

THE SILENT MAN'S
LEGACY



Francis Bartlett





Coming Home from School.

THE
SILENT MAN'S LEGACY.

BY
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PREFACE.

THE story of THE SILENT MAN'S LEGACY is in no dependent sense a sequel to *The Professor's Girls*, but readers who have been interested in the latter book will find in this many of the same characters.

A. L. N.

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THE SILENT MAN'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROFESSOR'S HOME.

“A man's fortune may grow out at heels.”—SHAKESPEARE.

PROFESSOR PRESTON was on his way home from the daily round of academy duties. It was a warm, sunshiny, fragrant afternoon in May. The long avenue of horse-chestnut trees was wondrously beautiful, for each tree was loaded with masses of white blossoms. Usually the Professor enjoyed such sights, but this day he never noticed his surroundings until he reached the pretty park midway between the school and his home. There he turned aside to a quiet, shaded corner where by a tiny, pattering fountain was a seat seldom occupied save by the Professor himself. He seated

himself and fell into so profound a meditation that two pugnacious sparrows fought unnoticed at his feet and almost chose his dusty boot as their battle-ground. A gentle little lady approached, and only aroused him by her exclamation :

“ I suspected I would find you here. I was on my way home from a call when I saw the schoolgirls were in the streets, and knew you had started toward home, at least.”

“ Yes, dear,” returned the Professor, his grave face brightening a little as he made a place at his side for the lady. “ Can't you sit here a little while and talk over matters? There will not be much chance when Ruth and Madge are home again. I do not like to worry Ruth, she takes everybody's troubles so to heart.”

“ Has anything new happened?” asked Mrs. Preston, anxiously.

“ No, but I question how long things can go on with me at the academy as they are now going. I am seriously disappointed with the trustees, and they are getting out of patience with me.”

“ It is grossly unjust, Philip,” she ex-

claimed, with unwonted heat. "You have given your best energies to that work, and have met with no return in appreciation, and only a meagre salary that you have earned five times over."

"I am getting old and rusty, it may be." He smiled sadly.

"Nonsense! You know it is they who are old-fogyish. They want no new systems, no innovations, but want to jog along with books that were discarded by all progressive teachers years ago."

"Yes, the old building itself is so dilapidated, so poorly ventilated and lighted, that I know more persons than one have suffered in consequence. That is bad enough, but that which sits heaviest on my conscience is the actual fraud—as I consider it—in regard to the educational advantages, or rather disadvantages. People are sending their sons and their daughters to that academy in the belief that for money paid a fair equivalent is to be received if the pupils do their best. This is not true. There is a score of cheaper schools within a circle of fifty miles where the advantages are beyond comparison bet-

ter. I do my best, but I am crippled hand and foot. Miss Elder is becoming really demoralized, and the other teachers are incapable of any higher standard, morally or intellectually, than that which satisfies the trustees. I would resign in a moment if I—" There was no need of his finishing the sentence: that mean salary which the Professor drew quarterly was all that kept the wolf from the door of the old yellow house on the hill.

For once Mrs. Preston could think of no encouraging word that had not lost all force by frequent repetition—at least, anything she could say about school matters; but, bad as they were, she suddenly apprehended that it would be far worse for all concerned if the Professor were to be deposed from his position as principal. After a little silence she exclaimed,

"Well, there is only one more month of school before the summer vacation, and possibly the trustees may conclude to take your advice and make the improvements."

The Professor opened his lips to impart a bit of information calculated to dishearten

her more than anything already said; then, restraining himself, he only remarked, more cheerfully, as she fancied,

“Yes; we will not borrow trouble. If I were a younger man, I would try to secure a new position elsewhere before fall.”

“Then you would have to resign the old one at the end of this term. That would be too precarious a step,” she returned, anxiously.

“Of course I shall not do it. Half a loaf is—bread.”

“We must not get down-hearted. Mrs. Allen writes me that Madge is doing so well in all her studies that next year she will engage her to teach the younger pupils and pay her three hundred a year, increasing the salary as she gains experience. She says, too, that if we can spare Ruth she will engage her also; but I think we want one of our girls at home.”

“Let me see: they will be here now in three weeks, will they not? No man ought to feel poor with such daughters;” and at the mere thought of merry, handsome Madge and fair Ruth, with her earnest eyes, his

face brightened, and he started homeward shaking off something of his despondency.

Mrs. Preston tried to forget how warm and worn was her winter dress, how fresh and attractive were the spring suits of the ladies who met and passed them with friendly greetings; she tried to enjoy the beauty of the new verdure, the flowering fruit trees, the song, the perfume and the sunlight all about her. As they approached the old yellow house she thought, "I ought to be the happiest woman in the village. There never was a skeleton in any closet under that roof—never!"

The Preston household at this time consisted of the Professor and his wife; Grandmother Grey, serene, light-hearted and beautiful in her old age; Johnny, a big blundering chap of thirteen, over whom the Professor sighed frequently, noting the discrepancy between the capacity of his brain and his stomach; Uncle Henry Preston, the silent bachelor, of late failing in health; and Abby, the well-beloved factotum.

"Abby," said Mrs. Preston, going into the spotless domain where the spinster presided,

“you may make coffee instead of tea to-night; Mr. Preston feels a little over-tired, and coffee will refresh him more than tea would do.”

“He’s worryin’ about them ’cademy performances, he is,” returned Abby, bluntly. “Ministers and teachers always do just fret the life out of them over stupid folks’ souls and brains, whereas I’ve noticed that when a man’s business has to do with bodies he is sure to get fat and hearty. Old Dr. Hickox is jolly from dawn till dark, and the butcher around the corner is like a porker. Meddling with consciences and brains and books never would be my choice of a profession.”

“But my husband would not make a very good butcher, Abby,” laughed Mrs. Preston.

“No! Mercy, no! He’d ought to have been rich; he’d have adorned a fortune, and so would you. I guess I’ll broil him a bit of ham.”

“Yes, do. Has any one been here while I was gone?”

“Not a creeter, but all the same I have heard something that will surprise you.

What do you think Uncle Henry is going to do?"

"Let the doctor take him under his care? I am really worried about him; he eats nothing to speak of, and looks more ill every day."

"Well, he ain't going to do that, but something queerer. Now that he has stayed here steady-like for 'most four years, I never expected he would pull up his stakes again and go roaming like a Bedowing A-rab. He's going to, though. He asked me would I give him his shirts out of the wash rough-dry to night, because he was going to Colorado to-morrow."

Mrs. Preston looked every whit as surprised as Abby supposed she would look after this announcement.

"You don't suppose he is crazy, do you, Mis' Preston?"

"Of course not, Abby; he has always come and gone suddenly. Probably he thinks his health will be improved by a change."

"Oh, 'tain't just the journey, but he has talked lately. He spoke twice of his own accord last evening to me, and once the day

before, and since about March he has said at least a dozen sentences, mostly grumbling. He says the house is getting to be an old rattle-trap and wants money spent on new doorsteps, weatherstrips and shingles on the roof, and, that done, it had better be burned down and rebuilt. Yes, maybe his health is a-taking him away, but he has lost some money in a mine out there; he said so one night after reading a letter. I reckon the old bachelor hasn't got only about enough to keep him."

"Not much more, I am sure," replied Mrs. Preston, her spirits falling lower than before at this new developement. Uncle Henry paid his board—at a very low rate, to be sure, but the small amount was a considerable item in the domestic finances. Had he been quite penniless, he would have met with care and kindness in his own brother's house, but, having a little income, Mrs. Preston had been glad that he chose to stay with them. A faint hope stirred in her for a moment, and then, half ashamed, she suppressed it—a hope that at his departure he might do as he had sometimes done upon occasions of

a similar nature: leave behind him a little gift.

Abby bustled about with cheerful alacrity, grinding coffee and broiling ham, while her mistress set the table herself to expedite matters, reflecting as she did it:

“He is quite right: everything is getting old and worn out. This carpet is almost threadbare, and how the curtains are faded! But the sunset light fills the room and mother's rugs cover the worst spots in the carpet. I will not distrust the care of God; all these little possibilities of trouble may come to nothing.”

Soon the tea-bell rang, and the family gathered around the board, ready, as usual, to talk only of the pleasant topics of that day's doing or seeing. Grandma had been to a missionary meeting, and after hearing the story of the privations endured by Christians in foreign lands felt as if she had lived all her life in luxury. Uncle Henry ate his toast in perfect silence. Just before the meal ended Mrs. Preston ventured to say to him,

“Henry, Abby tells me you are going to

leave us. Are you strong enough to stand such a long journey?"

"Yes; it is necessary."

Grandma was the only one who said much after that reply, given in a slightly-impatient tone. She assumed that his liver was out of order, and dared to advise him what to do and what not to do, as if he were likely to put her ideas in practice.

"Oh, mother," exclaimed Johnny, stopping a biscuit on its way to his mouth, "there is a letter from the girls in the other room; I got it just before supper, but forgot to tell you."

"I am sorry to have you go before the girls get home, Henry. They will be here in three weeks," said the Professor.

His brother lifted his eyes with a faint show of interest, and nodded; then the chairs were pushed back, and all but Uncle Henry hastened to the parlor to hear the letter. The first pages were from Madge, the last from Ruth:

"DEAR, DEARER, DEAREST PRESTONITES:
Do you realize that if all goes well you will

see Ruth's beaming countenance and mine (mine first, if, as usual, I tumble out of the train into somebody's arms) in three weeks one day and five hours? We are coming, too, with such neat little diplomas tied with white satin ribbons, certifying that we are learned to the last degree, absolutely faultless in deportment and capable of covering ourselves and all our relatives with glory if we happen to get an opportunity. I write this beforehand, for I have a lingering fear that you will fail in proper reverence for me, because, of course, there are a few little idiosyncrasies which I may still retain. Ruth says I am too poor to risk paying double postage on long words, so I will let you find out my perfections later. Ruth is just as well as I am; her cheeks are so pink that the girls call her 'Sweet-pea Blossom.'

"Mother, you need not worry one bit over our graduation-dresses; Ruth has evolved them out of next to nothing. Of course, when I saw the other girls' lovely white cashmeres and surah satins, I began to turn green with envy and knew we could get nothing fit to wear. But Ruth quietly took

those white mulls we have worn for three years; had a French laundress do them up like new (after Ruth had altered and modernized); then she trimmed them with some nice lace Cousin Jane gave her when she was in Europe, and, as you would say, mother, they are 'altogether suitable' for our circumstances.

"By the way, there is a funny old woman who sells vegetables here, and she told Mrs. Allen that once she 'enjoyed good circumstances, but she lost them.' Don't you wish we could lose our circumstances and find a great deal better ones? I am not complaining about myself, but father ought to be appreciated. Mrs. Allen says it is too bad that a man of his intellect should not have a college professorship at least. Now I will stop, for I am distressing grandma by such unthankfulness.

"Do you think that you could bring yourself to spare me for the last two weeks in June? I had a letter from Cousin Jane Raynor yesterday, and she said that her husband was going West on business—would stop over-night at our house on his return

and be happy to have me go on to New York with him and make a little visit before they leave the city for the summer. Bert will be home, and she says their new house up town is delightful. I would not ask to go if she had not intimated that she should see I had no trouble about expenses and added that Mr. Raynor had passes over the railroad. You know I never even saw a great city, and feel so ignorant and *green*.

“Mrs. Allen sends a most cordial invitation to you and father to come here for the closing exercises of the school. I suppose father can't come, for the academy term will not be out, but we do wish mother would come. Millbridge is a beautiful old town; I want you to see it. And then Mrs. Allen would enjoy so much a visit with one who she says was always her ideal of a perfect lady—meaning *you*, Mother Preston.

“Dear me! I was only getting ready to put something interesting in my letter, and here is Ruth waiting to finish it. Tell Abby I have dreamed three times of her lately—a sweet dream of maple syrup and delicious waffles, Abby hovering over like

an attendant spirit, Johnny and I, open-mouthed, sitting in the near horizon.—Yes, yes, Ruth!—I was going to end with a moral reflection, but she will not give me another minute.”

“Dear mother,” began Ruth, in a much neater chirography than Madge had employed, “do you not think it is possible for father to have some one take his place in the academy, so that he can come with you to Millbridge when we graduate? for it is quite decided that *you* are to come. This little money-order you will find in the letter pays your fare, so you have no excuse. And don't you worry for fear we stole it or went without something you would want us to have. Lest you do, I will tell you about it. One of the girls here admires to ‘distraction,’ as she says, that lace I learned to knit when in Germany. I tried to teach her how to do it herself, but her fingers are all thumbs. She has plenty of spending-money, and offered to pay me for making her a dozen yards. I was so glad in that way to get this money for your expenses here! And Madge earned it just as much, because,

to give me the spare time, she did my room-work and mended my clothes—even my stockings. Is not the last a proof that she has 'matured' wonderfully, as Mrs. Allen lately declared? I hope you will think she can go to New York; she would enjoy it all so very much.

“And now, mother, will you think of something and give me an answer when you come to Millbridge? Do you remember hearing Madge talk a great deal about her first room-mate, Loraine Faye? She was graduated two years ago, but returned as a sort of parlor-boarder. She has no home. Mrs. Allen says that her father was a man of brilliant intellect and great wealth, but he disgraced himself politically, became insane and committed suicide. Loraine's guardians embezzled a great part of her property, and her stepmother cast her off because she could not get possession of the remainder. Loraine herself I am sure you would like. She is almost three years older than I am, but from the first she seemed to choose me to talk and walk and be with. She is very fond of Madge, but always declares that you

all at home labor under a mistake in thinking Madge older than I am. In fact, we have given up trying to convince people of the truth, and without protest I let them tell me about my 'younger' sister.

"But I was going to tell you about Loraine. One night she said she would be so happy if she could be a little while in a real home; her mother died when she was six years old. While we were talking I wished that I was able to invite her to come and spend a summer with us, but I knew that company for so long would increase the family expenses and was not to be thought of for a minute. Yesterday, Loraine told me that she always boarded at the seaside or in the mountains every summer, and she asked me if we could be persuaded this summer to let her come and board with us. She is a real lady, mother, even according to your standard, which the longer I live the higher I find. She is one of the most conscientious girls in the school, but she does not call herself a Christian. She shows respect to every one's religion and is absolutely silent about her own belief and experience. For all that,

Mrs. Allen told me that no girl in the school ever had a better influence over the others than Loraine Faye, because she so hated hypocrisy and inconsistency. She always expects people to be true to their professions, and before her they are ashamed not to be so. Now, mother, could we not let Loraine come in the way she proposes? Think it all over—though, of course, if it will increase your cares in any way or be an inconvenience, don't hesitate to say 'No,' and Loraine will understand.

"Now good-bye, every one of you, dear home-folks. It does seem as if we could not wait three weeks before seeing you all."

"Affectionately your girls,

"MADGE AND RUTH."

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOL REVISITED.

“Choose for us, God, not let our weak preferring
Cheat our poor souls of good thou hast designed ;
Choose for us, God : thy wisdom is unerring,
And we are fools and blind.”

“**H**URRY, Ruth ! Oh, *do* hurry !” exclaimed Madge Preston. “What if the train should get in and we not meet mother ?”

“I am coming. But, Madge, I have often noticed that the three-o’clock train does not come at half-past two,” laughed Ruth, coming out to the great porch to button her gloves.

All over the pillars ran pink and white roses in luxuriant bloom ; great trees shaded the lawn, where the close-cut grass was like soft green moss. Within the roomy mansion all was youthful life and happiness. Girls were singing anniversary carols ; girls

were playing nine different tunes on nine different pianos; girls were laughing, talking, studying and running up and down stairs; and in every girl's heart were thoughts of home and friends.

Lorraine Faye, coming suddenly on the sisters as they stood there together, said playfully,

"Don't quite devour her at the station, but leave a bit for me to look at, because I never half believed in that perfect mother."

"That was because you judged her from two imperfect copies," returned Madge. "Wait until you see the original."

"Does either one of you resemble her?" asked Lorraine, looking at the lovely girls, who certainly could never be copies of the same model.

Madge was all roundness and graceful curves, with a dark, clear skin and glowing cheeks. Her big, soft eyes talked for her if ever her busy little tongue grew weary, which seldom happened. There were strength and elasticity in Ruth's tall, slight figure, though she kept a fragile, almost spiritual, air, so delicate was her flower-like face, so filmy the

pale-golden hair that caught every sunbeam in its meshes.

“Oh, you shall see our mother for yourself in just one half hour,” called back Ruth, running lightly after Madge down the broad gravel-walk.

“I don’t think I ever was young in the way those two girls are,” reflected Loraine, watching them along the quiet street. “I was contented and trustful of people in those days when father let me have my fairy-tales on the desk by his papers, but the house was so grand and empty! I never ran and shouted like other children. Then he married, and *she* made me wretched enough until I learned, when father died, what it was to be all alone in the world. I was getting to lean a little on father’s friend, to think he had my real interest at heart, when he betrayed his trust so shamefully. If he had only lost the money in any honest transactions, I should not have blamed him; but he schemed so cunningly to outwit a mere girl! There are good people in the world—Mrs. Allen is good; these Prestons must be—but is it not because actual temptations never

touch them, because their lives are shut away from the real world? Father lived out among strong men, where great political, moral and intellectual questions were debated and settled one way or another. His wife delights to call herself a 'queen of society;' she used to tell me she knew the world as I knew my primer. Yet neither father nor his wife believed in sincerity or in disinterested goodness or in any gratitude beyond the 'lively sense of favors to come.' I wonder if they missed something better in life that would have made it seem worthier to them? I don't want to grow bitter or misanthropic; I would like to approach people and things in the mood Ruth Preston meets them. Ruth is a real little gospel to me. What am I going to do with my life, any way? I don't need to be a teacher, and I don't want to be one, but I can't very well come back here as a scholar. Girls like me usually think that they have a 'mission;' I seem to have no enthusiasms for humanity, art or science, but it is dreadful to get where nothing seems worth while."

"Are you tired, Loraine?" asked Mrs.

Allen, pausing on her way past the hall door.

Lorraine looked less erect and strong than usual; her clear eyes were too sad for such a day of sunshine and roses:

"No, thank you, Mrs. Allen, only a little blue to think I am getting too old to stay here much longer under your wing."

"Well, dear, I promise you not to push you suddenly out of the nest as the hard-hearted old birds push their brood. What plans have you for the summer? If you will be happy, I wish you would stay here with me a few weeks after the school closes."

"I would be very glad to do that, Mrs. Allen. I have no plans beyond a hope that I can go and board a while in the Preston family; the girls are to ask their mother if I may."

"That is good, Lorraine," said the lady. "I am thinking so much of meeting Mrs. Preston again after twenty-five years!"

In about half an hour Ruth and Madge returned triumphant, both grasping their mother's hands as if they feared she would escape them and vanish, though with flushed

cheeks and bright eyes she yielded to their incessant demands to "see this" or to "come here." She must see the pretty room where so many hours had been spent in study, rest and social intercourse; she must go over the fine old mansion; she must see the roses and lilies in the garden; she must tell them all about home. Then at tea-time it was delightful to meet Mrs. Allen in her own cozy parlor and to have pleasant conversation together around a little table where they were her guests.

The girls restrained their desire to talk, and listened while the reunited friends recalled scenes long passed. How strange it seemed, and a little mournful, to be hearing of this girl "who was so lovely" and now dead; that one "we considered so brilliant" living an obscure burdened life; another, with ten children; this one, a missionary; that one, a famous writer!

"I suppose some day we may meet Lorraine and talk in this way," whispered Madge to Ruth.

"Then I hope we will be as sweet and pretty as mother is, and I often fancy Lo-

raine may grow somewhat like Mrs. Allen," answered Ruth.

That night, before the girls slept, Mrs. Preston, who had seen and liked Loraine, gave her consent to the proposed plan, only saying,

"Be sure, girls, that you let her know just how simply we live, or she may be disappointed."

"She knows it all, mother. Once I was too proud to have the rich girls know that we were merely—merely—"

"Poor but respectable," laughed Ruth when Madge hesitated; adding in a minute, "Loraine will stay a week or two here with Mrs. Allen before she comes to us."

"That will give us a little while alone together as a family before Madge goes to New York," said Mrs. Preston, answering the unspoken question she had seen in Madge's eyes.

"Oh, *am* I going?" she cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "Now I shall see the world."

"Not all of it, I hope—only a bright innocent corner. There is much world-

knowledge that I want you never to get. But I must go to bed now if I am to hear those remarkable graduation essays read to-morrow."

The record of the morrow would seem like a leaf out of the experience of two-thirds of the young girls who read this story. They will recall a dear old school-room wearing its sunniest aspect; June flowers and rosy-cheeked girls in white; fluttering hearts and tremulous voices reading laboriously-wrought-out compositions that sounded so elegant, so wise, so much more "finished" than anything one ever sees in print.

The public exercises ended, there were the affectionate partings on the stairs and in the corridors, promises to write regularly and "never, never forget" one another. It is not foolish, but all very sincere, even if Mary, who "never expects to find such a friend hereafter as Sarah," will ten years after wonder if she "remembers just who Sarah was" when by chance she hears the latter has gone to New Zealand. If Mrs. Preston did playfully suggest to Madge that

she should write names on the backs of the one hundred and four photographs in her collection, she said,

“Mrs. Allen thinks Loraine and Ruth will be a great deal to each other in the way of help. Loraine has the stronger intellect, and Ruth the more insight and faith in the spiritualities.”

“Ruth was always good,” said Madge, with a little sigh.

“And Madge, who long, long ago was capable of being naughty, is the best Madge for her mother that that mother could ask when she tries to be good,” laughed Mrs. Preston, smoothing the brown hair which the young girl had tumbled in her vigorous trunk-packing.

“I love Millbridge, apart from the seminary,” said Madge, emptying the contents of a drawer upon the floor. “I wish we lived here. There are beautiful old streets that run through the town and out to the river; the walks and the drives around are very picturesque, and Mrs. Allen says the society is far more refined and intellectual than in other places of the same size. Fa-

ther ought to have settled in a better town than ours."

"We had no choice, dear."

"But he is not contented."

"He is not unhappy, but he is dissatisfied with matters in the school. You must be very prudent, however, about saying anything to make his position insecure. We have no income whatever beyond his salary; to cut off that would be to leave us penniless."

"But father ought to be on the lookout for a position elsewhere, that such an emergency should not surprise him."

"Don't you suppose we reflect on that?" returned her mother, smiling, though her tone was anxious.

"I will leave my pictures and knickknacks in the room here, for Mrs. Allen said I might keep this same room when I come back as 'Miss Preston, assistant teacher.'"

Mrs. Preston made a little obeisance of mock-respect, and then they fell to talking of some changes that would be made in consequence of Loraine's coming among them.

Ruth's small trunk was already packed, and about the middle of the afternoon of

the day succeeding the anniversary exercises Mrs. Preston and the girls left the seminary. They had lingered until almost all the pupils with their friends had gone in order to enjoy more time with Mrs. Allen; but when once their faces were turned homeward, Madge declared that her mother acted as if she had been away weeks instead of three days.

The Professor and Johnny were waiting on the platform when the train arrived; and if the future "assistant teacher" tried to restrain her fervent greeting within the bounds of calm decorum, she yet showed her great delight. Johnny only waited his turn to hug her like a vigorous bear, while Ruth, holding fast her father's hand, started up the hill, and Mrs. Preston made them all laugh by saying,

"Everything looks just as natural as ever."

"Abby has got you up a regular wedding-feast, bride's loaf and all," explained Johnny, seizing their handbags. "What is more, she has wrapped her stately form in a brand-new blood-red banner."

"Be quiet, Johnny!—I need not warn you

not to laugh, girls, but Abby has made herself a Turkey-red dress. It is not very becoming, but she likes it, and— Well, grandma says 'it is rather cheerful-looking on a cold day.'”

“And Fourth of July will soon be past,” persisted Johnny, striding ahead and soon proclaiming, “If there isn't grandma coming to meet us!”

What a happy, proud old lady grandma was, going back on the Professor's arm after she had bestowed the most unbounded admiration on her two granddaughters, who were not in the least danger of becoming vain in consequence of knowing that she considered them good, beautiful and learned beyond ordinary mortals! Ruth used to say Grandma Grey's spectacles grew rose-colored when she looked at a Preston.

After supper all gathered in the warm moonlight on the dining-room porch, that Abby might enjoy the girls' stories of their school-life as she finished her day's work—Abby, who had bent over their cradles and ministered to their comfort all their lives and more than half her own.

“What do you hear from Uncle Henry?” asked Ruth. “It seems queer not to see him poring over his newspaper.”

“He has not written us yet, but he will not write unless he has something that he considers worth communicating.”

“Did he not leave any message for us?” asked Ruth.

“No, and he did not really bid one of us good-bye; but, for all that, I never felt so sure that he loves us as I did feel that morning he went away,” answered her mother. “As he picked up his valise he looked back on us from the door with a peculiar expression, and I saw tears in his eyes.”

“Father, did he never talk when he was young?” exclaimed Madge.

“He was always thoughtful and reserved; but when he was a young man he went from all his friends, and was in California during the gold-excitement. He made quite a fortune, and lost it, but, over and above that, he had some trouble that we never understood. It disheartened him and set him apart from the world.”

Ruth was wondering what sort of trouble

it could have been, when Madge began to ask questions about people and things in the village; and so the evening passed, and every one was surprised when the clock struck ten. It was the signal for the Professor to turn up the lamp, take the worn Bible and read the evening chapter. Although many disquieting thoughts were in the father's heart, it was with very sincere thankfulness that he chose the psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name." The return of his two children healthy, joyous and eager to make their parents glad and their home happier for their coming made him feel that God was very good. His faith grew stronger for the days to come.

The morning after the girls' return Madge said,

"Do you not suppose, Ruth, that we can earn enough, before we have taught a very great while, to make things about the house look better? I never realized how worn out everything has grown; every room needs painting, papering and refurnishing.

Mother keeps everything exquisitely neat and cheerful, but how threadbare all will seem to Loraine! Her chamber at Mrs. Allen's is finer, with its curtains and pictures, than our parlor."

"Yes, of course, but that need not give us any trouble while we cannot help ourselves. Just as soon as we can we will do our best to beautify the place. Don't let mother see that we think the house in any way shabby."

"I will try not to. But *how* faded the carpets are! The pattern has gone entirely."

"All the better. The huge blue roses were ugly; now the dull tint is quite æsthetic."

"Have you made a vow never to grumble, Ruth?"

"No, but I will tell you why I do not feel so much inclined to worry over the contents of this old house as I otherwise might. Before that summer three years ago when I went abroad with Cousin Jane, I used to think that elegant surroundings and rich dresses would make me happier than I could be without them."

“And so they would,” put in Madge stoutly.

“I am not sure of that, for you know I was often with the Merritts—who had everything money could buy—and not one of them was contented. Mabel used to say she was tired of everything and everybody.”

“That was because her father and mother were ignorant, common sort of people and Mabel had no ‘mental resources,’ as Mrs. Allen would say.”

“Well, take Loraine Faye herself for an example. She has a better intellect than either you or I have, and the utmost refinement; she has been very rich, and has now enough to gratify almost all her wishes; but Loraine is not so happy as we are.”

“Why is she not? That does puzzle me.”

“I think one reason is that a Christian father and mother very early taught us what to believe and all along made us believe what we had been taught. We know we can trust them, and where they are the place will be pleasant if there are no carpets at all.”

“Good for you! I will not grumble one bit more; I don’t want to do it now, when I see the sun streaming in and catch that faint delicious odor of Abby’s breakfast-cakes. How that girl knows every weak spot in our appetites, Ruth!”

“‘Weak’!” laughed Ruth. “She never would apply that adjective to any appetites that we ever possessed. There goes the bell.”

CHAPTER III.

A BLOW AND A LETTER.

“All is of God that is and is to be,
And God is good. Let this suffice us still,
Resting in childlike trust upon His will
Who moves to his great ends unthwarted by the ill.”

WHITTIER.

IN the academy of which Professor Preston was principal was a girls' department, at the head of which was a certain Miss Elder. If she had been as true-hearted as she was clear-headed, she might have been an estimable character. She saw plainly the mismanagement of the trustees and despised them for their incapacity and niggardly measures, but so long as she was not defrauded of her salary she cared little for her scholars. It had irritated her exceedingly when the Preston girls were removed from her care and sent to Millbridge. The Professor, perceiving this fact, took pains to tell

her that Mrs. Allen was an old-time friend of his wife who would permit Madge to pay her way by assistance given in household affairs, that Ruth was sent by her uncle Henry, and that both girls were anxious to fit themselves for teachers.

Miss Elder saw perfectly well that it would have been a disadvantage to keep the girls longer in the academy, and for personal reasons she was glad to have them gone; but she continuously misrepresented the matter whenever she spoke of it to outsiders. Did Professor Preston consider that he was furthering the interests of the academy and recommending it to other parents by sending his own daughters to a school sixty miles distant? She dropped this question into the ears of the trustees, and with it certain remarks of the principal, which, quoted only to be misapplied, could not do otherwise than help to make those individuals disaffected toward and ready to become unjust to the Professor.

So far as a knowledge of text-books was concerned, Miss Elder was an educated person, but she was conscious of lacking all

that culture which she erroneously fancied was the result of wealth and luxury. Reared in an unlovely and unchristian home, she looked back on and hated the poverty out of which she had risen by her will and hard study. When she came to know the Prestons and found them as poor as she had ever been, it was a most unpleasant surprise that they had all the gentle ease in any society, the winning grace that made them everywhere welcome, the dignity that is sure to be respected,—everything, in short, that she admired and secretly knew that she lacked. It made them all the objects of her jealousy and dislike. Class distinctions were not sharply defined in the little town, and, although there were three or four very wealthy families, the “aristocracy” was rather one of moral worth and social good-breeding than of the merely rich. It always angered Miss Elder that Mrs. Preston and her daughters were the chosen friends of people who gave her nothing more than a civil notice when she met them by chance.

Madge in her happy, busy life had forgotten Miss Elder's existence; Ruth only

remembered her quite compassionately as one who seemed soured and discontented. Both would have been astonished to know that all the spring before their return Miss Elder had pictured them coming back as young ladies, prettier, more attractive, than ever, to receive attention which she never enjoyed. She half convinced herself of injustice done her, although by whom it might have puzzled her to tell. Jealousy is never quiescent in a nature like this. Miss Elder did not deliberately plan to injure the Preston family, but she longed to "take them down."

About the time the Professor was laboring with the trustees to induce them to right some wrong and make some needed changes, Miss Elder learned of a teacher who wanted a position like that held by Professor Preston. He was near her own age, more congenial as a friend and unmarried. In a way that could scarcely be called straightforward she possessed herself of the knowledge that he would accept a smaller salary than that now reluctantly given by the academy trustees. Before the term closed several of these

last-named gentlemen began to wonder if a man without a family would not be "more manageable," less "notional," freer to devote "his time and energies to the school," which certainly was running down.

Ruth had been home about two weeks when she went out one bright morning for a call on some of her young friends whom she had not seen since she returned from Mill-bridge. She wore a light cotton dress that cost but ten cents a yard and was made by her own skillful fingers. That it was pretty enough for a princess when she had thrust a bunch of roses in her belt she did not stop to consider, but Miss Elder, meeting her at a street-crossing, was quite certain that Ruth thought herself wonderfully dainty and fine. There was coarse cruelty in the woman's sudden impulse to take the happy light out of the girl's eyes and send her home crushed, but first she joined her, talking of the day and of some bit of town-news:

"I suppose, now that you and Madge have finished your education, you will settle down to enjoy life?"

"Oh, Miss Elder! A teacher talk of our

finishing our education ! Don't think us so silly as all that. And, as for enjoying life, we always have done it. I can't imagine how two girls ever could have been happier," replied Ruth, feeling that she would like to "hop and skip" down the quiet street as she had done a few years since.

"Will you continue to live in the village?" asked Miss Elder, searching Ruth's face with her sharp little eyes.

"Well, I don't know yet. I would like to begin at once, as Madge will, to teach for Mrs. Allen ; but if I am wanted at home, why then 'there is no place like home.'"

"Yes, and your father has reached an age when it is pleasant to give up moving from pillar to post."

"Yes. Of course there is never any question of father's going away from here," returned Ruth, with a vague idea that Miss Elder's remarks had no force.

"Oh, indeed ! It is very nice, I should say, in that case, that his circumstances are such that he need not go away."

If it had been defiant, keen-witted Madge instead of Ruth Preston who simply turned

a sweet, bewildered face toward Miss Elder, the latter would have been less merciful. She buttoned her glove with elaborate care and tried to make her voice sound sympathetic as she went on:

“Will you be good enough, Ruth, to say to your father that the suddenness of this decision of the trustees was quite—or, that is, almost—as much a matter of surprise to me as no doubt it has been to him? Still, your father has been so long dissatisfied with the way things were going at the academy that he must be relieved to be thus freed from any more responsibility. The trustees were forced to act promptly, for this Mr. Sedgewick applied for the position of principal under the impression that your father meant to resign, and at the same time he said they must decide at once, because he—Mr. Sedgewick—was about going West if he was not called here at one hundred a year less than your father has always received. He is probably not half so scholarly as your father, but young men have so much energy! New brooms, you know;” and, out of breath with the information imparted, Miss Elder

tilted her sun-umbrella to one side just enough to peep at Ruth.

The young girl's face was as colorless as the white rose that dropped out of her hand. She did not gratify Miss Elder's curiosity by an outbreak of grief, surprise or indignation; only, after a long pause, she said quietly, though her heart fluttered like a wounded bird,

"I should suppose that father would understand the whole matter, as no doubt he must; for surely the trustees would not be dishonorable enough to engage any young man to accept a position still held by an older man who had filled it honorably for years."

"Oh, no doubt your father comprehends the situation. We have known for a long time that only the interests of the school kept him from resigning. Remember me to Madge. Good-morning!"

Ruth greeted several acquaintances who passed after Miss Elder parted from her, and she tried to calm herself to think what all this meant. It did not seem possible that her father could have lost his position. He

could not have known it at breakfast-time, for he spoke of forming a new class in his department.

Ruth was in no mood for visiting, so, turning off by a side-street, she made a circuit toward home again. Coming near the house, she saw Mr. Lyon and Mr. Barker just going out of the gate. They were the two trustees least in harmony with her father. Mr. Lyon was an illiterate, pompous man with a secret contempt for any other man not in "business" and making money; Mr. Barker was a gnarled and knotty individual fully persuaded that the arts of life were in perfection when he came of age, and that improvements since were new-fangled innovations "to be frowned down." A school, like a church, ought, in his opinion, to be "run" at the least possible expense to all concerned.

Ruth hurried into the house, and, crossing the hall, came on her mother and her grandmother chatting together with placid faces.

"Who went out as you came in, Ruth?" asked her mother.

“Two of the trustees.”

Something in Ruth's tone made Mrs. Preston anxious. She rose, and Ruth followed her into the Professor's room. He sat at his table mechanically turning a paper-weight over and over.

“Has anything happened, Philip?” asked his wife.

“Yes; I have lost my place, and have nothing to live on when what is left of last year's salary is spent. A new man is already engaged. I have been meanly dealt with, but I am not exercised over hurt feelings; the appalling question is, What will we put into our mouths next winter?”

Mrs. Preston's heart felt all at once like a leaden ball, but after a little gasp as if for breath she caught hold of the curtain-cord and rolled up the shade, disclosing a stretch of the bluest summer sky:

“Next winter is not here, Philip. We have enough to live on until then; in the mean time, we know that God is ‘gracious and full of compassion’—that for his children ‘there ariseth light in the darkness.’ We must trust, and not be afraid of evil tid-

ings. There are far better positions than the one you have had, and you are qualified for the best."

"The public is not so partial as a wife in judging of a man's capacity. Younger men are far more sought after." Catching sight of the distress on Ruth's face, he continued in his usual tone, "We will not worry. I am well, and certainly not superannuated. It seems to me that we had better not tell grandmother of this just now; it will not look so dark after a while, I trust."

"You are always thoughtful of dear mother," said Mrs. Preston, gratefully. She knew how sorry the old lady would be to reflect that she was a burden on them, and that for this reason the Professor would spare her all he could.

Madge's indignation knew no bounds when Ruth found her up stairs and told her the news, but after she had freed her mind in regard to the trustees' meanness she sobered down to consider what seemed to her the family's own unexpectedly-sudden downfall into abject poverty:

"Why, Ruth, father's salary, you know,

usually holds out only through the summer, or at the most till Thanksgiving."

"That is what so dismays him. But I have no doubt that we can be a little more economical and make it last longer this year. We can both go back to the seminary and spend almost nothing of what we earn there on ourselves."

"What shall we do now about letting Lorraine come?"

"Mother has been considering, and she says that she can come just the same. The ready money she will pay for her board will be some help."

Madge had been giving her wardrobe a thorough inspection and sorrowfully noting its many deficiencies in view of the visit to New York. She had not had any idea, however, of making her sentiments known, and thereby troubling her mother or Ruth; now all such petty annoyances were swallowed up in what seemed the general disaster. Putting away a box of gloves and ribbons with no more care about their worn condition, she said thoughtfully,

"I don't believe I will go to New York.

How can I enjoy myself when I know you all have this trouble hanging over you?"

"Oh, you must remember that father will go right about getting another position, and mother never broods nor worries over family misfortunes that she cannot possibly help; if they can be gotten rid of, she goes about doing it at once. So don't think of staying just to mingle your tears with ours."

Ruth tried to laugh, but it was a doleful little attempt, and Madge went on:

"No, but I could stay and be so ridiculous that you would have to laugh when you felt inclined to weep. I have always been the selfish one in this family. I wish you were going to New York."

"Well, in that case, Madge, I will do the very next thing to going. I had an idea this morning whereby you will have a constant reminder of me. I suppose you know that you have not many fine feathers?"

"No, but then I shall tell Cousin Jane that—that I am moulting," laughed Madge, quite merrily.

"You must take my white dress—which is different from yours—and my pale-blue

gingham. How fortunate that you can wear blue! Some brunettes are dreadful in blue. And I shall not need my lace scarf—”

“Don’t, Ruth, trouble yourself to tell me in detail. I will just carry off everything you have that I can possibly use, and you can borrow something of grandmother for Sundays, and weekdays you need not show yourself at all.”

“Don’t be headstrong, Madge. I really don’t need to use those things here, where everybody knows me, and—”

“Not so much as one pocket-handkerchief of yours will I take, Ruth Preston, so now! You are self-sacrificing enough to pluck out your eyes and go without your skin if I could avail myself of them.”

“Mother will make you come to terms,” said Ruth, nodding her golden head.

After that both girls were silent a long time, meditating on academy affairs. Suddenly Madge broke out:

“I believe that detestable Miss Elder is at the bottom of this. Father never would hear my complaints about her, but she was as deceitful as deceit itself when I was in

school; I have heard her tell positive untruths. And she never liked me, and I could not endure her."

"Probably that was just the reason that father thought you did not do her justice."

"She is a snake in the grass, Ruth, and you know it."

Ruth was silenced, for she did know that when in Miss Elder's presence she was always on her guard, always distrustful of that lady's politeness or discomfited by her rudeness. Moreover, she could not with all her charity persuade herself that Miss Elder had not worn an air of ill-concealed triumph that very day.

Mrs. Preston had not told Abby of the Professor's loss of his school. The faithful creature could not be more careful of the family interests than she already was. Still, Abby heard the Professor sigh or saw him sit abstracted throughout some absurd story of Madge's, while Mrs. Preston was unusually pale and quiet, and she said to herself,

"Something more than common is up. I

had better take all the work I can off Mis' Preston and make my part of the house as cheerful as I can. Surprises in the vittals line are sort of pleasant; I'll make 'em something nice they haven't had lately. I wonder if I dare buy some of that lovely flowered chintz down town and cover grand-ma's rocking-chair? If I only dast! But Mis' Preston has just downright forbid me spending my money for one of the family. It's positively tyrannical in her. All of 'em are for ever doing for one another, and I have got to be the only pig in the whole lot."

"Whose pig is in whose lot?" asked Johnny, appearing in the kitchen door.

"Oh, it is an allegorical pig," said Abby, blushing at being caught soliloquizing so audibly.

"Where is he on exhibition?"

"Oh, go along and pick me up some chips, Johnny; my fire is going out."

"'Allegorical pig'! You must be putting him into a poem instead of a pen, and I bet the poem is for the widower Simp—"

As Abby rapidly approached Johnny

with the potato-masher, which she chanced to be washing, he retreated, but a moment after he called,

“Oh, say, Abby! Put down your ‘weep-ins of war’ and I will give you a letter.”

“Who for?”

“Say, ‘For whom?’ elegantly and correctly, Abby, and I will say tenderly, ‘For thee, from thine own Simpkins.’ Say, Abby! after all these years you will have him, will you not?”

Abby calmly began washing a frying-pan; she had not received half a dozen letters in her whole lifetime.

“Honestly, now, Abby, I have got a letter for you, and it is directed in a handwriting like Uncle Henry’s,” said Johnny, entering the kitchen and holding out the yellow envelope, which Abby took suspiciously, turned around curiously, and appeared to give up as a puzzle quite too hard for her.

“Open it, why don’t you?”

“Would you? Maybe ’tain’t for me. I don’t know no men living out of town, and long as your uncle Henry didn’t speak to me over and above once a week, nor to

anybody else as often, it ain't any wise likely he is going to correspond."

"All the same, you can't read it until you open it, Abby."

"Seems sort of a liberty," she remarked, laboriously prying the envelope apart with a dinner-knife.

Abby made out the "Dear Abby," and then scowled, squinted and worked her large mouth in a desperate physical attempt to take in the contents by some process other than the natural one:

"I never could read writing that I didn't write myself, and not that after it had stood long. Johnny, you just read this document for me."

Nothing loth—for he was naturally curious—Johnny took the letter, exclaiming immediately,

"Well, it is from Uncle Henry."

"Gran'ther Grievous! How queer! Do hurry, Johnny; you are a regular poke."

Thus entreated, Johnny read:

"DEAR ABBY: I am sick; I may die. While I am alive I need care. I send mon-

ey for your expenses, and when you are here will pay you ten dollars a week. Philip will tell you just how to get here, and will know that I want you, and no one else. I am in a small town of rough men, and no women that I want near me. I shall leave enough money to pay your way back if I die.

“HENRY PRESTON.”

There was added the name of the town, but Abby paid no attention. She was speechless with amazement at the prospect before her, and at the same time smitten with sincere grief at the thought of the queer, undemonstrative man sick and suffering among strangers. She had always cared for him with the feeling that he was virtually incapable of caring for his own comfort; she had believed that she came as near understanding him as any one could understand a man who, as she had more than once declared, “had just locked himself up and thrown away the key to keep out the neighbors.”

“Shall I show it to mother?” asked Johnny, waving the letter before Abby’s

big green eyes, that seemed fixed on vacancy.

Abby nodded, and then, dropping her towel in the dish-pan, followed close behind the boy into the wide old hall, where the family sat sewing and chatting, with the sun shining through the open door and the perfume of roses creeping in at the window.

Every one was as shocked and surprised as Abby herself had been.

“Poor Henry! I wish I had kept him here. I tried to prove to him that he was too feeble to travel, but he was determined to go,” said the Professor. “What will he do if his money gives out? In a place like that he has no friends; you see that by his sending for Abby to nurse him.”

“I am very sorry too,” said Mrs. Preston. “But you must not worry about his means; he told me plainly once that he had as much as a thousand dollars a year and laid up some of it. How else could he have done for the girls as he has? He must have felt sorely in need of home comforts, or he would not have sent to Abby to go away to Colorado.—What do you say, Abby?”

“Do they talk English there? and if I get sea-sick paddling around on Sneider’s Pond, what will I be on the ocean?”

“Why, Abby, don’t you know where Colorado is?” began Madge; but Abby hastily interposed:

“Yes, yes! I’m so excited! Of course I know it is ’way, ’way out West, among the Mormons and cowboys and wild Injins. Goodness me! But I’ll go all the same. I can start on the three-o’clock train if somebody sprinkles them clothes on the line. But how will you ever get along with the work?”

“The girls will help me, Abby. And now let us get your trunk packed.—Philip, find out exactly how Abby is to go—all the changes—and make it plain to her.”

Mrs. Preston was on her feet as she spoke, and by the time the Professor had started for the railroad-station to make the necessary inquiries and arrangements everybody was at work. Madge went to the kitchen, where, with Johnny’s help, she tried to take Abby’s place; grandma got together everything that she fancied a sick

person might use; Mrs. Preston decided what was to go, and Ruth and Abby packed in with the latter's clothing old linen, jelly-jars, mustard-plasters, flannel, herbs, condensed beef, camphor, tea, cologne, and so many other articles that on contemplating them Abby remarked,

"If that trunk smashes, they'll take me for a sample-peddler. However, there may not be one thing too many, and I only wish I had a hop-pillow besides. If that man is on his back and weak, he can't help himself this time from having proper care taken of him, and I shall do it, whether or no."

"Do you think he will die, mother?" asked Ruth.

"If this is only an acute attack of his old malady, he may not be dangerously ill. He has a good constitution, and has always lived a simple, healthful life."

"Yes, he was a blameless creature, and he will have few idle words to give an account of," said grandmother, gently.

"If I was a betting character, I'd be willing to bet a good deal that he hain't said 'Boo!' to one of them natives since he got

there," put in Abby, rising, red-faced and excited, from her efforts in the trunk.

"But, for all he is so silent, I missed him after he had gone. He is a real gentleman at heart," said Mrs. Preston.

"A Preston would have to be that, it seems to me," commented the old lady.

The Professor appeared in the door too late for the compliment, and began slowly to explain to Abby every move that she must make until she reached S—— Forks, the little town where his brother was ill. She looked decidedly stupid, standing with half-open mouth and clenched fists, but she took in every word. If Abby lacked experience, she had an abundant store of common sense, and her intuitions of character were sometimes surprising, for she seemed so transparent herself.

When Mr. Preston had finished these instructions, Abby asked a few questions, and then said,

"If I get him on his feet, I shall bring him home, no matter what he says to the contrary. But perhaps you had better advise me what to do in case of his death."

The Professor's face was very sad as he called to his wife, and together they counseled Abby to the best of their ability.

"If I could, I would go to Henry myself ; but how can I? Abby is really of far more use to him than his own brother could be, and every penny we have we need for those dependent on us. The journey there and back is very expensive, as you see by this check for Abby's expenses."

The Professor's tone was sad, and Mrs. Preston tried to speak hopefully of Henry's recovery.

In less than an hour Abby had gone, and the members of the family, coming together again, could hardly realize what had happened since dinner.

"Now, mother," said Madge, "you will agree with me this time that I had better not go to New York. What will you do without Abby unless every one of us helps about the work?"

Mrs. Preston meditated a while in silence before she said,

"No, dear ; it is decidedly better for you to go. There is no loss without some gain.

The question of Abby's wages was just now beginning to trouble me. She never would have left me because we were poor, and I could not take her work without paying her for it. To get in debt is what we must avoid. This absence of hers for a while settles that difficulty. Again, the smaller the family, the less work. Ruth is well, grandma will always insist on doing something to help, and we can get on nicely. I prefer to have you go, Madge."

For the next few days everybody had more than usual to do, and perhaps it was just as well. The Professor began a correspondence with various agencies, hoping by some means to secure a position for the coming school-year. Mrs. Preston was busy apportioning Abby's duties that no one might be overtaxed.

"Is it not strange that we hear nothing from the Raynors?" asked Ruth one afternoon. "I supposed Cousin John would be here the first of this week."

"Yes, it is queer. And I wonder why Loraine does not write and tell when we are

to expect her? though she may come now any day, without giving warning," returned Madge.

"That is equally true of Mr. Raynor," said her mother; "so leave nothing undone that should be done before you go away."

"I could start at a half hour's notice, mother, and I can think of nothing but a call on Mary Parker. I might go there this very afternoon.—Will you go with me, Ruth?"

Ruth made a remarkable grimace, which Madge understood at once as a refusal and a reason not to be openly expressed. Ruth wanted to finish an old dress undergoing renovation; it was one of her mother's that the girls were turning and remodeling, happy in the knowledge that she would be pleasantly surprised.

"Go alone, Madge; I can finish it in an hour, and you may not see Mary if you don't go to-day," whispered Ruth.

"Very well," said Madge; and a few minutes later she was on her way.

Mary Parker was a very lovely girl, as refined and gentle by nature as was Ruth,

who had been from childhood her chosen friend. She was the only child of wealthy parents. Her father had formerly been one of the academy trustees, but, finding himself unable to influence the other trustees for the higher good of that institution, he had withdrawn from the board. Had he held office, Professor Preston would never have been so dishonorably deposed.

The Parkers lived in a handsome old square house with wide halls and high porches, having a beautiful shaded lawn in front and a large fruit-and-flower garden behind. When Madge opened the tall iron gate, she saw through the trees a summer-house where Mary sat making bouquets. Crossing the lawn, Madge approached her, exclaiming,

“What roses! Oh, I never saw more beautiful ones.”

“Are they not exquisite? You must take home a great bunch. I am getting half of these for the neighbors. Pick out the colors you prefer,” said Mary, after a hearty greeting.

“Well, pink ones for myself,” laughed

Madge; "white ones for Ruth; these pale-yellow roses are grandmother's favorites because for some reason they remind her of her old home; father likes deep-red ones, and mother every kind that grows. So, you see, Mary I shall help myself bountifully."

"Madge, what made your father resign his position at the academy? You are not going to move away, are you? We were greatly surprised to hear to-day of a new principal. The trustees have been trying to get father on the school-board again."

Madge's cheeks were redder than the roses she was choosing, but she tried to control her indignation:

"Father did not resign. This upstart of a teacher applied for the place while father held it; he offered to come for a lower salary, and the trustees engaged him and then dismissed father, who for fifteen years has served them only too conscientiously."

"Why, Madge, you astonish me! My father did not understand the matter in any such way."

"Very likely not; I should think the trustees would hesitate to give the plain

facts. However, Mary, father has warned me not to talk the affair over in public, for I am much too vehement; but I will say to you that from the bottom of my heart I despise a man like this Mr. Sedgewick."

"'Mr. Sedgewick'? Who is he?"

"Why, the new principal."

Mary was at a loss what to say, and soon changed the subject after satisfying herself that the Prestons had no present plans to leave the town:

"There, Madge! put your roses on that wet moss and come into the house with me. I want you to see some new books in the library."

The girls sprang up and tripped across the close-cut grass to the house, whose cool, richly-furnished rooms Madge admired and tried not to covet when she remembered the faded carpets and the patched furniture at home. They were talking very animatedly as they crossed the wide hall, and, coming suddenly into the subdued light of the library, neither of them saw Mr. Parker standing by the window in conversation with two gentlemen. One was Mr. Lyon.

complacent and pompous, as usual; the other, a rather short, thick-set man whose singularly pleasant voice was for the girls the first intimation of his presence.

“Don’t retreat, daughter, nor you, Madge,” exclaimed Mr. Parker. “Let me introduce you to Mr. Sedgewick, the future principal of our academy—though Miss Preston may have already met her father’s successor.”

Looking blandly at Mary, whose impulse had been to put herself almost between him and Madge, Mr. Sedgewick’s quiet response was,

“No; that is a pleasure in reserve. I was meaning to ask Mr. Lyon to take me this afternoon to call on Professor Preston.”

“You mistake; this is Miss Preston,” began Mr. Parker, getting into the middle of a sentence about not meaning any discourtesy to Mr. Sedgewick when he expressed regret that the Professor had resigned; but just what he said later he did not know, for Madge Preston’s face was a study. As if aware that her eyes were blazing with anger, she turned her face toward the open window, but not before Mr. Sedgewick and Mr.

Parker also had seen on it the quick contempt and indignation. Even Mr. Lyon was for some cause disconcerted, and muttered something about there being more time for social calls after the new principal had got past the business preliminaries.

"Excuse me for interrupting you, papa," said Mary. "I wanted to show Madge the books that came last night; they are over here;" and with as much tact as her lady-mother could have shown Mary made an easy impersonal remark and escaped.

"Would that man have the impudence to interview my father after what he has done?" exclaimed Madge, hotly, when once out of hearing.

"Perhaps there has been some mistake," returned Mary. "I like his face extremely."

"There is no mistake; there can't be any. But I am glad you saved me from uttering one word; I might have expressed my mind."

"You have a speaking countenance, and that spoke," laughed Mary.

"I hope so. Well, I will get my roses and go home; we are very busy these days."

The girls went back to the summer-house, where Madge left Mary, and started for home with her arms full of flowers. Several times she stopped in the quiet street to have pleasant talks with acquaintances. Just as she parted from the last, a garrulous old lady, a gentleman came up behind, lifted his hat and joined her, saying,

“I am glad to overtake you, Miss Preston. I am rather anxious to meet your father; will I find him disengaged at this hour?”

“He was at home an hour ago,” replied Madge, icily.

With many quiet glances at the beautiful girl who carried her head so loftily, Mr. Sedgewick spoke of the natural beauties of the place, made some candidly disparaging remarks about the academy buildings and carried on a cheerful monologue. A gleam of fun passed once over Madge’s lips at the thought, “This is what Johnny would call a ’versation. It is like the interviews between Abby and Uncle Henry—very one-sided.”

“I should like to know, Miss Preston, what led your father to resign his position,

though I can easily imagine certain discouragements from what little I have seen of the condition of things here."

"I presume my father would prefer to be his own interpreter."

"That is precisely my motive in seeking him out; I am not quite satisfied with hearing of and from him at second hand. After his resignation I had no time to write him before accepting the place."

Madge could not resist the question, put with the slightest accent of sarcasm:

"What was the date of his resignation?"

There was an almost unmanly gentleness about Mr. Sedgewick's mouth on ordinary occasions, but it rapidly turned to firmness as he said,

"If you will be kind enough to answer that question for me yourself, I shall understand better why you ask it in just that way."

"Oh," thought Madge, "you need not think to impress me with your stern airs; I am to be no pupil of yours." She calmly disentangled a thorny rose from the frill of her sleeve, gave Mr. Sedgewick a glance that

suggested scornful disapproval, and then answered,

“I am not aware that my father ever went through the useless form of a resignation. After you had applied for the position that he was holding, and when the trustees had given it to you, he was notified to step down and out. He will supply you with the dates if he—is meeker than his daughter.”

There was a sudden quiver of tenderness in the girl's tone as she thought of the humiliation to which her father had been subjected, and a second after she regretted having one word with this interloper. All the same, she stopped as he exclaimed, suddenly standing still in his astonishment,

“Wait a moment, Miss Preston. There is a shameful deception here, or a wild mistake. Do you know just what you are saying?”

Madge might have been a child of ten for all the heed Mr. Sedgewick paid to her after she had answered “Yes,” indignant at the doubt expressed in his question. He walked rapidly on in grave silence, and Madge thought better of him in this mood. Possibly he was not so deserving of condemnation

as she supposed. She guided him home and left him to the tender mercies of her father, who received his unexpected guest with much more self-possession than his daughter had displayed.

The latter darted into the sitting-room and reported the episode of the afternoon.

For the next hour earnest voices were heard from the Professor's room in constant discussion.

"Father must be giving him a terrible going over," said Ruth, apprehensively. "He will have one of his headaches to-night."

"Has he gone?" asked Mrs. Preston, appearing from the dining-room to say that supper was ready.

Just then the Professor's door opened, the gentlemen came into the hall, and, to the ladies' surprise, the Professor himself was heard to urge Mr. Sedgewick with much cordiality "to stay to tea," "to come in again" and not to let this matter give him "any more annoyance." Moreover, if he could help him "by any advice or information later, when school opened," he must "call on" him "freely."

“Heaping coals of fire,” whispered Madge—
“or, rather, trying to quite burn him up, I
should think. I could not be so forgiving.”

“What does it mean, Philip?” asked Mrs.
Preston when her husband shut the door
behind Mr. Sedgewick and joined the fam-
ily.

“It means that that man is a gentleman.
To make a long story short and not to harrow
up yourselves in looking for the real wrong-
doer, be content to know that before he asked
for it Mr. Sedgewick was given to under-
stand that my place was vacant.”

“Miss Elder,” whispered Madge.

“‘Charity thinketh no evil,’” murmured
Mrs. Preston, reproving herself for secretly
echoing Madge’s suspicions.

“He began to suspect the truth when Mr.
Lyon opposed his coming to see me, and he
resolved to know everything at the outset.
He was outraged at the indignity not only
to me, but to himself. Had he not been
undeceived, he would have rested under the
imputation of a meanness utterly abhorrent
to him. He insisted on throwing up his
engagement without delay, and I spent the

hour laboring to show him the uselessness of that. Self-respect would prevent my ever taking the position in circumstances like the present. I exonerate him from all blame, and he, as I told him, may even turn the affair to his own advantage and the public good. He can put the trustees—some of them—to the blush for their duplicity, and by taking high ground at the start he may get from them concessions for the academy that I never could. I like him extremely.”

“Dear me!” laughed Ruth. “I fancied from Madge’s fierce manner that his impudence must be superhuman.”

“So I thought it was. I would like to see him again, for I was so filled with indignation that I scarcely looked at him sufficiently to know him another time,” said Madge.

“Well, sit down to your supper now, for the tea is getting cold. I waited on purpose until the Eastern train was in, thinking Mr. Raynor might come;” and, so saying, Mrs. Preston took her own seat, adding, “I am sure I rejoice that the new principal is an honorable man.”

CHAPTER IV.

VARIOUS TOPICS.

“So links more subtle and more fine
Bind every other soul to thine
In one great Brotherhood divine.”

AS Abby was borne swiftly Westward on the first long journey of her life she experienced a great variety of emotions, but homesickness was for a time predominant. Suddenly she recalled her dialogue with Johnny, and said to herself,

“No, Abby, you shall not be an allegorical pig! What if you would prefer your own home-nest?” (Mixed metaphors never troubled Abby.) “Is that any reason for refusing to fly to a poor suffering fellow-mortal who has got himself in some outlandish place? When duty calls, all that ought to concern me is to get up and start;

the Lord will guide me the rest of the way. That poor old soul over there in rusty alpaca has got a cracking headache; I know it by the way she shuts her eyes and draws her mouth."

Five minutes later the weary old woman had Abby's shawl "in the small of her back"—where Abby had decided it ought to go—had her feet in a comfortable position, had told a common enough little story of ill-health, of a dying son whom she was going to see and of a life very full of lesser troubles. At the first stopping-place for refreshments Abby got her a cup of tea; after it the headache went away, and there came instead a hope that her son might be better, after all—yes, and a rested, comforted feeling that had crept over her after Abby said,

"You go to sleep now remembering what the Bible says to them that trust in the Lord. It says he 'shall preserve thee from all evil. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.' He knows that you and I are going West, and we need not be one bit scared."

In fact, long before Abby reached her journey's end she had gained the good-will of many who had laughed at her full-moon countenance and her bright-red traveling-dress. She petted the invalids, amused the children—would have enjoyed helping the porter had that been expedient. A great many people had confided their plans, hopes and troubles to her, and she felt at least a year older than when she started. Heeding a delicately-made suggestion of Mrs. Preston, she told no one anything of her own affairs beyond the fact that she was going to nurse a friend who was ill among strangers.

It was about eight o'clock one evening when Abby arrived at the little settlement of S—— Forks and made her way to Mr. Preston. An extract from her first anxiously-awaited letter will give her impressions :

“Traveling isn't anything; starting is all there is to it. That isn't anything, either, if somebody says ‘Start’ and furnishes the money; after that you just go. I found the greatest number of people going too, and they were all so like other folks that

before I got done with 'em it seemed as if I had known 'em all my born days.

“S—— Forks isn't a place at all; it is a huddle of rough houses and a rum-hole, and a store full of everything except them luxuries that I brought in my trunk for sick people, and a lot of mines. The men all look like murderers, and the women are dried up and yellow and wear the dingiest, slouching old calico dresses! How some of 'em scold! The very men who look like cut-throats ain't, for they stand the women's scolding as meek as can be.

“But I am rambling away from your uncle Henry. I found him in a tolerable decent house—the neatest one here—and the woman who keeps boarders had done the best she could for him. I can't tell what ails him; he can't tell himself, nor the doctor, either—if he *is* a doctor. Henry has sort of lost his grip, but he'll get it again, I hope. I made his bed all over and gave him beef-tea and told him all the news and cleaned house before midnight; after that I settled down to take care of him. He is just as sociable as he can be. He said that

first night, 'I knew you would come,' and 'How are the folks?' and some days since, when he hasn't said quite so much, he has let me talk; and that does just as well, because I always did know what he would say if he'd only think it was worth while to say it.

"The woman of the house is good-principled, I guess, but she is a poor coot about housekeeping. I amuse myself off-times cooking, and the boarders have offered me a share in a mine here if I will keep on doing it. There isn't a Bible in this house except mine, nor in any house around, unless I am mightily mistaken.

"I just wanted to get off by myself last Sunday and confess to the Lord what an ungrateful wretch I was always, reveling, as you might say, in blessings all my mortal days. Three women came visiting Sunday afternoon with uncombed hair, no collars and old dragged-out clothes. I hated to go around before them in my new Turkey-red dress, but I had to; and I guess they found out I was not proud, for they got to talking about the days before they came

here and their Eastern homes, and, it being Sunday and all, I read the Bible to them a whole hour steady; and one of them cried just like a baby, and all of them want Bibles and mean to get them. I think I'll try and do a little missionary work and sort of col-porteuring around off-times when I ain't nursing your uncle or cooking for the boarders. I gave a peddler three dollars to buy me some Testaments and fetch them when he comes again. Miss Peters here says he will not come, but I know he will. The Lord is sorrier for these folks than I am, and they ain't going to ask for his own word in vain. Besides, that peddler never got mad when I ec—ec—sorchtulated with him about swearing so dreadfully. He offered me a yard of ribbon for nothing. Johnny need not say my spelling is not correct, as if he'd found out something I did not know before.

“Mis' Preston, you'd better look to them strawberries I canned. If I didn't get 'em air-tight, they'll be a-performing, and spoil.

“Your uncle Henry came here to look after some silver-mine. It has bust up or fallen through or run out—whatever expres-

sion they use for the losing of what they never had—as near as I can make out.

“But I must stop writing, for I am going to blister your uncle. I have no faith in this numskull of a doctoring-chap who comes around with his pills. He hasn’t but two sorts, and neither is good for much—one sort for chills, and one for fever. I tried both sorts myself, and wasn’t one ioter hotter or colder than common.”

Immediately after getting this letter the Professor wrote urging his brother to send for the best medical attendance of which he could possibly avail himself; he also counseled Abby to use all her influence to this end if his brother’s case seemed serious. However, after he learned that Henry had no acute attack of disease, he remembered many times when he had rallied from similar weakness, and was almost sure that with good care he would soon be well again.

These were days full of anxiety to Professor Preston. He was making every effort to learn of some school needing a teacher, but day after day passed, and the most promising prospects proved delusive. Teachers were

wanted for dancing, for drawing, for music and French—for every department which the poor man was not able to fill. He tried with failing courage not to think of the oncoming days when his last salary would be exhausted and he be forced to borrow money or run in debt or— What? He would gladly do any work for which he had the strength, but he was not very well fitted for new employment, even if he could find any opening. Mrs. Preston tried to cheer him by telling him how cleverly she and the “girls” could manage. Their earnings would help, and perhaps if she herself were to take boarders they could support the family very comfortably. He knew better. Nobody wanted to board save a few persons very undesirable as inmates. Everybody in the village preferred a *home*, no matter how humble, to a boarding-place.

Johnny had brought Abby's letter one noon, and in the afternoon of that same day Loraine Faye arrived. The girls were sitting on the front doorsteps, which were back from the street and shaded by a great maple

tree. Neither of them saw Loraine until the gate clicked, and Madge, looking up, espied the slim figure in the stylish gray dress. They sprang up with exclamations of heartiest welcome and cries of "Where did you come from? Did you walk from the station?" and "Why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

"I came from a place that I did not start from, and I did not know when I should arrive here; and the reason I could not take a carriage is evident," laughed Loraine as, opening her dainty pocketbook, she displayed two cents, and nothing more. Her cheeks were flushed with unusual excitement, and she declared that she was not tired or dusty or hungry, but must at once tell her adventures since morning.

"I started on the seven-o'clock train from Millbridge in order to reach here about ten. Mrs. Allen has a new man who is remarkably reliable and intelligent; we have all come to depend on him to do our errands, and to make no mistakes. Well, he went to the train with me, checked my trunk, bought me a paper and found me a seat on

the shaded side of the car. You know two trains meet at the station there, but of course I never dreamed of taking the Eastern train, while, it seems, John Myers, either getting confused or having an idea that I was going East, hurried me across the Western train without my knowledge—I was certainly as stupid as he—and before the conductor came around I was well on the way to New York. My ticket was all right, and I was amazed to learn that I was all wrong. He was very kind and discussed the situation as amiably as if such blunders were common. He said I would do best to go to S——, stay there until two o'clock and take the express back. I resigned myself, and felt very placid when at nine o'clock we ran into S——. I walked about in a pretty park, went to a picture-gallery, and at one o'clock was very hungry. I did not like to go alone to a hotel, and, as I had noticed a very nice restaurant by the station and had seen ladies there, I thought I would take a lunch and be ready for the train back. The restaurant was quite crowded, but I ate leisurely, and paid my bill without being aware that any one was inter-

ested in my movements. I made sure later that I was getting on the right train, and, as I secured a very nice seat, I said to myself, 'There! now I am headed in the proper direction, and all is well that ends well.' I had my ticket and my money in my Russia-leather case—you remember it, Madge—not much money, I am glad to know. I went to look for the ticket, and the case was gone. A pickpocket had cut open my pocket, as you see here, and taken its contents. I suppose I looked as I felt;" and Loraine paused for breath, while Ruth cried, "Poor child!" and Madge exclaimed,

"It was dreadful. But I wish I could have seen you. You know I always said that no girl of your age ought to have such repose of manner as you have."

"Well, I lost it; I believe I groaned out loud. I know I just stared at that gash in my new dress, while I thought of having no ticket and not a bit of money—oh yes! these two cents—and such a story to tell the conductor. There was a man in the seat behind me who had been drinking. He began to ask me questions just as another

one in front turned around. I was afraid of the first one; and when the other saw it, he asked me quietly and kindly what had happened, and I told him the whole without waiting for the conductor. He had a face that I could not help trusting, and I did not realize that he was not an old man. When he heard where I was going, he said that I must not give myself the least annoyance, or even trouble myself to tell the conductor of my tribulations; I must let him pay my fare, take his card and return the loan at my convenience. His name was Sedgewick, and he was to be principal of the academy here next year."

Seeing the girls' surprise and amusement, Loraine continued:

"Up to that time I would have refused his offer, preferring to trust myself to the conductor rather than borrow money of a stranger; but when I exclaimed that Professor Preston was the academy-principal, he told me of the change and how he had called here only last week, and that he had met Madge. After that I let him pay the conductor, and I assured him that I could be

trusted to discharge my honest debts. Now here I am, as tired as if I had escaped perils of every variety."

"And where is he?" asked Madge, laughing at the impression her own scornful countenance must have made on the "irrepressible principal," as she henceforth styled him.

"Mr. Sedgewick? Oh, he went on farther west somewhere. I am to send his money to Utica."

"Well, Loraine, if you were one of the wild girls of the seminary, I should suspect you of having these adventures on purpose; as it is, I will admit that they must have been very trying," said Ruth, gayly; while Madge added,

"Now come in and see the family and rest a little after your exciting travels."

Loraine was prepared to find the Preston household conducted on simple principles. She found the house and its belongings almost poverty-touched, but before she had been there an hour she felt the charm of true Christian refinement, the presence of a home atmosphere full of love and kindness. The gentle Professor, the dear old grand-

mother, and even awkward Johnny, each made her welcome in a pleasant, characteristic way. She was especially pleased with Grandma Grey, who talked of unseen things as if they were the most real of any to her.

The second day of Loraine's stay the Professor received a reply to an application for a position of which he had cherished many hopes; this destroyed them all in a sentence. Loraine, who had been briefly told by Ruth the facts in the case, easily divined the reason of the sigh he gave as he folded the letter and said to the old lady, half playfully,

"Mother Grey, what would make you look melancholy?"

Loraine was a little startled as grandma replied promptly, "The white devil," and the Professor looked equally curious.

"That is what old John Bunyan calls unbelief. It is a reasonable, harmless-looking devil, he says, but one that makes mischief in a body's soul. When he is around, I am melancholy; but I can keep cheerful, no matter how crookedly things go, when I feel, as Bunyan does, that 'there is nothing

like faith to help at a pinch. Faith dissolves doubts as the sun drives away the mists, and, that you may not be put out, know,' he says, 'that your *time of believing is always*. Let it rain, let it blow, let it thunder, let it lighten, a Christian must still believe.'"

"You are right," said the Professor, going back to his room and leaving Loraine alone, as it happened, with the old lady, who said,

"Bunyan knew what he was talking about, and we all of us sooner or later come to places where we must be saved by faith or sink into wretchedness. Have you not found it so, dear?"

Loraine's pale face flushed; then, as if by a great effort, she replied:

"I have not realized for myself a great deal that people whom I trust tell me is true. I believe that they believe."

"And that doesn't give you a bit of comfort when your heart aches does it, you poor child? I must tell you one more thing Bunyan says: 'A little from God is better than a great deal from men.' He knew that one man's faith could not be shared with another, for, as he goes on to say, 'the

reason why people at this day are at such a loss as to some things is because they receive what comes from men's mouths (or reject it) without searching and kneeling *before God to know of him the truth* of things; and then, dear, he adds what is so wise: 'Things that we receive at God's hand come to us as things from the minting-house—though old in themselves, yet new to us. Old truths are *always* new to us if they come to us with the smell of heaven upon them.' Don't you rest, dear child, until God himself gives you the truth; and remember that Jesus Christ is the truth ready to be revealed when you are ready to receive. I see these blessed realities so plainly nowadays, perhaps, because I am getting old and useless in the world. Having so much time to think, I love to talk to young people who have their life before them. But I will try and not weary you. Madge and Ruth are so patient with me!"

Lorraine was very undemonstrative, but, bending over the old lady, she kissed her wrinkled cheek and with misty eyes whispered,

“Pray for me, grandmother, that God will give me a truth for myself ‘with the smell of heaven on it.’ My heart is very hard sometimes, but oftener it is very lonely.”

“He says, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.’ Have you been to him?”

“I have—tried—to start,” faltered Loraine, questioning her conscience.

“Well, he will meet you surely and give you rest,” said the old lady as cheerily as if talking to a child of an absolute certainty.

After a while grandma fell asleep in her easy-chair, and Loraine glided softly up to her room, or the one that had been Ruth’s before her arrival; now the sisters slept together.

“Ruth ought to be good, and Madge, too, brought up in such a home. How different mine was!” She glanced around at the worn bureau and the old-fashioned bed, the braided mats on the stained floor, the exquisite neatness of the whole place, made pretty, in spite of poverty, by feminine devices. She remembered the elegant chambers of her old home,

her French maid, the finery and show that she never enjoyed, and thought, "How much richer was the life these little girls had than mine! If I had only had a grandmother, failing of a mother! Everything seems to have been against my learning what came to them unsought."

Lorraine's face was so full of a discontent which Ruth more than any one else understood that when Ruth herself suddenly appeared on the threshold Lorraine said,

"Oh, don't be dismayed. I am a little melancholy, as usual. Your good grandmother, whom I have been coveting, would say a 'white devil' was after me."

"Yes, I have heard of him," said Ruth, a smile flickering about her lips. She went to a little shelf of books, took down a worn volume of poems and read aloud:

"I think, if thou couldst know,
With thy dim mortal sight,
How meanings dark to thee
Are shadows hiding light,
Truth's efforts crossed and vexed,
Life's purpose all perplexed,—
If thou couldst see them right,
I think that they would seem all clear and wise and
bright.

“And yet thou canst not know,
And yet thou canst not see :
Wisdom and sight are slow
In poor humanity.
If thou couldst *trust*, poor soul !
In Him who rules the whole,
Thou wouldst find peace and rest,
Wisdom and sight are well, but trust is best.”

Ruth shut up the book and said,

“Now, don't you want to take a walk and see this old town of ours ?”

“Yes, when I tell you that you are as near like your own lovely grandmother as sixty years' difference in age will permit. Is Madge going with us ?”

Yes, Madge was going. She danced in from her own room in the wildest of spirits, and soon all were laughing at her comical speeches. Madge was an optimist. If her friends were ill, she was sure they would recover, “because, you know, they have lived so long.” She was very angry at the treatment that her father had received, but, in the true Micawber spirit, she was positive that something fine “would turn up.”

Getting their hats, the three girls went down the hill and the length of the main

street, showing Loraine the few really fine houses and the many pretty old-fashioned cottages, then the one business street, almost as quiet as any other part of the village. Half a dozen "teams" from the country were hitched to posts where the staid old horses could contemplate the calicoes, straw hats and parasols in the windows. Inside the shop the farmers' wives were chatting together, and their daughters were trying to find out the fashions as they were worn by "folks in town."

Loraine liked everything, but chiefly the straggling side-streets where grass grew, where trees almost met overhead, and now and then between the old-fashioned gardens came a field full of dandelions and buttercups.

"And you want to leave all this for a city, you deluded Madge?" she exclaimed.

"All what?"

"All this nature—blue sky, roses, buttercups and—our society."

"Oh, I want to see some new human nature, and I dare say there is sky over New York. I shall miss you," replied Madge,

lightly, adding, a minute later, "You must remember that you had years in which to get tired of a city. Loraine, what are you going to do now that school is a thing of the past for you?"

"Tell me?" asked Loraine.

"Have a career," Madge answered, promptly. "I am thinking of beginning one myself. I have plenty of ability, and possibly *you* also may have."

"Thanks! May I ask in what line yours seems to lie? It may help me in finding out my—possible—own," laughed Loraine.

"I do not wish to commit myself prematurely on that point, but I have been seriously reflecting that ability without much self-confidence makes a failure. Of course self-confidence without ability makes a fool, but with self-confidence ability such as I undoubtedly possess makes success. If I were to live my life over again, I would not be so retiring—so unassuming."

"Ruth, there was not anything intoxicating in the pudding-sauce that you made for dinner, was there?" asked Loraine.

"No, dear hearers," continued Madge.

“Lacking self-confidence, I have not achieved greatness, and I can testify that it is all nonsense about having it ‘thrust on’ one.” Then, dropping her oratorical manner, she said in her natural voice, “I really do think that it would be charming to become what is called a ‘social success.’ I would like to live in a city, to have plenty of money and be a leader of the best style in refined and—and piously-fashionable society.”

“Oh, turn your adjectives around, Madge,” laughed Loraine. “I have heard—and seen too—fashionably-pious people, but there is an incongruity that I can’t explain about your combination of words.”

“Not at all; your arrangement is incongruous. I think a person might be really good and do ever so much Christian work, and yet know every time what was the very latest style in dress, house-furnishing and etiquette. I believe I have the sort of ability that would give me success of that kind if I only had wealth to back up the ability.”

How very girlish Madge looked standing there by Mr. Parker’s pasture-lot! She

wore a neat but faded and slightly outgrown cotton gown, because her better ones were being saved for the visit to New York. She seemed to Ruth to be talking purest nonsense, but Loraine said to herself, "Yes, with your beauty and high spirit, money would easily enough open to you a career of gayety; but I am glad that you can't have it, for it would spoil you."

"Ruth, why are you staring that poor cow out of countenance?" cried Madge, giving her sister a playful shake. "What do you think?"

"I think I would like plenty of money and city life sometimes—never in the summer—but it would be dreadful to have to keep pace with the very newest style in everything."

"Besides attending to all the 'Christian work,'" added Loraine, demurely.

"Of course the extremes in—in everything must be avoided," argued Madge. "My ideal lady is symmetrical in character—not so good as to be fanatical and not so fashionable as to be swallowed up in worldliness."

“A trimmer, as you might say, borrowing from history.”

Madge hardly liked this remark of Loraine's, but before she could reply Ruth exclaimed,

“There is Mary Parker sitting at her chamber window. She sees us, and beckons. Let us go in for a little talk with her.—You will like her very much, Loraine.”

Mary met them at the door, and the girls seated themselves in the cozy chairs that made the piazza so pleasant on an afternoon like this.

Loraine was greatly drawn toward Mary, and wondered how Ruth could once have said that she—Loraine—reminded her of Mary. Both were tall and pale, but there was a buoyancy about Mary, a happy, satisfied expression on her face, while Loraine's features when in repose had over them a shade of sadness and her large eyes were wistful.

Madge, who could never keep still long at a time, left the others talking and went to pick a rose from a bush at the end of the piazza. The long window of the library

was open, and close by it sat Mr. Parker. Seeing Madge, he put down his paper and greeted her cordially. She had always been a favorite of his, her bright ways amusing him when as a little child she used to visit Mary :

“By the way, Madge, why did you glower so on that poor little pedagogue I had in here the other day? He has brains enough, if he is not a Goliath. I thought you were going to annihilate me for introducing him.”

“Oh no; it was his destruction I was longing for in murderous fashion,” said Madge, laughing. “But I found out afterward that my angry passions rose all for nothing: he was innocent of the evil deeds I laid to his charge.”

“Tell me about it. I suspected there was something crooked somewhere.”

Madge had an impulse to evade a full reply, her better judgment hinting that enough had been said—at least, by her; but she reasoned that her motive was now to show how she had misjudged a man whom her father approved, and to say something in his praise.

Mr. Parker had consented to become again an academy trustee, and could be a friend and counselor to the new principal. He was a very impulsive man, and, being singularly straightforward himself, Madge knew how he disliked anything underhanded in others. Prompted, as she tried to assure herself, by a love of fair play, she gave Mr. Parker an insight into Miss Elder's character that filled him with surprise. Madge had always heartily disliked the woman, and it was really a revengeful desire to give that lady "what she deserved" that made her tell Mr. Parker of many occurrences long past and better forgotten, of scenes in which Miss Elder had played a part not quite honorable. Madge assured herself—while her conscience reproved her—that all was true, that her father would never tell it, since he had been for so long time associated with Miss Elder; but after she had behaved so dishonorably toward him the truth might as well be known.

Mr. Parker listened with a grave face, and Madge secretly rejoiced to think that one of the trustees had had his eyes opened. On the

way home she reported a little of what she had said to Ruth, who looked sorry and said,

“Suppose Miss Elder were to lose her place?”

“She made father lose his; to lose hers would be a just retribution.”

Ruth hated to seem to preach to anybody, so she kept silence; but Madge knew by her troubled face that she was thinking that personal dislike to Miss Elder had been the deepest motive in the late talk with Mr. Parker.

“I will not say anything at home about it,” thought Madge. “Perhaps I was too hasty, but I told the truth; so I will not repent.”

Just then the town-clock in the steeple of the church at the bottom of the hill struck six, and Ruth hurried home, saying,

“It is my turn to get supper to-night, Madge; so you need not hasten. I am only afraid mother has been too prompt for me.”

Madge and Loraine saw Ruth quicken her steps, until, reaching home, she turned at

the front door after a word with Johnny, and beckoned to them to hurry.

"She has found her work all done and supper ready, I presume," said Madge. "Well, there was almost nothing to do, for she had everything prepared."

Johnny came to meet them, and said,

"We are waiting for you. Mr. Raynor has come, Madge, and wants you to go on with him early in the morning. Why, you look as astonished as if you had not been expecting him by rail, telegraph and telephone every hour for weeks."

"But he has come suddenly, for all that."

"My! don't I wish I were going to New York! I never saw a ferry-boat in my life," muttered Johnny; adding, "I say, supper is ready and waiting, and a good one it is too, if Abby did not get it. Oh my! isn't Mr. Raynor fat? He puffed like a porpoise when he got to the top of this hill, and he said if he lived here he would own a chariot and chargers."

Lorraine had seen so little of home hospitality that she found that evening very pleasant. Mr. Raynor was one of those jovial,

kindly men who never get over being boys. He made grandma blush with honest praises of her beauty, he enjoyed Mrs. Preston's cookery because it was like his mother's, and he was full of fun and anecdote.

Madge, greatly excited, laughed, chattered and exclaimed to Loraine,

"Mother was wise when she made me get everything ready for my start before he came."

It was late that evening when all ceased to talk together in the parlor, and later still before Ruth had put the last article in Madge's trunk and Mrs. Preston had given her last charge about being "very careful of your health, dear," and "enjoy everything that is good and profitable; but remember that Ruth says she found Cousin Jane's ideas were not invariably in accordance with the principles we approve. Don't follow blindly anybody's example, Madge."

"Yes, mother, but you must remember that sometimes Ruth's ideas and mine are not in accordance," laughed Madge.

"That is not the point, dear. You know what is the standard whereby to test every-

thing—not my ideas nor Ruth's nor the Raynors', but whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. Madge, my child, I will give you that eighth verse of the fourth chapter of Philippians for your motto until you return. When you are puzzled or tempted, think on these things."

Mrs. Preston, tired out with the day's unusual effort, had sunk into the cushioned rocking-chair; Ruth, locking the trunk, perched herself on its top, looking very sweet and childlike as the soft lamplight fell on her flushed cheeks and her yellow hair. For a minute Madge felt homesick, as if she were already far from this cozy parlor that the girls still thought a charming room, mellowed a good deal by time—carpet dull, curtains old-fashioned, nothing modern or æsthetic about it—but very homelike, as if for years untold saturated with summer's sunshine and winter's cheer.

"Oh, mother, I never am good away from home. I presume I shall do worse things in three weeks with the Raynors than Ruth did all those months she spent with them

while they were abroad. But Ruth cannot be vicious."

"Oh, Madge!" cried her sister, with real pain in her voice. "You have gotten so into the way of talking about me that since Loraine came I am ashamed all the time. It looks as if I had set up a claim to being better than other folks or other girls, and she knows I am *not*, and what a hypocrite—"

"Oh! oh! What a hypocrite you are, Ruth Preston! But if you want to undeceive Loraine and everybody else, I will be careful to explain that I am the good, irreproachable one and you the deeply, darkly wicked;" and, hugging Ruth until she pulled her off her insecure position, Madge exclaimed, "Everybody who sees your treacherous countenance will believe that."

"Children, you must go to bed at once, for Madge starts by half-past eight. Don't talk, but try to go right to sleep."

The next day dawned bright as the brightest June morning can dawn, and what more need one ask on earth? There was a dainty breakfast, a great vase of dew-sprinkled roses

on the table. Everybody talked cheerily, and eight o'clock came surprisingly soon.

When Madge, running up stairs, reappeared in her traveling-hat, with her little basket on her arm, Mr. Raynor surveyed her deliberately and solemnly shook his head. Her great black eyes were first brilliant with fun, then tender with leavetaking; her cheeks were like pink oleanders, and altogether she was a girl so beautiful that the sternest critic must find her pleasing.

"It is a great responsibility," muttered Mr. Raynor. "I will hand her over to Mrs. Raynor at the earliest possible moment, and after five o'clock to-night I can't be responsible for consequences.—Oh, you have worn a veil! Well, some sort of an extinguisher ought to be provided for eyes of that power and magnitude.—Time's up!—Johnny, you must come to us next.—Good-bye, all!—Happy to have met you, Miss Faye.—Grandma, my mother would have been just your age, and she was very like you, so I may kiss you."

Mr. Raynor, playfully pulling Madge from her mother, after saluting the old lady, left



Madge off for New York.

them in a small tumult of last words and stir about the baggage.

Grandmother Grey wondered what the heavy little paper could be that John Raynor had thrust into her hand, whispering, "Take it, because I cannot ever give my mother a present any more." How the old lady's tears dropped on the five big golden twenty-dollar pieces when she opened the paper and laid them out on her Bible-cover! She had only yesterday learned by chance the straitened condition of the family finances; now she could help and not feel that she was making the burden of expense heavier, as she might have felt in spite of all persuasion to the contrary. It was very thoughtful of "Cousin John," as he called himself, by reason of a far-off relationship. He knew the Prestons had little, and Mrs. Preston's mother nothing.

That was a day of pure happiness to the old lady. She surprised everybody by putting on her Sunday dress and bonnet and walking off without telling where she was going. She had been in her day a notable housekeeper, and, now aware of just what

things were most needed in the family, she went from grocery to drygoods store with the delight of one who knows how and what to buy and has a purse equal to the occasion. She had made sure of a barrel of sugar, a barrel of flour, boxes of starch, soap, and similar articles, and was proceeding from window-curtains, bedspreads and towels to a new dress for Mrs. Preston, when dinner-time came, and she concluded to go home and rest. She never got back to finish her purchases, for she was found out and made to use for herself the rest of the money.

CHAPTER V.

ABBY'S LETTER.

“S— FORKS, July 1, 18—.

“DEAR RUTH: Your uncle Henry just says to me that he don't want to talk no more to-day, and *that* is his polite way of shutting me up, because he hasn't spoke since midnight except to say he wouldn't eat no more, and it's afternoon now. He don't grow worse, and he don't grow better: He sleeps a great deal, and is patient enough to drive a body distracted who wasn't used to him as I be. I have just made him comfortable and left him in peace, so will improve the time writing to you.

“Some days I do get so lonesome that I'd even stand Johnny a-tormenting me about that miserable Simpkins. Ruth, don't you never tell him, but I have had *such* a trial with a peddler—Babbitt—here! I feel as

if I shouldn't dare try to do good to another widower-man again as long as I live—at least, till he was well married. He left off bad language, and washed before he came to meals, and agreed that gambling was a bad habit, and did errands for me, and went and spoiled it all by asking would I marry him and settle down at the Forks. When he said he'd 'laid out the job of reforming' to please me, I talked to him an hour steady like a Dutch uncle. I tried to work for his poor soul and keep under my disgust for the homely, shiftless coot himself. Settle at the Forks! Ugh! I'd like to unsettle the Forks, whisky-guzzling, card-playing, swearing and general Sodom-and-Gomorrah doings as there is here.

“The Bibles came, and we have a class every Sunday afternoon. Almost every woman and baby in the Forks attends, and it is just blessed to read the Lord Jesus' own words to the poor discouraged creatures that don't find their life worth enduring. It makes me cry to see how they try every Sunday to tidy up a bit more and to wash the babies' faces, and last week I got them to

singing 'What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!' I had about given up, and concluded that trouble had crushed all the sing out of them. Miss Peters let me give them a tea-party last week, and I believe it is going to be a means of grace. We invited them early, and got the house in apple-pie order. Miss Peters ain't as particular herself as she had ought to be, but some way she is improving lately. We had just the best supper I could get up, and I took extra pains to have exactly the sort of victuals any of them could have if they only would learn to cook it palatably; and Miss Peters and I got them all talking about housekeeping, nursing sick folks, taking care of babies and setting a table fit for decent folks to enjoy. I never heard such awful sentiments as some of them had, and I guess they was as much surprised at some of mine; they seemed to be.

"There are a few women about the settlement that I do suppose are awful wicked. These other ignorant ones despise them as if they were the offscourings of the earth, and I suppose they be just that; but the poor

wretched creatures have got souls, and every one of them had a mother when she was little and innocent. Christ died for the very wickedest of them, and eternity's ahead of them. I can't get them out of my mind. I have to pray over them nights when I lie awake for fear your uncle will need me. One day I heard one of them was sick in a forsaken old hut without anybody belonging to her to care for her regular; some of her old companions and a half-Indian woman did for her by spells. I thought maybe she'd swear at me and throw the broth on the floor and behave awfully the first time I went, but she stared and stared with her great wild eyes, until she took to crying like a baby. Since then she listens to any amount of talk. I told her about her sins every single time I saw her, until one day she says, 'You don't begin to know nothing about them. You are so green you'd make me laugh if I could laugh any more. I could tell you enough to make you stop your ears and run. What makes you try to teach me what I know better than you can?' and such a groan as she gave! You better believe, Ruth, I felt

as if I was wasting my time, and I went at it with my whole heart, telling her about a Saviour for her sins. She receives it like a little child. She knows she has consumption and must die, and nobody ever told her what we have always known. Two or three girls and women of the same sort follow me there now and act as if they wanted to hear the Bible verses that I read, and the hymns. You know I can't sing fit for decent folks to hear, but, as long as these aren't decent, I think they'll forget all about me and attend to the gospel or the hymns. Do pray for these poor lost souls, Ruth, and thank God for sending you into a white, clean home.

“I hope your mother is not getting overdone with all the care she must have. Tell your father I do my very best as a nurse, and I wish I could see a more rapid improvement in his brother. Has Madge gone to New York? and is grandmother well? I do want to see you all terribly.

“Your affectionate

“ABBY.”

CHAPTER VI.

AT COUSIN RAYNOR'S.

“If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work ;
But when they seldom come, they wished-for come.”

MR. RAYNOR was a very successful business-man, and now, while comparatively young—or, at least, in the prime of life—he found himself rich according to New York standards. He was a man of the utmost morality, liberal and a regular attendant at a church whose congregation was fashionable enough to fulfill Madge's requirements. His wife was a good-natured, commonplace mortal who easily accommodated herself to the luxury denied her in earlier life, and who placidly admired anybody who excelled in beauty, in culture, or even in piety.

The only son, Bert, had been at times in the Preston family for several years. When

a heedless, warm-hearted, headstrong boy his father put him under the Professor's care with excellent results. Again, when, at the age of eighteen, he needed more wisdom in his guidance than John Raynor possessed, he stayed with the Prestons while his parents traveled in Europe. He was just then at a critical stage in his career, though no one fully realized it save Abby, who learned of several escapades unknown to the rest of the family. All the same, the introduction of Bert into that atmosphere of high living and Christian thinking and his affection for each member of the family changed in a twelvemonth all his preconceived ideas of religion and all his habits. True, they were crude ideas born of ignorance, but soon they would have become the prejudices of unbelief; and if his habits were then more follies than vices, they promised well to become the latter in time. Now, having attained his majority, Bert was what his father was not—a professing Christian, a good deal taken up with his law-studies, his recreations and the claims of society, but a thoroughly lovable, well-meaning fellow.

Being young, handsome and his father's heir, approbation not unnaturally had made him a trifle conceited. In the past Madge and he had been by turns fiercely belligerent and the merriest of good comrades. In fact, they were in both mental and moral characteristics strikingly alike.

Madge had written immediately after her arrival in New York, and a few days later, telling in glowing terms of Cousin Jane's kindness and her enjoyment of every moment. Somewhat later Ruth received from her the following letter :

“DEAR RUTH, AND LORAINÉ TOO: This letter is going to be for you girls especially, because I promised you ‘all the particulars.’

“I don't see, Lorainé, what ever possessed you to say that New York was ‘horrid’ in the summer. These June days are lovely here, and the streets are so clean and all the shop-windows full of beautiful summer silks and muslins, and such quantities of flowers for sale on the streets! We are only a block from Central Park, where every afternoon

we ride before dinner ; and once Bert and I took a walk there before breakfast. You can fancy how beautiful the place was—the grass like velvet, the trees full of birds, the pretty lakes and shaded walks and picturesque arbors.

“I can't tell you about the Raynors' house, but oh, it is just my ideal of a house! You remember that red-haired Billings girl at school who said she was going to write a novel as soon as she graduated and have it the story of 'the daughter of a lord' because she did love high life and had read so many English novels that she knew exactly how lords' daughters felt and talked? Well, I feel something like Miss Billings. I would like to live in just as much luxury as a lord or a Wall-street broker-father could supply. Don't you read this nonsense to *my* blessed father, who wipes his pen on the tail of his bottle-green coat and doesn't realize that he bought the coat when you and I were infants in arms. He might think I did not value him. You know 'my heart is situated correct,' like the chap's Dickens tells about, but riches are *so* nice! Why, picture my sur-

roundings this moment! Rose-colored silk curtains at doors and windows under cream-white lace, polished floors, Turkish rugs, divans and cushions, the loveliest cabinets, vases, statuettes, water-colors, and me in my second-best white dress, which is not a bit too good for a morning-wrapper. I ask myself if I am the girl who ten days ago washed this same dress in Abby's kitchen and upset the washtub, and had to mop the floor in consequence; then I step into a satin-lined carriage, and we dash down Fifth Avenue, while Mrs. Raynor consults me about a five-hundred-dollar set of china that she means to buy, and I advise her to pay two hundred dollars more and take one I like better.

“What is the news from Abby? If she writes any long letters, send them to me. Sometimes I think I actually need Abby; she is the ballast to my balloon at home.

“Cousin Jane says she can't show me anything of New York life because the fashionable season is all over, but everything seems grand and gay to me. She gave a lunch-party yesterday, and from the way

she talked I supposed it was to be five or six ladies in to lunch with her quite simply. It seemed to me a very splendid affair; the lunch was quite elaborate, and just the flowers at the ladies' places cost twenty-five dollars.

“When Mr. Raynor said all the star-actors had gone from the theatres and the great singers from the opera-houses, I said it made no difference to me, because I did not expect to go to such places. Perhaps you will think I am very weak, but I have attended several theatrical performances, and operatic ones too. I could not very well do any other way: the tickets were bought before I was consulted. Mr. Raynor says he drops into such places after a hard day's business just to rest and laugh a little, and he does not see that he ever was harmed by going, and that Cousin Jane and he keep ‘pretty respectable.’

“Bert is himself, but improved; we get on capitally together. He is more dignified than he used to be, reads considerable, belongs to the Young Men's Christian Association, though Cousin Jane says he ‘is not

tediously pious,' if you know what that is ; fanatical, perhaps.

“Cousin Jane is very kind to me. She has made me some handsome presents which I feel embarrassed to take, but she knows that I love pretty things and cannot afford many of them. She says she likes to give me what costs her no sacrifice, and that it is nonsense for me to be so scrupulous. I am afraid some days that— Well, I do not think, Ruth, that there are many people in the world so particular as our parents are, and so unworldly. Cousin Jane would rather die, she says, than be poor. Well, perhaps I should feel that way if once I were to be very rich.

“Ruth, what do you suppose mother would say if the Raynors wanted (*really* wanted) me to spend the whole summer with them—not in New York, but to travel with them? I feel it in the air that they are thinking of proposing this, and Cousin Jane says she is going to write to mother to-day, I suspect on this very subject. Oh, Ruth, if she does, will you not beg father and mother to let me go? I never have seen anything,

you know, and you have been all over Europe."

Madge filled the rest of the long letter with an account of a trip to Coney Island and with details of life in the Raynor household, interesting to Ruth, but of no importance in our story. When she had finished and sent her letter, she took a new magazine and ensconced herself in a great easy-chair by the window to read. It was too warm a day for much exercise. She had been in a very happy mood when she began her letter, but something now filled her with a vague discontent. She began to think that she did not want to spend the summer with the Raynors, after all, because of the discomforts of being, in a certain way, in a false position. Only yesterday the youngest lady at the lunch-party had talked to her as if everybody wore diamonds and went to the mountains or the seaside in summer. To fall into sympathetic converse with such persons was hypocritical; to keep explaining that she had no diamonds, was having her first pleasure-trip and had been, was

and always might be "poor" was downright humiliating—to Madge.

"I have no idea," she reflected, "but that Ruth would glide out of such difficult places as easily as she would truthfully. I don't believe that girl could ever understand that she was poor unless her stomach positively ached with hunger."

Perhaps, if Mrs. Preston had realized the undue value which Madge just at this time in her girlhood was putting on what to Mrs. Preston herself were the mere externals of life, she would have kept her at home. She fancied that Madge would enjoy New York in the whole-souled, merry way that she usually took any novelty, returning with the old zest to their simple home-life; but the truth was that Madge had never learned, as had poor Loraine, how rare as well as how blessed is a perfect home. The Preston home was in Madge's estimation just like the generality of "plain" people's homes; only, being her own, she loved it best. That her father was a Christian gentleman as well as a scholar was a matter of course, as was the fact of her mother's being lovely;

wise, and a lady in the real sense of that much-abused word.

The pages of the magazine were uncut while the young girl fell into a long revery, out of which she started at last thinking, "Cousin Jane will wonder at me. I promised to change that stiff-looking bow on her new dress." She laid aside her book and started down stairs, her slippers making no sound on the soft carpet. Hearing Mrs. Raynor's voice in conversation, she supposed that a caller might be in the parlor, and so entered the library, opposite. A moment after, she knew that Mr. Raynor was at home, for Cousin Jane was saying,

"I like Madge very much, and I understand her better than I do Ruth."

"Well, then, if things ever take that turn, you'll be satisfied, I suppose. She is downright handsome, for one thing."

Madge turned to retreat without a thought of lingering as an eavesdropper, but she could not help hearing one sentence more:

"Yes, I would rather that Bert should not fancy one of these extravagant, fast New York girls."

When Madge reached her room again, her cheeks were crimson with confusion. She tried to believe that she did not understand what she had heard. The Preston girls had been too carefully reared and were by nature too delicate to be, as are many silly girls, for ever jesting about beauty, courtship and marriage. If they thought of the last at all, it was as of some far-off contingency about which there would be time enough to think when occasion required. They had lived too busy, happy and useful lives for the mawkish sentiment or the coarse nonsense and flirtation in which too many vulgar schoolgirls are early adepts. But Madge knew that she had understood exactly what John Raynor and his wife were this moment discussing—the possibility of their son's wishing some time to marry *her*, Madge Preston. She was indignant. Bert was to her a gay, outspoken companion, just as he had been since they had played together as children. What right had his parents to be talking thus of him or of her? She did not expect to marry anybody for years, and nobody had any business to be assigning her

to any young man without as much as a "By your leave." She wished she were home feeling like a little girl again.

It was well that luncheon was late that noon, for Madge was decidedly out of sorts and not at once able to talk unconstrainedly; as it was, Cousin Jane told her that she looked as if she were feeling the heat very much. After luncheon Mrs. Raynor said that it was "quite too hot for anything but a nap," and accordingly retired to her own room, saying,

"It will be cooler later, and about sunset we can go for a drive."

Madge was glad to be alone. She resolved to enjoy her visit to the utmost for the next ten days, and then to decline any invitation to prolong it. She would drop a note in the morning to her mother, telling her to withhold her consent should the Raynors consult her about keeping Madge with them for the summer.

"I can explain it to mother when I get home. She will understand how disagreeable it would be for me if the Raynors had this idea that probably never entered Bert's

head unless they put it there. If it should be there, all the worse, for I like Bert just as I like Johnny, only not half as well—no, not quarter. Yes, I think I will go home. Ruth and Loraine are enjoying themselves, I presume.”

A few hours later the Raynors' elegant open carriage stood waiting to take the family for their after-dinner drive in the Park.

“I suppose there is hardly anybody that *is* anybody left in town,” remarked Cousin Jane as her son followed her down the steps, Mr. Raynor having already seated Madge in the carriage.

“No,” replied Bert; “almost every turnout last night in the Park was the family ark of a butcher, baker or candlestick-maker, or else a hired carriage filled with people from out of town.”

“Is a person from out of town so marked?” laughed Madge. “Does everybody who looks at me know that I am from the country?”

“Oh, you have found out already that everybody looks at you, have you?” exclaimed Bert, in the old teasing way that

Madge was pleased with to-night, it was so opposed to anything sentimental.

“Well, I declare! Everybody has not gone,” said Mrs. Raynor as they turned into the Park. “There is Mrs. Moulthrop.—See the style there, Madge.”

Madge had just glanced at the great black-and-yellow-trimmed carriage, the coachman and footman with yellow-rosettes to match; last of all, the lady and the dog on the seat.

“That is one of the richest women in New York City. She was a poor school-teacher on a salary of three hundred dollars a year when she met Thirteen Million—or Billion. He liked her pretty face, and she liked the ciphers to his unit—he is the most dried-up little unit you ever saw out of the arithmetic—so she married him.”

Bert gave this information after the carriage passed, and his mother added,

“Well, she has the most magnificent mansion that she knew how to devise, and I don't believe she pines after school-teaching. I do think that is about the most wearing life a woman can have, growing old beating

A B C into dull brains and growing prim and schoolmarmy herself."

"I am going to be a teacher. I wonder if I shall get very tired of it—if people will after a while find me sharp and prim like Miss Elder? It is drudgery, and poor father has grown weary in doing it, and has always stayed poor. Oh dear! how I am getting to *hate* poverty! How lovely it is to be rolling over these charming roads and to be as rich as the Raynors themselves are!"

A sudden thought flashed into Madge's mind—a startling new connection of the ideas that had that afternoon beset her—a thought how wealth might, after all, be hers. She was very pale and quiet for the rest of the drive.

It was delightfully cool, and the prettiest turns and cross-roads were chosen in order that Madge might have new views of groves, lakes, dells and wide sweeps of lawn. She admired everything pointed out, but not in any drive before had she seen so little. The amber sunset-light that filled every avenue, the exquisite tree-shadows, the bird-song, even the little boats afloat on a surface blue

as the sky, were less real to her than were certain ideal pictures taking on sharp outlines and vivid coloring in her imagination. Little she realized that the greatest temptation of her life was creeping toward her—the ugly passion, greed of gold, disguised in its most attractive form.

It was quite dark when the party returned home, and after a not very animated stay in the parlor the various members of the family retired for the night.

“What would mother say if she knew of what I am thinking?” murmured Madge an hour later, turning from the long mirror in her chamber and recalling her mother’s motto, given her the night before she left home. She looked about for her Bible, found it and turned to Philippians, fourth chapter. The verse quoted by her mother did not fix her attention then as did some other passages that she had forgotten :

“‘Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.’ That is the way mother does pray, remembering all her mercies—as she calls them

—in the past. Well, I ought to be thankful for mine.—‘Let your requests be made known.’ Mother’s requests are for blessings on her children and the poor and the sick and the wicked, and for daily bread. If I really made known to God to-night my requests—if I dared do it—I should ask for a grand house like this, servants, horses and carriages, diamonds and unlimited money.—‘And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’ When? Why, after offering such a prayer as that first, and living in the spirit of it, no doubt.” She read along farther, to the words, “For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content,” and commented, “So has mother and grandmother—yes, and Ruth. So have not I! I wonder if that is why they are not pulled this way and that—why father does not get cross and out of patience when he reflects how upright he has always been, and that now here he is left poor and without a way to turn himself?” Her glance fell again on the page: “But my God shall supply all your *need* according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Although Madge was far from knowing by experience what was the life of a consecrated follower of her Lord and Master, yet the root of the matter was in her, and as she shut her Bible there came to her an awe-stricken consciousness that her "need" was not gold, but grace—not the coming into possession of marketable treasures, but the recognition of unvalued blessings that were hers already. She lay awake very late, sometimes resolving to go home and be "so good, helping them all, never acting as if it were not delightful to pinch and scrimp and economize," saying to herself,

"I will put my whole heart into teaching, and delight Mrs. Allen so that she will find me invaluable. Then I can help father more and more every year, and Ruth can stay with mother."

Again, as in the Park that evening, she mused with secret self-disgust:

"What if I do not care anything about Bert Raynor? I do not like any one else, and his people would make my life a perfect holiday, and I should have money to help them all at home. I—I can influence Bert

Raynor; I know all his weak points. He knows mine too, no doubt; but Abby says I could always get him into mischief if there were any chance for it. Oh dear! I wish I had stayed at home, or else I just wish I could revel in poverty and make it blossom as the rose. That is what Ruth does."

CHAPTER VII.

BAD NEWS FOR MADGE.

“Not wholly is thy heart resigned
To Heavèn's benign and just decree,
Which, linking thee with all thy kind,
Transmits their joys and griefs to thee.

* * * * *

“Self-ease is pain; thy only rest
Is labor for a worthy end.”

WHITTIER.

“JULY, 18—.

“**D**EAR MADGE: You have not written us what you have decided to do about coming home. Mother waited to hear from you after getting Cousin Jane's letter; but when you wrote, we could not make out whether or not you were desirous of accepting her invitation. If you want very much to go to the seaside with them, mother is quite willing that you should do so. I can't understand how it is that you do not seem to know your own mind, for you are usually very prompt in your decisions. Of course

Loraine and I hope that you will come home and help us enjoy ourselves.

“It seems as if Loraine belongs here, she fits in so well. She gets into father’s study and interests herself in his books. (You know she is very well read and her father had a great library.) Well, she stirs up our father to talk, and gets him as animated as possible. She goes fishing with Johnny in the woods while I am helping mother about the house—that is, when we positively forbid her dusting and trying to help—and afternoons we have charming visits and drives together. Mary Parker comes for us almost every day with her basket-phaeton, and, fortunately, we are each thin enough to get in comfortably. We had a picnic not long ago at Blodgett’s Creek, and grandmother went. She let us row her out on the water, and told us about the first picnic that she ever attended, sixty-five years ago.

“Since coming here Loraine has made up her mind that she would like to be a teacher. (You know that she has plenty of means to live an idle life or to interest herself in anything without supporting herself.) One even-

ing we were invited to a small party at the Barkers'. Miss Elder was there, and, although she treated me very coolly, she went out of her way to be agreeable to Loraine. That night, after we came home, Loraine seemed much interested in her as a character-study. She said it seemed strange that a woman so thoroughly furnished with book-knowledge, with considerable tact and having very great ambition, should not have been a better teacher. I have never told her of Miss Elder's peculiarities, but she knows that no one speaks or thinks of her as Mrs. Allen's pupils love and reverence *her*. She asked father why Miss Elder failed, and he evaded telling; but he did give her his explanation of the success of certain other teachers like Mrs. Allen—women who themselves are just what they try to teach young girls to become. Since then Loraine talks to me with mingled fun and earnestness of the institution which she will some-time found and preside over.

“Abby writes that Uncle Henry is just about the same, or, if there is a change, that it is not for the better.

“Father does not hear of any opening whatever for the future. Mother says that we had better both go back to Mrs. Allen’s if she can give us employment; even if I earn less than any other teacher there, it will be something.

“This is a dull letter, Madge, but I need you to make me lively. The fact is, I am made a little mournful by the very efforts that father and mother make to keep bright and cheerful. They carefully avoid a word about the future, which shows that both are keenly alive to the question, ‘What shall a family eat, drink and wear when there is not a penny coming in for food and raiment?’ There is such a ‘depravity,’ too, ‘about inanimate things,’ as somebody says, in a time like this! The pump breaks, the corporation sends word that we need a new sidewalk, the chimney blows over and the roof leaks, not to mention that the grate of the kitchen stove has fallen in pieces. But we are all well and the sun shines. I suppose, too, these are just the times when it is intended that we shall take the Bible promises and rest on them.”

There was another sheet of Ruth's letter, but after reading thus far Madge dropped it in her lap, while a shade of annoyance crept over her beautiful face :

“ Ruth must be spiritually-minded if she can keep placid on Bible promises with everything about the house giving out. If I could help, I would go right home ; but perhaps I help more by staying away from them. I wonder if I am just drifting, or if I am being, as grandmother says, ‘ led,’ in concluding to go with the Raynors, knowing—all I—may—”

Madge colored at her own thoughts, and, stooping, picked up the last page of Ruth's letter, written a day later. It began :

“ Oh, Madge, I am so grieved by something I have just heard that I should sit down and cry like a baby if it were not for disheartening poor mother. I know you will feel even worse, for you were sure of your engagement with Mrs. Allen. She has given up her seminary—sold it out—and leaves the country in a week or two to live abroad indefinitely. You remember her only daughter married a banker in Edin-

burgh? Well, she has become a confirmed invalid—almost bedridden—and there is no one to care for her three little children. Mrs. Allen has decided that her duty is there. Mother had a letter from her last night, and she says that she tried to get us places to teach under the new dispensation at the seminary, but it is to be a Church school in charge of the bishop, and the teachers must be members of the Episcopal Church. This rule, of course, would exclude us. In all Mrs. Allen's haste and business plans she is kind as ever, and says she will do her best to find us positions somewhere. We must do something, Madge. There is the district school at Knox Corners; mother says she thinks one of us might get that through Mr. Parker's influence. I will talk with him. If you can do better, I might manage that."

For a moment or two Madge could not fully grasp the meaning of what Ruth had written; she seemed to have come suddenly into the stifling folds of a thick curtain dropped across a way she had seen to be open and tolerably pleasant. Could it be

possible that all those bright school-days were ended? Teaching under Mrs. Allen meant living in a second home and enjoying many things unattainable in her actual home. True, she had come to look at her prospective life there as compulsory on account of the domestic economy, but she had always known that no hardship was involved. Now, when she had lost this future which she supposed was assured to her, it all at once seemed doubly bright and agreeable.

“The Knox Corners district school! Oh, horrors!” she gasped as a picture of it rose before her fancy.

Two miles from the home of the Prestons stood a bare yellow wooden building where the sun glared in summer and around which the winds howled in winter, for not a tree protected it from either the heat or the cold. Often Madge had pitied the teacher pent up there with fifty or more stupid, saucy unkempt boys and girls of every nationality. She never could submit to such surroundings—*never*—and Ruth was absurd to mention it as possible for herself; they were

fitted for far finer work than that. But into her hot disgust came the chilling reflection,

“Where can we find what we like, and how long can we wait? If we don't get a school in the fall, there is small chance of one for the rest of the year. Oh dear! why could not Mrs. Allen's daughter stay well? Why was that bothersome Sedgewick man raised up to displace father? How can people keep patient and believe that all things work together for good, as grandmother is always saying? I think everything with us is working for evil.”

Madge was sitting alone in an elegant little reception-room. By her great soft easy-chair stood a table of hothouse roses; within reach of her hand a rack of pictures—photographs of famous paintings, fine cathedrals, Swiss and Italian scenery. Against a crimson satin curtain stood a dainty statue visible again in the mirror over the carved wooden mantel. Madge herself was reflected in that wide glass, and she was not wholly unconscious that she helped to make up a pretty picture. Suppose, instead of

this "harmony" with her "environment," she were sitting at a battered desk, a dirty spelling-book in her hand, her ears tortured with shrill voices, flies bumping on the curtainless windows of the old schoolhouse? No; she could not, and would not, endure that.

"Well, this is the first cool spot I have found since morning," exclaimed Bert, with a sigh of satisfaction dropping into a great willow chair. "The street is like a bake-oven. It is high time we were out of the city."

"'We'!" echoed Madge. "I thought that you stayed here almost all summer. Do gentlemen run away from their business?"

"That depends. Sometimes the business runs away from the gentlemen—as, for instance, that of Dr. Lord, over the way."

"Why, are not people ill here in summer?"

"Oh, plenty of vulgar common folks," laughed Bert; "but Dr. Lord's patients are off for Europe or for the mountains, and he follows. I might find—and usually have

found—enough to do, but this summer I think I need a vacation; or, rather, you need me to see that you properly enjoy yours. Mother never climbs mountains or takes sails, or does anything but sit on hotel piazzas and crochet.”

“I have not yet decided to go, Bert.”

“Ah, indeed! Well, then, neither have I;” and Bert laughed as boyishly as ever.

“Oh, I can get along beautifully without you, and I fear you may be needed by your—your clients, do they call them?”

“They might be so called if they existed outside one’s imagination. But why do you hesitate about going? Homesick?”

Madge took up a photograph of Dryburgh Abbey and seemed to be studying it a while before she spoke again, saying,

“Will you go with me to-morrow to one of the educational agencies or bureaus? I want to apply for a position as a teacher somewhere next September. They have applications for supplies, you know. I have—I am not going back to Mrs. Allen’s.”

Bert was about to say, “I wish that you did not have to teach,” but, remembering the

Preston finances, he from motives of delicacy refrained. He guessed without knowing that every year had increased expenses and made living harder for the Professor:

“Is Ruth too going to be a little school-marm?”

“Not if I can help it.”

“She would make a capital one—really, an ideal one,” continued Bert. “I can fancy her taking some backwoods ruffians and taming them, when they would pitch a man out of the window. She would do it unconsciously, just as they would submit. Wild beasts never fight a sunbeam: they caress it playfully and try to get into its warmth. You— Well, you would do admirably with a lot of stylish girls, I presume.”

“Why?” asked Madge, without any pique in her tone.

“Because you are not so fine and spirited as Ruth, but you are genuine after your fashion, and they would like and admire you,” returned the young man, thinking, as he always had thought, how pretty Madge was, and how pleasant. She, for her part, paid no attention to his last words, but said,

"I don't know what rough, ugly natures would become in contact with Ruth, but I know how she would suffer among them."

"No, she would not: the sunbeam gives, but it does not lose."

"Nonsense, Bert! Don't try to be poetical; that is not in you."

"Very well; then let us talk about our summer programme. In the daytime we will hunt, fish, swim, climb and soar—more or less. In the evening— Well, in the hotels the sentimental young people look at the moon."

"I have had astronomy in my school-course—"

"Exactly, but this is an advanced course—looking for the man in the moon, you know."

"Why, you are worse when you try to be funny than when you mean to be poeti—"

"Then the other young ladies dance," continued Bert, staring at the stand of roses in a meditative way before he inquired, "Does Ruth dance?"

"Oh, we girls at school used to dance in the gymnasium, just as we tried all sorts

of exercises. You know neither of us has ever had any experience in what is really society."

"I can't imagine Ruth hot and disheveled bouncing around a dusty ballroom."

"Ninety-five pounds does not bounce," laughed Madge; "Ruth would glide. And she never gets disheveled. Are ballrooms always dusty?"

"Of course not, and Ruth would look pretty there—anywhere, no doubt. But it is easier to think of her teaching clodhoppers arithmetic. Why, I wonder?"

Madge did not speak, but both had the same thought. Each felt, "Dancing is right enough, but I don't want to see Ruth dancing in any such place."

"It is odd how I know Ruth without knowing her. She was too shy when I was first at your house, a great, noisy boy; the next time she was abroad; and so I really have seen her but three or four times since we were children, while you are almost like a sister."

"Yes. Do you know what is the best agency here?"

“‘Agency’?” he repeated, blankly.

“For a teacher, you know, to secure a position.”

“Oh no, but I will find out. I will file an application saying that Minerva herself can be engaged to teach all the sciences, arts and accomplishments. At a thousand dollars a year, is it?”

“Anything from that down to ten dollars a week, or six and boarding around.”

“That is, I will start Minerva so far on her career if she will decide to-day to spend the summer under mother’s wing and within the circle of my own benign influence, which will soften the asperities of her temper—”

“Why, I think your mother is very amiable already, considering whose mother she has to be,” retorted Madge; and before Bert could right himself Mrs. Raynor entered, asking why her husband was late.

Madge soon ran up stairs to attend to something before dinner, and Bert was left alone with his mother.

“I thought Madge had decided to go with us,” he remarked. “I should think she would

be more eager in view of the fact that she never has seen anything outside of that little country town and a girls' seminary."

"I don't understand, myself, for she is very fond of excitement. Perhaps she does not like to be under any fancied obligation to us; she is as proud as she is poor. I only wish I could do twice as much for her, but I see that I may only go so far without giving offence. She tells me less and less of their family affairs."

• "It is a pity that she must go tossing about the world earning her living. Why don't you just make her live right along with you like a daughter?"

A peculiar smile passed over his mother's face at Bert's outspoken interest in the young girl. She played with a rose a minute before she replied:

"I am sorry to see such a nice, warm-hearted, handsome girl worried and overworked and away from home, as she must be, and she hates the prospect too; I can see that. I like Madge—I like the Preston stock—but, Bert, there is only one way that she would ever consent to come here as a daugh-

ter. Don't you know that? Your father and I would be right well pleased if *you* chose to invite her."

Abby, remembering the merry, heedless boy whom she used to lecture, coax and scold, would have forgotten Bert's six feet of manhood had she heard then his old ejaculation, now doubly emphatic:

"Christopher Columbus!"

"Don't be excited. I presume she would be equally astonished at the idea if it were too suddenly presented, but it will not hurt you to consider it. Here comes your father, just in time to save the soup from spoiling."

That night Cousin Jane by much persuasion and many arts convinced Madge that she might better spend the summer with her, but she was wise enough to give not the vaguest hint of her as yet baseless plans. Young, restless and ambitious as was Madge, she was thoroughly womanly and not to be grossly tempted into any path leading to the life of luxury which she pictured as so delightful. Moreover, Mrs. Raynor loved her son far too well to dream that any young

girl would in marrying him think more of his money than of himself; yet just of this last unworthiness did Madge Preston know herself to be capable.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN VANITY FAIR.

“And if he that firmly purposeth often faileth, what shall he do that seldom or but weakly purposeth anything?”—
THOMAS À KEMPIS.

WITH a philosophy peculiar to natures like her own, Madge Preston resolved to have all the pleasure within her grasp and let the future look out for itself. She was not needed at home, and there was no selfishness in staying away. Accordingly, Madge yielded to Cousin Jane, who under one pretext or another added many dainty little articles to her limited wardrobe, acting quite as if Madge were her daughter. The young girl was pleased and grateful, but in those busy days of trunk-packing she could not help contrasting Cousin Jane, who would discourse a full hour about one dress and its trimmings, with her own mother, who in a talk of that length would have left in

Madge's memory many a thought worth treasuring. It was, however, all charmingly new when once they turned their back on the great cool city-house in which one might easily have been comfortable all summer. They spent a fortnight in steamboat-trips and stage-rides to various watering-places and nooks in the mountains; then they arrived late one Saturday evening at a mammoth hotel on the seashore where they proposed to stay for the next six or eight weeks.

Madge was so tired that she did not awake from the time her head touched her pillow until late the next morning. She hurriedly dressed, but it was nearly ten before Cousin Jane and the gentlemen were ready to have breakfast in the great dining-hall. Groups of ladies in elegant morning-toilets interested Madge only less than the lovely children here and there with their tidy nurses, but by and by she forget these in listening to the animated discussion of several gentlemen near her in regard to certain operas. Mr. Raynor knew one of the gentlemen, and he and Bert were soon drawn into the

conversation. How ignorant Madge felt in a half-amused, half-puzzled way! Operas had hitherto seemed to her things apart from every-day life, not matters to be taken so earnestly and talked of as enthusiastically as grand poems or wonderful pictures.

After breakfast Cousin Jane led Madge out on the enormously wide, long covered piazza facing the water. It was gay with bright awnings and beautified with growing palms, ferns and huge rustic boxes of flowers in full bloom. The sun sparkled on the blue, dancing waves; the space between the hotel and the white sand was an exquisite little lawn sloping down to a shell-like building of crimson and gold where were musical arrangements. Cousin Jane found a cozy seat under a perfect bower of blossoms where they could watch the constant stream of promenaders back and forth on the piazza and the sports of the pretty children or the stretch of sea mirroring the cloudless sky.

By and by Bert took Madge for a walk along the shore, and the day was half done when he said,

“Now let us go back, or we shall miss the sacred concert. They have one here every Sunday.”

“‘Sunday’! Why, Bert, I never once thought that to-day was Sunday! This has been such a queer week, every day in a new place. It does not seem at all like Sunday,” exclaimed Madge, a trace of disapproval in her tone of surprise.

“Oh, it is exactly like all Sundays here, and better than in many places—quieter, I mean. There are not many such Sundays kept as you are used to, Madge,” returned Bert, dropping on a bench, forgetful of his proposal to return to the piazza, “but, all the same, I like them best. If I— How well I remember thinking that on Sunday mornings the birds in Hempstead sang hymns and everything out of doors seemed in some way fresher and sweeter than on common days! Then your mother made me come to breakfast in my ‘best clothes,’ and we all had a thanksgiving verse to season Abby’s muffins. Then grandmother used to inveigle me into reading her something good before church—or after, probably,

just as I was taking myself off for mischief. I never reflected at the time how regularly her eyesight failed on Sundays or how much better adapted to my mind than to hers was the reading she selected. Bless her! I got from her an idea that angels were old ladies with sugar-plums in their pockets and soft ways of putting their wrinkled hands on your head and making you sorry, when your father or mine would have prescribed a thrashing. Sunday was a holy day in your home—it is now, of course—or did it only seem so to us children?"

Madge murmured,

"Yes, it is different from this, and very old-fashioned. Out in the world it seems so, I mean."

Madge was wondering, in case she could wholly approve of the Sunday that she found "new-fashioned," whether she would like it as well—was mentally contrasting the gay hotel, the stylish people, the talk of operas, fashion, travel and business, the romping children and the sacred concert, with the reality at home this very moment, her people in the old pew by the open window where the

willow swayed and the birds that Bert told of sang not out of harmony with the prayer and song within. Listening to the good old Mr. Edgewood did make one feel "sorry" for one's evil-doing, quite as Bert said of grandmother's hand. Yes, it would be pleasant, Madge thought, this very day to sit down with Ruth and Loraine in her own room and talk as girls will of their hopes and failures.

"You are a member of the church, aren't you?" asked Bert, suddenly.

"Yes; I joined after Ruth came from Europe. I made up my mind that if she lived through that dreadful fever she had there I would try to be a Christian, for she had asked me to try before she sailed."

"Same year I took myself in hand; but I have not made much of a success of it. I wonder if the difference in Christians is largely a matter of temperament or chiefly of circumstances?" mused Bert, drawing maps in the sand with his cane.

"Not so much of circumstances, I imagine, as of temperament," said Madge, watching a tiny gleaming sail. "I am not in a

Sunday frame of mind to-day, but I need not think it is because of my unusual surroundings; I have been just as worldly-minded in church at home. Ruth's circumstances have usually been the same as mine, but she—"

"Is a different type of a Christian?" suggested Bert.

"Yes, as different from me as—as the Sabbath in Hempstead is from the Sunday here," replied Madge; adding, "And I can't tell whether or not I approve of this Sunday."

"What made you say 'Sabbath' there and 'Sunday' here?"

"Because I know they are remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and the holiness of this Sunday is not so apparent."

"Perhaps the difference in some Christians is parallel—holy-day Christians holding to a plain commandment, and holiday Christians bound to have all the fun there is going."

"Our folks are not glum, Bert; they like fun, as you know."

“ Verily they do, I can testify.”

Madge heard the first strains of a full orchestra and knew the sacred concert was beginning, but Bert was in a brown study. Finally he said,

“ I don’t know what we set out to prove or to disprove ; never mind, any way. You have been so religiously brought up, Madge, that I suppose everything is clear to you. Probably you don’t have my difficulties. I do not mean doubts or skepticism of any sort. I believe the Bible because I can’t see how any one can be fool enough to reject it wholly or in part, but— Well, I am not much of a Christian, Madge, as you can see for yourself, and—this you may not understand—sometimes I say to myself if Christianity is all that some Christians say it is to them, why I know precious little about it ; but if I have all there is to have, I don’t feel satisfied, that is all.”

Bert was speaking with a half-suppressed earnestness new in him and simply unintelligible to Madge. She looked at him wonderingly, then looked away again to the sunlit sail, and was silent, secretly wishing that he

would remember the entrancing music they were losing. This child of many prayers did not realize that she, having "need of nothing" spiritual, was therefore "poor and blind," while the one by her side, vainly seeking help of her, was hearing and longing to heed, not the music of an hour, but the voice of Him who says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him."

"Your mother is waving her handkerchief to us to return," said Madge, after a while; so they went back.

The next few weeks passed like a dream. Madge had not a care, a responsibility nor an ungratified whim. Life seemed a lotus-eating existence made up of successive pleasures coming without thought or labor. There was, of course, nothing wrong in the fact that she enjoyed most heartily all this new ease and luxury. She spent hours "on the piazza" with Cousin Jane, finding time to read there a number of charming books; she had long pleasant drives around a picturesque region of country, and sweet cool

mornings or long hazy afternoons for excursions on the water. Such diversions so occupied the first few weeks that she did not make acquaintance with many persons with whom she came into social relations of any intimacy. She petted the beautiful children, and the old ladies, moved by a singular impulse, petted Madge herself. A few merry boys found her a comrade worth encouragement. Cousin Jane was pleased at the compliments bestowed on her charge, and duly reported them to Bert and to her husband, who were equally pleased at hearing them.

About the middle of August the hotel received a large accession of fashionable people who had spent the first half of the season elsewhere. To many of these the Raynors were known, to others they were soon introduced, and all at once Madge found herself one of a "select set of society girls," as Cousin Jane called them.

"I knew this would happen, little girl," said that lady, in her half-coaxing, half-matter-of-fact way, "and so I made a little extra provision for it;" and forthwith she brought out, as she saw the occasion required,

laces, sashes or gloves, paying no heed to Madge's mingled thanks and protests.

"I don't like to take them," thought Madge, "but, being here, how else can I do? I should mortify her if I kept to these poor little trumperies that mother thought would be all-sufficient. Dear mother! her idea of a summer at the seaside could not have been much like the reality."

This reality for Madge was a new turn of the kaleidoscope, bringing before her fashion, folly, envy and giddy haste for the latest excitement; but every phase of each was so delicately exhibited, so in half light or deep shadow, that nothing was startling, or even repulsive. If insensibly Madge came to listen without aversion to the witty worldliness, the playful earnestness, of other young girls who believed poverty to be the curse of curses, and called poverty the lot of all men and women who worked for anything but pleasure, who wore plain garments or who lived out of their world, why it was because her eyes were dazzled and she was ignorant of the best and over-impressed by glitter and show, as are scores of girls every day.

Little by little she was drawn into doing and saying things that her best judgment would not have sanctioned had she stopped in her gayety long enough to think. Once, in a while, when Bert looked at her with a certain mild surprise, she assured herself: "This is not just according to the family traditions. They are all correct, but Hempstead is a little country-town, and we are very quiet as a family. I shall be none the less proper and contented for a little dissipation here."

Bert was always at Madge's command for a walk, a sail or a drive, although he seemed much less fond of gaslight festivities than Madge would have imagined him to be. He said that he had left the city to be out of doors and to have leisure to himself. His mother teased him about growing old before his time when for men of his father's age he neglected the young people who danced.

Among the new-comers was a family of Ventnors, very haughty and reserved. Mrs. Ventnor was a large, strong-featured lady with white curls piled in a majestic fashion

on each side of her severe countenance. Mr. Ventnor always reminded Madge of the fabled frog trying to swell to an abnormal size, while for Miss Ventnor she felt a strong dislike. The latter was as handsome as faultless features could possibly be when expressionless with studied "repose." The mother recognized the Raynors, but never saw Madge. Miss Maude seemed just conscious enough of her insignificant presence not to walk over her if she chanced to be in the Ventnor way in hall or in parlor; at the end of a week each heartily detested the other. Miss Ventnor secretly resented the "impudence of a nobody" in being so pretty that "everybody" admired her, so merrily winning that Miss Ventnor's own favored friends liked to chat with her by the half hour—with a girl whose whole wardrobe could not have cost as much as the ruffle around Miss Ventnor's jeweled hand.

How Madge read the young lady's pique behind her calm countenance only a girl could tell, but an evil spirit took possession of Madge, and soon her own pleasure-seeking was secondary to her desire to thwart

and annoy this Miss Ventnor. So quietly and with such exquisite art did she set to work that nobody dreamed that certain little events did not fall out by chance. Time after time the person with whom Maude had decided to talk, to walk or to dance gravitated toward Madge. Unable to endure this, and sure of one weapon that she could wield, Maude allowed some one to bring about an introduction between them. Whenever after that she spoke to Madge, it was to ask her if she had done or seen or enjoyed something possible only to people of wealth, and twice Madge was made to hear a sentence or two about some one who was "rather pretty; Mrs. Raynor's companion—a governess, I believe." How angry Madge was! How full her heart of really unreasonable spite! Was she not poor? and if not exactly a governess, was she not the next thing to that—a teacher-elect, perhaps, of the "Knox Corners district school"? But she did not remember this—did not consider how her gentle mother would have shown her the absurdity of her own attempts at social rivalry and all the unloveliness of her conduct.

It was an exciting game, and a little success in it turned Madge's head; but as days ran by it became evident to Madge that Miss Ventnor's position and social triumphs were, after all, something as far apart from her own life and pursuits as the Ventnor diamonds were from Professor Preston's best ten-year-old coat. In the estimation of all these elegant women and genial men and gay young people she was just a pleasant little nobody, and Miss Ventnor was an heiress whose parents gave grand receptions in their winter city-house and cruised in their yacht or went abroad to spend the summers. What was it that made the difference? Madge said, "Money."

It was curious—and to one who loved her it would have been alarming—how constantly of late the once-careless, light-hearted Madge was letting all her thoughts brood over money, money. In her own home the lack of money was beginning to be felt, but there all were trying to cast their care on the Father in heaven, striving to be grateful, without a fear for daily bread even if the future might bring want. Not so with Madge.

Having food and raiment was “not much;” wealth could afford so much more.

After such a mood of discontent—only too common nowadays—there came to the young girl the whisper of a temptation which still made her blush for shame.

CHAPTER IX.

GRANDMA'S BIRTHDAY.

"In God's good time his gentle grace,
Like sun and dew and rain,
Will make his green wheat-ears all ripe
And full of golden grain."

GRANDMOTHER GREY awoke one morning when the east was just crimsoned with the glory of dawn, and when the birds in the trees by her window were twittering with joy over the new day. She did not fall asleep again, but for full an hour mused on a solemn little secret—or she thought it a secret: nobody had remembered that this was her eightieth birthday.

"Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life," she murmured as a picture rose before her of her childhood home as it was seventy years before—a sunny old mansion standing back from a

New England common—herself a child frolicking down a garden-walk between rows of white lilies almost as tall as herself. She could see as if it were yesterday her beautiful fair-haired mother coming smiling to meet her with hands full of birthday-gifts—those tender hands that a few months later were folded on her lifeless breast.

“Poor little one!” sighed grandmother, as if her former self had been some other child. “She walked over thorns after that oftener than among lilies, but the Good Shepherd led her and never once left her to suffer alone.” Year by year she reviewed the time, finding such precious memories crowding on her that her faded eyes kept filling with grateful tears. “How many old people are ill and neglected in their old age, and are made to feel themselves a burden!” she reflected; “and here am I petted like a spoiled child by my child and her children. O my God, how good thou art to leave me in an earthly home so bright, and then to give me the promise of a ‘house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens’!”

When, by and by, the sunshine flooded

the room and she heard the family astir, grandmother went searching for her work-dress that she might go and help a little in the morning duties, now that Abby was away. But Ruth was too quick for her. There was a tap at her door, and in came the laughing girl, saying,

“I suppose, grandmother, you would prefer to take your eighty kisses with intervals between? Oh, you sly grandmother! How still you have kept about your birthday! Did you think you could cheat us out of it after all these years?”

“Why, dear child, ‘after all these years,’ as you say, it does seem foolish to be making any fuss over a poor old woman.”

“No; don’t touch that old dress to-day. I have come to be your maid of honor,” exclaimed Ruth, producing a new soft drab-colored gingham and a snowy muslin cap, in which she insisted that the old lady should array herself. “It is only an every-day dress, and I hope you will not laugh at my cap. I would never venture to make you anything but a morning one.”

“It is pretty enough for a party, Ruth,”

cried grandma, in a little tremor of surprise and pleasure, which continued while Ruth kept up her affectionate compliments as she arranged the new dress and the dainty cap.

The girls were quite right in thinking grandma a very handsome old lady, and their merry praises of her beauty made her blush sometimes as if she were eighteen. She had lost all vanity long years ago, but their loving playfulness in this way often made her feel as if sunshine were falling on her. To the very old, as to the very young, little demonstrations mean far more than they do to the rest of the world. They mean love, and in the beginning and the end of life it is hard doing without that, however one may make shift in the days between.

“There! now you are fit to see the queen, and she might feel herself honored to meet you. Come;” and Ruth led the old lady out into the dining-room, where everybody had a greeting for her, where was a glass full of pansies at her plate and in her chair a little heap of gifts. There was nothing costly—a copy of the Psalms in very big

print wrapped in a fine handkerchief from Loraine, a box of peppermint-lozenges from Johnny and a flask of cologne from the Professor. From Madge had come gloves, and then the two girls had united to give grandmother a pretty surprise. Long put away as useless was a quaint bead bag which she had carried when a child. It was, in part, unharmed by time; so they relined it with a soft-hued silk, slightly changed its shape, and there as a handkerchief-case, whole, fresh, yet almost the same, was the ancient bag with the faint perfume that it had never seemed to lose. The hundred dollars in gold had not given her quite so keen a pleasure as the sight of those pink, purple and amber beads woven into curious flowers. It was a bit of long-ago come back to her, like the picture of the child in the garden.

After breakfast and prayers Mary Parker came to take grandmother, and "nobody else," for a morning drive. She knew by confidences yesterday given that while the old lady was being refreshed by the ride past summer fields and along the river Ruth

and Loraine were to be making some extravagant preparations to give grandmother a later surprise in the way of a little tea-party. The minister and his wife, her old friend the doctor and the Parkers were to come for a visit.

The moment grandma was out of sight the girls dusted and decked the rooms with fresh flowers, and made them sweet and cool before they besieged the kitchen. Here Loraine was not of quite so much use as was Ruth, and so, under pretext of going to the post-office, she visited the market and added to the simple preparations a generous supply of delicious fruit and some other delicacies seldom allowed by the economical housewife. Every day Loraine was sunning herself in the genial warmth of this home-love into which she had entered. The Professor began to call her his third daughter, and Mrs. Preston was winning the confidence that Loraine might have given her own mother.

Grandmother came home a little weary with her unusual exercise, and after dinner took a long refreshing nap. It was after

five when, dressing herself with a little extra daintiness to please Ruth, she walked out of her own room into the parlor and encountered jolly old Dr. Hickox and the gentle, white-haired minister, Mr. Edgecomb, with his sweet little wife, who always made Loraine think of a "flower pressed in a Bible."

"She is just so delicate, pink and white still, and, if wrinkled a bit with age, keeps a kind of perfume of youth," was Loraine's comment.

The doctor was seventy-five, and one of the old lady's firmest friends for the reason that he had known Grandmother Grey when he was a boy. They had been neighbors in the beautiful old New England town. He never spent any time in her society without going back to "old times" and making her merry and sad by turns.

The two girls were very busy until after tea, because the whole care of that devolved on them; Mrs. Preston was banished to the parlor. But after supper was over and Mrs. Edgecomb had sipped her tea out of an egg-shell china cup almost a hundred years old,

and Dr. Hickox had "tried" a sixth biscuit just because Ruth made them, and everybody was settled again for an evening chat, when Loraine said,

"I hope they will get on the old times, as you say they always do."

"Never you fear," whispered Ruth, nestling into a corner of the deep sofa, whose cover she had that morning ingeniously patched.

Dr. Hickox, who was looking over some books, suddenly turned to the old lady, asking,

"Patience, do you remember the copy of Young's *Night Thoughts* that Deacon Alford gave you for being the best reader of blank verse in the school?"

"Indeed I do! And how many hours I spent behind the counters in my father's book-store reading anything I liked, though a vigilant eye was kept on me to see that I got nothing improper!" replied the old lady, adding parenthetically, "I kept a book called *The Haunted Castle* hid, when I was not secretly using it, in hop-jars and meal-bins, until I had read it through."

“Fancy such naughtiness in her!” laughed Loraine.

“How many a time I have seen Dr. Taggart, from the Hill, poking over dusty volumes there! Don’t you know how he would put a roll of papers under his arm and waddle away to the door? Then, mounted on his fat nag, he would begin to read, and the old horse would soon stop to eat grass. If a passer-by spoke to him, the doctor would take out his pocket-knife to cut a switch, forget his intention, and ride on reading, with the knife raised in the air.”

“Oh, I could tell no end of stories of his absent-mindedness,” said grandmother. “We laughed at them, but he was so devout, learned and genial that we loved and respected him. My greatest trial was being sober-minded in the church when he preached for us.”

“Yes, in the old white steepleless church with red doors and the big sounding-board that I always expected would fall some day and completely extinguish good old Roger Newton in his full-bottomed wig and small clothes.”

“Do you remember,” added grandmother, “the square pews with seats around the side that let down with such a clatter when the people rose for prayers? We children had chairs in the middle. How, when Dr. Taggart preached, he used to twist the great tassels on the pulpit-cushion! and many a time in praying he would turn with shut eyes and outstretched hand to sweep the loud-buzzing flies off the window just behind him.”

“Mrs. David Ripley told me,” continued Dr. Hickox, “that being at her house one morning, having prayers in the large kitchen, the pot on the hook boiled over. Parson Taggart walked to it, swung forward the crane and went praying back to his place.”

“Yet a more truly reverent man never lived, and he was mighty in prayer. Such a thing was really nothing, compared with the irreverence of studied solemnity of manner and a mind wandering in prayer to the ends of the earth,” said the old lady.

“Eighty years old to-day, are you?” mused the old doctor. “Well, I was at your thirteenth-birthday party, and we played a

game called 'King and Queen.' What a beautiful old parlor that seemed in your house! I wonder if it really was so fine?"

"Yes," said grandmother, gravely. "It had orange, green and wood-colored chintz hangings with heavy fringe, great sofa with pillows like the curtains, brass andirons, silver candlesticks, coat-of-arms over the mantel-piece, semicircular tables and the glass-doored china closet filled with most beautiful little cups and pitchers, that are coming into fashion now."

"And I suppose, Patience, if we last long enough, we may come into fashion too," said the jolly old doctor.

"We are going to last for ever," replied grandmother, clasping her wrinkled hands in her gentle earnestness; "and when I think how the fashion of this world passeth away and old friends drop out of our lives and never return here below, I love to think of Bunyan's saying: 'The thought of what I am going to and of the convoy that waits for me on the other side doth lie as a glowing coal at my heart. I am going to see that Head that was crowned with thorns

I have lived by faith, but I go where I shall live by sight. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of; and wherever I have seen the print of his shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my foot too. His name has been to me as a civet-box—yea, sweeter than all perfume. He has held me; yea, my steps have been strengthened in the way.’”

“Does your life seem long to you as you look back over it, Mrs. Grey?” asked the minister, after a little hush.

Grandma laughed softly as she answered:

“I have a sampler that I worked seventy years ago, and it seems like last week the day I finished it and my father gave me a string of gold beads. Then, again, remembering the scores of friends who have fallen by the way, I feel sometimes like a pilgrim on an endless march. But how foolishly I am taking all your time in talking about myself! They spoil me here, and no wonder that I get childish.”

The doctor made some absurd speech about regretting when it was too late that he had told his own age, and the minister and his wife contributed some reminiscences

of theirs to the general entertainment; the Parkers were cultivated people who always had something to say worth hearing, and so the little birthday-party went off cheerily. Nobody thought it out of place when at the last grandmother asked them all to stay for prayers. They joined in singing,

“My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary.”

The doctor's heavy base and Mrs. Edgecomb's slightly-cracked and grandmother's quavering tones may not have made perfect harmony with the girls' fresh voices, but Loraine thought it very sweet. If the reading of the psalm and the earnest prayer that followed made it an “old-fashioned” sort of a social visit, nobody (in Madge's absence) found out that fact, but everybody in the old yellow house went to bed tired and happy, while the Parkers, returning to their grander home, declared that the Prestons knew how to entertain their friends most sensibly.

Loraine sat silent in much thought after the tea-party, until at last Ruth playfully accused her of “naughtiness.”

“Mother used to say that Madge never sat meditating unless she was planning mischief, while in my case it was usually remorse for evil committed.”

“Conscience has nothing to do with my reflections this time,” laughed Loraine. “I was thinking what an inquisitive man Mr. Parker must be.”

“Why, I never thought that of him.”

“Well, perhaps he has always known about you. The other evening he asked me every imaginable question about my studies at Mrs. Allen’s—which of them I preferred, which I excelled in, what were my theories of teaching, provided I had any, and—Well, I can’t begin to remember the catechism that I was put through—politely, of course, and no question was too personal. But it puzzles me to know why he should be so interested in my education.”

“Oh, he is interested in all such matters. Mary is a graduate of Wellesley, and he likes to compare the methods and systems of various seminaries and colleges. I hear he says, now that he is re-elected a trustee of the academy, that there shall be some radical reforms.

Mary says that after Madge told him what she did tell that day on the piazza he made thorough investigations, and convinced himself that Miss Elder needed to raise the standard both of scholarship and of honor in the girls' department. I am afraid that father would not have approved of Madge's revelations—or, rather, that he would fear she felt revengeful toward Miss Elder; but all Madge said was true, and Mr. Parker is too discreet to mention her name, so perhaps good for the school may come out of all the changes."

"Does not your father mean to teach anywhere the coming year?" asked Loraine, who had begun to feel the undercurrent of apprehensive thought in the family-life. She longed to be of some help, but could think of no way that was at all practical.

"Father has not made any engagement yet," was all Ruth's answer, her face growing grave with the thought that in three weeks all the schools would open, and probably it was even then far too late to think that the Professor could get a position.

Lorraine, somewhat to Ruth's relief, said

nothing more; but when the latter left the room, she fell to planning something whereby the girls could help themselves. She wondered if they three might not in some near town start together a school for children. She herself had means to hire proper rooms, and to carry on such an enterprise until it could get a good footing. The longer she thought of this scheme, the more feasible it seemed; for if one girl was needed at home, the other surely was not, and with either of them Loraine was sure that she could succeed. Ruth would win the hearts of the children by her sweetness; Madge would carry everything before her with her usual impetuosity.

"I will go and talk it over with Mary Parker. She has excellent judgment, and could look at the chances of success or failure more impartially than either Ruth or I," said Loraine to herself. She put on her hat and gloves, told Mrs. Preston that she was going for a little stroll, and hurried away before Ruth missed her.

Mary Parker was at home, and took her guest to her own pretty room. Loraine,

seated in a dainty willow chair, chatted about indifferent things a little while, but soon unfolded to Mary her new ideas. She made only the most delicate allusion to the Prestons' circumstances, knowing that Mary must understand all without words, having always known the family.

Before Loraine had quite finished Mary exclaimed,

"It is very queer that you should have been thinking of something that in another shape has exercised father for the last week. This very day I was to ask you to come here and give him an interview."

Loraine looked surprised, not being able to guess what part Mr. Parker could take in her scheme.

"I will give you an idea of what he is thinking," said Mary, "and then we will go down and talk to him in the library. Soon after father was put in office again as a trustee he called on Miss Elder, after consulting with the other trustees, and told her plainly of some of the abuses that had crept into her department, and which must be corrected. She was very deferential, seem-

ing so pained and shocked by some of father's statements that, though he knew they were well founded, he was gentler with her than he meant to be ; and he came home sure that she would do better. Well, Mr. Sedgewick, who has been here several times and has now come to stay—he had a few talks with her about school-matters. It is evident to him and to father that she did not like him at all. She fancied he would feel that he owed his place to her diplomacy and be very grateful to her ; on the contrary, he assured her that he never should have accepted the position had he understood the state of affairs with Professor Preston. To him also she was very bland, but early in July she began to look for another position, which she secured almost immediately : it is an engagement to teach in a Western school at a much larger salary than she has here. Father does not blame her for trying to better herself, but it has been a little spiteful in her to keep this a profound secret until four days ago, so making the trustees lose a month or six weeks in which they could have secured a lady for her place. Well, the moment

father told me I said, 'Oh, can't you get in one of the Professor's girls? Both Madge and Ruth are well educated, perfectly competent to teach all that Miss Elder taught, and everybody knows that they are ladies refined and high principled—'

"Indeed they are!" cried Loraine. "And after what Miss Elder did to the Professor it would seem simple justice. What did your father say?"

"Well, you know," replied Mary, wisely nodding her pretty head, "men never see such things in a flash as women do: they see 'considerations,' as they call them. In the first place, he said that, while we appreciated the girls, the other trustees would see in them 'raw material' only. Ruth, whom he thought to be the older, was shy in her manner: would she have force enough to control high-spirited pupils? Madge had sufficient energy, but she is so erratic sometimes. He feared that the trustees would find their lack of experience a great objection, though I told him that Madge had taught a little in one department of Mrs. Allen's school, and was to have been regularly engaged."

Lorraine grew sober as Mary proceeded; and when she ceased, as if she had said all there was to be said, she was too much disappointed to remember that Mr. Parker must have something further to propose if she had rightly understood Mary.

As Lorraine asked no question, Mary, looking a little embarrassed, continued:

“Father said that if you, Miss Faye, were a candidate, there would not be the least trouble. You are older, and you have more of what we schoolgirls used laughingly to call ‘presence.’ You have been a postgraduate and have taught somewhat, have you not?”

“Yes, but I do not need to teach, and to take a place here when the girls are so perplexed—”

“I understand exactly,” said Mary, hurriedly. “But what did occur at last to father as feasible—if only you agreed—and perhaps it would seem absurd to you—”

“Go on, do!” laughed Lorraine.

“No doubt that you could get in other places a larger salary than Miss Elder received here; but if Madge or Ruth could be

accepted, father says he would have to struggle hard to keep the trustees from reducing the salary. Now, Miss Elder was really a little overworked—or, rather, she would have been if she had been faithful to all her scholars. Father says if you could be persuaded to take the lady-principal's position he might get either Ruth or Madge in with you as an under-teacher; Mr. Sedgewick is very solicitous to have two teachers in Miss Elder's place. Your salary would not be large, and the other lady's would be less, but after a year, perhaps, you might want to resign; then the other Preston sister might come in, and the first be promoted. Now, of course nothing but friendship would influence you if you should be induced to undertake this."

"Two things would induce me—yes, would be a downright temptation, Mary," exclaimed Loraine, her face kindling with a brightness that made it positively beautiful. "I should have an aim in life, something that I ought to do well and something well worth doing—to raise, as you say, the standard of scholarship and of character here among the Hemp-

stead young girls, and to be of real use to Madge and Ruth. The salary is nothing to me. I am not rich at all, if it is a question of actual wealth, but I have enough to live on in idleness all my life; which, please God, I never will do. Now, if your father could get two of us into that place, let him be the one to pay the salaries, and let us together manage that to suit ourselves. Two-thirds of mine can be judiciously applied to my assistant, and nobody but your father and I be the wiser. On that one condition I will gladly take the place if I can get it. I shall be doing nothing generous, either, Mary; for in this way I can stay on in a home. You don't know what a forlorn feeling has come over me at the thought of leaving the Prestons. Grandmother has been a gospel to me; until I knew her, I never dared to believe that I was a Christian. She has taught me to think in such a strange new way about Christ himself that every day's living is all different—is just trusting and being helped, giving thanks and wishing to draw somebody else into the light. I would not have dared to teach six months—

yes, three months—ago. I was alone then in the world, without a friend who was in any sense a helper.”

Mary took Loraine's hand in a warm clasp and kissed her for the first time; then she said,

“Now let us go down to father.”

Mr. Parker was glad to enter on a thorough discussion of the subject, and before they were well under way Mr. Sedgewick himself was announced. Both gentlemen were convinced that Miss Faye would suit the ideas of the most obstinate trustee. She had a woman's dignity and the perfect good-breeding of a refined nature reared in an atmosphere of wealth and culture; thought, study and trouble had very early taught her to stand alone and to hold her own. If she would not take the place without an assistant, which Miss Preston should it be? Mr. Parker inclined toward his favorite Madge; Mr. Sedgewick, alleging his ignorance, kept a discreet silence. Loraine was in doubt. She thought the school might be good for Madge; she was sure Ruth would be good for the school. Mary proposed that

the matter should be left to the Professor, who would probably be the best judge.

When the old clock on the stairs struck one, Loraine, refusing urgent invitations to dinner, ran away down the long garden, "'cross-lots," home, with the lightest heart that she had carried for years. She was going to be necessary to somebody, to be loved and trusted, to be a helper in God's good work in the world. Madge could not have understood that desire. Why, this Loraine could go to her city friends and enter on a career of social enjoyment; she was young, handsome, cultivated, fascinating when she chose to exert her powers; yet she chose to board with a country school-teacher and to tie herself up to a daily routine of duty. Madge would have called her a foolish creature without ambition.

CHAPTER X.

TIDINGS FROM COLORADO.

“AUG. 15, 18—

“**D**EAR FOLKS: How I do long to see every one of you, and every pot and pan in the dear old kitchen! Seems to me I never did appreciate the conveniences of what you might call ‘polite life’ till I came out here to live with human creeters who make no difference betwixt and between a dish-cloth and a duster, if so be they have either, not to speak of morals, which are dreadful. After I get home and at ease again, with all the applyingcies for good clean cooking and housekeeping in a Christian fashion, if ever murmurous thoughts come a-gurglin’ up in me, I hope I’ll remember Colorado and Miss Peterses boarding-house. If I hain’t done much toward recuperating your uncle, I have saved his

life time and again by not letting him swallow the mixtures that woman calls vittals and drink. I feel real discouraged about him. He don't suffer to speak of, but he is considerably feebler in body and mind than when I came. I thought he would die surely last week, for he began to talk off and on by spells. He says he can't live but a little while, and I will tell you just what he said then, and so later, when I am carrying out his directions, you will understand. He said if he was to die here I am to go to the nearest telegraph-office (six miles off) and send for a man in Denver who is a lawyer and a friend of your uncle Henry's. This Mr. French will attend to everything, as he has been already instructed. Your uncle wishes to be taken to Denver and buried. I am to see all done, and then to stay in Denver while Mr. French settles up some business and tells me when to go home. There are a few papers and trifles belonging to your uncle that I am to bring with me. After this talk he seemed brighter, and this week he rests so quietly it seems to me that he ought to get well; but the doctor says he

can't. I have asked him—the doctor—to write out for the Professor just what ails his brother, because I might not report things as they are, for there is so much more inside of folks besides heart and lungs and stomach than ever I heard of before—dykes, or ducks, and sacks and organs, all easy got out of kilter. I only wonder any of us live at all, let alone the weakly ones.”

At this point in her letter Abby went off into a detailed account of her daily doings quite too voluminous for quotation. Then came a sudden break, and the letter was not finished until ten days later, when it ran thus :

“DEAR FOLKS: I ought to have sent this before, but I have not seen the moment when I could stop to write down the sad events that I was passing through. I telegraphed you the day Mr. Preston died, so you will be anxious to know all there is to tell. Well, about the time I stopped in my letter he began to fail very fast. That afternoon he seemed to want to be entirely alone, so I

hovered around outside his door until evening, when I had to make him take some nourishment. After it he said, 'Abby, tell them I say God bless each one of them. I love them all, if I did not talk about it. Philip was always a good brother, and his wife— Tell her and grandmother they kept alive my faith in God—and in good women.' Then I think he kind of wandered, talking about an Eleanor that he said he forgave and being sorry that she came to want. I wouldn't have asked a question, and had no idea of hearing a dying man's secrets that he never told when he was himself, but long as I *did* hear more and could not help it I'll feel better to confess it to you. He talked about expecting to marry this Eleanor and thinking she was too good for him or any man, and she went and married a rich man because she must have money; and I reckon your uncle found it so hard to forget that he has been ever since forgiving and forgetting it in that awfully silent way of his. About midnight he dozed, and waked up with his mind clear as a bell, only he kept on talking as freely as

anybody. He didn't like the smell of a lamp in the room, so I had the windows wide open, and he said, pointing out, 'That is *my* star, Abby. I lie here and watch it every night. It makes me think of my mother, dead these fifty years, and that old hymn:

"When, marshaled on the nightly plain,
The glittering host bestud the sky,
One star alone of all the train
Can fix the sinner's wandering eye."

Then he whispered kind of to himself,

"Death-struck, I ceased the tide to stem,"

and the rest of it about the 'port of peace.' It was solemn, and I felt pretty sure that he hadn't any fears of dying; but poetry and hymns is not exactly like testimony, and seems as if I had to ask him if he was prepared to go. He answered as gently as could be: 'My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.'

"I set up all night just inside the door, and Miss Peters she watched the other side of the threshold. About two o'clock he

sent his love to Ruth and Madge, and said tell them to be good girls. After that there was not much sense to his talk. He thought he was a boy playing in a field full of dandelions, but most generally it was all confused with that star of Bethlehem, as he kept calling it. In the dim light I could see his long white fingers trembling in the air, pointing out the window, and him muttering how his mother led him until the star 'came and stood over where the young Child was,' and how she said now he would 'see Jesus.'

"Toward morning is always the time sick folkses' life seems to run lowest, so we tried to tide him over with stimulants. He let us do anything we wanted to, but just about daybreak he turned his face on the pillow, a feeble little quiver ran around his mouth, and that was all. I sent right after Mr. French, and he came and did everything that the Professor himself could have done.

"I will tell you every single particular when I get home, which I hope will be soon.

"Everybody was kind as kind could be,

and such as had ever had anything to do with Mr. Henry said that, if he was not noisy, he was the most blameless man they ever seen. Some who had never met him, and so could not know he was a gentleman, took him to be my uncle or father.

“The night we started for Denver, before the coffin was put in its box, one of those wicked women I wrote you about came in the twilight and asked for me. (That sick one of them died, and they had known I prayed with her about at the last, and she prayed too, thank the Lord!) Well, this poor creeter, she never said a word at first, but held out something white so sudden it scared me until I saw that it was a most beautiful cross of the very purest blossoms that could be found here. ‘It is for your father,’ said she, ‘and God bless you wherever you go now!’ Then, before I could speak, she kissed my rough hand and was off. I was so nervous-like I broke right out crying when I put those snow-white things on the coffin. To think of her being so grateful for almost nothing! I suppose it is being away off alone here that makes me

realize my blessings when I see such lives as these people lead—all taken up with making a little money or having what they think is amusement.

“I have been dreadfully homesick in this little dirty, noisy settlement of the queerest men and women I ever knew, but, putting Mr. Henry out of the question, I am so glad I came! Living in such luxury all my life since I come out of that orphan asylum, I had got regularly hard-hearted.”

A letter from his brother's doctor had fully prepared the Professor for the sad news soon after telegraphed from Abby. It was not at all to the little family what the death of one of their own immediate circle would have been, and none of them thought of assuming a grief more poignant than was actually felt. Uncle Henry had come and gone in and out of the household more like a shadow than like an ordinary man of words and deeds. He rarely touched their lives and he lived his own in silence, but because he was gentle, pure-minded and often generous they loved him for what he was and pitied

him for what he was not—namely, a man with interests in common with other men. They grieved sincerely to think that he would never come among them any more. Each one wondered if he or she had always been careful enough of his unspoken preferences, sympathetic enough to one who never complained.

It touched Loraine inexpressibly to hear the way in which the elder ones in this family talked of death. She had seen passionate, indignant sorrow and bitter revolt in the presence of the dread messenger, she had seen hypocritical tears and open indifference, but no one had ever seemed to love to talk about the Father's house, making no more of the brief passage there than of a step across a dim vestibule.

“The poor lonesome man will have some society now,” was one of grandmother's quaint remarks. “His mother will know just what to talk to him about, and he will be interested to see William the Silent, for he used to say he was a grand Christian. Henry was so shy here on earth, and so outside of other people's pursuits, that the

change to strength and peace and perfect love will be wonderful—wonderful—when he shall see the King in his glory and the Saviour. He trusted in Christ—I always knew that—and he tried to keep his commandments; so now, as Bunyan says, ‘the smallest saint, when he gets to heaven, shall have an angel’s dignity, and his knowledge of the love of Christ shall surpass all ours here, even as the light of the sun at noon goes beyond the light of a blinking candle at midnight.’ Think of all that for the poor forlorn old bachelor! I always knew he had at some time fallen in with a hard-hearted woman, just as Abby’s letter shows. Well, that’s all nothing to him now. Nothing on earth is any matter, except sin, that separates us from God if we let it go unforgiven.”

The day that Abby’s letter was received had been a terribly hard one for Mrs. Preston. Loraine had not yet heard from the trustees, and so was not authorized to tell what Mr. Parker had discussed with her in regard to the academy. The Professor had

utterly failed to find any position whatever; he had even tried to get an agency or a place in some book-store. He would gladly accept any honest employment that would ensure his family the plainest, simplest support. Everybody wanted "a younger man," or a "single man," or one who could talk "French and German," etc. As the time approached when usually he began his year's work he grew almost desperate. If he had been, as had been his brother Henry, a single man, he could—or so it seemed to him—throw off this burden of worry for the future, could meet poverty for himself without flinching. He was not by nature so hopeful and trusting as his wife, but, like his brother, he was more brooding and under trial inclined to despond.

Abby's letter came late in the afternoon, and its contents took off the Professor's mind from his own troubles, which that day had threatened to overwhelm his faith in a protecting Providence. In the forenoon his wife had gone to his room and found him pacing back and forth. Something in his face told her all she needed to know of the

letter lying on his desk—his last forlorn hope in the way of an application. She dusted the worn bookcase, put papers tidily on the table and drew the curtain to hide a little better the old carpet, from which the pattern had wellnigh faded; then she said in that gentle way of hers,

“‘I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread.’”

“I too feel like quoting Scripture,” he broke out, vehemently. “The words go over and over in my brain: ‘Why is light given to a man whose way is hid and whom God has hedged in? For the thing that I greatly feared is come on me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.’”

The patient little wife’s eyes filled with tears as, looking up, she noted how dark were the circles under his tired eyes—how even his hair seemed to have grown grayer. Her sensitive lips trembled over the words,

“‘He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea in seven there shall no evil touch thee.’”

Mr. Preston would not look at her, per-

haps knowing that if he did he could not reply so almost bitterly :

‘When I looked for good, evil came unto me; and when I waited for light, there came darkness. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro until the dawning of the day.’”

The Professor had read the grand chapters of Job to her far too often for his wife to forget to answer him lovingly :

“‘Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth, therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. For he maketh sore and bindeth up: he woundeth and his hands make whole.’” She waited a minute before she went on: “It is very hard, Philip, to go on with blind eyes and keep faith bright in the heart, but God knows that we trust him, and perhaps this time next year we shall be amazed at our down-heartedness of to-day and ‘remember it as waters that pass away’—this care that now burdens us.”

Mr. Preston wheeled suddenly about and looked the speaker full in the face :

“Do you yourself feel the hope and the comfort that you are so bravely trying to put into me?”

“I say to myself, Philip, a hundred times a day, that God never failed me yet; so why should he fail me now? I think I realize our circumstances.”

There was a little quaver in the lady's voice that touched the Professor with a remorseful fear lest he was selfish in crushing her with a double trouble—her own and his. He drew her down by him on the lounge, saying,

“You are a great deal braver than your useless old husband, and a blessing to him that ought to comfort him under any trial. The darkest day must come in every year, and this may be it.”

“It might be darker, Philip,” she returned, almost reproachfully, then added, “We have not heard from Madge yet; she may have had some answer to her application for a teacher's place.”

“Could we live on that child's earnings?”

“We are not really destitute yet: grandmother's gift filled the flour-barrel.”

“That is the last straw—to come down to taking her little pittance given in charity.”

Mrs. Preston burst into tears. She was worn out with overwork and the tension of every nerve. If her husband was to be soured by anxiety, it seemed to her just then that she could not endure with serenity any more worry. He was instantly sorry and ashamed, and comforted her as best he could, but she went away with a heavy heart. Everything tired her after that; all her elasticity seemed to have gone. Her head ached in a dull, numb way; and when she tried to plan, or even to pray, her thoughts wandered confusedly. Abby's letter with the news of Mr. Henry Preston's death came about supper-time, and the rest of the family attributed her pale face and silence to her feeling in regard to her brother-in-law. Meanwhile, she was reproaching herself for hard-heartedness. The contents of that letter, as read by Ruth, fell on her ears like something listened to in a dream. It almost seemed to her that she had heard it all before, and had known that Uncle Henry was dead. She wondered if he suffered, and

found herself thinking that Abby had not lighted the hall-lamp, then remembered that Abby was in Denver and that Ruth was still reading her letter ; and oh how a poor tired head *can* ache !

The family sat a long time talking of the different points Abby had touched on, until Loraine, happening to look at Mrs. Preston, saw the utter weariness in her pale face and the hands that seemed to lie helpless in her lap. She stole quietly behind the others and whispered,

“ Dear Mrs. Preston, you look really ill. Do go right to bed and let me help Ruth do anything that remains to be done to-night.”

To Loraine’s surprise, Mrs. Preston yielded instantly, saying,

“ Don’t worry them, but I feel faint. Let me lean on you a little, and I will get to my room and lie quiet a while.”

Loraine helped Mrs. Preston there and brought her a cup of tea, and then went back to do some little things that Mrs. Preston usually attended to, and which Ruth—her mind full of the letter—forgot. When

they separated, later, Loraine was moved to say how worn out Ruth's mother seemed, but, reflecting that Ruth would surely see it the next day, and in any case could hardly be more thoughtful than she already was, she said nothing.

The next morning Mrs. Preston was up and about the house, a little fagged until toward noon; after that unusually bright, for something pleasant occurred. Mr. Parker called and offered positions in the academy to Miss Faye and Miss Preston. Which Miss Preston he would not decide; he inclined toward Madge. The salary offered Miss Preston was liberal beyond anything the Professor could have expected from his own experience; and when Mr. Parker remarked that Miss Faye would be offered one somewhat larger still, only Loraine and he understood their private arrangement whereby the other teacher was to profit.

There was for the rest of the day a lively discussion as to which sister should begin the work, and, after all, it was concluded to leave the decision to Madge herself. The school opened the first week in September; a letter

setting forth the matter could be written to Madge, who, if she wished the position, might return within the following ten days.

When the Professor heard the news, he received it with resignation rather than with the pleasure which Loraine had hoped for, but in his present depression nothing looked promising. He remembered all the trials sure to meet any teacher in that academy, and fancied how certain annoyances would irritate his spirited Madge or wound sensitive, conscientious Ruth.

It was very late that night before Ruth could dismiss the subject from her mind and calm herself to sleep. No one dreamed how she shrank from the thought of having to take the offered place. The indifference, criticism, contact with rudeness and opposition that would arouse Madge to conquer them would hurt and dishearten Ruth, but, all the same, she would attempt whatever was duty, and fail doing her best if fail she must. She had just fallen into a troubled sleep after midnight when a hand was laid on her arm and her father's voice was heard in the darkness saying,

“Ruth, will you dress yourself at once and come to your mother? I am afraid she is going to be very ill. I am going now for Dr. Hickox. Her head pains her so badly I don't think it best to wait until morning.”

Trembling with the chill of sudden alarm and nervousness, Ruth hurried on her clothing and hastened down stairs just as her father closed the front door behind him. Her mother's low moans of pain distressed her greatly, for nothing she could do gave any relief, and, indeed, Mrs. Preston seemed hardly aware that Ruth was there trying to do for her.

The doctor came with Mr. Preston almost immediately. After giving several orders to Ruth he prepared a quieting potion for Mrs. Preston and said that he would stay and watch its effects. He was as unruffled as ever, and Ruth argued from his manner that her mother was not so ill as she had feared, especially when, with a joke about improving his time, the old doctor stretched himself on the sofa in the next room and was soon placidly snoring. Almost every half hour, however, he came into the bed-

room to examine his patient and note any change. Before daylight he made Ruth herself go for a brief rest.

When Loraine came into the dining-room next morning, the first impression which she received was that of a breakfast-table set by some "raw" Irish girl. Every dish was at odds with every other; caster and coffee-pot were *vis-à-vis*, and napkins were nowhere. When Johnny was seen through an open door laboriously cutting a loaf as if it were a green-wood log, Loraine went quickly to ask,

"Is anything the matter?"

Grandmother, coming from the kitchen, told Loraine the state of affairs, but no one seemed greatly alarmed until some hours later; then all understood that Mrs. Preston had been taken very seriously ill. The doctor gave no name to the attack, though Loraine heard him say something about typhoid symptoms. Before night Mrs. Preston was delirious.

"Oh, if only Abby were here!" groaned the Professor; but Abby was not there, and

there had to be speedy counsel taken. Grandmother, Ruth and the Professor were to care for the sick mother, resting by turns and holding out as long as possible before calling in outside help. Madge was to be summoned at once, and she and Johnny must carry on the house as best they could. For Loraine no one planned, but before many hours everybody felt her to be a power for effective help; she cared for everybody and thought coolly when all were in a quiver of excitement and fear.

"That is a grand good girl!" exclaimed the doctor the second day, when Loraine made grandmother take a cup of tea, sent Ruth for a nap and was off to the kitchen washing dishes. "I thought she held her head pretty high the first time I saw her; but she ought to do so: it's a head worth having, and there's a heart to match. When is Madge coming?"

"I telegraphed last night," said the Professor. "She will probably be here by the first express train to-day."

"And that wall-eyed Abby—where is she?"

"Abby can't get here; she is detained in Denver. Oh, if she could come!"

"Don't take things too hard, Professor; keep yourself up and we will pull through, please God, and come out all right again," said Dr. Hickox.

The Professor turned quickly away and shut himself into his room. He knew the doctor thought his wife very ill; he had sent to a near town for counsel, and his doing that so promptly proved his unusual solicitude.

The Professor sank into a corner of the old sofa, and as he buried his face in his hands he suddenly recalled the incident of the day before yesterday. He saw his wife's troubled face and heard her pathetic response: "It might be darker." What if there should come a day when she was not in the house, but gone for ever? At the thought of a day so "dark," so black, as that, he groaned aloud and accused himself of past ingratitude. What was poverty with wife and children compared with life without any one of them? Conscience-smitten for the past and weighed down by apprehen-

sions heavier than any felt before, he took refuge in prayer, pleading most earnestly,

“‘Hide not thy face from thy servant, for I am in trouble. Hear me speedily.’”

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASCOT'S RETURN.

“Sweet promptings unto kindest deeds
Were in her very look ;
We read her face as one who reads
A true and holy book.”

WHITTIER.

THE next three weeks were the darkest ever known in the old yellow house on the hill. During all that time the mother's life hung in a balance, and more than once the grim hand of Death seemed touching the scales. There were days when the hitherto soft voice rang in unfamiliar tones through the house, and again the girls must bend low to hear the faint whispers.

Madge was as helpful as Ruth when some one told her exactly what to do ; otherwise it seemed as if she could not think. She was, as it were, paralyzed by the awful affliction that threatened them. While she sat

motionless in the darkened room there was but one thing that seemed more unreal to her than the understanding that this perhaps dying person was her bright, sweet mother: this stranger thing was her own giddy self as she had been for the months just passed—the Madge whose whole interest had centred about dress, fashion, dancing, a future of pleasure and of wealth, a present wherein she was admired, flattered, even greatly disliked by those who she was pleased to believe envied her the sprightliness and beauty that she possessed. Then, if all this like an ugly dream were thrust out of her thoughts, there came quietly stealing into her memory picture after picture of this home-life over which a black curtain seemed about to drop. When her mother had been the sunshine of it, what a warm, happy place it had been, like some spot of perpetual summer for ever full of singing birds! Could it be possible that she had ever turned her back almost disdainfully on its happy quiet, its dainty simplicity, preferring instead the vulgar glare and the empty show of a summer hotel? A cold shiver ran over the girl

whenever she recalled the blare of the horns, the crash of the drums, as she was listening on the crowded piazza to the last concert. Miss Ventnor had tried a minute before to keep Bert Raynor holding her sunshade, and it had pleased Madge to thwart her and send him for her own letters. He brought instead her father's telegram. She read it, raised her eyes, wild with the momentous fact that her precious mother was ill perhaps unto death, feeling that nothing could matter so much in all the world, and then for one sickening second she realized that nobody there cared. What was it to that red-faced millionaire, to haughty Mrs. Ventnor or to supercilious Maude? Oh, the unreasoning, resistless homesickness that seized Madge then, and made her almost beside herself until she was actually on the way to Hempstead! Bert had been very kind and thoughtful. When she could think of anything besides her mother, she now remembered this of him in a curious, half-conscience-smitten way. He had sent his love to her mother with his eyes filling with tears as he said, "She was always so good to me!" He would

gladly have come all the way home with Madge if she would have let him.

The day before the academy was to open the school-year Mary Parker came, as she had come daily, to bring neighborly offerings or to render some help, but this time she sought Loraine, saying,

“Father has arranged it all. You need not even trouble to speak to the girls or the Professor, for I see their anxiety has swallowed up all thought of outside matters. I will take the place with you and teach until one or another of the girls is at liberty. If dear Mrs. Preston dies, it might be the only way to keep Ruth from grieving herself into the grave after her. Madge would take sorrow with the same abandonment with which she takes everything important, but it would not crush her. Do you think there is any hope, Loraine?”

“The doctor has broken up the fever, but the utter prostration that remains is disheartening. There does not seem life enough left to rally,” whispered Loraine.

“I am afraid that many more days of

such anxiety will wear out Ruth and her father; he looks like a ghost."

"But, Mary, did you ever see anybody like Grandmother Grey? She works and watches, carries everybody's good in her mind, and yet bears up better than all the rest. I keep thinking of that verse in Isaiah: 'They that wait upon the Lord shall *renew* their strength. They shall . . . run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.' I suppose the real promise is for spiritual, not physical, strength, yet the supply in grandmother's case seems true of both soul and body."

"Perhaps," returned Mary, "because an uplifted soul always does seem to make the body light. Don't you often notice how hopeless people drag? There is nothing this side of death that can make such an old saint faithless and gloomy, and everything beyond death she sees transfigured in glory."

Lorraine was silent a moment, then, returning to the school-topic, said,

"I wish one of two things—either that they could afford extra help or that the academy

did not begin so soon. I am not of great assistance here, but there are small services that I can render; and it has been so good to have been of any use in making the house orderly and seeing that the rest ate enough to keep them alive. By the way, Mary," cried Loraine, with sudden animation, "what a beautiful thing it is to live in a village like this when one is in trouble! The first day, as I saw grandmother go to cooking after losing almost all her night's rest, I could have cried to think that I could not make bread nor get them a comfortable meal; but since then I have actually cried at a revelation of neighborliness such as I never saw in my city-life. A dozen times a day it is 'rap-rap' on the kitchen door, and there is this one with hot soup, that one with roast beef or a child with pies or cakes. Jellies and broths without end come from neighbors who 'hope somebody will taste them if Mrs. Preston can't.' The weekly washing was carried across the road before any one but Johnny knew it, and there are a dozen neighbors waiting to come in the moment nurses not of the family will be allowed. It seems so

queer and lovely, and I think it a phase of life altogether beautiful."

"Why, it is the most natural thing in the world," laughed Mary. "A few years ago I used to rail away to mother about Hempstead, and say it was just full of gossiping, meddlesome mischief-makers, and that all little towns were much the same. She used to say, 'Yes, Mary; they will tease and tattle and speculate on the cost of your ruffles, by and by will engage you to the wrong man, and maybe will say that your front hair is not natural; but if ever you fall into great affliction in Hempstead, you will find grand unselfishness and long-suffering, tender care.' Father was very sick once, and I found mother knew what she was talking about. The very woman who said I was 'a conceited snip with no good looks to brag of'—she *would* nurse father; and one day when Dr. Hickox was downright discouraged she said, 'There ain't no sort of use in him a-dyin', and you've got to do something extra. Now, try;' and she proposed the oddest measure, that the old doctor said afterward really may have saved his life. He always called it

‘Sarah Elkins’s extra.’ But I am hindering you. Good-bye until we meet as school-marms. Did Madge say whether she would like this position, or has she been too worried to give it any thought?”

“She has been too much alarmed to think about it,” answered Loraine. “I told her about it one evening, and she seemed embarrassed. I fancied she might not think herself fitted for the place, and so I told her that she had carried her studies with Mrs. Allen farther than any pupil goes here. It was not that of which she was thinking, for she said she felt sufficiently qualified. Afterward she said she wished that she could take the position. She will explain hereafter, no doubt, what was the objection or the hindrance she saw.”

Mary stayed but a moment longer, and Loraine turned from the gate, where they had been whispering, back to the solemn house.

There were more days of fear and trembling, of weary watching and prayer—two days when all hope seemed vain; then, so gradually that they could scarcely see the

change from one day to another, Mrs. Preston did begin to get better. The last week in September, though she could not lift her head from the pillow, Dr. Hickox declared her to be "out of danger."

One golden afternoon, when all the mellow warmth of summer seemed lingering in the air and all the gay tints of autumn had begun to glow on tree and shrub, Loraine came home from her school-duties to find Ruth resting in an easy-chair by the open door.

"It is delightful to see you sitting still," said Loraine, dropping into her lap a cluster of red leaves.

"Yes; I have been feeling myself rest in mind and body, and after such a strain on both that sensation is delightful. Mother is doing beautifully, sleeping like a baby—Mrs. Parker is watching her—and grandmother too is asleep. Mrs. Parker sent every one of us 'about our business,' and elaborately explained that the business was sleeping or sitting still. Johnny is the only one who has disobeyed; he is at work in the kitchen. He tries so hard to help that I

have not the heart to tell him how absurd his proceedings are."

"Yes," said Loraine; "the only time lately I have heard Madge laugh like her old self was when she went up stairs and found Johnny had done her room-work. He made her bed as if he never had slept in one in his life—everything laboriously askew—had dusted with a table-spread, and had arranged her toilet-table too comically to describe."

"Hush! he is coming," laughed Ruth as Johnny came suddenly around the house instead of through it, mindful of his noisy heels.

"Kitchen fire's made," he remarked, "and I bet I could get supper slick as a pin if you'd only let me try."

A long mark of soot adorned his countenance, and at any other time his soiled cuffs would have distressed Ruth, who now only said,

"You are a dear good boy, Johnny, but Madge and I will get supper when it is time."

Johnny strolled down to the gate chew-

ing a twig and feeling only half appreciated. He stood there a while, and then seemed to discover far down the hill something that greatly excited him. He turned to the girls, was about to give a shout, thought of his mother, and, merely raising both arms, rushed away at a headlong pace.

"What is that red thing coming?" asked Loraine, who was near-sighted.

"'Red thing'? Where?" began Ruth, and then, rising, laughed and choked and actually cried hysterically at the sight of Johnny with his arms flung around a woman in a bright-red calico who had dropped bag and baggage to return the embrace so enthusiastically bestowed.

"Oh, Abby! Abby has come home!" and away went Ruth to meet her.

At heart Loraine was a little bit of an aristocrat, and she secretly wondered at the place this unknown Abby seemed to hold in a family so refined as were the Prestons. To care for, protect and be kind to a servant was right, but to love one had never been her experience. To be sure, they said Abby was "American-born" and had always been in

the family, which probably accounted for her influence.

Feeling no particular desire to see Abby on the instant of her arrival, Loraine retired to her own room; during the next hour she was not so absorbed in her book and her needlework that she failed to detect a sort of subdued excitement below stairs—the Professor's voice in hearty welcome, grandmother speaking faster than usual, a new stir of cheerfulness and muffled laughter every now and then from Ruth and Johnny.

It was three days before Loraine saw Abby, for very likely Abby herself had no desire to meet the critical eye of the stranger within the gates. At about the end of that time Loraine said to Madge,

“I must see this Abby, who is like nothing so much as the Corliss engine, for every bit of household machinery seems to get power from her.”

“Yes, indeed! Only three days home, and every disordered nook and corner is as it should be, every meal is appetizing once more, grandmother's cares are all removed and father is taken care of as if he were a small

mEEK boy, to say nothing of the life she seems to put into mother every time she goes in there and makes her smile. But she is not anxious to see you," laughed Madge.

"Why?"

"She watched you down the hill this morning, and she says that you are too stylish. Her favorite red gown is stained and travel-worn, though red as ever; you will not see her until a certain purple one is finished."

It happened, however, the next day that Loraine was ill with a severe cold and a headache. It was Saturday, so that, greatly to her relief, she had no school-duties, and she sent Johnny to the drug-store for a simple remedy which she fancied might help her. Before he returned Abby appeared and took charge of Loraine in a masterful yet gentle fashion there was no resisting. After one look into her beaming full-moon face Loraine did not want to resist, but let herself be wrapped up on a sofa and fussed over until she dozed off to sleep like an exceedingly comfortable baby, and she awoke

without the headache. Abby and she were excellent friends from that time, and Loraine enjoyed nothing more than to draw Abby out and hear her impressions of the people and the places she had seen. For at least a week after Abby's home-coming she was quite too busy, between Mrs. Preston's room and the kitchen, to talk any more than was necessary.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LEGACY.

“It is as ordinary as for the light to shine for God to make black and dismal dispensations usher in bright and pleasing.”—
BUNYAN.

IT was a cold, blustering day. The wind tore about the yellow house as if it meant to wrench away every shutter; the air was full of flying leaves, and heavy clouds hung low, making twilight early in the afternoon. But within-doors it was the brightest day for many weeks, because Mrs. Preston was for the first time able to come into the parlor and sit by the roaring fire that Johnny had spent much energy in building. Grandmother and Ruth had their sewing, but the latter was telling them a funny story of Loraine's school-experiences, and the Professor put down his newspaper to listen. A moment after, he glanced at Madge, who was

the only silent one among them, and remarked,

“By the way, little girls, we must come to a conclusion soon in regard to which one of you is to be the teacher. It is not fair to keep Mary Parker holding the fort a moment after you are rested enough to relieve her.”

Ruth looked up nervously, yet was evidently of her father's mind that the present would be a good time to decide the question; but when Madge gave a half-appealing glance at her mother, the latter instinctively felt that it might be better to talk with each girl alone.

“Yes,” she said, “we must talk that over, but perhaps the discussion might prove a little too much for my weak brain to-day. I think we will let Madge tell us instead something about her summer; I have not heard anything, you know, since she came home.—It was a pity to cut your visit short so suddenly, Madge.”

“No, indeed, mother; so far as I was concerned, I had seen and enjoyed quite enough for one season.”

“ Well, tell us about it, dear.”

Madge roused herself from the listlessness which the family attributed to the recent overtaxing of mind and body during her mother's illness, and gave them a highly-entertaining account of much she herself had found amusing. Grandmother heard with innocent surprise of life at a monster hotel; Mrs. Preston tried to banish certain haunting thoughts of expenses incurred by her illness, of a winter at the door and a larder to be replenished—how? The Professor, who had almost learned his hard lesson (if he had like thoughts), could, every time he looked at her pale face and almost transparent hand, feel thankfulness conquering foreboding. God, who had eased her, would do for them all in his own good time.

Madge ended her fun, and a quiet had fallen while they all listened to the roaring wind and watched the dancing flame on the hearth.

“ It is only five o'clock,” exclaimed Abby, appearing in their midst with a brilliant lamp, “ but I thought you couldn't see to sew any longer by daylight.”

“And you knew I should waste valuable time if I had a fire to watch,” laughed Ruth.

“Oh, the lazier *you* can be, the better, till you get some more flesh on your bones,” returned Abby, arranging the lamp where its light could not hurt Mrs. Preston's eyes. Then, turning to the Professor, she said, “Any time you get around to it I'll tell you some things that Mr. French said to mention to you, though he said you'd get the hull thing in the papers sent.”

“‘Mr. French’?” repeated the Professor, questioningly.

“Why, the Denver lawyer—your brother's friend I wrote you about. I didn't pester you with the particulars when I first got here, you all being in such trouble; but he's wrote it all out, I reckon, in the little tin box. You'd a-laughed to hear him a-tryin' without reg'larly insulting me to sort of insinuate the information into me that if I stole that tin box it wouldn't do me any good and they could ketch me at it.”

Abby looked around, expecting a response, but both the Professor and his wife seemed

struggling to understand some unthought-of condition of things.

When Abby went out, Mrs. Preston exclaimed in a voice so nervously tremulous that it frightened Ruth,

“Philip, your brother was never dependent on anybody; he may have had more than enough for his life—an insurance or something. I have thought sometimes he might have had.”

“It is possible that there may be something coming to us,” Mr. Preston interrupted, hastily. “A little would be such a blessing—a hundred or two dollars. Abby brought me a tin box, but the very morning that I shut it into my drawer Dr. Hickox seemed to lose his courage about you, and I gave nothing else a thought. Any way, I supposed—what may be the case—that it contained merely papers of worth only as belonging to Henry. I will go and see.” He rose, and, crossing the hall, shut himself into his study.

Grandmother, made drowsy by the fire, was quietly sleeping in her chair. Ruth exclaimed,

"Where is Loraine? She must have come from school long ago."

"Yes, but perhaps she thought we were having a family reunion and she would not intrude," said Madge.

"That is it. Loraine has the most delicacy of any girl I know. But she ought to know that we have adopted her."

"Well, let us go and tell her so," suggested Madge; and the two went clambering up the old-fashioned stairs, Ruth saying,

"When our ship comes in, let us tear out these steep stairs and have the kind that turns with a landing, like that at the Parkers'. There is a lovely window with a wide seat and a place for a desk and books."

The Professor did not come back. After about a quarter of an hour Mrs. Preston heard him suddenly drop something like a heavy book and rise to his feet; then everything was quiet again. Her illness had left her so very weak that this suspense made her quite nervous. She was tempted to send Johnny after her husband; then she reasoned that if there was anything to tell he would soon return: his not coming back



The Discovery of the Legacy.

was probably proof that his faint hope had gone out in disappointment. After five minutes more, chiding herself for what seemed really childish impatience, she resolved to go and see for herself. She wrapped closer the warm shawl and felt almost naughty as she stole out, careful not to awake the solicitous old lady, who would have forbidden the exertion.

The hall was warm, but the blast that swept past the front door reminded Mrs. Preston of how long it was since that lovely morning when she had last entered her husband's study, to go out of it very sad and burdened. The Professor's lamp was burning brightly, but he was not at his table, where in a litter of papers was the little tin box. Mrs. Preston went a few steps beyond the door, that closed behind her, and in so doing startled her husband from his knees. He sprang up suddenly, took his wife in his arms and exclaimed,

“How much good news can you bear?”

“All you have to tell.”

All the same, Mrs. Preston trembled already, and, warned in time not to be too

abrupt, the Professor put her gently down in the sofa-corner and, trying to calm himself, said,

“Henry was better off than we had any idea. He has left us plenty for present necessities.”

“Oh, I told you, Philip, that God would not forsake us, but I never thought of help coming by your poor brother's death. I wonder now that I did not think he might have more means than he talked of, for he was so reserved about everything. I am glad I never knew it; I might have calculated on his dying: poor human nature is so weak! Is it really enough to last all winter, Philip?”

Mr. Preston kissed his wife, laughing like a boy as he asked,

“Could you believe it if I said there was enough for next summer too?”

“Tell me the whole thing plainly.”

The Professor went back to the table, saying,

“I cannot tell you yet in detail, for I have only glanced over each paper and read the lawyer's communication. This much is

clear: for the last fifteen years Henry had an income of about one thousand a year, and now that comes to us."

"And we have never had over eight hundred," cried Mrs. Preston, eagerly, "and managed nicely on that."

"About five years ago Henry made certain new investments. One of these proved unwise, and he lost; the others succeeded much beyond his expectations. Mr. French tells me that Henry went out West this last time, not for his health, but to take this property recently made out of every enterprise that was in the slightest degree hazardous, and to see it put where, humanly speaking, there was no chance of its being lost. The principal is secured to our children—Henry knew I am no financier—but the interest amounts to another thousand, and, over and above that, Grandmother Grey has a gift of five hundred dollars, and Abby another five hundred."

Mrs. Preston began to cry so hysterically that the Professor became greatly alarmed and exclaimed in terror,

"Now I have killed you with all this ex-

citement! The doctor said a relapse would be dreadful."

"No, no!" she laughed, almost as hysterically; "joy never kills anybody. But I will go and get a cup of tea, for—"

"No; you will lie still on this sofa, and Abby will bring it to you. And I will not let those chattering girls—those heiresses of ours—hear anything of this to-night."

The Professor was not an old man, and all at once he seemed twenty years younger for his release from the crushing burden that had slipped off his shoulders. Never in all her married life had anything given Mrs. Preston more intense happiness than this night to hear the thrill of thankful joy in every word he uttered, to see the light in his eyes and the elasticity of his step. He did not love money; he was truly no "financier," as he said. He was unspeakably glad for those dearest to him, not for any selfish reason.

Nobody else was told that night, but there was an electric influence in the air that caused both Ruth and Madge to suspect the truth, though only, like their mother, to

the extent of "a hundred or two." When at family prayers the Professor read a psalm of thanksgiving in a voice that would not go evenly, Loraine was certain the clouds over him had parted, and that there was blue sky with clear shining.

It would be an utter impossibility to describe the content and the gratitude that reigned in the house after each inmate knew what had come to pass. A million would hardly have seemed larger to grandmother than did this unexpected gift. She was every bit as full of fancies as were the girls, only hers were after this fashion :

"Whenever the missionary society sends a box to the West now, I can put in a beautiful set of warm blankets, and every holiday I can send turkeys to the church poor and always have something for people in need. Yes, and I can pay for a Bible-reader in India. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.!"

The girls had always supposed their mother blind to faded carpets and rickety chairs, perfectly satisfied with home as it had

been. Now, when they settled her into an easy-chair and brought their own chairs close to her for a talk, they found her just as enthusiastic as themselves about improvements, and ten times as practical in her ideas. Indeed; Ruth soon suspected that often in the past this mother must silently have considered all these things and patiently given them up. She had surprisingly clear plans for adding to and repairing every article that was worth repair in the house, and thus making go much farther what they could spend for new things.

“We will begin no important changes until spring,” she said one day during a debate, “but in the mean time we can replenish our linen-closet. Then, as we sit together making tablecloths, napkins, sheets and pillow-cases, we will decide on every curtain, carpet and cushion.”

“Yes, and paint the house outside and inside, and paper and—” began Madge; but Mrs. Preston laughingly suggested:

“Two thousand a year is a wonderful amount for us, but it will not do everything at once, you must remember.”

“Well, I know *you* can make it do everything that we ought to want done,” returned Ruth.

“I hope so. At any rate, we can brighten and beautify the old home, in which we have been very, very happy, and where God has been pleased to leave us still a united family. A home is not quite the same after a dear one has gone out of it: we had an idea of what a difference it would make when we feared a few years ago that Ruth had gone from us never to return; and if I—”

The look Mrs. Preston turned on them filled all their eyes with tears. Madge could not control hers, and Ruth, wondering a little, turned the conversation back to their plans by exclaiming brightly,

“When we decide which one is to teach—and we must decide this week, you know—I have a proposal to make; only let it be a secret with us three. You know how dingy the study is. Well, wouldn’t it be nice for Madge and me to have the privilege of making that cozy and suitable again for father? As much as possible of the first year’s salary would do a great deal toward paper, paint, a

new bookcase and a big rug. We would get the floor stained and have the lounge stuffed and covered."

Ruth, stopping for breath, looked to see an immediate answer in her sister's face, but to her surprise Madge showed little animation besides a reply to the effect that the study did seem rather dilapidated. Soon after, she went away for some sewing-material, and did not return.

"I am afraid Madge did too much while I was ill; she does not seem like herself."

"I don't know. I confess, mother, that I hoped she would want to teach; but if she does not, we will not urge it. I have an idea she is dreading that."

"Of course there is not the necessity existing now that there was at the time this offer of a place was made; and if any more needy person stood ready to take the position, it might be best for her to withdraw. But your father says that under present circumstances it would not be showing proper gratitude to Loraine or due appreciation of Mr. Parker's efforts. Moreover, he thinks that Madge would get good, morally and in-

tellectually, from the discipline of teaching, while the responsibility might develop in her more helpfulness toward others. If we had come into large wealth, neither your father nor I would think that a reason why our children should not be workers and helpers in a world so full of ignorance and of trouble."

"That is probably as true of me as it is of Madge. I don't want to go among all those great girls—they really frighten me—but I am selfish to put it off on Madge."

"You don't put any terror of big girls on her, dear," laughed Mrs. Preston, smoothing Ruth's silky hair, "and you are better adapted to other duties. I think grandmother needs you at home."

"I wonder if Loraine does not regret now that she accepted the position?" said Ruth, after a pause. "I feel sure she took it only to help us."

"I sincerely hope that she is not sorry. One thing we can do, and that is assure her that we appreciate her staunch friendship."

This suggestion about Loraine troubled Mrs. Preston, however, and that evening,

finding herself alone with the young teacher, she resolved to get at the entire truth. Lorraine was quick-witted enough to detect her motive, and with a frank laugh exclaimed,

“Oh, I see! You fancy that I am a martyr. But I can't pose in that attitude long enough for even an instantaneous photograph. I never was so interested and happy in my life. I really believe that I have a going-to-be-developed genius for teaching. I like and understand the girls; I seem to know how to wake them up mentally and not repel them personally. I gave them to-day in the class of moral science a talk that grew out of the lesson on conscience, and we were so interested that we ran over the hour and were surprised by Mr. Sedgewick's coming to tell us school was out. You see the rapid growth of self-esteem in me, don't you? No doubt by another month I can give the Professor himself valuable instruction about instruction itself.”

“I see in you what I admire and love,” said Mrs. Preston, impulsively, “and I am

not jealous when the Professor says, as yesterday, that his '*third* daughter has by far the most logical mind.'"

The talk was interrupted at this point, and Loraine went singing to her room.

CHAPTER XIII.

MADGE OPENS HER HEART.

“Ofttimes one vehemently struggleth for somewhat he desireth; and when he hath arrived at it, he beginneth to be of another mind.”—THOMAS À KEMPIS.

“I BELIEVE I know just exactly what your uncle Henry gave me that five hundred dollars for,” exclaimed Abby, one evening, after sitting long in silent meditation. She was speaking to Ruth, who was helping Loraine draw a map that was spread on the long table.

“Everybody knows why he did it, Abby,” Ruth returned. “Uncle Henry always liked you and knew how much you were constantly doing for his comfort.”

“Oh, law, Ruth! I couldn’t in decency have done no less for the poor lonely creeter. No; he heard me a-telling once how I hankered after an orphan.”

“A—what?” asked Loraine, in surprise.

Mrs. Preston just then called Ruth to do something for her, and Abby continued :

“ I’ll tell you ; Ruth knows what I mean. I always did wish that I could be rich enough to find a Nankeen orphan such as I was—or maybe it would be a Blue-Jean one—and make it as happy as Mrs. Preston made me. You see, when I was a little girl, I had a mother and a home, and never thought anything about myself until there came a time of poverty, sickness and trouble that I remember like a dream. I waked up out of it in an orphan asylum. It must have been a very nice asylum, too, as I reason over it now—sweet, clean rooms, good food, pleasant grounds to play in, and all of us going to church every Sunday. But I wasn’t only seven years old, and I was queer. I presume I was so awful homely that nobody took to me—big rickety head, green eyes, white hair and a nose that got a-growing and could not stop. That is the sort of orphan I shall look out for—one nobody ever would think of adopting for her good looks. It was in Hampton, about seventy miles from here, you know, and the Prestons lived

next door—that is, the Professor and his wife: the girls weren't born. I wasn't old enough to know that it was ungrateful in me to be homesick, though I don't yet believe the Lord thinks it is the best way to care for little children in droves, being fed, dressed, put to bed by dozens and sort of loved and prayed for by wholesale, as you might say. It is better than letting them suffer individually, but I reckon lots of 'em long as I did to be— Well, sort of one of a kind somewhere with folks all to itself. I hated to see seventy-eight more of me dressed in nankeen, and seventy-eight bowls of bread and milk. I loosened a slat in the Preston fence and used to peep in when they had the window open. Mrs. Preston wore a pink muslin, and their little pretty rooms and small round supper-table were *so* lovely! She used to have a little wineglass of flowers in the middle, and one morning I found a daffodil in the grass of the asylum yard. I put it in a green bottle of water, and was going to set it by my plate on the dinner-table. Then I remember thinking that all the other seventy-eight children

without any green bottle and daffodil would feel bad to see mine, and, poor little goose as I was, I concluded it would be a beautiful present for Mrs. Preston. I crawled through the fence and took it to her. She asked me all sorts of questions, and she laughed like everything; she says she cried, but I didn't know it. She called the Professor to see me, and he says I gave myself away; any way, they took me in, and I never have gone out, and never will, God willing, while there is a Preston left to cling to. But how I do ramble off! What I am going to get at is this: I can't adopt an orphan right out, but I mean to find one in some asylum and make her feel that she has got a partic'lar person interested in her. I'll write to her, and, so far as rules will allow, I'll do for her in the way of books and toys, and try, too, not to have the others made discontented."

"How can you manage that?" asked Lorraine, much interested.

"I must. If I can't do no other way, I could give any girl of her age something similar, or a little treat. I haven't thought it out, and of course there is a best way; but

what that five hundred dollars will do is to make some lonesome little body happier than she was before. I haven't any use for such quantities of money—wages a-rolling up year after year. I don't know as I am set on its being an asylum-child, either; only I know the heart of one, for I have been there. It is awful to be nobody in partic'lar and have nobody in partic'lar to love you."

"There are a great many persons like that in the world who are no longer children—not in an asylum, nor poor even."

"Then they hain't no call to be lonesome, and selfishness, maybe, is what ails them. If they would take right hold helping somebody—say the next one to them—they'd be loved before they knew it, and, better yet, find no end of folks to love and do for."

"That is the true philosophy of Christian living, Abby, but it took me until a few months ago to find it out."

"The Lord Jesus Christ could have told you any time you wanted to know."

"I found it out by finding him. I trod a long weary way first."

"I'll warrant you did," said Abby, em-

phatically. "But there is this good for groping around after help and peace: you know it when you find it, and you can reach out a strong hand to fainting pilgrims, as grandmother calls them. When I was out in them mines, I saw one or two people in trouble that there was no earthly help for, and I tell you, Miss Faye, I just got hold of the sense of that verse: 'That we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.' I used to tell them I wasn't nobody nor nothing, as they could see, but I had an Elder Brother who was 'mighty to save even to the uttermost;' and I never found one who didn't want to hear about him."

Abby's plain face was all aglow with happiness and her voice tremulous with feeling. Loraine—the elegant, accomplished girl—did not see her then as the homely, illiterate handmaid: fairer, finer and wiser as she herself was, her soul had gone down on its knees, quite melted into reverence before this glimpse into a life so unconsciously revealed.

“Abby,” she said just as they heard Ruth returning, “I am an orphan also, and I have belonged to no one in particular; I want hereafter to belong to every one whom I can help by being helped or can comfort by the comfort which you will tell of. If I keep praying, will I learn the way?”

“Jesus Christ is the Way; learn all you can from him, and you can't begin to tell all you will have to tell.”

The two sisters were together in Madge's room, where Ruth had gone with a special purpose. She had found the former very quiet and unresponsive, and at last, in sheer despair of getting any answer except to the bluntest of questions, Ruth exclaimed,

“I do wish that you would say once for all what you want to do or not to do about teaching in the academy.”

“I don't know what to say,” returned Madge, moodily.

“By that you mean that you dislike the idea, but you think father or mother wish you to, or perhaps that *I* am decided *not* to teach. If you really—”

Ruth was going on to add that she would not refuse in case Madge was greatly averse to taking the position, but Madge hurriedly interrupted her :

“I am not holding back on that account at all. In the summer I did think that to teach—especially away from home—would be very tiresome, or even at home, if it should be at Knôx Corners, seemed to me dreadful. Now, however, things have shaped themselves so that to teach with Loraine at the academy might, I should think, be a downright interesting experience—all the more agreeable that I should not be worried with the thought that I must please, must succeed or starve.”

Ruth listened attentively, waiting for some communication that did not increase her perplexity, and so was silent.

Madge went on in a nervously incoherent way :

“I never appreciated our home as I have these last weeks. The fear of losing mother was what first opened my eyes, and now, when I think how much freedom from care this legacy of Uncle Henry gives father—

what liberty to make the home more attractive than ever—I feel as if I never wanted to go away again.”

“Oh— You— Why, the school-hours are not so very long. Is that it?”

“No, no!” replied Madge, impatiently.

“Letter for you!” cried Johnny, outside the door; and, as if glad of the interruption, Madge rose to take it from his hand.

“Another from Cousin Jane? How anxious she has been about mother! I have not heard half of those she has already written,” said Ruth.

“Yes, you have; Bert has written a number of those that you thought were hers.”

“Has he? Why, that is very kind of him. But he always loved mother. What does he say?”

“Oh, same thing he always says, no doubt. He is not gifted in the art of letter-writing;” and Madge delayed reading, upset her work-box and stopped to pick it up and rearrange its contents, until Ruth, having little curiosity and thinking the letter merely one of inquiry about their mother, began again to bring Madge to the matter in question:

“Well, you have not told me yet whether you will or will not be the one to commence teaching Monday next at the academy. Mother says we must decide at once.”

Madge tore open her letter, read it a little way, dropped it, looked at Ruth with heightened color, then suddenly burst into tears and exclaimed,

“I want to do it, of course—you might know that I did—and to stay right here at home for ever, and never, never go and—and marry nobody.”

“‘Marry anybody’!” faintly echoed her sister, with the growing fear that insanity was what ailed Madge, after all. “Why, it may be years and years before anybody wants you to marry, if—if you want to yourself.”

“I never shall—never. But oh dear, Ruth! I have done such an awful thing: I have let Cousin Jane think I liked Bert, and I have let him think that I would marry him; and one time I thought, myself, I should, all because I hated to be poor.”

Ruth stared at Madge in such speechless astonishment that Madge went on vehemently:

“You see— No, you never can understand, because you were contented; but last summer I saw such ease and luxury where money was plenty, and I realized how worried father was with nothing better to look forward to, and they were all so fond of me in New York. Bert seemed just like a brother, and I could not help knowing that Cousin Jane would like to have me there always. Then I thought how horrid it would be shut up in a place like Knox Corners instead of being able to travel and buy beautiful things, and to have you visit me, and to give father and mother no end of comforts; for the Raynors are generous. Well, I can't tell how it did happen. I never meant to deceive or to be wicked. I like Bert very much for a sort of a cousin, and I did enjoy that lovely house; so that I let him think the day before I was sent for that I— He expects I will marry him in five or six months.”

Ruth looked just as horrified as Madge had expected her to look, but it was a minute before she could collect her confused thoughts. Later she would surely be sympa-

thetic, but the boldness of Madge's statement, her half-childish truthfulness, made Ruth as indignant as she was shocked:

"You mean that you wanted to be rich more than—than you liked Bert himself?"

"I didn't exactly know it then, but as soon as I got home I knew that must be true, because I never want to go back there again—never!"

"And you have let him think that you liked him for his own sake, and Cousin Jane thinks so too?"

"Yes. I feel awfully about Cousin Jane," wailed Madge. "How she will despise me! and she was so good!"

"I should think you would feel awfully about Bert," retorted Ruth, sternly, adding with shy hesitancy, "Did he seem to think a great deal of you?"

"Oh, I came away pretty soon, and I couldn't tell. Any way, he isn't so much matter—that is, I mean the loss of me would never break his heart; but he would be grieved and ashamed for me, to think I was so worldly. I was so, Ruth, I know, and that is why I can't go and tell mother that

I have been mean enough to promise to marry him, when I never would have done it if he had been a poor man, because, Ruth, I don't want to marry anybody, and the thought that I have got to almost makes me crazy ;" and, driving her head into a pillow, Madge burst into passionate sobs such as Ruth had frequently seen in Madge, ever since their first doll broke its neck.

At that point it was borne into Ruth that the situation, though deplorable, was not really tragic ; and when Madge remarked in a smothered tone, " Now you see why I can't promise to teach school and get married too, and it is *so* humiliating to tell mother, and so awful to go away from home," Ruth said,

" It would be to my mind a good deal more awful to marry anybody who believed in you, when all you wanted was money and a fine house ; and there is never any way out of untruth but telling the whole truth. Besides, if you really didn't mean to act deceitfully, but slipped into it, why it is a little less wrong, perhaps. I will tell mother for you if you can't ; but you can."

“And what then? It is just as dreadful about Cousin Jane.”

“And Bert?”

“Bert could forgive me; he is very good-natured, and I think he is enough like me to be merciful. You remember he was always doing things that he had no business to do, and repenting.”

“I think it must be very uncomfortable,” suggested sweet little Ruth.

“Oh, it is dreadful; you don’t know anything about it. Walking right into a trap that you could just as well have kept out of and been free and happy!”

“Mother will say—”

“What?” cried Madge, rising animatedly from the pillow with brilliant cheeks.

“That you must write and confess.”

“Oh, I never can,” groaned the elder sister. “You do it for me, Ruth; that is a dear girl. Just say I thought I liked him well enough, but I don’t; and in some nice, delicate way say I never would have thought of it if he had not been rich and—”

“I think you can spare him that humiliation and punish yourself with it. But I will

go and prepare mother, and then you come and tell her all the rest; her way will be a wise one."

"What if she should say that I had promised and must keep my word?"

Ruth the younger realized then that Madge had actually thought less of the solemnity of marriage than she herself:

"Mother will say there is nothing wickeder than to pretend love and to plan to live a lie, as you would do if you deceived the Raynors."

"Oh, how can you always tell if things are wrong before you try them and find out, Ruth?"

"Did you think and pray over this?"

"I thought some, but I didn't pray; I couldn't seem to take time this summer. Is mother in her room?"

"Yes. But you will be interrupted there; I will send her up here to you," replied Ruth, going down stairs with her singular report, the full meaning of which she could not yet grasp. She had not seen Bert Raynor in three years, and remembered him as only a boy.

To say that Mrs. Preston was astonished would be to state the case very mildly. That Madge was a young lady she knew after a non-appreciative fashion, but that the time had come for a change in her lifelong relations to the home circle was something for which she was utterly unprepared. Underneath her consciousness that Madge had behaved very unworthily was a latent satisfaction that she would now gladly draw back and stay with them still longer. In spite of Madge's dismay at the thought of "Cousin Jane's" displeasure, Mrs. Preston was entirely of Ruth's opinion that Bert was the one who was to be considered, inasmuch as Madge had promised to marry *him*, and not his mother.

"And Madge cannot gauge his affection for her by her own lack of it for him," said Mrs. Preston as she started for Madge's room, adding, "It is perfectly evident to me, before hearing it from her own lips, that in Bert's surroundings, and not in Bert himself, is found the influence to which the foolish girl has yielded, and so deceived him."

It was a very simple story that Madge

had to tell; but when once she had begun, she told it from the beginning, and Mrs. Preston could see just the temptations that gradually had come up before her pretty, luxury-loving daughter.

“Of course, mother, I never once admitted to myself until since I came home that it would be marrying for money. I have heard of young girls who did that, and fancied them deservedly miserable with disagreeable old men; but Bert is very nice and near my own age, and living with Cousin Jane was very pleasant.”

“My child, you were not to marry Cousin Jane, as I just told Ruth. And now I want to talk to you about the folly and danger of a woman who marries in any such circumstances—of the unhappiness she usually brings on herself and the injustice done her husband. I have very old-fashioned ideas about marriage, and I ought, perhaps, to have given them to you before, but I did not realize that you were actually done with your playhouse and your dolls.”

No listener could have been in a more penitent and receptive mood than was Madge

during the long, earnest talk that followed. Indeed, so far as Madge herself was concerned, her mother could hardly be sorry for what had occurred, because it had taught the young girl a lesson that might have been learned later only with far more disastrous consequences. .

The next day, when they were more composed, Mrs. Preston wrote to Cousin Jane, and Madge, with a strange mixture of relief and mortification, succeeded in getting into shape a letter for Bert. Her mother counseled her to ask a release from her engagement for the simple reason that she did not love him. This she did, but, aware that she had encouraged his belief that she liked him more than was a matter of fact, Madge attempted no justification of herself, but wrote in a frank, half-comical, half-pathetic unreserve that could not fail to conciliate a harder nature than Bert possessed.

In a very short time both letters were answered. It secretly amused Mrs. Preston that "Cousin Jane's" was seized most eagerly by Madge. That lady was naturally very sorry and much disappointed, but she was

not angry or unreasonable. She moralized on the mistakes often made by young people and the advisability of guarding against them when this was feasible. She hoped that this little episode would make no difference in the friendly relations of the two families, and declared that it should not make any so far as Bert and herself were concerned. She cordially urged all or any of the Prestons to visit them during the coming winter, and she altogether justified her claim to being as Ruth said, "good-natured." Mrs. Preston fancied from this hint dropped—"perhaps later everything will arrange itself satisfactorily"—that Mrs. Raynor imagined Madge did not know her own mind, but of that no notice needed to be taken.

Bert's letter no one but Madge saw, yet she said he was "very good and a perfect gentleman;" so all inferred that he had given her the coveted freedom. Half an hour later she was singing so merrily that the house seemed filled with music, and before long she was most enthusiastically discussing academy affairs with Loraine.

The Professor had not been enlightened in regard to this last exploit of his young daughter; and when, that evening, she delighted him with some very sensible theories of education—the fruit of Mrs. Allen's long experience—he said to his wife,

“Our Madge is really very much more mature in judgment than I had supposed. I see now that she has been giving deep thought to her future as a teacher.”

“Oh, Madge is growing older every day,” said the non-committal mother, smiling sedately.

The Professor was very happy in these days. His wife was fast regaining her health, and home was never more cheery. When the wintry blasts howled about the house, he could for the first time in years reflect complacently on full coal-bins, well-furnished larder and outstanding bills all liquidated. He had no idea of settling down to inaction because in the prime of his life he had come into a moderate competency, but in the coming year he resolved to give himself to a congenial work which he had long wished to accomplish—the preparation

of certain grammatical text-books for school use. He felt that a year spent in this way would give him the time for study and recreation which he needed after long labor and mental anxiety.

It was a bright, cold morning when Madge Preston went down the hill with Loraine to begin her duties as a teacher. Freed from the vexation and sense of wrong-doing that had lately oppressed her, she was in most exuberant spirits.

"Miss Preston," remonstrated Loraine, pausing to laugh at an absurd speech, "you are about to enter on a career where dignity is absolutely essential. I will wait right here by this gate until you straighten your face and get into a proper frame of mind."

"Oh, don't worry, Loraine; I shall not disgrace you. But I am so happy! I have had such a narrow escape! I can't tell you about it now; perhaps I will hereafter as a warning if I see you growing reckless. There comes Mr. Sedgewick. Now I will assume such gravity that he will not know I could smile."

Before the week was over, Loraine was perfectly satisfied that "Miss Preston" would be successful in her undertaking. She was enthusiastic in imparting knowledge, and she possessed the vivacity and kindliness which attracted to herself those about her. Moreover, she was a good disciplinarian; all her rules were pleasantly but promptly enforced, and soon in the same way obeyed.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABBY FINDS HER ORPHAN.

“Unheard no burdened heart's appeal
Moans up to God's inclining ear ;
Unheeded by his tender eye
Falls to the earth no sufferer's tear.”

WHITTIER.

JOHNNY PRESTON was not an intellectual boy. He detested mathematics; he “loathed Latin;” he—the son of a Professor writing a *Grammar*—used double negatives and spelled a little like Abby. Nevertheless, he was a warm-hearted, truthful fellow, as industrious as possible at any mechanical occupation. Abby was a great consolation to him when he was conscious that “father” was “trying to make the best” of him :

“Because, you know, he wishes I could be a scholar like Mr. Sedgewick, and I never can be. Don't you suppose I can be a man that he never will be ashamed of even if I should be only a carpenter?”

“Our blessed Saviour was a carpenter, Johnny, and that fact ought to keep any man from looking down on that trade. Now do your very best, and nobody will ever be ashamed of you.”

“But I ought to love study.”

“Some folks can’t,” said Abby, well knowing whereof she affirmed, “but they can study, all the same, if their duty demands, and maybe love for it will come—at least, I’ve heard so.”

“When are you going to hunt up the orphan?” asked Johnny, who had discussed at full length this object (elect) of charity.

“Soon as I can take a little more time.”

“I don’t see why you are so determined that she shall be homely as a scarecrow.”

“You will see if you live to be old as I be, and a woman besides—which is not to be expected; so, being a man, you never may understand. But it is just this, Johnny: beauty gets taken care of pretty tolerably easy in this world; it settles naturally into soft places and has the strawberries and cream if any is being passed around in its vicinity. On the contrary, crusts and three-

legged stools—if it is a question of sitting down at all—is considered plenty good enough for tow-headed, crooked-nosed, freckled-faced little girls, especially if they are motherless and poor. Oftentimes they are tenderer-hearted and more lovable than the rosy-cheeked, curly-haired girls that visitors flatter till their heads are turned. Any way, my orphan isn't going to be one mite pretty."

"Such ought to be helped," was Johnny's sagacious comment, "but I should let out the job and take a beauty. Oh, say, Abby! Did you know that Simpkins—"

Abby prepared to hustle the lad out of her kitchen post-haste. To tease her about this shiftless old widower had been the boy's delight for years.

"Stop, stop, Abby!" expostulated Johnny, interposing the clothes-bars as a barrier. "I only want to tell you that he is dead."

"'Dead'! When and how did he die?" she inquired, at once ceasing hostilities.

"Oh, he had the rheumatism for the last year—got so infirm he could not do anything, and came on the county. He died suddenly of heart disease."

“I hope he didn’t suffer much. He took everything so easy it doesn’t seem as if he would. Well, I trust the Lord has saved his soul, and that he will take a new start in the next world. He had so much putty in him instead of charity, and some way it never hardened. I am glad he didn’t leave any children.”

“But he did.”

“No, he didn’t. His little girl, Nelly, that he used to fetch up here and tell me in a sort of insinuating way needed a mother—and much she did too—Nelly died of scarlet fever more than a year ago.”

“All the same, he left a boy fourteen years old.”

“Oh! Then he is old enough to take care of himself.”

“He would be if he could.”

“What? Is he as flabby as his father?”

“He is a great deal flabbier,” replied Johnny, “for three years ago he fell off a high building where he was helping—he was a smart little fellow, everybody says—and broke his back or paralyzed it. Any way, he never could sit up since, and never will.

Old Simpkins was as good to him as he could be, and nursed him like a woman. They lived in two little rooms over Hind's cooper-shop. I went to see Moza once, and took him some oranges."

"Moses is his name?"

"No, but it is another Bible name, he said—one his mother found in the Old Testament. He has had to be taken to the poorhouse, and they say he cried awfully—because, of course, he never will come out. But the doctor said he might live to be as old as his father."

Abby's big green eyes were dim with sympathetic tears; and when Johnny soon went about his business, she fell into a long train of thought. How she had detested "old Simpkins," the slow, lackadaisical creature who had dogged her steps a few years before, and had offered himself once a month for a length of time that drove Abby almost desperate! But he was harmless and pious, too, in an ineffectual, diluted way exasperating to a worker of any degree of energy, physical or spiritual. Abby wished now that she had not been quite so savage with

him—had oftener let him sit on the bottom doorstep and eat what he was wont to call a “snack of good vittals.” She wondered what the poorhouse was like, considered in the light of a steady residence, and she resolved before another Sunday came around to see for herself and to visit poor Moza. As from that visit came results which may (not here, but hereafter) be considered important, let it be recorded in detail.

The poorhouse was a long walk from Hempstead, but, as it was near the main road, Abby easily secured a ride to a point near by, and so one clear, cold day she presented herself at a side door of the big red-brick building. She then coolly constituted herself a committee for silent investigation. Being plainly clad and by no means stylish, she was taken for a relative of some of the inmates, and was thus enabled to see more than any supervisor or caller at the front door would probably have beheld. She concluded that there might be far worse institutions of the kind, and she sincerely hoped there might be much better ones. Perhaps her own account of the expedition, given that

evening to Grandmother Grey, will be more graphic than any elegant version :

“First, of course, I met the poor-folks’ smell—always the same ; sort of made up of old clothes, dead-and-gone victuals, depraved human nature and carbolic acid. I went in the kitchen—a big brick-floored, smoked-walled place with a roaring great fire in the end, around which were a lot of feeble old men and cripples. A half-witted woman was setting the table with wedges of bread and bowls of mush and milk down the bare boards. I stumbled up a staircase that ought to be mended, and looked through a lot of rooms where there was work going on—half-and-half clean—then into a lot more rooms scoured up and cold enough for a country funeral in January. I got halfway into a wing where I believe they are keeping lunatics contrary to law, for I am sure I saw one in a kind of sacking-bag—a strait-jacket, perhaps—standing by a barred window. I am going to find out hereafter why I was hustled out of that part of the house. Up another flight of stairs were big rooms full of women, old and feeble and lunny in a

harmless way. They were chatting together just like other folks, and some of them seemed contented; some grumbled about the tea they didn't get, and so should I in their places, no doubt. The old men's quarters were not one bit pleasant. An old woman with any of the woman left in her will tidy up her medicine-bottles and pin up a chromo and wear a knit breakfast-cape if she has one, but an old man-pauper generally shrivels into musty woolen scented with stale tobacco. I have often noticed it. There was a long row of little dismal rooms off a hall that wasn't furnished with anything but new whitewash. The hall, I mean; the rooms had each a bed, a stool and a shelf. I forgot what I came for, because I found half a dozen poor creatures that I had to spend a few minutes with trying to cheer them up—a poor girl dying with consumption, not a friend this side the ocean, a mother bedridden with five little children tossing about she scarcely knew where; but by and by I found Moza, and the moment I saw that the poor fellow hadn't a look like his shiftless coot of a

father my heart kind of went out to him. If he had a had that grin, nothing but grace could have made me want to help him; but he didn't—far from it. A woman said, 'Moz, here's company for you,' and let me right in where he was. I thought it was a girl till he spoke—a girl with nice features and big sad black eyes. I sat right down on the edge of his bed—a tin dish of baked beans occupying the stool—and we got acquainted. He has ten times the sense of his father, but, oh my! how doleful he was! and good reason he had to be. He can't set up unless he is propped up. The overseer promised to have a frame made to put behind his back, but he hadn't found time. He can use his arms and hands, but that is all. He thought that was nothing, and he had looked at those four white-washed walls for just one hundred and seventeen days and amused himself calculating how many more such there would be if he lived fifty years having three hundred and sixty-five days in each. Cheerful, wasn't it?"

Abby expected the "Poor child!" that

grandma uttered from the very depths of her tender heart, and she hastened to exclaim,

“Well, now, Grandmother Grey, if I didn't have a revelation right then and there that the Lord Jesus had sent me over to that county-house to find my orphan, I am greatly mistaken; but I know I am not. He is not a girl, and he is not awful homely, and he never will go out fighting his way in the world; but he is mine, and I love him. I do, now, and you needn't laugh. I told him so, and I told him enough to give him some things besides whitewash and the multiplication-table to think of. That boy is going to have a frame for his back; Johnny is going to make it, and I reckon he will get good in the process as well as Moza. Moza can read, and he is going to have such books as Mrs. Preston thinks good for him. Maybe he can learn to draw and to sew and amuse himself. I didn't say anything to him about it, but a boy who can use his arms and hands freely could learn some means of being self-supporting in a measure. The pauper feeling must never take the self-

respect out of the poor chap. I did not tell him anything unwise about my means or plans, but I promised to look around for something like basket-making or hand-work of some sort that he could learn. He has an aunt—a decent, kind woman—who would gladly take him into her little home if any small amount came in with him. I think that can be managed, and I don't propose to have this poor boy lie there in that poor-house year after year until he grows half idiotic for lack of care, as such people do grow. I mean soul-and-brain-care. The overseer told me his back was not seriously injured, and that the doctor said he might in course of time, being young and of good constitution, get much more use of his limbs. He misses his father dreadfully; and there must have been something good about the old simpleton, for he was kind to Moza."

Abby had really no breath left to continue her narrative, and so paused to hear grandmother's sympathetic comments. The latter warmly commended Abby's benevolent project, and declared it more feasible than the plan of patronizing a stray orphan in some

distant town. She said that she had heard of Moza's mother as a Christian woman who doubtless had prayed for her children's welfare, and that Abby might now be God's answer to those very prayers.

"I hope so; I would ask nothing better to do with all my spare time and money."

The simple-hearted old lady, who was equally "rich," did not think of smiling at the tone in which Abby spoke—quite like one able to found a hospital or endow a college.

From that day Abby had a mission. At least once a week she visited her orphan and with kindly words and vigorous common sense kept up his courage and his dawning manliness. There was no danger that she would coddle him foolishly, but she kept hope in him for the future and a present trust in the divine Helper who previously had been to him only as a Being remote from humble lives like his own.

That was a short and happy winter for the Prestons. The Professor enjoyed his books, his work and the delightful novelty of rest and recreation when he was weary.

Madge and Loraine were equally contented in the academy, which under Mr. Sedgewick prospered well. He was as conscientious as Professor Preston, and, being younger and more magnetic in personality, he awakened a real enthusiasm for reform in all his pupils. Mrs. Preston and the others of the home-circle gave many happy hours to plans for remodeling the dilapidated old house into an abode convenient and beautiful. In occupations like these the weeks and the months fled swiftly by, leaving only pleasant records behind.

CHAPTER XV.

GRANDMA GREY'S REMINISCENCES.

“And oh, beyond this shadowy damp,
Where all is bright and fair,
I know full well those dear old hands
Will palms of victory bear.
Where crystal streams thro' endless years
Flow over golden sands,
And where the old grow young again,
I'll clasp my mother's hands.”

IT was May again, and all about the old home the peach trees and the apple trees were in bloom; birds sang from dawn until dark, and the air was sweet with spring perfumes of bud, flower and tender earth. Only, the yellow house was greatly changed since last May. Without, it had been tinted the greenish olive that harmonizes with nature's own coloring, and within, all was renewed or beautified. Ruth rejoiced in the hall stairs with a broad landing where midway were a

window, a great easy-chair and a shelf of books. The Professor could not sufficiently admire his library with new desk, repolished and replenished bookcases, soft dark rugs and rejuvenated chairs and sofa. Madge's taste, cultivated by the New York visit and restrained by her mother's ideas of fitness, had found exercise in making the parlor artistically charming without taking away its old quaint individuality as a room endeared to them and their guests. Perhaps it was on account of hospitable thoughts of these last that the mother, the grandmother and Abby delighted chiefly in the enlarged chambers, now daintily fitted up and ready for the most fastidious visitor. Nothing anywhere in the house was very elegant or in any way new-fashioned merely for fashion's sake, but all was in order, appropriate and pleasing. What that means to a family who have had patiently to mend old furniture, patch old draperies and endure the constant sight of irreparable ugliness, only such a family can appreciate.

When Ruth one day gayly announced that the last pretty pin-cushion adorned the

last toilet-stand and everything was "complete," her mother said,

"What shall we do now?"

"Well, I was about to fill the blue jug on the mantel-piece with pink and white apple-blossoms. I will give you a holiday, as you have been a very industrious mother of late."

"Thank you! But I was thinking of the Raynors, or of Cousin Jane. Would it not be pleasant to write and invite Cousin Jane to come for a long visit? We could then return some of her kindness to Madge and do away with any lingering unpleasantness connected with that episode last fall, in case she harbors any resentment. I hope she does not."

"I think it an excellent plan," exclaimed Ruth. "She likes the country, and she told Madge last year that she began to get tired of fashionable resorts. We can make her comfortable now, because we are able to afford things which she thinks indispensable."

"Well, I will write to her to-day," was Mrs. Preston's conclusion when Ruth went to her bouquet-making.

The letter was written, and Cousin Jane promptly replied that nothing would please her more than an "old-fashioned" visit in a quiet place like Hempstead, and with friends like the Prestons. She said she had not been at all well and her physician had told her to avoid unnecessary fatigue, summer travel and excitement. Accordingly, the first of June found her in the sweet, cool front chamber whose arrangements grandmother had planned with a thought in her loving heart of that Pilgrim's resting-place—"the chamber called Peace." The day she came and was installed there Madge said to Ruth,

"She is growing old very fast; she looks ten years older than she looked last summer."

"Yes; she is going to lose her health, I am afraid. I hope not, for I can't think of her confined to the house, she is so fond of change and novelty."

"Yes; she never reads much, and does not seem to have what Mrs. Allen used to call 'many internal resources of amusement.'"

It was in consideration of this fact that

the girls devoted a great share of their time that summer to walking, visiting, driving and various little excursions with Mrs. Raynor, who from the first found herself very contented and restful. She was a simple, kindly woman who might have amounted to more mentally and spiritually had she ever had the companionship of earnest Christians or the discipline of trouble. She had placidly drifted down the current of an easy, uneventful life with all her wishes gratified because she had few beyond human agency to supply. She considered the Prestons exceptional for goodness and intellect, but for herself would have never known what to do with "their high ideals and profound principles." Madge was the only one of them whom she considered really "practical," although she had formed a strong attachment to Ruth while the latter was in her care abroad.

After several weeks spent in the family, Mrs. Raynor began to study the domestic life as a problem worth her thorough comprehension. Slowly the truth filtered into her mind that Christianity, over and above being the creed which she reverently recited

in church—when she attended one—was a life radiating from the heart out into every-day conduct and coloring all the believer's thoughts. Hitherto she had regarded her handsomely-bound Bible as in a vague way the corner-stone of civilization. The fact that it reposed on her centre-table and contained ten commandments which she hoped she kept by not stealing, lying or worshipping idols,—this fact made her a Christian, not a heathen. It seemed to her very queer when Grandmother Grey and Abby, perhaps, would talk about a psalm or a gospel promise with the unaffected pleasure of a child in a letter from home or a gift received of actual value to them personally. The old lady was the first one to understand Cousin Jane, to see that she was coming gradually to realize that, like the foolish ones of old, she had received her lamp, but had taken no heavenly oil wherewith to fill it, and now—late, but not too late—she might arouse to look for help to those about her. As opportunity offered, therefore, Grandmother Grey dropped a word in season, and soon Cousin Jane made opportunities and

lingered with her after prayers in the morning—even went with her to the evening prayer-meeting in the church.

Loraine was the only person in the family who failed to feel more or less interested in Mrs. Raynor. This exception was no doubt because the only topics of conversation between them had been New York society, shops, concerts and that about which each supposed the other chiefly concerned. Cousin Jane gave Loraine credit for great “intellectuality,” to be sure, but she carefully avoided any “book-talk,” being well aware of her own limitations.

The three girls were sitting together in the parlor one evening, when Loraine laughingly remarked,

“There is a wise injunction which says, ‘In time of peace prepare for war.’ Now, I can’t affirm that I have found any gray hairs yet, but I have been reflecting on old age. Grandma Grey suggested my reflections, I have no doubt.”

“She suggests a great many of mine,” said Ruth.

“I met an old lady a year or two ago,” continued Loraine, “and at first I was delighted with her. She was very elegant in manner, very cultivated; and when one day I heard her entertain a roomful of young people, I thought to myself, This is what is meant by ‘growing old gracefully;’ but later I was not at all sure that I cared to know her better. She was as vain of her beautiful white curls as she could ever have been when they were golden, and she was as full of petty jealousies as any foolish girl, in spite of her ability to shine in society long after she was a grandmother. In fact, I don’t think she was as agreeable as many fussy, tedious old ladies who never talk about anything worth hearing. Many of these last are Christians. Yet what makes them so different from your grandmother?”

“Well, my explanation of it is that she was a lady of uncommon good sense, to begin with,” suggested Madge.

“Granted; but so, doubtless, have been many women who break up and degenerate as they grow older,” returned Loraine.

“Let us artfully entice her into giving us

her ideas of 'growing old gracefully,'” proposed Ruth; and accordingly, when, soon after, the old lady came into the parlor with her knitting to rest a while, Loraine asked her the meaning of the phrase.

“Oh, I don't know, dear—just what most people understand by it; but I think it ought to mean growing old with grace—heavenly grace, all the time sought for to the end that the older we get, the more compassion we may have one of another, being, as the apostle says, ‘pitiful and courteous.’ He expressly says that if we will ‘see good days’ and ‘love life’ we must refrain our tongue from evil, must ‘do good,’ and, last of all, must ‘seek peace.’ We will not ‘love life’ in the right way if as we grow old we neglect to bless others and to realize that we ourselves are called, as Peter says, to ‘inherit a blessing.’”

“Yes, but Loraine said just before you came in that some old people who are sincere Christians are not so lovely as they might be, or are positively disagreeable.”

“Unfortunately, Madge, that is true of many who are young and middle-aged, as

well as of the old. However, as I am not good at theorizing, I will give you the result of my practical experience and my observation. When you get along toward middle life, you will do well, girls, to take yourselves in hand and find out what things you will be wise in avoiding. First, spend a while studying the good and the bad traits of your near relatives, for by that time the same traits may have gotten tolerably well under way in you. If there is a fussy old aunt who worries all her servants until they are cross, and who is detested by the children, the first time that you are 'nervous enough to fly,' just think, 'This way lies danger. Aunt X—— is a blood-relation, and what she is I can very easily be; so I will begin now to drill for a placid old age which seeks peace for myself and the people who may have to live with me.' In fact, just appropriate the best sort of heirlooms, and banish the worst kind to the attics with cast-off clothes. Hold fast to your grandfather's good manners, and relinquish that family spirit of revenge which, it may be, you were getting too intimate with. You will be

astonished to find, after such a time of mental and spiritual overhauling, how ignorant you were of your own failings and how uncharitable toward your relations. My particular struggle was to grow old believing that new things were just exactly as good as ancient ones, and often better—that as roses are blossoming rare and fragrant to-day just as they opened when I was a child, so all life around me is now bright and sweet and always young to somebody. You cannot arrive at this conclusion after you are old; you must grow old believing it. I had a lesson once years ago,” continued grandmother, smiling at the recollection, “and it did me great good. I was long past middle life when some young people were chattering and laughing within my hearing, and by and by they read a few letters from their companions that amused them greatly—just such letters as all girls like. I sat thinking of my schoolmates, and in looking back it seemed to me there were no such young people left—none so beautiful and so high-spirited and witty. I remembered their letters, and thought they

wrote in a style as superior to that of girls nowadays as one could possibly imagine. I did not mean to be ill-natured, and I don't think the girls considered me so; but by and by I told them of my girlish correspondents—how wise and witty they were, what elevated sentiments they uttered and what noble women they all proved. The dear young girls with whom I was talking wished so heartily that they could see 'those beautiful old letters' that I remembered I had a pack of them somewhere, and I resolved to find and reread them for their benefit and pleasure."

"And did you do it?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, and they could not appreciate them, perhaps," put in Madge. "I have read about those elegant epistles of olden times, and fancy them in the style of the *Spectator* that you liked to read, Ruth."

"Don't interrupt grandmother," said Ruth; "I want to know the rest."

"Well, I found the little yellow packet—forty-four years old—and I read the letters all over, and never but once before did I have the same kind of a surprise. My

mother had a jewel-casket that when I was ten years old I thought wonderfully rare and fine. My father gave it to one of his stepdaughters, and I mourned its loss more than words can tell. This half-sister died ten years ago, and among other relics sent me was the casket.—I told you, Ruth, before it came, about the inlaid lid, the golden hinges, the fine carved ivory and the rose-satin lining.—It came—the very same casket, but a little faded, common box that never could have been the thing I had imagined it after my imagination had strengthened with my growth. So it was with the poor little letters. I could not understand the long-forgotten jests, and the wisdom was very weak. They called up in me lively memories, but there was no life or worth left in them. I never read them to the young girls, whose own letters I realized were brighter, after all; I only preached a sermon to myself and afterward tried to put it in practice. But this very minute, in talking about myself, I am yielding to one weakness that often is apt to go with foolish old age.”

"You are yielding to an impulse to do us good," returned Loraine, warmly.

"That you are!" echoed Madge, giving the old lady a hearty hug as she rose to pull up the curtain, and in her own half-loving, half-teasing way added, "Don't you fail to tell us something that Bunyan says, or I shall feel cheated.—Grandma's good talks are little volumes with a Bible binding and a Bunyan clasp. Think, now, and please have it something that will encourage a headstrong, blundering creature like Madge Preston to try to grow old as gracefully as a certain modest relative whom I might mention. I don't feel that I promise well for age."

"Then I have just the right message for you, dear. Old Bunyan says tell you that 'some say, When *grace* and a good nature meet together, they do make shining Christians; but I say, When grace and a great sinner meet, and when grace shall subdue that great sinner, and shall operate after its kind in that great sinner's soul, then we have a shining Christian.'"

"According to that, I must believe that you were once a great sinner," murmured

Madge, "but it requires faith to accept the idea."

By and by the girls went for a stroll in the moonlight, and Mrs. Raynor, who had been silently resting in an easy-chair, was left alone with grandmother.

"I never thought about growing old in any such way. It has always meant disagreeable things to me—failing eyesight, false teeth and trouble with false hair. Real old people who have not had fine minds as you must have had," she continued as earnestly as ungrammatically "they do get silly and tiresome, asking endless questions and fretting."

"No, deary; it is no question of having a fine mind in younger days: it is only to have the mind of Christ and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit's teaching, and these are freely given to us of God, the Bible says. Of course physical decay may make many old persons childish and troublesome, but I was not talking to the girls so much about extreme old age as of people who were growing old."

"Like me, and not with grace," said

Mrs. Raynor, sadly. "If I knew how to begin, I would try to make myself over."

"Oh, none of us can do that, and so it is blessed to remember that the gospel says, 'By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.' We begin by believing the word and just taking the gift."

The old lady never talked in a sanctimonious, unnaturally-solemn way about sacred things. Just now she was gently rocking, stroking Johnny's cat, who would sit in her lap, and talking as easily as about the moonlight on the roses outside the window.

Swallowing something that seemed to choke her, Cousin Jane said humbly,

"I am pretty ignorant about religion. I would like to have you tell me a few things."

"I should love to help you, dear," said grandmother, quickly; and just because love did prompt her, every word she spoke found its way to the soul hungering after righteousness.

The three girls went down the hill talk-

ing of school-matters. The spring term at the academy had been prolonged on account of a Christmas vacation, and the next week were to be held the closing exercises. The new teachers were planning to make them of unusual interest.

“Here we are almost at the Parkers’,” suddenly exclaimed Loraine, “and if you don’t object, let us go in for a moment. I want to borrow a *History* which Mr. Parker has in the library, and that he offered to lend me.”

“There are Mary and her father now, sitting on the piazza. Yes, let us go,” returned Ruth; but when they had entered the gate and had been greeted by Mary, they discovered that the second person was Mr. Sedgwick, and not Mr. Parker.

“Sit here and chat a while,” urged Mary; “it is quite too beautiful a night to stay in doors.”

Mr. Sedgwick seconded the invitation, saying,

“Perhaps you don’t recognize my right to extend the hospitalities of the house—or, at least, of the porch; but I have the right of

an inmate: I have been taken in here, and the members of the family have promised to do for me.—Have they not, Miss Mary? or do you agree only to bear and to forbear?”

“Oh, I don't think I noticed the form of the contract,” laughed Mary, finding cushions for the girls, who soon understood, somewhat to their surprise, that Mr. Sedgewick intended to remain in Hempstead through the vacation, and that the Parkers had taken him as a boarder.

An hour passed very quickly, for Loraine and Mary had always much to say to each other, while Mr. Sedgewick and Madge discussed academy-affairs. At length he gave her a few very sincere words of praise in regard to her success as a teacher this first year, and seemed honestly glad that she had not refused to continue in the school the coming term. Madge was heartily pleased with this appreciation of her efforts. She had felt an undefined uneasiness in regard to Mr. Sedgewick's opinion of her ever since her first strongly-manifested hostility to him while she supposed that he had unjustly supplanted her father. In all their school-

relations he was sufficiently cordial, but he was decidedly more unreserved and affable with Loraine and Mary Parker—even with Ruth. This evening he came out in a new light. After a while he declared he would “talk shop no longer,” and soon the whole party were discussing a picnic to be planned for the week after school closed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PICNIC.

“Oh, sweet, lowly graces—poverty of spirit, meekness—that grow low and are of dark hue like violets, but of a fragrant smell! These are prime in the garland of a Christian.”

THE next morning Mrs. Raynor felt so unusually fatigued that Ruth easily persuaded her to remain in bed. The young girl brought her guest a tempting little breakfast and served it to her in French fashion, with many amusing allusions to the summer when they traveled together. Then she drew down the curtain and left Cousin Jane to take a longer rest.

There was a good deal going on below stairs that morning, and until dinner-time nobody wondered at Mrs. Raynor's non-appearance; then Ruth went up again, and found her in a sleep so heavy that it seemed unnatural. Hardly knowing why, she called her mother, who after a moment said,

“She breathes as if she were not resting comfortably, and I think I had better waken her.”

This proved to be such a difficult task that the watchers were getting alarmed, when Mrs. Raynor opened her eyes and murmured a drowsy excuse. Mrs. Preston in turn begged pardon for breaking her visitor's slumbers, but explained that she had moaned in her sleep.

“I feel wretchedly, but after I have a cup of tea my head may be clearer. I have waked up before several times, and once I did not seem to know where I was, or much of anything. I could not remember Ruth's name to call her.”

Ruth, who knew Mrs. Raynor's voice better than her mother, looked curiously at Mrs. Preston; for it seemed to the young girl that Mrs. Raynor spoke in a strangely thick, slow way. Mrs. Preston did not perceive anything peculiar, and so Ruth ran away to get a cup of tea.

“Take this first, and then I will help you dress to come down stairs,” she exclaimed, on returning; “or if you prefer, let me bring

your dinner to you and don't you get up at all to-day." Half in fun, she propped up Mrs. Raynor's shoulders with a pillow, saying, "I practiced so long with mother that I know just the right angle for hot tea."

Mrs. Raynor, smiling, took the pretty china cup, held it vibrating, spilled some of its contents, and, to Ruth's astonishment, carried it up much nearer to her ear than to her mouth.

"Catch it, Ruth!" said the lady, just in time to save her neck from a scalding. "Something ails my arm; it seems as if it were asleep yet."

Again Ruth summoned her mother, who now suspected the truth—that Mrs. Raynor had experienced the very slightest shock of something not unlike paralysis. She rubbed her and avoided any expression of her fears, but advised sending for Dr. Hickox. Mrs. Raynor was too dull to be at all frightened, but yielded herself passively to their care; and so Johnny was at once despatched.

The doctor confirmed Mrs. Preston's opinion, but said the attack was so slight that Cousin Jane might scarcely realize its results.

She would be a little duller mentally and tremulous physically. She would gradually get better control over this right arm, and perhaps in a few days be apparently as well as before. The import of such an experience was not its immediate effects, but rather was it to be recognized as prophetic of graver seizures in days to come. He said he would write a full explanation of the matter to Mr. Raynor, and they could soon nurse and cheer her back to a semblance of health.

For a day or two Cousin Jane was not like herself in this new stupor of mind and body, but before a week had passed she was up, dressed and had ridden out. She moved more slowly, could not easily go up and down stairs and dropped articles that she tried to lift or to hold. She was much less talkative and drawled her words a little, but she herself was less conscious of all this than was any one else.

Mr. Raynor came as soon as he received the doctor's letter, and was greatly troubled at first, but, seeing an improvement in his wife's condition even while he stayed, he departed hopeful at the end of a week. Before

he left, it was arranged, greatly to Mrs. Raynor's satisfaction, that Bert should come and devote himself to her for the remainder of the summer. She wanted to take long drives daily, to be helped in and out of carriages and up and down stairs by some strong arm.

"It will be very nice for Cousin Jane," remarked Ruth when the plan was announced to her by her mother, "but, mother, will it not be embarrassing for our poor Madge?"

"Speak to her about it and see," replied her mother, smiling quietly to herself.

At that moment Madge was heard approaching, singing as she came. With considerable hesitation and some circumlocution, Ruth made known to her the fact of Bert's expected arrival.

"Oh, will not that just be delightful?" exclaimed Madge. "I hope he will get here in time for the picnic Wednesday; if I thought he would not, I would write a note and tell him to hurry."

"Why, don't you— Wouldn't he—" stammered Ruth, incoherently.

Madge gave her sister a keen look, and laughingly added,

“Oh, Bert is not revengeful one single bit. He has forgotten all that nonsense, just as I have, and we shall not make ourselves uncomfortable over a trifle like that.”

“No, certainly not,” commented Mrs. Preston, with that queer little smile which neither girl quite understood.

About three miles from Hempstead was a pretty spot called “The Glen.” To find it one turned into a charming lane leading from the road to a grove thick enough in its centre to be called “woods.” This sloped rapidly down to a gorge, at the bottom of which rushed a wild little brook which once might have been a broad river, judging from the formation of the mossy rocks on each side. The whole place was delightful, for in the glen were spots where on dry, soft turf a large company could assemble, shaded by great oak trees and having an outlook along the winding gorge. Elsewhere were deep hollows filled with ferns, cool, damp and green, deeply-shaded, and again twisting

paths roughly trodden through tangled underbrush into sunnier nooks and pretty haunts of wild flowers, bright berries, vines and delicate mosses.

Madge and Mary Parker always claimed that they discovered the Glen and its "picnic capacities," and they also declared that so long as they could keep its delights a secret from the noisy public they intended to be silently selfish. They really need not have worried over the matter, for only people who loved the woods, fields and wild bits of nature were ever likely to leave the old picnic-grounds, five miles farther, where were a summer hotel, a brass band, lawn tennis and a saloon.

It was an exquisite day very early in July when "our picnic," as Madge called it, came off. Only the Parkers, the Prestons, the minister's family, Dr. Hickox and a few of Johnny's friends were going, and it was to be the most informal affair imaginable. About ten o'clock in the morning the procession started. In the great easy carriage belonging to the Parkers were Grandma Grey, Judge Parker and Mr. and Mrs. Edgecomb;

right behind them, in a similar carriage, Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Preston, the Professor and Mr. Sedgewick. Mrs. Raynor, who felt a little timid with "intellectual people like ministers and teachers," as she confided to Madge, came with Madge, Ruth, Loraine, Mary Parker and half the baskets in a curious but comfortable old vehicle as commodious and nearly as big as an omnibus. Abby lingered on the doorstep when these last departed with much laughter and fun about the contents of the hampers stowed in until where feet should go became a puzzle.

"See here!" shouted old Dr. Hickox, driving up in his gig. "I promised to get over there to the Gulch—or whatever Madge calls her camp-ground—in time for dinner; but the sight of you all forlorn just turns my stomach, Abby. If *you* stay away, I don't want to go; I should be miserable."

"Law, now! Don't get sentimental at your age, doctor—don't, now. I'm going fast enough, but I'm going with a whole load of boys."

"At 'your age,' Abby? Why, I'm astonished!"

“Six of 'em, at the very least,” said Abby; muttering, “Did I, or did I not, put mustard in the Professor's ham-sandwiches?”

“My patient was in that last carriage, wasn't she?”

“Yes, and she is improving every day now.”

“Did her son come?”

“No, he couldn't get here; but he is coming to-morrow or the next day,” replied Abby, glad to see the old doctor prepare to start again: she and the boys had a private enterprise of their own. She hurried into the house, packed the last pie, cake and chicken into the last basket, and then dressed herself in her gala-attire.

Ever since Ruth and Madge came to years of discretion they had vainly striven to regulate or to modify Abby's ideas in regard to adornment and propriety in feminine attire. They had given up the effort, just as their mother before them had given it up, for scarlet, orange and grass-green Abby would wear. That her own eyes, skin and hair were neutral in tint was to

her an added reason why she should gratify her love for brilliant colors. This day she wore a broad straw sun-hat with five blood-red roses on its apex; her gown was a pink-and-blue plaid gingham, and across her broad shoulders was a royal purple shawl. When she appeared in the door again, preparatory to mounting into the cart where were already collected the six boys, she looked like a slice out of a rainbow. Nevertheless, she experienced immediate pleasure in the admiration which she evoked from those same benighted boys, every one of whom was her firm friend. Now, seeing her so new, neat and glaring in costume, they actually told her that she looked splendidly, and, worst of all, they did not know any better.

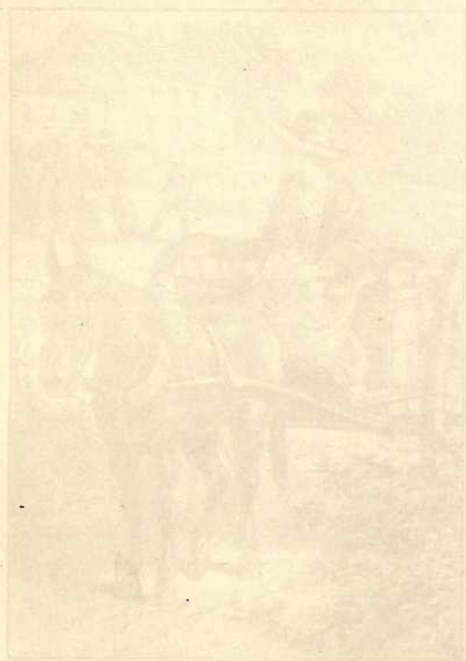
Johnny drove—chiefly because he was the boy who knew the least about driving—and the rest had a high time with themselves and with Abby. It would have surprised the advance-party to have seen them at a certain point turn quite off the road taken by the others, and, still more remarkable, they had ridden scarcely a mile before, with

a wild whoop of "Here we are!" every boy of them leaped to the ground and was off.

Abby, left alone, folded her hands in content, studied the radiant blue sky, said a few consolatory things to the patient old horse and awaited the boys' return. They had all rushed for the poorhouse, and not five minutes later out they came buzzing like gigantic flies about a roughly-finished but easy rolling-chair, which they propelled down the gravel-walk. In it reclined Moza, Abby's orphan, laughing with pure delight. Three months after Abby had found him in his loneliness she had stirred up such an interest respecting him in Johnny and his friends that Moza was now their common property. Johnny's mechanical ingenuity, their united contributions and the poor-master's co-operation had given to Moza this chair. With his uninjured arms he could propel it about the house and grounds, and the comfort he took in this way was indescribable. When the boys proposed to take him to the picnic, Abby gained Mrs. Preston's instant consent, and planned to give poor Moza a treat that he would not soon



Abby's Orphan.



forget. Their strong hands easily managed chair and occupant, so that, hoisting him into the cart, Moza was "one of the boys again;" and you can fancy what that meant to him. He talked and laughed, but all the time his happy eyes took in the familiar landscape, every road, house and bit of wood had formerly been daily seen by him. Once or twice those great eyes were turned on Abby with such loving gratitude in them that, as she told grandmother, "unless she sniveled right out she had to do something." What she did was to bestow a delicious great bun on Moza because he was "delicate," and then gleefully to enter on an uproarious squabble with the other six, who vowed they were delicate too and would have buns unlimited.

Moza almost choked between his enjoyment of the bun and his laughter over what seemed to him the very wittiest hilarity, for society in the poorhouse was decidedly tame. Sometimes in his gloomy room or during a season when he was suffering unusual pain, Abby had talked to him of holy things and divine love and comfort until he revered

her as if she had been a saint with a visible halo around her brow; to-day he thought her the most sunshiny, lovable human being on the face of this earth while she frolicked away under the shade of that hat with the bouncing red roses. It was so very good, too, for him to realize not only that heaven was beautiful and the next life desirable, but that earth was still a place for summers, birds' song and merry young life.

The boys were not in a bit of a hurry to get anywhere in particular; neither was Abby, so long as it was not dinner-time. Accordingly, they were perpetually leaping out of and into the cart, rushing across fields, stopping for drinks, begging cherries and interviewing wayfarers. It was high noon before they reached the Glen.

Now, what need is there to describe a picnic in detail? There was something delightful for everybody to do on this particular day, and each one did what seemed good in his or her eyes. The older ones conversed together in cool, fragrant nooks; the boys, never forgetting Moza, gave themselves up to innocent riot; the young ladies strolled

about exploring pretty places until Abby arrived and the hampers must be unpacked.

Just as the air began to be perfumed with the odor of coffee old Dr. Hickox came. He declared that he was "afar off on a country road, forgetful of the picnic, until, smelling that coffee," he remembered the Gulch; and "gulch" he would call it on purpose to tease Madge, who thought "glen" a beautiful word. She could not, however, stop to have her usual playful squabble with him, for the young people were marshaled about by Abby just then and made to put final touches to the feast, to seat their elders first and then to make themselves useful. But there was an instant revolt against any respect of persons, the older ones begging that Abby would not insist on too much style in table-waiting, but would let everybody help his neighbor; so all camped about the long snowy cloth, and the delicious viands vanished amid much merry conversation and laughter.

The boys were together at one end, around Moza, whose big black eyes shone with so much happiness that it was delightful to

watch him. This was for him a day of unalloyed pleasure; and when the old doctor discovered him, an hour or two after dinner, he gave him a new hope to make his future bright.

“Hello, Moza! This is good!” exclaimed the old man, looking him well over; and then, desirous to see more of his happiness, he said, “You look surprisingly better, my boy, than you did before your father died. Doesn’t the county-house doctor tell you so?”

“He does not examine me very often,” replied Moza.

Dr. Hickox put out his hand, rolled Moza’s chair quite out of sight of the rest, behind a thick clump of bushes, and proceeded to make an examination of his back and limbs.

“You are better—much better; and the fact that you have regained any power at all over those limbs shows that with proper treatment you will have more. I can’t say you will ever be well again—that is, ‘as good as new’—but I believe that you can be up and about among men by the help of one crutch,” were the doctor’s words, adding, as he studied

the boy's attractive face, "You need not think you are going to be left in that house much longer. Abby has been at me and I have been at the town authorities, and in a month's time at the farthest we will have you out and at your aunt's. There is far too good stuff in you, my boy, to waste in a pauper."

When the doctor had rolled him back, Moza sent the boys, who were reluctant to leave him, for the wild racing and tumbling down-hill, up-stream and through woods which they secretly longed for. This he knew, and so he assured them that he wanted them to go, because he was perfectly content to be in the midst of all the sights and sounds of out-door life. Moreover, Abby was there to amuse him, and every one had cheering words for him. The minister sat by him a long time; and if the rest did not hear all that was said, they knew by the light on Moza's face and the tenderness on Mr. Edgcomb's own that they were having a talk of Him who is the

"Hope of every contrite heart—
The joy of all the meek."

Shortly after dinner Mary Parker and Madge started for a stroll through the Glen.

“It is useless for you to run away from us,” called Mr. Sedgewick. “Miss Faye will not be left alone, and it is a necessity that I go along as a snake-chaser. I never knew a lady to go a rod’s distance over ground like this without hearing a rattle or seeing a copperhead—possibly a boa-constrictor if the dead twig was particularly dreadful in appearance.”

“After such a remark you ought to be forbidden to come one step with us,” said Mary Parker, severely. “I would like to cast insinuations on your own courage.”

“You may. I think it likely, if we do see a boa-constrictor, that I should climb a tree and shout ‘Shoo! Shoo!’ as wildly as you did when the Bradley cow would not get off the walk one day. I never learned to fight menagerie creatures—outside school-hours, at least.”

“Isn’t he growing frivolous since vacation began?” asked Mary.

“And I went to your house to board,” put

in Mr. Sedgewick, overtaking them and joining, not Mary, but Madge. He had resolved to remove, if possible, the stiffness that always made itself felt in his association with the latter young lady. She was unreserved with everybody else; perhaps she thought him only a prim pedagogue incapable of unbending. It was odd that with both Mary Parker and Loraine he could at any time drop into fun, banter or a merry war of words, but with Madge he was forced to be as grave as the Professor himself.

“Mr. Sedgewick,” exclaimed Loraine, “do you know—but of course you don’t—this is the anniversary of our first meeting, when—”

“Oh how flattered I feel! It marked an era in your—”

“It did not. At least, my meeting you was not the chief thing, but the way I met you was very embarrassing, and the date I remember because it was the beginning of my life in Hempstead.”

“Miss Preston,” said Mr. Sedgewick, with a teasing glance at Loraine, “I should think Miss Faye would be embarrassed to recall her

wild conduct. We know how unconventional and romantic she is, because now she has been with us ten months in the academy ; but then it was such a shock to me to find a young woman taking trains at random over any railroad that she happened to see, and with only two cents in her pocket. Or did you have three and a brass check ?”

“ No ; the check was stolen,” laughed Loraine, “ but not the trunk, fortunately.”

“ I have often wondered what would have become of her if she had not suddenly seen that benevolence in my face which inspired her with such unbounded confidence—”

“ Nonsense ! I was as afraid of you as I could be until you found out that I was coming to Hempstead and told me you had visited Professor Preston. I knew no scamp could be an acquaintance of his ; so you went forward simply on another man's respectability,” cried Loraine, warmly.

“ Well, well !—Miss Preston, don't you think she might have given your father credit for something beyond ‘ respectability ’ ?” continued Mr. Sedgewick ; and so the careless talk went on as the party walked

leisurely down a pretty path arched over with maple trees and leading to the noisy little stream below. Once down there, Mary and Loraine lingered to watch the boys, who had captured a great mud-turtle.

Mr. Sedgewick suddenly remembered a curious formation of rock quite down the stream, and showed a desire to conduct Madge to it without waiting to summon the others. Madge called, but they did not respond; so she followed her guide. The rocks were mildly interesting, and Mr. Sedgewick was a good talker on geology or on almost any other subject. He secretly exerted himself to be entertaining, until Madge grew animated herself, and they described a wide circle around the woods before they rejoined the picnic-party.

When Mary Parker had sufficiently admired the turtle's points as shown off by his enthusiastic captors, she carelessly remarked to Loraine as she glanced after their late companions,

"See! they are far ahead. Let us go on."

"No; let us not go on."

"Why, you are not provoked at Mr.

Sedgewick, are you, Loraine? He was entirely in fun. Since he came to our house we are always teasing each other about something."

"I know Mr. Sedgewick as I would know my own brother if I had one, and like him almost as heartily as I should like a brother. You don't know him, Mary, or else you are a trifle stupid all of a sudden."

The bewilderment in Mary's face matched in a most comical way the amusement in Loraine's.

"Yes, you are almost as dull as Madge herself. But then you are not in school, so your 'wision is limited,' as Sammy Weller said, to times like to-day."

Mary still stared in speechless meditation on Loraine's seemingly incomprehensible talk; but when once more Loraine glanced smilingly after the geologically-inclined couple, now still farther in advance, a light broke in and she exclaimed,

"O-h-h!"

"Exactly."

"I wonder—"

"So do I, and approve."

“Yes; there is no question about loitering with the mud-turtle. If he does not actually want us,” laughed Mary, “he is not wishing us present.—Oh, Mr. Sedgewick, I never thought it of you—never!”

After a brief silence Mary said,

“I think Madge has greatly improved this winter; she is not so restless and desirous for excitement. Once or twice she has surprised me by acting as reasonably as Ruth herself in circumstances where once she would have done something erratic, if not reprehensible.”

“Yes; ever since Madge came from New York she has been different—has shown this ‘sweet reasonableness,’ as you might well call it. I had an idea that New York would demoralize her.”

“Was it not her mother’s narrow escape from death that quieted her down, rather than the city visit?” asked Mary, linking her arm in Loraine’s as they started up the bank again.

“Possibly. One thing is certain: within the last six months Madge appreciates her home as she never did appreciate it before.

She used to seem to me both deaf and blind."

"I suppose their uncle Henry's legacy has enabled them to enjoy certain things denied them before."

"Oh yes; but, while that is all true, Mary, this is certain: money never made—as the lack of it never marred—the real happiness of that family-life. I could not understand any one of them but Madge when I first went there; in her discontent was an element that I recognized from acquaintance with self, but their restfulness was doubly attractive."

"Have you found out their secret?" asked Mary, with a glance at Loraine's noble face, which assuredly had acquired serenity in this last year.

"Yes, I believe I have; but grandmother told it to me first."

"By a Bible verse going hand in hand with a Bunyan quotation, was it not?"

"No; I think it was the Gospel according to Leighton. You know Leighton is Bunyan's rival in her affections. One day soon after I came Abby was out West, Mrs. Preston

was ill with a headache and poor grandmother looked tired out, but as angelic as ever. 'What is the reason that when everything goes wrong in this house there is never a domestic panic, a season of scolding or worry or blueness at least?' was the plain question that I put to the old lady. She beamed on me a minute, picked up a worn-out little book and read me this, which I have copied out since: 'The flower which follows the sun does so even in cloudy days; when it doth not shine forth, yet it follows the hidden course and motion of it. So the soul that moves after God keeps that course when he hides his face, is content—yea, is glad—at his will in all estates or conditions or events.' "

"Well, it stands to reason that a Christian family believing and acting on such principles must be a family with a home ideally and really beautiful," said Mary; adding, a minute after, "Thank God I have had a home in a measure like that!"

"I never had one, but God was good enough to open a door for me into this one; and if ever in years to come I have one of

my own, 'as for me and my house we will serve the Lord,'" said Loraine the child of an infidel.

When they reached the top of the bank and retraced their way through the woods, Mary suddenly exclaimed,

"Why, where is Ruth all this time? The idea of running away from her! What will she think of us?"

"I waited a little for her, but she said she wanted to do something for somebody, as usual, and told me to go on and she would follow. Perhaps she has joined Madge."

The mention of Madge made Mary smile, saying,

"Once or twice it has crossed my mind that the quiet, scholarly Mr. Sedgewick might find a congenial spirit in the shy, elusive Ruth. He has asked a good many indirect questions about the Misses Preston, I now remember, and I have dwelt at length on Ruth's perfections."

"Never mind; he has been quite equal, no doubt, to finding out Madge's for himself," laughed Loraine.

"Oh how stupid I have been!" energet-

ically exclaimed Mary. "This is why he stays here all his vacation! He told me last fall that he was going to tramp through the Catskills this summer."

"Softly, softly, Mary! You must not breathe one word of my romantic insinuations; just wait and see. There was never a person whose movements or emotions it was harder to predict than those of Madge Preston. Why, see! they are breaking camp and getting ready to go home."

"And it is actually half-past five," exclaimed Mary, hastening her steps.

The boys brought up the carriages, the ladies collected their napkins, dishes, baskets and extra wraps, Abby filled a basket with dainties for Moza to share with his friends in the poorhouse, and finally everybody was ready to depart.

Mr. Sedgewick and Madge were late in arriving on the scene of action, so that the order of departure, as regards the occupants of the different vehicles, was altogether changed. It made no difference, however, as everybody was provided with pleasant companions.

CHAPTER XVII.

RUTH'S ADVENTURE.

“The child leans on its parent’s breast,
Leaves there its cares, and is at rest;
The bird sits singing by his nest
And tells aloud
His trust in God, and so is blest
’Neath every cloud.”

ISAAC WILLIAMS.

[F Ruth had not been at all conspicuous, no one had any more enjoyed the picnic, and no one seemed more essential to the others’ comfort. Abby was not satisfied with the appearance of her table until Ruth said that it was all right in every particular; grandmother had to trust to Ruth to find her a nook where the ground was free from “damp;” the boys wanted Ruth’s admiration bestowed on their peculiar outfit for fishing; the old doctor wanted to joke Ruth, and the minister’s wife to pet her; and she happened about in her father’s vicinity just in time to

prevent his investigating a hornets' nest: the Professor was much more familiar with schoolrooms than with glens. After dinner she lingered by Cousin Jane, amusing her when the others discussed a book of which Ruth shrewdly guessed her cousin had never heard. But after a while Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Raynor hit upon a topic of mutual interest, and Ruth, who was exceedingly fond of roaming the woods, gladly found herself free to enjoy them to the utmost. She missed Mr. Sedgewick and Madge, who were not especially loud in their conversation; she did not take the right course to meet Loraine and Mary, but she did join the boys for a half hour's frolic a mile upstream. Then, not at all sorry to be alone, she hung her hat on her arm and wandered where she would, gathering ferns, moss and wild flowers, listening to the various birds' notes, peeping after nimble squirrels who were fleeing into leafy coverts, happier herself than any other of God's creatures there rejoicing in sunshine and liberty. Not, by any means, that Ruth was for ever thinking of unseen things, of religious things or of

her own self; she was not. This day her thoughts were just a part of the beautiful wood-life around her, all tangled in as it were with the sunshine spread like a golden net across the moss and leaves under the arching trees. "A heart at leisure from itself" can best joy in such scenes.

Naturally enough, Ruth forgot the flight of time, and, straying farther, stayed away longer than even Mary and Loraine. When, at last, the tree-shadows on the grass suggested to her that the sun must be low, she hurried back to the party. She heard their voices a long time before she came in sight of the picnic-ground. What was her surprise, on issuing from the thick shrubbery around about this last-named spot, to find it entirely deserted! It was as if the earth had opened and swallowed up every trace of the picnickers. No, not exactly that, either, for traces of them abounded in eggshells, brown paper, orange-skins and the peanutshells that marked Johnny's course. Gazing off in amazement, Ruth saw far down the dusty road, beyond all call, a short procession of carriages rolling briskly homeward. It

took a moment or two for her to realize that they had actually gone and left her, but, the truth once borne into her mind, she sat down on a stump and laughed until a fat robin perked his head at her as if to ask, "Are you right in your wits, young woman?"

"It is six o'clock, just," she said to herself, studying her watch. "They will not know that I am left here until they get home, perhaps; that will not be before a quarter-past seven. Then, if somebody drives back somewhat faster, I shall be rescued before or about eight o'clock. Well, my position is by no means perilous; no wild beasts abound. If I am utterly forgotten by my short-sighted relatives, I can walk half a mile across the fields to that red farmhouse and spend the night. I don't look like a tramp, at any rate;" and she glanced down at the neat blue cambric dress that she had worn to please Loraine—a dress that made her cheeks like apple-blossoms and her hair like spun gold.

Even when the sun went down, the air was not chilly; and so Ruth, being tired with the day's pleasure, sat quiet, singing

softly to herself, laughing as she fancied the dismay, when the party reached home, to find her "lost, strayed or stolen," and after a time watching the main road for a returning friend or relative. A number of teams passed, and after it grew late Ruth screened herself from view. She had thought that there might be going into town some farmer or person known to her to whom she could apply, but all the carts and carriages were coming *from* town at that time of day. She was not afraid; but when the birds went to roost in the darkening woods and the silence was unbroken save by the lonesome sounds made by the insects, Ruth was almost sorry that she had not gone at once to the farmhouse. What if by some strange inadvertence her absence were not discovered for several hours? Startled by the thought of staying there until it was actually night, she rose to her feet and resolved to go immediately to the distant farmhouse. She drew back at the sound of wheels, and, seeing a young man with a fast horse dashing past, she hid again behind a great bush. Scarcely had he passed, and Ruth, trembling a little with ner-

vousness again, had hurried toward the road, when the horse and carriage wheeled rapidly around and the driver stood up and shouted at the silent woods :

“ Ruth ! Ruth Preston ! Are you there ? ”

Whoever the person was, he had been sent for Ruth ; so she crept through a gap in the rail fence, ran noiselessly along the dewy grass, and was by the carriage-step just as the young man, straightening for a mighty effort, roared, “ Ruth ! Ruth Preston ! ” in a voice that verily might have penetrated to the red farmhouse far, far over the fields.

“ Yes, but I am not at all deaf,” was the silvery utterance that brought the astonished shouter to the knowledge of the fact that Ruth’s little foot was on the carriage-step. She had recognized Bert Raynor the moment he opened his mouth. Such war-whoops were, indeed, more familiar to her than were his now customary and well-modulated tones.

“ Why, my dear little cousin ! ” he exclaimed, grasping her hand to help her into the carriage. “ If this is not the most out-

rageous treatment for you to undergo at the hands of your own family! Do you think you are all here now? I left at least a dozen women weeping, tearing their hair and declaring that I would find you devoured by wild animals, frozen, starved, gone crazy with terror, if not scalped by Indians. And how is your health, any way, Ruth?"

Laughingly at Bert's vehemence, Ruth shook his once-more-proffered hand and assured him that she was unharmed and in her right mind.

"Were you not frightened?"

"I began to be a little lonesome and to wish I had a sister Anne here to help watch for the cloud of dust."

"And because you took me for a Bluebeard you let me pass you without knowing that you were there?"

"Exactly. I hid behind an elderberry bush until you— Well, not to mince matters,—howled," she replied, gayly.

"Didn't I? Well, I found you. Now, why don't you ask how it falls out that I am your preserver—the knight who rushed to your rescue?"

“ I suppose, so far as I have had a moment to reflect, that you came because you were on the spot when they discovered that I had been mislaid—left behind with the orange-skins and the eggshells. We expected that you would put in an appearance yesterday, and hoped that you would be here for this picnic.”

“ If I had come, *you* would not have been treated so shabbily. I always count the members of my family when I bring them home for the night. But really, Ruth, this is a queer way to meet you. Madge has given me such a very exalted idea of your dignity and your general superiority to the rest of us poor mortals that I planned to enter your presence in the most decorous style with some exceedingly wise sentiment on my lips.”

“ Well, I can assure you that I am just now twice as glad to see you as I could have been in almost any other circumstances. Your old-time yell was sweeter in my ears than a quotation from Marcus Aurelius would have been.”

“ Then I am perfectly content to have

come hooting and howling upon the stage," laughed Bert.

"Did you not find your mother looking better than your father gave you reason to suppose she looks? We think that she has improved rapidly in the days since he went away."

"I am glad indeed to hear you say that. In the excitement to-night over your loss she was naturally very animated; I should not have seen any difference if I had not been watching closely to detect how she had changed. She came up stairs with difficulty. Poor mother! I can't bear to think of her breaking up in health while she is still a comparatively young woman."

"Dr. Hickox speaks very encouragingly about her case."

"For the present. But I fear another and a worse attack." replied Bert, sadly, all the lightness gone from his manner now; and Ruth, for the first time looking in his face, discovered there a strength and an attractive manliness which had been undeveloped in the boy Bert, best known to her. "Yes, I must be good to her in these days,

for she has been a dear, good mother to me," he added, tenderly.

"I am glad that she does not seem at all despondent about herself," said Ruth.

"Father thinks that she does not understand the gravity of that attack, and I hope that she does not. I rejoice to know that she is here among such kind, cheerful people. If she were at a summer hotel, I should feel very sorry for her. Mother has not cared very much this past year for the things that she used most to enjoy—society and travel and in a mild way what you might call fashion. She has often seemed lonely; and when your mother's invitation came, she welcomed it heartily. She has written me since she arrived of how calm and restful it seems here, and of what a lovely old saint Grandmother Grey is. I knew that well enough before."

"Yes, she has spent a great deal of time in long serious talks with grandmother."

"It is hard for me," said Bert, gently, "to think that my own mother could be any better or needs to be, but I have thought if she could come out the kind of a Christian that

your grandmother and your mother and—I think—that you are yourself, Ruth, why then perhaps her own life would be more satisfying and she would feel less lonely.”

“Grandmother told me something last night that you will be pleased to hear,” said Ruth. “Your mother likes our minister, Mr. Edgecomb, very much, and a few days ago she told him that she wanted to confess her faith in Christ at the next communion in our church. She said that you joined this church, and that that was a reason for her uniting with Mr. Edgecomb’s people.”

It was quite dark now, yet some way Ruth knew there were tears in Bert’s eyes when he answered huskily :

“I have been a poor specimen for mother to study, Ruth, and sometimes I have thought that I had no business to call myself a Christian; but this I know—that at that time I was sincere in wishing to follow Christ, and I believed that I loved him. Later I was not sure of anything. About a year ago I began to get ashamed of myself; I think it was a healthy symptom. I read my Bible and let Darwin and Huxley

alone. I began to pray and fool away less time, and I have got now where life seems worth living."

"I am so glad for you," said a voice which Bert thought wonderfully sweet and sympathetic.

Five minutes more, and Ruth and Bert were received by the assembled family with a perfect uproar of excuses, greetings, explanations, laughter, and even tears; for Grandmother Grey feared that her precious Ruth would feel "so hurt to be forgotten and left in the woods." She meekly begged pardon for her share in the naughty deed, and was comforted only by a hug and with the assurance that "the woods were lovely at sunset," and that Ruth had enjoyed her ride home with Bert very much indeed.

Abby had spread a tempting supper, of which no one had partaken during the time that Bert was absent in search of Ruth, but now, happy and hungry, everybody ate, talked and laughed.

Madge, seated by Bert, rattled on in her merriest mood, as much at ease as if a certain episode were a matter of years past and

of no account any way. Bert in his heart fully agreed with Madge, if such were her opinion of bygone events. He answered some of her sallies and paid far more heed to his mother, seated on his right, but more than once he lost himself in admiring contemplation of Ruth's fair spiritual face, framed in that exquisite golden hair. What a blockhead of a boy he must have been to have thought her colorless and too quiet! The longer he watched her, the more she impressed him, until he wondered that he had dared go "bawling" after such an ethereal creature and joking with her as he might have done with Madge. Madge was his equal—a "jolly good" companion—but toward this sister of hers he could easily foresee that he was to feel more reverently—yes, far more tenderly. All at once it came to him, as his mother asked about city matters and Abby urged him to take cold chicken, that he always had felt something akin to these sentiments for Ruth the child, Ruth the young maiden.

Later in the evening, when some of the

older ones had retired and others of the family were entertaining Bert in the parlor, Loraine, going to the dining-room for a glass of water, said to Abby,

“Have you had a happy day?”

“That I have, and every day seems to be happy since I came into my fortune, but especially since I found my orphan. How could I ever have squandered all that money on myself? I never could have done it, of course. But money isn't the point, either; it is neither here nor there, as you might say. Anybody ought to be happy in a Christian home; and if a home ain't Christian, it ought to be. It has *got* to be if it is going to be happy. Then, when a body is happy that way, it is the most natural thing to go looking for orphans and sick folks, and ignorant people and outcasts, and showing them how God is their Father and wants to give them a home-feeling if only they'll let him. A home-feeling isn't absolutely dependent on a home.”

“What do you mean by that, Abby?”

“Well, when I was out West in that horrid mining-town with rough and dirty folks,

I did not feel at home in one sense, I can tell you, Miss Faye, but in another way I had the feeling—when I went out starry nights, for instance, and looked up a-realizing that He was my Father and their Father too, caring for all of us and wanting me to care for the others. Yes, it was a home-feeling, and I was happy.”

“I understand, for I have found it,” said Loraine, “and I think I shall never again be alone.”

“Yes, the Christian carries his home around with him if so be he is poor, and he keeps it till he changes it for heaven, I do believe.”

“Come to prayers,” said Johnny, putting his head in the doorway.

The Professor opened to a chapter quite new to Loraine, and two verses of it lingered in her memory long afterward like a strain of music: “And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. PRESTON RECEIVES A SHOCK.

“O life and love! O happy throng
Of thoughts whose only speech is song!
O heart of man, canst thou not be
Blithe as the air is, and as free?”

LONGFELLOW.

WILLING, and even glad, as all were to do it, the amusing of Mrs. Raynor, added to the necessary care that she must have, had been a real tax upon the time and the strength of both Ruth and Madge. They were very glad that after Bert's arrival she was wholly taken up with him. Every morning he took her for a long drive, every afternoon she wanted him to read and talk to her, and in the evening she enjoyed with him the family intercourse. Sometimes one of the girls rode with them, but not nearly as often as they were urged to do. It was Madge who went most frequently, and her

exuberant spirits made her a most desirable companion for the invalid.

One beautiful morning, as the mother and her son were going slowly along a swamp-road not very good for travel, but very picturesque, Mrs. Raynor said,

“What a cool woods-odor comes from the dense foliage! And see those lovely ferns! Stop the horse here in the shade and let us rest a while.”

“I wish that one of the girls had come,” said Bert, leaning out of the carriage and picking the ferns that grew almost under the wheels.

“Yes. I urged Ruth, but she was undecided when she saw Mr. Sedgewick coming in at the gate; and while I was finding Madge to secure her both escaped me, and Abby said they told her that they were too busy and I must excuse them.”

“Who is this Sedgewick? He comes to the house rather often, doesn't he?”

“Yes; lately he does call oftener than he did when I first came. He is a very genial man, and you will like him. I kept out of his way for a while, because, of course, he is

intellectual and all that; but he is as courteous to me as if I knew something. Ruth and he talk by the hour about books."

"Then he comes to see Ruth?"

"Well," said Mrs. Raynor, with an expression severely judicial, "I cannot positively affirm that he does, but I believe so. He first came, I think, to visit the Professor, but between him and Ruth there is great congeniality; all their tastes are similar."

"I fancied that it might be— That is, doesn't Madge like him?"

Mrs. Raynor detected the shade that passed over Bert's face, and fancied she could bring him into the sunshine again:

"'Like him'? Oh, no doubt. But then, you know, they are utterly unlike, and— Now I think of it, perhaps she does not like him. I have heard her say they had some little unpleasantness when he first came to the academy."

It was very still in the swamp. The tap-tap of a woodpecker could be heard far off in the woods, and no other sound but the stir of the tree-tops.

"How very light-hearted Madge seems!"

said the mother, after a long silence. "I noticed it about the time that you came, Bert. I was afraid that after the past she might feel ill at ease."

Bert seemed just that. He hurriedly replied:

"She had no reason to feel so. I am not sure that a team could pass us here; had we not better go on?"

"Oh, we will hear any one coming in time to drive on to where the road is wider. Madge is a wonderfully capable girl; I never half appreciated her until I saw her here at home. She was like any girl—fond of fun and dress, and flattery too—when she was with me that time at the seaside; I am now surprised to see her unselfishness and her real stability of character. She has matured greatly since she—since— Well, since she did not know her own mind in regard to you."

Mrs. Raynor paused, hoping for some rather confidential communication, but all Bert said was,

"I think she knew her own mind accurately."

"Oh, after a fashion. You were too pre-

cipitate and did not give her time to like you. She has had it, and— Well, all I have to say is that she was very frank in telling how pleased she was that you were coming to visit, and she is very happy since you arrived.”

“Has father written you about his Western lands? You know that three thousand dollars he invested and the fun we had about the city of L——, which numbered only a few hundred inhabitants when he bought? Well, it is a city now, and his land went up, until he sold three weeks ago and cleared forty thousand dollars. I suppose, according to the ideas of people like the Prestons, we are very rich. It is comfortable—very,” he soliloquized; “but there are things that money can’t buy.” A droll smile played around his mouth as he added, “I suspect, though, that it almost bought me a wife upon one occasion; Madge was honest enough to tell me something to that effect. I wonder if she is the only mercenary one in the family?”

“You are very unjust, Bert. Naturally, the poor thing, who could scarcely buy a

new ribbon without some sacrifice, wanted more means."

"Yes, indeed! And she acted more nobly than even you think," asserted Bert.

Mrs. Raynor looked delighted at this speech; evidently, matters would arrange themselves agreeably in due time:

"Yes, money is nothing to them merely as a means of show or extravagance. Madge would do credit to a fine establishment; Ruth would—"

"Would what?" asked the young man, promptly.

"Well, be a little like a stray angel with a fat pocket-book—likely to drop it anywhere the first time she ran to somebody's assistance," said Mrs. Raynor.

"A sensible angel would do the assisting with some of the contents, and Ruth is sensible."

"Ruth is about perfect," said the mother. The son said nothing.

The morning after the picnic, and in view of Bert Raynor's arrival, Mrs. Preston—awake at last to the fact that her little maids

were fully grown and very fair—took Madge and warned her to be very careful not to make any more mistakes in her relations with Bert. To her surprise, Madge blushed scarlet, laughed a little hysterically and assured her mother that mistakes were “impossible” between Bert and herself.

“Very well, dear; I am glad to hear it,” said Mrs. Preston, adding roguishly, “I might have remembered that you never in any circumstances mean to marry. That one experience of an engagement was too harrowing.”

Mrs. Raynor had no thought beyond a purely random jest, and great was her astonishment when Madge began an incoherent account of “yesterday, after dinner—and a walk—and Mr. Sedgewick and a mud-turtle—and she did not think anything about it at the time” (though why she should think anything of the mud-turtle to-day was the floating query in her mother’s mind); and “he talked and talked” (now, evidently, not the turtle, but the gentleman), and—

“He said he loved me.”

“And what did you say?” asked Mrs.

Preston, after a gasp and a kind of imploring look at Ruth.

"Oh, don't you be afraid that I did any rash thing that will have to be undone. I—I am going to take time for reflection."

"Why, you used to be very unjust and crusty to Mr. Sedgewick," exclaimed Ruth.

"That is just what I am going to reflect on, and repent, perhaps. I had to be crusty when I fancied he was wronging father."

"Madge," said her mother, more sternly than the sisters had heard her speak since they were children, "are you capable of trifling with a man like Mr. Sedgewick, and of letting him suppose that you might marry him if you do not know whether or not you even like him?"

"No, indeed!" replied Madge, warmly. "I do like him very much. I—I might have said 'Yes' right away, I suppose, but I thought this time I would be very wise and prudent; and here you don't approve of me this way, either;" and tears started in the great brown eyes so full of light a moment before.

"You dear silly child!" said her mother;

“if you were in earnest, I approve of you very much. But Mr. Sedgewick is very dignified and intellectual.”

“I should want my—him to be.”

“And will probably never be a rich man—maybe always as poor as your father was before we inherited this money.”

“Father was poor, but you married him, and you always led us to think you were happy.”

“Madge,” replied her mother, with a little quaver in her voice, “I don’t think Mr. Sedgewick need be distressed at his prospects during the period that you will take for reflection.”

The mother and daughter talked very earnestly a long time after that, for underneath Madge’s sometimes light words was a really solemn sense that now she knew what a true, unselfish love meant. The knowledge awed her and awakened all her womanliness. When they were about to separate, Madge said to her mother,

“Do you think it is necessary that the Raynors should know just yet? I would rather, on some accounts, that they did not

know. Bert is perfectly at ease with me, and has, I feel certain, gotten over all the sentimental fancy—it was nothing more—that he had for me; but Aunt Jane—Well, she would not like to see Mr. Sedgewick here if she thought he came especially to see me, and the little while she stays I want her to be comfortable.”

“I understand,” returned Mrs. Preston, reflecting; “she would be a little mortified to see another preferred to Bert. After they go home and your season of ‘reflection’ is ended we can write them. Very well; it makes no difference;” and the good lady went to seek the Professor and to surprise him in turn.

“No, of course it makes no difference, unless, as mother thinks, Cousin Jane might feel disappointed,” meditated Ruth. “And yet I think Madge is a little unjust to Bert; he is capable of a great deal more intense feeling than she supposes. I like him, and I am sorry for him.”

CHAPTER XIX.

"BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART."

"The more we are filled with the loving, persuasive, transforming spirit of Christ, the more intense, beneficent, hopeful and enduring will be the wayside service of our lives. . . . It is the service of life for life, heart for heart, spirit upon spirit."
—J. R. MILLER.

IT was Sunday, and the first day of September. Every one who formed a part of the Preston household was going to church, and the exercises of the day were to be in a more or less degree of peculiar interest to all. It was communion Sabbath, and Mrs. Raynor was to unite with the visible Church of Christ on confession of her faith in him. Bert was at her side to renew the vows taken a few years before, and he felt that his hope and belief rested on surer grounds than in those earlier days. He had learned much of his own

weakness and more of his Saviour's sufficiency.

It was an extremely beautiful day, and Grandma Grey, who could not always endure the fatigue of the public exercises of the sanctuary, had been counting much on sitting to-day at the table of her Lord in company with her dear ones. She went from the breakfast-table to her room; and when Ruth heard the key softly turned in the lock, she knew that, as Abby quaintly put it, the old saint was "adorning her soul" in garments of praise and prayer. Indeed, this morning so absorbed did she get in this occupation that a little time before the first church-bell rang Ruth had to stand outside her threshold and say in her pretty petting way,

"Dearie, I'm afraid you will not be dressed in time if I don't come now and help you."

The door was quickly opened, and the old lady somewhat nervously bustled about her preparations.

"Not the black dress to-day, grandma; that is for dull weather," said Ruth. "I

like that soft gray cashmere so much better ; it makes me think of a dove's breast."

"Or a nice old Quakeress, as Abby thinks. Well, the Quakers are a peaceful people, and often very godly in their walk," returned the old lady, taking from her closet the dress that Ruth preferred ; and then she meekly resigned herself to the young girl's dainty touches. When her snow-white locks were in order, the soft lace kerchief that went about her neck folded over on her bosom, and when she had laid out her large-print hymnbook and her tiny "smelling-bottle," she was as fair and sweet as any bride.

"Go now and put on your bonnet, Ruthie, while I rest a few minutes," she said, seating herself by the open window and crooning a psalm-tune.

When the first bell had ceased ringing, the Professor came to the old lady's door, saying,

"Mother, you and I will start on and go slowly down the hill ; then you can rest a bit before the services begin."

"Philip, don't mention it to the others, but I believe I had better not venture out

to-day, after all; I feel a little faint and unsteady on my feet. It is nothing new at all, but at such times I am better to keep quiet."

"Oh, I am sorry, mother, for I know you wanted to go to the communion. I will just hurry on and ask some one from the country who has a horse and carriage at the church to drive up here and get you. Mr. Ellers will gladly come, and will bring you home at noon."

"No, dear; I really do not think that I can sit up all the forenoon."

At this point Mrs. Preston and Ruth appeared, and grandmother's plan of staying alone was promptly discarded as not to be allowed at all; "for you might faint or be very ill and need help," Mrs. Preston declared.

It distressed the old lady to have any one of them stay, until last of all Johnny's name was mentioned, and after a moment's reflection she consented, saying,

"Johnny is not a church-member, as all the rest of you are, so he will not miss as much by staying. And then I haven't seen

the boy a great deal lately, he is so busy at one thing and another."

It was easy after that to arrange everything satisfactorily, and with tender words of regret to the old lady and many admonitions to Johnny to be "real good to his grandma," the family started off down the hillside avenue toward the village church,

Johnny brought a hatful of apples and two or three books, and settled himself in one corner of grandma's capacious lounge. She assured him that if he would not go quite out of the sound of her voice or her little bell he need not stay close by her,

Johnny said, "All right," but being, for a wonder in the mood to read, he found himself very comfortable. He was perfectly well aware that if he stayed long enough the old lady would "talk pious" to him, and Johnny was not more spiritually-minded than are most rollicking boys of his age. At the same time, piety was not an element that he could even in imagination eliminate from grandma's character; and was not that character as a whole a never-failing revelation of kindness? If he had tried to put his idea of her

into words, how touched and amused—yes, and perhaps shocked—she would have been! She was a special providence to him. He did not love her better than he loved his mother, but she was more quick in looking over his transgressions into his good intentions. He did not suppose that she had sinned for years, and no one on earth made such “doughnuts or such ball-covers as did grandma.”

Johnny munched apples and read and swung his heels in content until he reached the last page of the book, and then he tossed it aside. He looked out the window and called to the cat; he looked at his grandfather's portrait over the bed, and thought of him as having been dead nearly as long as Moses—in fact, for no conceivable reason, Johnny fancied that he resembled Moses; then he looked at his grandmother. Her sweet face was calm, but there were tears in her faded blue eyes.

“Does your back ache?” he asked, sympathetically.

“No, little boy; I was thinking how I would like to be down in the church with

the others. It is a holy, holy day and a precious feast."

"It is—only bread and wine," said Johnny, under his breath, curious, but not irreverent, as he tried to follow the old lady's thought.

"That is all that you see; but, my child, if you are thinking of the spotless Son of God, who lived down here among men and loved and blessed them—if you realize that, though he ascended into heaven, he said to those who loved him, 'Lo, I am with you always,' and that he is a friend, a helper, to-day as much as—yes, more than—when he walked the streets of Jerusalem,—then, Johnny, this communion means, not bread and wine, but meeting the blessed Saviour. The last time I sat in the church on a communion Sunday was before your uncle Henry died; I have been there since then on other Sundays. Well, that day we were all in trouble; your pa was poor and your ma sick, and I felt pretty low in my mind. I had only ten cents that I thought I ought to put into the plate for the poor of the church, and that grieved me, until just

before the plate came to me I happened to think that I might just give it to Jesus; he knew how I loved him and loved his poor. He was at his own feast, and was he not Lord of the whole earth, as when he made water wine and the little loaves and fishes into plenty for thousands? And, Johnny," whispered the old lady, "some way I never knew who held out that plate to me, for it seemed to me as if the Lord himself stood there holding out his hands and I was falling at his feet in adoration. It is love that makes that a feast; it is the remembrance of him that calls out that love in us. Don't you love the Saviour, Johnny?"

"I ain't good enough to, but I can't help it sometimes," said the boy, his own eyes very misty.

"Do you stop loving me when you are not good?"

"No; I love you all the better then, 'cause you are forgiving and you set me straight again."

"And I love you when you are not good because you need me most then. Now, Johnny, you know about your Saviour all

that any one can teach you, and what you ought to do is to think more about him, to love him better every day, to pray for help to do his commandments, and then to go down there to the dear old church and stand up among his people."

Johnny sat in silence a long time.

"Some of these Sundays I will not be here," continued the old lady.

"Are you going to New York?"

"No, child, but to heaven, and I want to know that you are following the Saviour on earth and coming to be with me there."

"I surely will, grandmother, but I shall be awful clumsy about it, for I am slow, any way, you know," he exclaimed, sitting up resolutely.

"We are all clumsy and slow, dear, until the Lord gets through teaching us, but his patience never gives out. Now I am a little tired, and you may run out in the garden and pick me my Sunday bouquet. But first turn over my Silent Comforter and let me see the verse for to-day as I lie on my bed."

Grandma went to rest herself a while,

reading, as Johnny turned the leaves on the wall,

“‘Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.’ That is beautiful. And never forget that we don’t have to wait for purity until we get to heaven. Ask the Lord to keep making your heart pure every day of your life, and then God will manifest himself to you; he promises that in his gospel.”

Johnny lingered by the bed, fingering grandma’s kerchief with boyish admiration.

“Why don’t you wear it every day? You look awfully pretty,” he asked.

Mrs. Grey laughed with innocent pleasure, and the lad half bashfully kissed her wrinkled cheek, because he felt very old in these days and thought kissing childish; then he went to the garden. There he struggled with the desire to make such a bouquet as he liked, and with the conviction that the sort that Ruth made were more in accordance with grandmother’s tastes. The biggest, most flaunting blossoms with what he characteristically termed “the loudest smell” were most beautiful in his eyes. He

was in a softened mood, however; so, coming on a bed of purest white lilies, he picked a double handful, and with a cluster of rose-geranium leaves carried them back to the old lady. He found a vase and arranged them on the table by the bed, first laying a number of them on her breast, and felt rewarded when she warmly praised his good taste. He took another book then, and read until noon in the piazza.

It was a long, peaceful morning—a good morning in the congregation of saints gathered in the church, a holy morning to the saint in the silent room which the fair lilies filled with perfume. She touched no broken bread, no silver wine-cup, but great blessedness came to her.

At noon, with a common impulse, the family turned toward grandmother's room to see if she were feeling better. Ruth stayed them with finger on lip, whispering,

"Fast asleep with flowers on her bosom."

Abby gazed fixedly, went forward slowly, stood hesitating, touched one wrinkled icy hand and broke into a long, bitter wail.

When grief had had free course for hours and the grandchildren were quite spent with crying, they gathered again around that bed, and the pastor whom their grandmother loved so well soothed them with tender, hopeful words—memories of the rare life here ended begun above, promises of blessed reunion a little later and inspirations to follow Christ as closely as she had done. It was very sad for them, but they could not help acknowledging that in no more loving way could the death-angel have summoned grandma's pure spirit. His touch had left no trace of pain on her face; he had not even shaken the earth-flowers from her grasp. Suddenly, without struggle or suffering, she had joined the redeemed.

Very often the death of the aged is *only* a relief to the living; this ought not so to be. It will not be if the departed soul has been a fit dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit and graces have ripened with years.

CHAPTER XX.

RUTH.

“The grand essentials of happiness are something to do, something to love and something to hope for.”—CHALMERS.

THE summer came to a speedy end, and much earlier than usual the leaves fall, while the autumn winds and rain made outdoor exercise very dismal.

After Grandmother Grey's death Mrs. Raynor found the atmosphere of the house a little depressing, although every one showed her a cheerful face. They mourned, and could not conceal the fact. She herself missed the confidential, earnest Christian intercourse with the old lady—an intercourse that had been to her of incalculable value. She was, therefore, not unwilling to return to her own home when Bert found it necessary to resume his business.

Mrs. Raynor was so much better in both mind and body that her friends felt assured

that life would never again mean to her the aimless existence it had meant. They were sorry to have her go from them; if not a very interesting person, she was kind and, as Abby privately designated her, "harmless." With Bert one and all were heartily unwilling to part, for more winning kindness and thoughtful consideration of other people's interests could not well be found in any other young man whom they knew. Sometimes they fancied that he was fast losing his former gayety and acquiring a gravity that occasionally seemed like melancholy; but if any demands were made on him at such times, he was eager to be helpful. His mother had a theory that accounted for his state of mind, and she wrote to his father that Bert found it rather trying that Madge would give him no "encouragement."

Ruth shared Mrs. Raynor's views so far as Bert's low spirits were concerned, and she too thought that he had better go home. For the first time in Ruth's own sunny life she was inclined to look down instead of looking up, in instead of around, and to be despondent. Nobody seemed especially to

need her. The mother's cares were lifted; Madge was very happy, and was being taken out of Ruth's life,—at least Madge had now a closer friend; Loraine was busily content in her school; and, saddest of all, there was no dear old grandmother to pet and to be petted in a quiet corner of that now still and unoccupied room where Ruth used to take all her troubles. Bert would gladly have spent more of his time with Ruth, but she was elusive, and after that first evening never so accessible.

By the first day of October, therefore, the Raynors were settled in their city home, and the Professor's household seemed quieter than ever before.

Abby and Dr. Hickox about this time were doing for Moza. Since the day of the picnic the doctor had taken the boy under his care professionally, and the result was surprising. From the first the doctor had believed that exercise would restore the power to Moza's limbs, which, he insisted, were not really paralyzed. He had so far benefited the boy that he could walk with two crutches, and the doctor declared that in time his gen-

eral health would be very good, and, as his mind had never been in the least impaired, he could learn a trade. He would be lame in one leg for life, but that seemed nothing to the poor fellow who once expected to be bedridden and a pauper all his days. After many talks with him the doctor had a plan of his own for the boy, whom he found by no means dull. Early in October he removed him from the county-house and lodged him with his aunt, who was glad to do anything that she could for him, but who was too poor to feed or clothe him. Every morning he hobbled over to the doctor's office, which fortunately was within easy distance. There he acted as office-boy all day, taking messages and keeping things tidy, or sometimes driving for the doctor. The office was in the house, and in return for his services Moza had comfortable food and decent clothing. He could not earn more; often he shrewdly guessed that he did not earn that much, for active boys able to harness the horse and do stable-work sometimes applied for his situation, but the doctor sent them away.

Abby it was, however, who gave Moza his best start in life when one day she said to him,

“Moza, in this world there is something sort of curious that I’ve noticed real often. Some folks the Lord means to go through on their legs, and some folks on their heads: I’ve been thinking maybe you are meant to go on your head.”

Moza’s great black eyes opened in amazement. Dr. Hickox had put him through many kinds of bodily exercises, but nothing quite so erratic as locomotion upside down.

“I mean like this;” and Abby extended a number six shoe with a “common-sense” heel with vast dimensions. “Evidently, he meant me to make them carry me around lively ‘from morn till dewy eve,’ as the hymn says. I knew so because my head was that useless for learning anything out of books whereby I might earn my bread and butter that reading almost made it rickety, and ‘rithmetic— Well, I tell you I am thankful I’ve got ten fingers to count on, and I use ‘em, too, oftener than any multiplication-

table. For me digging would be fun, but study— Oh, my gracious!”

Abby very seldom indulged in expletives, so Moza felt that she was greatly in earnest when she continued :

“Now, it was what the Professor calls a ‘wise provision of Nature’—meaning Providence, of course—that weak and nobbly legs often carry first-class head-pieces. I’m inclined to think, Moza, that you could learn out of books.”

“Oh, I love to do it! The doctor has promised me a lot of old school-books. You know I always kept up with my classes before I got hurt.”

“Exactly. Then fill your head full of the kind of information that will some day make you independent of—of your legs; then you can be a doctor yourself.”

“Could I?” exclaimed Moza.

“It ain’t for me to say, so far as the main thing is concerned; it is for your *head* to carry you there.”

“Where?” asked Moza; for Abby nodded her own head as if toward some special locality.

“To college.”

“Whew! That costs money.”

“Moza, if you will do your best to fit yourself, I will see that you go,” replied Abby.

Was Abby not now a person of means? Did she not regard Moza as her property, too, and might she not help educate a doctor?

November came in a relenting mood, and brought with it blue skies and balmy airs. Ruth used to take long walks through the quiet village streets under the leafless trees, whose soft gray tracery against the sky was very beautiful, and whose interlaced tops again reminded her of the lovely old cathedrals she saw in that European trip that sometimes seemed to her very, very long ago. Then, because she was only a girl, and not, as Mrs. Raynor declared that she was, either an “angel” or “perfect,” Ruth grew a little morbid and unreasonable, and wondered if she had any place in the world, and if it would have made much difference to any one if she had died that time she had

the fever abroad. But one day she resolved that this was weak and wicked. She went home and entered with new energy into the family-life, perceiving almost as soon as she did so that her mother looked weary and in need of change of some kind. She was not overworked, but the large family during the summer and the death of her own mother had taxed her strength physically and mentally.

About the middle of December an urgent invitation was received from the Raynors for just as many of the Prestons as could come to make them a visit extending at the least over the holidays. It was at once decided by Ruth and Madge that their parents must go, for the needed rest and change of scene; so the week before Christmas saw them on their way. Ruth was rather glad of the added care thus thrown upon her. She took on herself all her mother's duties and left Madge free for many seasons of reflection, but not always solitary "reflection," Mr. Sedgewick frequently assisting on these occasions.

Christmas Day was spent very quietly, for

no one in the house could forget that last year there was there a gracious presence which had for ever gone out from them. In the evening Madge, Loraine and Johnny went to a Sunday-school festival in the church, but Ruth, having a cold, remained at home. She was sitting in the firelight singing softly to herself :

“O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent hours go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.”

Out of a host of tender thoughts of the dead, and of not less loving remembrances of the living, Ruth was startled by the opening of a door and the entrance of some one—Mr. Sedgewick, as she supposed for a moment, until Bert exclaimed,

“No Christmas greeting for a belated traveler?”

Of course there was a cordial one, made unrestrained by the fact that Bert was in one of his sunniest moods, overflowing with the

peace and good-will of the season itself. When they had discussed the doings of the Professor and his wife in New York and all the items of interest in the respective households, Bert said,

“I expected to be here at noon, but we were delayed by snowdrifts.”

“Well, I am very glad you are here now,” said Ruth, pleasantly.

“Are you? Well, I wish you would ask me why I came, because I want a chance to tell you the reason.”

“Let us have it at once. Nothing has happened to—”

“Everybody is well and happy, only not so happy as I was to learn yesterday that Mr. Sedgewick is engaged to Madge. I thought that you meant to marry him, and, Ruth—”

But in dialogues similar to the one which followed two persons only are required to sustain the parts, and no audience at all is desirable.

Seven years have come and gone since a June morning when in the village church

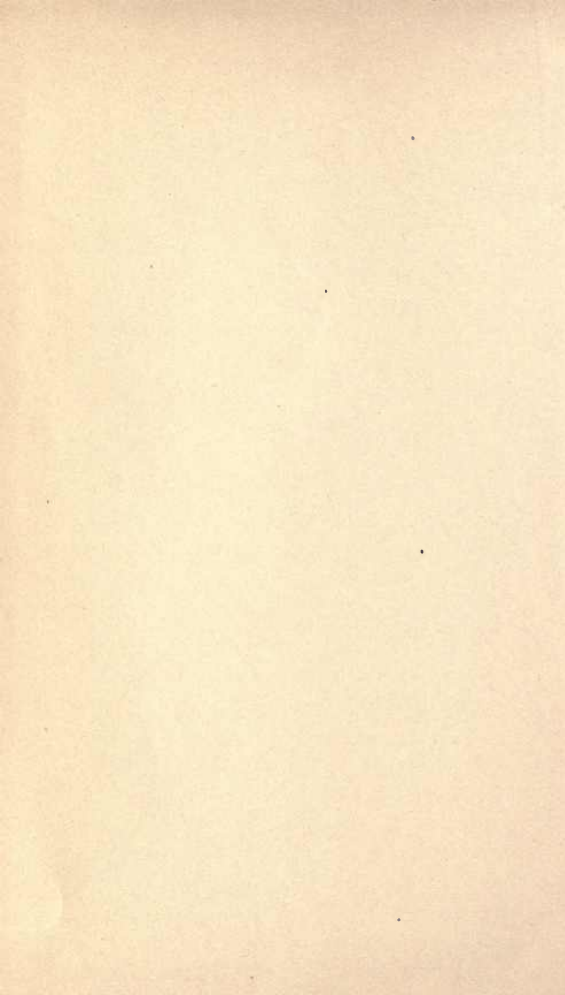
“the Professor’s girls” were married with fair promises of happiness, and so far those promises have been richly fulfilled. The house on the hill still shelters the old inmates, and, contrary to the adage, another family dwells there in harmony. Madge, beautiful as ever, but with added dignity and gentleness, is not less the devoted daughter that she is herself a wife and a mother. Four of the most remarkable children—if Abby’s word is to be taken—that ever were born have come to keep the house gay and bright with youth again. Abby ought to know, for much of her time is spent in a big chair with a girl on each arm and two boys dangling from the back while she tells of that time “I was ’way out West.” The Professor and Mr. Sedgewick have built up a school after their own hearts, and the present generation of village youths are profiting by the fact. Loraine Faye is at the head of a seminary for young women in the building once known as Mrs. Allen’s seminary. In this home of her girlhood she is doing noble work.

And Ruth is the wife of a millionaire,

with a husband and a father-in-law eager to gratify every whim. Does she spend money? Is she a power in society? Yes. She is no recluse; she wears soft silks and velvets; she is often seen where the "world's people" wonder at the grace and the ease of a lady "in her position" who never attends balls or theatres. She has no children—or she has, as Bert says, "hundreds of them." Oh, they know Ruth in orphan asylums! She sends barges full of babies sailing for cool breezes; she brings delight into childish hearts at every holiday, and very, very often—not dressed in silks—she moves softly through hospital wards. There are rough men who bless her with dimmed eyes, wicked women who reach out and touch her garments for very love and gratitude. Sometimes, in the presence of appalling wretchedness and sin, where so young a woman might naturally be dumb, it would almost seem as if Grandmother Grey's mantle had descended on her, so wondrously wise, so weighty with loving-kindness, are the counsels she utters. Again, in "society" has it many times happened that from the lips

of an infidel, a scoffer or a "fast" man or woman would fall a sneer at the faith Ruth holds most holy. She never argues, seldom reproaches, but a voice sweet with kindness repeats a saying of the Saviour, a quaint remembered passage of old Leighton or John Bunyan, and it is as if a casket of precious perfume were opened on the air.

THE END.



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