tell "the children" of her young days, and point, always with a smile, (unlike any other smile that ever shone on their mother's face, even the very youngest of them knew,) to the path by the brook-side or the wood road, out toward the mountains, and her voice was very soft and gen-

tle, when she said, "It was there your father gathered this, that spring before we were married;" or, "There we found these flowers, long years ago;" and the children held the faded flowers tenderly, while in the mother's eyes a far-off look came. Sometimes, too, when the summer evenings were longest, all together they would go through the pasture meadow, beyond the belt of pines that divided the farm land from the road way, to a little enclosure, sheltered from the scorching rays of the sun in summer, and protected from the winter's storm by the overhanging boughs of the forest trees—hedged in by wild roses and clematis—planted with the dear "old time" garden flowers—snow drops and violets, that bloomed when winter began to woo the spring—lilacs and lilies, as the spring melted into summer; of summer blossoms there was no lack; for the autumn, the late coming chrysanthemums, with their yellow and crimson flowers, and in the winter, when the flowers shut their eyes and went

to sleep, the pure snow fell like a trailing cloud from heaven, and the sunlight stole, in flickering smiles, through the evergreen boughs, tracing promises on the white stone in golden letters, for there was a white stone there—a mound of earth—and beside it a little mound, such a very little mound, marked by no stone, only a cross, cut by the father's hand, for he did not go home for a twelvemonth after the baby.

These were the household graves. And about that quiet place—about the flowers in her Bible—a little dress—a tiny pair of shoes—a broken toy—a golden ringlet—a lock of dark hair—all of romance or poetry the world ever caught, as belonging to Mrs. Merwin's life, lingered. And yet, her heart sang its own songs—some sweet—some sad. What heart does not?

Her children knew her love—they knew her prayers were constant for them; but as they grew out of childhood, something of reserve kept their mother often silent. It is wont to be thus with some women;

when love is strongest, almost with a pain do they put it into sounding words. So the last night of Alfred's stay at home had come, and still unspoken were the longings that filled his mother's heart. No one, except perhaps Mary, the eldest daughter, guessed the struggle it had cost Mrs. Merwin to give her consent to the urgent letters, his father's only brother, a wealthy merchant, had sent, offering Alfred a situation as clerk in his office. But the time came when the mother yielded; to-morrow he was to go forth—to sail down the river, beyond the sheltering mountain-peaks—to begin life in the city. And there they sat together—that quiet woman and the young man.

Into her soul the whisper of the day's storm—the glory of the sunset brightness, the significance of the eastern rainbow promise, stole, and, all unconsciously to herself, these mute interpreters of her heart's thoughts gave power, and clothed with tender beauty the words she uttered; and yet, though their influence shone

through her language, its inspired earnestness was caught from the silent up-lifting of her soul heavenward. Words she said, of loving warning — tender words of entreaty, pointing to the only safety—the only succor in temptation—Christ—"Who was tempted in all points, and, in that He suffered, being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted."

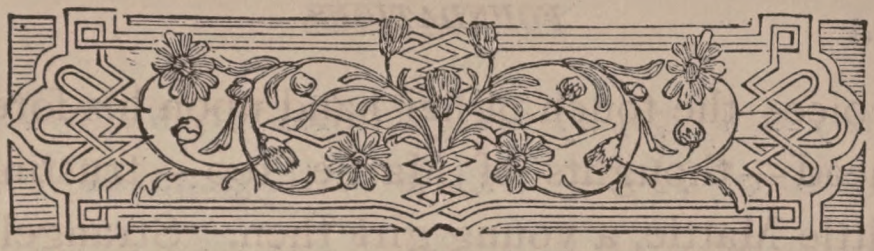
Alfred hardly recognized his usually quiet mother, listening to the outpouring of her soul's desire for him. After her words, they were silent again for a little while, till, in her wonted voice, Mrs. Merwin said, "Now my boy, we will go in," and she kissed his forehead, adding, "Are all your good-byes said, Alfred?" So calm was her tone, no one could have detected the yearning heart it concealed. "Yes, mother, all but one. I promised Mattie I would go round this evening. You will love Mattie, mother, for my sake;" and again Alfred's voice was tremulous. "For your sake and her own Alfred. Are you going now?"

"Yes, tell the girls I will be home soon;" and, with one more kiss, the young man passed hastily down the garden walk, through the little gate, and up the lane, which was almost dark now. Standing in the door-way, his mother watched him, till the outline of his figure was lost in the twilight gloom. Then her head was bowed. But—only God knows a mother's prayer.

When quite out of sight, Alfred paused and leaned against the stone wall which stretched along by the road-side. Over him came the words of his mother; the echo of her voice still lingered so near to him. Strong resolves, earnest purposes, were struggling in his soul as he stood there.

He never forgot that evening—long years afterward, the thought of it would come to him, stirred into warmth and life by some apparently trivial thing. The sound of the crickets and the katydids—the sweet odor of the pine woods—the cool, damp breath of the swamp lands he passed just before he came to Mattie's home—his mother's

voice—the touch of her hand upon his forehead — thoughts of Mattie, too — trusting little Mattie, a young girl then. Strangely these memories blended in with the dull, heavy clouds, the rainbow and the sunset. Overlaid by much of pleasure—much of pain — disappointment and hope — feeble effort for the right, failure and weakness—never out of his heart did the memory of that twilight fade — never out of his life passed the knowledge of his mother's love.



CHAPTER II.

IT was quite dark when Alfred reached the red house at the end of the lane, and not till Mattie spoke, did he see her, leaning against the great elm-tree, down by the gate, almost hidden by the gloom. The far-spreading branches of the tree stretched over the porch, and when the wind was high, were swayed back and forth as far as the window in Mattie's little room. This elm-tree was the pride of Mr. Wilson (Mattie's father); he never tired telling its circumference and pointing out its beauties, always ending with the story, which the neighbors well knew, of how it was plant-

ed years ago, by his grandfather, when the town of H—— was a settlement of but three or four houses. "No tree like the elm," he would add; and then Mattie's mother, a cheerful-tempered woman, ever claimed her say in favor of the forest trees —the pine, cedar and hemlock, liking them best, as she said, "because they were so intimate and friendly, always making one think of some great loving family." When her husband shook his head she would ask him "what the roots meant, by twisting in and out so, one with the other—what the massive ever-green boughs meant by interlocking their out-spreading branches, if it were not love and friendship." If he still looked incredulous, she would push her question further, and want to know why the "slender tops, so close against the sky" bent and touched one another, when the wind was nothing more than a breeze, if it were not their way of kissing. Though her argument was familiar, it always silenced Mr. Wilson, and made him say, "Well,

well, little woman, you have got the best of me"—it always sent him off to his plow, or hay-field, whistling, and the tune was ever the same, "Home, sweet Home." All this was because in his heart there was a little picture—a tender little spot, from which the bright colors never faded. The memory of an autumn day, long ago bygone—a cloudless day—a merry party starting for a chestnutting frolic, the golden sunshine up on the hills, and the softened light down in the pine woods, over toward Dominie Merwin's house; an awkward, overgrown young man; a laughing, rosy-cheeked girl; these were the memories that made his heart's picture, and that had touched them with perpetual light ever since that day, because of a questioning voice which asked "why the pine-trees grew so near together. Was it that they loved each other so well?" And then—but what need of telling over again the old well-known story.

Something had wakened its echoes very loudly in Mr. Wilson's heart as he stood in

the doorway, for over his face came a broad smile as his wife called, "Where is Mattie? The child should not stay out so late; the evenings are growing damp and chilly." Then, comfort-loving woman as she was, she stirred the wood fire, already burning brightly, till it sent forth a more ruddy, sparkling blaze, listening meanwhile to her husband's reply, "Tut, tut, she'll take no cold this night; let the child stay." When Mrs. Wilson joined him she saw the smile, for the fire lit up the door-way, and then the little woman put her hand on his arm and smiled too, right up into the honest, true hearted eyes, looking down into hers, and whispered, "It is the chestnutting time of year, John." Simple people though they were, they understood one another, for their hearts' music was the same.

All this time Mattie was by the garden gate, at first, watching and wondering why Alfred delayed his coming, for, in that quiet country village, evening meant sundown, and he had promised he would come in the

evening. Still he was not there, though the long shadows of the early twilight had lost themselves one in the other; though the glow in the sky had faded quite away, and the moon was just a silvery crescent thing of hope, not really light-giving yet. And then, Mattie was glad, for though her bright eyes could not fathom the darkness of the sheltered way, her listening ear caught the sound of Alfred's approaching footsteps.

It is a difficult task to describe Mattie. No one would ever have called her beautiful, though a sweet charm was in her every look and motion, for nature had been very bountiful in her gifts to this young girl. All unlearned as she was in the finishing touches of city life and boarding-school culture, her manners were not wanting in ease and grace—the sweetness of innocence—the calm simplicity of a pure true heart; these were Mattie's charms. And, just by way of parenthesis, that any reader may "skip," without losing one thread of our story, will we copy the lines of Hood's, which picture

little Mattie, in her young gladness, as first we knew her:

"She stood high breast amid the corn,
Clasp'd by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweet-heart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won.

"On her cheek an autumn flush,
Deeply ripen'd,—such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.

"Round her eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veil'd a light,
That had else been all too bright.

"And her hat, with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim;—
Thus she stood amid the stooks,
Praising God with sweetest looks."

Alfred was not the only one who detected "the charm of her presence." His voice grew softer than its wonted tone as he replied to her greeting question, "Did you see it, Alfred?" "See what, Mattie?" "Why, the sunset and the rainbow. I thought them sent for you."

Every one, who knows with familiarity the lives of "country people," and the subtle influence of nature on the opening heart and mind of those reared amid great natural grandeur and beauty, will recognize the undertone poetry which runs, like the tide of a river, through all after years of their lives, ebbing and flowing, something as their days come and go, affecting the internal and the *eternal* by the symbolism of external things.

Those who deal most in words, (whether they be uttered by the voice, or traced by the pen,) and who win the most abiding place in the hearts of men, are those who use them to make beautiful and vivid pictures for us; and is not the secret of Nature's great power, because it is ever leading us to pictures, infinite in number and variety, among the "mountains and plains of the earth, in the clouds and stars of the sky?" Yet, these *alone*, are, like the winter tree, stretching leafless branches out into the air, waiting to be vivified into fresh green life

by the upwelling sap, cold and desolate, till warmed into life by human fellowship, by thoughts of home, of loving fathers and mothers, of glad-hearted children, brave men and noble women, who have forgotten self in love and sacrifice. Even after the possession of these memories, as the tree is still waiting for the buds to unfold into leaf and blossom, ere its beauty is complete, the heart is waiting to be touched into lasting life by looking beyond the visible, beyond the images, bowing in "spirit and in truth," in worship of Christ, the revealed and self-revealing God.

This mystical influence of Nature strongly pervaded Mattie's inward life, giving coloring to the expression of her thoughts, as it did to Mrs. Merwin's, though they were so very different, for Mattie was outspoken and joyful, like her mother, seeing everything in rosy hues, while Mrs. Merwin, even from girlhood, had looked through sober tints.

That evening hour was a fitting time for

Alfred and Mattie to say farewell, such a tenderness was about everything; the very dimness was holy and soothing; no wonder their voices were low and gentle; and it was an easy thing for Mattie to tell the thoughts that stirred her young heart. They hardly knew how well they loved one another, for their love had grown with their years, and Alfred had made part of Mattie's dreams, even from childhood, all along the way her girlhood had journeyed; while to Alfred, however dazzling his hopes for the future, however aspiring his ambition, visions of Mattie's gladness always were blended in with the sweetness of the coveted success. There was no need to put it into words, and Alfred was silent as he listened to Mattie's eager prophecies for him. "Yes, Alfred," she exclaimed, "I know it was sent as a sign for *you*, all the beautiful golden light over toward the sunset place, just like the crown of success that will come to you when life has crept on to the west. The rainbow, that was in the

east, where you are now, it made my heart shiver, the clouds were so heavy and dark there. Do you think they meant the struggles you are to have in your young days?" And then, with the quick change of a nature, hopeful like Mattie's, all the sadness was gone from her voice, as she added, "But, the rainbow, it was made of the very brightest colors, and if that span your clouds, we will not mind the storms, will we, Alfred?"

Thus they talked, just standing, as they were, on the threshold of life, building their castles for the future. But they built them in the air, those castles, made of such beautiful jewels, only so fragile, for they built with hopes and dreams.

Not till the village clock struck nine did the parting-time come, and then Mattie said, it was not to be a good-by, "for up in the morning I will be, Alfred, down in the meadow-lot, where I can see you passing, and I will call out my good-by in the morning, not say it in the evening."

Very kind were the farewell words of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, and almost as though he had caught something of Alfred and Mattie's talk, Farmer Wilson added to his hearty "God bless you," "Remember, my lad, on the foundation on which you begin this new life will depend the future." Walking home, Alfred thought for a minute of Mr. Wilson's words, and their real meaning, "but the castle in the air" he and Mattie had been building, it was so much more tempting than the structure of hard labor and steady work, which he knew the farmer meant, he overlaid his advice with bright fancies, just as he had done his mother's words, which pointed him, not to a castle, but to the "*Corner stone.*"

CHAPTER III.

A FLOOD of light from the windows in the sitting-room shone out as Alfred approached the house. Mary had left the blinds open, because, as she said, "it will look cheerful to Alfred when he comes home;" and, for the same reason, Joe (the man-of-all-work) lit the logs which had been drying all summer in the wide open-hearted fire-place, apologizing, as he did so, for acting contrary to his oft-expressed opinion, "that no one needed a fire in the sitting-room short of October," by saying, "Ye see Master Alfred likes the looks of a blaze, and after the rain I reckon a heating

will do the old house good. Mrs. Merwin smiled and replied, "Very well, Joe."

Alfred stood for a minute or two outside, looking into the room, trying to persuade himself it was just to have a good glimpse of them all, and not heart-sinking at the thought of the morrow, which made him shrink from going in.

It was such a comfortable, cheerful room, and made so pleasant a picture, framed in by the window-casement, possessing, as it did, that peculiar charm which has stolen away so sadly from the great houses of the present day, perhaps, because the "spirit of home" is lost in wandering from room to room, sojourning a little while in one, then in another, while, in "old-fashioned times," its abiding-place was *there* in the sitting-room.

Never had home seemed dearer to Alfred than it did that night. There sat his mother, on her little low chair, busy with "last stitches" for him, he knew. Mary was kneeling down by his trunk, carefully lay-

ing in piece after piece of the neatly-folded clothes. On the other end of the lounge lay Bertie's books and cap, where he had tossed them on coming in from school. Little Bessie's broken doll, tucked away snugly for the night, in the tiny bedstead he had made, was standing in the corner she always called hers. Gertrude was leaning over the table, with flushed face, and eager, trembling fingers, finishing a little sketch of the dear home, for "Alfred," that he might hang it in his new room, where, every morning, he could see it. The little drawing, to cultured eyes, would have looked rough enough, but the lack of perspective, the too heavy strokes here, the too light there, did not mar its beauty to those loving gazers. "It must be good," Mary said, "for even baby Bessie calls it 'our house,' and old Margaret, when I showed it to her, exclaimed, 'Why, do tell—that's this 'er place, Miss Gertrude has put on to paper.'" As if to give more comfort to the scene, Rover, the dog, had crept

in and stretched himself before the fire; the kitchen door had been left open, and through it Alfred caught a glimpse of Joe busy shelling corn, and of old Margaret, going in and out of the store-room, "setting the cakes to rise for Master Alfred's breakfast," he could almost hear her say. The *home* look of it overcame him; the dreary sense of going away and ceasing to be *in* it all. It was this that made him push the hair from his forehead, draw himself up to his full height, and open the door hastily. His mother caught the action, and the look on his face, which he so resolutely tried to hide; so did Mary; but, with the ready tact of women, they seemed unobserving, and talked of surface subjects, while each one knew the deep underlying thoughts of the other. "Has it cleared off, Alfred? Will it be a fine day to-morrow? Are the stars shining?" All these commonplace questions they asked. By and by Mrs. Merwin put away her sewing, and wandered about the room restlessly, shut-

ting the blinds for the night, hanging up Bertie's cap and laying away his school-books. Meanwhile, Mary called Alfred to tell him where to find one thing and another, when he opened his trunk, saying, "Mother knows all about the tray, for she packed that," "Yes, my son," said Mrs. Merwin, joining them, "here you will find your Sunday suit and some other little things you may need;" and, spite her efforts, Mrs. Merwin's voice grew tremulous. It was such a hard thing, this first going away from home. No wonder the pain of it would creep out, though they tried so bravely to seem cheerful. "It is late, and we must be up early in the morning. Gertrude, call Joe and Margaret; we will read now," said Mrs. Merwin.

The Bible mark for that evening's Scripture pointed to Luke, 15th chapter, but almost hastily, as though the spirit-meaning of the parable was shrouded in the visible picture of the son a prodigal, Mrs. Merwin turned the leaves backward, and read

from Matthew 7th chapter, pausing, when she came to the 24th verse, to say, "Do not forget, my children, as we build so will our future be;" then she finished the chapter, but ere closing the Bible she read the one verse, from Corinthians,—"Other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid—Christ."

The girls wondered at her selection, but Alfred knew *why* his mother chose as she did.

With the shadow of the morrow's parting heavy on their hearts, the good-night kisses were silently given by sisters and brother; only the mother lingered for one more word alone with her son.

Ere the clock struck again, the lights which had shone with cheerful brightness from the windows of the old farm-house, had gone out, and unbroken darkness settled down over the valley, as it had done over the village an hour ago. Still, the gentle and sweet night-friend, Sleep, strangely delayed his coming, at least to those

with whom our story has to do; but if the old belief be true, that "good thoughts" are the whisper of the unseen band of ministering spirits, then very lovingly was Mrs. Merwin surrounded, for while she could not sleep, thoughts many and prayerful, filled her heart; earnest pleadings that her children might indeed build on the Rock; special pleadings for the one going from the shelter of home. In answer to her prayer, came the comfort-promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" that was her foundation. The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, it was the secret to that quiet woman of the "grace sufficient," of the "strength made perfect in weakness."

Mary, in her little room across the hall, lay wide awake, too, thinking of Alfred and the future before him, planning for the time when he would return, with a thrill of pleasure which allayed the pain of his going away. Gertrude, the "dreamer" of the family, had her visions, also, of a bright

some day and *some* where, of which Alfred would be the hero.

Alfred's night was restless and disturbed; tired from the excitements of the day, he slept a dull heavy sleep at times, then waked suddenly, to fall into fitful slumber, broken by strange dreams. Once he thought himself climbing a rugged mountain path, striving to reach the rainbow, which arched its summit; but, ever as he neared the thing of bright color, it slipped beyond his reach, and swung away from him out into airy space. Then, he was falling from a great height, and Mattie's voice was calling him; unrefreshed he awoke again, and wished the morning would come.

Little Mattie, over in the red house, she could not sleep either. The talk with Alfred, and the near approach of parting from him (the first parting Mattie had ever known), kept her wakeful. Long she lay with wide-open eyes, looking at a little star, so far off, the dim radiance of which she caught through the window pane. She

wondered so, what the stars really were; they seemed such kind, mild little lights, surely they must be angels looking down, even though astronomers did make them out such wonderful orbs; and then she wondered whether up there, in the beautiful ocean of blue, all day long glorying in the sunlight, and at night not losing the golden brightness caught from its beams, the stars ever were sorry, ever felt lonely; whether they were glad when the clouds came, and shut them all away from even looking down on the trouble of the world below. Then Mattie laughed at herself for such childish fancies, and began to think of other things (just as childish, had she but known).

Lying awake made Mattie restless, and she hearkened, almost impatiently, to the low voices of her father and mother in the next room, wondering why they talked so late into the night. "I hardly know why," said Mr. Wilson, "but even though Alfred is a noble fellow, there is something about

him that makes me uneasy. I hope he never will cause his mother disappointment, nor our little Mattie either."

"He is young yet," answered cheerful Mrs. Wilson, "but he will never stray far from the right path, I am thinking, after such a home training as he has had."

"That don't always tell," replied Mr. Wilson; "there's Henry Lee, what a bringing up he had, and who would think it now?"

"But the *end* is not yet, husband," whispered Mrs. Wilson.

"At any rate, he knows where the secret of well-doing is to be found," said farmer Wilson, as he reached his hand across the little table, taking up the Bible to read the chapter together, as had been their custom for years.

At first it had cost him a hard struggle to confess Christ thus, even before the one he loved best on earth, but that time had long since passed, and now, the half hour of prayer and reading together was looked

forward to as a time of rest and refreshment, whatever the cares and toils of the day might have been.

By and by silence was unbroken, not only in the stone house, but in Mattie's home, too; and peacefully the night waned toward the morning.

CHAPTER IV.

HALF an hour before sunrise, the Merwin family were all astir. Old Margaret, bustling about the kitchen, "prepared" as she told Joe afterwards, "the very comfortablest breakfast; just the things Master Alfred set most store by, but scarce a mouthful did he touch." Joe, out in the stable, where it was so dark he needed the light of a lantern to see how to harness Jem (the old black horse), talked to himself over his work by way of encouragement, saying, "It 's your young master you are going to carry over the fust bit of the road to fortin."

In the sitting room, Mrs. Merwin moved about with a peaceful, calm look on her face, reflected from her communing in the night, occupied with a mother's thoughtful care over the always remaining "little things" that cannot be done till the hour of departure. Mary busied herself with Alfred's lunch, insisting that room must be found in the already well-filled bag, for one more package of sandwiches and seed cakes. Gertrude carried his overcoat (the new one, which had caused such pride and satisfaction to the village tailor), into the kitchen to warm it before the fire, meeting Alfred's remonstrance with the assurance, "It is so chilly out." Bertie wandered from one to another, wanting to help; and little Bessie, the darling of them all, the golden-haired wee sister, who came to them one stormy March night, five years ago now (just before that saddest parting ever they had known—just before their father was carried silently from his earthly home), crept up into Alfred's lap, and nestled her curly

head on his shoulder, thinking, in her childish ignorance, thus to comfort him, while all the time she was making it so much harder for him to go away.

But why dwell on the leave-taking longer; every one, almost, knows what parting means; what it is to go from home for the the first time, even when return is thought of as no farther off than autumn from spring.

When the sun rose bright and clear after yesterday's storm, the farewells had been said, the blessing and care of the Heavenly Father asked, and Alfred Merwin had gone forth, closely followed by the loving hearts left behind. "Gone to make his own way in the world;" that was what old Margaret said; but his mother answered, "God grant, Margaret, he may commit his own way to the Lord's way; then my boy is safe."

In the meadow-lot, which was separated from the road by the rapid water of the brook, whose starting place was up among

the mountains, stood little Mattie, calling in her sweet musical voice, the farewell words she could not say mid the evening shadows, mingling a good-bye with a good-morning greeting; and Alfred sent, in his strong voice an answering farewell back to her. It was all over in a moment, for the road, just there made a sudden turn, and Mattie and home were shut away from Alfred.

"A good omen, I call that 'er," said Joe; "Miss Mattie a standing there in the sunshine as ye passed." Poor little Mattie, if Joe could have stolen one peep through the hill-side which hid her from them, he would have found the smile of the minute before all lost, because of her tears. But Mattie was no foolish, sentimental girl, though she was a very natural, human-hearted little creature, and wept like the rest of us when sorry. Alfred's going away, too, was, measured by her peaceful, care-free days, a trial of unwonted severity. Still it would never do for Mattie to be idle, even for that, and

she turned homeward with a quick, light step, saying to herself, "They will be waiting breakfast for me." On her way she stopped once to shake a branch of wild grape-vine, gemmed with dew-drops, they sparkled so as she swayed it back and forth in the morning sunlight, making Mattie wonder whether to the green leaves her tears looked like jewels, as their dew-drops did to her; whether the little fairies, whose homes were in the moss-cups and lichens, so rich in brown and umber color, watched her passing; whether they whispered to one another the question, Why tears were in the eyes of the earth maiden? Then Mattie quickened her walk into such rapid steps, she seemed almost running, to her father, who had come part way down the lane to meet her. She found they had waited breakfast for her; but no one chided her for being late, only farmer Wilson, when he gave her the good-morning kiss, looked down into the bright eyes, where something like a dew-drop still shone, then

at the dimpled mouth, where an unmistakable smile played, and gave her another kiss, saying, "You are your mother over again, Mattie."

It was towards noon when Joe returned, bringing a "cheerful account of Master Alfred," and a last message for Mrs. Merwin from him, to which Joe added, with the familiarity of a long-trusted and faithful serving man, "Now just set your mind to rest about the lad; he is well started, and will be a pride to this 'er village ere many years are gone by; that 's my opinion." To Gertrude, in a low voice, Joe confided, "Ye see, I'm not superstitious like, though we all know a touch, I 'm thinking, of that thing, and last night, when I see the new moon over my right shoulder, it turned my thoughts to a saying of my old mother's, 'Throw a penny for good luck after a parting guest.' So this morning I just heaved a copper after Master Alfred as the boat slipped out of the dock; just like a bird a flying, that boat went. Don't think it wrong,

do ye, Miss Gertrude? yer face is so grave like."

"Not wrong Joe, but you know there is no such thing as luck."

"So folks say, but according to my observation, things turn out mighty comfortable for some, and pretty tough for t' others. How d' ye account for it, Miss Gertrude?"

Gertrude Merwin was quite unequal to talking metaphysics, even with unlearned Joe, yet her reply was, after all, the only one that can *satisfy* learned or unlearned.

"The Bible says, Joe, 'Your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have *need* of,' and I suppose it is the different needs makes the different lots."

"Well, I suppose that 's so," said Joe, as he went off to his work.

After dinner Mrs. Wilson and Mattie came over to spend an hour or two. The house had been so quiet all day; spite the bright sunshine outside, everything had looked so dull and desolate till their com-

ing, when the spell seemed broken, and all touched again with its wonted cheer. "I thought you would be lonely," said Mrs. Wilson. "I knew the day must seem long after starting Alfred so early, so I said to Mattie, 'Let us go and sit awhile with Mrs. Merwin and the girls.' What a splendid day Alfred has had for his journey! I suppose he is near the city by this time. Let me see, it is three o'clock now, and he will arrive about six, won't he?" So the kind-hearted woman talked on of that which was uppermost in their minds, comforting them by a recognition of their loneliness, and at the same time, seeing the bright side of it. She gave a cheerful coloring even to Alfred's arriving in that strange city, the thought of which had many a time during the day forced tears into Mary's eyes, and which lay like a dull weight on his mother's heart.

It is a beautiful gift from the Heavenly Father, this power to console; Mrs. Wilson possessed it in large measure, for though

unlearned in book knowledge, she had that tender heart-knowledge which can approach all, because its delicate tact of comfort-giving springs from love and kindness. This fairest of the blossoms of grace had grown into such rare perfection, from her much pondering on those words of the Master, "Inasmuch, as ye do it unto one of the least of these ye do it unto Me."

There were other reasons, too, why Mrs. Wilson gave consolation with the peculiar acceptableness that can only come when comfort giving is the outgrowth of *sympathy*; for she, though so bright and happy, had known the meaning of sore trial (but this does not lie within the limits of our story). The memory of that time had taught her, also, there are sorrowful hours, when silence is the sweetest and only comfort an earthly friend can give; the touch of the hand upon the brow, aching because of the wildly throbbing heart; the shutting a ray of sunlight out, when its shining into a room of sadness seems to mock the inside

gloom by the outside brightness. All these gentle ministries of a loving heart, Mrs. Wilson was ever giving, and there was not a home in the village which she had not made the gladder; though, she was naught but a farmer's wife, with rough hands and sun-browned face.

After talking for a while, Mrs. Wilson proposed the girls should go for a walk. "These bright days cannot last" she said; "you must make the most of them." So they went; Gertrude and Mattie, to the woods, Mary and little Bessie, down to the village post office.

The two mothers went out into the porch to watch the children. The autumn sunshine was so warm, they sat down on the broad seat, and while their hands were busy with knitting and sewing, in soft voices they talked, as is the way with mothers, of the young lives so dear to them, and of the future, into which they every day were stepping farther and farther.

All unnoticed, the shadows of the trees

stretched far across the meadow, as the sun sank toward the west. Not till the shout of Bertie, driving home the cows from pasture reminded them of the hour, did Mrs. Wilson start for home.

CHAPTER V.

THE girls kept together till they came to the meadow-lot; there Mary and Bessie turned into the road leading to the village, while Mattie and Gertrude crossed the little bridge, taking the path by the brook side. On they wandered, hand in hand, till they came to the very spot where Mattie stood in the morning. This was their favorite place, sitting on the projecting rock, cleft on one side, so that it formed a sheltered seat. Many and long were the talks they had of those questions which press hardest when first they greet the young soul, and which they met even in their own secluded lives.

From early childhood, the girls had loved and been intimate together like sisters; the very unlikeness, in many of their most striking characteristics, only served to add a fresh zest to their intercourse; for while Gertrude, in thought and acquirement was the superior, Mattie's guileless heart was constantly adding a sweeter perfume to the more solid opinions of her friend.

It was a pleasant resting-place they chose —the rock side, overgrown with gray and olive-green lichens. On the top were soft cushions of tiny tree-like white moss, with here and there a clump of "red tips," as the children called the little crimson-crowned things. "Bits of red coral, they look like; don't they Mattie?" said Gertrude, "filled out, as they are, from the rain-drops they drank in yesterday. I always think of a verse in the Bible when I come here after a rain-storm. The little mosses, growing way up on the rock-top, catch the falling drops so eagerly, and seem so glad afterwards when the clouds disappear, and

the sun shines again, while those down below are out of it all. I always long to say to them, 'Why don't you grow a little *higher*—creep up a little more—then you would be in it too.'"

"I never thought of them so before," replied Mattie. "What verse is it they make you think of?"

"Why, that one in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where it says, 'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, while I perish with hunger.' It seems to me parables are written everywhere. This, I think, is one reason why Christ used such simple, every-day illustrations in the teaching of them; just that we, in following after Him, might look for them too."

"Who but you, Gertrude, would ever have thought of the little moss-cups, as filled with Gospel meanings; but they are, aren't they?" said Mattie. "But I don't

see why they make you think specially of that verse."

"Don't you, Mattie? Just look at them now; those that have a place from which they *look up* all the time, right into the blue sky, seem so full of life; while those hidden away from its light are dry and brown, as we all—I mean some of us—are pictured in that parable, standing out of the sunlight of His presence, while others of His followers are dwellers up in the place where the heavenly light falls all the time, and we, by a little more striving, might be up there, too, only we are content to stay down on the rock side instead of climbing up to its top—content to perish with hunger, fed only with the bread which comes from below, while we might be filled with heavenly manna. Oh, Mattie! I am sometimes so dissatisfied with myself, I stay so outside of the fullness of Divine things, not only in my thoughts but in my life."

Mattie shook her head, and replied, "Gertrude, dear, we won't do any better by

being dissatisfied, will we? And I do not think at all as you do, for I believe the brown mosses, that cling to the rock side, are just as much filling their place and doing their work as those that are up on its top, just as we are to be hopeful and cheerful, filling the place God gives us in this world, whether it be a clinging rock-side place, or up in the light of His sunshine."

"Dear little Mattie," said Gertrude, as she bent over and kissed her, "you always find the *comfort* in everything. But, thinking of the parables, doesn't it seem to you that Christ classified them according to our different ranks and wants — for the rich and powerful, the 'pearl of great price,' the 'ten pounds,' the 'rich man and Lazarus;' and, for the working-people, the 'leaven,' the 'house swept and garnished,' the 'net cast into the sea,' the 'laborer in the vineyard;' for the fearful and timid-hearted the 'good shepherd and the sheep;' for the active workers (and the indolent ones, too), the 'vine' and the branches. But, hark! I

hear Bertie calling to Rover up in the pasture. Can it be time for him to drive the cows home already? If so, we must go too."

Still they lingered, gathering sprig after sprig of the bitter-sweet vine, which hung in graceful festoons from a cedar tree round which it had twined for support. Great clusters they pulled. Then, laden with their treasures, they turned homeward. "Oh, I am so tired," said Gertrude. "If Alfred were only here, he would have climbed after it for us. Don't it make you miss him, Mattie, to think how often that dreadful little *if* will have to come when we speak of him now? I know it will be in my heart all the time."

Mattie did not reply for a moment; then she said, "I lay awake so long last night, and I made up my mind to think more of his coming home than his going away."

"Did you lie awake, too?" answered Gertrude. "So did I. Mother read the chapter where it tells of the wise man who built his

house on a rock, and of the foolish who built on the sand. I repeated the words over to myself so many times in the night. They hold a parable for us, don't they, Mattie?"

"I am so glad your mother read that; it was just the very end I wanted to give to what Alfred and I had been saying. We talked for ever so long about the future, planning all sorts of beautiful things for it. Alfred laughingly said he would always call me, little 'Castle Builder.' I did so long to tell him, I was trying to build something more enduring than 'Castles in the Air;' but I am always afraid to say such things, even to Alfred, whom I know so well."

"Castles in the air, and castles in the heart; how busy we are making them all the time," replied Gertrude. "Our life is like a piece of mosaic work, isn't it?"

"I never saw any mosaic," said Mattie.

"Oh, I forgot, you were ill that summer Aunt Merwin came to see us; she used to wear a brooch, a picture of a ruined castle,

made of bright-colored stones, the very tiniest bits of stones; each one fitted into its own place; if one were loosened it would be spoiled, she said. That was the very day before baby Bessie dropped it from her little hand, and marred all its beauty by a great crack right across the castle. We are like the mosaic workers, Mattie, all the time filling up the days that a few years hence will make our life; and each little action or thought is like one of those tiny bits of stone fitted in somewhere. Does it not frighten you to think that some day, just as our life mosaic seems complete, perhaps a rude shock may come and mar its beauty as the crack did Aunt Merwin's brooch?"

"No, it does not frighten me," said Mattie, "because, if our days are held together by the *abiding* Faith, Hope and Charity, nothing can really mar them; but see, the sun is almost down."

And laden with the branches of red berries and green leaves, the girls hastened homeward.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day which seemed so long to those left at home passed rapidly to Alfred, varied as it was, by new scenes and quickly changing emotions.

Not till he waved a last farewell to Joe, and the steamboat pushed off from the dock, did he fully realize the time had actually come when he was to begin life for himself. Even then, for an hour or two, he felt still surrounded by familiar scenes, for the river banks, for miles above and below the village, were well known to all the young people; every rod of the way was traced with some memory. There was the clump of

trees where he and some other boys made a hut with snow sides, and evergreen boughs for its roof, one winter three or four years ago, kindling a great wood fire, roasting potatoes in the hot embers for the girls Alfred smiled, thinking how clear and smooth the ice was that Saturday afternoon, how he glided over it with bird-like fleetness far in advance of the others, even though he did push Mattie and Gertrude on the sled before him. He remembered how the girls clapped their hands with glee at being the first, and their merry shouts on discovering the hut and the fire which some of the younger boys had gone down an hour before to light; and how Mattie called his skates "feet wings;" how Gertrude in the evening at home, helped him rub the already shining steel of skate and sled-runner into mirror-like polish and brightness. Roused, by some one passing, from his reverie, Alfred looked up to find the clump of trees left far behind the quick-going boat; but he had yet to pass one

more "memory place"—the winding creek—whose quiet waters in spring and autumn days, he and Joe had so often stirred into a thousand little ripples, by the stealthy paddling of their tiny boat, made into a bower of moving green, to delude the wild ducks and snipe into the belief that what approached them was only a green bush, till with quick, sure aim, the cruel little shot and the harsh bang of the gun scattered many of their number into a restless flight, and always made two or three drop silently, to be picked up exultingly and carried home as trophies of the morning's hunt. When he had passed beyond these haunts of happy days, he fixed his gaze on the mountains, every minute now growing fainter and more far away in outline; so long as he could see them, something of home seemed near; even after they became quite indistinct, he still wondered whether the misty lines up northward were clouds or mountains.

Just as the dull ache of home sickness

was settling with a bitter chill about his heart, a cheerful voice asked, "Bound for the city, young man? Never been there afore, I reckon." "No, never," replied Alfred. "Well, a pretty stiff place you 'll find it for your principles, lad, but there's a powerful sight of good there, mixed up with the bad. Ain't it surprising, what little soil, and poor at that, the good grows on." Before Alfred had time to reply to the quaint old man who addressed him so unceremoniously, a gentleman, standing near, joined them, and said in a deep powerful voice, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away; and some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell

into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold;" adding, as he finished the quotation, "The fruit here described seems to have needed good ground and plenty of it."

"Well, yes, that's so," said the old man, "but them 's Bible words."

The new comer smiled, and answered, "Then they are the best we can have; beautiful scenes like these, by which we are surrounded to-day, lead one to think of Bible truths, at least if they know anything of their meaning, and so the picture words which Christ used, come to us with more fullness at these times.

"Be you a preacher? I judge ye be, by speaking so natural like, on such matters. Most folks are kind o' still in talking about the Bible, least ways afore strangers like this young man and me." "No, I am not a preacher, but a lawyer," replied the gentleman.

This was Alfreds' introduction to Wolcott Burnham, whose friendship, in long

after years, was such help to him, and whose council given that first day of absence from home, if heeded, might have been such a safeguard against the many new and unthought of temptations which so soon he encountered.

Could Joe, an hour later, have seen Alfred and his new-found friend engaged in earnest conversation, he would have said, "Well, it 's just as I calculated it would be; the lad has made a lucky hit already." But Mrs. Merwin would have bowed her head in prayer, and lifted her heart in thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father, whose love had brought her boy, even for a little while, into the circle of pure noble influences which emanated from the warm, active Christian life of Wolcott Burnham.

The old man proved to be a cattle dealer from the West, who, as he expressed it, "had toughed it all his days;" but spite the toughing, a warm true place in his heart remained, which responded to much Mr. Burnham said.

Half regretfully, he told them, pointing down the river, "that 'er place where ye see the church-steeple, is where I stop." Then he paused a moment, awkwardly fumbling in his pocket, from which he drew forth a yellow-and-red handkerchief of no scanty dimensions, unfolding it with an assumed air of indifference and importance, as though to hide, by his action, the real, deep feeling which sounded in his voice, while he said, "I 'm obleeged to ye, sir, for the good seed ye 've let drop in my hearing, and it may be it ain't all fallen among thorns. If there were more such men as ye a-going, the world would be a different place entirely, that 's a fact. Well, good-day to ye both." Turning to Alfred, he added, "I hope ye 'll be prospered." Then, looking at Mr. Burnham, he said, "You are prospered already. Good-by agin;" and he left them.

After that, Mr. Burnham and Alfred fell into a long talk, in which Alfred quite forgot Mr. Burnham was a stranger. Won by the dignity and calmness of his manner, ere

half an hour had gone by, he was telling him, with as much freedom as though he had been conversing with an old acquaintance, of his home, his mother, sisters, Bertie and Mattie, "who is almost the same as a sister," he said. From talking of home, Mr. Burnham led the conversation, easily and naturally, round to the subject of which they first spoke, asking Alfred had he ever thought, "that only once, and that at the time of the creation, did the earth bring forth trees and grain, which had their seeds in themselves, without previous sowing; since then nothing grew unless first its seed had been put into the ground." Then he went on to speak of the seed incorruptible, "the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" — went on to tell of Christ, Whose life and death was the sowing of that incorruptible seed — the seed which is springing up wherever His Gospel is made known.

All this Mr. Burnham said, with none of that constraint of manner which so often

mars the influence of those who strive to reveal the love of Christ, more from a sense of duty, than because *that love* is infused into their own souls, and so, as they grow (as we all do) toward that which they love best—approximate to that they long after most, they cannot refrain from speaking of the Divine Master, who is their Lord and Friend. "How many different kinds of soil," Mr. Burnham, continued, "are described in the parable! The wayside—the path trodden hard by many passers; the stony ground, where but little earth lies, where the seed sown springs up into green, that quickly decays for lack of nourishment, just as those that hear the Word with joy, but perceive not the deep need of ground, freed from rocks and stones, that the roots of the heavenly plant may expand, soon tire of the Christian life. The thorny ground—*that* is the saddest of all; for it seems to tell of 'insincerity in everything;' even the fruit which it bringeth forth is interwoven with thorns. Dark, in-

deed, would be this picture were it not for that after-word, which tells of 'the good ground which is free from stone and thorn, and which typifies the pure good heart.' Only he who gives himself up unreservedly to the Heavenly Sower finds his heart daily becoming like the good ground, which yields now thirty-fold, then sixty, and, growing more and more into the *likeness* of his Master, goes on, from glory to glory, till the sixty-fold becomes a hundred.

"Now I must bid you good-by," said Mr. Burnham; "for, as our old friend said this morning, yonder white spire marks the village where I stop. You will reach the city in about an hour." Putting his hand into his pocket, he took out a card, on which he wrote his address, handing it to Alfred, saying, "Come and see me soon. I expect to be in town Friday. After this pleasant day together, we shall always be friends, I trust." Then, with a cordial grasp of the hand, he hurried off, warned by the ring-

ing bell, before Alfred had time to say one word of thanks for his kindness.

Alfred watched his tall figure, as he mingled with the crowd on the landing; saw an elderly gentleman come forward to meet him, and, a minute after, saw him stoop and lift a little girl, with golden hair like Bessie's, up into his strong arms. Just as the "All aboard" was shouted, and the boat pushed off, Mr. Burnham turned, smiling, with the same frank kindness of his first greeting, and waved his hand in token of farewell.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was toward twilight when Alfred reached the city. The unwonted noise and confusion quite bewildered him for a few minutes ; he felt almost hopeless of ever finding his way out of the crowd of men, women, children, trucks and produce, which filled the wharf. He had claimed his trunk, and there it stood by his side, seeming so small and insignificant amongst the huge piles of luggage which were being rapidly deposited on the dock. Looking down on it, Alfred had, for the first time, an undefined sense that things were going to seem so different to him from what they had done

at home. His uncle had written he would meet him, but not till the crowd had somewhat dispersed, did he notice a portly gentlemen approaching, a stranger, Alfred thought, till the smile which lit up his face, as he extended his hand, showed Alfred it was none other than his uncle, who addressed him, saying, "I thought I never should find you. How you have changed! Your aunt will hardly believe you are the slender lad she became so fond of that summer—let me see—four years ago now." Not giving Alfred time to reply, he continued, "All well at home, I hope. A hard trial for your mother to part with you. Well, well, we must get her and the girls to the city. Had a pleasant journey, I trust. Come this way; my carriage is waiting." Then, turning to a colored man in liveried coat, Mr. Merwin said, "Bring the young gentleman's trunk, Thomas." And in a few minutes, Alfred was leaning back in the soft cushioned seat of a luxurious carriage, and being rapidly whirled through street after street.

Notwithstanding his uncle's kind manner, the undefined loneliness of feeling was growing more and more intense. The gaily-lighted streets, thronged with people, made it all seem so strong and self-confident—made him realize so vividly his own littleness and unimportance. His heart sank, and he felt almost a terror of the morrow, when he must encounter and make part of just such a crowd. After the brief conversation with which he welcomed him, Mr. Merwin relapsed into silence, and Alfred, looking from the carriage window, fell into wondering whether it really could be, that God knew and cared for every *one* of the many passers, just as He did for the dwellers in quiet country villages; whether the Heavenly Father's eye was looking down on that vast throng of people, separating the interests and wants of one from another, all *individuality* seemed so lost; but the dear simple faith his mother had taught was still throbbing warm and fresh in his heart. Almost unconsciously, in a low voice, which

was lost amid the rumbling of wheels, ere it reached his uncle, he repeated to himself the verse, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Saying the words eased the dull pain, quieted his foreboding dread.

It was but natural Alfred should feel thus on first arriving in the city; all was so unlike the secluded village where he had grown up, and where he had recognized every passer. The constant meeting with strangers could not but call forth a sense of loneliness, for he had known the great pulsing heart of humanity with knowledge vague as that of the trapper, who leaps the brook and *thinks* he knows the waters, till brought into contact with the weather-beaten mariner, who has crossed the broad ocean, and who leads him to the beach, where the sea-wave of one day creeps up and along the sand with peaceful monotonous flow, and the next breaks in dashing

waves, crested with foam-crowns, on that same beach. While the sailor points out over the wide expanse, the trapper stands bewildered, finding the stream he knew, contrasted with the waters, is nothing more than one little leaf amid the thousands and thousands that shimmer in the morning sunlight, out in the oak opening where the brook was born.

Next morning, he was duly installed in his uncle's office. For the first day or two, he went about the duties allotted him, in a dull, mechanical way, feeling self-conscious all the time. The clerks seemed to him such handsome, well-dressed young men, and so very clever in all they said, he quite despaired of ever equalling them; but this soon wore off, and when Saturday came, he was on cordial terms with some half dozen of his new companions, and already the novelty of the crowded streets, the noise and confusion of the city, had become familiar sights and sounds. But, Sunday morning, the longing for home took full

possession of his heart again; it all came over him so vividly, as he took one thing after another from the tray which his mother had packed, and where she told him he would find his "Sunday suit." There it lay, neatly folded, just as her dear hands had put it in; beside it, the unpretending little blue cravat, (quite unlike the flashy ones worn by his new acquaintances,) which Gertrude had made and thought so pretty, with the spotless linen, and well-starched collars, looking as he was sure they never would when done up in that smoky city. In one corner, his mother had slipped in several books that had belonged to his grandfather, Dominie Merwin, and which Alfred had been brought up to consider among the chief treasures of his home. To be sure, there were the old silver spoons, marked with the initial letter; some curious china; one or two ancient relics, in the way of side-board, arm chairs, and the great clock which stood in the sitting-room; but these Alfred's father always said, were of little

value compared with the 'books,' which linked them, not only by the sight and use of things belonging to the by-gone, to those past years, but brought them into intimate knowledge and sympathy with that former time.

They were quaint little volumes Alfred's mother had selected, marred by time stains and much use. The first he looked at, often he had seen in her hands. It was an old copy of the "Imitation of Christ," by Thomas a Kempis, bearing the date of 1762. Opposite, was written in straight up and down letters, his grandmother's name, "Abigail Merwin, her book." Several places were marked, Alfred wondered, whether by his mother, or grandmother. The first his eye fell on was, "Simplicity and purity are the two wings with which man soars above the earth and all temporary nature;" just beyond came the sentence, "He only can have great tranquillity, whose happiness depends not on the praise or dispraise of men. The rejoicing of a

good man, is the testimony of his conscience."

Every leaf he turned was rich in counsel, for, little matters it that years have come and gone since the old monk, in quiet cloister, "with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chaunting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours," wrote the words that have echoed down through the ages, because they came from a human heart that suffered, sinned and struggled, just as we do; who found calmness and peace by treading the same path we must tread if we would attain to the same faith and final triumph—the lowly path, that ever keeps within the shadow of the Rock. These records of striving after nearness to Christ, that were written in monastery cells, that were born into life amid poverty, retirement, and self-renunciation, are like perpetual incense, whose clear flame burns steadily through all the changes of time and creeds, ever bearing testimony to the "glory of the Lord."

There stood Alfred, on the threshold of a new and strange life; already he was dazzled by the glimpses he had caught of unthought of excitement and new pleasures. It was the very sense of having become, even in such a short time, a stranger in many things to the self of a week ago, that wakened the longing for home and the accustomed way of Sabbath spending; it was this that held him spell-bound, turning the leaves, one after another of the books his mother had chosen. He took up one, less time-worn, but here and there containing passages marked with pencil, such firm emphatic marks, they must have been his grandfather's; the book was "Taylor's Rules for Holy Living." A folded paper was pinned on the fly leaf; Alfred opened it, and read, "Schiller's three words of strength, translated May 3rd." (He knew the writing and translation were his father's, for Mr. Merwin was a scholarly man).

"There are three lessons I would write—
Three words, as with a golden pen,

In tracings of eternal light,
Upon the hearts of men.

Have hope! Though clouds environ round,
And gladness hides her face in scorn,
Put thou the shadow from thy brow,
No night, but hath its morn.

Have faith! Where'er thy bark is driven,
The calm's disport, the tempest's mirth,
Know this, God rules the hosts of heaven,
The inhabitants of earth.

Have love! Not love alone for one,
But man, as man, thy brother call;
And scatter like the circling sun,
Thy charities on all.

Thus grave these lessons on thy soul,
Hope, faith, and love, and thou shall find,
Strength, when life's surges rudest roll,
Light, when thou else wert blind."

Were they written on his heart? Alfred stood silently asking himself this question, till the ringing of the church bells sounded, when he hastily laid books and paper away.

CHAPTER VIII.

JUST as in the spring time, the stream that has crept along month after month, in even course, is swollen into rushing waters, that overflow the bank sides, breaking down barriers, making now and then a new path in its onward way, because the ice-bound brooks and cascades up among the northern hills are unchained; so there are days in almost every life, that divide the past from the future or present with clearly defined distinctness; days, to which the soul turns, and, hide the knowledge from stranger eyes as it may, confesses to itself, it was then and there I lifted up the flood-

gate, that first little gap, through which the waters began to flow in. It may have been the "well of water, springing up into everlasting life," the first drops of which slaked the thirst of the weary soul. It may have been the still waters, leading through the green pasture land. Or, perchance, it may have been, standing by the side of one being led by the Lamb unto the "Living Fountain of waters," that a day was sealed for him who stays here, as well as for the one gone *there*, as the entrance into a life different from what it ever was before. But, alas! it may be no green pasture path—no still water course—no thirst-satisfying portion, that alone possesseth the power of marking *one* day as a *bridging* place; for there is a tide rushing through the heart leading from all this—a turbulent stream, with current swift and treacherous, carrying the soul onward, but so far away from the peaceful "river of God." And yet, *its* waters sparkle with dancing gems of light, when first we sail them, as in the dark night

the ocean waves gleam with phosphorescent glow, that, looked down upon, rivals the stars sometimes in brightness. Only, to them we always look *upward.*

It was thus with Alfred's first Sabbath in the city. In the morning, he turned the leaves of his Bible; he held in his hands the books his mother had chosen for him; through his heart the sweet home memories echoed; and he went from his room, to the house of God; he heard the song of praise; he listened to the prayer of supplication; hearkened to the minister's earnest pleadings, which told of Jesus—which ended with the words, "Ye are bought with a price."

From the church he turned, with mind full of aspiration, with something of desire to know for himself (not only through his mother's faith and Mattie's simple trust) what it *really* meant, to be indeed Christ's. By the side of the still waters he stood that noon time. But, "I think I 'll wait a little longer," he said to himself—and—the church bells rang again. Just at that mo-

ment of indecision, came one of his new acquaintances, the one he liked best of all, a young man scarcely more than a year or two older than himself. "Splendid day, isn't it?" said Frank Howe. "Came to see if you felt like a drive." Why did the color rush up into Alfred's face as he replied, "No, I am going to church"? "Church! No such thing; you are going to drive with me." It was only a ten minutes' parley, but it was the first step to Alfred—the first turning from the habits of childhood. Together the young men passed through street after street, and then—What could Alfred do when his new found friend said, "Let 's stop awhile?" Jumping out, he fastened the horse, and led the way into a hotel, where the remaining part of the day was lounged away in idle talk and light jest. The lamps were lit when they started to return, but still the "Sunday look" pervaded every thing; the shop windows, usually blazing with light, closed and dark; the noisy thoroughfares, almost quiet, missing the

wonted rumbling of omnibusses and business vehicles. This mute recognition that it was the Lord's day, and holy time, reproached Alfred, perhaps more than any words could have done. When he reached his boarding house, (for he had left his uncle's the day before,) the servant handed him a card saying, "A gentleman left it for you about two hours ago." The card was Mr. Burnham's, who had written on it, "I have been to your uncle's, who gave me your address. Am sorry not to find you. Come and take tea with us, at six o'clock. I want you to go with me to the evening service."

Alfred looked at his watch, the old silver one that had been his grandfather's and then his father's; the hands pointed to half-past seven. "It is too late," he said, "and I am tired." Then he went up-stairs into his room, lit the gas, looked about; everything was the same as when he stood there in the morning, but all seemed so unlike. What was it made the difference? He

turned the gas low and sat down by the window, asking himself, What had he done? Nothing so very wrong. To be sure, he had not spent the day quite as his mother would be hoping he had; and in his heart loudly sounded the early teaching, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." But then there came another little whisper, which said, "No great harm in taking a drive." So the warfare of conscience and self-justification went on; and the latter gained the victory, for an hour later Alfred shut the window with impatience, saying to himself, "What a baby I am to sit here fretting over a thing I never need do again!"

The stream—had it so soon begun to overflow the green banks, blossoming with the flowers of a mother's love? Would its waters quite drown the little tender plants, whose roots were in home influence? Had it already begun its new way for the onward voyage, dividing the by-gone and the coming by only the 'bridge of a day'?—a

seemingly uneventful day, passed much in the ordinary way of Sabbath-spending—church in the morning, afternoon spent with a friend. That was Alfred's account of it to his mother, in the letter he wrote to her that same evening. And yet that misspent Sabbath, that morning message, "Ye are bought with a price," which Alfred set aside, stretched over the stream that divided the old way from the new, growing for years, wider and wider; for after that Sunday it never was so easy a thing for him to say "No." Not but that often he did it; much he resisted; but the resisting was done in his *own* strength; and so it gave way to the steady pressure which surrounded him. His house was built upon the sand. How could it stand amid the buffeting waves and wild winter winds?

And yet the Rock was near him.

Many months came and went ere Alfred passed quite into the darkness of a life estranged from the God of his fathers; and then his eyes were blinded, and he called

light, dark, and dark, light. Still, in his heart ever lingered echoes of his mother and home—only he heeded them not. Then came the midnight into his soul. But after the night is the morning; and, mid the darkness, his mother prayed.

CHAPTER IX.

GERTRUDE and Mattie were more with one another than ever before, the fall and winter after Alfred left home. Long walks they took in the bright autumn sunshine, rambling over the hills in search of treasures for the winter, as they called the frost-painted leaves, with which they came home laden almost every afternoon during October and November. "There never was a season of such wonderful beauty in leaf-turning, I do think," said Mrs. Wilson, one Saturday, as the girls sat on the door-step, resting after their walk, and displaying the "perfect beauties" they had found.

"Just look at this, mother!" exclaimed Mattie, holding up a branch of maple, tinged with brightest color; one leaf was edged with crimson, blended into a faint glow ere it met the bright green, which was unbroken, save by a golden kiss, outlined by shadowy brown.

"It seems like a little history of a year—a little story of life, does n't it?" said Gertrude; "just like one of those German tales, Mattie, we took last winter from the village library to read, which 'half reveal and half conceal' their meaning. Look at the beautiful bright green of its centre, murmuring of spring and childhood; the lovely glowing of its color-dyed edges, whispering of summer and maturity, and that golden mark, telling of autumn and of life, when the spring and summer buds and blossoms have ripened into rich fruit; the shadowy-brown, that tells of winter and old age near. See how it touches every one of the other colors, encircling the golden, surrounded by the green, reaching down

on that side till it creeps into the crimson. I suppose life always must be so encompassed with the by-gone days."

"It is beautiful to think," interrupted Mattie, "that old age is not *really* very far separated from the fresh green of youth."

Mrs. Wilson smiled, listening to the girls' talk. The way Gertrude had of making "little song bits" out of everything, always seemed, (familiar though she was with it,) wonderful to Mrs. Wilson, and while such fancies never would have occurred to her, they were none the less appreciated and sympathized with. "Give me the leaf," she said, stooping and taking it from Mattie's hand; "I will press it; some day when you are an old woman, Gertie, Mattie must give it to you. I hope you will find the green, then, dear." So all unconsciously Mrs. Wilson, too, gave the first line to an after poem, little thinking its song would be learned through pain before the time of "old age" came to the young girls.

But are not the sweetest songs cradled in the little ark, that, hidden down among the rushes, safely guards the flowers that blossom mid the *shade*? "Do we not learn in suffering, what we teach in song?" Is there not an amber of spirit life, that needs floating off, and bringing up to the surface? Just as the "germ of fossil trees" needs the ocean waves to float it off and upward ere we catch its mellow radiance, does the soul need storm-waves, ere it gives forth its sweetest notes of praise — its "hymns of spiritual amber."

This talk was but one of the many picture patches, that were constantly filling up the girls' days with beautiful glad memories. Not but that they led very practical lives; there were mornings, busy with dusting and sweeping, cake baking and bread making; never were there lighter, whiter rolls than those Gertrude made; never cake so delicious, as the loaves Mattie's dainty fingers mixed; long seams of plain sewing, too, were accomplished; neat little stitches

taken which converted strips of linen into collars and wristbands; wonderful handiwork, in all these ways, they performed. And, are not these last, homely duties though they may be, as much (and more) woman's work, as the weaving of her light graceful fancies into tangible forms? — which, after all, are but words.

Mrs. Merwin and Mrs. Wilson thought so, though, to be sure, they were only country women, who never caught any thing more than the reverberation of the great outside strife, for "women's privileges and rights." When of a Friday afternoon, the weekly paper came, and they read of Mrs. this one, speaking there, Miss that, asserting herself here, they shook their heads and wondered what the women wanted with more privileges than they already had. Mrs. Wilson thought of her husband and her household; they seemed to her to comprise such a large sphere—the helping him make "both ends meet," (for farming was not the profitable occupation it once was,)

and making home cheerful and comfortable to welcome him, when with twilight he came, weary, from hours of toil. Then there was Mattie to guide and care for; beside all this, to go where a man could not, and minister beside beds of pain and languishing; to whisper words of womanly tenderness and cheer in homes of sorrow and want; to be a patient Christian in the kitchen and the dairy, where things would go wrong now and then; to make the shining little needle fly, stitch after stitch, in the completion of needed garments for farmer Wilson, Mattie, or herself, and to crowd in with that home sewing, stitches for others, who had less time and less to do with than she.

"Dear me!" she said, talking to Mattie, "I don't know what more, women want, than they have already in the outside living, and the inside too, for that matter. Think, Mattie, how Christ hearkened to the prayers of women; think how He said of Mary, 'She hath chosen the good part;'

and what was she doing? Not mixing with the multitude, lifting up her voice in the councils of the people, but sitting at the Master's feet." Mrs. Wilson's voice grew softer as she added, "Think, too, of the Saviour's word of tender mindfulness and care for Mary, the Virgin Mother. How even, mid the suffering of the cross, He said to John, the well-beloved, 'Behold thy mother; and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*,' sheltering and shielding her. That 's what home protection means, I think, and what all the women I ever knew needed. Anyway, home and home duties, make a large enough place for you and me to fill, Mattie, for *home* means no narrow selfishness; it means take the command 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.' Just stretch it out as far as it will reach, and there is plenty to do, without wandering off in search of more, child. That reminds me, the broth I made for old farmer Holmes is ready to take; you may

as well add a pat of that fresh butter; he likes it before the salt seasons it."

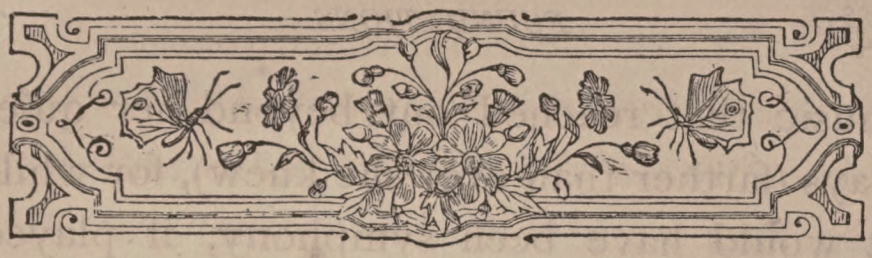
Mrs. Merwin read the papers with much the same feeling as her friend, but with fewer words, though they led her to think much of what a woman's work really is; and her thoughts always made her more gentle, if it were possible, to her children; more prayerful too, for prayer seemed to her the fullest of all woman's blessing-winning work; always made her more considerate and kind towards old Margaret, Joe and the farm laborers; more guarded in intercourse with her neighbors, charitable in judgment and in word. "Charity," she used to say, "is a wonderful secret of power in doing good. 'Speak kindly of every one, or not at all,' that is what your father often said," she would tell the girls.

It was thus that Mattie and Gertrude were moulded by the home teachings, while the decided individuality of each was not lost but softened. In Gertrude, the love of idealizing and meaning-finding, which

might, under other circumstances, have made her life fanciful and visionary, was tempered by the common sense of her daily surroundings.

In Mattie, enthusiasm and quickly formed conclusions were brought into submission to the higher motives which, through her mother's teachings, governed her actions. But through the days of each, ran the golden thread of their own particular self-hood, touching their lives with the mystic something that crystallized all else into a clear, symmetrical whole. "Just as in a land-scape, there may be some bend of a river," some bold outline of rugged rock, or curve of a line, some great oak tree, or graceful vine-wreathed elm, "which, in itself, would be nothing, but which yet is the central point of the scene, making it unique and complete." So Gertrude's "little poem thoughts," as simple Mrs. Wilson called them, shone through her practical every-day life, mak-ing it beautiful. And Mattie's sweet faith, charity and love for all, helped to make

music that reached out beyond her quiet days (farther than ever she knew), for while it would have been symphony, if played only in the cadence taught by her mother, it became in connection with that which sprang from her own heart, "a strain of original beauty." But the key note, the central light to all, of beauty and music these young girls gave forth to the world, was found in the "old, old story," the story which they read, written everywhere, of God's love, of Christ, the Saviour, who said, "Follow me;" and it was following Him they found the Music and the Light.



CHAPTER X.

THERE are some lives which it seems as though God educated from infancy, for the trials and joys with which the after years surround them; we see it in a large family, how one child is fitted for his life's place, another for hers; both starting from the same homestead, and yet led by such different paths. It was so with Mary and Gertrude Merwin. Mary from childhood had been calm and quiet, subject to no sudden bursts of emotion, always doing for others, forgetful of self. Now that the time was soon coming when she was to leave her mother's home for a little nest of

her own, the near approach to the change did not ruffle the tranquillity of her daily life, only as the weeks came and went, the happiness which blessed her was intensified, showing itself in an outgrowth of more than her wonted loving thoughtfulness and sympathy with her mother's cares and the children. Through the after years this same calm, this same satisfied content with all God sent her was unbroken; it seemed as though there were no need of severe personal trials to perfect her Christian character, as there had been no need for discipline in childhood. Yet her mother often wondered, if the very peace of her outward life did not contain the germ of spiritual conflict, waged, so far below the surface, no human eye ever caught its struggles. For Mrs. Merwin felt, unless we know suffering in our *own* hearts, we can but half know joy; just as we need to feel the *weariness* of earth, before we can know the fullness of meaning in the heavenly *rest* promised — the *rest* which is "serving day

and night," with never a need to say, "I am tired."

With Gertrude it was very different: there was the strong consciousness of self, the eager longing for her own will to be accomplished, that had to be subdued; the idealizing of her surroundings and friends, which the bright mid-day light so often disenchanted, making sorrow and disappointment for her, where Mary would only have seen the "ordinary way of things." All this Mrs. Merwin knew would give Gertrude hours of exquisite joy, but must give her, too, corresponding hours of bitter sorrow. It had been so from the time she was a little girl; and now, standing, as she was, on the entrance of womanhood, her mother often trembled, thinking how her sensitive child would bear the harsh touch of real life. But He who knew the end from the beginning, was leading Gertrude gently, storing her mind and heart with sweet, pure memories; stamping love on everything, revealing to her *hidden manna*, that

in the future days would be spirit nourishment, helping her to say of the trials that came "They are blessing pains."

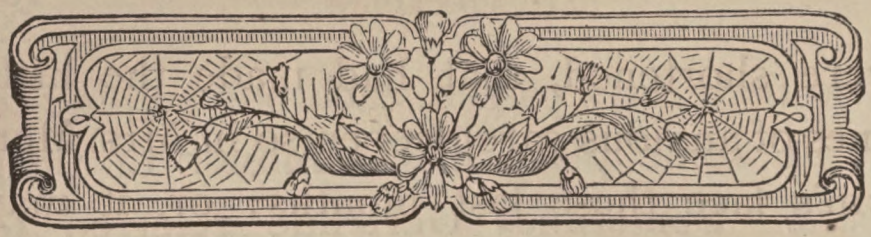
And little Mattie, by all the love, tenderness and gladness which encircled her young life, was laying up stores, too, that would stretch sunshine over into cloud days.

The mothers watched their children, wondering sometimes why that winter seemed one unmarred season of sweet, innocent happiness, "with never a shadow," said Mattie; and then the musical gladness of her voice caught a low tone, touched a plaintive chord, for a minute, while she added, "except Alfred does not write so often; and, somehow, his letters do n't seem quite the same, mother; but, (for love is ever excuse-finding,) he is so busy, and June will come soon; then we shall see him again." With that thought, little Mattie went about her tasks, singing to herself snatches of old songs, that served as tangible outlines of the under-lying song singing in her heart.

So their days passed, each one helping to fill up some place in the mosaic of their years. Sometimes Gertrude referred to that fancy of theirs—the day after Alfred left home—and they wondered which part of the picture they were laying in now.

"It must be the ground-work," said Gertrude, "where dear little flowers grow; don't they Mattie? I wonder what the castle will be that will crown it all." And the young things smiled at one another.

But whatever their visions were, however far-reaching their thoughts, they always ended thinking of the *safety verse*, as Gertrude called it: "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid—Christ." "Oh, Mattie, are we, indeed, building on the Rock?" she would ask; and then, in softened voices they would talk of the life hid in Christ; the life all safe from outward changes; the life that could not be crushed, "even if our air castles fall, as so many people's do," said Mattie." And thus the winter passed into the spring.



CHAPTER XI.

IT was towards the close of a dreary March day that Bertie came running home from school, shouting, as he entered the house, "Mother! mother, here is a letter from Alfred!" The coming of Alfred's weekly letter was looked forward to by the whole family with eagerness, even though the pages closely written, which came during the first weeks of his absence, had given place to one sheet, and that often not full, because, as he wrote, he was "so pressed for time, and had so many engagements now." Perhaps it was the thought of these many engagements, for which his letters home

were shortened, that had made the little lines of anxious care deepen so in Mrs. Merwin's face these last months; or, it may have been, the want of that *something* which a mother is the first to miss. Whatever her anxieties were, she kept them to herself, and only Mary guessed the postscripts, which came so often, contained the secret of her mother's frequent countings, over and over, of the lines of figures in the little brown book which she always carried with her to the village bank. Other things, too, Mary noticed, which passed unobserved by Gertrude and the younger children—little unwonted economies in the household arrangements, her mother wearing her last year's dress, pressing over her bonnet-ribbons, saying they looked almost as fresh as ever they did, when Gertrude asked, "Why don't you get new ones, mother?" Only trifles they were; but Mary saw them all, and longed to speak to her mother of them—longed to share her burdens, and yet had said nothing, for she respected the

love and silence with which her mother shielded Alfred's thoughtlessness, (surely it was nothing more,) even from a sister's eyes. Beside this, Mary had other cares and thoughts. She was two years older than Alfred, and had been a womanly girl always—motherly and care-taking, as the eldest child is apt to be, and on her devolved many home duties. Then, too, there were piles of snowy-white linen (increasing all the time) in the press in her mother's room, which, when June came, were to be carried not very far away, only over to the little cottage building (just at the turn of the road) where Mary was to be mistress. It was three years since she had promised Homer Grant to share his home. All that time he had worked patiently, laying by, week after week, something toward the fulfillment of the promise. Now the cottage was nearly complete, the tasteful furniture already selected, and Mary, though neglecting naught of her present duties for the future, was occupied every leisure min-

ute with the simple outfit which was being prepared at home. Mary thought it so bountiful, and was continually begging her mother to let her do without one thing or another; but Mrs. Merwin always answered with a loving kiss, saying, "If your father were living, dear, it would be far more; let me do the best I can for you."

The girls had gone that afternoon to the sewing society, which met at Mrs. Wilson's, so Mrs. Merwin read Alfred's letter alone, before she opened it, sending Bertie and Bessie out to play. Something in it made her very thoughtful, for she rested her head long upon her hand, after reading and re-reading it, ere she rose, and took from the drawer in the side-board, the little brown book, counting over for the second time that day, the lines of figures. Adding them up, she set apart the sum still needed to complete Mary's wardrobe. Such a small margin was left, from which to draw for her own, Gertrude's, and the younger children's wants, how could she meet the amount

Alfred wrote begging her to send him? What could she do? His letter hurt her so; the very words in which he framed his request, revealed to Mrs. Merwin, her boy had sadly changed: "I'm uncommonly hard up," he wrote. "Send what you and the girls can spare, say fifty dollars, or more. I am sorry to ask, but what can a fellow do?" It was not the lack of refinement in expression that wounded Mrs. Merwin so deeply, but that Alfred, her son, should even in his thoughts, for a moment, sacrifice his sisters to his own comfort. Heavier became the shadow which had grown with every day of the new year, that March evening; for the mother knew her boy had yielded; and yet he seemed so armed for the warfare, when he left her. Backward her mind turned to the years of his childhood. Was Alfred selfish then? Was he easily led astray? Had she been weak when firmness was needed? Had she prayed earnestly enough that he might be kept from the evil of the world? Question after question, did she ask of her

own heart, and of the past, trying to shield her child, by persuading herself many of his faults were the fruits of carelessness on her part (just as mothers always are trying to do, in their thoughts of wayward wandering children). Sitting there mid the gloom of the deepening twilight, little things came to her memory long forgotten. She went back to early days, when she stood in that room, grown so familiar now—a bride; and with one of those strange, mystical freaks of memory, her present grief and care were blended in with great gladness. She saw it all, as then it appeared; the little table with its snowy cloth, and places set for only two, and mid the pain of the present time, smile after smile flitted across Mrs. Merwin's face, as moonbeams light up the sea-wave, that has moaned only an hour before over shipwrecked mariner. After days she thought of too, when Mary, their blue-eyed baby, came; and then her thoughts turned to another birthnight, in the first of Autumn's months. She remembered, as though it

were but yesterday, her husband's whispered thanksgiving for their first-born son, his murmured words of prayer for the little soul just entered into life, and how she joined in the whisper, "For Christ's sake, Amen."

And the Bible says, "The promises of God in Him, are yea and amen." Could she doubt *He* had heard and would answer that prayer of earnest seeking, for a blessing on their child? Were her husband's prayers unheard? Her own, it might be they were but the weak yearnings of a faith always so far behind his; but surely his were heard; surely they would be answered by that Christ who said, "Ask and ye shall receive;" and yet—and then came to that quiet woman, as it comes at one time or another to every follower of Him, the darkness of the hiding of the Father's face. Her faith, it seemed gone; prayer, it seemed unheard. Falling on her knees, she bowed before Him, weeping in bitterness of soul. No words she spoke; but, are not such tears prayers? And while she knelt,

struggling with the tempter who bade her doubt God's promises, the angels came and ministered unto her.

Half an hour later, when Mrs. Merwin rose from her knees, she was a different woman; older, so much older; for such hours of anguish age the soul as years do not. But, on her face was a calm peace, in her heart was comfort; whatever Alfred's future might be, it was committed to Him who had promised, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" and yet very falteringly, almost stammeringly, she said, half aloud, as though to seal the truth in her heart by the utterance of her lips, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." In that hour, she had taken up her Cross, the *Cross* of waiting and trusting amid darkness; leaving her prayer, and the prayer of her boy's father with *Him*, even if the answer came not to her in this world.

Then she lit the lamp, folded up Alfred's letter, laid the little brown book away, went to the window, drew the curtains, opened

the door, calling the children, who lingered out, never caring, in their merry play, for the growing darkness: "Bertie, Bessie, come in."

Just while walking across the room, just while doing these loving ministries of a mother, making home cheerful for her girls, who would be coming soon, calling her little ones into shelter and warmth, she laid away her dreams that had been so many and so bright of all that Alfred was to be, (it takes such a minute to break the gossamer thread with which we weave our dreams for the future); and yet in her heart the promise was singing, singing loudly, "Trust in the Lord, and verily thou shalt be fed." Mrs. Merwin knew nothing of theology; only one or two of the volumes which made the "minister's library" in Dominie Merwin's time, had she read; but she well knew the comfort and repose, where only a little while before conflict and doubt had been, was the *food* promised.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was quite late before Mary and Gertrude returned. Bessie had gone to bed, and Bertie was very sleepy, though he tried manfully to keep awake, saying, "I don't want to leave you alone, mother;" but glad enough was he to kiss good-night, when the girls came. They had much to tell. "The new minister's wife was there," said Gertrude. "She seems hardly any older than Mary." "She just answers my ideal of a 'Christian woman,'" joined in Mary; "she was so undisturbed when old Mrs. Parker handed her the Bible, saying, in such a formal way, 'It is the custom

to open these meetings with prayer and reading of Scripture.'" "Yes," exclaimed Gertrnde, "my cheeks grew quite crimson. I thought she must mind it so much. I think she did, too; for the rosy color flushed up into her face. She selected such a beautiful chapter, mother, only not at all like those usually read at sewing society. It was the 35th of Isaiah. Then she knelt, and offered a simple, heartfelt prayer, but her voice trembled. I was so glad afterwards, when old Mrs. Parker went over and actually kissed her, saying, 'Thank you, child, for you seem scarce more to me, though you are a married woman, and our minister's wife at that. Well, well, "out of the mouths of babes He has perfected praise."'

"Mattie and I were talking about the chapter Mrs. Lyman read, when she brought her work, and asked if she might join our little group. Kate Field and Emma Mason were with us, you remember, Mary, when we sat over in the corner. I think she

overheard what Mattie was saying, for almost immediately she said, 'Do you enjoy reading Isaiah? I do very much.' You know Mattie is apt to be timid before strangers, but she was not so in the least with Mrs. Lyman, replying, without any constraint, 'Yes, only I don't understand it very well.' 'I do not think we should expect to understand all the Bible; do you, dear?' she answered. 'Even David, the Israel singer, wrote, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; I cannot attain unto it;" and Paul, the brave old man, who fought such a good fight of faith, tells us, "Now we see through a glass darkly. Now, we know in part."' Then she said the Bible seemed to her 'like a casket made of most precious stones and costly gems, banded together by golden links and casings, and the casket filled with treasures from many lands, each perfect of its kind—every stone traced with a truth and meaning of its own, which long years of patient study would hardly suffice to quite unfold,

even to the diligent student; and yet, the stones, when held up toward the light, whether by the hand of sage or child, always revealed something, always caught a glimmer from the far-off sky, and with every change of position, a new radiance, just as we do with Bible words.' Not waiting for our reply, she continued, 'Take but this verse, from the book of Isaiah, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee," and let us hold it up, as we would a precious stone, where the Light of Life falls on it, and trace the threefold golden cord that binds us through that one promise to the Saviour. "Fear thou not, for *I* am with thee." With what light that illumines the darksome way. "God with us," He who knows what is best for each of us. Then again look at it: "Fear thou not, for I *am* with thee;" with *all* those who fear Him; especially near those who suffer, leading them by pain, if patiently endured, into a closer, more beautiful fellowship with Him, who was "the man of sorrows." Once more think of the

promise, and see it radiant with light: "Fear thou not, for I am with *thee*," not merely with all men, but He comes to us, as individuals, so that we need never fear we shall be neglected or forgotten. I have only pointed out the promise shining in darkness,' she said, as she folded up her work, 'but its Light is just as beautiful, just as needful, for our happiest, as our saddest hours.' Then she smiled, and asked, 'Do you think I have been preaching you a sermon, girls?' adding in a low voice, 'God grant He may be *felt* near each one of you.' Before we could reply she was gone into the other room, where the old ladies were. I think I never knew any one so winning before." Mrs. Merwin only answered, "I am very glad, dear," and went hastily from the room.

It seemed so wonderful this conversation repeated by Gertrude; almost like a heavenly message sent to *her*, the words came, "Fear thou not," as she said them over to herself on her way upstairs to give Bertie

her good-night kiss, with the "God bless you," without which the day seemed incomplete to her children—as a prayer without its Amen seal of "So be it."

"Mother looks so pale to-night, do you think she is not feeling well," asked Gertrude. Mary's reply was interrupted by Mrs. Merwin's return. "Did Alfred's letter come to-day, mother?" inquired Gertrude. "Yes; he is quite well, and sends love to you all. I will not read it aloud, as it was written only for my eyes;" and the mother's voice trembled. "Oh! I am sorry, I do miss his letters so much. What shall we do, if being away from home changes Alfred?"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Merwin, "we have not prayed enough for your brother, that he may be kept from the evil of the world. Think much of Alfred, my children, when you pray 'Lead us not into temptation; deliver us from evil.'"

"Do you think temptation always means sin?" asked Mary. "Why, no," interrupted

Gertrude. "Don't you remember, how in James' Epistle it is written, 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.' What temptations does this verse refer to, mother ?" "I think," said Mrs. Merwin, "the verse alludes to afflictions and trials, which we should welcome, as they loosen our hold on the things of this world. Trials of faith and patience, which teach the soul to *wait* and *trust*." "You make me think, mother, of the little hymn dear old grandmamma used to say so often those last weeks of her life:

'Trials prove and strengthen patience,
Trials purge the dross away,
Trials sweeten expectations,
Of a bright and glorious day.'"

"I beg your pardon, Ma'am," said Joe, entering the room, "it is getting kind o' late, and if ye be minded to read now, me and Margaret will be glad." "Almost ten o'clock," said Gertrude. "How long we have talked !" Then the chapter was read,

and the family separated for the night. Gertrude slept almost as soon as her head touched the pillow, but Mary went to her mother's door, and gently knocked, hardly waiting to hear the low permission, "Come in, dear," ere she entered. "Tell me all about it," she said, laying her head on her mother's shoulder. "Is Alfred in trouble?" "Mary, dear," answered Mrs. Merwin, "do you remember the parable I read the night before your brother left home. It will tell you my sorrow, child, for it will tell you of the man who built upon the sand, just as our Alfred has done. Pray for him, Mary."

CHAPTER XIII.

WAS Mrs. Merwin unnecessarily anxious about Alfred? It would have seemed so to any casual observer who noticed the daily increasing favor he won from employers and companions. Then, too, he was becoming a great favorite in the society to which his aunt and uncle introduced him. Besides this, there were evenings spent with Mr. Burnham; evenings after which Alfred was always more thoughtful, more like the boy who left his mother that autumn morning. Outwardly, he had changed, certainly. "Wonderfully improved in appearance," his uncle said.

What was the something his mother missed from his letters? the want of which Mattie felt too, for it was that which made her restless one Tuesday afternoon in June, when he was to come home for the first visit. "I cannot understand it," she said to herself. "I have longed so for this day, and now it has come, I am almost frightened;" and with nervous fingers, little Mattie, who had never thought much before of becoming, or unbecoming, tried on one ribbon after another. The blue looked so pale, the scarlet so bright, which should she choose? With girlish irresolution she ran downstairs where her mother was, exclaiming, "Tell me, mother, which hand will you have?" holding the bits of ribbon behind her. Mrs. Wilson laughed. "You foolish child," she replied, "I 'll choose the left." "That 's the scarlet," said Mattie. "Well, I will wear it now, any way." And she darted off upstairs again, just to fasten on the simple bow, and band the wealth of curls with a confining ribbon. These were

the only adornments to the pure white of her muslin frock.

Three hours before, Joe and Bertie had driven by, on their way to the landing, to meet Alfred. It was almost time for them to be coming back, and Mattie, with eager haste, crossed the meadow-lot, that she might see Alfred on his return, from the very place where she called "good-by" to him; only that was in the morning sunshine, and now it was towards twilight.

"Yes, there they come," she said, softly, and, for a minute, bright little Mattie stood still, with the smothering weight about her heart, which comes with great joy as well as with sorrow. But it was only a minute ere her clear voice was calling, "Welcome home!" and Alfred was replying in accents glad as her own. Then the turn in the road hid them from her.

"Oh, how wrong I have been," said Mattie, "to even think he had changed!" Had she been mistaken?

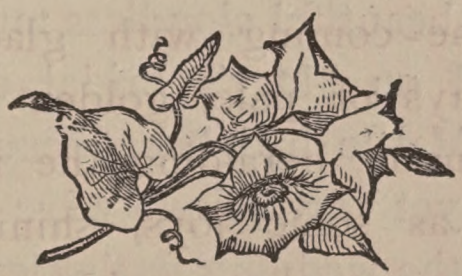
Why is it so much easier to tell of sor-

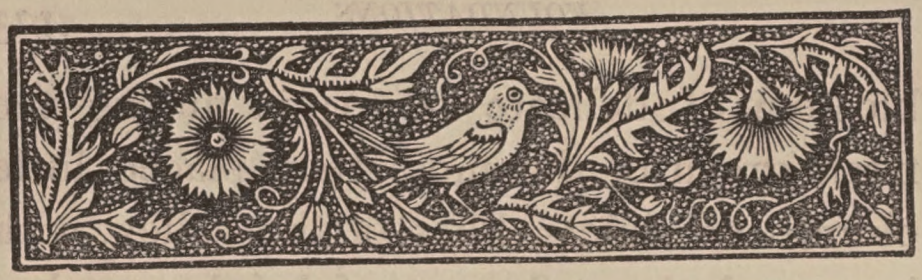
row than of joy? Is it that we know it better? Or is it that there is something almost sacred in the deep, restful gladness of the return of a loved one home that wakens memories so heart-breaking? We shrink from putting them into words, because so few are unlearned in the loneliness which whispers, "There is one gone who never will return."

These tender memories, while they encircle home-coming with gladness, are like the rays of pale, golden light, that halo the moon, heralding the rain-clouds near, just as some joys, shining things though they may be, are but preludes of our tears.

Then there are so few words for joy, compared with those that express sorrow; glad, joyful, satisfied, happy, jubilant, exultant—we soon exhaust the list; but sorrow—it is written in words that multiply one another in quick succession—pain, grief, anguish, agony, suffering, disappointment, and, alas! how many more sorrowful words there are!

Only once, of that sacred life unfolded to us in the Gospel story, is it said, "Jesus *rejoiced* in spirit."





CHAPTER XIV.

IT was a beautiful cloudless morning that dawned on Mary's bridal-day. Gertrude and Mattie had been occupied for a week past, yet very simple were the preparations for the wedding festivities. Though the house looked like a bower of flowers, every one said. "It was the season for them, to be sure," the old people remarked; "but where did they find so many?" The girls were busy from early morning; the mantelpiece, which looked so awkward and high, Gertrude thought, they covered with moss Bertie brought from the woods. From it they festooned the wild honeysuckle (that

blossom of delicate odor); in among the fresh green of the moss they placed little clumps of violets, lilies of the valley, with here and there flowers of brighter color. The evenings of the by-gone week they had spent in twining long wreaths of ever-greens, which Alfred helped them fasten over windows, book-case and pictures.

"I don't want any straight lines about it," said Gertrude, as she looped up garland after garland.

Between the windows, where Mary was to stand, they had made, with much painstaking, and not without the aid of Joe (who entered quite into the spirit of it after he had been made to understand what Miss Gertrude meant by an arch), a little temple, Mattie said it was—just a bower of green Gertrude had called it—"a bower of flowers, now," she said, as she twisted, in-and-out with the evergreens, roses and hyacinths, exclaiming, "The dear little apple-blossoms, they are so late this year; we will have

them, too, just blushing, as they are, with the faintest touch of pink, as though from sensitiveness, at proclaiming the fruit they hold for us!"

So the girls worked until it was time to dress; then the last touches were given, the last look taken, and "Is n't it beautiful," said by them all, though in different words; for old Margaret exclaimed, "Well, I reckon this is worthy of the Queen of England!" Joe added, "It beats all ever I see; great success now, ain't it, Miss Gertrude?" Little Bessie clapped her hands at the "beautiful garden in the room." Bertie, with boyish dignity, expressed himself satisfied with the result, and glad he brought that moss, "though it was a day's work." Mrs. Merwin looked beyond the outward show of evergreens and flowers which graced her child's wedding-day; looked backward, too, blending the onward with the backward look: it was this, which made her say, as she kissed Mary, looking at her through tear-dimmed eyes, "God grant,

dear, your married life may be as happy as your mother's."

Then Mrs. Merwin slipped away from the young people, going into her own room for a little while, quieting her heart, which ached from the heavy pain of parting from her child, by thoughts of Mary's joy, by committing her and her future to the Heavenly Father. That quiet half hour, alone in the morning, (No, not alone, for He hath said, "Lo, I am with you *alway*,") gave her strength for all the day was to bring—and take.

Mary only thanked Gertrude and Mattie with a loving kiss, and just a whispered word or two, in a voice which trembled, even though she said, "I am so happy." Alfred was lavish in praises, so lavish, Mattie running home hastily "to dress," wished to herself he had not said quite so much, "it seemed as though he were talking to the young ladies he had learned to know, since he left home, and not just to Gertrude and me."

At noon time, the guests began to assemble. Homer Grant's father, mother, sisters, and brothers, such a family of them as there were, scattered all the country side over. Mary had but few relatives, beyond the home circle. Her father's brother had sent a costly remembrance by Alfred, with a note of regret that he could not be present. There were several aunts and uncles of her mother's, and one cousin; that was all. "But I have friends just as dear," she said, "as if they were relations," when Mrs. Wilson came into her room, saying cheerfully, "I want another kiss while you are still Mary Merwin." All the neighbors came, and that included nearly all the village people, for neighborhood, in that quiet country place, was not a thing of avenues and squares. Mary never looked more lovely and peaceful than she did that morning; the wedding dress was of India muslin, (sent by her aunt from the city), which fell in graceful drapery folds about her; the veil, a gossamer, almost invisible thing, "just like the cobwebs on the

rose-bush, in the morning," little Bessie thought it; it hardly concealed the brown hair, which was coiled with no artificial aid about her shapely head. Gertrude fastened it with white rosebuds, and silvery lined geranium leaves. Then the minister came. It was the first time he had performed the marriage service. It may have been this which made him so tender, or it may have been the presence of his own young wife, scarce more than a bride of three or four months; but, whatever the cause, as old Mrs. Parker said "It was an uncommon holy wedding." And so the lives of Homer Grant and Mary Merwin were sealed in a companionship never to be broken, for surely, such pure love as theirs is a something which lives on, even in that land where they "neither marry nor are given in marriage."

By and by the wedding cake was cut, a loaf so generous, it seemed as though it never would grow small. Gertrude and Mattie, after distributing to the guests, made

up parcel after parcel, to be sent home to one and another, either too old, or too young, to come to the wedding. The hearty good wishes were said in words of no idle congratulation ere the company separated. The last one had gone, while the sun was high in the still cloudless sky, and Mary had laid off the pure white of her morning and girlhood's costume, for the dress of delicate lavender muslin, "which gives you a womanly, older air already, I do declare," said Gertrude, as they came down stairs together.

Then, standing on the door step, shading her eyes because the sunlight was so bright, Mrs. Merwin watched Mary, just as she had watched Alfred pass down the garden walk, pass through the garden gate, to begin life outside of her childhood's home.

Up the road they walked, Mary and her husband, toward the cottage, where the door was standing wide open. This was their bridal tour. Just the walk by the

grassy path, with its bank sides gemmed with early flowers; wild roses nodding their heads as they passed; little blue-eyed anemones and violets lingering beyond the spring time in the sheltered woods; golden buttercups and daisies, with the clover field beyond, a sea of honey-laden blossoms. By their side, crept along, with song-like ripple, the stream, which led out where the water lilies grew; and over all the sunshine fell. Thus they came to their home.

"Mother, was it wrong?" asked Bertie, when Mrs. Merwin stood by his bed-side. "I was over at Mary's (so strangely the child's quick use of the new expression fell on the mother's ear), when they went into the house, and, do you know, the first thing they did before they looked at a thing, was to kiss one another; then taking hold of Mary's hand, and keeping hold all the time, Homer and she knelt down and prayed. I stole away because I kind of thought they would rather be alone. I did n't mean to peep, but the door was open, and I could n't

help looking. Was it wrong?" So sleepy was Bertie, that having confessed, he laid his head on his pillow, and fell asleep even while his mother was replying.

CHAPTER XV.

THE moon was at its full that June night, making the evening light only a softened reflection of the golden sunshine of the day. Gertrude was sitting on the doorstep when Mrs. Merwin came downstairs. Hearing her mother, she called, "Come out here, mother, it is as bright as day," adding, as her mother joined her, "I am so lonely already for Mary, what shall we do without her?" Mrs. Merwin made no spoken reply to Gertrude's question, but she sat down by her side, and soon they fell into quiet talk of the day, and how lovely Mary was as a bride. "Though not more lovely than she always is," said Gertrude.

"Has Alfred gone over to farmer Wilson's?" asked Mrs. Merwin. "Yes, he said he would not be gone long." And then they talked again of Mary, till the mother interrupted, saying, "It is late. I wonder he does not come. You had better go to bed, Gertrude. I will wait." "Indeed, you will not, alone, mother; but hark! I hear him now; and I will run away, because I know you want Alfred all to yourself, mother, dear." Gertrude passed through the hall, and upstairs; then the moonlight was so beautiful, and the excitement of the day had been so much, she knew she could not quiet herself to sleep, so she sat down on the upper stair, beside the hall window, which was open wide, thinking to wait for her mother, meanwhile, dreaming to herself, all unconscious, sitting there in the moonlight, that she was building her last air castle for many a month to come. Often afterwards, Gertrude recalled just how every thing looked; the mountains, clear and almost hard in outline; the stars,

which seemed dim and far-off in the sky, silvery and shining with light; the stretch of pine trees, dark and gloomy with shadows. This was the far away look. The near showed her the glimmer of Mary's little cottage home, where the rays of light seemed to congregate, falling with never a shadow on its white painted panels. The chimneys of Mattie's house she saw, too, and nearer still, their own garden, filled with shadowy reflections, making duplicates of shrubs, flowers, and vine; tracing pictures of them in lines of strange delicacy and softened sober tint, on gravel-walk, grass, and garden fence.

Gertrude saw it all; but *her* moonlight pictures were painted in colors caught from thoughts that roved far out beyond the scene before her; a vision of "some day," when she would leave home, just as Mary had done. The young girl smiled, for the "with whom" was no very puzzling question. And then, away over eastward, she journeyed in fancy; saw a little room, just

like dozens of rooms in that gloomy college building, which was so prison-like outside, so cheerful in; saw a little table, with lighted lamp, and by the table "the *some one*" sitting, bending over books, lost in diligent study, spite the moonlight of the June night. She smiled again, a smile which lingered long, and asked herself, Why? And the answer was, because, mid the study and absorption of a scholar's life, she knew not many hours came and went without thoughts of her finding their way into that room. It was this that made her smile; this, and the knowledge that when the thoughts came, little answering thoughts were sent on speedy wing over the miles that lay between that distant town and the quiet farm house—memories which bridged over rivers and mountains, hills and plains, not in the tangible form of those white-winged messengers which are sometimes so crumpled in the crowded mail-bag journey, but just heart greetings which are felt without words. How did she know all this?

she asked again. The moon had travelled quite round, and was shining all about her, as she whispered to herself once more, prefacing her reply with a because—"Because he said he would think of me amid his books and study; and"—the secret of the smile, it was found just there—"and I trust him."

So she sat and dreamed on, till the barking of a dog down in the village roused her; then she arose, almost with a start, and wondered whether it was very late, shivering with the chill night-air, even of that summer time. She heard her mother and Alfred still talking. Was it fancy, or was there something in her mother's voice she had never heard before? And she shivered again. Then came Alfred's reply in broken words. The howling of the dog must have aroused them, too, for her mother came into the hall just then, and, quite plainly, Gertrude heard her say, "You had better try to sleep, now," and the voice was still, just as though it halted for a moment, ere it added, "my son."

A minute after, Alfred passed hastily up-stairs, never noticing Gertrude. It all frightened her, the quick transition from her beautiful dream, her mother's voice, Alfred's face, as he passed in the moonlight. What had happened? Was anything the matter? And then, in the stillness of the hour, she heard the sound of low sobbing. Surely it was her mother. Never pausing to think, Gertrude hastened down-stairs into the sitting-room. Yes, it was she, standing all alone in the place where Mary stood in the morning. Gertrude threw her arms around her mother, eagerly asking, "Tell me, mother, what has happened?" "You here, my child!" and Mrs. Merwin's voice grew strangely calm. "We will close the house now, it is very late." Then they locked the doors, shut the windows and went up-stairs together. In reply to Gertrude's question, Mrs. Merwin only said, "Do not ask me to tell you more, my child, than that Alfred has been sorely tried and he has yielded."

CHAPTER XVI.

SOMETHING very sad it surely must have been that Alfred told his mother, to have called forth the grief which Mrs. Merwin, with all her natural reserve, was powerless to conceal from Gertrude; yet it was only the oft-repeated story to which mother's hearken—of temptation yielded to —of straying from the path of strict rectitude, step by step, till the narrow way which divides right from wrong is left far off amid boyhood days. Scarcely a year had it taken to do this; and through it all Alfred had known "the safety place," when the billows of temptation were wildest, the

sea of allurement most tranquil and inviting, was only to be found in building on the Rock, in resting securely, because the foundation was not in his *own* strength, but on *the Corner Stone*—Christ. And yet knowing this he built on the sand; and though the structure was, to casual lookers on, fair and promising, he knew himself it was hollow and foundationless. Sitting there, on the old door-step, home again with his mother, a great longing came into his soul to be again the boy he left her. It was this which led him to seek the relief of telling her all about it; just as, when a little child, he used frankly to confess the faults committed, always sure with the punishment, tender sympathy would be blended. And so an hour later, the fears that had made Mrs. Merwin's heart anxious for the last few months, had become realities.

It was not a long story Alfred had to tell; it began only with little things; the first misspent Sabbath; the going night after night to places of amusement; the borrowing

"just small sums" from Frank Howe and the others. So from one thing he was led on to another. Then he told of going to Mr. Burnham, who helped him out of those first difficulties, with never a word of reproach, and who won from him the half promise to come to him if in need again, rather than borrow from any young friend; who made no allusion to why he needed the money, only said, "Do not forget our talk, Alfred, that first day we met, of the *seed* that fell on the good ground, and the fruit it bore." "But," Alfred continued, "I could not go to him again, and the fellows urged me so, and they seemed such *little* things, till the debts increased so; then I wrote home for money; so it went on, till at last I made up my mind I would not think of you, mother, the girls and Mattie. Then I consented to try, just for once, the game of chance, at which the other fellows made enough to keep them out of trouble. I won those first nights, and then, mother—I lost all."

To Mrs. Merwin the tale of Alfred's wanderings seemed sad enough, when he had gone thus far, for it revealed how he had trodden down the principles which she had thought so firmly rooted in his heart (only trodden down, not crushed and killed; but, when they were to upspring again, *that* was hidden from the mother; still her faith clung to the promise, "Wait on the Lord and He shall bring it to pass").

She thought Alfred's story ended, for he was silent many minutes ere he resumed, in a voice fuller of pain than it had been before, "And now, I never can be the same, mother. It is that which hurts me so. Every thing seems changed since that night; I did not know how much changed, till I came home to you—till I saw Mattie." And he bowed his head on his hands. The pale moonlight shone in flickering, broken rays through the vine-covered porch, falling about the mother and her son, the silvery rays from the far-off sky coming like winged messengers, laden to the mother with the whis-

per, "Be of good cheer," "The Lord is mindful of His own."

From Alfred's last words, Mrs. Merwin understood the restlessness of his manner; understood why he had striven to keep up a gay, bantering conversation with Gertrude and Mattie; why he had avoided being alone with her till that evening, when she waited for him; knew why the cheerfulness, which made those who only looked at the surface, say "How Alfred has improved!" seemed to her assumed, just as it had done to Gertrude and Mattie, and to others beside them, for farmer Wilson shook his head and said "I like Alfred's old manner the best," and Joe, though he said it not, thought much the same.

"I never can be the same, mother." Over and over he repeated the words—such bitter words they were—revealing to them both the ideal with which he left home all marred, never to be his former self; never again to look backward on self-respect unsullied. *There* is the agony of wrong doing, which

changes the cool, dewy freshness of many a young life into the dry scorching heat of mid-summer, while still their years are in the spring time. Recognizing this, Alfred and his mother sat that June night, mid the ruins of their "castles in the air." "I built upon the sand, mother; not the rock;" and again he repeated "I never can be the same."

Only simple words his mother chose to comfort him, and they were very few. She did not speak of his wandering; she did not upbraid, and tell him of her own sorrow; but woman-like, with gentle touch she took his hand into her own, tenderly caressing it—the hand of her first-born son—the hand she had loved so long and well, ever since the days when it was a dimpled, child hand, when with baby touch it nestled into hers; so changed now it looked, the strong hand of his early manhood; and his mother held it with as tender a clasp as if never he had gone astray, and the moonbeams fell on the hands, resting one

in the other. Was it strange that a ray of unshadowed light played about the little ring the mother wore, the golden band, growing so slender from long wear, that another hand—the hand of Alfred's father—had placed upon her finger. "And he prayed for our boy,"—that was the thought in Mrs. Merwin's heart, as softly she said, "The Rock is still near you, my child; build again, choosing the only abiding foundation; and remember the promise, 'As far as the east is from the west, *so* far will He remove our transgressions from us;' 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.' And His pardon of our sins for the Saviour's sake is, 'They shall be remembered no more,'—'mentioned no more.'"

After that, they talked for a little while of Alfred's need. The debts should all be paid, his mother promised. Then the sound of the dog, barking down in the village, which startled Gertrude, roused them too, and Alfred and his mother parted.

When Alfred reached his room, he stood long by the window, looking out on the calm summer night, looking on nature, so restful and so resting, so unlike his own restless self. Gentle influences, the pleading prayers of his mother, were about him. He knew her longing for him; he knew his need was to come *now* to the Saviour—to come all unworthy as he was; knowing that if he came in humble penitence, for Christ's sake, the "sins, like scarlet, should be white as snow," washed in His pardoning, forgiving love. Once again a new life stretched before him. Would he enter the open *Door?*—the Way, of which Christ said, "*I am the Door.*" Why did he delay? Why did he hearken to the voice speaking from his own life, saying, "You never can be the same; you are all unworthy; you may become nobler, calmer, taught by this early experience, chastened by the remembrance of these early wanderings; but never the same. And, with that thought, the bitterness came into his soul again, and his cry

was not, "God be merciful to me a sinner," but "*I will* be worthy of them all." So Alfred began to build once more on the sand, seeking to make himself worthy in his own strength; turning from the One who alone is strength, he entered on another life, but a restless, unsatisfying life of ambition, crowned, though it was, with outward success, as all lives are that know not the secret of rest and peace found only in the "shadow of the Rock."

Gertrude did not leave her mother till the moonlight had given place to the early gray of dawn; then, for in that night mother and daughter seemed to have changed places, she knocked at old Margaret's door, told her Mr. Alfred must leave at six o'clock, and it was time to wake up. A little later, she called to Alfred, "Wake up, dear Alfred, the sun has risen."

It was very hurried that morning-parting. Alfred did not come down till late, the children were too tired to rouse themselves, and he had to leave good-by kisses on sleep-

ing faces. Joe (an unusual thing with him) was impatient, and sure they would miss the boat unless Master Alfred made haste. So there was no time for many words—just a kiss and good-by to Gertrude, a smothered sob, as he laid his head on his mother's shoulder, while she softly whispered, "God bless and keep you, my son," and he was gone.

Mrs. Merwin watched them till quite out of sight; then, with something in her look which overawed and made Gertrude silent, she turned and passed through the garden, over the little stile into the meadow, on beyond to the quiet place on the hill-side, where the white stone caught the first rays of the morning's sunlight — where the flowers were in bloom.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW did Mattie pass that beautiful moonlight night which followed Mary's cloudless wedding day? With the twilight Alfred came, and they walked together up and down the lane where they walked the night before he left home, in the autumn, talking just as they did then, in low voices. But it all seemed so different. And why? That was what Mattie asked herself, sitting alone later in the evening. in the broad seat of the window, in her little room, where the elm-tree branches made a bower of green just outside—made little safe hiding-places, where the birds built

their nests and came to sing; but in the night their songs were silent. Everything looked so peaceful and happy. Why was she dissatisfied and restless? She could not tell. So little knowledge had this young girl of that intricate thing—her own heart, And Alfred, she had known and loved him always. It seemed so wrong to even think him changed; so wrong to feel the want of the something which used to make her happy, when with him; so doubting, to think he did not care for her as much as ever he did. Mrs. Wilson, down-stairs, with her husband, talked of their child; for, with the quick divining instinct of a mother's watchful love, she had felt all day the approaching shadow which she dreaded was to shroud Mattie's glad young heart. "Only for a little while, John, a little while; surely it will not be for long," she said, in her hopeful way, as Mr. Wilson spoke to her of his fears for Alfred.

She did not go to Mattie for an hour after Alfred left; then she softly opened

the door, asking gently, "Are you asleep, dear." Never waiting for a reply, she entered, adding, "What, sitting in the moonlight, my little girl!" and then she folded Mattie, just as though she were a child again, in the loving shelter of her arms. Mattie nestled her head down upon her mother's shoulder, weeping out her sorrow where she was so sure of sympathy, saying, in broken voice, "I don't know why, but Alfred seems so changed." Mrs. Wilson soothed her, not with words, but with tenderness, only whispering, ere she left her, "Trust, Mattie, where you cannot see; that's what *faith* means, child; walking cheerfully and willingly in the path 'Our Father' chooses. However rough and dark the way may seem now, it will be light, if you trust Him, and wait. Alfred is the child of many prayers. You know who hears and answers prayer; leave all your care with the Lord, and don't be afraid to tell your Saviour all about your troubles, dear, however small they may seem." Then

her mother left her, and Mattie was alone again in the moonlight, but her tears had given place to a smile; sadder perhaps to look on, than tears, the smile seemed; but better, far better. It was a great comfort to Mattie, the feeling her mother knew and sympathized with her, yet after that night they did not talk of it again (not for long years — then just once — her mother murmured, in voice very faint and very low, "Wait, my child, and trust the Lord"). In the early morning, Mattie was up as was her wont, singing, too, "a song sweet as the bird's song of morning praise," farmer Wilson said; for though in that night of her first real disappointment, the gay carol of her free girl-life song had gone away, the morning song was none the less sweet and peaceful for the new notes it had caught. Mrs. Wilson, hearkening to her voice, wondered where she found the words, never thinking they were just the utterance of what her child had been praying, for while Mattie's air-castles had fallen, they

they did not lay in ruins about her; they only helped her to sing; they only served to build the castle of her life into a fairer temple; only aided to star the mosaic work with thoughts that were aspirations, and that shone like gems, because of her simple, trusting faith, that all would be, must be, well for her, because all came from her Heavenly Father. So she stood in the morning sunlight, and folded up, and laid away the little ribbons, which, only a day or two before, she had chosen with gleeful merriment; she held them in her hand a minute—the pale blue and the bright scarlet—and—she did not cry—she did not sigh; she was no sentimental girl, to brood and make sorrow, when God had given her so much to make life glad. She only looked at them again, and said to herself, "I think I will wear them no more." Then she sang again in a lower voice, perchance, the words she sang before, very simple they were, but still a song was Mattie's. "Where did you find it?" her mother asked, when

afterwards coming in from the garden with her apron full of flowers, Mrs. Wilson heard her repeating the same words. "Find it," Mattie replied, "why I hardly know;" and she sang once more:

"Leave God to order all thy ways,
And hope in Him, whate'er betide;
Thou'lt find Him in the evil days
An all-sufficient strength and guide.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love,
Builds on the Rock that naught can move."

* * * * * * *

"Only your restless heart keep still,
And wait in cheerful hope, content
To take whate'er His gracious will,
His all-discerning love hath sent.
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known,
To Him who chose us for His own."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER those first hours of entering into full sympathy with her mother's cares, and of knowledge that Alfred had done wrong, the unbroken gladness which had surrounded her life seemed strangely dimmed to Gertrude; for, to a nature like hers, such a trial was one of peculiar severity; one which, had her faith been less firmly grounded, would have shattered it with rude shock. Even clinging as she did to the promise which bade her "fear not," for many weeks and months, though she bravely tried to conceal her pain from her mother, she was toiling, like those old-time

workers, who, day after day, with weary hands, wove in one silken thread after another, making pictures, while to themselves, only the knots and tangles of their thread appeared. Sometimes never did those patient laborers, who wrought, with softly shaded colors, delicate outlines of blended hues, rich clusters of flowers, or the gay scene of ancient minstrel's song, behold their accomplished task—for they worked it in from the other side—those wonderful hangings of gobelin tapestry. And it was thus with Gertrude. Her mother, Mary, Mattie, Mrs. Wilson, Joe, and old Margaret, too, watched her daily growing more gentle and loving, reflecting more the spirit of the life hid in Christ. And she herself, all the time, was unconscious of this; for she seemed only working with tangled threads, finding so many knotted ends, never once thinking the other side was a thing of joy and beauty to all who knew and loved her. So it often is in this life; we work with the threads—we call them tangled—we think

them such dull, insignificant things, to spend our days in laboring over. And yet, the "little things," would the great ever be without them? Where would be the music in the lofty gilded organ, were it not for the little reeds? Amid the gloom and smoke of London's crowded city, up towers the dome of St. Paul's with its golden cross. What upholds the mighty cathedral? What supports its massive walls? Far down, out of sight, hidden by stone work, overlaid by cement and plaster, there lays a stone—the corner stone—such a little thing from which to begin so great a building. But is 'nt it always so? Even as seeming trifles make our days, coming as they do, comfort laden, if we remember not one is too small for Christ to notice; for the widow's mite was not hidden from Him. The one trembling touch of the poor woman mid the thronging crowd was not unheeded, for of it He said, "Who touched me?" And the woman "departed in peace." If, but mindful of *this* comfort, no "insignificant things"

are left; for *all* may be offerings of praise and service to "Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us."

Mrs. Merwin and Gertrude consulted long together ere they decided to tell Mary and her husband of the trouble which oppressed them. It seemed so hard, Gertrude said, to shadow the first happy days of their life together. But they had to be told, for Alfred's debts must be paid; and the only way to do this was to raise money on the land—the dearest, best loved part of all the farm—the meadow-lot, that extended over to the hill-side, and the wood-land, bounded by the belt of pine-trees. All this would not more than suffice to yield the needful sum. Through the kindness of a friend this was done. The village doctor, who had known them all their lives, came one morning for a long business-talk with Mrs. Merwin. "And he never asked a question as to why mother needed the money," said Gertrude, when she was telling Mary of his visit. "I think it was so kind of him.

And now mother says that part of the farm is no longer really ours, for he holds what they call a mortgage on it."

It was thus that Alfred was relieved from the bondage of debt. All this made no very apparent outward change in the home life of Mrs. Merwin and her children; but Gertrude and her mother knew the interest must be paid; and, for this, strict economy would be needed—the giving up of little things they had been wont to call needful, but now numbered among luxuries. But they never reproached Alfred; only they sent loving, tender letters to him, even more frequently than ever before.

While this business was being accomplished, June had given place to July, and July had slided into August, a month, that year, of intense heat, unbroken by cooling showers; the sun shone day after day with fiery blaze; the earth was fevered, the green grass scorched and yellow; the rippling music of the little brooks and rivulets was silenced; the water-springs were

thirsty to be filled again; still the longed-for rain came not; the faces of the farmers grew sober. A hard year, they said it would be; no ripened grain to garner. So the harvest-time came, but the harvesters were few. Never before had the farm yielded so little as that year; and "never before did we seem to need it so much," said Mrs. Merwin; "but it is all right. What would we do without that 'surety,' dear?" she added, kissing Gertrude, who could not keep the tears back, when Joe came in from the fields with news of fresh disappointment, saying, "I was about confident that 'er corn-field would amount to something, but the blight has took it along with the rest."

CHAPTER XIX.

GERTRUDE and Mattie were as intimate that summer as ever before, only with one difference—by a tacit consent they no longer talked of Alfred. It was at the close of one of the warmest days of August that they wandered off down towards the woods. As they passed the open door of Mary's cottage, she called to them, "Where are you going through the heat?" "In search of a cool place," answered Mattie; "but I don't believe we shall find it."

On they went, till they came to their old seat in the rock-crevice. "No mosses here, now, Gertie," said Mattie. "See! they are

all dry and dead." "Not all, Mattie. Those growing on the side, they are still fresh and green. Do you remember what you said last autumn about the clinging mosses on the rock side? I have thought of it so much lately."

"Yes; I remember," replied Mattie. "Only last night I was thinking of it. How strangely things, not at all connected, will bring other things to one's mind! The verse in my little 'Daily Food' book recalled our talk to me, though I cannot see why. It was such a strange verse—'And his pillow was a stone.' Tell me, Gertrude, what do you think it means—the stone for a pillow; and the dream—a ladder, with angels ascending and descending?"

"It was several minutes ere Gertrude answered, "I hardly know, Mattie; but surely it is a very comforting verse. Think of it. With only the cold, hard stone for a pillow, Jacob *slept;* and while he slept, there came to him the most blessed typical dream of all his life-time. That night was

the most wonderful of all the nights ever he knew; for it was then and there he heard the voice of the Lord, and hearkened to the promise, 'Behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.' Just so I think it is now with God's children mid the night of earthly trial. He speaks to them, saying, 'Behold I am with thee.' Even from the stony pillow, the ladder of prayer reaches upward, whereon the angels ascend with petitions and descend with blessings." Then the girls were silent, thinking of their own lives, appropriating their words and thoughts to their *own* condition, as is the way with the young. It takes so long ere we learn to look outside of self; and yet nothing helps so quickly towards it as silence, for "meditation is done in silence; by it we renounce our narrow individuality, and expand into that which is infinite." This "*sacredness* of inward silence," and true communion with the invisible, is a far different guide upward and onward, than that retrospection and in-

trospection which fills the mind with gloom, narrowing the life about its own *centre*, rather than about the great Central Light of Life—Christ.

How tenderly the "divine depth of silence" is revealed in those hushed places where the Gospel story points towards the hidden treasure, and is still; those mystical chapters, which only lift the veil a very little—the veil which hangs on golden cords between the now and *then*, swaying back and forth, unfolding the promise of our God traced upon it, "What ye know not now, ye shall know hereafter." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Presently Mattie said, "It is beautiful, is n't it, Gertie? to know from *everywhere* this upward-reaching ladder may ascend."

Thus, at the close of the day, Gertrude and Mattie thought and talked together of heavenly things. Almost unlearned they were in the full, deep meaning of sorrow,

yet their trials were very real to them, and accomplished just the work for which disappointment is sent to us all; for whether it comes gently and quietly, like the snow that falls with no sound, or in wild beating storm of sudden fury, it is sent for the same purpose, and always, if we search, we shall fine the heavenly seal, "God is love." The shadows which came to these young girls did not make them dwell with moody sentimentality, dreaming over their castles fallen to the ground, but served to enlarge and dignify their thoughts of life, making them more tender and loving, more kind in judgment, more pitiful for others' sorrows, and help-giving to all; (just as pain, if received as sent by "Our Father," always does). Constantly present with both Gertrude and Mattie, though they never put it into words, was the truth, that *now* was their time to do, though it seemed only such little services to which they were called; but the *waiting* for the great—why, it would be like standing at "the pass of By

and By," which leads only to the "valley of *never*." Realizing this, Mattie was still the gladness of her home, hopeful and cheerful, even though the sunshine of her heart was shadowed, and she a quieter girl than a year ago. "But, I am a year older, you know, mother," she would say. She did not yield to the pain of thinking of what might have been (though self-pity is such a tempting thing, sometimes, not only to the very young); but she was active and *healthful* in spirit, performing her humble home duties, finding enjoyment in them, too, saying to herself, "God will send me gladness in His own time, and how much I have to make me happy and thankful!"

Gertrude—her castles in the air, they, too, were laid low—lower than any one knew, for a little note she sent, without saying a word—"It would only make mother sorry," she thought. The note was but a scrap of a thing, and yet, ever so many days it took Gertrude to write it, though, after all, it was only, "Please do not think of me any

more, and do not ask me why." So she pulled down her own air-castle, for "surely," she thought, "not till the debt is paid, could I leave mother; and that would be so long for him to wait." No answer came to her note for many months, but she, through all that time, only grew more patient, more thoughtful, helping in simple ways, teaching Bertie and Bessie, thus saving the school bills; patiently cutting and turning garments, laid by as worn-out; making them over, "not quite into new ones," she would laughingly say, "but almost as good, aren't they?"

And her outward life, though its tasks were so homely, so monotonous, some would have thought, was full of fragrance and content, because every act sprang from a heart where dwelt the longing, that "*whatsoever* ye do, do all to the glory of God."

CHAPTER XX.

NOW we must leave Gertrude and Mattie, spending their days thus, in trustful peace, because they committed all to God. Those days which passed so quietly, little did they think they were freighted with riches that would come sailing back again — treasures that would never grow old—treasures that "moth and rust corrupt not." "Temples of the living God," said Mattie, as they walked home together from the village church, one Sabbath afternoon, late in the autumn of that year. "Ah! Gertrude, no need for us to talk as we used to, of castle building and mosaic work, for if our hearts be pure and true, then *He* hath

promised that we shall be 'temples of the living God;' 'I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people;' 'And will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' They are verses of such wonderful comfort and promise, are n't they?" Then for the first and only time for years after, Mattie spoke of Alfred. "Do you remember," she asked, "the night before Alfred left, that first time he went from home, the clouds and the rainbow in the sky, Gertie? There would have been no rainbow, without the clouds, would there? And the *bow* is a promise." That was all she said, but it revealed to Gertrude the secret of Mattie's smiles and tranquillity. Gertrude's reply was only to the first part of Mattie's sentence: "Yes, it is a wonderful verse, yet it makes us no less builders, I think, for it *transforms* us, even while *here*, into '*fellow-workers*' with Him, with whom we are 'joint heirs.'"

The mothers watched their children, passing out of girlhood into womanhood, with the same calm trust that filled *their* young hearts, for their foundation was the same, —even Christ. Day by day, Mrs. Merwin saw Mary ripening into all her heart desired she should become, as a good wife, "a help-meet" (Mrs. Merwin clung to the old-fashioned word) to her husband; as a gentle, loving mother, for as the years came and went, the sound of baby laughter, the patter of children's feet, made music in the cottage home. And Alfred — she watched him too, with tender mother-love, waiting for the time (though it tarried so long) when his master would no longer be ambition—when no longer he would strive to make *himself worthy*, but would come home to her, "clothed, and in his right mind," through no merit of his *own strength's* winning, but because he had found Christ— "All and in all."

PART II.

"We search the world for truth; we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful
From graven stone and written scroll,
From all old flower-fields of the soul;
And, weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from our quest,
To find that all the sages said
Is in the Book our mothers read,
And all our treasure of old thought,
In His harmonious fullness wrought
Who gathers in one sheaf complete
The scattered blades of God's sown wheat,
The common growth that maketh good
His all-embracing Fatherhood."

WHITTIER.

CHAPTER I.

MANY years have gone by since our story began—years that seemed so long, looked forward to—so short, looked back upon. Great changes had they brought to the quiet village of H——. The old meeting-house, with its white walls, straight high-backed seats, square pews, and unshaded windows, through which the light shone in broad sunbeams, had given place to a "modern church," where sunlight fell in tempered, mellowed rays, through the stained glass of arched windows; where the walls were of sober, softened tints, the pulpit no longer a desk of harsh outlines and sharp

corners, but a thing of graceful gothic structure, with warm crimson hangings of velvet. But though the *outward* building was so altered, the *inward* spirit was the same, for still its seal was, "Holiness belongeth unto thee, oh Lord," and its call, "Let him that heareth come, and whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely," for, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

Other changes there were, too. New homes had sprung up, nestling closer than had been their wont, together. The one long, shady street, that ran through the village, now turned off here, opened out there, into other streets almost as long. Bay windows and French roofs, had found their way, even into that retired place. Still the "old stone house" was unaltered, at least in external appearance. The sitting room, too, had lost none of the comfort air which belonged to it in by-gone days, though one

would hardly have recognized its inmates as the same, looking in upon them one autumn afternoon, twenty years or more after Alfred Merwin first left home. An old lady with snowy white hair and peaceful look, is sitting on a low chair, before the warm sparkling wood fire—a calm, quiet old lady, that makes one think of "*rest*" as very near. By her side lay the soft ball of wool, and shining needles of her knitting work—tiny socks for infant feet; but her hands are idle now, while her thoughts are busy thinking of the *Past*. She must have slipped away from the *Present*, and then must have glided onward to the *Future;* for a smile lit up the old face, so peaceful, albeit, it was furrowed by lines of time and care. Which leave the deepest marks on the face of the aged? The smile reveals to us the old lady as none other than Mrs. Merwin. Can that tall, slender young woman, walking to and fro, quieting, with low-voiced lullaby, the restless little one, whose head is pillowed on her shoulder, be Bessie? Such

a restless, playful little one, who lifts his curly head, stretching out his tiny hands in welcome to the stranger who enters the room, (stranger to us, but not to baby,) making baby music, the cooing sound of gladness, that heralds the first half-uttered word.

He who sits over by the table drawn close up to the window to secure the little remaining light of the day, bending over books and papers, must be Bertie; "the scholar of the family," they call him. "Only these two left at home, Bertie and Bessie, my youngest; the rest of my children have gone out and made nests of their own," Mrs. Merwin used to tell her new neighbors. Mary, not far off, for the cottage, added to on one side, was still her home, and she the queen of it, ruling, with gentle sway, the tall sons and graceful daughters growing up around her; a happy woman, "whose children called her blessed," and in whom "the heart of her husband safely trusted."

And Gertrude—how had the years dealt

with her? Where was she? Many miles away, making glad a home of her own, with happiness which was no transitory blossom, but a plant of perpetual bloom and fruit, because it flourished in the soil watered by the "graces of the Spirit." Often she asked herself, would all this mid-day calm have been, without the morning storms, without those early trials, when she learned sympathy for others, patient waiting and trust in Him who giveth or withholdeth "*in love.*" And her answer was always, "Thank God for the rainy as well as the sunshiny days." It was years now since she was crowned a happy wife, for the answer came to the little note which had caused such pain in the writing, and her happiness and content since then had been almost unbroken. Anxieties had come, as they come to all, when the life-barque is pushed off from the home-haven of childhood. "But the anxieties are always shared with my husband"—so she wrote her mother—"and they only serve to make us love and cling

to one another more. *Sometimes* we think our lives almost care-free, so peacefully our days have come and gone all these years through."

Thinking of all her children, was Mrs. Merwin, as she sat in the twilight; but her thoughts lingered longest about those most widely-separated from her, Gertrude and Alfred—Alfred, whose birthnight it was (a middle-aged man now), though his mother still called him "her boy." Five years had gone since he had been home. Always he was coming, "but so many little things prevented," his letters said. Singularly prosperous; wonderfully successful!—that was the world's verdict, looking on Alfred Merwin's life.

Long years ago he had paid the last of the debt, the memory of which never left him, because with it he had lost that which money cannot buy—his unblemished self-respect. "A lucky fellow," he was called by the young friends with whom he started in life; a generous man, who gave with no

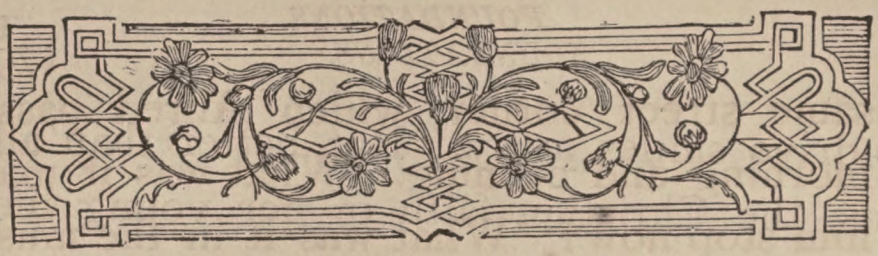
sparing hand; whose name was on every subscription-list; benevolent and perfectly moral;—thus he ranked in the estimation of others. Was he happy? Was he content? Or, was the restless heart still there?—the bitter cry, "I will make *myself* worthy"? It was long since his mother had asked these questions; but well she knew he never would be *really satisfied* till, like a little child, he sat at the Master's feet, learning of Him. And, though her heart was not unlearned in the command, "Possess your soul in patience," a sigh was in the words she murmured to herself, "I am waiting yet—waiting a little longer, till my boy comes home. The tarrying-time seems long, but,"—and the sigh changed into a smile, "He is faithful who hath promised."

Then Mrs. Merwin's thoughts wandered to Mattie, who was so shielded in her young days from trouble, and who had known so much of sorrow since; for scarcely had her girlhood gone when the call which summoned her father from earth came; and only

a few months later, the angel, with beckoning, upward-pointing hand, entered their home again, and looked upon her mother; and Mattie was an orphan. After that, the red house was sold; the great elm-tree cut down; "the place remodelled," till all traces of its past seemed gone.

Mrs. Merwin urged Mattie to come to her; but "No," was her answer; "there is work for me to do up among the mountains, where my uncle lives, and where he has offered me a 'home.'" So she went. Since that they saw her but seldom. "I am not brave," she wrote; "it is better not to come where everything is a memory." Bessie often wondered "why Mattie never married." "Perhaps she will, some day," Mrs. Merwin would reply; but the "some day" had not yet come, and Mattie was growing old. Still the light had not gone from her eyes; still the dark hair stole in clustering ringlets about her forehead, and the dimpled mouth had not forgotten to smile, even though there had been so much

to drive smiles away. But better than all this, the Christian faith of her young life had grown clearer and brighter with every passing year, making her more loving and more loved by all. "She is always giving something—kind words or kind deeds," said the children in her uncle's home. So her days passed. Now and then, when she turned the backward leaves of her "life-book," she would whisper to herself her mother's words, "Wait—only wait, Mattie, and trust." And she waited. But not often did she think thus, for onward, not backward, she strove to look; outward, not inward.



CHAPTER II.

THAT evening, when his mother sat in the old-familiar room, thinking of him on his birthnight, Alfred's thoughts, too, were of his childhood. It was towards the close of the day, when he returned to his home. He lingered for a moment on the door-step, listening, he could not tell why, to what hardly won the name of music, for the sound which held him almost spell-bound was only the old tune Mattie used to sing of "Annie Laurie," which, hour after hour, the one-armed soldier-boy, with monotonous turn of the hand, ground out of his weather-beaten organ, just at the

same street corner which Alfred passed morning and evening. What was it made him stop now? What was it in the music, that autumn day, that touched him? Was it what it made him forget? Or, what it made him remember? Presently he opened the door, saying to himself, "I am tired to-night." Turning to the servant awaiting his orders, he added, "Do not come to me till I ring." From the hall he passed into an adjoining room—a luxurious room, with shelves and book-cases almost filling one side. At the far end of the room was an open fire-place, which sent forth a cheerful blaze of light. Drawing the massive arm-chair, with its soft cushions of velvet, before the fire, Alfred seated himself, folding his hands, never turning a leaf of the many volumes which filled the table near him. "I will rest," he said. "I am weary from my walk." Long he sat thus; so long, the twilight faded; darkness crept over the city; the fire burned low; its light grew dim; still he was motionless; back-

ward his thoughts had wandered. Again he was a child—a happy child; he heard his mother's voice; it was the time of evening prayer, and his mother read, "God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." He heard his sisters softly singing the evening hymn:

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

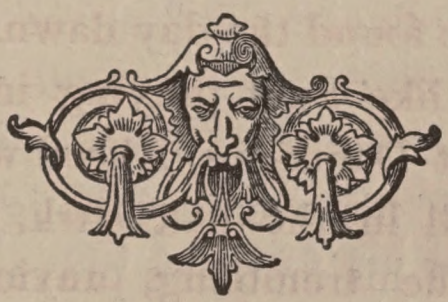
Then memory carried him on from childhood, and he was a youth, leaving his mother's home. Recollections of the darkness of his wanderings came; but he pushed these memories away from him, striving to think of his manhood and prosperity. Still, close beside him, even as it had been near the child, very near the young man, a shadow ever walked—the shadow of a restless heart. Thus his life stretched before him, as he said, "It is my birthnight. My mother is thinking of me."

Had the wind risen? Was it the echo of the street music, that made a sound in that quiet room? Or, was it Alfred sighing as he looked backward, that wakened the moan, never very long silent, since Solomon the king, the wise man, uttered the dirge of *earthly* satisfaction, which, repeated by thousands of weary hearts, has come down through the ages, "Vanity of vanities—all is vanity!" With the sigh, Alfred's face grew older; the lingering rays of light faded from the gilded picture frames; the rosy glow passed from the room; the fire had gone out. And then came hours which cannot be framed into words; for who can approach to unveil those holy times, when the soul is *alone* with God; those "still hours," from which we come forth with changed thoughts and aims for life; with different hopes, too; come forth like little children (who have been hearkening to sweet music, faint, low music, like the rippling of water on ocean beach when the summer night is calm), smiling, because,

in our hearts, marred though they are by sin, wearied by disappointment and the rude tossings of this earthly life, there is murmuring the peace which "floweth as a river," proclaiming sin pardoned for Christ's sake! It was thus with Alfred Merwin that September night; none knew the heart-struggle it cost, ere he, the proud, strong man, who had for years striven to make *self* worthy, bowed and accepted the "gift of God." None knew the conflict of those hours, when the *night* passed out of his soul and he found the day dawn. Only the dawn, for, like Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, Alfred was still sorrowful, still in the half-dark. But "he prayed" the trembling, anxious prayer, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." And "the Father had compassion"—compassion, even though for so long the greatness of His forgiving love had been slighted and forgotten.

Toward morning Alfred slept; and in his sleep he dreamed that the angels came with

his birthday gift—"the angels who shine and burn with thoughts and desires, of how God can be praised, peace be on earth, and all men be of good heart and mind." Softly they seemed to whisper, "What gift hast thou to offer to Him who hast done all for thee! only thy heart the Saviour asks."



CHAPTER III.

WHEN into the stately room the morning sunlight shone, revealing the tokens of Alfred's wealth, the evidences of his learning, all found worthless to win the "unspeakable gift," again he prayed; and, as in music, the key note which rules the strain, closes it, so the morning caught the echo of his evening thoughts, caught the echo of his mother's prayer, the sound of the hymn his sisters sang—

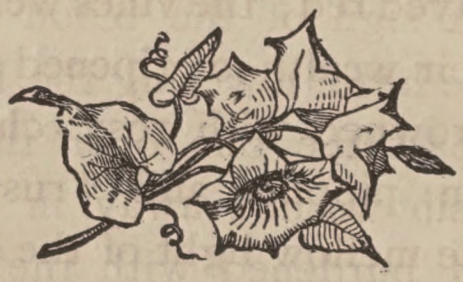
"Nothing in thy hand need 'st bring,
Only come."

And he came.———

Later in the day, Alfred sought his old

friend, Mr. Burnham, oppressed (even mid the peace which filled his heart) by thoughts of the by-gone years, wasted in building on the sand. His soul was sorrow-stricken, that for so long he had staid away from Christ, whose promises of love and pardon were so full and free. Thinking of self, he felt all unfit to accept them as meant for him. It was this he told Mr. Burnham, who, in reply, asked, "Do you know the mute language of those voiceless people, who express their hearts' joy and sorrow by signs? When they pray, they lift the hand upward, and looking at it, they point to the palm, where the nail pierced, in sign of the blood shed; and bowing the head, lowering the hand quickly, they pass the one over the other in token of sin washed away in His blood. And when burdened with the weight of their own sinfulness, they take the Bible, and with eager haste, turn the leaves, resting their finger on the words which tell of the debtors whose debts were of such dif-

ferent magnitude, but of whom it is written, 'When they had nothing to pay He frankly forgave them both.' All you have to do, Alfred, is to receive this full forgiveness promised by the Heavenly Father, because Christ loved you and gave Himself for you. Trusting Jesus, your salvation is sure, and though all unworthy of the blessing, you may, with confidence, ask Him to 'fill you with joy and peace in believing.'"



CHAPTER IV.

OCTOBER, the month of brilliant color, had almost gone, "pouring more glory on the autumn woods," touching the maple leaves into shining gold and crimson beauty, the rugged oaks into deep brown and richly dyed red; the vines were bending beneath their wealth of ripened fruit; the orchards crowned with rosy-cheeked apples, golden pippins and "rusty coats." Over all, the mellow light of the sun shone. It was "the Indian summer," the farmers said. The day was very still; the men were off in the fields at work; Bessie had gone with baby over to Mary's, where Gertrude was staying for a week or two. Mrs.

Merwin was alone; but surely she heard a footfall coming near—up the garden walk—pausing on the door-step. Why did she start? Why did the old hands tremble?—the face whose calm was wont to be so unbroken, quiver with expectation? — the voice, always tranquil, thrill with eagerness, as she exclaimed, "It is my boy — come home at last." Yes, it was *her* boy. Into the room came Alfred—the man of middle age; down by his mother's side he knelt—low he bowed his head—broken words he uttered — and in the mother's heart was great joy, as softly she whispered, "For this my son was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and he is found."

That evening, in the old stone house, they sang the hymn again:

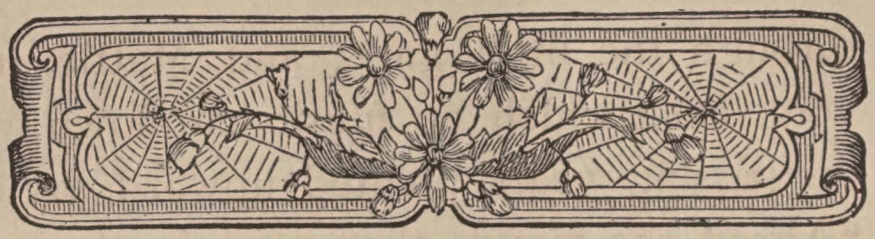
> "Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to thy cross I cling."

The mother sang, in voice grown feeble from age; Mary in notes of softened earnestness; Gertrude in sweet tenor tone;

Bertie and Bessie, they all joined in, but no voice was gladder, though none so tremulous, as Alfred's.

"They can all sing it now—all my children;" the mother said.

"Trust in the Lord, and verily ye shall be fed." This, in the quiet hours of the night, often they heard Mrs. Merwin saying to herself, adding, "My boy has come home—has come to the Father's house—has come to Christ—is building on the Rock." Then she slept; but, in her sleep she murmured, "My boy is safe—'the Lord is mindful of his own.'"



CHAPTER V.

ONE more look into the old sitting-room, and our story is ended.

They had not wreathed it with flowers, as they did for Mary's bridal; but branches of the autumn leaves they had brought, and the sunshine was about everything, as then.

There they stood together—Alfred and Mattie—with hearts as warm and full of love and gratitude as ever they could have been in the days of their early youth. And the pastor, just as tender was he as on Mary's wedding-day, while he said the words which joined those lives so long separated.

An hour later, toward the sunset-time, they too passed down the garden walk,

through the little gate; and Mattie, in a voice from which no music had flown with the passing years, pointed upward, saying, "Alfred, the clouds, they were in the east; and the rainbow-promise, it caught its brightness from the western sky — do you remember? — westward where no clouds were."

Gertrude and her mother stood together on the door-step watching them. "Castle-builders," said Gertrude—"that was what we called ourselves in the girl days; but what have *we* built? Nothing in our own strength." Then she stole her hand into her mother's, just as had been her wont when a little child, and softly whispered, "For, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it;" and 'Other *foundation* can no man lay than that is laid—which is Jesus Christ.' "

"Complete in Thee! No work of mine
May take, dear Lord, the place of thine;
Thy blood has pardon bought for me,
And I am now complete in Thee."

Complete in Thee—no more shall sin
Thy grace has conquered, reign within;
Thy voice will bid the tempter flee,
And I shall stand complete in Thee.

"Complete in Thee—each want supplied,
And no good thing to me denied:
Since thou, my portion, Lord, will be,
I ask no more—complete in Thee."