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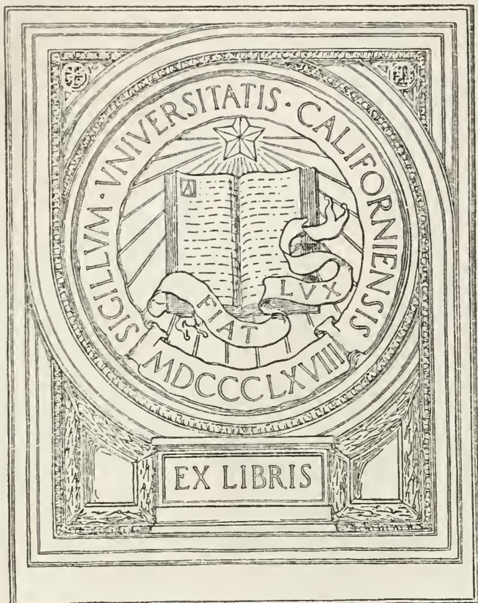

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BLACK ICE

BY

ALBION W. TOURGEE

AUTHOR OF "A FOOL'S ERRAND;" "HOT PLOWSHARES;" "BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW;" "FIGS AND THISTLES;" ETC

NEW YORK
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1888

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

To

DR. WILLIAM CHACE,

WHO IS INSEPARABLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE DAYS OF PAIN, WHEN THE PAGES THAT FOLLOW WERE WRITTEN,—TO WHOSE SAGACIOUS KINDNESS AND CHEERFUL PRESENCE, RATHER THAN TO THE DRUGS AND SIMPLES WHICH ARE USUALLY ACCOUNTED THE PHYSICIAN'S ARMAMENT, IS IN GREAT MEASURE DUE THE FACT THAT THEY WERE WRITTEN AT ALL,—THIS VOLUME IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED.

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BLACK ICE.

CHAPTER I.

IN SITU.

PERCIVAL REYNOLDS, Civil and Mining Engineer, somewhat past forty, fairly well known as an expert in my profession and not altogether unknown in certain scientific lines outside of it; Hester, my wife, a comely matron some years younger, though the struggles that have brought me somewhat of success have given her gray hairs; and Bertha, our daughter, aged thirteen, — these constitute our household. Man-like, I have named myself first—perhaps because social convention has imposed my name as a sort of proprietary stamp on the other members of this agnatic group. Named in the order of their rank the category would be reversed. What is to be is always of more importance than what has been, and in our high-pressure age the future

crowds us to the wall almost before we have lived out half of the allotted span. So, in our family group, the mother's life is being already absorbed by the destiny that lies before the daughter; and as for myself—well, the only rôle that has been discovered which I seem at all fitted to enact is one played solely for their benefit. I do not mean to imply that I am any less selfish than other men—only my selfishness takes this particular form and includes them in its scope.

I am not at all cosmopolitan, and, strange as it may seem to the self-flattering contemners of our American life, have no desire to be. I have felt the pulse of the old world at many points at home and abroad, and studied its various phases as one does the specimens from different strata of a mine in order to judge its extent, character, and the reliability of its output, but I have found nowhere the promise of a better or truer development than that which is taking form in our Western world. In my opinion its especial excellence consists not so much in its resemblance to the old-world life, as in the differences generated by new conditions. The gilding is perhaps somewhat better done abroad—more smoothly laid on, and perhaps better calculated to deceive—

but there is no better workmanship in any line than our life exhibits, and a decidedly lower average both of finish and material.

But if I am not cosmopolitan, neither can I claim a place in the front rank of good Americans, being neither a politician, a philanthropist, nor a reformer. I try to do my duty as a citizen, and never allow a primary to be held in the village without attending and giving my voice for what I think fair and honest in the party to which I belong. If in spite of this the party goes wrong in my judgment, I do my share of scolding, and sometimes refuse it my support at the polls. So, too, while not a philanthropist, I hate an ill-ventilated mine, an unsafe building, or a railroad-bridge built of pot-metal, on a strain-sheet calculated for "prime Bessemer." I do not feel called upon, however, to preach a crusade against even these evils, especially since my great work on the necessity for an inspection and testing of all iron used in such structures, in order to prevent the terrible accidents that occur for lack of such a simple provision, fell unheeded from the press. Of course, being neither a politician nor a philanthropist, I cannot claim to be a reformer. I believe that fair is fair, and think the man both a coward and a

fool who simply sits down and snivels because something goes wrong without doing anything to improve it. So, if the tares get too high in our little corner of the moral vineyard, I am willing to do my part to help tramp them out, and mean to do it whether others help or not. I must confess, however, that I like the good side of humanity better than its evil phases, whether considered individually or collectively, and do not ever feel inclined to organize what might be termed in Western phrase a "round-up" of the shortcomings of others. So I love myself and my household—chiefly, I suppose, because they minister to my vanity—so well that everything I do seems only waste and dross if it does not somehow add to their enjoyment. I have a very cosy corner in my nature for the few I call my friends, a special kindliness for those who are fortunate enough to be my neighbors, and no particular spite against the world in general. So greatly does my regard for humankind depend on proximity, however, that I have often thought that Newton's law of radiation would hardly prove erroneous if applied to me. Though my world is a very narrow one, I know it is but one of an infinite series of confederated realms, self-directing yet mutually in-

terdependent, which make up the sum of our new-world life, and consequently appraise the whole on the basis of the value of a known aliquot part. Thus, I am one of those who believe that, though our American life may be self-sufficient and self-conscious, it is also self-reliant and full of worthy aspiration.

We dwell at Cragholt, a sightly place overlooking the village of Gladesboro, its threshold just two hundred and thirty-nine feet four inches above the low-water mark of the river that flows by the base of the hill on which it stands, and one hundred and ninety-seven and a half feet above the track of the railroad that creeps by on the other side as if dreading the plunge it makes a mile away into the mountain-side.

In the social scale we may be said to occupy a middle place. Measured by that golden rule by which social gradation is always determined by American habit, we are neither rich nor poor. Of what we need we have enough, and of what is not absolutely essential more than many can afford. We are not as rich as I once hoped to be, nor as poor as I have often feared we might be. For myself, I am very democratic. I have usually found a stone-mason better company than a millionaire, and consequently would rather talk with

him. My neighbors call me a "plain man," without any intention to offend. My wife has a good deal of the genuine American feeling that we are "as good as anybody else"—if not a little better. She would be glad to have me pay rather more heed to the conventionalities and recognize a little more fully the sovereignty of what is termed good society. But while Science may find time for an after-dinner cigar and now and then a friend, she is a mortal enemy to dress-coats and satin slippers. While Hester, therefore, fights gallantly for the leadership of our village life, and Bertha goes to the city for some of her accomplishments, my only contribution to the struggle for social precedence is the house I have planned, builded, and half-hidden with masses of contrasted foliage, the broad, finely-graded, well-drained road that winds down the hill to the village streets, and a span of trotters that do not "take anybody's dust" upon the road. The latch-string of Cragholt always hangs out to my friends, but for all forms of fashionable rout I have neither fear nor favor. To reconcile these predilections of mine with the demands of society is the one ever-puzzling problem of Hester's life. A most rigorous sense of duty compels her to see to it that the world

does not forget our existence nor ignore our claim to recognition. At the same time she recognizes the fact that it is essential to modify and adjust her social relations so as to harmonize with my idiosyncrasies. The task is a difficult one, and I am often called upon to admire the exquisite skill with which she makes the web of social duty cover at once the demands of friendship and of fashion. She often yields much and I sometimes a little, so that she is one of the leaders in our circle at Gladesboro, and not altogether unknown in the social life of the great metropolis, while I remain the unconventional recluse of Cragholt, without any serious strain upon the domestic machinery on account of this apparent incongruity. I suppose this very contrast is one of the things that has united us so closely. She is not at all scientifically inclined, though she has mastered something of scientific lore,—just for the sake of enjoying to the full my modest triumphs, I suppose; but I am sure she would not have been exactly happy with a husband who was not a specialist, and equally sure I could never have been half as fond of a wife who insisted on keeping step with me in my own path. So it seems to me, at least; but I cannot think of Hester as anything different from what

she is. If she were anything else, I suppose I should prefer that in the same way.

I should say, in concluding this introduction of our household, that Bertha is what is known as a "spoiled child." She has always had whatever she wished that our means could compass, and curiously enough has never desired anything she ought not to have. So at least *we* think. Perhaps instead of "we" the word should be "I," for, in addition to being indulged to the top of her bent by both parents, she has been specifically and peculiarly spoiled by her father. She has climbed mountains, explored mines, hunted, fished, ridden and driven with me over more of the earth's surface than falls to the lot of many people to see in a lifetime. More than that, she is fond of all the unwomanly things I have taught her to do. She has even taken a fancy to some phases of science, and, accompanied by a great Saint Bernard, has tramped over the whole region about Cragholt in search of specimens for her cabinet, of which she is justly proud. I suppose the tendency is inherited—and probably incurable. In the mean time her education, in the ordinary acceptance of that much-abused term, has been sadly neglected. Thanks in part to her own inclination, she

dances almost as well as she swims, sings almost as well as she whistles, and plays a fair enough accompaniment. When I add that she is a reasonably good shot, sits a saddle as well as a cowboy, and "pulls a good rein" on the road, the list of her accomplishments is well-nigh closed. Of late her mother has deprived me somewhat of her society, and she is now learning to thread the paths of wisdom under the guidance of the teachers in the village school. She is a terrible "tomboy," yet withal a healthy, brave little lady, of whom her father is very proud, and whose faults her mother cannot recount without showing symptoms of like appreciative regard. There was one accomplishment she lacked at the time this story begins, the want of which was a constant grief to me—*she did not skate;* not that there was any mental or physical infirmity that prevented, but just there her mother drew the line, and on it set her foot—a solid though very shapely foot, by the way—with the defiant declaration that her daughter should never learn to propel herself on two bits of polished steel.

Such is our household—poor material enough for romance—just the middle of that life of which the modern masters of the art of story-telling inform us that the heights are not high

enough and the depths not deep enough for romantic contrast. They tell us that fiction is of necessity limited by its sterile commonplaces to laborious self-dissection and elaborated display of the results of morbid mental anatomy. Yet somehow the air about Cragholt seems to be charged with some subtle fluid which has almost convinced me that love is not yet eliminated from our common life. I have even begun to doubt whether self consciousness and indecision are the dominant characteristics of our people, and to question whether pettiness, cowardice, and insincerity are genuinely distinctive phases of the average American character. I am not intimately acquainted with the methods of analysis by which such results have been obtained, but judge that they must be largely reflexive in character, and that the analysts, instead of painting a life which they have seen, have merely given us the shadow of one they have felt: mistaking themselves for types rather than sports of the great life, they think it the real function of art to belittle. Taking men and women as I find them in and about Gladesboro, and subjecting them to fair qualitative tests, I must say I find more and richer streaks of "pay dirt" about them than the new triturating processes appear to yield. For

myself, I must confess I am glad of it, for I had come to think that if the life which is portrayed in our so-called "realistic fiction" is a fair average product of our institutions, the time cannot be far distant when the killing of an American will be no more properly accounted homicide than the drowning of supernumerary puppies.

Of the chain of incidents herein recorded which impressed this conviction still more deeply on my mind, I should probably have remained in ignorance had it not been for the daughter's irrepressible desire to learn the art of self-propulsion along the glassy level laid by the frost's enchantment.

CHAPTER II.

A SLIPPERY SUBJECT.

"DID you get the things I asked you to bring, papa?"

I had returned from a professional tour that had compelled an absence of some months: had been whirled up the hill at Cragholt in the gray of a chill November evening, by the restive trotters who awaited my arrival; had been welcomed with smiles and kisses; had dined and smoked, and was now lying dreamily, stretched at length upon the low wide couch which Hester had insisted upon making a prominent part of our sitting-room furnishing for just such occasions as this. When a husband visits his home but once a quarter, he is sure to be a hero for at least one day after his arrival. I was enjoying this rarest of luxuries. Bertha sat upon a hassock beside me, and Hester occupied a rocker within easy reach of the daughter's hand. The glowing firelight was tempered by an intervening screen. The astral sent its softened glow

to tinge the steely locks that clustered in abundance about Hester's brow. Bertha's eyes sparkled, and her mother's cheek was tinged with the warm glow of happiness. They were burning incense at the shrine of their love. Who would not be a god? And being a god *pro tempore*, who that has human instincts would not tease his worshipers? So I paid no heed to the query until it was repeated, and then answered in tones of assumed reproach:

"Have I brought all the things you wished me to get? Well, I declare! that is a pleasant greeting to give a parent whose wanderings have spanned a continent since you saw him last, before he has had his wonted after-dinner nap at home. One would think it was the presents you ran to greet when you heard my step in the hall instead of the tired home-comer. Nay, you need not throw your arms about my neck, put up your soft lips to be kissed, or glance with eyes of arch entreaty at me. I am not to be pacified in that manner. I am not only insulted for myself, but for the kindly saint who ought justly to be allowed to manage all such proceedings for himself, especially at this time of year. It is clearly an abuse of his privilege for a young lady to write to her papa and even suggest that

the multiformed old Myth who has by dint of much brain-sweat been worked over into a sort of hybrid Christian gnome does not understand his business. But you are perhaps excusable, for I am sure he would never have thought of bringing such a heterogeneous mass of absurdly unfeminine things to a young lady.

"You are not a young lady? Hoity-toity, my blessed bantling! Sits the wind in that quarter, then? You are not a young lady, eh? And pray how long will your bald-headed papa, and the placid-faced gray-haired mamma who sits yonder in the shadow of the screen, and who has long ago surrendered not only at discretion, but all her discretion, to the one revised and enlarged second edition of herself which circulates unbound—just wrapped in rose-tinted vellum,—how long shall we have to wait before we can speak of this tyrant of the household as a young lady, without offending the dignity of fast-receding childhood?

"Till you are sweet sixteen?—A matter of three years! No, you need not seek to wheedle me with snatches of an old song. I know your ways and wiles too well. The very mention of that magic time wakens the dream of unconscious womanhood in your young heart. No, you can-

not deceive me. The transition invisible to other eyes already shows itself to the paternal vision. Your mother cannot forget the babe that smiled up into her face, unconscious of the anxious yearning with which she sought an answering love-light, only a few short years ago. She has not noted, as I have, the fact that your ear sometimes catches the melodies of that siren who wooes us onward with alluring strains until we have passed the isle of hope, and then sends after us down the stream of time the discordant notes that tell of blighted dreams. She does not see the shadows that flit before your half-shut lids, nor realize that to you the sunset glow is full of visions of the morrow's joy. Already your unconscious feet feel the music of the weird pipers, and are longing to thread the mystic mazes of life's fateful dance.

"Aye, bound away—and in the twilight of the winter day, up and down the dim-lighted room, in and out among the shadows with which memory peoples it, trace, if you will, with fleet and noiseless steps the wondrous figures of that old Morisco dance which unites the dreamy, sensuous languor of Andalusian twilight with the prophetic sadness of oriental allegory.

"I see your white, arched neck and willowy

arms waving in the dim firelight, as you weave the endless web which hides and tells the mystery of life, with all the grace of the healthy child, but yet with a nameless hint of coming womanhood. Aye, that is it: clasp your white hands above your head, bend your dreamy half-regretful eyes upon me, and steal noiselessly away again into the gloom that lies beyond the flickering firelight. It is the very picture of life. The time is nigh at hand when mind and memory—the habit of a past hallowed with remembered joys—may incline you backwards towards us who sit in the gloaming, beside the embers of life's sacrificial fire, watching your departure. Ah, then perhaps the white hands will be wrung in an agony of dread and doubt. The half-unwilling limbs will shrink from the dim unknown that lies before; memory will seek to bind you fast to the old home-love, but another love, imperious and irresistible, clutching your very heart-strings, will draw you away—away adown the valley into the brightness of a new life, while the old one sinks into the shadows, living only in your memory, backward glancing now and then; becoming dim tradition to your children, and then forever hidden in the rayless night that shrouds the past.

"Of all this, thank God, you know nothing,

and never will until you stand where we do to-night and look forward to some new life that springs from yours. You do not know that in this weird measure, which is meant to tell the story of life, which some sad-eyed interpreter of destiny must have wrought out of dreaming fancies such as mine to-night,—you are but preening your wings for that flight which will take you far beyond sight, almost beyond memory of the home nest. It is only a delicious impulse to you now—an impulse that stirs to rhythm and motion—that fills the future with visions too vague for words, yet thrilling nerve and fiber with unrestful yearning. The future even now is beckoning to you out of the darkness. I see the shadow that creeps over the mother's sweet face as she calls out of the shaded nook where she sits, and, with a touch of unconscious pain in her voice, bids you cease the allegory which your lithe limbs are tracing all too truthfully for our eyes which pierce the shadows veiling the pathway before your feet—feet that already yearn for the journey of life, careless of its flinty path and weary burdens."

So I spoke to my daughter Bertha or thought to myself,—hardly knowing what was spoken or how much was reverie. As I always came

through the metropolis on my return, after the frequent absences made necessary by my professional labors, I had become a sort of intermittent gift-purveyor to my young daughter, who understood very thoroughly the plastic nature of a father's heart on his way home. On this occasion she was all impatience to ascertain whether I had performed certain commissions which she had transmitted to me in the imperious prose which modern childhood is apt to employ in addressing the errant parent. I had received her letter in New York a few days before, and had derived no little amusement from its queerly conglomerate character. No sooner, therefore, did her mother's voice recall her from her saltatory dream than she perched again with a bound upon the couch beside me and renewed her importunity with lavish endearments and unlimited caresses. So the pretty warfare of entreaty and avoidance was renewed.

"Well, now, my dear, that *was* an assortment you ordered," I continued. "Did you think I was going to buy out a hardware store for your benefit?"

"I hope you did not ask your father to get you any skates, Bertha," said the matron on the other side of the fireplace, with a tone betraying

a decided disapproval of those bits of slippery steel.

"Why, my dear," I hastened to say, "should you suppose that she would desire so absurd a thing? She only ordered a boy's knife with a big blade and a tool-box in the handle, a scroll-saw, a turning-lathe, a set of implements for *repoussé* work, and a few other pieces of feminine machinery."

"Well, I must say, husband," exclaimed the lady of the house, severely, "I do hope you did not get her any of those things. You must see that you are simply ruining the child. Here she is, nearly thirteen, and has hardly been at school at all. It is a perfect disgrace. I feel thoroughly ashamed every time I see a page of her writing to think that a child of mine should misspell even the commonest words at that age."

"Oh, not quite so bad as that," I laughed.

"Well, pretty nearly," my wife responded with that suppressed energy a woman gives her words when she has determined not to recede farther no matter what may be said.

"Oh no," I continued, in amused remonstrance, knowing very well where the oft-fought battle would end. The fact is that, half against the mother's wish, sometimes I fear from a mere

spirit of mischief, and again from an earnest conviction that a sound body was the prime prerequisite not only for a healthy mind but for a really deserving soul, I had managed to make our one child just as much of a "tomboy" as her mother's vigilance would allow. As a result of this the sun and air, mountain and plain, had given her strength, vitality, an irrepressible love for nature, and a fondness for certain branches of knowledge so far out of the usual range of girlish accomplishment as to seem to her mother almost to enhance the lack of the ordinary school training, which has become so habitual to our American life that any departure from its routine comes to be looked upon almost as a crime.

"Not so bad as that, my dear," I repeated. "You know she has some rather unusual acquirements for her age."

"Yes, I should think she had," came somewhat decisively from the maternal lips; "such as—"

"Such as the progress she has made in botany and entomology," I said, interrupting. "You know she has one of the finest collections of the *Coleoptera* in the country, and I really think that her cabinet of *Arachnidæ* contains absolutely every variety to be found in this region."

"I know that she is always tramping about

the fields, wet or dry, hot or cold, at almost any time of day or night, and all alone, too, unless you happen to be with her."

"O, mamma, I always take Pedro," ejaculated Bertha.

"You mean he always goes with you," returned the good wife, almost tartly. "I think it would make small difference to you whether he went or not, so long as you could find flies and bugs and spiders, or even toads and snakes, to bring home!"

"Why, mamma, I never brought home but one snake, and that was such a pretty little fellow, I am sure he would not hurt any one. Indeed, he could not, for I asked papa what it was, and when I looked it up I found that the whole species was entirely harmless."

"Besides," I added, anxious to make a diversion, "you know she can ride and row and shoot, besides being—"

"My dear husband," interrupted my wife, "is not that enough? Only think what a list of accomplishments for a Di Vernon. Would you have our child grow up a veritable Lady Gay Spanker, and a blue-stocking beside? For me, I must say, Mr. Reynolds, that I think one scientist and one sportsman in the family is enough as long as it contains but one man, and I do wish you would

second my efforts to have our daughter study those things that are most necessary for a lady to know."

"I quite agree with you, my dear," I replied; "and now that she has arrived at an age when the confinement of school is not likely to do her harm, I am sincerely desirous that she should acquire all those accomplishments which befit the station of the gentlewoman."

"I am sure I am glad to hear you say so," was the mollified reply, though there was a keen glance in my direction, which I could just catch by the firelight, to see if I was in earnest; for though on the whole, as I believe, a contented and happy woman, I must confess that the wife of Percival Reynolds, "Civil and Mining Engineer," had somehow a vague suspicion that her amiable and submissive spouse was prone to jesting at her expense. She was evidently satisfied with her inspection, and a glow of justifiable pride passed over her comely countenance as I added blandly:

"Indeed, my dear, I am especially anxious that she should possess all those accomplishments for which you are so justly noted and which we have proved contribute so much to the happiness of domestic life."

"Well," she responded meditatively, lifting the

needle she had just knitted out, and resting its point exactly in the dimple which adorned her comely chin, "you know I have been very anxious about Bertha. It is true her health is good and the life she has led has given her a fine constitution. I don't object to her riding or rowing, or even hunting and fishing, now and then. I will admit, too, that she has learned many things that it is well enough for her to know, but you cannot deny that she is a shocking bad schólar."

"Why, my dear," I interposed with mild remonstrance, "I am sure she is not behind any of her associates in general intelligence. Her reading is really quite extensive and, I must say, of a very sound and healthy character. I doubt if even her mother was so well informed on general literature and current events, at her age; and when it comes to natural history and geology—"

"O, bother natural history and geology, Percy!" (my wife always calls me Percy when she wishes to be especially affectionate or is afflicted with a sort of sub-acid tartness of temper), "you know very well what I mean!"

"But I understood you to intimate that she was unusually dull and backward, while you know very well that Professor Trilobus, who is a man eminent in his profession throughout Europe as

well as America, says that he has rarely met with a more enthusiastic and promising student than this same tomboy daughter of ours."

"Professor Trilobus is well enough in his way, Percy," said my wife, blandly, "and I am glad that Bertha has deserved his praise; but you know a woman cannot be a mere scientist like a man!"

"Why not, my dear?"

"Why not? O, Percy, there is society, you know. Up to a dozen years old, or so, tomboys are well enough, but after that they are simply horrible."

"Of course, as she grows older she will become more absorbed in what interests her; and so long as she does not become an artist nor an author, it seems to me there is little danger of her ever regretting a life that brings her so close to nature's heart."

"But here she is, thirteen years old, Percy, and is yet a poor arithmetician, has never looked into Algebra, cannot construe a sentence of Latin, and, thanks to your encouragement, scouts the idea of studying English grammar at all."

"For all of which mercies let us be duly thankful," I piously ejaculated.

"Now Percy," said Mrs. Reynolds, reproach-

fully, "this will not do. You said a little while ago that you wished her to resemble me."

"In that I was most sincere," I answered earnestly. "Go to your mamma, dear, and promise her that you will learn to grow more like her every day you live."

This was an appeal that could not be resisted; and as the graceful girl stooped over and kissed the fair brow, I saw a flush of pride upon the matronly cheek, and the next instant they were locked in each other's arms.

"You must let her study what her mamma studied at her age, then," she said, as she held her daughter close and glanced at me in arch triumph.

"I would not have her omit a single accomplishment," I answered, "and in proof of that let me show you what I have brought her that she may begin without delay to follow in your footsteps."

I left the room to get a package from my gripsack; and when I returned, the lamps were lighted, the curtains drawn, and only the steady beating of the snow upon the panes told that the storm was abroad upon the hills. It was a month yet to the holidays, but the winter had set in early, and we had the prospect of abundant

sleighing even for the Thanksgiving which I had hastened home to enjoy, where only a man with a heart in his bosom is really able to affect a gratitude not unmixed with discordant murmurings. I handed a carefully-wrapped parcel to my daughter, and resumed my seat. My wife eyed me narrowly, I thought, even suspiciously, while Bertha went to the centre-table to untie the knotted cords.

"Here," I remarked carelessly, "is the knife you wanted;" and I handed her one of those formidable jack-knives which are the delight of every boy-tinker's heart.

"O, thank you," said Bertha, with careless sincerity as she opened the knife with all a boy's handiness, snapping back the blade with her thumb, and thrusting it deftly under the knotted cords. There was a series of quick, sharp cuts, a crackling of torn paper, the rattle of falling steel, and then a pair of soft arms were flung about my neck and kisses were rained upon my face, while a delighted voice exclaimed in shrill staccato, between the resounding smacks:

"O! You! Dear! Old! Pop!"

Now I am sensitive about my age. I am painfully aware that the unprotected condition of the most elevated portion of my cranium induces

the impression in the mind of the casual observer that I am fast approaching the sere and yellow leaf, but I never allow even the most playful allusion to that unpleasant fact. When, therefore, my oldest and youngest was guilty of this irreverence, I immediately started to my feet, and in so doing found myself face to face with the wife of my bosom, who held in each outstretched hand a shining nickel-plated instrument, while she gazed first at them and then at me with a face pallid with incredulous horror.

"Per—ci—val—Reynolds!" she exclaimed at length in tones that would have lifted my hair as quickly as an Apache's knife if time had not been beforehand with it, "what—have—you—done?"

"Whatever may become a civil and mining engineer, madam," I answered stoutly; "who dares do more is none."

I was good at amateur theatricals in my younger days, and I fancy I threw a good deal of tragical force into my voice on that critical occasion. I remembered the stage direction too, and crossed from R. to L. with a stride that would have done honor to the leggiest "hero of an hour" that ever donned the buskin. The effect on the audience was nothing less than "im-

mense." My daughter, who had slid from my lap to the floor when I arose, put her hands to her sides and gave way to her feelings in shrieks that rang above the storm,

> As loud as ocean birds,
> Or female ranter moved to preach.

Upon her mother, this evidently unlooked-for display of histrionic talent seemed to have a no less remarkable effect. Her face lost its pallid hue, her form its rigidity; a smile spread over her full-orbed visage; tears sprang to her eyes. Her limbs bent beneath her, and a deep-seated armchair received her ample form. Then the tears flowed over her matronly cheeks, and irrepressible laughter rippled musically between her teeth, which, even under such trying exposure, really looked quite as well as those which in my younger days I had more than once described as pearls without suffering conscientious twinges for any lack of scientific accuracy.

When the applause had somewhat subsided, I bowed my appreciative thanks, and would have gracefully backed off the stage had not the glowing grate behind warned me that I must

hold my ground. I resolved, therefore, to risk an encore in the hope that some fortunate accident would give me an opportunity to escape by the wing.

"Oh, Percy, Percy, how could you do it?" at length exclaimed my wife, wiping away her tears and striving to compose herself after this outburst of admiration. "How—could—you—do—it?"

"Genius, madam," I replied, bowing humbly in appreciation of this compliment, and touching my brow lightly but suggestively with the forefinger of my left hand—"Genius is always unable to define its methods!"

This evoked another round of applause, during which I skillfully made my exit by edging around the screen; and throwing myself upon the lounge, I sought for that repose which my throbbing and overwrought brain required. I thought the struggle was ended, and that after two years of persistent endeavor I had finally conquered for my daughter the privilege of wearing that pair of harmless nickel-plated beauties, as bright and cold as the ice they were designed to cut, but which would make the lithe-limbed darling as fleet as wing-footed Mercury, when once trained to their use. I had counted,

however, without my host, or rather without my hostess. Hardly had I time to simulate a snore when I heard her voice, this time full of real tears and tender reproach, as she exclaimed:

"Oh, Percy, how could you?"

There was no longer room for laughter or dissembling. I sprang up, and in an instant was kneeling by her side. I drew her head upon my shoulder, and her sobs pierced my heart. Bertha snatched away the skates, and throwing them under the piano, clasped her mother in her arms and exclaimed:

"Oh, mamma, don't—please don't. I will never wear them, indeed I will not—not once!"

After some moments my wife recovered her composure. Then looking at me tenderly but reproachfully, she asked, with a smile quivering about her lips:

"Why did you do it, Percy?"

And I answered earnestly and solemnly:

"Because, my love, I wished your daughter *to follow in your footsteps.*"

Her smile grew softer, but a shudder passed through her frame as she said:

"You should not take advantage of my weakness, Percy. Besides, you know your promise."

She shook her head sadly, and looked at me

with yet deeper reproach. The child gazed from one to the other in grieved surprise.

"What promise do you refer to, my dear?" I asked in my tenderest tones.

"You know very well, Percy," she replied, and the tears began to flow afresh. "I would not have minded but—but for that. I—I—had thought of getting her a pair for Christmas myself, but I did not dream you would break *such* a promise." It was evident that she did not wish her own beneficence to be forestalled. As usual, I had made a blunder; but I knew that it would not do to admit it. I must at least capitulate only on honorable terms. So I stood on my defense.

"Really, my dear," I repeated solemnly, "I do not know of any promise that I have broken."

"Oh dear," sobbed Bertha, "I wish I had never seen any skates! Papa, what made you get them if you knew it would so distress mamma?"

"I am sure I had no notion it would have any such effect upon her."

"Percival Reynolds!" exclaimed the partner of my joys. "Did you not promise solemnly, upon the honor of a gentleman, that you would never teach or encourage a child of mine to skate?"

She threw back her head defiantly, and eyed

me with a look of angry rebuke. But I was equal to the emergency. Again my histrionic talent stood me in good stead, and I replied, in a voice as hollow as that of the ghost in Hamlet:

"My dear wife, I do not remember ever to have made such promise."

"What!" she exclaimed, starting away from my embracing arm, and looking angrily down upon me. "Do you mean to say that you have forgotten the only promise I ever exacted from you?"

"Not at all, madam," I replied with dignity. "I remember every word of it."

"Will you be good enough, then, to tell me what it was, sir?" she asked, with freezing formality.

"Certainly, my dear. I promised on the word and honor of a gentleman, and sealed it upon your fair lips, that I would never teach nor encourage any *boy* of yours to skate; but I submit to your good sense, my dear, that such promise could not include our *tomboy!*"

CHAPTER III.

A RUGGED ESCULAPIAN.

THERE was an interval of very eloquent silence after my last remark. Bertha and I were waiting in unconcealed anxiety to know whether the eclipse of the central luminary of our little household was to be partial, annular, or total. If partial, we knew from experience that it would last hardly a moment; but if annular, so as to embrace all within the circumference of the wedding-ring, or total, so as to becloud our entire little home-world, we had no idea what might not be the period of its duration. In fact, we had never seen such an eclipse. For me, I had been in mortal terror of such a phenomenon during all the years of my married life. More than once there had been a vague hint thrown out by some of the most considerate and thoughtful of my kin-in-law to the effect that my better half was descended from a family renowned through many generations for a pecu-

liarly relentless and undying steadfastness of purpose which was chiefly manifested in the indomitable fervor of their wrath. I had been kindly forewarned by these considerate affinities that if once her anger was aroused, the night of her displeasure would know no ray of light until its shadow merged in the oblivion that broods above the tomb. I cannot say that I entirely agreed with these well-meaning monitors in the apprehension that they expressed, or gave full credence to certain hints of like character which had fallen from the lips of my *cara sposa*, even so far back as our courting days. I had, however, unbounded confidence in my own ability as a tease, and remembered very distinctly my grandmother's oft-repeated declaration that I had "a most winning way of making people angry;" so that, despite my incredulity as to her inherent obstinacy and my exalted faith in her forbearance, I had a lingering apprehension that the dreaded evil might yet befall.

It was, therefore, with no little relief that I saw the lowered brows begin to quiver and the sternly-shut mouth sending its corners backward in search of the deepening dimples that adorned her cheeks. I knew at once that the threatened storm was averted, and needed not the confir-

mation of the silvery laugh which followed, the loving touch of her plump fingers upon my unthatched cranium, or the tender tones of her voice to inform me that I had been forgiven for all past offenses, and was at liberty to plan new trials for her unsuspecting temper.

"Oh, Percy," she exclaimed, with a sad sincerity that cut me to the heart, "I think you *will* —kill me—some time."

Terrible as the idea may seem, she had hinted at such a catastrophe more than once before. Though the words were accompanied by a laugh which plainly told that she would prefer that manner of death to any other, yet as I could not regard such an occurrence with any sort of equanimity, it was not to be expected that I would respond less anxiously than I did with the tender inquiry:

"Is it your heart, dear? I am sure it was very inconsiderate of me. I will have Dr. Colton over to examine it in the morning."

Now, unfortunately, Dr. Colton was a pet aversion of my wife's—professionally, I mean; personally I think she counted the grim old physician among her warmest and truest friends. She was a homeopathist, however, and took especial pride in the saving efficacy of the remedies which she

procured in bulk and kept in stock, so as to be ready for that ever-apprehended day, which, thank God, had never yet come, when "some of us might be really sick"—the "us" being composed of the trio already introduced, the household servants and various and sundry wayfarers whom fate or stress of social circumstance might bring beneath our roof.

Sooth to say, these were not few; for though Cragholt was but a modest nook, it was famed far and wide for its elasticity, and no one ever came within the range of its mistress's influence without feeling that a measure of its sweet content was theirs. Yet I think that one of the keenest sorrows of the good lady's life lay in the fact that no one had yet fallen ill enough to make any serious drain upon the close-stoppered minim bottles of her medicine-case, or demand the presence of Dr. Landis, a sleek and slender young man,

> "Equipped with sugar-pills and thirtieth dilution,
> The host of human ills to scatter in confusion,"

whose card adorned a door in the most fashionable quarter of the neighboring metropolis, from whom she purchased her medical supplies and patronizingly referred to as *her* family physician.

On the contrary, Dr. Ebenezer Colton, who was *my* doctor and lived in the village almost under the eaves of Cragholt, was of the tough and rugged "old school" who mean business when they start on the trail of disease. He was getting on towards seventy, but was one of those men who would never be any older if he lived to be a hundred, and who had been growing younger in spirit every day since he had crossed life's meridian. He had lived in the village all his life, where his father had been a practitioner before him; and counted every new-comer in the vicinity only another of a great family whose ailments he might some day be called upon to soothe or subdue. So he had come to watch the habits and characteristics of them all in order that when the day came he might be equipped for the conflict. It needed but one glance at his keen gray eye that hid away under his bushy brows, and the myriad of little wrinkles in which the cavities were framed, to tell how keen and shrewd an observer he was.

He was a thrifty, well-to-do man, who had been content with the steady income of his professional labor and had never been tempted into speculation. A railroad that had crossed his patrimony, and some manufacturing enterprises that

had established themselves upon the river bank, had enhanced the value of his lots, and he had been able to settle comfortably in life a family too sturdy and enterprising to remain in sight of the home-nest. So the doctor and his wife, with now and then a grandchild or two, constituted the family of the old weather-beaten house, which stood just far enough up the hill to overlook the village. It was full of warmth and comfort, but the good couple would never permit its interior arrangements to be changed, or anything more done to modify its exterior than to give it at long intervals a fresh coat of paint. Even this had not been done for many years, by reason of which the owner facetiously declared that he found his mansion at length to be in the very height of fashion, needing no artistic aid to give it the guise of age.

He was not a lady's man, nor one calculated to find favor in the sight of those who account disease a luxury. His splashed and battered buggy comported well with his somewhat careless dress, and a casual observer would have said that neither the doctor nor his hired man gave much attention to his turnout. One who looked closer would have seen, however, that the plain, black harness was always soft and well

oiled, and that the horse he drove had all the points of a well-bred roadster. Those who knew him, too, understood perfectly well that the seemingly careless driver who jogged about the town and over the neighboring hills so leisurely during the summer days, had a hand of iron upon the rein, and drove like Jehu through wind and storm whenever humanity uttered an emergent call for aid. There were many fine steppers belonging to the wealthy men who had builded their summer homes upon the hillsides, but not one among them ever cared to try a second time to pass the old doctor with his uncouth rig and unclipped Hambletonian on the river road.

So, too, one who had judged him intellectually and professionally by his externals would have made a sad mistake. The battered silk hat and heavy buckskin driving-gloves which he wore summer and winter, together with the fact that he was an inveterate chewer of tobacco, which he masticated with the utmost industry though without the usual salivatory accompaniment, did not at first sight produce a favorable impression. When, however, he had removed his heavy glove and you had shaken the firm, white hand, listened to the sharp, cleanly-enunciated syllables

that came in clear, calm tones, watched the play of his thin, mobile lips, and caught the flash of his keen eye, you became at once aware that he was a man of thought and character. He was more than that, too: he was a man of the ripest culture. Rusty as he looked, he stood in his profession abreast with the newest thought. Not an instrument, a process, or a theory came to the surface in the healing art that he did not master its principles and application, and decide for himself upon its scope and value. Among his brethren of the vicinity he was an authority hardly second in many respects to the highest lights of the great metropolis, and the name of Ebenezer Colton was honorably known, through many a clear and pungent monograph, to every well-read physician in the land.

He had found time also to look into many an unexpected nook of our literature, and had read, with a care and appreciativeness few would have expected from him, the standards of style and excellence in more than one language. Upon all subjects of which he had thought or read he was sure to have his own ideas, which he expressed with keen and idiomatic pungency. His words were often as caustic as his remedies, and he hesitated no more to lacerate the slug-

gish brain, or excoriate the dormant conscience, than to blister the torpid membrane. He knew very well the triple nature of humanity, and realized the mutual interdependence of body, brain, and soul. So, too, he looked at the present always in the light of the past, and never forgot its relation to the future. To him the living man was only a link between a generation that has passed away and one which has not yet matured. When he studied To-day he had always in his memory Yesterday, and in his hope To-morrow.

As I said, my wife has—or professes to have—a strong antipathy for Dr. Colton, professionally. He not only laughs to scorn—and his laugh is sometimes very scornful—the minim doses and infinitely diluted "potencies" that fill her pretty little Russia leather pocket-case, but he has an irrepressible contempt of that tendency to the use of so-called specifics which is almost sure to get a strong hold upon the heart of a devoted wife and mother. He is wonderfully inclined to "throw physic to the dogs" and seek his remedy in air and sunshine, silence, repose, or change of occupation. To one who yearns for an opportunity to do nature's work for her, such a man is peculiarly aggravating. Especially is this true

when he has a horror of humbug and despises subterfuge—when he insists upon recognizing intangible forces as recuperative agencies, and scorns the innocuous pellets that are so often given to console with the thought that something is being done rather than with any purpose to heal.

I could hardly blame my wife for her antipathy to the restless, keen-eyed old Æsculapius who trampled on her pet notions with such a sublime disregard of her most cherished fancies. I remembered well when he first entered the house in a professional capacity. Long before that he had found his way there as a friend, and many a rare hour had I enjoyed with him in the library before I ever thought of him as a physician. The time came, however, when Nature demanded at my hands the penalty of outraged law. Years of unremitting labor had been capped with some months of peculiarly exhausting toil. Ambition had led me to undertake a task all too severe for mind and body. I had sought to grow rich beyond the need of daily exertion by attempting to crowd the work of years into months, the anxiety of a century into a decade. When the crisis came I returned home stricken in every nerve. The weary brain throbbed with

dull agony. The spectres of dim, faded hopes thronged my unresting mind. Every flaccid muscle was animate with pain. Just at the base of the brain there rested a dull, heavy sensation that bowed my head forward, while the aching spine seemed to rebel at the very thought of bearing messages demanding action of the weary, dragging limbs. I had crawled home, I hardly knew how, arriving at midnight and climbing wearily to the dark and silent house. Sleep and love I thought would restore me ; but sleep refused to visit my eyelids, and my wife's anxious speculations as to the nature of my ailment and the proper remedy to be applied were by no means soporific in their tendencies.

Despite her anxiety, I believe those half-dozen hours between midnight and sunrise were among the happiest of her life. At last fate had favored her cherished hope. She had at length an opportunity to show how thoroughly she had studied the art of expelling disease from the household. I shall never forget how lovingly she clasped the miniature medicine-chest with its silver clasp, which she carried back and forth, as if to aid in her diagnosis, giving me a dose of sweet particles first out of one bottle and then out of another, turning the little white glo-

bules out in the palm of her hand and counting them with the utmost care, as if the destiny of all mankind depended on one of those infinitesimal bits of crystallized saccharine, until I had sampled the whole array of pellicles, and began upon a course of teaspoonful doses out of minim-charged tumblers of *aqua pura*. She said about a thousand times that she did not know what to do, and asked me as many more whether I had any notion what ailed me. She was at one time unable to decide whether it was small-pox or scarlet fever, and at another wavered for half an hour between neurotic rheumatism and cerebro-spinal meningitis. She prepared hot and cold applications for my head and feet respectively; but could not decide which should be applied to which, and so, to make sure of being half right at least, applied them alternately first to one and then to the other. She prepared a mustard-plaster about half a yard square, which she was sure ought to be applied either to my back or my breast, but fortunately for me she could never determine which. So the dawn came, and I had escaped this torture. Sleep had obstinately kept aloof from my couch; the little resisting power I had left had been exhausted, and I was almost ready to wish that the worst

of the dear woman's diagnoses might prove true, and the swiftest form of fell disease take me beyond the jurisdiction of the imp who dwelt within the Russia leather case, and his fellow who danced about among the pages of "The Family Physician." As for my anxious watcher, though sustained by an unfaltering confidence that if her remedies did no good they could do no harm, she was so alarmed at the sight of my face by daylight, and my continued restlessness and groanings, that she hurried a servant off for Dr. Colton, who she thought might be able to keep me alive until the great homeopathic light, Dr. Landis, could be brought down from the city to effect my cure.

I shall never forget the conversation I overheard that morning between the old physician and my feverish, frightened nurse of the night. The portière was drawn across the door and the curtain carefully pulled down to exclude the light, in the hope that I might sleep. Indeed, I must have fallen into a doze from which I was waked by the cool even tones of the physician coming from the little sitting-room without.

"Ah, good-morning, Mrs. Reynolds," I heard him say. "Is your husband ill?"

"Well, yes, doctor," with doubtful hesitancy.

"You see, Dr. Landis is our family physician, but Percy is so bad—"

"Exactly—exactly," said the old man with a little tartness in his tone, caused, I have no doubt, by the mention of Dr. Landis's name; "been expecting it for some time."

"Expecting what?" asked the wife in surprise.

"Your husband's sickness, ma'am. When did he reach home?"

"About midnight."

"Thoroughly done out, I suppose?"

"O, not at all, doctor; not at all. You don't understand his symptoms. He seems very strong and active; cannot sleep at all, and is evidently suffering from some acute and, I fear, contagious malady."

Then followed a recital of all that the dear woman had observed and concluded, done and thought of doing, during the night, ending with the consolatory statement that the remedies she had prescribed being homeopathic could do no harm.

"Exactly," responded the doctor in clear and sharp tones; "that is the prime merit of the homeopathic system.

"Your friends will have this solace, when in the grave you lie:
The doctor didn't kill you—*he merely let you die!*"

I think his joke was the first thing that did me any good. I actually chuckled when I heard it; though I have not dared to let my wife know that I was eavesdropping, to this day.

Well, I did not mean to tell the story of my little siege of sickness. It is hardly worth mentioning, though it was a good many months before I was able to attend to my affairs again, and by that time they needed very little attention from any one. The doctor came in firmly and naturally; threw up the curtain; opened the shutter; looked at me keenly, as he held my hand for a moment, and then said, with a severe look upon his face:

"Humph! Just as I expected—just as I expected. Trying to discount your life and outwit the Lord. Found you couldn't do it, too. Glad of it—glad of it. Teach you a little sense, perhaps."

Then came a series of short, sharp questions eliciting full information as to my life and occupations for a year before, and a few brief but pertinent inquiries as to my physical symptoms during the past few days, and my present sensations. To all these my wife listened with equanimity, but her surprise was hardly less than anger when the doctor said:

"I don't know anything that will do you quite

as much good as a sound pommeling. You ought to have had one that would have laid you up before you reached the end of your tether, but I believe I will just give you a moderate one now. If it does not have the desired effect, I can bring a mortar and bray you thoroughly next time."

He took off his coat as he spoke, turned up his wristbands, and, removing the clothing, proceeded to belabor me with the palms of his hands up and down the spinal column, not lightly and pettingly as in what is known as the "massage treatment," but sturdily and lustily, with blows that resounded through the house and shook my whole frame with their severity. The skin burned and my flesh tingled under the heavy strokes; and as he went up on one side of the spinal column and down the other, it seemed as if each blow would dislocate a rib. Yet what a comfort there was in it! The pain at the base of the cerebellum was forgotten; the weariness and weakness left the spine; the dull limbs rested quietly; the shadows departed from my brain: and when the doctor had thrown up the window, —though it was wintry cold without,—compelled me to take twenty of the deepest possible respirations, timing each by his watch, given me a

powder and a glass of water, and thrown the bed-clothes over my shoulders, I was asleep. I learned afterwards that when my wife asked, as he was leaving the house, what medicine he would prescribe pending Dr. Landis's arrival, he had turned upon her sharply and said: "Madam, if you wish your husband to live, you will keep the door of his room shut, never opening it except to give him food, should he desire it on awaking, until my return. Do not let any noise come to his ear; and if the quack you have named should show his face upon the hill, set the dog on him. Your husband needs but three things—silence, sustenance, and sense, but he needs them very badly. If you will look after the first two, I will supply the third."

It was harsh language to address to a tired and anxious woman; but the doctor was in dead earnest, and had no idea that his earnestness might make him an enemy—or rather, I am afraid, cared but little whether it did or not.

"What shall I give him when he wakes?"

"O, anything he wants except delicacies—say a boiled egg and a piece of toast, a dozen raw oysters, a pound of porter-house steak, a couple of baked potatoes, and a glass of milk, letting him finish up with any little thing he has a liking

for. But don't disturb him if he sleeps all day. I will be up about five o'clock. If he doesn't wake before that time you may just duplicate the order I have given, and I'll breakfast with him and give him a dose of sense at the same time. It will take a great deal of steak and sense to cure that man, Mrs. Reynolds; remember that." He shook his lean white finger at her, flashed his keen eyes from under his bushy brows, and strode off muttering angrily to himself.

His grave manner impressed her even more than his words, I suppose. At any rate, she obeyed his instructions implicitly, and did not send for her fine city physician. I did not wake until the lamps were lighted at evening, and found the old doctor there ready to "breakfast" with me as he had agreed. For weeks there was hardly a day that he did not take at least one meal in my company. Since that time there has always been a wordy warfare between him and my wife, who declares that she would rather die a natural death than meet her fate under his care. It had been my notion, however, that this contention only covered a profound respect on the part of each for the other, as she had more than once been heard to commend to her friends the sagacity and thoroughness of Dr. Colton,

and he has incidentally remarked to me that there are very few women who have sense enough to obey a physician's instructions when they include simply steak and silence. "Indeed," he sometimes adds, "very few are able to understand the meaning of either of those purely medical terms."

At my proposition to have in Dr. Colton, therefore, Mrs. Reynolds resumed her air of freezing dignity and replied:

"I think it quite enough, Percy, that I have asked the doctor and his wife to eat their Thanksgiving dinner with us."

"Ah, indeed," I replied; "that relieves me greatly, as it shows that your heart is all right, after all."

"Oh! oh! oh!"

One should have heard those monosyllables bursting in reproachful staccato from the lips of mother and daughter now joined in an alliance, offensive and defensive, against the so-called head of the house, to understand the scorn they conveyed. This was the invariable greeting which any approach to a pun on my part was sure to receive from them. Under this combined attack I retired again to my lounge, and Bertha, having restored the *entente cordiale* with her mother, be-

gan to make some further inquiry in regard to Thanksgiving.

"Who else are we to have with us, then, mamma?"

"I have invited his grandson, of course—Edgar Colton."

"He is nice," commented Bertha.

"And Professor Hartzel."

"O, he is splendid!" ejaculated my daughter.

Hartzel was a bachelor for whose state of single blessedness no one could reasonably account. He was so fine a fellow that every man was glad to count him a friend, and so witty, gay, and yet tender withal, that many a woman would have liked him for a lover. Why so good a friend should never be a lover none could guess.

"And Mrs. Somers, the teacher of the village school, whom your papa admires so much," continued my wife, with just the faintest trace of meaning in the closing phrase.

"She is real sweet," said Bertha, heartily.

"Aha!" I said to myself. "The wife is going to try her hand at match-making. George Hartzel and Helen Somers, eh? Not a bad pair to begin with, anyhow, to say nothing of my own admiration for the latter, of which she seems hardly to approve. A very well-laid scheme, my dear."

Mrs. Reynolds paused a moment, evidently expecting me to make some remark. I remained silent, however, and she continued, in reply to her daughter's question:

"I have also asked your cousins, Maud and Allie, to come and spend the winter with us, or at least to remain until after the holidays."

"And will they come?" asked Bertha, eagerly.

"They will arrive to-morrow, my dear."

"O, you darling mamma!" exclaimed Bertha as she raised her head from the maternal bosom and kissed her mother's cheek.

"That was like you, Hester," I said, coming forward and laying my hand caressingly upon the soft gray hair, which curled above her fair smooth brow. Perhaps I kissed it, too, for it was worthy of such reverent salutation.

"Thank you, Percy," she said.

Maud and Allie were Bertha's cousins only in the second degree, but they were the orphan daughters of a favorite cousin of mine, and I knew that my wife's invitation was due to a thoughtful remembrance of the widow's needs. If they staid for the winter, it would give us a chance to bestow many unnoted favors on the bright Western girls, and also allow their mother to take a few months of much-needed respite.

I felt very proud of the mistress of Cragholt, at that moment.

"Is that all?" asked Bertha, presently.

"That is seven," answered her mother, thoughtfully; "and with us will make ten at table. Considering everything, I don't know as I ought to ask any more, though we have always had twelve at our Thanksgiving dinner. What do you think, Percy?"

I knew she was thinking of the orphans, and wondering if we ought not to limit our hospitality for their good. We were not rich by any means, and she was accustomed to mingling economy with kindness. Yet I had one friend whom I had arranged in my own mind to invite to the annual home-feast. So I said:

"There is Twining, my dear. He was with us at our first Thanksgiving, and now,—he is alone, you know."

"And his little boy, too," interposed Bertha.

"Yes," said the mistress, tenderly, "he must be very lonely since Mary's death. Well, that makes the twelve, and a very well-assorted company it is. I can see just how I will have them sit at the table. And now, Percy, I want to say a word about what amusement we shall have after the dinner."

"Anything you please, my dear. We shall then be able to declare, 'Fate cannot harm me; I have dined to-day.'"

"That is all very well, Percy; but now that Bertha has grown old enough to take a part in such things—"

"Or the whole, for that matter, my dear," I interjected.

The elder lady paid no attention to this weak attempt at wit, and the younger merely made a threatening gesture in my direction.

"I say," continued my wife, "that, as the mistress of ceremonies on that day, I have decided to restore the old rule, and require of every one a song, a story, or at least a verse."

"Good, good!" shouted Bertha, in an ecstasy of anticipation. "That will be splendid. And, papa," she continued, coming over and leaning her head caressingly upon my shoulder, "you will tell us then why mamma objects to skates, won't you?"

"Bertha," said her mother, severely, "I positively forbid your saying another word upon that subject."

As for me, I made no answer to my daughter's request beyond a shrug of the shoulders, and perhaps the slightest suspicion of a wink.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME FOOLISH NOTIONS.

THERE was still a week before Thanksgiving Day. The cold was unusually severe for the season. The sleighing was good, and ice had already formed upon the river. The country people had begun to revive their recollections of the years that had elapsed since the babyhood of each for like cold seasons and remarkable Novembers. Of course this was pronounced a little the worst they had ever known, though some whose memories went back to that notable year "when the stars fell" recalled the fact of snow in July, of frost every month of the year, and that the brooks were frozen to the very bottoms before December set in.

Bertha was all aglow with the prospect of having her cousins' society for the winter, and of a pleasant company at our little hillside home, which, if it was never quite empty of friends, was yet rarely the scene of any formal festivity. Even the thought of such a modest company as

her mother had proposed made her pulses throb and her eyes sparkle. With womanly prescience and childlike glee combined, she began at once to plan for the entertainment, seeking with thoughtful courtesy to devise something that she might do to enhance the pleasure of each of our expected guests. Naturally the first thing to be considered was the sending of the invitations. Some had already been given and accepted; others had not yet been prepared. Bertha, who is deft with her fingers, and has an artist's love of nature's forms, caught at this opportunity, and at the breakfast-table the next morning exhibited the design of a card which she proposed to illuminate with her own hands, and send to each of our friends as a memento of the day. With some amendment it was approved, and before night one was on its way to John Twining at his lonely rooms in the city, and another had been left at Dr. Colton's. The design was simple, —just an oval space in the middle, with the hint of a waiting table, in and out among the covers being traced the words of invitation. On the left, a snow-laden hemlock drooped over a mountain torrent clogged with ice; on the right appeared the head of a Puritan with hands and eyes upraised. Above the oval were the day

and year; below the waterfall, on the left, the names of the expected guests. The legend which the table bore in quaintly-formed characters was as follows:

To whom these presents may come, ye mistress of Cragholt sendeth greeting, and biddeth to her Thanks-giving feast, if so be they find it to consist with duty and inclination to favor her desire.

Across the scroll formed by the cloth falling over the end of the table her mother traced in firm and even characters the name Hester Page Reynolds. In the lower right-hand corner was inscribed:

Ye rule of ye feast: Every guest shall something do for entertainment of ye others.

Maud and Allie Brownlee, the half-orphaned cousins, arrived the next day as was expected. Their mother had been my favorite cousin in our childhood—a double cousin, in fact, since her father and mother were the brother and sister of mine. But for this fact I think we should have been accounted lovers, so inseparable were we in our younger days. Just before the war of Rebellion she married Arthur Brownlee, a brave-hearted, self-reliant companion of our childhood, and they had moved away past the verge of civil-ization almost, out upon what were then accounted

the desert plains of Kansas. Arthur, as sagacious as he was stout-hearted, in studying the westward course of empire had decided that one of the great ganglia of American life would be located not far from the spot he had pitched upon for his home. So he not only invested all his little means in lands, but contracted for more upon the seemingly easy and fascinating terms which the speculators of the West have devised, of numerous small and long-deferred payments with enormous interest. Fortunately, the first seasons were favorable, and before the war began he was already in advance of the payments required. It was well, indeed, that he was, for the first rumor of conflict brought an incurable disquiet to the heart of Arthur Brownlee. He was a born soldier, bold and resolute, with a body of iron and a hand that seemed made for the saber-hilt. Day after day, month after month, he resisted the impulse, knowing full well the peril to wife and babes that disaster to himself would bring. Month after month the gentle Annie saw the look of care grow deeper and darker in his eyes; watched his brooding, distraught manner; and finally, when the news of a great disaster swept over the land, seeing that it was useless longer to attempt to dissuade, she made a virtue of

necessity, choked down her grief and fear, and putting the little child out of her arms, went and twined them about his neck, saying, without a tear or a hint of tremor in her voice, "Go, my husband."

Looking into her eyes, he caught the spirit of self-sacrifice and unshrinking heroism which lighted them; and while his own flashed back the fire of martial ardor that thrilled his veins, he strained her to his breast, and answered simply, "Thanks." He had waited, uttering no word; she had granted his desire unasked. Domestic duty had constrained his patriotic impulse; wifely love had strengthened her patriotic ardor. He could not bear to think of leaving her to carry on alone the struggle of life. She could not endure to see her husband panting for the conflict, yet bound to his home by a sense of love and duty. It seemed to her a degradation, like the harnessing of a war-horse to the plow. She would not see her husband debased even in his own thought. Come what might, she would not have him live to look back with regret upon that hour. Better a thousandfold that he should die fighting bravely for the flag he loved than live to feel that the land it covered with its shadow suffered scath through his neglect. So Arthur, at the head of

a company of his neighbors, went to the war; and Annie, calling to her side her younger brother, undertook the management of the frontier home.

He did his duty. I need not say more; the official record tells the rest, though indeed it matters little now whether he did his duty or not. Little did he think, when he won his colonel's stars in that desperate charge at Chickamauga, that before his youngest reached the years of womanhood it would be accounted more honorable to have served in the ranks of the nation's foes than to have fought for her preservation. I had not seen him since their removal to the great West. It is hardly surprising, therefore, when one night, while our army was on its "March to the Sea," a gaunt and haggard figure, clad in noisome rags, came to our quarters, and in a weak and trembling voice asked for me, that I did not recognize in him the husband of my favorite cousin.

Why should I tell the story? It is of Thanksgiving that I write, and all these things are long since forgotten. It might harrow up old prejudices if I should call its details to mind, and all our duty now is to forgive and forget— to forgive all evil-doers of that day and time, and to forget that there were any who had no need

of forgiveness. We have revised the judgments of that day, and in the light of riper wisdom have learned that neither side was exactly right, and the one which we then thought radically wrong hardly at all in fault. Perhaps we are scarcely ready to impute all the blame to those who were unfortunate enough to be upon the winning side; but we are quite ready to anathematize every one who attributes any portion of it to our foes. We have learned that both sides were patriotic—especially the other side; and having long since forgiven our enemies, we are now striving earnestly to forgive ourselves. Let me not cloud the dawn of the millennial day with memories of war. A sentence shall suffice.

A year of Andersonville had burned out the vitality even of Arthur Brownlee. We cared for him as tenderly as we might during the rest of the march. Every soldier of the command counted him a brother. After we had swept over the forts at Savannah, we sent him North upon one of the government transports—the easiest and most luxurious passage we could give him then. His brave wife met him in New York and took him back to the prairie home, already the centre of a prosperous community, with the whistle of the locomotive waking the echoes of

the silent plains. His neighbors honored him. For a time there was hope; then the shattered life ebbed slowly away, and in a few short years the wife was left to wage alone the conflict which he had dreaded for her sake.

It is true that her husband's sagacity had lightened the load that rested on the young widow, but it was still a heavy one. She bore it bravely; reared and educated her two daughters, met the obligations which her husband had assumed, and now, that the struggle was over, for the first time showed how weary and difficult it had been.

In all the long years of this struggle, she had had no rest, no luxury. Everything had been sacrificed to secure for her children as far as possible the advantage of their father's foresight. Not an acre had been sold that could by any possibility be redeemed. Unmurmuringly, she endured every deprivation in order to meet the usurious contracts which would have been as nothing had he lived to devise ways and means and take advantage of that flood-tide of prosperity which began at length to pour in upon them. It was over; the day of sharp sacrifice was ended. The future was safe for her children at least, if it held nothing for herself. So Maud and Allie came to us, while she went to that newer, softer

West which wooes the invalid back to health with the warm, sweet breath of perennial spring.

This life of toil and sacrifice had left its impress upon the two fair girls that came that day to Cragholt. Allie, the elder, had been with us for a month or two, some years before. She was the very image of what I remembered her mother to have been—with frank, gray eyes and light, wavy hair that lightened almost to gold when the sunshine kissed it fairly—a brave, saucy creature, with a sort of intellectual audacity that made her delight in speaking her own thoughts with a seeming disregard for consequences, which had induced her mother long before to characterize her "a genuine Reynolds." Maud, the younger, then only sixteen, had her father's dark eyes and his grave, gentle ways, and was inclined to melancholy, perhaps because of the shadow that had rested over her young life. She contrasted with her sister not less in temper than in appearance. Although the younger by two years, she was more sedate and womanly than her slighter and brighter sister.

It was with a sigh of satisfaction that my wife greeted these two girls upon the platform of the station that afternoon. Her one daughter had ceased to afford sufficient scope for her maternal

solicitude, and she had long since given up the task of taking proper care of a husband who was quite as likely to be found on the crest of "the Rockies" as in the bosom of his family. It was absolutely necessary for her peace of mind that somebody should be introduced into the household in whom she might not only take an interest, but over whose well-being she might watch with untiring vigilance. The "Kansas cousins," as we were accustomed to call them, exactly met this requirement. She had the ordinary Eastern notion that Westernism is, in a sense, synonymous with barbarism. She religiously believed that these two unfortunates were in serious need of the civilizing influences of Eastern society—that it was high time they were taken in off the prairies and taught the various paces and graces which, according to her notion, only Eastern refinement could bestow. To her mind they were greatly to be pitied, not merely on account of the hardship which had surrounded their life, not so much for the struggle and self-sacrifice to which they had been accustomed, but because of the supposed lack of an elegance and culture which a moment's thought should have taught her that no hardship could ever crush out of such natures as their mother and father possessed.

She little knew that a knowledge of the free, untrammeled life these very girls had led in their humble Western home had constituted the impulse which had induced me to encourage our daughter in those hoydenish sports which had made her at once the village tomboy and the village favorite. Before the lamps were lighted that night, the mistress of Cragholt learned that her self-imposed task was not to be a light one. The three young girls affiliated so heartily that the whole house was at once instinct with their presence—a presence which, instead of being dependent upon our fostering care, seemed to surround our lives with an atmosphere of innocent mirth and, instead of seeking direction, almost unconsciously shaped our wishes to their wills. It was the first courteous notice of dispossession which the future serves upon the present—To-morrow on To-day.

Next day at luncheon came the doctor to answer in person the invitation he had received. He had just heard of my arrival home, and knowing that I had been in the Western city where one of his sons had settled, rightly judged that I brought intelligence of his welfare.

"Yes," he said in response to Bertha's importunate inquiry, "we are coming, all hands of us.

For the first time in the forty odd years of our married life, the good wife has agreed to shut up the house on Thanksgiving Day and imperil her digestion by eating a dinner that has not been cooked under her supervision."

"O, she can still give directions. Everything shall be as she wishes," my wife hastened to say.

"By no means," said the doctor, remonstrantly. "It is my opinion, individual and professional, that, for once in her life, she ought taste a Thanksgiving dinner of the character and components of which she has not the least hint or prevision. I insist upon that; and I assure you, Mrs. Reynolds, if I learn that the least intimation with regard to the bill of fare or the after-entertainment is in any manner conveyed to her even an hour before the feast, I shall pack her straight off to the city and we will take our Thanksgiving dinner at a hotel."

"But you have not told us about Edgar," said Bertha. "Is he coming, or is he already pledged elsewhere?"

"O, I suppose he'll have to come," said the doctor, shaking his head resignedly. "We could not very well leave him at home, you know, and he is such a sorry dog that I hardly believe he

is acquainted with another household in the village. You don't know the lad?" he asked, turning to me. "He is my son James's oldest boy, who has come to stay with me for the year elapsing between the close of his preparation and entrance to the university, to see if I can make a man of him. You know, it is a fancy of mine that this modern life, which keeps pushing a boy on from the day he leaves the cradle until he finally tumbles into the grave, is a very Moloch, to which we are sacrificing the strength and manhood of future generations. Even when my boys were growing up I saw it coming, though it was nothing to what it is now. Still I held them back; encouraged them to live out of doors, and to fish and hunt, and set their feet flat down on the earth. I was not disappointed in the results, though their mother was sorely afraid they would grow up young savages rather than men fitted for their day and time. Perhaps they did not come on as quickly as they would have done if they had been reared in a different manner; but when they finally got into the fight, they counted for their full weight. I have taken care to impress upon them, in one way and another, the fact that, in my opinion, they owe their success and vigor, in the main,

to the toughening processes of their early life. It was not so much training as the lack of training. So they have all promised me not to send a boy to college until he has had at least one year of opportunity to develop muscle and brain and heart, either by actual roughing it upon the mountains or at sea, or, what is still better, by working steadily and faithfully at some manual avocation."

"And which," I asked laughingly, "do you consider that the boy is doing here? Roughing it among the mountains, I suppose."

"I am not so sure but that is what would have resulted," responded the doctor, "if Edgar had waited for me to make his life for him. The fact is, our boys have been gone from home so long that it was a perfect luxury for Harriet and me to have one around the house. Really I did not know how much I had missed my children until this young fellow came and took possession. We just gave up our lives to him as if he had been a beautiful young demigod come to restore our own lost youth. We lived in him and grew young again. I think we should have humored him in all things, and have unfitted him for any sort of life, if his father had not infused into him my old idea, so that

within a week after his arrival he had already become impatient to know what he was to do during his twelve months of sojourning in the wilderness."

"What did you set him at?" I asked.

"Set him at? Bless you, Reynolds, I didn't have a chance to set him at anything. I simply told him I'd look around; and before I had fairly begun to do so, he started off one morning with a pair of blue overalls under his arm and a dinner-bucket in his hand, down to Smith & Tanner's machine-shop, where I found he had engaged himself for the whole year for next to nothing, on condition that he should be allowed to learn just as many things as he could honestly and fairly pick up. Well, he has been at work there ever since, just as steady as if he was forty instead of twenty; going to the city every Saturday afternoon for a lesson in mechanical drawing, and settling down to the business as if he had nothing before him in life except to be a practical machinist."

"You don't tell me!" I exclaimed, giving the old man's hand a congratulatory shake. "Bring him up by all means. I know of nothing in the world that would give me greater pleasure than to look in the eyes of a young American that is

really determined to learn to do something with his hands. I thought it quite gone out of fashion, and that nobody really mastered a manual occupation in this country now, outside of the making of toys and spectacles or the setting of type, except Germans and Scandinavians."

"Well, well," laughed the doctor, "I admit that Edgar is a *rara avis;* but he is certainly working hard and steadily, and I judge is giving his brain a good healthy rest. I told him he was not to open his books nor look at a sentence of Greek or Latin during the whole year; and from present indications I should say there was little danger of my being disobeyed. Some would consider this a waste of time," said the old man, shaking his head, "but I have observed that our American people have time for everything in the world except for rest and work—real rest and good honest work. The best work that a man can do requires, first of all things, a big reserve of rest. A tired brain, like a half-exhausted battery, may give off bright flashes, but it takes freshly-cleaned plates and sharp biting acids to give a steady flow on the wires. So I have always maintained that the best thing that can be done for a boy who wants to accomplish something—to do the most work, and the best he is capable

of—is to give his brain an absolute rest between the struggle of preparation and the graver task of the college. It seems like wasting time, perhaps, and, so far as any immediate advancement of intellectual preparation is concerned, it may be; but a boy that has been working hard for three or four years, or more probably six or eight, as he must to keep his place in our public schools, is just as much in need of rest as a man who has discharged the duties of an active life for forty years, and is able to get a good deal more profit out of it too."

In this opinion I heartily concurred; but Miss Allie, whose Western notions excluded all idea of the need or value of rest, flatly declared that for her part she did not see how a young man who was fitted for college could content himself in a greasy machine-shop.

"Aye, aye, that is it," said the old doctor; "that's what is the matter with the boys. Of course, we cannot expect them to grow up strong and sturdy hand-workers and brain-workers, capable of doing a soldier's duty, as your father did, Miss Allie, just as long as you young ladies cast your influence on the other side. I declare I don't believe I will let Edgar come here at all. It is bad enough for the lad

to be exposed to such a battery of charms at the best," said the old man, bowing gallantly to the gay trio, "but to come here and be corrupted by such notions as that—"

"O, you must let him come," interposed Bertha.

"Yes, indeed," said Allie, putting her hand familiarly on the old doctor's arm. She had been a favorite with him during her former visit, and knew very well that his grimness was all upon the surface.

"I don't know about it," said he, pulling down his brows and wrinkling up his eyelids. "I don't know about it. The boy's quite contented now, and likely to make a man if he keeps on. If he should hear such heretical notions enforced by your seductive wiles, I might never be able to reduce him to subjection again at all. No, I think he had better bide at home Thanksgiving Day."

"O, we won't hurt him," said Allie, demurely, but with a saucy toss of her head and a flash of her bright eyes that boded ill, I thought, for the young man's peace of mind. "We won't hurt him," she continued, patting the old man's shoulder. "We will put him in Maud's care, and you know Maud is just the properest

young lady that was ever born—west of the Mississippi."

"Why, Allie!" said Maud, with a quick flush mantling her cheeks, as she cast down her eyes.

"There, there, Sis, you needn't say a word. Mamma is not here, and I am going to have just the best time in the world, saying whatever pleases me. As I said, doctor, Maud is the most harmless girl in the world; and as for me, —you know I fell in love with the boy's grandfather two years ago."

"Well, I declare!" said the old doctor. "This is a pretty state of affairs. And you expect me to bring that innocent boy here to be exposed to such blandishments? Not much. I'm not quite sure of myself, even. Gracious! Miss Alice, what do you suppose Mrs. Colton would say to that? Please get my hat, Bertie," he continued, rising hastily. "It's high time I was going. Bring the boy? No, indeed! not for the world!"

"O, doctor!" implored Bertha, "you must not say that. You cannot have your hat nor your over-coat until you take it back. You must let him come; we shall not have any fun at all without him."

"O, I shall have fun enough," said Allie,

glancing saucily at the doctor. "I am to sit by you at the table. Am I not, Aunt Hester?"

"No, indeed, my dear," replied my wife. "I have arranged that matter, and I shall place you —let me see where—O, I shall place you next to Aunt Harriet; she will take care of you."

Allie pouted saucily, and Maud took occasion to offer a word of apology for her elder sister's levity. Bertha was not to be diverted from her purpose, however. She was a pet of the doctor, and accustomed to coax him to do almost anything she wished.

"Now, doctor," she entreated, you *will* let Edgar come, won't you? That's a dear," she continued, holding the old man's hat tantalizingly behind her, and backing away out of his reach as she did so.

"Don't ask me, child—I don't think it safe," replied the doctor, shaking his head with mock solemnity.

"O, I will take care of him," she added, balancing herself upon one foot, and turning her head archly upon the side.

"You! Worse and worse!" said the doctor. "Why, he lost his drawing-lesson only the other day through taking you out skating."

"Skating!" It was my wife who spoke. That was all she said, but it was enough.

The doctor saw at once that he had put his foot in our domestic tranquillity, and thought of nothing but getting himself outside the door. Allie and Maud looked at their auntie in surprise, while Bertha "started like a guilty thing upon a sudden summons," and then stood with her head down awaiting what might come. When the doctor reached for his hat she made no effort to retain it. That worthy lost no time in making his exit, but my wife forgot to return his parting salutation. She sat gazing in stony silence at her errant daughter.

Hardly had the door closed upon the doctor's retreating figure, however, when, despite all attempts on my part to divert her attention, she broke the silence with the horrified exclamation:

"Ber—tha Reynolds! Bertha Reynolds,—*is—this—true?*"

Bertha's head was downcast and her cheeks flushed as she answered:

"Yes, mamma."

"Did you not know that I disapproved of skating?" asked her mother.

"I thought you were afraid to have me skate, mamma," answered Bertha, glancing towards her

mother with tears in her eyes. "I did not know you disapproved of skating or I would not have done it."

"Did you not know," said her mother, somewhat mollified by the child's frankness, but not ready to confess herself conquered—"did you not know that it was a very wrong thing for a girl of your age to go out upon the ice in that way?"

"He said it was perfectly safe."

"He? And who, pray, is '*he*'?"

"Why, Edgar, of course."

"A young gentleman we do not even know."

"Why, I know him, mamma."

"Have you ever been introduced to him, my dear?"

"No, not to say introduced, but I met him out geologizing one day when he first came, and we have been good friends ever since."

"That is what comes of your notions about what a girl may be allowed to do, Percy," said my wife, severely.

"Well, my dear," I answered laughingly, drawing Bertha down upon my lap while I wiped away the tears, "if nothing worse happens to our daughter than making the acquaintance of a young man like Edgar Colton, climbing about

the hills, with a hammer and a bag of specimens over his shoulders, and perhaps a volume of Dana and a magnifying-glass in his pocket, we are not likely to suffer much on her account."

"Oh dear, Percy, I was in hopes that when Maud and Allie came you would at least cease to encourage Bertha in such ridiculous freaks."

"Which do you mean, geologizing or skating?" I innocently inquired.

"O, you know; skating, of course"—with sarcastic emphasis.

"But, my dear," said I, remonstrantly, "it does not strike me as at all ridiculous. The fact is, she was tempted to the river by the sight of others' enjoyment, and naturally wished to share in it. You know, my dear," I added, "a sheet of smooth black ice *is* a temptation, and Bertha is not the first young lady that has gone farther than the river bank to meet a strange young man."

"Now, Percy!" said my wife, reproachfully.

"What *do* you mean, papa," exclaimed Bertha, seeing that her offense was already forgiven. "Did mamma ever skate? Please tell us all about it."

"Yes, do tell us," exclaimed Allie, eagerly;

while even serious-faced Maud drew nearer in expectation of a story.

"Well, my dears," I began prefatorily.

"Now, Percy," interrupted my wife, vehemently, "positively you shall not tell that silly tale!"

"O, please, mamma, let him tell it," said Bertha, springing up and clasping her arms about her mother's neck. "You know we girls want a story awfully; don't we, Allie?"

"Yes, indeed!" responded Allie; adding, for my encouragement, "We haven't had a real good story-telling since Uncle Percy was at our house a year ago; have we, Maud?"

Maud assented, and I could see by the flush stealing over my wife's fair face that she was herself relenting; so of course, like a prudent general, I began to manifest disinclination.

"Hush, my dear," I said, shaking my head solemnly, "you must not ask me. You see how it pains your mamma, and you know I do not wish to say anything that would occasion her discomfort."

"Please let him tell us, mamma; tell him he may," implored the persistent daughter.

"Of course your papa can do just as he

pleases," said my wife, half consentingly. "How should I know what he is going to tell?"

"But why don't you want him to tell anything, Aunt Hester?" inquired Allie. "I am sure it must be something funny or you would not blush about it."

"Pshaw!" said my wife, rising and ringing for the servant to clear away the luncheon, "your uncle can tell you anything he chooses," adding with a meaning emphasis as she passed by me to enter the sitting-room, "*about himself!*"

No sooner had she closed the door behind her than those three girls pounced upon me as if they would tear out my very life. The amount of affectionate importunity that I resisted during the next few minutes was amazing. But I did resist it, simply saying to the persistent trio:

"My dears, you see I cannot. It evidently affects Mrs. Reynolds's nerves too seriously for me to risk telling you a skating story."

"O, papa," entreated Bertha, "is it about mamma? and why doesn't she want it told?"

"Really, my dear," said I, "I cannot answer either of those questions unless she bids me do so; but if you girls will put your heads up close here where I can whisper to you, I will tell you what I *think* is the reason."

Three pearly ears were crowded just as near to my lips as it was possible for them to get. I was tempted to kiss them all, but restrained my inclination, and simply uttered in a ghastly whisper one word: "*Jealousy!*" Then I rose and fled, while they pelted me with blows and reproaches, mocking glances, and cries of "Shame! shame!" pursuing me to the very door of the sitting-room through which I escaped into my wife's presence, where I knew they dared not come with such an accusation.

CHAPTER V.

ADVISED AND ENJOINED.

THANKSGIVING DAY dawned clear and bright. The sharp dry air and round hard pellets of snow which the gusty wind drifted about in default of the autumn leaves unseasonably hidden away from it, reminded one more of January than of November. The sun looked warmly down as if remonstrating at the undue shortening of its reign. The snow upon the roofs melted and formed long, glittering icicles upon the southern eaves. Cragholt for a week had been resonant with the murmur of that preparation which comes in every home where a drop of Puritan blood, actual or imaginary, asserts itself in that one day of mild rejoicing the primitive New-Englander allowed himself, not professedly for his own gratification, but under the specious plea of glorifying God by partaking of the good things of His hand one day in every three hundred and sixty-five without mixing with his pleasure the bitter

waters of Marah. Strange as it may seem, this festival, established, without any attempt to repeat or continue its observance after the first memorable occasion, became, to a people jealous of all religious observances not specially authorized and enjoined by Scripture, almost as distinct a type of the life sprung from New England as the Feast of the Passover is of Israelitish faith.

The village below was early astir. The sleighing, which had been of dubious quality before, was prime that day. This fact gave to the day a more enjoyable and rollicking aspect than American holidays usually display. The ice upon the river, which, till that time, had been smooth and clear, was now unfortunately covered with snow, so that the skaters were obliged to find recreation upon land. The river-road was full of sleighs; the hilly streets alive with coasters. Shouts and laughter and the jingle of bells floated up to us from the valley. The river seemed like a ribbon of white velvet spread between its rugged banks, flecked here and there, where the sun touched its surface, with glowing crystals. Dark rocks and clustered evergreens shone through the mantle of snow. The great black engine drew its train like a wriggling serpent along the opposite bank, sending up a

column of dun vapor where it passed through the shadow, and one of fleecy light where the sunshine crept between the hills and kissed its smoky rings. We heard its angry snort as it fought its way sullenly and stubbornly through the heaped-up drifts, and almost laughed at the petulant, defiant blast with which it dashed into some newly-discovered obstacle, sending a shower of frosty fragments flying from the sides of the giant plow that cleared its path along the icy track. The whistle echoed among the hills, muffled and softened by their covering of snow.

As I watched the train disappear around the base of the mountain about which the river swept, a span of chestnut trotters came into my field of vision around the corner of the house. Not only form and color but the ease and freedom of their movement showed unmistakable traces of their Blue Grass origin. Prancing and curveting, they dashed along the driveway leading from my stable and turned into the winding road that ran from Cragholt down the hillside to the village below. The quaint but harmless antics, and the readiness with which they yielded to restraint, and minced with dainty footsteps down the sharp declivity, attested not only the excellence of their training, but the

firmness of the hands that lay upon the reins. They were my one extravagance—this pair of finely-bred roadsters that always met me at the station and whirled me swiftly up the hillside to the welcoming portal. I hardly knew whether I clung so steadfastly to Cragholt because of my fondness for the trotters, or to the trotters because of my fondness for Cragholt. In fact, the one was always my excuse for the other. If Hester proposed removal to the city, as she sometimes did, the chestnuts clinched the argument against the change, and we still clung to our eyrie. If my friends protested, as they often did, against the hiding away of such equine excellence in a country town, the inaccessibility of Cragholt was a reason that permitted no rejoinder. If the station had not been a good mile away, or our home-nest had not been perched upon a crag offering no trivial task even to the sturdiest mountain-climber, I should have walked back and forth from the train, saying to myself that I could not afford to drive. Having fixed our home in the clouds, however, the means of ascent and descent were of the last importance; and I easily persuaded my prudent spouse, who knew my weakness and was never unmindful of aught that would give

me pleasure, that, in horseflesh at least, the best was always the cheapest and the cheapest never the best. Bayard and Blossom were the outcome of many domestic parleyings and no little self-sacrifice. I do not know just where the thrifty housewife economized to make their purchase possible, but we never felt the expenditure, and after they had once become domesticated at Cragholt would have reduced even our own rations, I think, rather than have parted with them. Fortunately, no such extremity had ever come to us. I thought of it with thankfulness as they dashed by my window that Thanksgiving morn, their sleek coats glistening in the sunshine, and their eyes aglow with suppressed fire that told how the blood bounded through their veins at the prospect of exertion to which the cold-blooded horse must be forced with the lash.

They were a splendid pair. I hope the reader will pardon my enthusiasm, and know that if he loves a horse as the noble animal deserves, he will do it gladly. I do not care much for drygoods and furbelows, and have a sort of contempt for those who would transform our literature into an endless series of mere descriptive catalogues of millinery and haberdashery; but the man or woman who really loves God's works,

and whose eye lights up with appreciation of excellence in their noblest forms, finds always an easy access to my heart, and will, I know, forgive me for taking a neglected and despised way to theirs. We cannot all be tailors and milliners,—more's the pity, perhaps,—and a mining engineer is apt to grow distrustful of appearances, knowing well that the most precious metals are often found in the most unattractive matrices. I had, besides, that personal relation to my pets which enhances a thousand-fold appreciation of such favorites. I had selected them myself one sultry day in May as they browsed before me knee-deep in the tender blue grass on the Kentucky plantation where they were foaled. They were yearlings then; akin both on the side of sire and dam. I bought them against the advice of the best judges, just because they pleased me. The experts declared it to be a foolish thing. Though their pedigree was undoubted and embraced the finest trotting strains, it was asserted that they lacked so many points of excellence that even my preference was for a moment shaken. Just at that instant, as if he read my mind, one of them raised his head from the fresh herbage, glanced inquiringly at me for an instant, and then, followed by the other, came up and

rubbed his black muzzle familiarly against my hand. That settled it. Even the breeder was so impressed with the notion that they would never do anything creditable upon the track that he abated materially from the price he had put upon them. I left them in the hands of the trainer on the plantation where they were foaled, only giving direction that they should be exercised regularly, never treated harshly, and never required to do "fine work."

The result more than justified my expectations, and three years afterwards they came to us playful as kittens and lithe as does. The soft skin showed the play of well-placed muscle. They were dainty creatures who fed as gently as children out of Hester's palm and suffered Bertha's childish caresses without impatience. How proud I was of the lithe, sleek beauties! My friends who had laughed at me for disregarding their wishes admitted freely their mistake. I was urged to allow them to be trained and make a trial of their speed. I did so, and timed them myself from the grand stand. Nay, I even made a small bet on them against time, in order that they might make "a record." They made it handsomely, and I have it framed and hung above my mantel, duly attested by

the signatures of the magnates of the association in whose grounds the trial was made—names so well known in the sporting world that, like the seal of a court, they need no verification. It was not the best record that had been made up to that time, but it was one not to be despised. I suppose I am really prouder of this certificate than of any diploma I have ever won myself. I thought of its words as the pair came snuffing and prancing into view that morning: "Bayard and Blossom, chestnut four-year-olds—Percy Reynolds, owner; in double harness against time, single mile-heat, two minutes twenty-seven and a quarter seconds."

They had done it so easily and steadily that everybody declared they could do much better, and my friends besought me to let them make another trial. But I would not hear of it. From that day they have not left my stable, and the hand of a trainer has never touched them since. They were my pets, my pride. I drove them—I and James, the groom who had come with them from their Kentucky home, and had cared for them ever since they were foals. Only James and I, and little by little, as she grew older, and under careful supervision, my daughter Bertha. My friends said it was an unpardonable ex-

travagance. I knew it, but pleaded that it was my only luxury.

They were of noble lineage, too—of as high descent as kings might boast, tracing their ancestral line even to the stud of the Prophet; yet full of the fresh, free life and nervous energy of the Western world. Types of the noblest of their race, they were matchless of their kind by anything beyond the sea. Like his master, the American thoroughbred is fast becoming a distinct species. Like him, too, the best strains may come from his English prototype, but the air of the Western world has toughened his muscle, stimulated his nerve, and made him distinctive.

How proud I was of them as they passed my window that morning, every muscle quivering with the thrill of the keen winter air, full of that trembling delight with which the high-bred horse welcomes the opportunity for action! I could almost feel the thrill of their pleasant antics. It seemed hardly prudent to trust that bevy of young lives to such a pair, guided by a girl's hands; but I knew Bertha's wrist. I caught the watchfulness of her eye as she threw a quick glance at the window where I stood as they sped by it. Bayard noted even this diversion.

He felt that brief relaxing touch upon the rein. The well-bred trotter is ever jealous of a driver's inattention until he drags himself homewards, tired and steaming after he has done his best, and before the desire has grown again to outdo himself. Even as Bertha turns her eye upon him again Bayard rears, and Blossom, ever ready to second his absurdest motions, follows his example. How the black crests toss upon the breeze! How the red nostrils show in their quivering muzzles, while their slender forelegs beat the air, and they stand for a moment outlined against the snowy slope beyond the river! It is in vain, my beauties! The little lady knows your tricky ways! It is a cool eye that watches you, and a firm hand that presses the grip upon the rein. Steady, now! How finely she brings the rascal down to his place! With what a careless ease she makes him know her power! Perhaps the proudest man in all the world that day was the one who stood gazing out of the library window at Cragholt—Percy Reynolds, Civil and Mining Engineer.

Bertha, who had inherited all my fondness for the horse, was taking her cousins and Bobbie Twining, who had come the night before with his father, for the first real sleigh-ride of the

season. It was a beautiful picture. Bertha and Allie upon the front seat, matching well in color and vivacity; Bertha sitting erect and firm, with the unconscious gracefulness of poise that characterizes the accomplished driver, a fur gauntlet stretched along each rein and moving back and forth with graceful ease, as she restrained the one or the other of the eager steeds. One knew without looking that hand and eye were constantly alert, and, though they might rear and paw the air, the thoroughly trained horses were entirely under her control. Allie's fair hair, falling over her dark habit, was tossed about by the lawless breeze, and caught snow and sunshine in its meshes. They were chattering gayly as they swept by, and the laugh that came back to me as they jogged down the hillside showed a harmony of tone as marked as the sympathy of their natures; for the two cousins, who had always been boon companions, had now become sworn intimates—for the winter at least. Upon the back seat, Maud, the staid younger sister, sat regarding with maternal solicitude the gray robes above which Bobbie's fiery fez, black eyes, and glowing cheeks were visible. They were a pretty sight, as I said, and no father's heart in all the valley leading up

from the great metropolis beside the sea throbbed with more heart-felt gratitude than mine as I watched them pass from sight, and with a sigh of pleasure turned away from the window to begin the observance of the old-time holiday with a smoke and chat with an old-time friend.

Jack Twining had been my one particular crony since our boyhood. We had fished, hunted, studied, and fought together. Each had shared with the other his pleasures and his possessions, and each had claimed from the other, with persistent imperiousness, not merely the right to share his sorrows, but even a monopoly of such burden. In the academy and college we had been inseparable, and even in our love so closely united that only a party-wall had separated the homes of our sweethearts. Year after year our friendship had flowed on—a peaceful, undisturbed current. In all our lives there had been but one approach to an altercation between us. I have tried a thousand times to remember the cause of that quarrel, but have never been able to do so. I can only remember that we were standing alone in the old school-room. Jack, who was skillful as I was awkward as a penman, had traced some graceful characters upon the blackboard. I had mocked or erased, I know

not which. There was a blow—a clinch; tables and chairs were intermixed, desks loosed from their fastenings, and after a time a couple of battered boys stood looking confusedly in each other's eyes. It was too much for my sense of the ludicrous. I burst into a laugh, and held out my hand, which Jack grasped heartily, and said in his grave way, as he brushed the dust from his clothing:

"We ought to be ashamed, Percy."

How we came to affiliate at first I could never imagine. We were as unlike as night and day. I cannot remember when I did not worry him with my ill-timed levity, but he was never angry with me after that once. Whatever I might say or do, he merely looked on with a grave, calm smile. Slighter in build and less impetuous in nature, he was yet not lacking in manliness. In our younger days, it is true, I usually fought his battles for him, but it was simply because I was always the first to meet the assailant and not because of any desire on his part to shirk the conflict. I do not think he ever fought for me. His was one of those calm, even natures that had no more need for turmoil than desire for conflict. He took the world easily but gravely, never running to meet joy or sorrow; while I, despite

my natural vivacity, was always discounting the future's promises of hope and fear.

He was the son of wealthy parents, while Poverty had been my nurse. He had no wish that need be denied, while whatever of luxury I enjoyed was paid for in advance with sweaty drops. Not only did the dear old fellow share ungrudgingly with me whatever advantage he possessed, but, looking back upon it now, I can see that he very often denied himself lest he should wound my pride by enjoying what I could not share. He was of slender, graceful form, with great brown eyes, and hair that needed no invitation to assume the most graceful lines. Long or short, it curled or waved as the occasioned demanded, above his smooth, dark brow and around his shapely head. I was of sturdier build, with stiff, unpromising, mud-colored hair, that despite all persuasion stubbornly asserted its inalienable right to stick out in its own peculiar fashion. Everything fitted Jack, and nothing fitted me. He was the only born gentleman I ever knew, while I was by nature unquestionably designed for a bruiser.

I think I must have begun to fight my way through life before I was fairly out of the cradle. Everything opened before Jack's feet with-

out waiting his demand. When we hunted and fished together, he always caught the finest game and the biggest trout. I had the bruises and mishaps. But then he always insisted that he would never have caught anything if I had not discovered just where the best fish lay and put him where the game was sure to run. He never let me miss a lesson if he could get a chance to prompt me, and I never allowed him to take a drubbing without sharing it. If he excelled in intellectual tasks, I was his careful teacher and guide in all physical accomplishments. People laughed at our friendship because of our notable unlikeness. Everybody liked Jack Twining; everybody dreaded Percy Reynolds. We fitted each other as poorly as pig and porcupine. Even our names were mismatches. Nobody but me called him "Jack," while everybody called me "Perce," pronouncing it as the Bostonians do Pierce. He ought to have been Percy Reynolds, and I ought to have been Jack Twining. The only really appropriate thing about us was the fact that he was a millionaire's delicate son, who was sent into the country to gain strength, while I was the country cooper's boy, as common as the shavings in my father's shop, and as uncouth as the dowels

that held his "knock-down" work together. In college he took naturally to the classics, while I browsed on algebraic roots and the earthy facts of physical science.

When we came to fall in love, the contrarieties of our nature showed themselves again. His Mary was the jolliest girl imaginable, and the only child of a nabob; while my Hester was grave and calm, and one of many in a household not overburdened with this world's wealth. Next to Jack I think Mary liked me better than anybody else in the world; but Hester, though she had always a good word for Jack, seemed to feel towards him something of the repulsion that separates similar natures, just as like magnetic poles repel each other. Everybody said Jack ought to have been in love with Hester, who, though staid and calm, was beautiful and by no means rich; and that I ought to have been in love with Mary, who, though short and plain, was gay and piquant, and munificently dowered.

I do not believe I ever realized how much I loved Jack Twining until we came to be together in the army. It used to give me a sort of frenzy to think of his being exposed to the enemy's fire. I believe if he had been killed in battle I should have made a mad break for the enemy's

lines to avenge his death. It was this very fact that finally separated us. Slight as were his physical proportions, the fatigues of the soldier's life seemed never too much for him. At first we were subalterns in the same regiment. I looked out for him carefully, and saved him all fatigue and exposure that I could. From the first he was a favorite with the colonel, so that I had no difficulty in obtaining leave to take many an exhaustive detail that would otherwise have fallen to his lot. It was some time before Jack found it out. I think, perhaps, it came at length to be whispered about in the regiment. At any rate, he became conscious of it, and without my knowledge obtained a staff appointment I do not think anything had ever given me more joy than the knowledge of this promotion. It was the end of our intimacy, however. No sooner had he an opportunity to display his capacity and win the esteem of his superiors, than promotion came to him as all the good things of life had come, unsought. It gave me some twinges when I saw an eagle on his shoulders before I had won my second bar, but I knew that he had deserved all that he had received, and felt that I had received all that I had merited.

When I clasped his hand I knew that he was still my dear "old Jack;" but our lives had never come together again until now. His career had been brilliant; mine hard. He had achieved an enviable fame; I had won a moderate success. Now and then, in the rush of life, we had met; a bow, a hand-clasp, a hasty chat upon the street, and sometimes a quiet lunch together; once or twice a family dinner—that was all. They lived in the city; we in the country. They were rich, and Hester—well, Hester was proud. I do not think I should ever have felt it. There was never any constraint between Jack and me, but somehow Hester seemed to think there was a great distance between John Twining, the millionaire, and Percy Reynolds, the hard-working engineer. His wife had died a year before. We were at the funeral, and Jack's eyes seemed to reproach me as we stood beside the grave for being more heedful of his loved one's death than of her life. Ever since that day I had been planning to get Jack Twining into my home and back into my life once more. Now he was here. We lighted our cigars and—thought. I had planned that we should have a talk as long as the thoughts of youth; but we said very little.

Yet I think I had never observed Thanksgiving Day so fitly before. The whole world seemed full of calm delight. Why should I not be grateful? Hester came in once and sat down between us on a low stool and rallied us on our quietness. She seemed to have forgotten all her lack of appreciation of Jack, and bantered us gayly on our early David and Jonathan friendship which we had been wont to swear passed the love of woman, and playfully ridiculed the separatism of our later years. She told Jack how I had followed every incident in his career, and ended by dragging out from its hiding-place a scrap-book I had no idea she had ever opened, in which I had pasted whatever came in my way of the good things the newspapers had said about my "old Jack." It was a new thing to have Hester enact the tease. That had always been my especial function in the domestic economy, and I had no idea she could do it so gracefully.

As for Jack, I think he was the most puzzled man I ever saw. In all the years of her maidenhood I doubt if he had ever heard Hester laugh as much or as gayly as she did that morning in the sunny library, with the gray curls dancing over her smooth brow and the

flush of matronly pride mantling her soft cheek. When she declared with the utmost vehemence that during her whole life she had been jealous of but one human being, and that one was the "Honorable" — "General" — "Jack" Twining, Jack, poor fellow, was more disturbed than I had ever seen him in my life; and for myself, I will confess that her apparent earnestness really annoyed me. It is not pleasant for a man with a bald head to have it demonstrated even by his wife that he is still as foolishly fond of an old friend as a boy of fifteen. I am sorry to say it, but I was actually glad when Mrs. Reynolds found it necessary to withdraw in order to superintend the preparations for the event of the day—the Thanksgiving dinner.

There was an awkward silence after she had gone; then Jack and I rose and looked at each other. He had grown a little older, but was in the prime of a magnificent and graceful manhood. I knew he was scanning me too, and glancing at the mirror behind him, I felt that the years which had added grace and strength to his manhood had softened somewhat my ruggedness. For the first time in my life I think it flashed across me then that "my Jack" had no reason to be ashamed of his old friend. We

shook hands in silence. He left the room without a word. I sat down before the grate and wandered off into pleasant dreams.

Bertha's voice called me back to earth.

"Why, papa," she was exclaiming, in reproachful accents, "you have spoiled that beautiful paper-knife I gave you on your birthday."

I had stirred the fire in the grate with the gilded toy.

But I am forgetting the special thing for which the day was made—the dinner. It was a rare party which mustered beneath the roof of Cragholt that day. If I were to live a thousand years I should not cease to be proud of my guests, and prouder still of my own. Our dining-room was a narrow one, as befitted our fortunes, but I thought as we entered it, the mistress leading the way on the arm of Dr. Colton and taking her place at the head of the table, and I following with the doctor's wife, that I had never seen a pleasanter sight or a fitter place for a feast of thankfulness. I do not know how Hester had managed so completely to transform its plainness. I only know that there was a profusion of light and color. Two great oleanders, which I had brought myself from their native Southern home, had kindly withheld their latest fall

flowering until now they filled each a corner of the room with a wealth of snowy light just tinged with fleshly warmth.

There were flowers and vines and evergreens transforming the walls into a bower, while lights glimmered among the leaves and cast a flood of radiance on the spotless table and its bright appointments. Hung in cages on the limbs of the oleanders were birds of various kinds, Bertha's pets, who greeted us with an outburst of song as we entered. I had been sedulously barred out of the room until that moment, and had no idea of the scene that awaited me. I think the lights or the birds, or the combination of sound and color with the sight of the pleasant faces about the table, must have overpowered me for a little while. Perhaps it was the fact of Thanksgiving and the remembrance that the past and the future were meeting in the delightful present. I recollect noticing with what graceful self-possession Hester stood behind her chair and assigned the guests to their proper places. I remember noting, too, with a father's pride the glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes of Bertha, as she came in last of the procession, stooping to jest with her little escort, Bobbie Twining, suppressing a laugh at his comic

efforts to fold his hands upon the back of the chair, as he saw his elders doing; glancing slyly at her mother as she did so, and then looking inquiringly at me.

As I have said, we were plain people, living simply, entertaining only a few friends to whom we were so closely attached that they seemed almost of our own family. Such a thing as a company, even so modest a one as had gathered to share our Thanksgiving dinner, was a rare thing at Cragholt. Of relatives we had few, and they were remotely scattered. Life and death had narrowed our circle of friends. We had grown old enough to mourn many; while life had been busy and eventful enough to compel us to forget, and doom us to be forgotten. My own, indeed, had been a rough, disjointed one, as much of it passed in the rude mining camps of the West as at home, perhaps more. I knew the world—the arena where men meet and mangle each other—thoroughly. I had seen the pits sanded for many a bitter fray. I had learned the ways of "bulls and bears," and pointed out the rottenness beneath even the "ground-floor" of many a glittering scheme. I knew the world—the solid earth on which we stood. I had breathed, for months at a time,

the burning air upon the lower levels of the Comstock. I had followed golden-freighted fissures into the heart of the mountains—aye, and into the hearts of men, too—until I felt the blackness, the silence, the fetid earthiness of both. But I was not accustomed to society. Hardly half a hundred times had I mounted a dress-coat since my wedding-day. When I was at home, a household was enough. When away, all other society was a mockery. So while I had grown strong, and in a sense, perhaps, not unpolished by the friction of years, I was inept, not so much in the duties of hospitality, as in the art of welcoming and entertaining. So I think I was a little abashed as I stood in my place opposite the regal figure at the upper end of the table and thought that this was *my* home, *my* Thanksgiving feast—that these were *my* friends, the lives which had given color to my life, or whose future my life would color.

At any rate, I forgot the duty of the host, until I saw the flush of embarrassment upon my wife's face, and noted the look of anxious entreaty in her eyes. Even then I could not understand her mute appeal. I only knew that there was something she wished me to do which I was not doing nor likely to do. Meanwhile

the guests stood solemnly, each in his appointed place, in true Puritan style, with head bowed over his hands clasped upon the back of his chair. Still I waited and wondered, until the doctor's wife, the sweet-faced lady on my right to whom years had never been unkind enough to give the lineaments of age, said in a soft voice, hardly above a whisper, with that kindliness of accent that came from her Quaker birthright and still sat gracefully upon her tongue:

"Is thee not going to give thanks?"

Then all at once I remembered that in my grateful meditations during the day I had written some words which seemed to me fit and proper for this occasion. So I drew forth a blurred and crumpled manuscript and read.

It was not, perhaps, just what the good lady expected, but I think she approved my poor attempt at—

A THANKSGIVING GRACE.

We give Thee thanks, O King of kings,
For all the joys the season brings,—
For life and health, for friends and home,
For blessings more than earthly tome
Might briefly tell, or time give scope
To sing, of Memory and of Hope.

We thank Thee for a land at peace,
For favoring seasons, earth's increase,
Escape from scourge of fire and flood,
Intestine strife, fraternal blood,
The pestilence that stalks by night,
The earthquake's shock, the famine's blight.

For all we have of good or ill,
For mercy and for judgment still;
That woes endured were not the worst
With which Thou justly might have cursed:
That Hope survives, and Folly's scath
Thy grace attests and not Thy wrath.

For all, O God, whom we adore,
Thy constant blessing we implore;
May those we love e'er love us still;
Forgive all those whose thoughts are ill;
With Thy sweet grace all evil hide:
In mercy let us still abide.

CHAPTER VI.

"IN TRUTH, IT WAS A GOODLY COMPANY."

I FELT very shamefaced after reading this unusual form of grace. Though I had certainly thought of using the crude verses in that manner, I do not think that I had definitely concluded that I would do so until my memory was jogged by the matron in gray silk, who stood at my side. Looking down the table upon either side, however, as we took our seats, I did not at all regret what I had done. A tender silence rested over the little company, and I thought we had begun our Thanksgiving feast in a most appropriate spirit. I even fancied that I saw a hint of tears in more than one pair of eyes, but it is probable that they were in my own instead. The silence did not last very long. Master Bob broke the ice and established what diplomatists would call a basis of negotiation, by announcing in a most matter-of-fact tone that he too had some verses he was

"going to say," but not until after dinner was over. With the laugh that followed, the spatter of conversation began and the little company was at ease.

It was not a brilliant gathering; it would not be hard to find a more pretentious and perhaps to a stranger's eye a more attractive one; yet to me, with my knowledge of the lives and, as I thought, of the hearts of the little company, there seemed never to have been one more charming. The old doctor, keen and wiry, "with his restless eyes aglow," his form unbowed by time, was easily the Menelaus of our board, "rich with the wisdom of the years." His long black hair straggled across the white dome that rose above his shaggy brows, in fantastic defiance of fashion and elegance. His great dark eyes were like the "war-clouds rolling dun," pointing with expressive glances his incisive wit. His shapely hand flashed now and then like a white wand across the current of his conversation. Taken all in all, he formed a splendid foil to the sedate lady who did the honors of the table. Opposite the doctor sat John Twining, the most distinguished member of our little company, as the world counts distinction—a very Sir Galahad in knightly achievement, modesty, and sweet-

ness. What a harmony of tone and character there was between him and the dark-eyed Maud, who sat beside him! I saw her eyes kindle and her cheek flush with interest as she listened to the conversation between the doctor and her escort, now and then catching a word herself and tossing back a bright phrase or a light laugh, her earnest young nature showing a delightful sympathy with their maturer thought. I do not believe that I had ever felt a throb of the match-making instinct in my life before. Perhaps even then it was the result of a profound conviction that my wife was innocently seeking the happiness of another pair present which caused the thought to flash through my mind. However that may be, I could not help wishing that the young life of our gentle cousin Maud might some time draw closer to the heart of dear old Jack Twining. Upon her left sat the doctor's grandson Edgar. He was a young man in whom it was easy to trace the characteristics which the doctor had given in his humorous description of a few days before. He was tall and rather spare, showing a good deal of muscular power and giving promise of a commanding presence. His face, somewhat long at best, had all its defects and angularities empha-

sized by the close-clipped dark-brown hair that set out sharply and stiffly over his head. Bashful and awkward as he evidently was, his keen eyes, clear-cut mouth, and shapely jaw showed that there was no lack of character and determination about him, while an occasional lifting of his brows and half-perceptible twitching of the corners of his mouth betrayed the fact that the grandfather's sense of humor was not entirely extinct in his descendants. All this I noted as I listened to the bantering chatter of the beautiful Allie, who, conscious of her charms, had taken the young man in charge with a patronizing freedom that smacked almost of ridicule of his uncouthness. Aha! I thought to myself. The pretty bird does not know how strong a nature she is sporting with. Look out that you do not get your feathers ruffled before the play is over, my fair one!

I could but smile as my eye left this happy pair and rested on the fair lady at my side, in whose snow-white locks the hint of their once golden color was no longer traceable. The delicate face matched well the soft white kerchief that wrapped her throat, while her tender blue eyes seemed to have gathered little of the dimness of age, but only something of the distance

of the sky's azure as she neared the end of life's journey. I could but smile, because I found her studying also with approving intentness the young girl beside her. She must have felt my glance; for as she turned and met it, she said, as if she knew she had been thinking my thought:

"I am glad Edgar and thy pretty cousin have met. They need each other."

Ah, wise heart of loving woman! It was no wonder the doctor's voice, even at his years, took a tenderer tone when he spoke of "Harriet."

Next to the doctor sat Bertha, and beside her Bobbie Twining. Here childhood reigned. The girl had forgotten the hint of budding womanhood and enjoyed to the full the frolicsome mirth that filled the boy's heart.

Upon my left sat Mrs. Somers, and next to her George Hartzell. As I glanced from one to the other I could not wonder that my wife should be guilty of the innocent diplomacy I attributed to her, in order to bring them together. If there were ever two natures that seemed especially designed to supplement each other, or two lives whom every one could see were fitted to round out the circle of each other's happiness, they were unquestionably George

Hartzell and Helen Somers. It was no wonder that he was a favorite with all who knew him. Without any lack of manliness, he was one of those men whom everybody calls by their Christian names. He had come to the village with his widowed mother some years before, a young man of twenty-five, with strains of tenderness and dignity in his character, which every one attributed to his watchful care over his invalid mother. In three months he had won his way into every house and heart in the village; old and young, male and female, spoke kindly of George Hartzell. He had some business in the city—clerk or cashier, I understood, of some great corporation. His salary, I think, constituted their chief if not their sole support. He was a skillful musician, having inherited a taste in this direction, and I suspect a greater part of his training, from his mother. At any rate, the chief enjoyment of her life—she had died a year or two before—had been little musical gatherings in her quiet home. Because of this, George had come to be regarded by the village generally as a musician—a fact, I think, somewhat derogatory to the esteem in which a man is held by our rural if not by an urban public. However this might be, George, though

so great a favorite in society, had been singularly derelict in finding a companion for his life, and at thirty odd was still a bachelor. He must have had many opportunities to marry. As I glanced at him from time to time, I was sure there must have been many hearts among the fair ones he had met who would have been glad to answer kindly to a tender word from his lips. So far as anybody knew, however, he had never spoken a loving word except to his mother. While she lived the village smiled at his devotion, and after she had died the gossips despairingly declared that George Hartzell had been so deeply enamored of his mother that he could see no charms in any other woman. As for him, he carried his six feet of manhood as lightly as ever. If there was a trace of care in his life, it never showed in look or tone. The brown curls clustered carelessly about his brow; the heavy mustache drooped over his full lips, and his blue eyes looked as brightly in your face as if care had never entered a corner of his heart. We who knew him best knew only this, that the musician was a rare lover of nature, who, under a *nom de plume*, unsuspected save by a few, had won an enviable standing in literature. I had long been anxious that he

and Twining should know each other better. There was a harmony about their natures which one who knew them both could easily detect. Besides that, I had a notion that George, who had given his whole life to his mother, had by his very devotion lost those opportunities for self-advancement which come to a man only in his early years, and after her death found himself still bound by a past of rigorous duty to the treadmill of unpromising daily toil. I thought if Jack once knew this young and cheerful self-immolater he might be able, almost without exertion, to put something in his way that would make life easier for him, and allow him to seek, as he had never done hitherto, his own happiness.

As I glanced from him to Mrs. Somers, it seemed that my wife's thought had supplemented mine. She was one of those slight, graceful figures so characteristic of our New England life; her complexion a marvelous compound of translucent white and tenderest rose. Her hair was of a neutral brown, lying smooth upon her shapely head, and knotted simply at the back. Her voice was soft and finely modulated; her smile sweet and winning. Her gray eyes had a tender dewiness which was almost

pathetic, despite their steadiness of gaze. It needed no second glance to assure one that she was that finest product of American soil—a high-bred New England woman. From crown to heel there was but one word fitly describing any attribute—she was exquisite. The finest lines of American life and thought met in her nature. Her age could not be guessed. Every one knew she would tell it in an instant if asked, but it was doubtful if any one had ever been brave enough to make the inquiry. Nobody in the village knew anything about her, though everybody loved her. I say nobody. It was believed that Dr. Colton knew her past, and that there was some painful mystery about it. That she had suffered no one doubted. There was something in the expression of her countenance, whether animated or in repose, that told a story of sadness and suffering. Even without this, one might have felt reasonably sure that no woman of her charms—no woman who could afford to wear that trying and exasperating shade of gray that seemed but to enhance her beauty, though not one in a thousand dared defy its power—would have been at her age simply a teacher in the public school of Gladesboro, had not some sad experience driven her from pleasanter surroundings.

She had come there three years before. Nobody knew whence or how, except that Dr. Colton had gone one day before the School Board, when there was a vacancy, and in his masterful way declared that Helen Somers was the best woman in the United States for that position, if she would consent to accept it. As a result, Helen Somers came, and, without any heart-burnings on the part of the two or three who stood above her then, had gone step by step to the highest place ever occupied by a lady teacher in the village. On the resignation of the principal, some months before, she had been proffered that position, and, greatly to the joy of the whole village, accepted it. During all this time, however, though the friend of every one, she had made no intimates. She seemed even to be quite unconscious of the fact that Dr. Colton had ever interested himself in her behalf. During the whole time she had been in the village, it was said that she had called but once or twice at the doctor's house, and the gossips regarded it as certain that if there was a secret, Mrs. Colton did not share her husband's knowledge of it. I had myself often wondered what was the mystery that lay behind the life of this refined but energetic little woman. But like all the rest of

Gladesboro, I had asked no questions; indeed, there were no questions to be asked, and nobody to inquire of if there had been. She was simply Mrs. Somers, the principal of the high-school of the quaint little village that had grown up between the hill and river after the railroad had pushed its way along the other bank. The little community of city workers and country dwellers took her at her own appraisal, and found the estimate none too high. She had shown a capacity not merely for teaching, but for organization that had lifted their high-school far above the level of similar villages, and brought an influence to bear upon the lives of their children that showed in every home. So the thrifty burghers appreciated her; saw that she was worth money; paid her good wages, and intended to keep her where she was just as long as she would stay. Yet every man, woman, and child in the town, had it been suggested to them, would have been delighted to have seen her step down from the teacher's desk, stand before the altar in the vine-covered church, and from thence go to the little home upon the hillside the wife of George Hartzell. I do not think anybody had dreamed of such a consummation except Mrs. Reynolds; because every one believed

that some terrible sorrow in the teacher's past life had doomed her to the duty which she did so sweetly, but which everybody felt that she ought not to be compelled to perform.

Of course I did not sit staring at the company, nor did the dinner wait while I made these meditations. One by one the thoughts ran through my brain in the intervals of the feast and of the conversation, which was varied and entertaining enough to have occupied every one's attention, as indeed it did mine. My wits had really no time for wool-gathering, for, in addition to the requirements of courtesy to those upon the right and left, I had every now and then to take part in the conversation of each of the various groups that I have named. The doctor seemed to have quite overcome Mrs. Reynolds's prejudices, if she really had any, and they with Twining kept up a ceaseless flow of conversation, the doctor's quizzical tones contrasting sharply with Twining's clear, even utterances, while Hester's matronly imperiousness was rendered all the more attractive by Maud's maidenly timidity. Sometimes the wave swept down the table and took us all in; then it ebbed back and forth until at length each two or three became a little storm-center, from which would

now and then burst out cyclones of wit that eddied around the table or were lost in the universal murmur. Amid this pleasant excitement I was quite unconscious that I had been scanning the characters and parceling out the fates of my friends, until all at once it came to me that I had really been carrying on a double line of thought, one *with* my guests and the other *about* them. I grew hot with shame when it flashed upon me that I was really seeking to enact the rôle of the match-maker. I had prided myself all my life upon an utter lack of inclination to intermeddle with other people's affairs, yet here I was coolly mapping out the lives of others and seeking to assign to each a future perhaps too absurd even for fate to count among its mockeries. I suppose it must have been due to the season. One who finds himself as happily situated as I was on that Thanksgiving Day must be a hard-hearted man indeed if he does not at least dream of a like happy destiny for those he loves.

I am sure the dinner was not a short one, but I have no recollection of its composition or character. I suppose it was not much different from that which was spread in many happy homes that bright Thanksgiving Day. I remember Mrs.

Colton praised it highly, and added the happy compliment that she was glad to have eaten even a Thanksgiving dinner outside her own home. Bobbie Twining seemed entirely satisfied, which was a still higher compliment. But the conversation did not flag, and I was still busily engaged in picking over the nuts upon my plate and discussing the morning sermon with Hartzell, the widow, and Mrs. Colton, who had heard it while Jack Twining and I were renewing our acquaintance in the library, when the good wife gave the signal for rising, and we sauntered back to the bright, cheerful parlors, with the flavor of pleasant jests wherewith the dinner had been seasoned yet fresh in our minds.

The doctor immediately reminded Bobbie, whom he persisted in calling "Chump," much to that young gentleman's annoyance, that he had promised to "say some verses" for us after dinner, and insisted that the time was now come for the fulfillment of that promise. Bobbie, who was not as hilarious as when the feast began, made various excuses; but Bertha's coaxing, and a quiet word from his father, induced him to submit to the inevitable, and, mounted upon a chair, he prepared to undertake his appointed task. It was evident from the know-

ing glances that passed between them that the merry girls had arranged to make Bobbie the medium of some sort of fun from which we elders were excluded. At the last moment, however, the boy's courage and his memory both gave way at once. No amount of prompting seemed sufficient to start him right, or, once started, to keep him on the track. After a dozen false send-offs he was likely to break down entirely, and there were signs of tears in his black eyes, when Hartzell turned to the piano and rattled off a medley which I think he must have improvised just to bring Bobbie's spirits to the sticking point. At least that was its effect; for hardly had he finished the first verse, when Bobbie, who had been studying his father's eyes in the mean time, called out with heroic determination :

"I can do it now!"

George lifted his hands from the keys, his foot slipped off the pedal, and whirling around upon the piano-stool, he called out heartily :

"All right. Go ahead!"

But the sudden silence and the waiting faces were too much for the boy's memory. He hemmed and stammered as many older folks

have done, while the three conspirators vainly tried to prompt him.

"Hush! hush!" said Helen Somers. "Don't bother him."

Almost at the same instant came the calm, even tones of Jack Twining, who stood leaning against the mantel:

"Steady, my son! Take your time."

I remembered afterwards the glance of quick, startled inquiry which the young widow shot into the dark, impassive face above her. They were all quiet enough after that, and while Bobbie strove to gather his wits I wandered off into a reverie of that last time I had seen Jack Twining in the glare of battle, when I bore to him an order commanding him to charge with his regiment one of the deadliest spots in the enemy's lines.

"All right," he said, as he listened to the command that left no duty but obedience. "Good-bye, old fellow."

We shook hands as he spoke; then he sprang into the saddle; reined the black horse around the flank of his regiment, drawing his sword and placing it at a carry as he did so, and when he had reached his place exactly in front of the center of his line, with the shot whistling

thickly about him, I heard his calm, even tones, as, without turning his head or once looking back, he gave the command:

"'Ten*tion,* b'ttalion! Shoulder arms! Forward—guide center—MARCH!"

The black horse and its immovable rider passed on towards the line of fire upon the crest beyond, without questioning the ready obedience of the steel-crowned wave that followed after. It was a place where the bravest might well have flinched, but not a man thought of faltering while Jack Twining rode ahead.

The same magnetic qualities steadied the young boy's nerves, and before I had time to finish my reverie he had started bravely off on his appointed task:

> "I love Thanksgiving 'cause it brings
> Roast turkey and such lots of things
> So good to eat,
> So nice and sweet;
> And fires so bright,
> And snow so white;
> With drifts to wade,
> Till paths are made;
> And sleighs to ride,
> And robes to hide;
> And skates to slide,
> And—and—"

At this point his memory failed utterly, and no efforts of his prompters could bring to his mind the witty things they intended he should say of each and every of his listening elders. When his voice failed, however, his eyes came to his relief, and looking past the expectant group at a glass door that opened on the porch, he exclaimed :

"O, Bruno! Look at Bruno! He's come for his Thanksgiving dinner."

Jumping from his perch, he ran to the door and admitted the great Newfoundland, whose shaggy coat was sprinkled with new-fallen snow. Hartzell turned to the piano, and with ready tact transformed the lad's confusion into a pronounced success by singing another installment of his impromptu medley :

> "Old dog Tray is ever faithful,
>   Want cannot drive him away ;"
> "His head was made of pease straw,
>   And his tail was made of hay."
>
> "He came from the mountains
>   Of the old Granite State,"
> A "Bunthorne" in his "Patience,"
>   With his "Pinafore" of state.

"Down by the old garden gate,"
Dear "Little maid of Arcadie,"
"Tell me the old, old story,"
"With the banjo on my knee."

The mirth was uproarious, for George sang it, according to the slang of the day, "for all it was worth;" and as Bruno passed round the circle, he was the subject of more laughing and boisterous attention than had ever fallen to his lot before. This unusual welcome quite upset his accustomed gravity, and, apparently puzzled as to what he ought to do, he clambered into the chair George had left, seated himself gravely, facing the audience "like a gentleman," as Bobby declared, and as George finished the last stanza, opened his mouth and took part in the tumult with an inquiring but resonant bark. Every one applauded this performance, and Bobby, full of glee at the outcome of his brave attempt, at the suggestion of the mistress made his exit with his shaggy friend in tow, on the way to the kitchen, where no doubt the exploit was duly recounted, and Bruno abundantly rewarded for coming to the rescue of his nonplussed little friend.

With their departure the mistress of ceremonies resumed her sway with the announcement

that the gentlemen were to be allowed one hour for smoking and scandal in the library, while the ladies would enjoy a brief period of sensible conversation. At the end of that time we were informed the evening's entertainment would begin with music, to be followed by a story by that one of the gentlemen who might draw the highest number in an improvised ballot. She passed around a little tray of cards for us to draw from as she concluded this announcement, presenting the last to me. I turned it over and found upon it the figure *one*.

"Just my luck," I exclaimed gleefully, as I held it up for inspection. "The lot has fallen upon some poor Jonah. I sincerely pity him, but I could not help it. I always was a favorite of fortune, even drawing a prize in the lottery of life."

I bowed gallantly to Hester as I concluded this flattering speech, and was greatly surprised at the jeering round of applause that greeted this remark until the others held their cards towards me, and I found myself the victim of a fraud if not of a conspiracy. All the rest were blank, so that mine was unquestionably "the highest number."

There was a great laugh at my expense,

which became still more uproarious when I turned upon the author of my woe, and shaking my finger in her face, exclaimed with tragic emphasis, hissing the last words between my teeth:

"I shall have my revenge, madam,—S-K-A-T-E-S!"

As we fled through the hall to the library I heard the faintly reproachful words:

"Now—Percy!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCHOOLMA'AM'S STORY.

"NO, I don't know her story. I don't even know that she has any story."

It was the doctor who spoke. We were sitting in the library—the doctor, Twining, Hartzell, and myself. Edgar had remained in the parlor under the plea that he did not care to smoke. I noticed that he did not say he did not smoke, and naturally inferred that he preferred the society of the ladies to a cigar, our company, and the classic shades of the library. So far as the cigar was concerned his choice was well enough, but I rather disliked to see a youngster avoiding the society of older men. Even if he did not smoke he should have come with us, not because it was the proper thing to do, but because it was the natural thing for him to wish to do. Of course there is no better companion for a sound-headed young man than a healthy-minded young woman. At the same time I believe that young heads and hearts are

always fresher for association with maturer natures, especially at such times of quiet relaxation as our withdrawal to the library implied. I saw his grandmother eying him keenly as we left the room, and shrewdly suspected that the next time the young man had an invitation to my workshop he would not be likely to decline.

The fact is, I have always been jealous of my library, and proud of the sense of ease and hospitality that fills it. It is not at all remarkable as a library, and would hardly be considered attractive as a room. Architecturally, it was simply designed to adapt itself to the wants of any household that might chance to inhabit Cragholt. Indeed, the whole house was built with that purpose steadily in view. I have a notion that a man does a very foolish thing who carries out the modern idea of building a house on the plan the snail makes his shell—just to fit the rugosities of his own nature-and accommodate itself to a particular period of his life. Still more foolish is he who endeavors to foresee all his future wants and make provision for them in the arrangement of his habitation. I have an idea that the snail himself gets awfully sick of his own work, wishing not only that he had made it bigger, but

that he had waited until he had seen more of the world, and decided not only just what sort of a domicile he wanted at the moment, but what he might want at some other time, and so made his lodgings a little more elastic and adaptable to circumstances. When Cragholt was built, Hester was fully possessed with the idea that one should be measured for a house just the same as for a coat, only that for the coat the physical man alone needed to be measured, while for the house the moral and intellectual nature should also be surveyed and staked off. I had seen a good deal of this custom-made architecture, and had a notion that if a house was simply fitted to a man's nature, or rather to what he thought his nature, he was very apt to grow up just to it, never allowing his tastes or aspirations to get outside of its peculiar conformation. He is very likely to cramp his brain and wear out his soul by packing the homestead round through the world after the manner of the snail. After a time it becomes absolutely inseparable from him, and when he comes into your home you can see that he is carrying his own dwelling on his back. He has trouble in getting it through the doors; sits down on it in the

parlor; puts it on your table when he dines with you, and actually carries it into the library and cushions your armchair with it while he smokes your tobacco and tries to feign himself at ease.

Our modern craze of individualism in architecture is well enough for the houses, but it is terrible in its effects on the owners. We get so that we recognize our friends by their houses instead of their countenances. A. becomes the man with the brown house topped out with two stories of redwood shingles, and B. the man with a lilac-colored house, with variegated tile stripes, cochineal blinds, olive trimmings, and a half-finished gable. I have an acquaintance whose eyes are getting to look exactly like a pair of dormer windows that constitute the distinctive feature of his mansion. If he lives in it a few years more the windows of his soul will no doubt have the same sort of flimsy honey-comb wicker-work about their sides and in the corners. Years ago I had an old friend whose first home-nest was in a narrow city block. The first story front was given up to business, while the third was surrendered to lodgers. It was plainly furnished, for though keen and prosperous he was still compelled to

be frugal. Yet everybody counted it one of the most charming homes in the city, and its doors were never opened without its straitened limits being filled to overflowing. Mark now the sequel. Ten or twelve years afterwards, grown rich and past the need of labor or economy, he began the building of a spacious mansion which should embody his ideal of a home. Everybody looked forward with delightful anticipation to the time when it should be completed and opened to his friends. He was a royal good fellow, and his wife the very paragon of entertainers. Everybody said to everybody else: "When Bob's house is finished we shall know what kind of family mansions they have in the kingdom of heaven." By and by the house was finished, and the whole world invited to view its splendor. I had already seen it. Although I had not been within a hundred miles of it, Bob had brought it to me. I could see that his head was getting to be the exact shape of his new library. The shelves in his cranium were put up in the same way as in the library, and had the same books upon them, with exactly the same bindings. The same knight in tin armor stood beside the doorway of his brain, and the same sorts of manufactured-to-order bric-à-brac were hung

about the walls. The world went to the house-warming, and wondered why it was that host and hostess seemed to require to be warmed up too. For a little while that house was all the rage. Then guests began to shun its portals, and its splendor was as rarely visited as an art-gallery in a city where art happens not to be the fashion. In a year Bob's house came to be the terror of all his friends. It has nearly killed him, but he has stood up to it manfully, and still carries the great mansion smilingly around, quite unconscious that it is crushing all individuality, manliness, and breadth of sentiment out of him. His wife, poor soul, died long ago—killed by the new house. She carried it about with her for three or four years, but it rested so heavily on her bright sunny life that she had to leave its weighty splendor and go to that fair land where there are many mansions—none of them, it is hoped, made on the "especially-adapted" plan.

Having these things in mind, I plucked up courage and stoutly combated Hester's preconceptions. It is no little thing to attempt to push her off a track on which she has once started. Not that she is at all inclined to be stubborn; such an imputation would be most

unjust; but she has a multifariousness of method that puts a simple-minded man like myself at a great disadvantage. She rarely offers any opposition or attempts to refute my arguments, but the first I know, while I am priding myself upon the strength of my position and the security of my works, she makes a flank movement, comes in with the rattle of drums and blare of trumpets at the rear, while I haul down my colors and surrender at discretion. I had set my heart, however, on having Cragholt built upon a broader principle than the snail-shell mansion of to-day; so I told Hester that, according to my notion, a house ought to be made upon the same plan as a bee-hive—not merely to fit the peculiar requirements of the first swarm, but adaptable, within reasonable limits, to the needs and fancies of any colony that might occupy it afterward, whether they had exactly the same proportions of drones and workers as had constituted the other or not. I tried to convince her, not only that we were unable to define the possible extent of our own swarm, but utterly incapable of even guessing the peculiar inclinations of its component parts. I insisted that we had no moral right inflexibly to apportion to ourselves certain parts of the hive,

according to our present needs, and to those who might come to share it with us certain other parts without knowledge of *their* needs. I do not think I should ever have brought her to my way of thinking, however, if it had not been for the library. This I plainly demonstrated to her could not be permanently located in any part of the house. This year I might want a northern light, and next year a southern exposure. To-day I might have a notion to line its shelves with books, and to-morrow to transform it into a geological museum. At one time a foot-lathe and work-bench might be among its furniture, and at another a small furnace cupola with a formidable array of crucibles and test-tubes.

"And you expect to swing this variegated nondescript around the house, 'upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber,' just as you happen to feel inclined, I suppose," said the good woman, somewhat tartly.

"Within certain limits, my dear, like a movable feast."

"And you expect the rest of us to take what is left?"

"Well, indeed," said I, somewhat hesitantly, "I did not think of it exactly in that light.

Of course, I should expect you to have the same liberty."

"Suppose, then, I should take a fancy to one room for my parlor, and you should take a notion to it for your workshop, which would it be?"

"Well, my dear, I do not think there could be any conflict between us."

"Perhaps not," she replied with a touch of exultation in her tone. "But which do you think it ought to be especially designed to accommodate?"

Unconsciously she had given me my cue, and I blandly replied: "Both, my dear. Your parlor should be so planned as to make a capital workshop, and my library ought to have pitch and breadth enough to make an equally good parlor, if you should ever see fit to oust me from its possession."

On this basis we compromised, and, while not forgetting our present needs, sought to shape our house with consideration for those who might succeed us—so arranging the mansion which might shelter us for a little time that almost any family life might readily adapt itself to its conformation.

So the library was not really a library at all.

It had no high-pitched, quaintly-shaped windows, and consequently none of the dimness of stained glass about it. It had no purposely created re-entrant angles, no heavy and immovable cases, no bare and massive beams, no meaningless mosaics, no mullioned walls or curtained arches, and, above all, none of the meaningless frippery of dilettante scholarship or amateur science about it. It was a room—or rather a suite of rooms, for there were three of them—designed for just two purposes—work and play, labor and lounging. Not a thing about it was fitted for the show business. Everything was solid, significant and useful, and at the same time commonplace and comfortable. In one corner was an old stand-up pine desk, on which I wrote all my most erudite scientific theses, and in the intervals of composition whittled it with my jack-knife to my heart's content. It was the only piece of carving in the room; and though it sometimes attracted no little attention, I do not remember anybody having been struck with the fineness of the work. Sometimes the floor was carpeted, and then, again, it was bare. Sometimes the room was pretty nearly filled with books, and anon literature retired into the back

ground, and drills and lathes, blow-pipe and anvil, came to the front.

The world was thoroughly shut out of it. I think I might have blown up that end of the house with a dynamite bomb without occasioning any astonishment to the denizens of the rest of the mansion. Now and then, when my mood changed, the room was rearranged and *sometimes* dusted. Of desks and writing-tables there was an assortment which came in and went out one after another, as fancy inclined me. I always like to change my desks when I take up a new idea. One's work gets located on a table devoted to a special subject. One sort of papers occupy this corner, and another that, topically arranged without trouble of pigeon-holes; so that when one wants an idea which has been once sorted out and located, he has only to slip the loose mass of papers towards him, and run it over as easily as he cons the faces of his friends. In twenty-five years of office and field work I do not believe I ever had a paper in my hands that I would not recognize to-day on sight, without looking at the indorsement; and, to tell the truth, very few of them have had any indorsement. Red tape, pigeon-holes, and all the senseless paraphernalia

of needless arrangement and rearrangement only bother and torment a worker who knows what he wants to do and is bent on doing it.

The walls of this apartment are plain, ornamented by a few prints interspersed with some drawings in which I have had a professional interest. A few faces that I love look down upon me from them. I do not like pictures, nor any striking ornament, where I have to work. A glowing grate with an old-fashioned mantel above, and an indefinite number of great deep-seated rocking-chairs, together with one hard-seated, straight-backed revolving chair, in which I sit while at work, constitute really the only fixed characteristics of the room. They are always there. Sometimes when I am in a busy mood the rocking-chairs are reduced to two—never less than that, for I need one in which to lounge and smoke while waiting for my thoughts to come, and another, perhaps for some privileged friend who may be allowed within the barrier, but especially for the good wife when she comes for the accustomed chat before retiring. She sits absorbed and silent while I tell her of the day's work and the morrow's plans. She never professes to understand my work, but all the same she likes to hear of it, and I be-

lieve she would rather miss all the rest of the day than that one quiet hour in the workshop. I know its condition often offends her sense of neatness and order. It sometimes has that effect on others who chance to get their noses within the door. I suppose it would be the same with me if it were not that my sense of order has for its key-note, convenience and adaptation to results. I have learned that I can do more and better work with such surroundings than any other; or rather, I find that adjustability of surroundings is essential both to ease of production and quality of work.

Perhaps my profession is in part answerable for this. I have noticed that the great Architect of the universe combines the elements of which it is composed with very little regard to the rules of taste or the requirements of scientific classification. The ruby and the diamond are not found enthroned in crystal or imbedded in stalactite. The various qualities of iron ore are not generally conveniently grouped. The lodes of silver wander deviously through the mountain's heart, and the gold creeps into crevices where worthless pebbles hide its gleam. Confusion seems to be the law of the universe, absolute incongruity the principle that govern

the juxtaposition of matter,—until we think what purposes the mountains are intended to subserve, to what use the valleys are dedicated, and how exquisitely the distribution of matter is adapted to promote these ends. In nature as in life, however, are combined two sorts of order—the one that of the store-house, the other that of the workshop. The key to the one is harmony of arrangement and economy of space; the motive of the other, convenience and readiness of use. The woman whose house is always in order is inspired by the instinct of putting things away. The workman whose bench is simply the theater of accomplishment, arranges his tools and material only with regard to ease of application. Every now and then perhaps he gets ashamed of the apparent confusion, "smarts up" his bench, puts every tool in a specific place, brushes away the dust, picks up his scraps and arranges his material—only to throw it all into like seeming confusion by the next half-hour's work.

Hester sighs in hopeless agony as she notes the cobwebs on the ceiling, the careless array of pipes upon the mantel, the dust upon the floor, and the uncouth medley of literature, science, and leisure all round. She wonders how

I can either work or rest amid such confusion. Yet I notice that when care or trouble comes to her, nothing rests and restores her to cheerfulness and hope like the pleasant fire and easy chair, the quietude and hospitality, of the workshop. Yet she habitually speaks of it as "horrid." In cases of extreme agitation, as when some distinguished visitor has been ushered into it without apology, I even seem to recall the fact that she has used the term "filthy" in connection with it. Bertha, however, always pronounces it "lovely," and is never so happy as when she can hide in one of its corners while I work on unconscious of her presence.

None but friends ever come into the workshop, though I think it is due not so much to any rigid rule of exclusion as to the charm which this thoroughly natural interior exercises over the consciousness of one at all capable of appreciating its excellences. Now and then, upon very rare occasions, the door has been forced with kindly violence, and mere curiosity has thrust its querulous, criticising nose within. Such visitors have spread abroad in the village strange tales of the barbarous uncouthness of the room in which Percy Reynolds does his work and takes his ease, and the little company of

friends who are wont to invade its precincts are so few that it may well be that the young man who lagged behind in the parlor thought that only dry, scientific questions were ever discussed within its dusty purlieus. I smiled grimly to myself as I thought of this, and wondered if even Allie's charms would have kept him away had he known how young and old meet upon the level of good-fellowship within its walls.

On this occasion, the school-mistress, who was chattering with the other ladies just across the hall, was the first subject of conversation on which any of us lighted. I do not know who first mentioned her name. Hardly were our cigars well aglow and each friend comfortably ensconced in a great rocker—I cannot help preferring the straight-backed working chair save when I fall into reverie all alone, or when Hester makes her diurnal visit—when some one asked the doctor what he knew about the pretty widow. I have always thought it was George Hartzell who asked this question, though it may have been Twining, or in fact I may have propounded the inquiry myself. At any rate, the doctor answered in the words I have given. His reply was greeted with looks of such evident amazement that the doctor, glancing from one to another,

drew a long whiff, took his cigar from his mouth, and fastening his keen eyes upon me, shook his white forefinger in my direction and said, as if I had questioned his assertion :

"No, sir : I do not know anything about Helen Somers, nor of any story that may be connected with her life. I might almost say, as I did inadvertently, that I do not know she has any story that would be worth telling or worth hearing; but I think that it would not be quite correct."

He shut his thin lips, turned the pointed beard upon his chin towards one and another of his auditors, as if he had propounded a riddle he defied them to guess, or made a declaration he dared them to deny.

"Which means," said Hartzell, "either that you only guess at what we think you know, or that it is none of our business what you know or what you guess."

A gleam of satisfaction came over the doctor's face as he noted the effect of his strategy. He leaned back in the great arm-chair, resting his hand upon the broad side-piece as if he held a pencil and were taking notes of an interesting case; raised his eyes meditatively to the cobwebs on the ceiling, again took a whiff or two from

his cigar, and then said, in condescending tones:

"I see, boys"—he very greatly enjoyed calling us "boys," but I can hardly imagine what he would have done if we had returned the compliment by calling him "old man"—"I see, boys, you are dying to know something about our little school-ma'am; and to tell you the truth, I'd give as much as any of you to be able to resolve the mystery that surrounds her life."

"If that is the case," I said, "how do you know there is any mystery?"

"How do I know?" said the old doctor, flashing a withering glance at me as if to rebuke my stupidity. "How do I know anything? How do I know the difference between whooping-cough and measles? How do I know black is black and white is white? How did I know George Hartzell was a good fellow the first time I set eyes on him? How did I know you were making double-time towards insanity or the grave the first time I shook hands with you? How do I know that General Twining, whom I never met until to-day, is yet unaware of his powers despite what he has accomplished? How do I know—"

"How do you know everything?" laughed George. "But, doctor, we give it up; we cannot tell."

"What we want to find out," I interjected, "is how you know or why you guess that Mrs. Helen Somers has a story worth hearing."

"Don't talk about guessing, boys," said the old doctor, with sudden seriousness; "it hurts me. I do not guess. No man guesses when he reaches a conclusion. He may not know how he reached it. It may flash upon him as the lightning does out of the darkness of the cloud and the fury of the storm. He may not be able to define his premises or tell by what particular steps he arrived at it. But there it is, clear and sharp as the line of light that marks the ragged edges of the cloud-rift. He sees and he knows by the exercise of powers just as reliable in their action as the eye when it traces the lightning's flight."

"I think, Reynolds," he continued after a moment's pause, "that our profession are more accustomed to leap to conclusions, as people carelessly say, and more given to rely and act upon such swiftly-drawn conclusions, than any other."

"Would not that be a rather dangerous doctrine to get abroad, doctor?" said Twining, thoughtfully.

"Not at all, not at all," said the doctor, raising his hand protestingly. "I do not mean to say that we are rash or careless, or accustomed to act with-

out investigation and serious thought. I do not believe we are. As a profession, I think we are the most cautious in the world. Only think of our responsibilities. Do you ever see a physician do anything while in doubt? Not once in a thousand times can one be induced to take a step until he has formed an opinion, right or wrong, of the nature of the malady he has to deal with, of the habits, character, and constitution of his patient, and what remedy, considering all these things, is most likely to produce beneficent results. What I mean to say is, that we get in the habit of doing all this, passing through all these intellectual processes, in an instant, "quicker than a flash," as the boys say. For instance, General, suppose you were brought to me out of the heat of battle with, say, a wound here in the shoulder. I had known nothing of you before—never heard your name, knew nothing of your character, your constitution, temperament, or habits. From the apparent direction of the wound I might infer that the shot had passed backward and downward; that it might be found under the clavicle; that it might be lodged in the shoulder; that it was possible it might be in the lungs, or even have fallen, spent and dead, in the thoracic cavity. All this I should note in an instant. But suppose that, glancing

into your face, I saw there care, anxiety, fear; twitching muscles, restless eyes and relaxed mouth; and perceived that your breath came quick and gaspingly, though apparently free and unobstructed. Do you know what I would think and what I should know?"

"I haven't the least idea, doctor," answered Twining.

"That he was more scared than hurt, probably," said Hartzell, mischievously.

"Not a bit, sir," said the doctor, impetuously. "I should see the straps on his shoulders, note the lines of mouth and brow, and know, without requiring to be told, that he was a brave man."

"Good! good!" shouted Hartzell. "You're in luck, Twining. Not many people get such a compliment from Dr. Colton."

"I'm sure I am very much obliged," said Twining, modestly.

"It was only by way of illustration," said the doctor, half-apologetically, "though I do not know as I should want to go back on it as a matter of diagnosis. But as I was saying, I should know from these things that my patient was a brave man, and would not be unnerved by the mere pain of the wound, or fear of death. So I should

say at once that the bullet was not in the lungs, nor in the thorax, nor hidden beneath the clavicle. I should be sure that it had made the circuit of the cavity and touched the heart, or struck an artery very near that organ. I suppose all this would pass through my mind in a second, and I should never know that I had thought at all. One might say that I had leaped to a conclusion, but it would not be a guess by any means."

"From which I suppose we are to infer," I said, "that you have 'leaped to a conclusion' in this way with regard to Mrs. Somers and the story she might tell if she were asked."

"The story she *will* tell, whether asked or not, if it ever becomes necessary; and will *never* tell until it does, whether asked or not," asserted the doctor. "Well, yes; I suppose I leaped to a conclusion on this subject in the manner I have described, though I was not conscious of that fact until two or three years afterwards."

"You have known her for some time?" I suggested cautiously.

"I had met her twice before she came to the village," said the doctor, as he thoughtfully scanned the cobwebs.

"You knew her family, perhaps?" I suggested.

"Never heard of them. Do not know that she

ever had any, except in the same way that I know she has a history."

"H'm! h'm!" I ejaculated in surprise.

George Hartzell whistled. Twining said nothing,—only looked gravely at the fire.

"Your knowledge of her was derived from others, then?" I ventured, after a moment's silence.

"Never heard her name mentioned in my life until about the time she came into the school here, and never had any acquaintance with any one who knew more about her than I do."

"Well, I vow!" exclaimed Hartzell. This time it was my turn to whistle. Twining remained silent.

"I thought," I said hesitatingly—"I am sure I have always heard that—that you recommended her for a position in the village school."

"No doubt! no doubt!" said the doctor. "I did it, anyhow, whether you heard of it or not."

"Well—how—why—" I began confusedly.

"I suppose you wish to ask how I came to do so?" said the doctor, coolly.

"Exactly! That's just it," I answered with some positiveness, as I recovered from my surprise.

"Well, I will tell you," said the doctor, "not only why I did it, but all I know about her. You

know I have always been keenly interested in our public schools, and have a notion that something more than mere knowledge is required to make a good teacher. As I say, I had seen Mrs. Somers twice. At our first meeting I was convinced of two things: first, that she was a most remarkable woman, and could do what very few women, or men either, would dare attempt; second, that she had met with some great sorrow, or suffered some great wrong—possibly both. I was so lost in admiration of her conduct, however, that, as I said, I never thought of these things until about two years afterward. Then I saw her again, and studied her somewhat more leisurely. In the light of what I already knew, my previous impressions were more than confirmed. On this occasion I learned two more things about her. First, that no purer or gentler woman ever lived."

The doctor spoke solemnly, and each one of us drew a long breath of relief.

"Secondly," continued the doctor, "that she was the best teacher I had ever seen. Happening to hear of the vacancy in the school soon after, I went before the Board and told them what I thought about her as a teacher. Having some confidence in my judgment, they acted on it.

"And that is how she came to Gladesboro, and all I know about her antecedents."

CHAPTER VIII.

SADDLE-BAGS TO THE RESCUE!

THE doctor paused a moment to note the effects of his declaration, gazing from one to another, his eyes twinkling with mirth.

"After all," he said when he had sufficiently enjoyed our consternation, "I learned a good deal about the little lady in those two interviews. I doubt if ever a newspaper reporter came as near getting the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth out of one of his victims as I did to learning the story of Helen Somers, without asking her a question or exchanging a dozen sentences with her—in fact, without thinking a word about her past or future, but only observing her sufficiency for the present. She made an impression on me the first time I saw her that I shall never get over. I think I would do battle for her, actually or metaphorically, just as willingly as for one of my own children; and I am not sure that I would not go about as far in the sacrifice of time and fortune in her behalf as for one of them. It

was that summer when the excursion-boat blew up at Dwight's Landing, ten miles below here. You remember it, Reynolds?"

"I remember hearing about it," I responded. "I was not at home at the time."

"A bad thing," said the doctor, paying no attention to my remark. "A bad thing! About the worst I ever knew. I have seen a good many hard things, too, in forty-odd years' practice. I was upon the battle-field more than once, General," nodding toward Twining,—"or rather in the rear of it, as a surgeon always is, and where, I take it, the pain and horror of the battle are really concentrated."

"Indeed!" said Twining, looking at him with interest. "I had no idea you were in the service."

"In the service?" said the old man. "No, indeed. I hardly know why I was not, either. I was not so old then but that I might have served if there had been need of it. I suppose that was the real reason. There was no necessity for a draft to fill the medical staff. Besides that, I was responsible in a certain degree for the health of this little region about Gladesboro. At that time the village was hardly worth notice, and I do not think there was another physician within six or eight miles. One moved in soon after the war began, but he

wasn't of much account, and it was not until the war was over that this young Dr. Parsons came, who is gradually relieving me of my practice and opening the way for me to retire from business entirely. I am glad to let him have it, too. It is getting a little heavy for me, and he is not only a good fellow, but a sound-headed man who will be a credit to his profession when he gets a little older.

"As I was saying, though I was not in the service, I went more than once as a volunteer to help care for the wounded after some great battle. You see I had a couple of boys in the Army of the Potomac myself, and so was naturally interested in being around when they were engaged, though of course the chances were only one in a million that they would fall in my way if they were wounded. Whenever there was a battle expected, however, I used to grow restless, and if the condition of affairs at home was such that I could leave, and I could get some friend to look after my patients for a few days, I used to take a trip to the hospitals, as I told Harriet, by way of recreation. She did not quite approve the jest, nor understand how it could be a recreation. Yet there is nothing better for a man of our profession than to drop out of his own round of practice and visit for a

time some of those centers where the extraordinary phases of medical and surgical practice are developed. It is a new field of observation for him, and I defy a country physician to be a week or ten days in an army hospital without going home, not merely instructed by what he has seen, but inspired and invigorated thereby. You see, a thousand things cross his path that awaken interest and curiosity, and supply him with subject-matter for recreative thought for months afterward. Of course at the time he is harrowed and distressed, and in a sense overwhelmed, by the shock of aggregated suffering and the unceasing demand for difficult and exhausting work."

"I can well understand that," said Twining. "I think I have suffered more myself, when under treatment in the hospital, from witnessing the suffering of others than from the pain I experienced."

"No doubt," said the doctor; "I think that is often the case. But, as I was saying, I never saw anything in the field-hospital at all to compare with the horrors of that explosion. You see, the boat was a miserable old tub at best, and was loaded down to the water's edge with excursionists, men, women, and children, though there were more women and children than men, as is nearly always the case with such crowds. They had just pulled

up to the little wharf at Dwight's—I never could understand why, unless it was to select the most inconvenient spot upon the river for an accident. At that time it was perfectly desolate about the landing. A shackling, crazy little old dock built on worm-eaten piles, hardly safe for a rat to run over, stretched out into a little cove. The banks of the river come sheer down to the water a few rods below, and for half a mile above there is hardly room for a road beside the river. A little stream puts in just at the head of the cove, coming down between the hills for ten or fifteen miles. There are a few farm-houses on its banks, but its chief use is to furnish opportunity for a roadway by which the country people bring their produce to the wharf for shipment. Before the railroads were built, of course quite a scope of back country found its outlet here, and at that time there were perhaps a dozen houses at the Landing, occupied by people who were connected in one way or another with boating. All but two or three of these had disappeared years before. Very fortunately, however, the ruins of an old warehouse and a big barn remained, lonely but useful relics of a former era.

"I had been to see a patient in the neighborhood, a mile or such a matter up the creek road.

It was the latter part of June, and the day as still and bright as one ever sees. I was perhaps half a mile from the Landing, intending to take the river-road home, and was watching the sky that showed at intervals before me, thinking I had never seen it of a deeper, clearer blue. All at once I heard a dull, heavy thud, as if some foreign substance of immense weight had dropped on the planet somewhere in that vicinity. After a moment there suddenly appeared on the horizon a white, fluffy mass, looking as if a few thousand fleeces of wool had been shot toward the zenith. I knew what it was in an instant, and the professional instinct sent me whirling toward the Landing as rapidly as Hannibal could take me, before the rumble of the explosion was well over. Hannibal was a colt then, Reynolds, and I think I hardly appreciated what the sleepy-looking brown rascal could do, until that day. I got a great respect for him then, and haven't altogether lost it since."

The doctor threw me a satisfied glance as he spoke. We all knew his weakness for the animal in question, and the pride he took in his own horsemanship.

"I should think not!" I answered, in a tone of appreciation which horse and master well merited.

"He was not long in taking me down to the Landing, that's certain. But short as the road was, I pictured the whole scene in my mind before reaching the bend, and determined what must be done in case it should prove as I feared, one of those overloaded excursion-boats, and there should be many injured. As I came round the foot of the hill I beheld a scene of confusion that I have never seen paralleled. The steamer was lying at the dock, a perfect wreck, her head rapidly sinking. I suppose the water where she lay must have been twelve or fifteen feet deep. Steam was still rising above her decks, and the water for a hundred feet around seemed alive with struggling humanity. The wreck, the wharf, the shore, and the roadway above were covered with human beings, running, walking, crawling, groaning, shrieking, in the wildest confusion. Almost every one was looking out for himself; and those who had recovered their self-control enough to help others had not had time to perfect any system of co-operation, or indeed to act with coolness and efficiency as individuals. It was evident that there had been a great slaughter, and that there must be a great number of half-drowned, maimed, and scalded wretches to care for.

"I saw at once that my first duty would be to

transform the terrified crowd into an efficient and self-controlling company of rescuers; but I knew that an immense amount of surgical work would have to be done, and that I could not long give my sole attention to the matter of rescuing the wounded and drowning.

"I never felt quite so helpless as when I stood in the presence of that great calamity and realized that I was alone with only a pocket-case of instruments, the ordinary equipment of a country doctor's saddle-bags, and not even a vial of sweet-oil nearer than a mile, and across the river at that. Fortunately one of the first men my eye fell upon was Jacob Stohl, one of the residents of the Landing, a slender, gray-whiskered man, who had been a patient of mine for years, afflicted with one of those incurable maladies which never kill. He was a stanch, reliable man whom I could trust to do exactly as I directed, though he was so thoroughly overcome by the magnitude of the disaster that without direction he would have done nothing. One or two of the other denizens of the Landing, with the ready instinct of the 'river-rats,' were already helping those in the water. Stohl was standing bareheaded in his gateway, gazing in helpless horror at the scene before him. I knew if I could once get his mind away from that and let him un-

derstand that he was to obey me, there could be no more faithful and efficient helper. He was not able to do much in the way of relieving the injured, but he had been a horse-trainer in his time, and could do what was quite as necessary to be done just then—drive a horse and remember what he was told. I pulled up beside the old man, and called his attention by a sharp stroke of the whip over his shoulders. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and used to show the mark of that cut for a week afterward So terrified was he at the time, however, that he hardly shrunk beneath the blow. As he turned his face toward me, I saw that it was of an ashen hue, his eyes distended and lips quivering with terror.

"'Is it you, doctor?' he gasped. 'Thank God!'

"'See here, Jake,' said I, jumping down from the buggy and pulling out my saddle-bags, 'there is no time for you to stand here gaping.'

He shut his mouth as if it had been a steel trap, and fastened his eyes inquiringly upon me. I laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"'You see that,' I said, pointing to the wreck and the people struggling in the water.

"'See!' he exclaimed. 'O, doctor! I—I—'

"'Not a word of that, Jake Stohl,' said I; 'you

can help them. You have something better to do than stand here whining like a baby.'

"The taunt stung worse than the whip. 'What can I do?' he cried, grasping my arm eagerly, though his hand trembled.

"'You can drive a horse, can't you?'

"'Yes, that I can;' he said, with a quick look of intelligence. 'Let me get my hat.'

"'O, hang your hat! What do you want of a hat? Here, take mine.' I jammed my old hat on his head as I spoke. It was well I did so, for it not only served to enforce my words, but I think the fact that I was bareheaded helped me to accomplish what I did that day. Before he well knew what he was doing, Jake was sitting in my buggy with the reins in his hands.

"'Give me that whip,' said he, reaching for it.

"'No,' said I, 'that colt don't need any whip, and you are in no mood to handle one.'

"'I guess you're right, doctor,' said the old man, growing every instant calmer and more self-possessed. 'What shall I do?'

"'Ah! That's right, Jake,' said I, encouragingly. 'You do just as I tell you. Don't forget a thing, and especially don't hurry. If you attempt to drive that horse fast—as fast as you would like to, I mean—you will break him down the first mile.

Now drive steadily. Take the river-road to Gladesboro. Keep the colt to his work, but don't press him. You know where Spring's Ferry is?'

"'Yes.'

"'When you get there, send some one across the river to Dr. Sprague. Tell him an excursion-boat has been blown up here. He must come at once, bring everything necessary, and send to every doctor up and down the river on that side.'

"'All right!' said Stohl.

"'Then get yourself a drink of whiskey. You will need it by that time. Do you understand?'

"'Yes.'

"'Drive over to Medford. Tell Dr. Harris the same thing, and have him bring everybody in town to help. Don't wait a minute there, but take the mill-road across to Gladesboro. It is two miles further, but will bring another good man. Tell Raines, the druggist, to pack up sweet-oil, cotton, morphine, chloroform—everything necessary for burns and wounds—take a span of horses and come here at a dead run. Tell him not to spare the horses; I'll pay for them. Do you understand?'

"'All right. Good-bye.'

"Jake was turning round to start when I said:

"'Hold on! When you have done that, drive to

my house and instruct my man as to his care of the colt, if you don't kill him before you get there; tell my son George to pack up whatever his mother thinks may be useful, and come here as fast as the gray mare can bring him. Come with him if you choose, though you had better stay there.'

"'All right,' said the old man; and I could see that he thoroughly understood my errand, and, knowing him as I did, felt sure that he would perform it well. Besides I had put him on his mettle as a horseman, which was sure to act as a balance-wheel to one of his training.

"I do not suppose this conversation had occupied a minute, or hardly more; but I recollect noticing, as he turned the buggy and started down the road toward the little run, that Jake's hand was steady, and that the colt was likely to do good work under his management. I felt glad of it, for seconds meant lives, and everything depended on the bottom of that colt. Jake himself was not very well, which was the reason I had directed him to get a drink of whiskey at Spring's. I was sure he would forget himself unless especially directed to brace up at that point.

"I kept the whip in my hand, and started across the road toward the head of the little pier, holding it as firmly as if it had been a sword, and

feeling, I suppose, very much as if it were a scepter. I knew that somebody must make an impression on that mass of confused, demoralized humanity which would compel it to obey. Any head is better than none at such a time. As long as there is no controlling will there are sure to be a thousand conflicting ones. A hundred brave and efficient men will strive in vain, without direction and control, to accomplish what ten of them would do with ease under efficient leadership. I have always thought it must be a comparatively easy thing to lead an army, because the emblems of rank indicate the right to command, and the demoralized man is rarely inclined to dispute authority. Neither does it require any remarkable power in a man to lead a mob, if the mob knows him and is looking to him for direction. But the hardest job I ever undertook, and the one in which I expected to be the least successful, was the management of that mob—turning it back upon itself and making it an efficient instrument in the salvation and relief of the scores of injured and helpless victims. Already some of the strongest among them were climbing the bank in the rear of the houses, impelled by a blind instinct to get beyond the reach of danger. Only a few were making any effort to relieve those who had jumped

overboard and were struggling in the water, or for rescuing the wounded on board the steamer.

"Fortunately for me, the opportunity which I needed most of all things, though I did not know it then, or at least did not realize it, came to me before I reached the pier. A great strapping fellow in his shirt-sleeves, and wearing a silk hat, came rushing up the path directly in front of me, bellowing like a mad bull. I am pretty hot-tempered, as all my friends know, but nothing rouses me to an absolute frenzy of madness like an exhibition of cowardice. I saw in an instant that the fellow was not hurt, only frightened half out of his wits, and halted him with a voice of authority that even in his frenzied condition made some impression on his sensorium.

"'Where are you going?' I asked imperiously.

"'Oh Lord! Oh Lord!' he panted. 'Don't stop me! My God! don't stop me!' He tried to pass as he spoke, but I stepped squarely in front of him and ordered him to go back and help bring out those who were injured.

"'Oh dear! sir,' he said, 'I can't go back there. There will be another blow-up in a minute. Only one boiler exploded, and there's two of 'em!'

"Again he tried to press by me, but I ordered him back and enforced my commands by applying the

whip with unsparing severity over his head and shoulders. Pain often overcomes terror, and before I had struck half a dozen blows this gigantic fellow was reduced to a condition of absolute obedience, and was actually begging me to tell him what to do. I pointed to a pile of lumber beside one of the houses, and told him to carry it down to the water's edge and throw it off for the assistance of those who were struggling in the water. A score of men who seemed only to have been waiting to be told what to do, instantly volunteered to help in the work.

Passing down the little wharf I met a firm-faced, clean-jawed man, who was assisting another in bringing off one who was terribly injured.

"'Where shall we take him?' he asked as I approached.

"'Relative of yours?' was my answer

"'No.'

"'An acquaintance?'

"'No.'

"'Here,' said I, speaking to one who stood near, 'take this man's place. Carry that man over yonder,' pointing to the old warehouse, 'and put him in as comfortable a place as you can find, and then come back for more.'

"'Now,' said I to the man who had addressed

me, 'you take charge of getting the wounded off that boat. If anybody disputes or questions your authority, knock him down. Stand there at the gang-plank and see that parties do not interfere with each other coming and going, and that the scalded and maimed are brought out as rapidly as possible. The boat will sink in a few minutes.'

"'All right, sir,' he replied. And picking up a piece of the guards that had fallen near where he stood, he stationed himself as I directed. He was a man who could be trusted not only to obey, but to enforce obedience.

"I wanted one more assistant, and that one I found in a great hulking young fellow whose eyes, full of horrified pity, met mine as he came up on the wharf with an injured child in his arms. He brought her toward me, no doubt judging from the saddlebags which were upon my arm that I was a physician. I shook my head as he drew near, saying:

"'Don't bring her here. I can't look at her now.'

"'What shall I do with her?' he asked. 'There are others that must be helped.'

"'Right,' said I. 'Give her to some one to carry to the warehouse yonder. Then take this

whip, and go among those cowards that are running away, and drive every one of them back here to assist in saving these people. Don't be afraid to use it.'

"I saw the fire in his eyes as his great fist closed over the stock, and knew that the able-bodied men and women who had run away from their suffering fellows would soon be clamoring to assist in the work of rescuing them. I was not mistaken. The whip, after all, is the best weapon for slaves and cowards. I do not know that he struck one of the fugitives, but they knew he would if they did not obey.

"Already the natural process of crystallization which quickly affects such masses of humanity had established little centres of activity. A young fellow who had thrown off his clothes and jumped into the water had brought a half-dozen drowning wretches up to the wharf, where others stood ready to take them immediately to the warehouse and barn. A man with one side of his face burned to a blister by the escaping steam was directing the removal of others from the boat. A cool-headed fellow, whom I afterward found to be the mate, had torn down a canvas awning, fastened ropes to the corners, and by the aid of two or three others whom he had compelled to assist him, threat-

ening to brain them with an axe if they did not, was gradually working the sheet back under her bow to check the leak caused by the explosion, and prevent her rapid sinking. It was well, indeed, that he did so. The wounded were scattered about in every part of the boat, and one of the greatest dangers was that she might sink before they could be removed. I remember noticing that he worked as coolly as if there were nothing to disturb or excite him.

"By this time the runaways began to return. The children and the women who were unable to assist had mostly been gotten out of the way, and the stream of mangled and suffering humanity began to move up the gang-plank and along the wharf toward the warehouse pretty steadily. Distracted relatives were holding their dead, or seeking to soothe their wounded. I was importuned on all sides to look at this one and that, and, despite my conviction of its impropriety, I found myself once or twice yielding to their solicitation. Then, perceiving that the work of removal was going on steadily, and knowing that my place of action was at the point to which the injured were being removed—was, indeed, strictly that of the medical man—I took my way to the warehouse, and began the organization of an extempore corps of

nurses to assist in the separation, care, and removal of those who had been rescued. A good many had been brought ashore insensible; some of them drowned, others perhaps susceptible of resuscitation. These, of course, demanded my attention first. Fortunately the blue-eyed giant whom I had sent out upon the hills after the shirkers was at hand and asking for something more to do. Telling him to select as intelligent men and women as he could lay hands on, I directed all the apparently dead or insensible to be taken to a barn a little farther up on the hillside, whither I hastened, and examined each body as it arrived. I exemplified the methods of resuscitation, and, after giving as full directions as I could, placed the work of attempting to revive some of the more hopeful cases in the hands of these willing but unskilled attendants.

"I had been upon the ground probably something like an hour. I remember noticing that the sun was getting low as I hurried back to the warehouse. During all this time I had not opened the case of instruments which I fortunately had in my pocket, nor done hardly anything for the relief of a single sufferer. I had only organized the forces which were at hand, keeping steadily in mind the fact that more good was likely to be ac-

complished by facilitating the removal of the injured and attending to the resuscitation of those apparently drowned than by specific attention to any one of the wounded victims.

"On my return to the warehouse I was surprised to note that something like order had already been established therein. Parties with extemporized stretchers were bringing in the wounded, while others were fetching hay from the barn across the road, on which the sufferers were placed in regular rows along the sides of the building. There was no lack of nurses; every one who was uninjured seeming anxious to do something. Except the hushed wailing moans of the wounded, and the intermittent shrieks of those who had been scalded by the escaping steam, there was little noise and no confusion. Every one was busy under intelligent direction. The old building had settled down upon the side toward the river, and the sloping floor seemed to have been especially designed for this last service which it rendered to suffering humanity. The whole thing fell in not long afterward, and now only a few unweighted piles remain to mark the spot. I had hardly passed the doorway when a little woman came up to me and said:

"'This way, doctor, if you please. You will

find all the worst cases over here. I have had them arranged as nearly as possible with regard to apparent necessity for immediate attention.'

"She spoke with perfect coolness, and even then I could not but admire her good sense and unusual self-control.

"She led the way to the other side of the building as she spoke. There I found a sight—well, I have no words to describe it, and hope never to see its like again. I took off my coat and went to work. Of course I had none, or next to none, of the things that were most required. Somehow the little woman managed to get me lint and bandages—how, I could only guess. I had little use for the latter. Most of the wounded could wait. It was the scalded and burned that demanded attention first. Cotton batting and sweet oil were what I most required—cotton by the pound, and oil by the gallon. I think the comfortables in all the houses at the Landing were torn up to get the cotton they contained; and though no oil could be procured, this level-headed woman got a crock of cream and some eggs, out of which was made a substitute that mitigated many a sufferer's agony. This and the steady drip of cold water were the only means we had of relieving a hundred shrieking sufferers. I tell you, gentlemen, it

was a stroke of common-sense that any medical practitioner might be proud of. I confess it had not occurred to me until a supply was ready at my hand. It was hardly inferior to the best prepared collodion. I would have taken off my hat to her, when she brought it to me, only my hat was gone, and my hands were too busy to take it off if it had not been.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOFUL NIGHT.

"AFTER a while my professional brethren began to arrive with help and supplies. Raines had obeyed orders, and was among the first to report with a wagon-load of necessary articles. The poor fellow was greatly grieved that he was not the very first. Since that time he keeps a couple of hampers ready packed in his pharmacy, with the things needed in such an accident, and it has more than once been proved a very wise thing to do. Say what you will, General, about promptness in the army, I doubt if there was ever a set of men who would do as many things, and as nearly the right ones, in the same space of time as a company of physicians to whom knowledge of a great disaster comes unexpectedly. Here were these men, nearly all of them country practitioners, not accustomed to accidents of this kind, as, thank God, few people are, who half an hour before, perhaps, had not heard of the explosion. Not one of them had wasted a minute's

time. Everything he had in his office, or that the village in which he lived afforded, that could be of benefit to the sufferers, he had thought of, and either brought himself or directed others to bring. One after another they came, and with the invariable courtesy of the profession reported to me for duty, simply because I happened to have been the first on the ground and was naturally supposed to know what needed most urgently to be done. I assure you, General, I have often felt very proud of the impromptu hospital staff that gathered around me that night.

"After a while George came, and the old man Stohl slipped around and whispered in my ear:

"'Never broke his stride the whole way, and I believe would have made the trip back without hurting him a mite.'

"I looked up at his face, and never saw a finer exhibition of the beautifying power of good works. I do not think the glow of that day ever left the old man's countenance until he entered the golden gate a year or so afterwards.

"Well, we had a terrible time—terrible! Though help and supplies flowed in so that there were hands enough to do, and abundance of all things necessary to do with, I shall never forget the long hours of that night, and the terrible scenes with

which they were filled. I lost sight of the little woman who had been as my right hand before the surgeons arrived, until, some time along in the early morning hours, I heard a childish voice, down at the lower end of the warehouse, singing, in soft, clear tones, snatches of Sabbath-school songs. It seemed strange indeed, amid the sad sounds and sadder silence of those scenes of death and pain, to listen to these tender notes. As quick as I heard them I knew they were the saddest of all sounds—the dying notes of an unconscious soul. Almost involuntarily I went to the spot from which they proceeded, and there saw my assistant of the evening before, with a golden-haired child of perhaps seven or eight years of age pressed close against her breast. The child was singing, with wide-open eyes that saw nothing of the sad scenes around her, one after another of the little hymns she had learned at her mother's knee. All about her was pain and woe. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of those who stood around. The sufferers, who lay upon each side of the room by scores, almost forgot their own agony as they listened to her voice. Her cheek was flushed. In her dreaming fancy she was about to retire to rest. She bade good-night to all, and sank into the sleep that knows no waking. She was the most beauti-

ful child I ever saw. A piece of the wreck had struck her head and fractured the skull. Nothing could be done until the morning, and that morning she could not wait to see. As she ceased singing with a tremulous gasp, I stooped down, touched her wrist, noted the signs of death, and sought to take her from the enfolding arms.

"'Don't take her away, doctor. Let me hold her,' said the brave woman.

"I informed her as gently as I could of the fact which is always unexpected and terrible. With a groan that wrung my heart she laid her head beside the dead child's face, while her form was convulsed with sobs. After a little, some of the women lifted her up and took the child away. She was as unconscious as the little corpse that was taken from her arms. I saw her comfortably placed upon a pile of straw, waited until she began to revive, and then, to spare myself the pain of witnessing the sorrow which I expected would follow her complete restoration, strolled out upon the wharf down toward the sunken steamer, the smoke-stack and upper deck of which were all that remained above water.

"A little group of those who had been among the most active workers of the night gathered about me. Perhaps some of them were already

there before I came. As we stood, talking disjointedly as people do on such occasions, some one pointed to the water just in front of the steamer's prow. In the early morning light one could see everything beneath almost as plainly as above its placid surface. We saw, I think, the strangest sight that ever mortal eyes beheld. Standing upright on the river-bottom, the left hand clasping a book to her breast, the other raised upward with outstretched finger as if pointing to the sky, stood the figure of a woman clothed in white, swaying back and forth as if keeping time with some melody too subtle for mortal ears to catch. The eyes were open, and seemed to look toward us with a tender, pleading gaze. The soft white drapery rose and fell about her as if moved by a gentle breeze. Her long fair hair floated over her left shoulder. For a moment all were petrified. It seemed like a vision of promise to the dead that lay about her on the bottom of the river. Instinctively, those who were covered removed their hats as if conscious we stood in a holy presence. For a moment a sweet supernal awe thrilled every heart. Then reason asserted its sway, and told us that it was no heavenly vision. Arrangements were quickly but silently made for raising the seraphic form.

It was the body of a bride, yet arrayed in the spotless garments she had worn at the altar, and clasping to her breast a prayer-book which contained betwixt its leaves the record of her yesterday's marriage.

"Turning away from this sad scene, a woman informed me that the lady whose little child had died wished to see me. I found her where I had left her with the calm look of self-control which I had noted the evening before upon her face.

"'I am very sorry, madam,' I said, 'for the death of your little girl.'

"'It was not my child,' she said.

"'Not yours?' I asked in surprise. 'Whose was it?'

"'I do not know. Would to God she had been mine!'

"Then the tears burst forth, and for an instant I thought I saw into her heart. No one in all the rescued company knew aught of the little corpse that lay beside the weeping woman, whose heart yearned to claim even the beautiful clay as her own. Nothing more has ever been learned of the seraph who joined the angel-choir with the earth-notes of praise upon her lips. The little grave upon the hillside just above has on its head-stone only the last lines the dying sufferer sang.

"I was about turning away when the lady said, half apologetically:

"'I wish you would examine my arm, doctor.'

"Looking at her carefully I could see that she was suffering intensely. Upon examination I found her left arm was dislocated at the shoulder. She had ministered to others all that night, uttering no word of complaint nor disclosing by any sign her own suffering."

"And that woman?" said Twining, as he leaned forward with a glow in his dark eyes I had not seen there for years.

"That woman was Helen Somers," said the doctor, jerking his thumb toward the parlor. "That was the first time I ever saw her," he continued, after a short silence, "and I had never heard of her before. She continued her journey that afternoon after the little girl had been buried on the hillside in a coffin she sent across the river to procure. I noticed that her purse was none too heavy when she gave me the commission, and through the grateful remembrance of some whom she had served I was able to return it to her unlightened by the kindly act she contemplated. She handed me her card as she was leaving, but I hardly thought of her again for two years, except now and then to wonder what had

been the experience which had made her the woman she had shown herself that night. You see I have no sympathy with this idea that men and women are born of heroic tempers any more than they are born of heroic mould. Heroes are grown, cultivated, raised—just as much as beets and turnips. So I knew that this modest, self-contained woman, who never once lost her head among the terrible scenes of that night, who remembered that eggs whipped up with cream were not a bad substitute for sweet-oil in the treatment of fresh burns, when an old practitioner like me was in despair; who thought always of others and not of herself, and who took that little golden-haired angel into her heart and made her heavenward way more tolerable by ignoring her own suffering—I knew that this woman was no more a work of chance than the human soul itself, but that the Divine Master had cut and shaped her nature with the keen-edged but unerring instrumentality of suffering. A rare nature like hers shows the finest touches of Divine handiwork, no doubt, but it needs them all the same. I used to think of her sometimes and wonder what the process was by which this diamond had been so finely cut.

"About two years afterward I was spending a

week or so in a little village among the mountains of Vermont. Mother had coaxed me to go with her for a vacation, as she said. I don't care much for vacations, and have an idea that we really get more rest by running down to the city and staying at a hotel for a few days, any time except in the very hottest weather, than in any other way, simply because it affords the most complete change. However, Harriet insisted upon going; so we went. I very soon exhausted all there was of interest for me in the region, and one day in sheer desperation dropped into the school-house. I had listened to wonderful stories of the lady who had charge of the village school, and suppose I had heard her name a dozen times, but had never once thought of connecting her with the heroine of Dwight's Landing. I recognized her, however, in a minute. She welcomed me as if I had been an old friend, though there was a shade of pain mingled with the soft flush on her cheek. Well, I need not say what I saw at the school. She surprised me just as much there as she did at the Landing, but her capacity in the school-room has become an old story in Gladesboro, while I have never before told the story of the explosion to any one but Harriet."

"Mrs. Somers, of course, knew you were instru-

mental in getting her this place?" mused Hartzell.

"She called and thanked me," replied the doctor, "and remarked that I had probably done her a greater favor than I supposed. I asked her to what she referred, thinking I might perhaps get a clue to the story, about which I was really curious."

"What did she say?" I asked.

"Merely looked at me with those great earnest eyes, and said she preferred not to tell me just then. The time might come, she said, when I would not need to be told."

"I vow!" said Hartzell, "that was cool."

"It was honest, George Hartzell," said the doctor, warmly. "I had never felt as much respect for her as I did at that moment, and it has increased every minute since, as I have noted her life and work here."

"She is unquestionably a good teacher," I remarked sententiously.

"Bah!" said the doctor, snapping his fingers viciously in my face. "That is all you know about it. She has done more to make Gladesboro the unusually happy and orderly village it is than all the other people in it."

"Why, what has she done?" I asked in surprise.

"What hasn't she done?" retorted the doctor.

"Look back and see the changes five years have wrought in the social and moral life of our village."

"They have been very great," I admitted.

"I should think they had," he said exultingly. "Look at the library, the reading-room, the evening school, the Mechanical Club, the Art Class, the Reading Club, and the courses of lectures we have each winter."

"But you don't mean to say she has done it all?" I laughed.

"Every bit of it. Of course she has made you and me and all the people help her; but we would never have lifted a hand but for her inspiration and leadership. She has revolutionized the town, and left us to think we were doing it ourselves."

"And you have not learned her story yet?" said Twining, after a pause.

"Not a word," replied the doctor; "but I shall know it some day. I was so impressed by her course in declining to speak of her own affairs that I told her if she ever needed a friend to call upon me and she would find one ready-made, who would do her bidding and ask no questions."

"What did she say to that?" I asked.

"Merely put her hand in mine and said, 'I am sure of it, doctor.' But there were tears in her eyes, and in her voice too, as she said it."

"Well, doctor," said Hartzell, laughing, almost sneering, I thought, "Mrs. Somers has a most knightly defender, though he is an old man."

"George Hartzell," said the doctor, severely, pointing his long finger at him as he spoke, "it would be greatly to your credit if she had a *young* knight who was equally honorable and devoted."

Twining and I were both astounded at the doctor's warmth. Hartzell flushed deeply and seemed about to make an angry response, when there came a knock at the library door, and an instant after Hester opened it, as is her wont, without waiting to be bidden, and swept us a royal courtesy from the threshold as she said:

"If you can dispense with tobacco and scandal for a little while, gentlemen, we shall be glad to see you in the parlor."

NOTE.—The incident of the bride, related on page 187, and that of the little girl singing Sabbath-school hymns as she lay dying from the effects of the explosion, being literally true, the author feels morally certain that they will be regarded as improbable and unnatural by those conscientious and all-wise critics who are wont to condition Divine power with unhesitating readiness. From some experience as a writer of fiction, the author has learned that the portions of his work which are always pounced

upon by these sapient oracles as too improbable for belief, if not altogether impossible to have occurred, are always those which have been transcribed with the utmost literalness from actual life. In one instance, he copied almost word for word the sworn confession of a criminal, and was met with universal comment that the situation was "too improbable to command belief, and the idea that a man would employ such language in speaking of such an act absolutely incredible." In this case the incidents given were related to me by a good physician in whose life it was an unforgettable incident.

CHAPTER X.

"PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL."

HESTER is a queenly woman. Perhaps I have intimated this before; but I am sure I have not uttered the thought half as often as it has been in my mind. As she stood in the dooway betwixt the brilliantly lighted hall and the dim cosiness of the library, and shook her forefinger at me with mock imperiousness, I thought that time had but added to her charms. Our life had been one of intense earnestness, yet our friends were accustomed to say that we made of it a constant jest. The fact is that my profession separated me so thoroughly from the home life, that the glimpses which I had of it were almost of necessity filled with rollicking mirth and almost continual banter.

The man who stays at home seven days in the week, fifty-two weeks in the year, and is engaged in a business all of whose ins and outs, ups and downs, prospects and contingencies, his wife and family understand and share with him, finds it

hard to appreciate the domestic life of one whose business almost of necessity excludes participation in the knowledge of its details, enforces his absence from the family circle perhaps three fourths of the time, and breaks up the remaining fourth into periods of indefinite length and uncertain recurrence. At home to-day, I make the most of it. To-morrow I may be summoned to go a thousand miles away, and must leave upon the instant. Such is the imperiousness of a profession ordinarily regarded as especially enviable in the independence which it brings.

Usually my stay at home, whether long or short, is chiefly devoted to the elucidation of some idea, a demonstration of some fact, or the solution of some professional problem which is always lying in wait to pounce upon my leisure.

Chance, rather than inclination, forced me into the position of the consulting engineer. Though my name was still associated with a firm in a neighboring city, I had for some time performed but little of that labor which falls to the lot of the constructing engineer. Perhaps a natural aptitude, or it may have been a cultivated inclination, had led me not only to prefer the solution of knotty problems, but to acquire some reputation for success in that direction. This is a quality

always in demand in our profession; so that no sooner was this characteristic recognized by my professional brethren, by lawyers and by capitalists, than I was in a sense forced out of the regular routine work devolving on the firm of Reynolds, Bryce & Co., and compelled to take up the somewhat nondescript existence, peculiar to our day and time, of the professional scientific expert. The life was in the main a most agreeable one, but its effect upon the domestic economy was no less marked than its influence upon the library. A professional man who does the bulk of his work at his office, bringing home with him at night, if anything, only some fag end of the day's labor which he quietly employs to economize an unfilled hour or two of the evening, would have had no use for such a combination of library, laboratory, and machine-shop as I deemed essential not merely to my comfort, but to the achievement of specific results.

Here I hid away from the world when I had a purpose to accomplish, a problem to solve, a result to achieve. Though in my own home, I was hardly of it. Hester and Bertha loved to come and watch my work, but it was too far outside of their training for them to comprehend its details or judge of the prospects of success. Not only

this: but my time was too valuable, or the necessity of working with that peculiar glow which comes almost like inspiration to those on whom devolves the performance of such tasks, imperatively excluded association and companionship therein. It was only when the task was done, or when my mind was crushed by its apparent hopelessness and I threw it aside to wait for a more favorable time, that I really became a part of the household. In fact, Hester was not merely the head of the family, but she and Bertha, with such friends as they chose to have with them, really constituted the family itself, I being merely a transient guest, for whose entertainment all things were indeed ordered, but who was held exempt from the cares and burdens of the home. I think these are the chief reasons why our married life has been such an exceptionally happy one. Hester has never had time to get thoroughly tired of me. A husband who to-day is required to examine Lake Okeechobee and report upon the feasibility of draining it, and to-morrow may be employed to devise a plan for turning the waters of a California river against a mountain-side miles away, that it may be eaten down and its auriferous deposits revealed,—who goes up and down the earth dealing always with some new and

more or less remarkable problem,—is sure to be regarded not only as a visitor in his own home, but a most welcome and distinguished one, during the brief intervals which he can give to domestic enjoyment.

This was my condition. How the household goes on in my absence I have little idea. I suppose just the same as when I am present. I used to smile when they spoke of being lonely in my absence. I confess I am rarely ever lonely when away from home. Perhaps because always busy with something new and in new surroundings; perhaps because I have long ago acquired the habit of leaving home at home, and looking forward to the day of joyful return rather than regarding with mournfulness the day of departure. To me my home life was a true oasis. I not only turned back to it for enjoyment, but really counted it all there was of life. Outside of it was the desert. I made journeys across it. I sought advantage, performed tasks, did the work the world required, but carried about no home with me, nor thought that my life was of it. For all this I turned back to the quaint little castle on the summit of Cragholt.

It was because of these things that my presence at home during a holiday, or, indeed, at any

period of the year without the burden of pressing, imperious work upon me, was always a signal for gayety and rejoicing. Though quite outside of fashionable life, the little village above which we dwelt looked forward to such intervals with almost as much of anticipation, I have sometimes thought, as my family themselves. On such occasions I always found that Hester and her cronies were sure to have some plan by which the days of home-staying might be made to contribute something to others' enjoyment. She and Mrs. Somers had been very earnest co-workers in the various schemes of improvement which the doctor had so justly ascribed to the influence of the latter; yet, somehow, they had not become as intimate as ladies are apt to grow when associated in such work. Indeed, Hester was one of those women who have few intimates. Every one in the village knew her, and I think nearly every one liked her; but there was about her a sort of dignified reserve that kept her from giving more than was asked, and frequently, I think, prevented her rendering as much as was expected. So while she and Mrs. Somers had worked very earnestly together for the uplifting of the village life, there was none of that effusive devotedness between them that is ordinarily found in such cases. I

have a notion that Hester felt somewhat hurt at the fact that Mrs. Somers did not make herself a more frequent and familiar visitor at Cragholt, though I do not think it ever crossed her mind that the woman with whom she had wrought so earnestly and pleasantly for the good of others, had any such thing as a past that needed to be explained.

I am not a bashful man in the ordinary sense of that term, yet somehow I am terribly afraid of *little* companies. Great ones I do not fear at all. Indeed, there is a sort of solitariness about a multitude which makes one feel almost as lonely as in the wilderness. I can remember more than once standing before a large audience, whose eyes were all turned toward me, and experiencing the same sense of loneliness and isolation that one feels at sunrise on the desert, with only the sky and the unbroken horizon-line to mark the limit of individuality. The multitude does not come near to me. They may scan my features, criticise my coat, or comment on my words: I do not mind that. They cannot come within the limit of my personality. They cannot see into my soul. They cannot catch my eye, and enter through this treacherous portal the inclosure where my thought sits secure and calm. One man may read a whole

life's history in another's face. A thousand can see nothing there, no matter how carefully they scan its lineaments. The crowd never trenches on one's individuality, no matter how carefully or how intently they regard him. One may always be sure that he can safely defy public scrutiny. One man is stronger than a host. He has them at a disadvantage. Their common thought is perfectly legible to him. The orator always knows what is in the mind of his auditors, while his own thought is inscrutable to them. That is the reason, I suppose, that an audience is said to "hang on the lips" of a speaker. They get the idea that he has some thought that may be of interest to them, and their only way to this treasure hidden in his heart is over his lips. If he were sitting face to face with the dullest of them, the eye would ferret out, and the searching soul weigh and measure, the secret long before the lips could coin it into words.

So the "little company" puts one at a disadvantage. It is too large a circle for the self-forgetful abandonment of friendship, and yet comes too near to permit the barrier which fences out the multitude to serve as a protection. While a hundred would put a man at his ease, a dozen may thoroughly disconcert him. I might think

myself peculiar in this respect, had not others admitted and exhibited the same sensation. I know a great orator on whose words thousands have hung with delight, who seems hardly less than a boor in the presence of a "little company." One who has led the greatest armies of the age, whose heart-beats the world counted for months with sympathizing agony, once told me that the greatest multitude that could be assembled did not at all embarrass his thought or seem to restrict or limit his individuality. On the contrary, the "little company" was like a barrier of fire about him. He shrunk into himself to hide away from those who came so near that he felt their scrutiny, and yet not near enough so that he could afford to throw down the screen of selfhood and open his soul to their gaze without reservation.

It was with no little misgiving, therefore, that I clasped the portfolio which contained the sketch I was to read, and followed my friends out of the library. Hester was waiting for me on the threshold. I suppose my unprotected scalp even then traitorously betrayed my trepidation, for as she took my arm she said, in a half-laughing, half-remonstrant undertone:

"Don't distress yourself, Percy. There is no one here whose presence need annoy you."

The truth is she knew my weakness and pitied my embarrassment. I think one of the dearest wishes of her life had been that she might now and then assemble a company of friends and have me read to them some little product of my leisure. I was given to writing little sketches of what I saw in my various journeyings; and though I liked well enough to read them to Hester and Bertha, and might have included Maud and Allie, I could not go beyond that without visible constraint. I do not mind seeing things in print—that is like addressing a crowd; but to read what one has written to a dozen listeners, in one's own house, is a test of nerve for which war offers no parallel.

I suppose that by the time we had crossed the hall and reached the brilliantly lighted parlors my confusion must have been evident to the dullest observer. Hester, who had no sympathy for this state of mind, but was naturally anxious to conceal it, kept me in strict charge until she saw me safely ensconced upon a lounge in the farthest corner, beside which she had placed a stand with an argand burner, well knowing that deceitful distance would disarm prying eyes, and that after a time I would forget whether I read to half a score or to a thousand.

She had done more than that. Her cunning foresight had shown itself in the arrangement of quite an elaborate programme which was to be completed before my ordeal began. First there was music—George Hartzell at the piano and Jack Twining with his violin, and fresh young voices filling the room with harmonious prophecies of to-morrow. I had not heard Twining play since the old days before the world came between us. As I lay back on the lounge and watched him, I could easily note the growth since then. His was the "singing touch" upon the bow that made this most inscrutable and bewitching of instruments the interpreter of the soul. Softened yet strengthened had Jack Twining been by his past, yet somehow it seemed as if the future promised still more, as the old doctor had declared. He was one of the few players whom I have heard, whether professional or amateur, who seemed to be easily and thoroughly master of the instrument he held. The "imp of the violin" gave him no trouble. It obeyed his will, and under his firm, even touch gave a man's rendering of what he played. Somehow, I fancied that he was playing to Mrs. Somers that night, and offering her knightly sympathy and chivalric admiration.

I do not know what put it in my mind, but

when the music ceased and George Hartzell turned quickly on his stool, I thought it was to flash a look of inquiry into the face of the teacher, and then another into that of my friend, who was putting his violin into its case. He even seemed troubled or irritated by something he saw or failed to see in their faces. I smiled as I thought that Hartzell, for all his carelessness, might be jealous of the pretty widow. He was one of the most familiar frequenters of our hearth. Mrs. Somers I had but rarely met in company, and never before when George was present. As he moved his eyes from Twining's face and let them rest on the fair, daintily cut features of the woman of whose heroism we had heard that night, there was a strangely anxious, almost angry, expression in his blue eyes, and a hard, set look about his lips which I did not like and could not understand. As for the object of his scrutiny, she sat gazing into the fire as if her thoughts were very far away. The start she gave when Hester spoke her name convinced me that they were.

Then came the surprise of the evening, which had been carefully kept from me. There was to be a Shakespearean reading. The parts had been given out and practiced by the young people for a week, I learned afterward, but that from

which we all expected most entertainment was Hartzell's rendering of the character of the Cardinal, for the play selected was that which pivots on the trial of Queen Katherine and the downfall of her relentless enemy. The *rôle* was a favorite one with George, and he was a reader of rare skill and power. Mrs. Somers was Queen Katherine. She had, too, the general arrangement and assignment of parts and positions, as it appeared. In so doing she seemed to pay no attention to Hartzell. She merely noted his position, and grouped her readers accordingly. The place reserved for herself, not by design, but by the exigencies of the play, as it seemed, was just beyond the chandelier, with the full glare of its light falling on her face. Hartzell stood opposite, only his side face showing, from where I sat, when addressing her We were not disappointed in the Cardinal, nor, indeed, in any of the other parts save that of the Queen. The young people read distinctly, promptly, and with fair appreciation. Indeed, they formed, as should always be the case in such private dramatic efforts, a pleasant but not striking background for the really accomplished readers.

But, as I said, Mrs. Somers's rendition of Queen Katherine was a surprise. I happened to be looking at George when she uttered the words, " I am

a poor, weak woman," and I saw the color go out of his face and his lips quiver as he listened to the firm, tender, pleading accents which told a stricken woman's woe. Then my eyes rested on her face, and I did not wonder at the hush that had fallen on the little company. The soft brown hair had lightened into gold under the blaze of the chandelier. A soft flush rested on her face, and an almost tearful light burned in her eyes as she looked up at George, as if the defense she uttered were her own hopeless protest against intangible injustice. I will not try to describe either her reading or its effects. If I should live a thousand years, I could not forget that slight figure in the circle of softened light—a hint of pearly white about the throat, one slender hand half-raised in unwilling remonstrance against the act of "the king, my husband," whom she seemed with undying loyalty so very loath to blame even by implication. I shall never forget either her tones or her manner.

The character has always been a favorite one with me, and I so rarely hear one of Shakespeare's characters rendered without feeling that my own ideal has been tarnished and distorted, that I dread almost to see them attempted even by the most famous artists. On and off the

stage I have heard the best. Strange as it may seem, I have never heard anything to compare with this frail, weak teacher's rendition of this wondrously intricate and difficult part. For once my ideal was infinitely beneath the one portrayed. Neither on nor off the stage have I ever listened to a characterization to compare with this in effect, in delicacy, fervor, and truth. Her voice was not remarkable. Indeed, I think it would have been termed thin if one could disassociate it from the words—the thought which even its weakness served to intensify. One knew she was a "poor, weak woman," and pitied her because her wrongs were incurable. The sympathy of the poor gentleman who alone dared speak his pity was phrased by Twining, and I make no doubt that every one felt its tender abruptness to express their own thought most fitly.

Hartzell's part, finely as it was given, lost flavor by comparison with this strangely thrilling impersonation. I thought that was the cause of the strange, dissatisfied look on his face when the reading was over. Every one but he joined most heartily in the plaudits showered upon the fair reader. She bore her honors modestly, but I thought somewhat wearily, as if she would rather not have won them if by that means she might have

escaped the involuntary training which made such a triumph possible.

As for the doctor, he had not taken his eyes from her face from the beginning to the end. When it was over he turned to me, and laying his slender hand upon my knee, gazed searchingly into my face and whispered:

"I declare, Reynolds, she terrifies me. What do you think she will do next?"

And yet, though unusual, this unrivaled power was not unnatural. It was only another instance of the superiority of nature's preparation over any mere human training. The trouble is that only once in a century do we find one strong enough to endure such preparation, and of fine enough texture to give forth true notes under the touch of the Master's hand.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ORDEAL OF "NO. I."

I WAS so engrossed by what I had seen and heard that I opened my portfolio mechanically, when called upon by the company, and, almost before I knew what I was about, began to read. The schoolmistress, somewhat flushed with the ovation she had received, but still calm and collected, sat directly in front of me in the full glare of the light, as if she challenged the almost sinister gaze which George cast upon her from the half-shadow of the screen which shielded him from the firelight. Bertha, who had long been a devout worshiper of the fair woman who was uppermost in our thoughts that night, had drawn an ottoman beside her, and with one arm thrown across her lap in affectionate freedom, waited for me to begin the story of

"MY FIRST SKATES.

Dedicated to my Daughter."

(As I read the title, Bertha rose and courtesied with a mock gravity that brought a laugh. I was

glad of it, for a laugh takes away a great deal of the terror a "little company" inspires, and I proceeded much more at my ease for the saucy interruption.)

"I should not like to confess how many years ago it was that I first became the owner of a pair of skates. It seems to me an age, but it cannot be long. The world has been moving so fast that cycles seem to have intervened since that winter morning when, a chubby boy of twelve, I rode with my father to a village twelve miles away to invest a part of the proceeds of the autumn's harvest of nuts, and perhaps a few of the skins of wild 'varmints' I had trapped, in such a glittering possession. For a year this had been my one ambition. There were not many boys of my acquaintance who possessed such a treasure, and this fact no doubt made the luxury doubly dear to me. In that day skates were to a country lad of that part of the region where I lived, at least, very much what camels are to the Arab, ponies to the Indian, or reindeer to the Laplander,—the indubitable evidence of rank among his fellows. It was not even then the far West, but there was not a railroad within a hundred miles, and the only sort of steam transport I had ever seen were the low-pressure steamers which in summer trailed their long lines

of black smoke above the blue waters of the great lake lying to the northward. The regular stroke of their engines, which could be heard miles away, is one of the summer memories of my boyhood.

"The country was not new, or at least not considered new. Its first settlers were already old men and women, and growing scarce at that. The forests were rapidly disappearing. There were even some places where one could see the light through the strip of woodland on the rear ends of the abutting farms which fronted on the township roads a mile apart. It was a farming community, and farming, in that day meant hard work and small profits. There was no want, and hardly any trace of luxury. Money was scarce, and toys scarcer still. California had yielded its first harvest of gold, but its influences had not yet reached the popular life. It had only touched the consciousness of that region in the form of little nuggets sent back by adventurous miners from that El Dorado. How well I remember peeping over my father's shoulder at the first nugget I ever saw—a lump of virgin gold holding, in a grip which the ages had not served to loosen, a bit of white translucent quartz polished by long attrition with the pebbles in the river-bed. It was perhaps as large as a

good-sized pea, and I dreamed that night of picking them up like chestnuts under forest leaves.

"Luxuries were scarce. I doubt if there were three pianos in the town. I am not sure there were any. I know I had never heard one. Almost every child had a few picture-books, and we made those few go a great way. For the same reason toys were scarce also, and save such means of childish pleasure as nature afforded, and some rough, home-made playthings, the boys and girls of that day had very few of those mechanical aids to enjoyment which constitute so large a part of the child-life of to-day. I suppose Bertha had more books before she was ten than her father and mother both possessed at twenty. We were greedy for them, too. The boy or girl of that day counted a book the most priceless of treasures. In this respect I was looked upon with envy by my fellows. Yet our youngsters would laugh if I should give a catalogue of my library. Fortunately my father was fond of reading, and had a few good books. Two weekly papers and a monthly magazine came to the house. Of these the files had been sacredly kept for years, and what treasures they were! How many days they filled with golden glory! Some of them were brown with age. The smell of the paper-mill was yet upon others. How full

and rich they were in story and tradition! The world they dealt with was even then the world of the past. Tales of colonial life and war; Washington and his generals; Napoleon and his marshals; historical and biographical sketches; pioneer hunters and preachers—the life of the nation's past was recorded in them with a vividness the present knows little of.

"There was not much news in those days. Save the debates in Congress, and the stories of battles and marches in Mexico, there does not seem to have been much happening that was thought worth recording. The tale of each day's iniquities was not told over and over again with that horrible particularity which characterizes our modern periodical literature. Masses were of more importance than individuals, then. The debates in Congress were given at great length. Column after column of speeches, some good and some bad, no doubt, but all bearing on the great questions of the day, came week by week, to almost every household in the land. I wonder what the boys and girls of to-day would think of a group of youngsters from ten to fifteen, sitting on the hay in the great barn mow, listening while one of their number read the last great speech in Congress, or discussing with fierce ardor the pros and

cons of the pending political questions, while the swallows twittered in their nests under the eaves.

"Ah, we do those things better now! Master and miss know all the tedious chatter of to-day. Gossip has taken the place of history, and scandal the place of political discussion. In this way we nourish crime and pettiness. The boy of fifteen knows little of his country's history save what his school text-book tells him. The young lady of to-day knows more about the city's sins than she does about the war for liberty.

"Even the religious papers are largely taken up with the record of personal incident. In some of them it is well headed 'Religious Gossip;' though the column is apt to contain more gossip than religion. The record of petty incident takes the *pas* of everything else. Perhaps it is better, but I should feel safer about the future if our youth read and thought more of the great things of yesterday, and less of the little things of to-day.

"But to return to the skates. Their purchase was a momentous epoch in my life. I remember that they were 'fourteen shillin's,' so the merchant said. He had some for 'twelve shillin's.' They lacked the brass tips on the slender

points that turned over the toes, however. I could never see that those brass tips added at all to the propulsory capacity of the skates, but somehow they seemed a most essential ingredient of the investment I was about to make, so that, despite the extra quarter, I finally decided upon those with the coveted tips.

"Even with this piece of added extravagance they were very plain and cumbrous affairs compared with the modern 'club' skates. Instead of the solid metallic nickel-plated bed fitting exactly the sole of the boot, and firmly attached to it by almost invisible metallic clamps which act automatically, or are manipulated by means of a thumb-piece which hides itself under the curve of the instep,—instead of these multiplied adornments and modern conveniences, my first skates were simply crude, hollow-edged runners set in clumsy wooden frames, to which were attached a multiplicity of straps and buckles by which the feet were harnessed to them. I had still to pay a harness-maker another half-dollar for putting on these attachments. There was a stay-strap for the toe and a back-strap for the heel, with a ring upon each side where the cross-straps, which passed over the instep, engaged with the heel-strap, and returning buckled close about the

foot. All these were considered necessary in those days to hold the skates in place. In addition to them all it required a great deal of stamping and puffing to drive the iron peg into the heel and get the skate actually in position, and buckle the straps up to the very last possible hole. I am half inclined to think, sometimes, that the boy and girl of to-day would rather forego the pleasure of skating than have so much trouble to put themselves 'in stays' before their sport begins. Yet I doubt if any earthly possession has given me greater pleasure, or filled my heart with more vainglorious pride, than those awkwardly made and marvelously equipped skates.

"I could hardly restrain my anxiety to show them to my playmates. The journey home seemed almost interminable, though the sleighing was delightful and the lively bays did not loiter on the road. As soon as the chores were done and supper over I started for our nearest neighbors, the Matsons, to display my treasures. The Matson children were my especial cronies,—probably because they were the nearest. I was an only child, saving a little wee sister whose cunning blue eyes had not yet learned to take pleasure in anything so cumbrous and unattractive as this pair of iron runners. Like myself she was strongly at-

tracted to the brass tips, however, and seemed to have an irresistible inclination to put them in her mouth.

"At the Matsons' there was no lack of children. They ranged from several years older than myself down to a close rivalry in infantile experience to my baby sister. I was at liberty to choose association with the oldest or the youngest. There was but one boy, Tim, who was about my age. He was a fat, lubberly fellow, but as good-natured as a seal. He seemed to have been born to bad luck, however. His parents were not poor, but there were a great many children in the house. The father was always 'complaining,' and the mother found it difficult to 'make buckle and tongue meet.' Tim was a wonderfully willing fellow, but he seemed never to be in the right place at the right time. He was always at the tail end of a race; the first one to be found when we played 'I spy,' the first to be caught when we played 'goal,' and the last to be chosen when we played ball. He was not bright at his lessons, either, so that school offered little compensation for the mishaps of the playground.

"But Tim was not envious—it was too much trouble to be anything so positive—and I remember well how longingly and earnestly he gazed at

those skates in the glowing firelight without a particle of discontent or envy in the tones in which he recounted their excellencies and rejoiced with me in their possession. He was somewhat older than I, and a great deal bigger; but somehow I used to 'boss' him around and patronize him as if I had been his senior by half a decade. But then I fought his battles for him, too, stood up for his rights, and allowed nobody to impose on Tim Matson on the playground or in the school while I was around. We never had a quarrel in our lives; and though the years are many since I have seen the dear old dunderhead, and I do not even know whether he is in the land of the living or not, I must say that I have met few really better fellows or truer hearts than my boyhood playmate, lubberly Tim Matson.

"Tim's sisters partook a good deal of his characteristics. They were fat, fair, freckled, and fussy; not over-bright, but endowed with an inexhaustible good-nature. Those who were older than Tim petted him as the only boy of the family; those who were younger than he looked up to him as the coming man. They were good-natured girls, whom labor or privation did not trouble, but to whom the curriculum of the district school was rather formidable. Tim was the

king of their hearts and the prophet of their hopes. But they were jolly friends of all the other neighboring children; and as for me, who was their nearest and most familiar associate, I think they liked me almost as well as Tim, having a due appreciation for certain attributes I was thought to possess, and of which poor Tim was wofully lacking.

"From this description must be excepted his sister Mary Jane, an ethereal, tender, sensitive soul, next younger than Tim, and the boon companion of my life. When Tim and I parted company she kept step with me in every hope and aspiration. Plain as was the life which encompassed us, it did not lay heavy burdens on the children's shoulders. There was little luxury, but much leisure. Woods and fields were open to us. Brook, meadow, and hillside brought to us their priceless treasures of beauty and inspiration. All these she shared with me to the fullest. When Tim and the other sisters tired of story or adventure, we were always anxious for more. The rarest wild flowers, the most cunning bird's nests, and the fairest little nooks in the forest I sought out for her. In all that we studied I think she kept pace with me, if, indeed, she did not lead the way. In searching out the wonders of the printed

page she was always my companion. We read the same books, loved the same things in nature, had the same thoughts and hopes. We left the others simply because they did not care to go where we delighted to wander. I do not think it ever once occurred to us that they might not have kept pace with us if they so desired. We were simply of kindred tastes, and shared unconsciously each other's aspirations. We were so much together that the others laughed at our apparent fondness for each other, but I do not think we ever once thought of being annoyed at the fact.

"She was very fair; her hair a soft brown, while the blushes came and went upon her cheeks as quickly and lightly as the shadows flit over the summer meadows. She was wonderfully gentle, too. I used to get angry at the gibes her sisters sometimes addressed to her. I do not remember ever to have heard her answer harshly. Nor do I think that even my unconscious tyranny—for of course I was a tyrant, as every boy is of a girl playmate—ever produced a suspension of the amicable relations between us. She used now and then to wish that Tim were a better scholar or a livelier boy, and would occasionally attempt to stir his sluggish nature to the accomplishment of tasks for which he had little relish. Yet she was very

jealous of her lubberly brother, and more than once incited me to hostile measures against those who had spoken slightingly of her poor Tim.

"As we sat around the fire that night, Tim holding the skates out to the light, turning them over and over and dwelling warmly upon their excellencies, the mother and older sisters were inclined to improve the occasion to stimulate his energies by disparaging comparison.

"'Got them with the money you sold chestnuts for, did you?' said the mother, shrilly. 'Tim wouldn't ever think as far ahead as that. He don't seem to care about doing anything nor getting anything for himself like other boys. There's Mary Jane, now; she's got some gumption. Picked up most as many chestnuts as you did last fall, didn't she? But Tim don't seem to have any faculty for doing anything unless he has some one to lead him around, show him how to do and tell him when and where, and then, of course, he only gets the leavin's after the rest have taken all they want.'

"This was a great wrong to poor Tim, who indeed worked much harder than I had ever done, and would have gathered just as many nuts, perhaps, if the labors required of him at home had not rested so heavily upon his young shoulders.

That Mary should have as many was not strange, for she always went with me, and we picked often in the same basket.

"Mary Jane came to the rescue, and boldly asserted that it was quite unnecessary that Tim should have a pair of skates, because he could use mine half the time, and one pair would do very well for both. This was a new view of the matter to me, and one which I may confess was not entirely satisfactory. I was willing that Tim should have my skates half the time, but I preferred to select the time and let him have them, say, from April to November. Perhaps I might have consented to his using them now and then during the winter, but that they should be avowedly held at his disposal for any considerable portion of the time available for use was not at all a comforting reflection. Mary evidently saw that I was not in an especially generous mood, so she cleverly suggested that we should all go out to the pond and try the new skates. The proposal was a welcome one to all except myself. I did not care about making my *début* upon the new runners with quite so many spectators. Alone in the cold winter moonlight, or even with Mary Jane as sole witness of my exploits, I should have been very willing to display my skill in their management.

However, it was useless to demur and impossible to escape. All were ready in an instant; the girls muffled in shawls, with mittens and hoods, and Tim and I with our caps pulled down over our ears, and coats closely buttoned up.

"The pond was down the hill just below the barn—an acre or two of clean black ice, as smooth and glare as a still winter night without a hint of snow can produce. The frozen ground gave back our echoing footsteps; the sides of the barn and the thick forest-wall across the little stream multiplied our shouts and laughter until it seemed as if an army of boys and girls were marching down upon the silent pond to witness my trial-trip.

"I was a little afraid of the new skates. In the first place, they were new, and I was not exactly sure there might not be some peculiar idiosyncrasy attached to their sharp, smooth surfaces which would prove more than a match for my knowledge and experience. I had now and then had a bit of exercise upon a borrowed pair, and, when the previous winter gave way to spring, had gotten considerable confidence in my power to manage a pair of the mystical slippers; but that was ever so long ago —it seemed an 'age' at least. This was the very

first freeze of the winter. I had not yet got my skating legs on, and here I was to perform on a pair of utterly inexperienced ice-cutters before half a dozen girls, one of whom was ready any day or night to wager her immortal soul that I could beat the champion of the world. I got very cold before we reached the pond, and kept growing colder all the time as I proceeded to adjust my skates. It seemed as if there never was such a cruel, cold-blooded, vacillating moon as the one that teetered and tipped and jeered at me out of the deep blue-black of a night with snow in the northwest. I almost wished I was a girl, because girls did not skate in those days, or at least very seldom did so. After a long time the skates were properly adjusted and securely fastened. There were straps enough on them to make a harness, and I spent all the time I could over each one, but I could not keep on forever. Tim was very helpful. Confound the rascal! I believe he had an intuition of what was going to happen. He pulled and buckled and thumped and twisted and tried every strap until there was no further pretense for delay—no reason why I should not rise and conquer. So I got up on one knee. Tim gave me his hand. Mary Jane stood by smiling and triumphant. The other five girls,

one or two boys who had been brought to the pond by the sound of our voices, and a stray dog stood on the shore to witness my *dénouement* and applaud the marvels I was expected to perform.

"The start was not promising, and the audience seemed to be coolly critical. At the very first stroke my feet took an unaccountable aversion to each other, and very nearly pulled my legs off trying to get to the antipodes. When I managed to conquer this inclination and get them firmly together under me again, I turned and faced the audience, determining to remove the unfavorable impression which I felt I had created. I suppose the instinct of politeness impelled me to bow very low in acknowledgment of their presence and attention. The movement was executed with what might be termed impetuous haste. I stretched out my hands—stretched them out very far—and suddenly lifted them straight up, then as quickly thrust them straight downward. The skirt of my 'warm-us' stuck out in a direct line toward the Ursa Major. One of the boys on the shore said that I was taking a back-sight at the North Star. Tim coolly intimated that I was feeling for stones in the ice. I mentally vowed to whip both of them the next day; but in the mean time devoted my energies to regaining the perpendicular,

which I rigidly—very rigidly—maintained for a considerable time. The audience, one by one, got tired of inaction, and went off by themselves to slide—all but Mary Jane. She faithfully remained near to cheer, soothe, or assist, as the case might be. I hated those two boys and despised those other girls. However, I went on practicing. They laughed at my movements, and I twitted them with not having any skates. Gradually I grew more confident, and at the same time more angry.

"At length there was a call from the other side of the pond, and out of the shadow of a group of willows sailed a boy who had lately come into our neighborhood from the city. The skates flashed and sang as he sped toward us. How I envied his skill! He went hither and thither with that easy, rapturous swing which reminds one of the swallow's flight when he skims 'along the smooth lake's level brim.' He was a graceful, polite boy, with something of the culture of the city which seemed inscrutable to our country ways. His jaunty fur cap sat lightly upon the short brown curls, and his face was one of those bright, sparkling countenances that charm all beholders. As he came near enough to recognize us he inquired whose skates I had, and when I

answered, very curtly, that they were mine, he came close to me, stooped down, inspected them sharply, pronounced them beauties, and patronizingly offered to lend me a hand to start me on my slippery way. Of course I repelled any such proffer with indignation. The idea of a boy with new skates hanging on to another's coat-tail was nothing less than insult. He laughed at my timidity, told me to strike out and not be afraid, and away he went, turning, doubling, backward and forward, swaying, sailing on in the moonlight. I saw Mary Jane watching him with admiring eyes, and hated him.

"Finally I felt compelled to abandon my policy of dignified reserve. I grew more and more confident, and at length struck out boldly across the pond, determined to rival, if I could not outdo, this adversary who was taking all the admiration from my new skates. I made a few strokes with tolerable success, and was already beginning to congratulate myself upon having adopted a bold policy, when there came a sudden mutiny among my members. I do not know to this day exactly what was the matter. Three or four pairs of legs seemed to be mixed up in the controversy, although I was sure I was alone, almost in the middle of the pond. All the legs were apparent-

ly opposed to 'rapid transit.' No two of them were inclined to go in the same direction. The world itself turned over and over, and with it went 'the starry firmament,' at a most tremendous rate of speed. I believe every movement of which the earth is susceptible was performed in the brief interval while I stood there attempting to suppress those seditious legs. The 'sweet little star that sat down by the moon' got out of his seat as if it burned, and danced all over the blue empyrean. The boys and girls at the other end of the pond played a war-dance that would have made the Modocs ashamed of their choicest performances. I do not exactly know what it was, but it left them all standing on their heads in the middle of the blue vault of heaven with all the world looking on. The last I saw of Mary Jane, she was sitting on the ridgepole of her father's barn a hundred yards away, with the new moon in her lap, trying to pick her teeth with the brass tip of one of my skates.

"That is the way I remember the catastrophe. Exactly what happened to me after that last look at the confused surroundings I have never been able to understand. There was some sort of a collision. A comet with

"'Ten thousand cubic miles of head,
Ten billion leagues of tail,'

flashed across the sky. It was accompanied by a meteoric shower of most unprecedented character. The crazy planets flew in all directions—up and down and from every point of the compass. They flashed and hissed about me in such numbers that I thought all the stars of heaven had broken from their orbits, and were making double time toward that little patch of smooth black ice. How terribly black it was! I remember how its inky surface gaped and yawned beneath me, and then, with demoniac fierceness, leaped up and wrapped me in its Tartarean folds. I seemed to be falling through infinite space into impenetrable gloom. Then there was a crash. Evidently two planets had collided and I was somewhere between them. The moon and stars had been extinguished. I doubted if there was any light left in the universe. I thought of the morning of creation, and wondered if the Divine command, 'Let there be light,' had been suddenly negatived. Then there came a sense of infinite distance and silence and rest. I remember thinking that my playmates were separated from me forever. I did not seem to care what became of them or of me. Then all was blank. There was no more heaven nor earth. The waters of oblivion had covered me and I was no more. I knew I was hurt, thought I was dead, and was perfectly willing to have it so.

"The next thing I really remember was a crowd of boys and girls holding an impromptu inquest over a sadly-battered corpus in the middle of that pond. Tim was faithfully rubbing snow on a rear extremity of my cranium, about as big as a goose's egg, which I had no recollection of possessing before I lay down to rest. I was stretched prone on the ice, with my head in somebody's lap. Mary Jane was scattering snow upon my face and begging me to look up. The others were industriously pinching whatever portion of my anatomy was most convenient, in search of broken parts. After a little I sat up, and began to feel around after the pieces too. I had a sort of vague notion that something had happened, but could not remember what. Somebody mentioned skates. Then they unbuckled the new pair, one after another, from my feet. I asked if there had been an earthquake, and inquired if Mary Jane had hurt herself getting off the barn. They shook their heads and whispered to each other. They evidently thought the shock had affected my brain. I knew better, so I asked them to hand me the skates. They did so, and I tucked them up over my shoulder toward Tim, who was still manipulating my posterior craniological annex.

"'Tim,' said I, very softly and weakly.

"'What is it, Percy?' he asked. There were tears in the poor fellow's voice.

"'Would you like a pair of skates?'

"A sigh of relief came from the lips of Mary Jane. She noted the evidence of sanity.

"'Yes, of course,' said Tim, hesitantly. Despite his anxiety, he could not entirely repress his gratification.

"'You can have them if you want them.'

"He took them willingly. I was glad, for they seemed very heavy. Then all was dark again. There was a sense of uneasy motion. My whole body was full of pain. Then there came a sense of warmth. The smell of camphor was in my nostrils. Lights and voices were around me. I wished to sleep, and was not allowed to. Every touch hurt me. Even the doctor's hand seemed clothed in mail. The glare of the lamp was like a sword thrust through my brain. The lightest footfall renewed the agony of the catastrophe. After an age of torture oblivion came again. I slept.

"I was sick a good while afterward. There was little pain, but a terrible weariness oppressed me. Little by little I grew stronger. My playmates came to visit and cheer me. For a time Mary Jane came every day. They told me that during

my long slumber she hardly left my bedside. After a while her visits became less frequent. I learned that Tim was making famous progress with my new skates. By and by I heard that Mary Jane was learning to skate too;—she was using the skates I had given Tim, and the graceful city boy, Fred Compton, was teaching her."

At this point I closed the portfolio, and rising from my seat, bowed to the company in token of the fulfillment of the task assigned to "No. I."

There was a hearty round of applause; for besides the fact that little companies in one's own house are apt to be very gracious, I also found that the recital of my youthful mishaps had won for me abundant confirmation though but little sympathy. My story seemed to have been only a portrayal of the common lot of those who put their trust in skates. Hester looked at me with a flush of pleasant surprise, and Mrs. Somers lifted her eyes to my face with a curious startled look which I could not understand. George was still watching her—malignantly, I thought. To distract his attention, of which I must admit the teacher seemed entirely unconscious, I said to him :

"A crack skater such as I have heard that you

are ought at least to have some sympathy for the woes of a lubberly tyro."

Before he could answer, Twining, who had listened with a tell-tale smile of superiority upon his lips, cut in with the exclamation :

"Don't let him play upon your sympathy in that way, Mr. Hartzell. Wait till you hear the sequel."

This raised a clamor among the young people, which was vigorously seconded by Hartzell. The others cordially concurred. Mrs. Somers said nothing, but gazed silently into the fire. Hester's face grew crimson to the very roots of her steel-gray hair.

"But you see there is no sequel," I said, handing the portfolio to Bertha, who was tugging viciously at it.

"Don't say that, old fellow," said Twining, looking mischievously at Hester.

"O, tell it, please tell it, papa," said Bertha, clambering on my lap and seeking with kisses to estop refusal.

I glanced at Hester appealingly.

"I suppose you may as well," she answered, with a sigh.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR A LADY'S FAVOR.

WHEN I finally received permission to recount the incident I had so long threatened to relate, I found myself strangely disinclined to enter upon its narration. There was no resisting the importunity of Bertha, however, who in her eagerness to hear had removed the ottoman from the teacher's side and now sat with her head bowed upon my knees. So I toyed with her unbound hair, and told a story all too true in its elements to need the gloss of imagination :

"It was some years after my first experience on skates. I had grown to be an awkward youth of eighteen or thereabouts. The Matsons had suffered reverses and misfortunes. Some had died, and those who remained had moved to a village home in the intellectual metropolis of the county, twenty miles away. In this little village of Cranberg was a prosperous academy to which the youth of both sexes flocked from far and near. It was one of those ganglia of intellectual life peculiarly

characteristic of the period in which it flourished. It had grown out of the actual wants of the life which surrounded it just as naturally as the flower-bud bursts from the stalk. The rush of the present had not yet seized upon our lives. The narrowness of the past had just broken away. That huge-limbed giant whom we term American Life had lately risen out of his cradle, thrown aside his swaddling-bands, and like an infant Hercules was casting about for those wonders which he has since performed.

"I was a student at this academy. I met there a boy named Jack Twining, who by mere chance became my room-mate. He was a slender, girlish fellow, whom you would never have suspected of any intention of growing such a beard as he is now caressing." (The company laughed good-naturedly, and Jack dropped the hand with which he had stroked his beard while listening. Bobby took advantage of the interruption to clamber upon Hester's lap, where he was soon fast asleep.) "Fred Compton was the pet of the professors and the pride of the institution. He had grown to young manhood an Adonis in form and feature. He excelled in most of our athletic sports, and was easily first in his classes. Jack had a great admiration for him. I hated him—perhaps on account

of Mary Jane—and desired nothing in the world as much as a good excuse for whipping him. I was sure the opportunity would some time come, and equally certain that when it did I should embrace it eagerly. Jack was very doubtful about the result,—at least he pretended to be,—and whenever Compton had shown his skill in wrestling, or had beaten everybody at the run and jump, which he always did, Jack used to beg me to forego my cherished ambition. I had set my head on humbling the pride of my handsome boyhood rival, however, and every fresh success of his only increased my anxiety to match my strength against his skill.

"I do not believe it was merely because of the old grudge, still less was it because in most things I was the antipode of this young Antinous. As I have said, he was a city boy who had come into our country neighborhood the adopted son of a rich uncle, who had not unfrequently paraded in an offensive manner the fact of his prospective wealth. Perhaps his city manners, or the consciousness of a lack of outward refinement on our part, increased the sting of his superciliousness to us country boys. He had always made a special butt of me. I did not mind his laughing at my uncouthness as much as might be supposed, for I had always been

given to understand that beauty was not one of my strong points. Some slurs that he had flung at my father's occupation had, foolishly enough, no doubt, cut me to the quick even before the episode with Mary Jane.

"My father, as you know, at one time worked at the coopering trade. Being of a mechanical turn of mind, he had taken up this occupation as the readiest method of earning a livelihood after suffering financial reverses in that wonderful 'East' which was the fairyland of my youthful dreams. Among the pleasantest recollections of my childhood is the cosy shop flanked by piles of seasoning staves, oak and pine, while on each side of its creaking door were great heaps of shavings, broad, white, and fragrant, among which the children of the neighborhood delighted to disport themselves. As I grew older the farm had become of more and more importance, and the shop diminished in glory. A few years previous to my advent at Cranberg Academy my father became convinced that tubs and barrels might be made by machinery, and had devised a set of machines which performed in a very creditable manner much of the most difficult and laborious part of the cooper's work. These lucky inventions at once transformed the shop into a factory, elevated my father

to the dignity of a manufacturer and dealer in 'heads and staves,' which he supplied by the cargo to the trade. This era of prosperity was fast preparing the humble homestead for the luxury and ostentation which the railroad was rapidly bringing westward. To this fact I suppose my appearance at Cranberg ought really to be credited. I had outgrown the educational opportunities of the region where we dwelt, and the ambition of a prosperous father no doubt looked forward to a fulfillment of its dreams in the life of an only son. It was a great thing for a boy to have the advantage of a classical education in those days, and I ought to have remembered gratefully the trade to which my enjoyment of this privilege was due. Instead of doing so, I must confess that the old shop, with all its pleasant memories, was the one fly in my pot of ointment. I was very angry, therefore, when I learned that Fred Compton, who had been for two years a student at Cranberg Academy, hearing of my advent there, had sneeringly remarked:

"'Percy Reynolds? O, yes, I remember him. His father was a cooper.'

"This was an insult I could not forgive, and coming as it did on the top of other offenses, I determined to settle them all at once, and teach him

it was not for naught that my father followed a hammering trade. But for Jack I think there would have been a fight that very day. His intercession prevented an immediate rupture, but every day strengthened my determination. The summer and autumn terms had passed, and still there had been no open rupture between Fred Compton and myself. The winter had come, and the sluggish river that spread itself out below the little town was covered with its first coat of dark glare ice. It was Saturday afternoon, and I was tired with the week's study. It was nearly sundown, when, looking out of my window, I saw a single skater buckling the polished steel to his feet on the dark smooth surface of the river. I knew him in an instant, and was at once affected with a burning desire to measure myself with Fred Compton on that element where I had met with such inglorious defeat at his hands. Since that time I had learned to skate. The chagrin of failure had stimulated application until I had become so expert that I hardly feared any competitor. I knew that he was prouder of his skill in this direction than of almost any other accomplishment.

"Jack spent his Saturdays at home, so I was alone. I did not wait to combat my inclination. In five minutes I was kneeling on the ice, tugging

away at my skate-straps, and glancing now and then at the lithe form of my opponent. He was taking little turns up and down the river, like a wing-footed Mercury trying his pinions before attempting a prolonged flight. He noticed me in one of these, and came gliding easily past just as I had finished fastening my skates and was making those first strokes with which one unconsciously tries the straps and ascertains the exact positions of the blades beneath his feet.

"'Hello, Reynolds!' he exclaimed, as he drew near, his feet exactly parallel, his body motionless, the impetus of his last stroke and the pressure of the light wind which blew up the stream bearing him smoothly and steadily towards me, until, on arriving almost within arm's length, an imperceptible motion of the heels turned him to the right, and brought him to a standstill hardly ten feet away. I thought his tones expressed something of surprise, and I exulted in the thought of what awaited him when he should see what I really could do. The stooping, uncertain position which the skater always assumes while trying the skates he has just put on gave no indication of my powers.

"'I declare!' he continued in a tone of sneering incredulity; 'you *have* got so that you can stand

on skates, haven't you? The last time I saw you make the attempt, you came to grief from not having your head padded.'

"He gave a quiet, exasperating laugh. I suppose my face must have flushed. I was determined not to show anger, however, so I answered with apparent good-nature:

"'Yes; but you know a bad beginning makes a good ending.'

"'Do you think so?' he replied. 'Well, I admire your pluck. It must require a good deal of faith.'

"'Why so?' I asked.

"'Because you will be gray before you are a good skater.'

"He laughed at the taunt, and I laughed too, with exultation at the thought of the surprise that awaited him. So I answered jocularly:

"'Perhaps. This is the first time I have been out this winter; but seeing you on the ice, I thought I would come down and give you a lesson in their use.'

"'Me?'

"I laughed outright at the incredulity of his tone, and answered mockingly:

"'You, my lord.'

"'You don't know what you are talking about, Perce Reynolds,' was his testy rejoinder.

"'Perhaps not,' I said; 'but I mean to find out.'

"'Do you know,' said he, boastfully, 'that nobody has cut the ice across my track for years?'

"'That may be,' I replied; 'but I expect to do it to-night.'

"'You!' he sneered. 'You couldn't keep within sound of my skates if you were to practice until doomsday. A fellow of your build can't skate. A neck like a bull and legs like a gatepost may make a good cooper, but they don't make a good skater. I should think your first experience would have taught you that.'

"While we talked we had been moving about, half unconsciously. The ice, which was tough and smooth, was none too thick. It bent and cracked beneath our weight in a manner that would have seemed threatening to persons not well accustomed to the freaks of black ice. We hardly noticed it. I suppose if we thought of the ice at all, it was only that it was in the most perfect condition for a race. Compton, as I have said, was a graceful fellow, and the ease with which he moved about during our little colloquy must have been in striking contrast with my own awkwardness and constraint. I fully appreciated the taunt he aimed at my thick neck and disproportionate weight of limb. Yet it was upon these very qualities that I relied for success. I was, perhaps, unable to skate

as easily, and certainly could not move as lightly and gracefully upon the ice as he; but the weight I carried was muscle, and the added power more than made up, as I believed, whatever advantage he might have over me in litheness of limb and dexterity of movement. Nevertheless, the shaft struck, and I answered somewhat sulkily:

"'Well, you see it didn't.'

"'So it seems,' he replied jauntily; 'and you have come out to-night to match yourself against me, I suppose.'

"'Exactly,' I replied.

"'It is a pity it is so late,' he responded.

"'Why so?'

"'O, nothing; but I should like to have the town see how I am going to treat you.'

"'Never mind,' I replied; 'you may pray for darkness before it comes, yet.'

"'Fudge!' he sneered. 'What do you propose to do, anyhow?'

"'To follow your lead,' I replied, 'and ring your tracks so often that you will think you never learned to skate at all.'

"'Well,' said he, impatiently, 'if nothing but a race will satisfy you, let's fix the terms.'

"'All right.'

"'Which way shall we go, up or down?'

"'Just as you choose.'

"'The ice is likely to be the best up stream, and the wind, what there is of it, is that way too.'

"'Up stream it is, then.'

"'How far?'

"'As far as you choose, and back again.'

"'Nothing could please me better; but we must have limits, so that there will be no dodging. I don't mean to let you go back and brag about what you might have done if I had kept on skating all night.'

"'Suit yourself,' I replied; 'I don't want any doubt about the result.'

"'Well,' he said, as he glanced up the river, 'what shall we make the goal?'

"For nearly a mile above the town the course of the river was almost straight. The sun, now near its setting, shone through a cloud-rift, and lighted up like burnished gold the sheet of glare ice that lay between the low dark banks. A mile away the stream veered sharply to the left, and a huge sycamore stood out upon the other shore, directly opposite the middle of the channel. Its great white bole showed clearly against the dark body of the forest beyond.

"'How would the big sycamore do?' I suggested.

"He shook his head by way of reply.

"'We must have something that we can skate clear around or actually touch.'

"We scanned the smooth expanse in search of something that might serve our purpose. Save a few stones near the shore which the urchins of the village had thrown upon the ice to test its strength, it was absolutely bare. The river had not yet been pronounced safe, and the children had been rigorously forbidden to venture upon it. As it was in plain view from almost every house in the village, this injunction had been carefully observed. We were almost the first skaters who had cut the smooth, dark surface. While we gazed, another shot out from behind the point above. It was a lady, tall and graceful, as we could see even at that distance. I had no suspicion who it might be until I saw the flush come over Compton's face. Ladies who could skate were very rare in that day.

"'Gad!' he exclaimed admiringly, 'she moves nicely, don't she? Bet your life she's cut ice before, and under a good master too.'

"There was no mistaking the exultant leer with which he turned toward me as he uttered those words. He had evidently recognized his own pupil — the little girl-sweetheart he had stolen away from me.

"During the two terms I had been at Cranberg, I had often met Mary Matson, — the Jane had been elided by common consent,—and we had, in a measure, renewed the intimacy of our childhood. They lived at the upper end of the village, and kept boarders — students who attended the academy. Her mother, younger sister, and herself constituted the family. The father was dead. So were the other sisters. Tim had gone to the West to seek his fortune. Mary had managed, by taking one or two classes, not only to attend to her duties as the head of the household, but also to become one of the most accomplished students in the institution. She had grown into a beautiful young woman, slender and fair, with all the charm of her childish tenderness and devotion to the happiness of others. Our acquaintance had not been renewed without mutual embarrassment. I watched the fair girl from a distance for many a day before I ventured to claim the privilege of an old-time friendship. I was shy as well as awkward. One afternoon at recreation hour, however, when the rules of the institution permitted, I mustered up courage and called at the Matsons'. She received me as simply as if we had parted but the day before, only saying:

"'I began to think you were not coming.'

"The reproach in her tones covered me with confusion; but her words implied that she had thought of my coming, which gave me pleasure. I was soon at ease in her society. No other reference was ever made to the rupture of our childish relations. So far as broken links in the chain of friendship can be repaired, ours was again united. I felt the old-time peace and repose in her presence, and soon began to think of her with some of the old exclusiveness of feeling. She was a great favorite in the village and among the students, as it was natural that she should be, having both beauty and mental attainments. In those days and in that region wealth was little thought of in connection with social position. Indeed, it may be doubted if the few young people who possessed it did not really find it a detriment. In the school all met upon a level. Compton and one or two others gave themselves airs sometimes, upon the strength of expected inheritances, but the fact excited more ridicule than envy.

"The Matsons, thanks to Mary's good management, made a fair livelihood, and were all the more respected for their industry and economy. Her many admirers, no doubt, made my shy

attentions seem to her but casual courtesies. I do not think she had once thought of me as a lover, though I had grown to dream of that relation. I had heard it vaguely rumored among the students that Compton, when he first came to the academy, had shown her very marked attention. Since that time he had become a general beau, and almost every girl in the village having any special attractions had been at one time or another the focus of his attention. His name had not been mentioned between Mary and myself, but I had an impression that she had expected more than she had received from him. His attentions must have been very marked, for, even in that society where gossip had little foothold, her name was still linked with his in a way it often made my blood boil to hear. It seemed to be thought that he had only to reach out his hand to secure that as well as other prizes. This was the unmistakable language of the leer upon his handsome face as he turned it toward me and said :

"'The very thing. Let's make her the goal.'

"The look and tone enraged me. The idea of mixing her up with our contest seemed little less than sacrilege. So I made haste to object.

"'She is moving,' I urged.

"'What if she is?' he sneered. 'It is not the first time you have run after her.'

"'But what if she should leave the river?' I asked, restraining myself with difficulty.

"'Why, we will leave it too. I suppose you can run if you can't skate.'

"'Very well,' I said; 'if it suits you I will not object.'

"'Suppose we make these the terms, then,' said he: 'the one who first touches her hand, no matter where, to be acknowledged the victor; or if one shall fairly ring the other's track before overtaking her, the defeated one shall not put on skates again this winter.'

"'All right,' said I.

"His eyes were full of triumph, and he laughed exultantly as he continued:

"'There ought to be a wager, just to make it a race, you know. Suppose we make a bet?'

"He was a gambler by nature. I had never made a bet in my life, but I would have staked my soul against a pinch of dust on the result.

"'Name your wager,' said I.

"'The lady's favor,' he said, waving his hand toward the figure upon the ice, and waiting for my answer.

"'Confound your impudence!' I burst out.

'Bet something you possess, and do not make a wager of what you may not win and never will deserve.'

"He laughed loud and mockingly at my angry words.

"'So, so,' he said; 'he hasn't forgotten his little sweetheart yet. Very well. If our knight is so tetchy, let us make the wager not the lady's favor, but the right to sue for it. If I win the race, you shall not seek her until I fail; and if you win, ha! ha! I give you a clear field with no limitations.'

"'Done,' said I, holding out my hand.

"'All right,' said he, just touching my palm with the tips of his fingers. 'Let us skate down the river a little way to get our distances, say five steps apart, then turn, come easily up until the flag-pole is in a line with the academy steeple, and then off, and neither to attempt to cross the other's track unless he has gained ten strokes ahead. If you ring my track, or I yours, before we reach the goal, that ends the race. If not, the one who first touches her hand to be the winner.'

"I assented. We wheeled down stream by a simultaneous motion, went perhaps a hundred yards with easy strokes, and returned in like

manner. The ice creaked beneath our skates, and we felt the spring of the imprisoned waters. As we neared the starting point, both kept our eyes fixed upon the prescribed objects, and both at the same instant shouted, 'Now!' There was a sudden spring upon the part of each that bent the ice, and sent a sharp, shrill report like the crack of a rifle echoing from shore to shore. Neither got the advantage in the send-off. There was hardly an inch difference in the length of our first strokes. I think both of us were disappointed. Each had counted on getting the lead at the outset, and we scanned each other curiously as we settled down to work. For a time we struck as fast and hard as possible, but neither gained an inch. Gradually our strokes lessened in rapidity. We leaned forward, scanning the ice carefully in our front, to avoid accident. Stroke answered stroke on the singing ice, with equal effect and unflagging regularity. The clang of our skates echoed from the low, dark banks. We were half way to the point above the village before I had a chance to note what progress we had made. Neither had gained any advantage; but as I caught his eye I saw that he had lost nothing of the confidence with which he started. I wore a light frock belted

around the waist; he an easy-fitting coat buttoned close. Our animated goal had passed out of sight around the headland.

"All at once it occurred to me that the terms he had proposed were intended to put me at a disadvantage. The lady was an accomplished skater. The fact that she was alone, upon ice generally regarded as unsafe, showed her confidence in her own powers. Judging from the rate at which she had crossed the river, it was quite possible that she might be the equal of either of us for a short distance. She evidently had not seen us, and had turned back up the river unconscious of our pursuit. It flashed upon me, as I thought of these things, that Compton counted somewhat upon his ability to control the movements of this skater, the touch of whose hand was to decide the struggle. At the rate we were going both were certain to be very much exhausted when we should near the object of our pursuit. A single stroke, one turn of the ankle, aye, even the scraping of a heel, upon her part, might incline her to one side or the other, and determine the contest in his favor or mine. I did not state the alternative to myself, for I had no hope that, seeing us both, flushed and panting, suddenly rushing

toward her, she would think of turning to me rather than to him. I knew that my dark and angry face would terrify, and his fair face and smiling lips attract.

"The conditions were well calculated to favor this piece of trickery. I could not cross his track unless I had gained ten strokes upon him without violating the terms we had agreed upon. If I should be five strokes ahead and he should call to her on any pretense to come toward him, I could not cross the line of his course even to intercept her without willfully violating the agreement. As I thought it over I was sure that he intended as a last resort, if need be, to make some sign or utter some word that should control or affect her movements favorably to himself. It seemed to me that my only hope was to gain ten strokes upon him before we came near enough to enable him to carry this plan into execution. I redoubled my efforts, but without avail. Step by step, with even stroke, he answered my most strenuous exertion. Now and then I led, as a racing man would say, by a head, and a moment after he would be half a stroke in advance.

"The glimmer of the sunshine faded from the ice just as we turned the point. Here the advantage

would have been with me, since I was upon the inside, had not a glance up the river shown the lady to be close in shore beyond another point where the river turned again to the right. We checked our speed a little after passing the point, but skate still answered skate, and the heavy breathing of each told the other that the run had not been accomplished without exhausting effort. Almost as we caught sight of her our goal disappeared again around the headland. After we reached this curve we saw her half a mile away, spinning across a level reach of the river directly toward the mouth of a smaller stream that emptied into it from the right. A bold promontory jutted out between them. I remembered that the deepest pool upon the river was said to be just where the two currents mingled. The streams, after flowing almost side by side for miles, hemmed in by ranges of slaty hills on either hand, just here became one, cutting a deep and narrow passage through the rocky barrier. Through this passage the water rushed so fiercely, during the spring and autumn freshets, that it received the name of 'The Whirlpool.'

"Toward this point the gray-clad skater was advancing at a rate fully equal to our own.

Evidently the long open stretch had tempted her to a burst of speed much greater than she had before displayed. She was racing with herself, while we were racing after her. She was already half way to the whirlpool. All at once it occurred to me that she had forgotten the fact, or perhaps had never known it, that the ice was always much thinner over this deep and narrow portion of the river than elsewhere along the course. I think my heart stopped beating as the terror of her situation forced itself upon me. I could hardly speak for want of breath, but I did manage to exclaim:

"'My God! she will be drowned. Let's stop and call to her.'

"His only reply was a smile of contempt. He evidently thought my proposition a mere subterfuge. Perhaps he knew nothing of the danger.

"If there had been any hope of attracting her attention I should have stopped and shouted even then. But I could not have made myself heard over half the intervening distance. My chest seemed bound with iron; my head bursting with pain. My breath came in short, labored gasps. The pace at which we had come was killing, and I could hear that Compton was as badly blown as I. Yet we kept stroke, step

for step, foot for foot, and neither gained upon the other.

"All at once a mountain seemed lifted from my brain. My eyes, which had been barely able to discern the skater we pursued, now saw, even in the dusky shadow of the wooded banks, the flash of her skates and every motion of her graceful form. My breath came easily; my limbs were no longer heavy, and my feet seemed light as air. For a moment I could not understand this sudden change. Then I felt something clogging my breath, and looking down saw that blood was streaming from my nose. This sudden relief of the overcharged blood-vessels of the brain was like an infusion of new strength. For the first time I shot visibly and easily ahead of my competitor. One, two, three, I counted the strokes that carried me from him. I heard his labored breathing grow more indistinct. But I had forgotten all about our struggle. I was striving almost superhumanly to reach the goal, but all thought of our foolish race and still more foolish wager had been driven from my mind by the danger which threatened her a touch of whose hand was to decide both. I saw her nearing the mouth of the defile.

"She was hardly a hundred yards in advance

of me, and rapidly approaching the narrowest part. A hundred yards farther and I was sure the ice would be unsafe even for her light weight. She moved somewhat more slowly after entering the chasm, not apparently from any apprehension, but because she was impressed by the grandeur and solemnity of the surroundings. I expected every instant to see her disappear. Ah, how my feet consumed the intervening distance! I tried to shout a warning, but my lip could not utter a sound above a whisper. Every stroke brought her nearer and nearer to destruction. If she reached the upper edge of the chasm and the ice broke beneath her, the current would be sure to bear her down under the frozen surface to a hopeless doom. The only chance was for me to catch her, wheel suddenly about and speed away from the dangerous region. I had never skated as I did those few last strokes. Every muscle was like a spring of steel. Each stroke seemed equal to half a dozen of the best I had ever made before. My skates hardly appeared to touch the smooth, dark surface that covered the deep, still waters. Every instant hope and fear were alternating uppermost. I felt the ice bending beneath my feet. I redoubled my exertion. Another stroke, hardly two, and I would bear her back to safety!

"She was scarcely five yards in front of me, and already my arm was outstretched to clasp her waist, when suddenly she turned her head. I saw a look of mortal terror come into her eyes as they fell upon me. She sprang quickly forward, shrieking with fright. The sight of her face, pale with terror, for an instant paralyzed my brain. I could do nothing—think of nothing—to avert the catastrophe which I knew impended. There was a sharp crackling sound, followed by a sudden splash. The overweighted ice shivered in all directions as she fell prone upon its surface. The momentum I had acquired would not have permitted me to stop if I had wished to do so, but I had no thought except to reach the sinking form. I did not think of danger, nor even of the means of extricating her from peril. I only thought that if I could reach her before she sank and the cruel black water sucked her under, I might do something—I knew not what—to save her. My last stroke was a leap from the sinking ice-floe into the waters, that already reached my knees, toward her swiftly-disappearing form.

"I hardly know what happened afterward. I was in the water, clutching wildly in the darkness after something. Luckily I had not missed

my aim. That last spring brought me within reach of her sinking form. I saw her white face disappear beneath the black water, and my right hand shot down in swift pursuit. The impulse of the fall, even more than the fixed purpose to rescue, carried me under. My hand touched her clothing, and fastened on it with the vise-like grip peculiar to the submerged swimmer. I lifted her above me toward the surface, fighting desperately with my left arm against the swift, smooth current that I knew was carrying us down under the ice. It was well, indeed, that I did so. She had fallen upon her side, so that her face did not strike the ice; and now, as I lifted her toward the surface, her arms were raised in that wild, instinctive struggle a young and healthy nature always makes against sudden death.

"Fortunately the opening in the ice made by our fall was of considerable extent. The smooth, elastic surface had yielded beneath the swiftly passing weight, until we had reached a point where it gave way all at once, and being broken in one spot cracked and shivered in every direction. The waves created by our fall and ensuing struggles lifted and shattered the ice over which she had passed, or it may be that the imprisoned

waters had already pressed so strongly against it, that when once they secured an outlet they lifted and broke the thin, glassy sheet for a considerable distance. As we floated down the stream, her arms caught upon this broken edge, and she made a vain attempt to lift herself upon it, while the current, acting on her soaked garments, drew her steadily beneath the surface. Her head was above water, however, and, strangely enough, she had not strangled. I let go the hold I had upon her with my right hand, and throwing that arm over the edge of the ice, put my left hand under her head, and waited an instant to get breath and think.

"My first impulse was to look for Compton. It was getting dark, but I could see for a considerable distance over the polished surface of the ice. No one was in sight. He had of course gone for assistance. That was my thought. I wondered vaguely why he had not staid to help. My heart sank as I thought how helpless was the task before me. A shivering moan from the drenched and shivering creature clinging to the ice beside me, nerved me anew for its performance. I could not rid myself of the thought that I was responsible for the peril she was in. I knew she could not hold

out until help should come from the village. So I set about the task of saving her with dogged resolution and without any thought of failure. She should not die. This was my only thought. Whatever was to be done I knew must be done quickly, however. The icy water would very soon render me incapable of exertion.

"As soon as I could get breath I spoke to my companion, and was surprised by her quiet answer. Neither had time for questioning. I told her in a word that I would save her, and urged her to be calm and patient. She replied expressing confidence and hope, but her chattering teeth were more eloquent than words. I explained to her that the ice was so thin I feared we should be unable to raise ourselves upon it, and proposed that she remain where she was while I tried to break a passage to the shore and return. To this she objected, fearing to be left alone. So, still resting my right hand against the edge of the ice, I reached down with my left, and drew her up against the current while she tried to clamber out upon the ice. She worked very carefully, following all my directions, and had almost reached the surface when the ice parted in front of her and we were again engulfed. Fortunately I was expecting

this, and throwing my right hand quickly around, I caught the edge of the firm ice and drew her up again without subjecting her to the peril of complete submersion. We tried again with like result. I could see that she was growing weak and becoming much discouraged. Her hands were numb and almost useless. The icy water had evidently chilled her very marrow. I was a skillful swimmer, and the furious exercise I had undergone before my submersion prevented my yielding to the benumbing influence of the cold as soon as I might otherwise have done.

"I had learned, by this time, that my companion could swim as well as skate, but her clothing so fettered her movements that the fact was of little avail. At length it occurred to me that if she could be so placed that her whole body might at one time rest upon the edge of the ice, it would perhaps endure the strain and she might roll back to a place of safety. I suggested it to her, and at once proceeded to put it into execution. While she clung with her left arm outstretched upon the ice, her right resting against the edge to prevent the current carrying her under, I grasped her floating clothing with my right hand, raised her feet to the surface, and,

placing them on the edge of the ice, called upon her to lift herself carefully out of the water. She did so, little by little, inch by inch. The ice bent and cracked beneath her, but held. In a few minutes she was out of the water. I dared not permit her to sit up, but directed her to roll away from the edge until entirely certain that she had reached solid ice. Even then I watched with intense anxiety her first cautious attempt to rise. She sat up carefully, drew one foot after the other beneath her, rose to her knees, and finally stood upright, safe!

"My heart gave a great leap of happiness. She was safe. I did not think of myself. During the whole struggle one terrible idea had been tugging at my heart, weighing me down with apprehension — the thought that I had caused her peril. If I had not rushed upon her, I said, if I had not pursued her in the gathering darkness, if I had not come with outstretched hands and bloody face, like an angry demon trying to seize her in the loneliness of the wild glen, she would certainly have noted her danger and have turned before the ice broke beneath her feet. Perhaps if I had not brought my own added weight so near there would have been no danger at all. If she died, I felt that I would be her

murderer. So I had not once thought of danger or pain or difficulty in the struggle to free her from the river's hungry clutch. Now that she was safe my whole nature relaxed. I called to her to skate quickly away, to whip her arms about her shoulders, to rub her ears, and be sure that she did not relax her efforts until she reached warmth and shelter. I said nothing about myself. It did not once occur to me that she could render me any service. Indeed the danger that still threatened her precluded any such idea.

"She obeyed my injunctions as she had done from the beginning. I heard her skates glide over the ice, and the sharp snap of her hands as she beat her arms about her shoulders. It was dark enough in the gorge, though the stars were in the patch of blue sky above. I soon lost sight of her receding figure. Then the sound of her skates died away, and I began to think about myself. I was not only thoroughly chilled, but completely exhausted. I was lying with my arms outstretched upon the ice, my breast-bone resting on its edge, and knew that any effort to raise myself upon it would only result in breaking off piece after piece. I think I could in this way have broken an opening

to the shore at first; it was not a great way, not more than twenty or thirty yards, I suppose. Now I felt too weak to undertake such a task. Even if I should succeed, the banks were sheer and smooth, and it was doubtful if I could obtain a foothold. I could not roll myself over upon the ice as she had done, since the smooth surface offered nothing to which I could cling. Besides, I knew that as soon as I quit my hold the current would bear me under, and I was now too much exhausted to resist its force. The only thing left for me, I concluded, was to remain as I was, and wait until she should send help, if, perchance, I should be able to hold out until it arrived. I had no doubt that she would send aid. I firmly believed that, despite all that she must suffer on the way for succor, she would return with it. I even pictured to myself her sorrow if she should fail to come in time. I was sure she would reproach herself with having caused my death. I think this fact did more than anything else to keep up my hope. She had been so calm and heroic in the face of danger, that I could not endure the thought that she should suffer pain on my account.

"Odd as it may seem, it flashed upon me all

at once that for the first time in my life I was really in love. It was a strange situation for the development of romantic sentiment. The wind had freshened, and swept almost a gale through the narrow chasm. It was bitter cold. My hands were stiff and numb, and my legs, which, half unconsciously, I had kept in constant motion to aid in supporting myself while struggling for deliverance, now hung outstretched and motionless in the water, which swayed them to and fro as if they were mere lifeless things. The edge of the ice, bent down by my weight, dipped beneath the surface of the water, making a gurgling little whirlpool on either side. I listened to their ripple, and wondered how long it would be before the ice gave way, or my strength failed, and I should be sucked under the glassy surface, and carried down by the dark, still current. I wondered dully what sort of a bed I should find on the river's bottom; whether the rocks which formed the whirlpool were harsh and jagged, or round and smooth; whether I would be left to rest in peace beneath the water, or whether the river would give up its dead, a thing of horror, when the springtime came. I remember hoping that I might be carried far out into the

blue waters of the lake where no eye could be offended by the unsightliness of all that was left.

"Then I thought of one who had fallen through the ice a year ago. I remembered how the skaters swept up and down the stream searching carefully through the ice for the lost form, scanning with hushed and curious care every dark, vague outline that appeared beneath the half-transparent ice. I remembered that a cannon was brought down and fired, first upon the river-bank and then at different places on the ice, in the hope that the unconscious dead would hear the summons and come to greet those who watched for his reappearance. I recalled the fact that holes were cut in the ice, and long poles, armed with hooks, thrust through and dragged about upon the river's bottom in search for the dead whom the river held in its cold embrace. I wondered if they would search for me in this manner—if the sharp hooks would lacerate my flesh as they had his. I shuddered with horror as I thought of that terrible gash in the young lad's cheek. I remembered that the body was found in the eddy at the end of the long, straight channel below the mouth of the glen. I thought how distressing

the search would be to her who had shared my danger, and the wish to save her this pain induced me to attempt once more to crawl out upon the ice. In doing so I found that the glove which remained upon one hand, and the sleeve of my coat, had frozen fast to the surface of the ice. This gave me a little hope; it was something toward which I might draw my stiffened limbs. Slowly and cautiously I pulled myself upward. I felt the ice bend beneath me and moved very carefully in my reawakened hope for safety. Little by little, farther and farther up I crept. I was half out of the water.

"The ice bent and cracked so that I dared attempt nothing more. If I could only throw myself around so that the weight of my lower limbs would come upon another part of the floe, I thought I might roll out as my companion had done and yet be saved. I rested a moment, I was so very tired. My legs seemed so heavy, I was sure they would break the ice. Then I began to turn myself as on a pivot, hoping against hope that the ice would endure the strain. Very slowly I let my legs swing round the edge of the ice; then I lifted one, inch by inch, upon it. At last the task was accom-

plished. I had one leg upon the ice. The other still floated in the water. If I could only turn over, stretched out at full length as I was, I was sure the ice would bear my weight. I was doubtful about my ability to do this on the slippery surface. One who has never tried to climb upon the edge of a half-submerged sheet of ice cannot guess how difficult a task it is. I made the attempt. There was a warning crack. I whirled quickly over, only to find myself struggling again in the water, clutching wildly for the edge of the ice as the current bore me down. Dragging myself again up from the grasp of the sucking current, I heard the pieces of ice that had been loosened by my vain attempt grate under the frozen surface as they were borne downstream by the waters, that seemed to mock at my failure.

"Then I gave up hope. I knew I had grown too weak to risk another attempt. So I merely stretched out my arms upon the ice, let my head drop upon the sinking edge, while my body, borne around by the current, was swept half under the treacherous sheet. I knew I could not retain this position long, but I was so cold and tired that I hardly cared. Then

I thought I heard a shout far down the river. Compton had probably given the alarm. I did not think it possible that I could hold out until help arrived, and I had given up the hope of self-deliverance. I only wanted to rest and sleep. I even fancied it would be pleasant to lie undisturbed upon the river-bed. If I could have been sure that I would sink at once and lie quietly at the bottom of the stream, I think I should have let go my hold, but the horrible grating of the loosened ice under the hard glare surface was still in my ears. Every time my hands slipped and I seemed in danger of being borne under, I thought of the horror of being swept along by the black gurgling current under the cold glassy surface, marred, wounded, and perhaps showing ghastly and terrible in the torchlight under the feet of those who would seek the dead. This fear kept me still clinging to the ice, though constantly slipping backward little by little, borne under more and more by the hungry current. I fancied that the fierce river already exulted in its savage triumph. Once more I thought of her whom I had rescued. I felt sad and hurt that she had obeyed me and gone away without one word of cheer or farewell. I wondered where

she was. Then came a terrible fear that she had fallen, chilled and numbed, on the black bosom of the river. I think my hands were just slipping from the edge of the floe when this thought first entered my mind. It stirred even the slumberous lethargy which had fastened itself upon me, so that I woke again to a dull consciousness of things about me.

"I heard a cry—there could be no mistake this time. Not only did I hear a voice, but a curious scraping noise that echoed along the ice, mingling with the singing cut of polished steel. I thought it a dream, but I tried to answer. It came again — a shrill, anxious hail. It was a woman's voice. It brought to me the vision of her I had so lately learned to love, and peace came with it. I still thought it but a dream—the precursor of the end,—and was quite content that it should be so. I thought no sweeter vision could come to cheer my last moments. Then I heard the call again—distinct and clear, but full of pain. I was sure it must be her voice, but wondered dully what could give her pain. Then the horrible picture came again. I saw her huddled, frozen, faint upon the ice in mid-river. The thought of her suffering roused me once more. My senses struggled into wake-

fulness, but things about me were strangely confused. I could not rid myself of the idea that the one I loved was very near me. I told myself it was absurd, impossible, but could not shake off the impression. It never once occurred to me to believe that she was really near; I only thought it a mental impression — the dream of the dying. It seemed curious, too, that I should dream I heard the sound of skates. There was that same grating sound as of something moving almost within reach of my hand, too. I listened intently, curious to see whether the hallucination would recur again. I thought I heard a sigh—I was sure I did, and only a few steps away. Then came a sobbing moan. It seemed too real to be a dream. Was I really awake? There was another quavering cry. Then I heard mingled sobs and words:

"'Oh dear! I am so afraid! He must have drowned! I don't know what to do! I cannot go away. He must be here somewhere. Perhaps he has become insensible! I must know!'

"Then I heard the sound of cautiously-approaching skates. There was a queer splashing in the water at my side. All at once it flashed

upon me that it was no dream. She whom I had saved had returned to rescue me. At the same instant a sense of the peril she was incurring for my sake roused me to full consciousness.

"'Stop!' I cried. 'Don't come any farther!'

"At least that is what I tried to say. I learned afterward that I only uttered vague, incoherent moans. No matter; they accomplished my purpose. The skate-strokes stopped, and there came a little joyful cry out of the darkness:

"'O, sir, I am so glad! Where are you?'

"I thought I answered, 'Here!' I know I tried to. But the only one there present has often declared that I merely uttered another groan.

"However that may be, what I said evoked a very pleasant response. The tears had all gone out of the voice, and there was no chattering of the teeth after that.

"'O, I see you now. You are in the water yet. Poor fellow! Thank God, you are still alive. To think that I should have gone and left you after you helped me out! I hope you will not think I meant to desert you. I never dreamed but you would follow me. Can't I help you? I

have brought this long pole. Please tell me what to do.'

"I do not know what else she said, but her tongue ran on as if she had just learned its use. Her words were celestial music to my ears. The love of life came back to me, and I was anxious enough to do all I could to help myself. But my hands were stiff and numb, and my limbs useless in their leaden helplessness. She would have come to the very edge of the broken ice in her eagerness to assist me, but I warned her to keep away. She pushed the end of the pole within reach of my hands. I tried to seize it, but my fingers were so numb they could not grasp it, and the effort so loosed my hold on the ice that I came very near being carried under. I think I should, had not something caught the sleeve of my left arm and held me fast. When my hand slipped I gave myself up for lost, and was much surprised to find my arm tightly grasped by something that held me still above the water. Then I heard her say in hurried tones:

"'O, you've got it. Shall I pull? Be sure and hold fast.'

"There was a sharp pain in my arm as I felt myself drawn steadily up on the ice. This,

with the hope of rescue, sharpened my wits not a little. The ice was so thin I knew that great care would be necessary to prevent its breaking. So I cautioned her to keep as far from the edge as possible, and pull as steadily as she could. The pole she had was a long one. She went back to the end, sat down upon the ice, dug her skate-heels into it, and pulled. I thought my arm was being torn from my body; but I kept lifting myself from the ice with my right hand, and steadied by the pole, wriggled forward by degrees upon the surface. Finally my whole body was upon the ice; only my legs still dangled in the icy current. I begged her to wait a moment while I tried to lift them one after the other over the edge. The moon had risen, but had hitherto been overcast. Just then the clouds passed off and it cast its rays half way down the walls of the chasm. By its light I saw my deliverer rise and peer eagerly forward at the strange fish she had hooked — for hooked I literally was, as I then first realized. I had drawn one leg with difficulty upon the ice, when I felt it begin to sink, and knew that the water was again creeping up around me. A sudden effort perhaps precipitated the result. The ice cracked, broke, and I felt my-

self sinking once more, when there came a furious tug at my arm and I felt myself dragged swiftly out of the water and along the smooth surface toward the moonlight at the mouth of the gorge. Then all was darkness and silence. I had fainted. When consciousness returned I was lying on the frozen ground in the clear moonlight. A fair face was bending anxiously over me, and two or three men were rubbing my hands and pouring some burning liquid down my throat. Others were coming up hurriedly. There were questions and answers and confusion. Blankets were wrapped around me. A huge bonfire was soon blazing beside me, curling up the leaves on the overhanging hemlock boughs with heated waves that rose above its tongues of flame.

"Almost as soon as I opened my eyes, the lady in whose lap my head was lying fell heavily forward upon my face, with the utmost disregard for my respiration. Then there was more confusion. I could not understand it. After a time I became aware that two swathed and steaming forms were lying on a bed of evergreen boughs beside the raging fire, and a great crowd of noisy, exulting people were striving with each other in ministering to their restora-

tion. Finally we were placed on improvised sledges made of hemlock saplings fastened together at the larger ends, while the flat outspreading branches formed an elastic pallet which slid easily over the ice. I suppose this care was half unnecessary, but those who had gathered for our rescue thought they could not do too much to testify their joy at finding us alive.

"I could not understand it at that time, but afterward all was made plain. Compton had returned to the village for assistance — or rather to give the alarm, and have search made for our bodies, since he reported having seen us swept down beneath the ice by the current. Perhaps he thought this was the truth. He could not have returned very rapidly, as he was already worn out by our race, and he was ready to drop with fatigue as soon as he delivered his message. The bells were rung, and the good people of the town, remembering the sad experience of a year before, were soon on their way up the river with axes, ropes, and poles; some of them bringing blankets and restoratives also, though of these they expected to have little need.

"My companion, as she had already informed

me, had started shoreward immediately after getting on the ice, expecting that I would follow. She said afterward that my injunctions with regard to her own safety were so earnest and imperative, and she was so thoroughly benumbed with cold, that she really had no thought except to obey my directions and save herself from freezing. She accordingly struck out as fast as her numbed limbs would permit, and had almost reached the bend of the river before a doubt as to my safety crossed her mind. She stopped and listened, bending close to the ice and peering along its surface to see if I were coming. Then the thought flashed upon her that I had been weakened by my exertion in assisting her, and might be unable to extricate myself. What to do she could not for a time decide. She had skated half a mile at the highest speed her chilled body and drenched clothing would permit. This exercise had brought a reaction; and though the wind bit cruelly, the tremor had left her frame, and her teeth no longer chattered with the cold. Her first thought was to hurry on and bring help from the village. Then she reflected that minutes might be precious. She remembered the crumbling ice, and thought of possi-

bly vain attempts on my part to scramble onto its treacherous surface. The cruel hungry gurgle of the waters, rippling against the edges of the broken ice, sounded in her ears, and she determined to return.

"She wore what was termed in those days a cloud — a long knitted comforter that was wrapped again and again about her head and neck. Fortunately this had retained its place, and, though frozen stiff on the outside, protected ears and face from the wind. Her hands, encased in woolen mittens, she had kept from freezing by whipping her arms about her shoulders as I had directed. Uncomfortable as she was in her drenched and stiffening garments, she determined to return. Fortunately, she was then near the spot where the body of the lad had been found a year before, and happened to remember a long pole, with a hook upon the end, that had been used in the search, and afterward left leaning against a thorn-tree on the shore. Securing this, she returned — with what result I have already told. Without the hook upon the end of the pole, I think her fortitude would have proved unavailing. This slipped around my arm above the elbow, and the point, taking deep hold in the radial muscles below the

joint, formed a grip that held securely when my numbed and icy-coated fingers were of little use. It tore quite a hole in the forearm, but I am always thankful when I see the scar.

"It is said that our return was a very imposing spectacle. More than a hundred people, many of them bearing torches, some on the ice and some on shore, composed our escort. Those on the river were scattered over its surface to prevent too great a strain upon the ice. Each of the improvised sledges was drawn by a dozen or so of our schoolmates, by means of the ropes that had been brought in anticipation of being needed for a far less pleasant service. Every one was laughing and shouting as we went. I can just remember the glare of the torches, the joyous clamor, and an exquisite sense of warmth and motion. She who shared this ovation with me has often declared it the most delightful ride she ever took. Perhaps the remedies that had been employed in restoring us to consciousness had something to do with the ecstatic character of our sensations.

"When we reached the point above the town we were met by almost the whole remaining population of the village—including Compton, who had just recovered from his fright and ex-

haustion. Just before they met us, a young lady came down upon the ice and joined them. Compton shrieked wildly at sight of her, and then fainted clean away. It was considered conclusive evidence of his love for one whom he thought dead.

"There were many cheers and congratulations as we were taken from the ice and carefully borne to the home of my companion. I am sure I could have walked, but I was too tired to insist on doing so. They ought to have taken me to my lodgings, but somehow they did not. Just as we reached the house, the village bells rang out a joyous peal. The journey from the river-bank had roused me, so that I remember her father saying, as we crossed the threshold:

"'Really, this is as good as a wedding.'

"It was about as near a jest as the good man ever got, though there were tears in his eyes, and his lips trembled as he spoke."

"I thought you said Mary Jane's father was dead," interrupted Bertha.

"Mary Jane's father? Bless you, child, that was your Grandpa Nellis."

"Was it my mamma who pulled you out?" she asked, in great surprise.

"Well, yes," I answered. "You see she was a little ashamed of having run away and left me to drown, and thought the only way to prevent my telling the story was to keep me under her own control. So I have not only borne her mark, but worn her yoke ever since."

The impulsive girl sprang up, threw her arms about her mother's neck, and kissed away the tears that were stealing down the flushed matronly cheeks.

"What became of Fred Compton?" asked Hartzell, in a strangely hoarse voice, with his eyes riveted on the face of Helen Somers.

"O, he married Mary Jane," I answered carelessly.

There was a little gurgling cry. The teacher's slight form swayed back and forth, and she would have fallen to the floor if Twining, who was always doing the right thing at the right time, had not shot across the room like an arrow, caught her in his arms, and borne her to the sofa from which I had risen in stupid surprise.

"Just what I have been expecting for the last half-hour," cried the doctor, angrily. "I declare, Reynolds, if you will use that beastly hot-air furnace, you might at least have put an escape-

valve somewhere about the house to save your friends from suffocation. Why a man who has an open grate wants to supplement it with an oven, I have never been able to understand, anyhow."

He bustled around, angry and snappish, in the work of resuscitation. The fainting woman quickly revived, but the doctor insisted that she should be put to bed immediately. The clock struck twelve as the little company departed, and somehow or another I could not resist the feeling that the day, which had opened so brightly, had been the precursor of a sad morrow. This feeling seemed to have affected the others also. Our guests departed in anything but a merry mood, and when Hester came into the library for our wonted chat before retiring, there were tears in her eyes which my kisses could not dry.

"Ah, Percy," she said wearily, "I am afraid we shall regret we ever gave a Thanksgiving dinner."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STUBBORN KNIGHT.

MRS. SOMERS did not appear at breakfast. Dr. Colton had called early, and in his jocose manner had prescribed three nights' sleep in a strange bed, and three days' lounging in a strange house, as the essential conditions of her recovery. So she was to remain our guest until school opened again on Monday morning. In the mean time the resources of Cragholt were to be taxed to the utmost to keep her from doing anything. Hester announced herself as delighted at the prospect of an invalid who would be likely to appreciate her care. At the worst she said it was only a headache, and she would have her guest ready for dinner with a good appetite, and in the mean time would get better acquainted with her than she ever had a chance to become before.

Twining, whose visit was to last until Monday also, seemed restless enough during the day. The narration of my Cranberg adventure appeared to have awakened memories, some of which I knew

must be unpleasant. His first love-episode, as well as mine, had been connected with that period. In fact, he had first made the acquaintance of his Mary in one of his visits to me during the period of what they were pleased to term my convalescence, at Hester's father's. We sat all the morning in the library smoking and chatting of old times. I talked of all the pleasant things I could remember, told him of our schoolmates whom I had met here and there in unexpected and unheard-of places as I traveled up and down the land. He seemed particularly anxious to learn about Compton, of whom I had not heard a word for years. Indeed, the last I knew of him was that he had abandoned Mary Jane, or at least wronged and neglected her so that there either had been a divorce or some steps in that direction. Since then I had known nothing of his life, and had seen no one who was acquainted with her fate. These reminiscences seemed to afford little pleasure to my friend, and I greatly regretted having related the incident which called them to his mind. I was surprised, however, to find his thoughts running especially upon Compton.

"I'll tell you what, Percy," said he, "the man always was a scoundrel, and I have a mind to hunt him up and see what deviltry he is at now."

"Yes?" I queried curiously. "With what motive?"

"Oh, I may be able to balk some of his rascality," said Twining, as he strode up and down the open space in the middle of the "workshop," biting nervously at the stump of a cigar which had long been extinguished.

"You are becoming a philanthropist, and propose to labor for the general good of humanity, I suppose."

"No, you don't suppose any such thing, Percy," he replied testily, as he stooped, and looked down earnestly into my face, as I leaned back in one of the great rockers.

"Well, Jack, if you say I don't, I don't; but what else could tempt a decent man like you to put himself on the track of a miserable dog like Compton, I am sure I can't imagine."

"H'm! H'm! Well, I suppose not," said Twining, thoughtfully, as he resumed his sentry march up and down the room. "I hardly know myself."

"Worse and worse, Jack. You accuse me of knowing, and then claim ignorance for yourself."

"No, I don't mean that," he replied. "I mean if I were required to give a reason, I should find it difficult to state one that would seem sane to any other mind."

"I fear you will have to fall back on philanthropy after all,—the inborn spirit of knight-errantry that has always been the mainspring of your life, and is the real reason why you have grown famous, while the rest of us, your old friends, have only managed, the most of them to be comfortable, the best of them only prosperous."

"Pshaw!" said Twining, impatiently. "I have done nothing. The fortune which others have had to struggle for, I found ready made to my hand. What I have done has been the recreation of a man who never felt the necessity of doing. If I have labored at all, it was because I was unwilling to remain idle in such a busy world. If I have done anything for others, it is because I needed to do nothing for myself. Don't mention it again, Percy. It makes me ashamed to have such a worker as you allude to it."

"Yet you are just hunting some new field of disinterested labor."

"Not at all, Percy," stopping in his walk and laying a hand upon my shoulder. "You may perhaps call this new freak of mine knight-errantry, but certainly it is not disinterested in its character."

"Will you just tell me, then," I asked, "what interest a man like you can have in Fred Compton?"

"Well," said Jack, hesitatingly, "I think I may be able to prevent his doing harm to some one else."

"To some one else? Ha! ha! old fellow, that is the very thing. That is my idea of philanthropy."

"Not at all," with a serious shake of his head. "If I had been a philanthropist I should have said *any* one else."

"O, vain quibbler!" I said, shaking my finger at him reproachfully. "Don't think to play over again the games of the past. How often have you seduced me from the profitable paths of practical science to the vain wranglings of the schoolmen? Don't try to inveigle me into a controversy as to the logical force of 'some' and 'any.'"

Twining laughed pleasantly.

"I had no thought of leading your unsophisticated nature into scholastic disputation. I merely meant to say that my interest in Compton's rascality was of a particular and not of a general character."

"Don't, don't, Jack, if you please," putting out my hand with a protesting gesture. "If you wish me to get an idea, please don't deal in riddles. I have enough of them in my profession."

"Well," said Twining, with a half-abashed look, "to speak plainly, I am interested in your—your friend—the teacher."

"Mrs. Somers?"

"Well—yes."

"I don't see how a man of any taste could help being interested in her."

"She is a very pleasant woman," sententiously.

"Pleasant?" I exclaimed. "Well, I vow! Jack Twining, you are the most provoking mortal I ever saw. To speak of being interested in such a woman as Mrs. Somers, and then in the same breath coolly allude to her as 'pleasant'! Why, man, I should feel myself wanting in due allegiance to her worth and beauty if I used any weaker term than 'charming' in regard to her. Only think how she read that most pathetic of all Shakesperean passages—that noblest plea of outraged womanhood—Queen Katherine's submissively defiant challenge to the array of them that stood in judgment on her marriage! Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"I confess I never did," said Twining; "though at the time I thought more of the reader than of the theme."

"So, Jack, you thought more of the reader? Bless you, old fellow, I am glad of it. I wish you'd keep thinking of her. She's worth thinking about, if ever woman was!"

Jack took my impetuous words as coolly as if

he had no idea of their purport, and answered quietly:

"Yes, that is why I have determined to follow up Fred Compton."

"Fred Compton?" I angrily exclaimed. "What on earth has Fred Compton to do with the sweet-hearted angel who blesses Cragholt with her presence at this hour?"

"That is just what I mean to find out," said Twining.

"See here, Jack,"—I rose and laid my hand upon his arm,—"you aren't losing your wits, are you, old fellow?"

"No," he smiled in reply. "I am just trying to get them together."

"Will you please tell me, then, what reason you have for supposing that Helen Somers ever heard of Fred Compton until last night?"

"Reason? I can hardly tell. I seem to have known the fact so long that I am not sure I could give the reasons in detail."

"'Reasons as plenty as blackberries,' eh? Well, you might give one, since there's no compulsion."

"One? Well, you remember what the doctor told us about her, of course?"

"Yes."

"Of her remarkable coolness amid danger and excitement?"

"Certainly."

"How steady her hand and eye were in the midst of appalling disaster?"

"Of course."

"You know how she has lived here?"

"Like an angel. To be sure I do."

"I mean alone—self-contained, self-helping."

"Just so."

"Well, do you suppose that any trivial matter would make such a woman faint in the presence of a dozen people?"

"Trivial! Do you call a hot-air furnace in a close room a trivial matter? You had better give a little attention to sanitary engineering, Jack!"

"Hot-air furnace! Bah! Percy, with all your shrewdness you are the dullest fellow I ever saw! It is well that you have to deal with Nature, who always tells the truth, or if she plays any tricks, does it in a simple fashion that never misleads the true-hearted votary. If you had to deal with men you would never have been deceived by the doctor's shallow pretense. The furnace, indeed! I sat by the only register in the room, Percy, and had myself turned off the heat two hours before."

Had the ceiling given way and the teacher floated

down before us as noiselessly as a thistledown out of the chamber above in which she lay, I could not have been more amazed.

"And—and—you—think, Jack?" I said hoarsely.

"I think," he answered with great deliberation, "her life holds some mystery in which Fred Compton plays an important part."

"And you—what will you do, Jack?" beseechingly.

"I will track the rascal up, Percy, find out whatever is to be learned about him, and see if I cannot do something to relieve this poor woman of her terror."

"God bless you!" gripping his hand hard. "You always were better than the rest of us."

"No, no, Percy," he replied, and there was a tender quaver in his voice; "but you know I have no one else to serve, and I have learned how pitiable beyond the power of words to express is the condition of a woman who has suffered wrong."

I could only shake his hand by way of reply, and then there was a long silence between us.

"Did you notice Hartzell last night?" I asked finally.

"No," he replied, "I was watching her."

"So was he."

"Do you think he noticed anything—drew any conclusions, I mean?"

"You remember he asked about Compton?"

"So he did. I had forgotten it."

"I happened to notice the expression of his countenance just then."

"Was it—do you think his motive is—friendly?"

"I should say not—decidedly not," I answered.

"Poor woman! I am afraid there is more trouble in store for her," sighed Jack as he threw away the stump of his cigar and lighted another.

I fully shared his misgivings, with an added consciousness that the visit to Cragholt had done something to precipitate the evil.

The calmness with which Mrs. Somers met us at dinner-time, however, dissipated all my apprehensions, and I felt sure it must have had a like effect upon Jack. Certain it is that there have been few pleasanter days in a home notable for the happiness of its inmates than the two which followed while Twining and the teacher remained our guests. As they drove away on Monday morning, he to take the train and she to go to her lodgings, Bertha said, as they disappeared down the winding road:

"Aren't they nice, mamma? I wish they were coming back to-night."

I think a like feeling on Hester's part was at the

bottom of an arrangement she had made by which Master Bobby was to remain with us for the winter. Various and sundry other reasons were, it is true, advanced in favor of this proposition, but I have always believed that the wise-hearted woman meant to keep the son as a hostage to insure the father's return.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BREAKING OF THE SEAL.

DAY after day passed quietly and pleasantly during the week that followed. I began to doubt my premonitions. Hester had apparently forgotten her apprehension of evil. I was busy preparing a long-deferred report upon one of the puzzling questions with which our profession so abounds. Hester, who rarely went abroad during my presence at Cragholt, had remained even more constantly at home, because a part of my work had been of a character in which she was able to assist, and the habit of sitting in the library once established, she was sure to continue it until my absence interrupted it again. It was during these halcyon days that the storm broke upon the little village which our home eyrie overlooked. We wondered afterward that we had not heard its echoes sooner. Bertha and her cousins might have heard it from their classmates, one would suppose; but let it be recorded for the credit of human nature in Gladesboro that they

did not. Toward the close of the week, however, when Hester had gone out to pay some social debts which she declared could no longer be delayed, and I was more than usually busy on the conclusion of my report, the area of depression that had prevailed in the valley for some days had extended itself so as to include Cragholt.

I ought, perhaps, to have stated that for some years I had been a member of the School Board of our little town. It is the only office I have held since I laid aside my shoulder-straps and took up in earnest the varied implements of my anomalous profession.

As a rule, the duties of this position had proved very light, and, I must admit, had been but ill performed. I had sketched the course of study, and had made myself in many cases the voluntary adviser of both teachers and pupils; but, as a rule, the financial and administrative functions of the Board had been performed by my associates without any particular assistance from me. This state of affairs had proved so satisfactory to all, that I was regularly chosen to succeed myself, without effort, or knowledge of the fact, on my part. Two exceptions to this rule of careless inattention to the more important duties of the Board had occurred. One of them was the organization of our High

School. It had not been accomplished without what politicians term a fight. I had been in the thick of this conflict, and as a result had an almost parental interest in the institution that came from it. The other was the struggle which resulted in putting Mrs. Somers at the head of this institution. So unusual a thing had not been done without sharp opposition. Mr. Strayhorn, the President of the Board, an old and valued citizen of great wealth, undoubted probity, and somewhat antiquated notions, had been especially desirous that a man should be chosen to the position. He admitted Mrs. Somers's merits as a teacher, and did not attempt to deny that it was due very largely to the inspiration of her influence and example that this modification and extension of our village school system became necessary, or even feasible. He was even willing that she should be placed upon a level as to salary, and almost on a level as to authority, with the principal, if only we would consent to recognize the time-honored notion of masculine superiority, by placing a man at the head of the school. He was entirely disinterested. He did not care who was chosen, but he believed in men as leaders and rulers, and was thoroughly orthodox in his views with regard to woman's proper sphere. Everything that smacked of woman's rights, or

seemed a recognition of her in an independent and responsible relation, he disapproved.

I had championed the cause of Mrs. Somers, who, almost a stranger personally, had made such an impression on our village youth of both sexes that I, in common with very many of the fathers and mothers of her pupils, felt very anxious that her influence should be neither trammeled nor neutralized by the appointment of a nominal superior, who was pretty sure to be actually an inferior; since it is an unfortunate fact that, while such a village can almost always command the services of a first-class woman in such a position, it can only hope to have a second-class man.

The struggle that ensued over the question, though sharp, was fortunately good-natured. Yet Mr. Strayhorn had never quite forgotten that when it came to the final vote, there had been two of our associates who stood with me, and only one who had stood with him. That one had since retired from the Board, and in his place had been chosen a Mr. Martindale, good-natured, middle-aged, and a widower, whom common report jocularly charged with having unsuccessfully sought to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Somers.

It is a rule at Cragholt that the master, when at work in the library, is to be disturbed only in cases

of the most imperative necessity. When, therefore, a servant excused herself for interrupting my work by alleging the importunity of these two gentlemen for an interview, I felt confident that my fears were about to be realized, and that I should very soon hear evil tidings of the lady principal.

The thought gave me a very keen regret. I could not believe that this woman, so refined and womanly in all her attributes, with her heroic hiding of a wound which showed only involuntarily in look and tone, could have been in any degree unworthy of the confidence bestowed upon her. Yet I knew the force of that strange spirit which pursues with unresting virulence the woman who errs, while readily condoning, and ofttimes rewarding with special favor, the man whose life is but a continued chapter of the most notorious crimes against the home. I remembered Him who wrote upon the sand the keen rebuking sentence which had scattered a woman's accusers, and wished I might have something of His wisdom.

Yet I will confess I had not much hope. I realized how little was required to destroy a woman's usefulness, and though I might feel as a man, I must act as a trustee; and I knew how often the adage "Right wrongs no man" was falsified by the requirements of such a position. She might be in

the right or the victim of outrageous wrong, and yet the prosperity and interest of the school demand that she be still further wronged.

I determined, however, that no act of mine should be wanting to delay or prevent any injustice of this sort. This was my mental condition when my associates of the Board entered the library. Their evident constraint confirmed both my apprehension and my resolve. After some irrelevant conversation the elder of my visitors said, with considerable embarrassment:

"I suppose you know our business, Mr. Reynolds?"

"I haven't the least idea of it, gentlemen, unless it is a friendly call."

"We should not have interrupted your work for that, however pleasant," replied Strayhorn, courteously. "The fact is—ah—that—in view of the extraordinary rumors afloat—you know—something ought to be done."

"Well, I should think so, Mr. Strayhorn, if it is as bad as that," I answered jocularly. "But to what rumors do you refer?"

"What rumors! Haven't you heard?"

"Not a word."

"You don't say so! Where *have* you been?"

"Right here."

"That accounts for it," said Martindale, laughing. "If you had been outside the house, you could not have been ignorant of what all Gladesboro is talking about."

"Indeed! Please don't keep me in suspense, gentlemen. It must be some very weighty matter. I hope no public disaster, such as—"

"O, it's all about Mrs.—that is—the lady principal," said Strayhorn, with some show of asperity.

"Ah, gentlemen," I answered gravely, "I expected trouble in that direction."

"You did?" both ejaculated in surprise.

"Certainly. I have long been confident that some one would induce that paragon of teachers to abandon the public school and take charge of a private one. Since Martindale failed, however, I have been in hope that she would hold out for another year."

"O, it isn't that," said Martindale, good-naturedly, though his face flushed.

"No, indeed," said the other, solemnly. "It's worse than that—a good deal worse."

"You don't say so? Suppose you tell me what it is, then."

"It's just this, Mr. Reynolds: it turns out, just as I expected it would from the first, that this Mrs.

Somers, or Mrs.—that is, the lady principal, whatever her name—is a married woman after all."

"Well, I am glad to hear that," I answered.

"You are?"

"Certainly."

"You had some doubt about it?"

"Not a bit."

"Why are you glad, then?"

"Because no one else can doubt it now."

"You thought her a widow?"

"I suppose so, if I thought about it at all."

"But she isn't, you see. That's what's the matter."

"That is bad news for Martindale and other would-be suitors of the lady, but I do not see how it can interest us, Mr. Strayhorn."

"You don't?"

"I do not."

"Why, man alive, she's got a husband!"

"Well, I have got a wife. So we're even."

"But she has been palming herself off as a widow—and—"

"Stop, gentlemen!" I interrupted. "The lady of whom you speak is a friend of my family, and under this roof, at least, must be spoken of with respect. I believe her a pure, good woman who is incapable of deceit. If you have any facts to

show to the contrary I will hear them, but must decline to listen to any unsupported imputations against her."

"Why, her name isn't Somers at all, Mr. Reynolds," said the old man, with indignant surprise.

"You are sure of that?"

"Well, yes—that is, her husband's name is not Somers."

"You know that, I suppose?"

"I have his word for it."

"You have seen him, then?"

"No, but he has written."

"Indeed! With what object?"

"I hardly know."

"To whom did he write?"

"To me—and others."

"Did he write to you as a member of the School Board?"

"Yes."

"Does he want her wages?"

"He did not say so."

"It is queer. Where did he write from?"

"Paris."

"Paris? What did he want?"

"His wife, I guess," said the old man, with a chuckle.

"His wife! He didn't expect you to send her

back as we used to return fugitive slaves, did he?"

"O, I don't know," said the old man, testily. "Read his letter yourself. I'm not the only one that has been favored with such an epistle."

He handed me as he spoke a letter postmarked in Paris, and bearing the stamp of New York four days before. I noticed these things as I drew the letter from the envelope. It read as follows:

"*To whom it may concern:*

"The lady whose likeness is hereto attached is my wife. We were married at Columbus, Ohio, by Rev. Julius E. Gardner, rector of the Protestant Episcopal church in that city, on the 14th day of May, 187–. About a year afterward she abandoned her home, and since that time, as I am informed, has been living under various assumed names in different parts of the country. I send this notice in order that unwary parties may not be misled, by the supposition that she is a single woman, to receive and treat her as such.

"Respectfully, FRED. H. COMPTON."

There was no mistaking the signature of my old enemy. Mrs. Somers's mysterious agitation at the mention of his name came to my mind instantly as a corroboration of his marital claim. There was

no question as to the likeness, an elegant little Parisian vignette, copied from an American photograph, the name of Sarony with the unmistakable trademark appearing in a light line above that of the French *réproducteur*. It was unmistakably a likeness, and a wonderfully good one, too, of the lady-principal. Appended to this letter, as if by an afterthought, was a postscript in these words:

"The lady's real name is Margaret Somers Compton. I have heard that she has assumed the name of Mrs. Helen Somers, and passes for a widow. There has never been any divorce, nor, so far as I am aware, any proceedings looking toward one. I shall arrive in New York about January first, and my address afterward will be the Everett House, Union Square. F. H. C."

Perhaps I occupied more time than was actually necessary in reading this strange epistle, or it may be that my fellow-members of the Board saw a look of surprise or doubt upon my face. We are all Lavaters by instinct, and given a knowledge of the subject of a man's thoughts, there are very few so dull as not to be able to give a good guess as to their specific character. At any rate, they evidently saw that it had made an impression on me and judged its effect to be convincing.

"Well," said the older man, when I had concluded the examination, "what do you think of that?"

"Does anybody here know this man Compton?" I asked.

"Never heard of him, and cannot find that any one in town ever did," was the reply.

"Did you say that several people had received these letters?"

"All the Board except you, I think, and several prominent citizens; I believe all the ministers."

"Did Dr. Colton get one?"

"It is thought not. No one has spoken to him directly about it, but he has been given an opportunity to refer to it if he wishes."

"Were the letters all alike?"

"Precisely," said the younger man, drawing one from his pocket.

I compared them carefully. They were exact duplicates—written in a fine, precise French hand, but signed in a bold, strong style.

"He has a confederate in the village," I said, half to myself.

"What makes you think so?" they asked in surprise.

"How else would he know whom to address and whom to omit?"

The idea seemed not to have occurred to them before. So they merely said:

"Sure enough."

"You see, gentlemen," I continued, feeling the path grow smoother before me, "it is evident that whoever is at the bottom of this has persecution of a poor woman for his sole motive."

"Do you think so?" the old man asked doubtfully.

He was a strict man, to whom even the appearance of evil was obnoxious. But he was especially a just man, and I knew nothing would affect him more deeply than the idea of being the instrument of malice or injustice. I saw that there would be a conflict, and my belief in the teacher's innocence was so great that I determined to lose no opportunity to make sentiment in her favor.

"Certainly," I replied. "Look with what skill the matter has been conducted. First he writes to you, Mr. Strayhorn, asking questions about her. This letter might have been the result of mere suspicion of her identity. If that had been the case, he would have written to you alone in reply, and not scattered these detracting missives throughout the village."

"That seems reasonable," said Strayhorn, shaking his head dubiously.

"Then," I continued, "mark the malice in the next step. The leading men of the village are carefully canvassed, omitting the two who are known to be her most active friends. Why? Evidently in order that his slanderous attack may become well grounded in the public mind before her friends hear of it and take measures to counteract it."

"It certainly looks as if that were the case," assented Strayhorn.

"There can be no doubt about it. Now, gentlemen, what are the facts—I do not mean all the facts, but the facts that everybody knows? In the first place, a woman comes here as a teacher, not on her own application, but on the invitation—I may say the solicitation—of the Board."

"We acted on Dr. Colton's recommendation," said Strayhorn.

"Of which she knew nothing, I believe."

"That is what the doctor said, and her letter of acceptance referred to her election as a complete surprise," said the younger trustee.

"And I have reason to know that such was the fact," I continued. "Now, this teacher has been here among us some four or five years, and during that time has, I believe, on all occasions demeaned herself as a lady."

"There can be no doubt of that," said the elder of my listeners.

"She has proved herself so efficient, that she has been placed in the most responsible position in the school, and has filled it to your entire satisfaction."

"The best principal we have had," said Strayhorn. "I was opposed to her appointment, but must admit the truth."

He said it doggedly, as if to clear himself from any suspicion of injustice.

"In addition to her duties in the school, she has interested herself in whatever affects the welfare of the village, making herself an active and beneficent influence in it. Is this not true?"

"She has certainly done a great deal for our young people," said Strayhorn, cautiously.

"And there isn't a poor family in the town she has not benefited in one way or another," added our associate, warmly.

"During all this time I believe she has kept herself entirely excluded from society, except so far as her work demanded the co-operation of others. She has lived quietly at her lodgings; doing her work in the school; visiting the poor; providing instructive amusement for our children, her pupils; neither seeking nor avoiding society; having no intimates."

"That is all true," said Strayhorn. "I guess your house and Dr. Colton's are about the only ones she has entered in a social way in all that time."

"And only a few times has she visited those," I added. "Yet she has not shrunk from observation. In the church or wherever her self-imposed duties have made it necessary for her to do so, she has, I think, shown herself ready to mingle freely with our people."

"O, certainly," they murmured.

"She has not been without admirers," I continued. "Men of whose admiration any woman might be proud, and whom an adventuress, as this fellow wishes to imply that she is, would regard as very flattering conquests, have offered suit to her. Yet if I am correctly informed, she has encouraged none of these, but, on the contrary, has quietly and gently, but at the same time effectually, discouraged them."

"I can vouch for that," said Martindale, emphatically.

"So skillfully has she maintained this course," I went on, "that no would-be suitor has been humiliated, and her name has not been linked even in the lightest whispered gossip with that of any man."

"That's exactly so," ejaculated Martindale.

"In other words, Cæsar himself could not have asked that his wife should bear herself more discreetly than she has done under what it is now evident must have been very trying circumstances. Your wife and mine, Mr. Strayhorn, have not more blameless lives, apparently, than she."

"Very true," assented the elder man.

"Now, gentlemen," I said, "one of two things is unquestionably true: either she is this man's wife or she is not."

"I should say there was no doubt about that, Mr. Reynolds," said Strayhorn, with the hint of a smile upon his face.

"Very well, now; if she is his wife, she has done nothing while here to justify such imputation as he has cast on her in this letter?"

"Not that anybody knows of."

"If there has been a separation, or an abandonment as he insinuates, who is most likely to have been at fault—the man who pursues his fleeing wife in this manner, or the woman who makes herself a blessing to every community among whom fate casts her lot?"

"The chances are of course in her favor," said Strayhorn; "but she ought not to have practiced deception. That looks bad, Mr. Reynolds, say what you may."

"I am not so sure about that, Mr. Strayhorn. Let us suppose a case. You have a daughter, only just married, on whom this woman left the impress of a pure mind?"

"She certainly did have great influence with Mira, and the girl just worships her," said the old man, softening.

"Well, now, suppose that after your death your daughter's husband should mistreat her—we will not say how, as badly as you can imagine—until she was compelled to go and earn her own living; and then suppose he should seek to prevent her from enjoying even this poor privilege by sending to her employers and associates such missives as these,"—holding the letters toward them,—"don't you think she would be justified in assuming any name, or making use of any subterfuge, to secure the right of peaceable maintenance?"

"Of course, of course!" said the old man, with emphatic decisiveness.

"And would you not think it was a mean thing if men blamed her, and refused her work, simply because her husband pursued her with such base insinuations?"

"That's what it would be, anyhow," said Martindale.

"That's just my opinion, gentlemen, and I don't

think we ought to do what we all agree to be mean and cowardly."

"But we were in hopes, Mr. Reynolds, that you would be able to shed some light upon this matter," said Strayhorn, piteously,—"you or Dr. Colton."

"Dr. Colton knows hardly more than I do of the lady in question. He found her doing noble work, and asked no questions in regard to her past."

"You know nothing, then, about this man Compton? I thought the name seemed to strike you."

"The man who signed these letters was known to me when he was young. I have not seen him since, and know but little of him."

"Mrs.—ah—Mrs. Somers has never spoken to you of her marriage, then?"

"Not a word."

"Does she know that you are acquainted with the man who claims to be her husband?"

"She has known it for a few days only. May I ask if she is aware of these letters, and the excitement they are making?"

"I understand that she has seen one of them," answered Strayhorn. "The fact is, the minister was so troubled about it—she being one of the most active of his flock—that he sent the one he

had received to her with a request that she would make any explanation she saw fit."

"Did she explain?"

"She answered his letter," said Martindale, laughing, "and the dominie has been trying to rent a knot-hole to crawl into, ever since."

"Have you seen her reply?"

"Yes; he showed it to a few of us last night."

"And what did she say?"

"She said that when Mr. Fred H. Compton, or any one else, saw fit to make charges affecting her good name she would be ready and willing to meet them. As for the rest, she did not suppose either he or the church or the people of Gladesboro had any especial interest in her personal affairs, or any right to demand of her an explanation of another's acts or motives."

"She is quite right, too," I exclaimed warmly.

"Yes, I suppose she is," said the old man, regretfully; "but, for one, I wish the whole matter had never happened. Such things are not pleasant, and, put whatever interpretation you please on the affair, it is sure to impair her usefulness and, I fear, make a good many of us unhappy."

I could but share the old man's apprehensions; and when they departed, having first notified me of a meeting of the Board to be held the next

night, I must confess that, with all my confidence in Mrs. Somers, or Mrs. Compton, or whoever she might be, I looked forward to a long, unpleasant, and, on the whole, perhaps unprofitable struggle to retain her in the position she held. Before the time appointed for the meeting, however, events occurred which greatly simplified the task before us.

CHAPTER XV.

TOO FINELY TEMPERED.

HARDLY had my visitors departed, when Hester returned in a state of great excitement. It was evident that the commotion in the village had not been at all magnified by my friends of the Board. Hester had scarcely begun to unburden herself of the tale of detraction which was afloat in the little hamlet, when Bertha knocked at the library door, and with tearful eyes, and hot, indignant words, implored me to go at once to the aid of her beloved teacher. Gladesboro did not often have a sensation, and was making the most of this. Men and women, old and young, were canvassing, not the teacher's merits, but the atrocity of her conduct in neglecting to make each and every one of them the special confidant of her matrimonial woes, instead of hiding with studious care the interesting episode of what they all felt certain must be a most eventful life. Despite all that she had done, and the irreproachable character of her life among them, hardly a

voice was raised in her defense. Such is indeed "the rarity of Christian charity"! A self-confessed sinner of the grossest type would no doubt have been received with open arms by the majority of those anxious to condemn this woman, whose life, so far as they knew it, had been fragrant with the perfume of good works.

Hester is one of those even-tempered mortals who are seldom moved to tears; but what she had seen and heard was too much for her composure, and salty drops sparkled on her long lashes as she told the humiliating story.

"They think she is but a poor weak woman, who has no friends to fight her battles for her," she said angrily, "and so every one seems to vie with his neighbor in trying to work her ill."

"That is but natural," I answered, with philosophic composure. "Darwin used the wrong term in formulating his great theory. The law of nature is not 'the survival of the fittest,' but the survival of the toughest. That little frail bit of humanity is no doubt worth a ten-acre lot full of such creatures as Fred Compton, yet the chances are that he will crush and worry and wear her out. She is the 'fittest' either for earth or heaven, but he is the toughest."

"Percy Reynolds," exclaimed Hester, as she

turned a flushed face and flashing eyes upon me, "I am ashamed of you, positively ashamed of you!"

Hester rarely speaks so emphatically, and I could not help noticing how very becoming was her ingenuous anger. Perhaps I even smiled.

"O, I mean it," she reiterated. "I am ashamed of any man who will sit still and let a brave woman suffer unjustly."

"I do not blame you at all, my dear," I answered mildly. "Indeed, I may say I share your sentiments very fully—so fully that I do not exclude those of your sex who do the same thing, from a like feeling of humiliating disapproval."

"What can a woman do?" she asked with a scornful accent.

"I might respond, what can a *man* do in such a case as this, my dear?"

"But we women are not school trustees, and ministers, and so on—the mouthpieces of public sentiment."

"And we men are not mothers, and wives, and women of society—the *makers* of public sentiment," I replied.

Hester laughed, wiped her eyes, turned her muff over and over in her lap half a dozen times, smoothing its fur with her dainty gloved hand.

"Percy," she said, looking up at me with a sud-

den blush spreading over her face, "may I do as I choose?"

"Does the sun ask leave to shine?" I answered lightly.

"No. I am not jesting," she rejoined. "If I do just what my feeling prompts me to do in this matter, will you—will you—that is—"

"O, I will stand by you to the death, madam," I exclaimed melodramatically.

"Of course you will," she laughed. "A man who will not stand by his wife after he has stood still and seen her get into trouble is hardly worth having. What I mean is, will you promise not to laugh at me if what I do turns out not to be the very wisest thing I might have done?"

She had risen, and stood at the end of the desk at which I sat as she said this. I laid down my pen, and taking her hand in both of mine, kissed the gloved fingers, as I answered earnestly:

"Hester, if ever I laughed at any earnest purpose of yours, I pray to be forgiven as for a heinous crime."

"O, no," she answered, while the tears flowed over her swollen lids. It is not that; but if—if you should—if I should make a very bad mistake, and you should laugh at me, Percy, I—I think it would kill me."

"You will make no mistake in following the inclinations of your heart, my love."

"I don't know, Percy," she smiled through her tears. "I am awfully afraid. It is a strange step for me to take—especially without you, and of course you cannot appear in it at all; but you will not ever be sorry if it fails, will you?"

"I shall always be proud of anything you may do for those who are unjustly treated," I answered.

"Then I shall go and bring Mrs. Somers here for lunch during the noon recess, and insist upon her making her home with us until this trouble has blown over."

I confess I was startled at the boldness of this proposition. I half stammered in reply,

"But you do not know—had you not better hear her story first, my dear?"

"Percy," said Hester, laying her hand on my arm, "I am a woman and during the past hour I have been trying to put myself in this woman's place. I know nothing of her past, but this I do know: she is a pure woman, or my eyes and instinct are sadly at fault. What she most wants, or what I should want in her place, is not sympathy—not kindness, as it is called—but confidence, especially from another woman. This is what I mean to show. I do not mean to ask her

story. I do not wish to hear it, not now at least. I want to say to her, 'I know nothing of your past, and ask nothing of explanation or guaranty. I know you are a brave, pure woman who needs a friend—a home—the moral support of one who trusts implicitly. Come with me and make my home your citadel."

"But if she will not come?" I suggested.

"I will make her come," said Hester with determination.

"Then, my dear," I said solemnly, "you will succor one who, in my opinion, has more need of a friendly refuge than any castaway."

"But—but Bertha and the girls, Percy. Have you thought of them?" she asked with tender misgiving.

"They cannot have a better lesson than such an example. Are you not doing as you would wish them to do, or as you would wish others might do for them in like trouble?"

She hesitated no longer, but, with a face too radiant to go unkissed, set forth upon her errand of compassion. In half an hour Mrs. Somers was brought a deluded prisoner to Cragholt, and after luncheon informed of the only terms on which she could be allowed to depart. The Doctor had come in meanwhile, and was one of the council who met

in the library to await her decision. It was pleasant to note the little lady's surprise and gratification struggle with a sense of anger and humiliation.

"O, I cannot do it, Mrs. Reynolds," she declared, "I cannot do it. I do not think you ought to ask it."

"I do not ask it," said Hester. "I demand it as a right. You have been kind to others, which gives us the right to be kind to you."

"But you do not know me, Mrs. Reynolds, and I am not ready to repay your kindness with the confidence it deserves."

"We do not ask your confidence. We know *what* you are and do not care *who* you are," said Hester, firmly. "If the time ever comes when you wish to speak of the past, we shall be glad to hear. You will put yourself under no obligation by coming here, but will be at perfect liberty to speak or keep silent as you may choose."

"And do you freely assent to this?" she asked, looking toward me in surprise.

"Treason! treason!" shouted the doctor before I had time to reply. "No one but you, Mrs. Somers, would have dared question the paramount sovereignty of the mistress of Cragholt."

"Indeed, Mrs. Somers," I hastened to add, "nothing could have my warmer approval. I

think you owe it not only to yourself, but to us—I mean the doctor and myself especially—to accept."

"You are all very kind," she said with a sweet, weary smile, as she laid her hand caressingly upon Hester's open palm; "but I cannot do it—indeed I cannot."

While she spoke, the doctor had been gazing curiously in her face.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Somers," he said seriously. "I have a word to say on this matter. You will not listen to me as your friend. Let us see if you will also be deaf to the physician. Allow me to feel your pulse."

He took out his watch and counted the beats. Then he looked searchingly into her eyes, put his finger on the lid of one, closed it for a moment, then watched it keenly when the lid was raised.

"Mrs. Reynolds," he said with unusual earnestness, when his examination was concluded, "you must not let this woman's sensibility influence you to recall your invitation. You little know how much she needs the very refuge you have offered her."

But now it seemed as if all our kindly scheming was to be in vain. Hester was not accustomed to ask twice, and the refusal of Mrs. Somers had to her

mind been aggravated in its ungraciousness by the fact of her own self-sacrifice in making it. Her tone was cool enough, therefore, as she responded to the doctor's earnest appeal:

"I cannot compel Mrs. Somers to accept our hospitality, or even our confidence."

There was a little gasping cry. A pair of slender white hands were clasped together in an agony of supplication as she slid to the floor, and buried her head in Hester's lap.

"Don't! don't!" she wailed in piteous, pleading tones. "It is so long since I have expected confidence that I do not know how to meet it! Don't blame me! Don't!"

Her voice rose into a thin, quavering shriek, as she uttered the last word. Hester tried to draw her hand from the hysteric woman's fierce convulsive clutch.

"Stop! stop!" cried the doctor, seizing Mrs. Somers by the shoulder and shaking her rudely, while he glared as if he meant to strike.

She looked up at him with a gray ashen face and blue quivering lips, shutting her teeth firmly and drawing her breath in long, gasping sobs.

The doctor loosed her hands and gave some brief directions to Hester, who rose and hurriedly withdrew. He sat holding Mrs. Somers's temples

and looking steadily into her eyes, while he told me in a low monotone to get the medicine-case from his overcoat pocket and take from it a small vial which he described. She moaned with every stertorous breath: her eyes glared fixedly, and the pupils seemed to cover the whole iris. Without taking his eyes from her face, the doctor directed me to put a few drops of the contents of the vial in water and give it to her. I poured out the medicine, and held the glass to her lips. She shook her head angrily, as if its touch annoyed her.

"Take it!" said the doctor, sternly.

She made another gesture of dissent.

"Take it!" he repeated, still more imperatively.

She looked into his eyes a moment with a curious gaze that somehow made me shudder; then opened her lips mechanically, and swallowed the potion. Almost instantly she became drowsy. Then the doctor relaxed his grasp upon her hand, drew her head tenderly down upon his knee, and began to smooth her soft brown tresses.

"Poor girl," he murmured. "She must have suffered fearfully to bring her into such a state. Strong as she is in some directions, she is weaker than a child in others. That is often the way with a brain that is over-strained. It will get strong enough on every subject and in every direction but

one. The least recurrence to that destroys its equilibrium or snaps the cord of life. I have known men whose business troubles affected them so that sometimes the sight of money, a column of figures, or again the very mention of the business in which they were engaged, completely unnerved them and made them, though rational enough in other respects, absolutely maniacal.

"Ah, Mrs. Reynolds," he continued as Hester reappeared, "there is no longer any question of her acceptance of your invitation or your refusal of her ungracious assent. The merest Christian charity makes her your enforced guest for an indefinite time. Meantime you may be sure that your self-sacrificing kindness will in the end be richly rewarded."

Hester would have reproached herself, but he would not allow a word.

"It is best so," he said gravely. "If the blow had been deferred, and the excitement and strain continued, I could not have answered for the result. As it is, a hot bath and a night's rest, or, at the worst, a few days of quiet, will probably restore her."

We bore her to the room Hester had prepared, and Hester went herself to order the things most needed to be brought from her lodgings; and long

before night it was known throughout the village that Mrs. Somers was sick at Cragholt, and on her recovery would reside there as one of the family. The effect of these things was indeed wonderful. Before the Board of Directors met next night, we were overwhelmed with petitions in her favor. There were so many of the citizens in attendance, that it was proposed that we adjourn to the Town Hall. This we did; and when the meeting was organized, the old doctor told in fiery words all that was known of the teacher's story,—not forgetting Hester's part,—and spoke of her present condition. All the ministers of the town had a warm word of praise for her good works and patient spirit; there were some touching incidents roughly told by a few of the recipients of good from her hands, and Gladesboro resolved to stand by its lady-principal. There were many muttered hints that if Mr. Fred Compton showed himself in that region he would get rough treatment.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FOOL'S PUNISHMENT.

I HAD returned from the meeting of the Board, finished telling Hester of the demonstration in favor of her *protégée*, kissed the dear woman good-night, and addressed myself again to work, hoping to make up the deficit in the day's neglected task, when there came a light tap upon the window, and looking up I saw the pale face of George Hartzell, framed in the wide sash and set in the inky blackness of the clouded night.

In answer to his beckoning signal, I crossed the room on tiptoe, and opened the window. I do not know why I should have taken the precaution to step lightly. I was in my own house, and Hartzell was my friend. I had no need to move stealthily, nor, after he had entered, to greet him in a whisper and inquire what was the matter.

His face was pale, but wrong-doers are not the only persons whose pallor is often noticeable. I do not even know why I should have coupled Hartzell with the idea of a malefactor, but I did; and when

he pushed by me with only a muttered "Nothing" in answer to my whispered inquiry, I carefully closed the blinds and drew down the shades to prevent observation from without, before attempting any further conversation. When I had done this and returned to my desk, I found Hartzell sitting by the fire, his slouch-hat drawn down over his handsome face, evidently absorbed in meditation of an unpleasant character. I was about to propound an inquiry, when I recollected that friendship sometimes manifests itself most acceptably by silence. Concluding that he preferred, for the present at least, his own thoughts to my inquiries, I turned again to my interrupted work, and was soon absorbed in the delicate balancing of reasons *pro* and *con* which constitutes the bulk of a scientific expert's report. I do not know how long I had worked, but I had quite forgotten Hartzell's presence until I was startled by his vehemently exclaiming,

"Reynolds, do you know I am a scoundrel?"

"Really, George," I answered lightly, "I had not entertained that notion until I saw your face outside the window there. It struck me then that such a visage did not match well with an easy conscience."

"Don't laugh at me," he exclaimed, looking up,

his face drawn with pain, "but tell me how she is."

It struck me in an instant that it was he who had played the spy upon the fair sufferer in the room above. All the kind feeling I had had for him in that moment turned to scorn. I was angry at myself for having admitted him beneath my roof. If he had come to my window an actual criminal, under the ban of the law, I am afraid I should have given him shelter, fed him, and perhaps have helped him to escape. I have lived so much in the far West that I have lost some of the tender regard for the forms of law which constitutes so important a part of our Eastern civilization; but the thought that he should have pursued and persecuted a woman, or aided in her persecution by another, filled me with indignation and disgust. I could have spurned him with my foot. This man, who had eaten my salt, I felt had betrayed my confidence to stab a helpless woman who had fled to my hearth for shelter. So I answered, sternly enough, no doubt, for my hands were opening and shutting nervously with an almost irrepressible desire to do him violence:

"She? Whom do you mean, sir?"

"Whom should I mean but Mrs.——the—the woman you have given shelter."

"You mean Mrs. Somers."

"I mean the woman who calls herself Mrs. Somers."

"See here, George Hartzell, Mrs. Somers is living under my roof as one of my family. As long as she sustains this relation to us she is entitled to the same protection I would accord to any other member of my household. I will hear no imputation against her."

"I suppose you know she is the wife of Fred Compton?"

"I know she is my guest, and not to be maligned in my presence," I replied, somewhat threateningly, perhaps.

"What object could I have, Reynolds, in maligning my brother's wife?"

"Your brother's wife?"

"Certainly. You did not know that Fred Compton was my brother?"

"Never heard of it."

"Very few people have—at least from me. He is not a relation of whom one is likely to feel very proud."

"But how—what?"

"You do not understand the relationship? Well,

he was my mother's son by her first husband, and resembled the father in character. I am thought to be like him in appearance, and for the last few days I have been thinking that the parallel ought not to stop there. On his father's death he was adopted by his uncle, his father's brother, who refused to do anything for my mother, although she had been left destitute, unless the boy was given up to him and ceased to have any intercourse with his mother. Hunger—the actual fear of starvation, Reynolds—compelled the delicately-nurtured woman to accept these cruel terms, though the act made her whole after-life a burden. No matter; they were rigidly enforced. She was fairly provided for, but soon remarried, thereby escaping from the humiliating obligation to her husband's brother. Fred observed the terms of his adoption faithfully, even after his uncle's death, and it was only just before his marriage with Miss Matson that he visited my mother. I had never heard anything but good of this elder brother—the mother's love being so strong as to lay no blame at his door for the continuing desertion. Of course I was greatly fascinated by the handsome young fellow who came for a short visit to our humble home. I even felt hurt by my father's coolness toward him. It was only when that

parent was upon his death-bed, and solemnly laid upon me in my tender years the burden of caring for my mother's welfare, that I learned what a heartless scapegrace my handsome brother was. From him I learned of Fred's treatment of his wife —his first wife, I mean. I beg your pardon," he continued, noticing my frown; "I assure you I mean no disrespect. I haven't the slightest doubt of the fact. I wish to God I had!"

"You mean that Mrs. Somers is Fred's wife?"

"Yes."

"Never mind that now. Go on."

"Soon after my father's death I found that the only way to keep my mother from squandering our little store upon Fred—who had already spent his own inheritance—was to remove her from his influence. She was a just woman in purpose, though a weak one in her love, and I knew that if I could keep her hidden from him, she would not only be relieved from his importunity, but be much more comfortable and happy. After a peculiarly flagrant breach of confidence on Fred's part, who had now become a confirmed gambler, if not something worse, she consented to sever all connection with him. I sold off our little property, gave my mother a pleasure-trip to the West, and returning, settled at this place, she promising not

to let Fred know our whereabouts. To prevent his discovering us, we had to break off all intercourse with our friends. Fortunately we had but few. To prevent my mother from repining at their loss, I devoted myself to her, almost to the exclusion, as you know, of other society. This life suited my inclination, and we lived happily and peacefully until this woman came."

"You mean Mrs. Somers?" I interrupted coldly.

"I mean my brother's wife."

"Well, how did she disturb your serenity?"

"How did she disturb it? My God!" cried Hartzell, springing from his chair. "She made me love her!"

"You?"

"Great heavens! do you suppose because your own heart is full of joys, and your home overflowing with delights, that others have no capacity for love? I have lived only on love of her since the night she first landed in Gladesboro!"

"You have kept your devotion very quiet," I said, almost with a sneer. His kinship with Compton, and the conviction that he had betrayed this woman to her persecutor, made me distrust even his love.

"Very true," he answered proudly. "The little we had, together with what I could earn, was barely

sufficient for my mother's comfort. My first duty was to her. I waited till the end should come, intending then to speak; but a horrible revelation was in store for me. Before her death my mother's fortitude gave way. She could not resist the promptings of her heart, and wrote to her eldest son, disclosing our hiding-place and asking him to visit us. He was on his way here when death overtook her. But my heart was tender with the hope of love, as well as sore from bereavement. So in writing to him I foolishly enough referred to my love, and the hope I entertained of making a home-nest for myself."

"Poor fellow!" I exclaimed, "how could you keep on nourishing such a hopeless passion?"

"Why should it be hopeless? I thought her a widow; I am not so unattractive as to make that an insuperable objection. I loved her as man rarely does, and she was very kind."

"Yes; too kind to give you hope that she would ever love you."

"O, I would have compelled her to love me if this dark shadow had not come between us. Even as it is, I would rather she were dead than see her the wife of another. I thought, as you were relating your adventure on the ice the other night, that if I had her in the sweeping current yonder, I

would take her down under the smooth, imprisoning ice, and die with her in my arms,—mine still, though dead,—never a look or smile or kiss given to another! My God! I would kill her now, rather than see her fall to another's lot."

"I recognize your relationship to Fred Compton now," I said, as he strode savagely back and forth across the room.

"Don't say that, Reynolds." He stopped his walk, and stood grasping one of the dowelings on the back of the desk at which I sat. "Don't say that. I may be hot-tempered and selfish, but I never purposely did harm to any one."

His white face, drawn with suffering, attested his sincerity.

"I did not mean to do her harm," he continued. "How could I, when I loved her so? My mother knew my passion and my hope. But she could not think of any woman coming between us, and I promised that I would utter no word, make no sign, while she lived. She knew I worshiped from a distance, however, and it cut her to the quick. I suppose the failure of her efforts to establish any intimacy with the object of my love increased her dislike. At least she also had written to Fred about it, as it appears, and when he answered my letter he rallied me upon it,

inquired the name of my inamorata, and felicitated me upon the prospect of matrimony—two ventures in which, he said, had thoroughly satisfied him. In my reply, of course, I answered his queries. It was some months before I wrote, and then the letter was a long time reaching him. He answered quickly, asking me to give a complete description of the woman and tell how and when she came to the village, adding that he suspected her of being an adventuress.

"I laughed at the idea, but fell into his trap. I received a letter saying that the so-called Mrs. Somers was his wife. He said he cared nothing what became of her, but supposed I would like to know who my enchantress really was. To this I answered incredulously and angrily, but I could not wholly shake off the impression which his letter made upon my mind, although I did not for a moment give it credence. I had intended to declare myself as soon as my mother's death was far enough away to make such a thing proper. But I could neither get nor make a reasonable opportunity. She seemed to avoid me, not, I thought, from dislike, but from a fixed determination to avoid all society of a private or personal character. To overcome this I devoted myself to those things in which she was inter-

ested, and met her in every company she attended. Yet I could not get nearer. I was not easy to discourage, however, and all the more determined to win her because of her evident resolution to discourage admirers. I attributed this, you see, to that feeling which prompts the delicate and high-minded widow to consider herself morally bound to devote her life to the memory of the dead —making widowhood a far more piteous sacrifice than the Indian suttee. Fred's letter, claiming her as his wife, was received just before Thanksgiving. It made little impression on me beyond exciting my anger, until I met her here. Then the doctor's story filled my mind with suspicion which her agitation at your unexpected reference to Fred confirmed. A few days later, I, with others, received a copy of his circular letter. I cannot understand his motive, but am sure it is malign. Of course she is lost to me, whatever may occur. I understand that. The impression of fear and horror which he has made upon her can never permit even a friendly confidence in his brother; it is best that she should never know my feelings. I must go away and begin a new life; but if I can ever be of service to her, I hope you will let me know. I will meet Fred upon his landing, and

if I can avert further trouble from that source, will do so. Do you think the shock is likely to prove dangerous?"

He asked the question with an evident distress which it was painful to behold.

"My dear fellow," I said, grasping his hand, "if you had not been absorbed in self-accusation, you might have spared yourself a vast amount of suffering. The doctor's prompt treatment produced a gentle slumber, and she has been in a quiet, half-unconscious state all day. Hester roused her on my return from the meeting to-night to tell her the good news of how the townspeople had rallied to her cause. The tears crept through her closed lids, but she smiled peacefully, and in an instant was asleep again. The doctor came a moment after, and having heard our report rubbed his hands gleefully, and declared that she would be better to-morrow than she had been in many a day even before her collapse."

"Thank God!" said the young man, solemnly bowing his head upon his arms, while his sobs shook the desk.

"Come, come," I said after a moment. "This will never do. The best thing for you is to—to—do nothing."

This stammered solecism was too much for George's sense of humor even at that time. I heard him catch his breath once or twice, and then, despite all his efforts at restraint, the gay healthy nature asserted itself, and laughter succeeded tears. A sense of fun is a great relief to a healthy nature, and a man who knows how to laugh is insured against many ills.

"I beg your pardon, Reynolds," he said after a moment. "Your fun is bad enough, but your efforts at consolation would convulse a corpse."

"It was something of a bull," I answered, glad to take advantage of this change of mood. "But have a cigar, and let us talk sensibly about this matter."

"No," said he, cheerfully, "I have had enough of bungling, and must go and think how best to hide my sorrow. There is one thing I came near forgetting. Fred sent me this letter, asking me to deliver it into his wife's hands. I thought of burning it, but am afraid I might deprive her of knowledge she ought to have. I will leave it with you to do with as you see fit. I think you had better read it before giving it to her. Make any excuse you can for my absence and silence at this time."

"Why not tell her the truth—that you are

Fred's brother; that you accidentally betrayed her refuge, and are greatly troubled in consequence? This will give a reason for your absence, and make your future avoidance of her seem natural."

The tears glistened in his eyes.

"As you choose," he replied.

He lit a cigar hastily, and shaking my hand he let himself out of the sliding window, and went off into the darkness, no longer ghostly and morbid, but a healthy-minded man with an honest purpose in life, which was based on real consideration for another's happiness. I had no fear for him. His love was one of those pure passions which ennoble but do not destroy. The trouble might leave a cicatrix upon his heart, but it would beat just as strongly and honestly as it had ever done. He would not, indeed, forget the woman he had loved so long in silence, but the wealth of affection which he treasured up for her would some time flow forth to brighten some other woman's life.

I sat a moment by the fire, thinking of these things. I could not but regard the events of the day as omens of good. I could not see how the tangled skein was to be unraveled, but I was sure it would be. My heart was so full that I found myself unable to work longer. So I hid

away the letter which Fred had given me, in my desk, where it would not be always staring in my face and tempting my lawless fingers. Then I stole up to bed, very quietly, as I thought, only to be greeted, as I opened the bedroom door, with the warning exclamation:

"Do stop whistling, my dear. Remember Mrs. Somers."

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME RAVELED THREADS.

THE doctor proved a true prophet. Though he would not allow his patient to leave her room the next day, the smiles and tears that mingled on her face attested an April gladness in her heart as she thanked us for our friendship, and promised that we should soon know all there was worth knowing about her life from her own lips. The confidence which the people of Gladesboro had manifested touched her very deeply, and she was, in her humility, inclined to ascribe to us a much greater part of the credit for this kindly ovation than we were entitled to claim.

I started the next day on a sudden summons requiring a journey half across the continent, which promised to compel my absence until the close of the year, leaving Mrs. Somers an inmate of Cragholt, and forgetting all about the letter hidden away in my desk. I stopped in the city on my way westward, and told Twining, over a hurried

luncheon, all that had happened at Gladesboro. Among other things I gave him one of the letters Compton had sent to the people in the village, thinking some legal steps might be taken to prevent our invalid from being annoyed in such manner in the future. He promised to give the matter his attention, and to inform me at Christmas what would best be done.

Then I was whirled away to a bleak mountain-side of Montana, on which one of the ever-recurring new problems of my profession was waiting to be solved. The time required was longer than I expected. The Christmas festivities were over; and the Saturday before New Year's, which festival-day came on Monday, had arrived when I reached Cragholt after a hurried journey. The trip had been an unusually severe one, but promised unusual profit. In order to reach home before the holidays were quite over, I had come directly from the mine, and was still clad in the rough garments of the camp, when Bertha met me at the train and threw her arms about my neck, only to start back the next instant and exclaim upon my personal appearance, which she declared would put the company at Cragholt in a shiver. Of course I inquired who the company were, and learned that they were our friends of Thanksgiv-

ing Eve, with a few others who had been invited to Cragholt that evening by special request of Mrs. Somers. Bertha told me this as we rode homeward over the smooth, hard road in the bright winter moonlight, adding, of her own notion, that Mrs. Somers had been very anxious for my return for more than a week. For the first time since I had placed it there, the letter reposing in my desk came into my mind. Somehow it made me catch my breath anxiously. Had my neglect exposed her to any further annoyance? Why had these people been invited to meet her?

I felt sure that she intended to tell the story of her life, that night. This seemed the more probable as Compton's letter had named January first as the date of his expected arrival in New York. I asked for George Hartzell, and was told that he had sent his regrets, having a prior engagement for that evening in the city. I remembered his promise. Bertha said he had acted very strangely, not having been at Cragholt since my departure. Then I knew that he remembered it too. The train was a late one, but I had telegraphed the hour, and Hester had thought it best not to disturb the arrangements already perfected, based on my expected arrival at an earlier hour. On reaching home, I was smuggled into the library by

Bertha, who was anxious that none of the guests should see her father in his disreputable Western garb. Hither soon came Hester, whose greeting was hardly over when she informed me that Mrs. Somers was very anxious to see me before I met any of the assembled company. Without waiting for an answer, she called "Come in," and Mrs. Somers entered, looking flushed and embarrassed, but with a happier light in her eyes than I had ever seen there before. She came and stood by Hester, who put her arm about her protectingly, as if to assure the frail creature that the sturdy savage who stood before them was entirely harmless. They formed a pretty picture, as they stood there in the firelight, with the candles burning in the brass sconces about the room, which were only lighted on special occasions—Hester tall and calm, with the white hair resting peacefully on her broad brow, and the other slight and fair, with the light golden-brown coil knotted low on the neck, and the soft eyes lifted to mine in timorous questioning.

"Mr. Reynolds," she said, "you know my—that is, Mr. Compton—is to arrive in New York very soon."

"That is what he wrote," I answered with a careless nod.

"Since you were so kind as to make yourselves my friends and give me the shelter of your roof without question, I think I ought to take no important step without your knowledge and consent."

I bowed my acknowledgment, and she continued.

"In consideration of the confidence shown in me, and the possibility that there may be a revival of unpleasant rumors, it seems to me, and Mrs. Reynolds is of the same opinion, I believe,"—she pressed Hester's hand, and looked up into her face with a smile which Hester answered with an affirmative nod,—"that I ought to inform my friends of the facts of my life before he has another chance to take them at a disadvantage."

"That would certainly be my opinion," I replied.

"It had been my purpose," she continued, "to have first confided everything to you and Dr. Colton, as the two oldest and stanchest friends I have, and then been guided by your advice. Even now it does not seem that I ought to put you on a par with my other friends."

"We are very glad to be counted among your friends at all," said Hester, warmly.

"If there were time," continued Mrs. Somers, "I would like to inform you of the main

facts before speaking of them to your guests. Do you think—"

"I think, Mrs. Somers," I interrupted, "that whatever seems proper to you will be entirely satisfactory to your friends. For me, if it would please you just as well, I would much rather you placed us on a level with the others, and I am sure the doctor would be of my opinion too."

The tears rose to her eyes as she said in tremulous tones:

"I hope you will not regret your kindness."

She was about to withdraw when I remembered the letter, and taking it from my desk I said:

"Before I left, Mrs. Somers, a letter from Fred Compton addressed to you was placed in my hands, to be delivered whenever I saw fit. As its contents may have some influence upon the course you propose to take, I now deliver it to you."

She drew back proudly as I held it toward her, and a flash of lofty scorn took the place of the tender, grateful glow upon her cheeks.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Reynolds," she said with the utmost dignity and firmness. "Nothing that Mr. Compton can ever say or do can in the least affect my course in any matter whatever."

"But what shall I do with this?" I asked, puzzled by her refusal to receive the letter.

"Just what you choose," she answered carelessly.

"Shall I burn it?" I asked, holding it toward the grate.

"Really," she said with a smile, "I have no interest in the disposition you make of it."

I was about to drop it on the glowing embers, when Hester sprang forward and caught my hand.

"Don't," she exclaimed; "some one ought to read it."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Somers. "You can read it, Mr. Reynolds, and if, after hearing what I have to tell our friends, you think it important that I should know its contents, you can inform me of them. For myself, I never wish to see his handwriting again."

"All right," I said; "I will keep it and read it as a postscript to your narrative."

"Do so," she said earnestly; "it will be a confirmation of my words from the mouth of an enemy. It has not been opened?"

I turned it over and showed the seal unbroken. She shuddered as she recognized the device—an eyas "waiting on."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"A POOR, WEAK WOMAN."

IT was a strange story, quietly told, that we listened to in the parlor an hour afterward, when the belated dinner had been discussed with as much good-nature as the restraint of indefinite anticipation would permit. Two or three of the School Board, with the pastor of the church to which the teacher belonged, had been added to our company. The frozen river had more attractions for the young people than such a sober gathering of solemn-faced elders, and they, with Bobbie, had gone to lengthen out the last holiday of the old year by the light of the moon. Sitting quietly in the circle of light beneath the chandelier, Mrs. Somers said:

"The kindness of those present, as well as of all the people of Gladesboro, has been so great, that I feel it due to them that I should give them my confidence. There is little in my life worthy of note, but what there is I propose to relate to this company without comment

or evasion. Who and what I am, and the circumstances that have shaped my life, all of you are entitled to know; and when you have heard, you will be at liberty to relate much or little of it to others, as you may see fit. I put no restrictions upon any one.

"I was a very happy child; was early left an orphan, with a most indulgent guardian, and was known to be entitled to a large fortune in my own right. I was carefully nurtured, well educated, and indulged in all things. This was my history until my eighteenth year. I was, of course, praised, flattered, and sought after, not only for my fortune, but also, I believe, for myself. My guardian, a tender-hearted bachelor uncle, earned my lasting gratitude by making me his companion in sport and travel. He enabled me to see the world in a way which, if not altogether conventional, was thoroughly healthful. For the ills that followed I can blame neither him nor any one except myself. His tastes were of the healthiest, and his life one of charming simplicity. The fortune I had received from my father was the twin of his own, both having been gained in a business from which they had retired during my childhood. My father had married late in life,

and I was his only child; and as my mother died at my birth, these two old men became my associates, and after my father's death the one remained a 'guide, philosopher, and friend,' who showed me the world through his own pure yet wise eyes. After retiring from business he had resumed the studies of his youth, and when I can first remember was a leading scientist of one of the great Western States. The remarkable museum which now forms the chief attraction of its university was collected by him.

"The education I received was both more and less than the word usually implies. I knew the fauna and flora, the present products and past history, of the West, and especially of my native State, almost as well as my uncle himself. I had assisted him in obtaining, classifying, and arranging his great collection. I had aided him in the investment and care of our united fortunes, and knew more of business than most women ever learn. I had become acquainted with many bright, intellectual men, who sympathized with my uncle's scientific pursuits, and on the whole, no doubt, knew more of the world, animate and inanimate, than most women of twice my age. Intellectually, I may well say that my educa-

tion was good. Socially, however, I was as innocent as a child. The society in which we lived was of the best—unpretentious, sincere, and earnest. My uncle would laugh sometimes about fortune-hunters, and the good lady who had been his housekeeper ever since my remembrance used to fret about my unprotected state, and regret that there was not some fashionable relative to chaperon her favorite, and initiate me into the ways of polite society.

"It was at this time that I met Mr. Compton. My uncle was engaged upon the great work of his life, the preparation of his report of the geological survey of the State, and required assistance in the classification and arrangement of the results of the field-work, which had been done under his direction during the preceding three years. I do not know how Mr. Compton came to be connected with the survey. Almost the first thing I knew of him was that, on returning from school, I found him installed in the house as the trusted chief assistant of my uncle. Whence he came or who he was I never questioned. My uncle esteemed him very highly for his capacity and faithfulness, and so far as ability is concerned he was very worthy of his approval. My uncle's health was fail-

ing, and he was very anxious to complete his work.

"I was a most welcome addition to the meager force the State allowed him, as years of instruction and unrestrained association in his work made me familiar with its details. So we wrought together, Mr. Compton and I, for a year. He was much my senior—about thirty at that time—polished, accomplished, and, above all, devoted to my uncle. I have since had reason to believe that before this time he had led a life of dissipation, but no one could have been more exemplary than he while in the house of my uncle, Professor John Somers."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Are you Professor Somers's niece,—the one to whom he dedicated his 'Report'?"

"The same," she answered. "Margaret Somers. You know his work, then?"

"Know it? Every man who claims to be a scientist is bound to know one who has done so much and such excellent work."

"Thank you," she answered simply enough. "It was for such commendation that he labored. Though the credit for much of his best work has been appropriated by others—notably the system of observations on which our meteorologi-

cal reports are based—yet he would have been quite content to know that scientific men spoke of his work with approval."

Then she went on with her narrative.

"I hardly know when I first became aware that Mr. Compton regarded me as something more than a fellow-worker. Of course the thought was flattering to my vanity. He was a man whom it seemed any girl might be proud to regard as a lover. Aside from his personal appearance and social accomplishments, his intellectual and literary attainments were by no means despicable. You were wrong, Mr. Reynolds, in thinking his acquirements superficial. He was at that time a keen and accurate student, and an indefatigable worker. If his moral nature had been on a par with his intellectual development, no woman could have desired a worthier husband. In a few months we became engaged. The prospect of our marriage gave great pleasure to my uncle, and I am sure his confidence in Mr. Compton did much to make his last months peaceful. He felt that if he should not live to finish his great work it would be faithfully completed by him. He had no need of such aid, however, as he lived to write 'Finis' at the end of the last chapter. Then he failed rapidly. We started for the South with

him. He grew worse, and died a few days after our marriage.

"I have never quite understood this period of my life. I do not know whether I loved the man I had taken for my husband or not. I certainly admired him very greatly; had no distrust of him, and looked forward to a very happy life in his society. I did not come very close to him, it is true. There was something about his nature that kept me always at a distance. We lived together, but our lives were separate. At the end of a year we were no nearer than when we first met, so far as our thoughts and feelings were concerned. He expected to have been named as my uncle's executor and residuary legatee. In fact, I think he supposed himself to have been designated as such before our marriage; but when we came to examine my uncle's papers we found his will, executed some years before, unchanged. My own fortune had been in my uncle's hands up to my marriage. My husband took charge of it then, as a matter of course. After a few months we went abroad. It was a long time before I learned his real character. I am not timid by nature, but terror only weakly expresses the feeling I came to have for him. I hardly

knew what I feared, and there was hardly anything I did not fear. His sole purpose seemed to be to get control of my estate and squander it upon his vices. I think that my life would have been of less than pin's fee to him but for the fact that, so far as the realty was concerned, my estate was made inalienable, by my father's will, until I had reached a certain age, except with my uncle's consent or the written advice of another especial friend. While I lived, my husband would, of course, enjoy the income from this property; but if I died without children, it would pass into other hands. The man in whom my father had reposed this trust was of a peculiarly cautious nature. He had always distrusted my husband's motives, and no influence that could be brought to bear would induce him to consent to a sale. My frenzied requests only made him the more obdurate. He was a conscientious man, however, and to relieve himself from the charge of prejudice he began an investigation of my husband's past. It was from the hand of this devoted friend that the blow came which made all that I had suffered before seem tolerable when compared with the fate in store for me.

"We had just returned from abroad when a

letter came from him announcing the terrible fact that *I was not even a wife!* The man whom I supposed to be my husband had been previously married; there had been a legal separation, authorizing the wife to live apart from her husband, and compelling him to contribute to her support, but not releasing him from the nuptial obligation. The blow fell upon me with a terrible force. Hitherto I had bewailed the fact that my child, when born, would be compelled to bear the name of its father. Now I thought it would be a priceless blessing if it might only enjoy that poor privilege."

She knit her hands tightly together on her lap; the blue veins stood out like quivering cords upon her brows; her cheeks were pale as marble, and she gazed steadily at her inlocked hands as she spoke. The silence in the room was painful. The tears were rolling down Hester's cheeks; Mrs. Colton sobbed softly, and the doctor drew down his brows and tossed back his black mane until he reminded me of nothing so much as a scowling old lion, who desired to rend some one not within his power. After a moment she went on:

"I suppose the shock of this disclosure was

too much for my brain. At least I have but a confused notion of what happened afterwards. When I recovered my reason I was in a house on the outskirts of a great city, watched over by a woman who never relaxed the vigilance of her espionage. At first I could not understand the situation. I learned finally that several months had elapsed since my mental impressions had been clear and consecutive. After a while my nurse became aware that reason had returned. Still she did not leave me; and though her vigilance was somewhat relaxed, I knew that I was still kept under supervision. I asked about my child, and was informed that it had died at birth. The nurse offered to write to my husband, but I begged her not to do so. She would not allow me to write to other friends.

"There was no doubt that I had been for a time insane; it was not quite certain that I was yet restored. I was allowed full liberty in the house. Once or twice a week I was driven out, usually in a closed carriage. To these arrangements I did not offer any opposition. Everything was quiet and comfortable about the house, and I felt so tired that I did not care to exert myself even to think. Besides that, it

seemed a refuge from the terrible facts of my life. I do not know how long I should have remained in this condition had I not been informed by the nurse one day that my husband was coming to see me in a few weeks. My husband! the term itself was an epitome of shame. I determined to escape. I had shown so little interest in anything outside my place of refuge that the care of my attendant had greatly relaxed, and I was allowed pretty much my own discretion. There is no doubt that the trained nurse who was employed to care for me regarded her task as very nearly at an end. She naturally supposed that the return of the man she knew as my husband would work a permanent cure of my malady. Escape was, therefore, easy. There was a small sum of money in a purse in my room, and my jewels, strangely enough, had not been sacrificed by my husband. I did not stop to consider where I would go or what I would do after making my escape. My only idea was to get away and go where he would be unable to find me. I was sure that he would expect me to go to the western city in which my uncle had lived. To confirm this idea I bought a ticket thither, and took a western train, turning eastward at

the first junction with another great trunk line. Everything favored my movements. After a few days spent in an eastern city, I matured my plans, and before my slender fund was quite exhausted I was buried in a mountain hamlet, under the name of Mrs. Helen Somers, the village school-teacher. That was ten years ago. Nothing worthy of note has happened to me since, except one or two changes of location. I was the more ready to come to Gladesboro, because, in looking out of the window of my school-room, I saw, or thought I saw, Mr. Compton driving by. I have since had reason to believe that it might have been another."

She raised her eyes to mine as she uttered these words. I wondered if she was thinking of George Hartzell.

"There have been numerous advertisements designed to discover my whereabouts, some of them no doubt inspired by Compton, and others by parties interested in my estate. The friend who discovered my husband's perfidy died soon after writing the letter I received. No one else knew of the real state of my affairs, and my supposed husband yet receives the revenues of my property. I suppose he has squandered all that was convertible of it.

I have never made any specific inquiry, not choosing to subject myself to torture and humiliation in order to reclaim my own.

"I went once to my old home—a trembling, disguised fugitive. I had then some thought of fighting for my rights. I found myself so thoroughly forgotten that it seemed better to keep on with the new life, rather than strive to take up the old one again. It was on my return that I first met my good friend Dr. Colton. His good opinion brought me here, where you have all known my life. I have never heard of Mr. Compton since that time, except now and then by accident his name has been mentioned in my presence, until I received one of the letters sent to warn the people of Gladesboro against me. I do not know his motive in doing this, and prefer not to speak of it further. I may have done wrong in dropping his name, but I would rather be branded on the cheek than wear it. Mr. Reynolds showed me an envelope addressed to me in his handwriting this evening. I refused to receive or open it, as I have determined to hold no further communication with him under any circumstances. If Mr. Reynolds thinks proper, I would be glad if he would open and read that

letter. Knowing how I am situated, he can judge whether I ought to be made aware of its contents or not."

Every eye was turned on me. She who had been speaking was by far the most composed of the whole company. I took out the letter somewhat confusedly, opened it and read with a surprise I could not conceal these words in the precise, even hand of Mr. Fred Compton:

"MARGARET: You will no doubt be surprised to learn that I have at length found your hiding-place. You have had a long run, but you will not escape me again so easily. I did not care so much for your society, but was anxious to know just where you were. You perhaps expected me to resign my marital rights upon the crazy charge of that old fool Jordan; but I had no notion of letting go of a good thing on those terms. He is dead, and his silly notion perished with him. I am your lawful husband, and mean to maintain my rights as such. The child you thought was dead I kept under my own control, knowing very well that you would want it some time bad enough to comply with my wishes as the price of its possession. You are now able to convey your

estate without restriction, and a country school-teacher really has no use for all the property that stands in your name. Some of it would be very acceptable to me at this time. I find the income by no means unwelcome; but, as you know, I have always wanted to handle the principal. Perhaps, if you are inclined to be reasonable, an arrangement may be made by which you will not be entirely the loser, and I greatly the gainer. I speak plainly, as I take it there is no longer any need for sentiment between us, and confident that you will be willing to pay liberally for absence, silence, and freedom. You can address me at the Everett House, Union Square, New York, after January 1st.

"Your partner in marital bonds,

"FRED H. COMPTON."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE END OF THE CHASE.

MY astonishment was only equaled by my indignation at the perfidy and coolness of the man who held this woman's heart in his grasp. The unmurmuring heroism of her life, made patent by her simple narrative, had smitten all our hearts with self-reproachfulness, but to me her wrongs came home with peculiar force, as I saw her holding one of Hester's hands in both her own, as if in mute appeal for the protection of our home life to be cast about her. It was very strange that this woman alone of all others should have found the way to Hester's heart. I felt very glad this was the fact, and pledged to her in that glance all the support a brother's strength and a man's aggressive courage might give. I felt a burning desire to see her wrongs righted, and a determination to do all in my power to effect that result. My agitation must have shown itself in my face. Hester grew pale, and her hand grasped one of Margaret Somers's so tightly that I could see the tense drawn filaments from

where I sat. She evidently feared the letter contained something that might constitute an insurmountable barrier to their friendship.

She who was most interested in what I had read sat gazing at me with anxious, but unflinching look. Seeing that I remained silent, she uttered the one word, "Well?"

In my confusion I looked from one to another of the group of friends, only to find every eye fixed inquiringly upon me.

"Does it contain anything I ought to know?" asked the teacher quietly.

"Yes, indeed," I answered; "but—"

"Then read it aloud. Having broken my silence, I will have no more concealments.

"Gad!" said the doctor, fiercely, brushing the tears that gathered in his eyes.

"Perhaps thee had better read it thyself, first," said Mrs. Colton, suggestively.

"I understand what you mean," was the reply, "but there can be nothing between Frederick Compton and myself that others are not free to know. Besides that, I have determined never to speak to him again, nor to read anything he may write."

"You are entirely right, too—entirely right!" burst in the doctor. "You have fled from him

long enough. It is now time to begin to fight. We will stand by you—every one of us. Isn't that so?" he asked defiantly, glaring from one to another as if he would like nothing in the world so well as to be contradicted. There was no dissent. On the contrary, the minister said heartily:

"I quite agree with you, doctor, and only regret that we did not sooner win the confidence bestowed upon us to-night, that we might have helped, if only with our sympathy, to bear a sister's burdens."

The tears came into Margaret Somers's eyes; but she bravely turned the current of remark away from herself, saying to me:

"Read the letter, please."

I did so, with misgiving. Whatever may have been her feeling for Fred Compton in the past, one needed only to have watched her face during the reading of that letter to know that no spark of tenderness for the man she once called her husband remained in her heart. Only calm, impassive scorn showed upon her face till mention was made of her child. Then she leaned quickly forward, clasping her hands convulsively, while her lips trembled and her face became deadly pale.

"My baby, oh, my baby!" she moaned, as I finished reading.

"There, there, child!" said the doctor, pushing his chair close to hers and taking her hands soothingly in his own. "The scoundrel probably lies about that too."

"Perhaps," spoke up Twining, in his firm, even tones—"perhaps I can shed some light upon that matter."

Every one looked at him in surprise, but he continued quietly:

"You know, Reynolds, I had a premonition that something of this kind would occur, when I was here before. After we met in New York I put what I knew of Fred Compton together, and set detectives on his track. I think there is little in his life that I have not learned. I am not only able to confirm the story we have heard, but to add some facts necessary to its full comprehension.

"I found it easy enough to trace Compton's life from the time we knew him until his separation from his first wife. At that time they were domiciled in one of those States which still uphold the policy of partial or limited divorce. Under this an absolute divorce was granted to the wife, but he was restrained from

remarriage during her life. One of the curious things about our dual system of government is that a marriage may be good in one State and not valid in another. Fred Compton no doubt thought that he was committing bigamy when the marriage-ceremony between him and Miss Somers was performed. Perhaps it might have been so held in the State where the decree of limited divorce was granted, but for a fact at that time, at least, unknown to him. This is probably the reason he has spent so much of his time abroad since his second marriage, and the fact that a criminal action is now barred by the statute of limitation may be one reason of his present boldness. However that may be, there is little room for doubt that his marriage was legal, and that he now is, as he asserts, the husband of Margaret Somers Compton, who is lawfully entitled to bear his name, and whose daughter was his legitimate offspring."

A flash of gratitude passed over the lady's face at these words, followed quickly by a shadow of doubt as she asked:

"But the other,—the divorced wife?"

"As I said," answered Twining, "she was granted an absolute divorce, and Compton was enjoined from remarriage during her lifetime.

It was probably not known to him that some months previous to his second marriage she had remarried in another State."

"That, of course, annulled the decree," I said.

"That is another of the curious anomalies of our law," answered Twining. "It has more than once been held that such remarriage does not release the prohibited party. The restraint imposed by the decree is in such cases regarded as a sort of punitive continuance of the marital contract as to one, though it is annulled as to the other—a penalty for evil deeds. It has, however, more generally been held that a remarriage of the released party releases the prohibited one, and that would seem to be the natural effect of such act. In this case, the subsequent marriage having taken place in another State, in which the decree was inoperative, even without the fact of remarriage of the other party, it would no doubt be held valid in that State.

"Another curious thing has come to my knowledge, which, of course, could not have been known to Compton at that time, but which puts the legality of the second marriage beyond question. The lady who had been his wife—our old friend Mary Jane Matson, by the way, Reynolds—died on the very day of his marriage to Margaret Somers. I

presume he is yet ignorant of this fact, as he does not mention it in his letter."

"I should think the significance of this fact would depend on which occurred first, the death or the marriage," said the minister. "In that case a curious question of hours and even minutes might arise."

"Such questions do sometimes arise in one branch of the law," said Twining, with a serious smile, "but would not be likely to affect a case of this sort. The law does not favor the division of days, and would certainly not do so in order to establish a disability. Even according to the terms of the order in the proceedings for divorce, he was legally capable of contracting marriage on that day. The marriage was therefore legal, and there having been no divorce it still subsists."

"So it seems I am his wife, after all," said Margaret, with a weary smile.

"I think," said Twining, hesitantly, "it would not be a difficult task to secure a divorce."

There was a solemn pause. All eyes were fixed on Mrs. Compton.

"I shall never make the attempt," she said earnestly. "He is my husband, and I am too grateful for that fact to seek a separation."

"But your child," said Hester, whose sterner nature was hardly inclined to approve her friend's leniency.

"Ah! I had forgotten," she exclaimed, with a little gasp. "My baby! my baby!"

"Perhaps," I suggested, "some arrangement might be made by which he would consent to surrender it."

"No doubt, that might be done," said Twining, "if it were necessary. But the strangest thing connected with our investigation is the fact that Compton himself has lost sight of the child."

"Lost her?" exclaimed the bewildered mother.

"Yes, he has no trace of her, unless he has discovered it since going abroad, which is not likely. The woman whom he employed to nurse the child became very much attached to her charge, and got the notion that its mother had been unfairly dealt with by Compton, who in conversation with her, it seems, had let out the fact that the mother thought the child was dead. She knew you had been confined in an asylum, and with great skill and patience tracked you to the place from which you had escaped. She advertised, giving a minute description of your person, and evidently got some

information as to where you were, since she went to New York and bought a ticket to the very town in which you then resided. At this point our investigation ended, as I took it for granted that you knew the child's whereabouts, and I had no wish to pry into your affairs further than was needful."

"But I never knew she was alive!" exclaimed the poor woman. "I thought she was dead! If I could only have her in my arms once—just once!"

She stretched out her hands with a pathetic yearning.

"I will at once direct the inquiry to be renewed," said Twining. "It will be no easy task, I fear, since I am assured that the agents whom Compton employed were unable to advance a step beyond this point. I was able to procure a likeness of the child taken just before she was removed by the nurse. This woman, I should remark, was a very religious person, and no doubt acted from a strong sense of duty. She was much attached to the child, and very careful of her in every respect. Unfortunately, she is not a woman of striking appearance, or one given to talking of her own affairs. It was only by accident that a friend

of hers was found from whom we learned the few facts I have related. Even she would say nothing until assured that we did not represent in any way the father. Compton's agents traced the child by her appearance, which was very striking because of her unusual beauty. This likeness was taken but a few days before her disappearance. The photographer saved the negative because of its remarkable loveliness. Indeed, Etta Compton, which was the name she bore, was well remembered in the whole village where the nurse resided because of her beauty and sweetness of disposition. The likeness is said to be an unusually good one."

He crossed the room as he spoke, and handed Mrs. Compton a small photograph. She caught it with a frenzied hand, and, scarcely glancing at it, pressed it first to her lips and then to her bosom, exclaiming, while the tears poured down her cheeks:

"My darling! My baby! My baby! Where are you? Come to me, darling! Come, come!"

Hester clasped the stricken woman in her arms and soothed her as if she had been a child. Her sobs gradually died away, and she lay quietly in Hester's embrace, the picture clasped tightly to her breast. All at once

she burst away from the clasping arms. There was a new, wild light in her eyes.

"My darling, my daughter! Let me go. I must find her. Oh, I should know her anywhere! Let me see her!"

She held the picture up in the strong light of the chandelier, and gazed intently at the features. The color fled from her face. Her eyes seemed bursting from their sockets! She held the picture at arm's length, struck her forehead with her open palm, and with a shriek fell back unconscious into Hester's arms. Then there was a scene of confusion. By the doctor's direction she was taken to her room. A powerful anodyne soon quieted her struggles, and the doctor and Hester returned to the parlor, leaving Mrs. Colton with the unconscious sufferer. It was a gloomy company that waited to hear their report. The young people had returned from their outing on the river with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, and stood looking in hushed surprise from one to another, evidently unable to comprehend how the fact that the teacher had fainted should bring such a solemn and mysterious hush over us all. They gathered in a corner and spoke in whispers, except Bobbie, who held one of his father's

hands. In the other Jack held the photograph, which had dropped on the floor in the confusion.

"Let me see that picture," said the doctor, sharply, as soon as he re-entered the room.

Jack handed it to him without a word. The doctor threw back his long black locks, put on his glasses, and holding the picture up to the lamplight gazed fixedly at it, while we all gathered around to see. It was a pretty picture—a sylph-like figure with hair rippling to her waist, and eyes full of a tender light. We had only time to note these things when the doctor started back, thrusting the picture out at arm's length, and shading his eyes with his other hand, while he exclaimed in a voice of horror:

"My God, it is the same—the very same!"

"What do you mean, doctor?" asked Twining, nervously.

"When did you say you lost track of her?" asked the doctor, savagely, paying no heed to his question.

"Some four years ago—in the summer."

"You say she was coming up the river?"

"The nurse bought an excursion-ticket to a town some fifty miles above here."

"Do you remember the exact date?"

"I think the twenty-fourth of June."

"And the name of the boat?"

"The Osprey."

"The Osprey! I knew it. There could be but one. Poor woman! no wonder it was too much for her."

"What do you mean, doctor?"

"The Osprey," he answered in a trembling voice, "was the steamer that blew up at Dwight's Landing on that very day!"

"And this picture?"

"Is that of the child who sang her Sabbath-school hymns in that scene of terror."

"She died, then," said the minister, in a hushed voice.

"In her mother's arms," answered the doctor, reverently.

"Thank God!" said the minister, with an upward glance.

Thinking of the unconscious mother in the room above, we all responded solemnly, "Amen."

Then the company broke up. The family retired, and the lights were extinguished at Cragholt except one that burned dimly in Mrs. Compton's room, where Hester watched with her suffering friend.

CHAPTER XX.

A MIDNIGHT HORROR.

I DO not know how long I had slept, when I awoke to find Hester standing beside the bed, and saying anxiously:

"Percy! Percy!"

I sat up half stupefied by the light and the sudden awakening, conscious only that something was wrong and Hester in distress.

"Percy," she repeated, "have you been awake—have you heard—anything?"

"Burglars?" I asked under my breath.

"Percy, I can't find Mrs. Somers."

"Mrs. Somers," I repeated dully; "can't find her?"

I was so heavy with sleep that I could not imagine who Mrs. Somers was, why she could not be found, or why my wife should wish to find her.

Hester went on without noticing my stupidity:

"She was sleeping quietly when I went up, and as it was the doctor's orders that she should simply be kept quiet, and allowed to sleep all that she

would, I turned down the light, lay down upon the lounge, and went off into a doze, expecting to wake whenever she might require attention. I must have slept very soundly. I woke at length with a start to find myself in darkness. I sprang up at once, and found the room empty."

"She probably awoke, and, feeling restless, put out the light and went down to the sitting-room," I said, as coolly as I could. "Have you looked there?"

"Oh, Percy!" Hester exclaimed, sinking upon a chair, and placing the night-lamp she carried on the stand. I cannot—I—I *dare* not!"

"Why, what are you afraid of?" I inquired reproachfully, as I rose and began to dress.

"Oh, I don't know—I *can't!*" she exclaimed excitedly, clasping her hands over her eyes as if to shut out some terrible sight.

I shuddered at the thought suggested, but responded soothingly:

"You are nervous and excited, my dear. Why should you think any harm has befallen Mrs. Somers?"

"Percy," said my wife, solemnly, letting her hand fall upon her lap, and turning toward me a strangely pallid face, "her bed is made up as if she had not slept in it at all."

It is strange what a thrill this simple announcement brought. I did not at all wonder at her words as she continued:

"I cannot tell how it frightened me. I hardly dared look around the room, but just ran down for you."

I knew very well what she feared to see, and felt the terror inspired by the simple act she related. Thinking of it now, I wonder at the feeling it produced. It shows how swiftly the mind acts without any conscious exercise of the reasoning powers. Yet undoubtedly we did reason. When Hester saw the bed nicely smoothed and arranged as if no one had occupied its snowy depths, she knew at once that it was an unnatural act upon the part of the patient who had eluded her care, and unconsciously accepted it as the indication of a fixed though insane purpose not to return. Hence the nameless fear that held her back from making search for the invalid.

I took the lamp and started for the parlor, not doubtful that we should there find the very thing we feared. I do not think I am a specially timorous man, but will confess that I was almost glad when Hester shudderingly said:

"Don't leave me, Percy! I can't stay here alone!"

It did not occur to me till afterward that there was any absurdity about the remark. I think I was even glad to feel her clinging to me and starting at every creaking of the floor as we crossed the hall into the parlor. The fire was burning brightly in the grate, and the room was warm and —empty. The dining-room, which we next examined, held nothing more terrible than some weird shadows, and we began to smile at our fears. Still the mystery we set out to explore had not been cleared up, and we passed rapidly from room to room, growing every moment more confident and cheerful as our search seemed to become more hopeless. Such is the contradiction of human nature. At length we had examined all the rooms, and stood together in the empty apartment whose occupant had so mysteriously disappeared.

"Can it be that she has left the house?" I asked.

"Her bonnet and wraps are in the closet at the head of the couch where I slept," answered Hester. "She could not have taken them without waking me."

I opened the door, and Hester, peering in, confirmed her statement with the report that they were still there.

I sat down upon a chair and looked about the room thoroughly nonplused.

"Oh, Percy!" exclaimed Hester, suddenly clasping her hands upon her breast and paling with fear which for a time had been half forgotten. "There is one place where we have not looked."

"The garret?" I asked, with a smile.

"No," said she, with emphasis, "I don't believe any one could find the way there even if the house were on fire."

The matter of access to the garret had been one of the architectural questions on which we had differed when Cragholt was built.

"No," she repeated, "I did not mean the garret, I mean the—the cellar."

I started to my feet. Hester's fear flashed across my apprehension with the force of certainty. I rushed down the stairs into the cellar, passed all around the furnace Dr. Colton had so vigorously objurgated, and found—nothing. Returning I stepped into the hall, and trying the front door found it securely locked.

"Where is the key?" asked Twining from the stairs.

I started at the sound of his voice, and asked confusedly:

"You here?"

A glance at his face showed it to be calm and fixed as I had seen it in battle. I did not need to ask if he knew the object of our search. In the moment's pause which followed his appearance, Hester came and stood beside him in the inner door of the vestibule. She glanced at the lock of the outer door on which the light shone clearly, and exclaimed:

"Why, the key is on the outside!"

Sure enough the brass stock of the key just showed through the plate inside the door. Despite the fact which this discovery proved beyond a doubt—that our guest had fled and locked us into our own house—Hester and I each drew a long sigh of relief. What we had most feared, at least, had not occurred. So selfish and cruel is humanity. The poor woman might be suffering we knew not how much of agony in the freezing night outside, but we had time to forget our sympathy in self-gratulation that our home had been spared the horror we had feared. I think we were both ashamed of this almost as soon as it made itself felt. I dropped my eyes in confusion from Hester's face, and scrutinized the lock once more.

"Where can she have gone?" she asked anxiously.

"My God!" exclaimed Twining. "It is a terrible night for one in her condition to be out."

I looked up inquiringly. It was a chill, keen midwinter night, with the light of the full moon lying clear and cold on the frozen ground—a sharp night, but by no means a trying one.

"I mean crazed and unclothed," said Twining, answering my look.

"Unclothed?" I exclaimed.

"Certainly. Did you not say she had not taken her clothes?" turning to Hester.

"Her wraps," she corrected. "I did not think about the clothes. I will see."

She ran upstairs. Twining paced back and forth along the narrow hall, more excited than I had ever seen him. I sat upon one of the straight-backed chairs and tried to think. After a moment I rose and began to put on my overcoat. Twining paused in his walk and looked at me inquiringly.

"We must find her," I said impatiently.

"True," he rejoined, in a self-reproachful tone, as he also began to prepare himself to go out, "but where?"

"I don't know," I said. "I will go and help James harness the horses."

I had already touched a knob that rang an

electric bell in the groom's room, and knew I should find him awake and dressed.

Just then Hester reappeared.

"She has taken her ordinary clothes, shoes and overshoes, but no hat or cloak," she reported.

"No hat or cloak," repeated Twining, "and the door locked on the outside. It means a short journey—pursuit delayed, and no intention of returning." He spoke very solemnly, and after a pause added, half interrogatively, "The river?"

"Ten inches of ice," said I, as I drew my cap over my ears.

"True," he answered, with a sigh of relief; "and the icemen have not yet begun their work. But where then?"

"I don't know," I answered. "Think it up, you and Hester. There is James knocking to know why he is called. Get everything ready that is needed. You will go with us, Hester?"

"Of course. What shall we take?"

"O, everything," with a comprehensive gesture. "Whiskey, clothing, blankets—"

"O, that reminds me," interrupted Hester; "I threw back the bed-clothes, and found that a double blanket was gone."

"What!" exclaimed Twining, "a blanket?"

"Yes; one of my big white double blankets—

you know them, Percy, those heavy Sonora wool—"

"Hurry, Percy!" said Twining, pushing me toward the door, where James was impatiently knocking. "Bring the horses around," he shouted to the servant. "We shall find her," he continued confidently. "She has gone to the grave!"

"The grave!" shrieked Hester.

"Yes," exclaimed Twining, excitedly. "The child's grave—her baby's grave!"

A light broke in upon us with his words. They were a master-key to all that had occurred. After that there was no more doubt. I went out to assist James, who already had the horses half harnessed in obedience to Twining's shouted command. Leaving word for them to follow me, I ran by a footpath down the hill to Dr. Colton's. The old man was at the door in an incredibly short time after I rung the bell.

"It's no use," he exclaimed testily, as he undid the fastenings. "I won't go. What do you mean by calling up a man of my age at this time of night? Do you think doctors are invulnerable and immortal? I don't care who it is. Don't tell me anything. I won't go out at night—not a step for any one. Other people might as well die as I. There is no excuse. I've long ago told my

patients not to send for me at night. Go to Dr. Parsons. He's young and tough, and a good physician too. I'll come in the morning if you want. Where is it? What? Eh? Is that you, Reynolds? Come in, come in. Why the dickens didn't you say so? What's the matter? Eh? Gone? Let me have the harness put on that rascal Hannibal."

He stepped to the back of the house, gave some directions to his man, and returned. A few words explained to him all we knew.

"No doubt you're right," he exclaimed. "At the same time you may be wrong. It won't do to rely upon a single hypothesis. Physicians are the only people who are not allowed to make mistakes. Let me think."

He strode once or twice across the room, his long black hair tossing about his head like the mane of an angry lion, his eyes rolling fearfully in their sockets, and his lips moving as if talking with inconceivable rapidity. Turning suddenly upon me, he exclaimed:

"You are right, sir, you are right. I would wager anything on it. At the same time, as mistakes are possible we must cut off the chances. A doctor's life is one continual practice of the *abscissa infinita*, at best. You go on. Don't spare

the horses, and keep your eyes well ahead of you. A brain that is a little out of the normal is a very subtle thing. She evidently fears pursuit, and a half-crazed person will hide where a rabbit would not deem concealment possible. Look sharp! I will rouse a few of our friends, have them make search on the river, at the depots, and across the river, too, and follow you in half an hour. Remember, I will not be more than thirty minutes behind you! If you find her, warmth is the first thing. Yes, whiskey—anything that is hot, no matter how baleful it might be at any other time. There is your carriage. Good-by."

I ran down the steps, drawing on my gloves as I went, and sprang into the seat with the driver. Twining and Hester sat behind.

"I knew you would want to drive yourself," said Hester, with the pride a wife always has in her husband's physical prowess, as we rattled down the street.

"Certainly," I answered, as I buttoned my coat, only pausing with something of the horseman's instinct, before I took the reins, to pull out my watch, and, by the light of the full moon, note the time. It was forty-five minutes past two. The road had frozen smooth and had been worn

still smoother by a week's travel, with the days warm enough to soften the surface but not melt the track.

"We will make it inside of fifty minutes if nothing happens," I said, as I took the reins from James. "Watch every bush and rock and shadow, lest we pass her on the way. If we are right in our guess, we ought to overtake her before we get there."

I twisted the reins about my hands and brought the spirited horses down to their work. It is at such a time that a man feels proud of the breeding of his team. It is on the long stretch that blood tells—blood and courage, for blood almost always presupposes courage in man or beast. Accidents excepted, I knew I could tell almost to a second the time it would require to make the ten miles that lay between Gladesboro and Dwight's Landing. It was a sharp, keen air ; the moon was hardly more than an hour above the horizon, and already the shadow of the western hills began to stretch across the surface of the frozen river. The walls and trees sparkled in the moonlight with the hoar-frost that had gathered on them. There was not a breath of wind, and the night had that preternatural stillness which only comes with winter moonlight. The sound of the

horses' hoofs echoed with rhythmic clearness from the sharp banks upon the other shore.

The road was pleasantly undulating, and wound along the river's course, now close to the shore, now leaving the bank to find an easier grade. I gave my attention entirely to the horses, urging them somewhat along the more favorable stretches, and holding them back on the sharper inclines. A dozen times some of the watchers thought they caught sight of a figure crouching behind a wall or under the shadow of a bush. Once we stopped while James beat up a hemlock thicket on the hillside, and once Twining persisted in looking under a bridge where he fancied she whom we sought might be in hiding. I whipped my numb fingers about my shoulders at such times, and the steaming chestnuts sent up white vaporous clouds from their quivering nostrils. No sooner was the searcher's foot upon the step, than we were again in motion. We neither saw nor heard any sign of life, except a train sweeping up the river on the other side, until I was steadying the horses down the hill that slopes to the creek, just above the Landing. The road here is in a sharp cut, lined on either side with a close growth of hemlock. The hills shut off the moonlight, and for the first time, almost, since starting out we were in a

darkness which seemed almost unnatural because of the contrast with the moonlight through which we had driven. It was no doubt all the more impressive from the fact that in another moment, as soon as we turned the foot of the hill and crossed the bridge over the creek, we should be in sight of the cluster of graves upon the hillside, and know whether our search was to be rewarded with success or not. My heart was in my throat as I peered forward at the roadway with unnecessary care. A rustle in the hemlocks by the roadside startled me as if it had been a thing of terror. I pulled the reins and stopped the surprised horses at the very steepest part of the declivity. As I did so a shriek, clear and shrill, rang out of the unseen space beyond, and echoed and re-echoed across the river.

"My God!" I exclaimed, "that is a cry for help!"

The cry was repeated, shriller, clearer, and unmistakably in a woman's voice.

Before I could start the horses, Twining had leaped to the ground, and his answering shout might have been heard a mile away.

"Here!" he cried, and dashing down the sharp slope I heard his footsteps on the bridge before I recovered myself enough to give the trembling

steeds the word. It came at last in a shout almost as loud as Twining's. I think James and Hester must have added their screams, as, without regard to what might be in the way, the horses leaped forward, tearing at full gallop across the little bridge, past the few deserted houses, and came to a dead stop just below the little cluster of graves. Half way to the top of the hill a black figure was running toward the moonlight that shone over the crest. Hardly twenty steps behind the fugitive was Twining, in hot pursuit. I threw the reins to James and joined in the race.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE PALE MOONLIGHT.

AS I sprang to the ground I saw the foremost figure silhouetted against the moonlight for an instant as he scrambled up the bank and disappeared over the crest. Throwing aside coat and wraps, I prepared to follow with something of the pleasure which the athlete always feels in an opportunity to utilize his powers. I was not young, but my profession had made mountain-climbing a necessity, and the rarefied atmosphere of high levels is a wonderful developer of lung-capacity. My step might not be quite as light, but I thought with complacency that I was hardly a less formidable pursuer than when I raced Fred Compton on the ice twenty odd years before. I had not stopped to question who it was that fled, or why Twining pursued. It hardly needed an act of ratiocination to determine that the man must be a malefactor. The place and time, the screams that we had heard, the fact that Jack Twining was on his track, were enough, and more than enough,

to stir my blood with the fever of pursuit. It flashed upon my mind as a strange coincidence that this deserted hamlet should be selected by fate as the scene in which two acts of a sad drama should be performed, and my mind went back to Compton and the strange links which bound his malign nature to this bleak hillside—to a child's grave and a wife's woe. Instinctively I glanced toward the spot where I knew the little tombstone stood. I am not superstitious, but I must own that my heart stood still with terror as I saw a white figure rise out of the cold, hard earth and noiselessly flit along the dark hillside in the direction the two men had taken. At the same moment I saw Twining scrambling over the crest, and heard his angry shout:

"Halt, villain!"

Then I saw the white figure swerve from its course and flee with redoubled speed along the hill-side. Directly in its path the sloping bank had been cut away by the current till a sheer precipice overhung the ice forty feet below. As I thought of this, suddenly the truth burst upon my mind. The terror I had felt before gave way to a sickening, overpowering dread. The figure was hardly fifty steps from the

precipice, and twice that number from where I stood. It was not possible to intercept it. Twining was nearer,—hardly half as far away from the brink, indeed,—but his attention was directed the other way. In an instant I knew that he would disappear, and then—! I could not move. My feet seemed rooted to the frozen earth. I heard the horses breathing heavily behind me. The bits rattled as they stretched their necks after their long, hard drive. One of them shook himself, and I felt the quiver of his strong muscles as I stood motionless with lids close shut, seeing what I would not see!

Suddenly a shriek rang out. I felt my flesh creep with chilly fear as its tones swept my nerves like a hand that strikes and breaks harp-strings too tensely strained. My eyes flew open. The white figure was nearer still to the brink. Twining still stood motionless on the crest. The shriek was echoing along the hills upon the other shore.

"Helen! Percy! Twining! Help!"

One after the other the words burst from Hester's lips, each in shriller tones than the one before. I saw the white figure stop and turn toward us as if listening. On the instant tongue and feet regained their power.

"Call again," I said; "keep on calling."

I shot up the hillside like an arrow from a tense-drawn bow. Yet how weak the muscles seemed whose strength I lately vaunted to myself! Each footstep seemed to consume an age! The earth was whirling dizzily beneath me!

"Helen! Oh, Helen! Jack! Help! quick!"

Hester filled the night with shrieks, instinctively obeying my directions which she probably did not hear. The white figure was moving once more toward the cliff. Twining stood as if frozen upon the moonlit crest. I dared not shout lest the only chance of overtaking the fleeing wraith should be lost. Suddenly I heard a sharp, clear cry:

"Stand still!"

It was Twining's voice, keen, penetrating, commanding. The figure stopped as if turned to stone. Then Twining dropped out of the moonlight, and I felt rather than saw that he shot downward along the steep declivity. I was still toiling up the hillside at a snail's pace, as it seemed, when I should have flown. There were yet twenty steps between us, when I saw the figure glance quickly around, and with a start leap forward toward the chasm. Now, however, her flight was deflected downward in my direc-

tion. The rush of Twining's footsteps had awakened terror, and she was fleeing from them, but still toward the brink. How leaden seemed my limbs, as I mustered all my power to intercept her flight! The flying figure seemed just upon the brink of the precipice when I stumbled and fell headlong toward it. My hand touched a woman's clothing. Instinctively I clutched it and drew the wearer backward from the edge of the chasm. As I struggled to rise, she fell against me and bore me to my knees. Then there came a sudden shock, and I felt myself thrown backward down the sharp hillside.

I knew in an instant what had happened. I have said the bank was steep. One who has observed how an imprisoned river cuts its way through rocky barriers will understand my meaning. Toward the summit the declivity was almost sheer; even in ascending it, one needed to pick each foothold with extreme care. Lower down the accumulation of débris was piled sharply against the face of the hill, making an easier slope; yet it was everywhere so sharp as to demand constant attention in going up or down. Where the current turned to the westward, it had cut away the sloping mass and formed an abrupt, overhanging bank

above the frozen eddy, fifty feet below. Twining's attempt to intercept the fugitive had resulted in a fall, and, striking us just as I was staggering to my feet, had rolled us down, along the edge. I knew this could not be far away; I had caught the lappel of his coat as he brushed past, and I dared not loose my hold. So I lay upon my back, clinging desperately to both my companions; wondering what I should do, and how far away the brink might be.

Presently I heard Hester's voice:

"Percy! Percy!" she cried in alarm.

"Here!" I answered.

She uttered a low cry, and I could hear her panting with exertion as she climbed toward us.

"Where are you?" she called in astonishment. We were lying almost at her feet.

"Here we are—all right, my dear," I answered in tones as reassuring as I could command.

"Oh, Percy!" she exclaimed. "What is the matter? Are you hurt? Did you catch her? Oh, where is she! Why don't you get up?" She took hold of the woman and tried to lift her up. She had fallen half upon me.

"Never mind her," I said. "Twining—here below me—is he safe?"

I heard her move a little nearer. Then there

came a half-suppressed scream, and she exclaimed:

"Oh no! Hold on! Can you?"

Then I knew that he hung over the abyss, and my fingers seemed suddenly to grow weak. But Hester came to my aid, and together we drew him up. Then she lifted my burden off me, and I rose to my feet.

"What's all this?"

It was the doctor's voice. I could have wept for joy. My strength suddenly departed, and I sunk down again as weak as a shorn Samson, and as dumb as those on either side. The doctor needed no answer to his question. Turning the light of a lantern which he caught from Edgar's hand upon the white-robed figure which Hester was clasping in her arms, he disclosed the widely-distended eyes of Mrs. Somers. He made a quick threatening gesture toward them with his hand. She winked and drew quickly back.

"What is the matter, doctor?" she asked, in a voice natural enough, but expressing no little surprise.

"Nothing in the world, ma'am," he answered with unhesitating assurance. "You just lie still while I give you some medicine, and then go to sleep."

He had his case out, and slipped some white pellets into her mouth, almost before he ceased speaking. She looked about her in surprise for a moment, then obeyed his injunction and fell asleep like a tired child. The doctor drew a long breath as she closed her eyes, and then began a more careful examination. Her face was dabbled in blood which flowed from a small wound in the region of the temple. She was wrapped in a thick white blanket, one corner of which she had pulled over her head after the manner of a hood. She had drawn a pair of fleece-soled knitted socks over her shoes, and so was literally shod in wool, which had muffled her footsteps on the hillside. The doctor glanced at the wound and remarked cheerfully that it was "a most fortunate accident."

Hester, whose nerves had been disturbed by the sight of blood, looked up in surprise at his tone, and asked reproachfully:

"How do you suppose it was done?"

"Really, I haven't the least idea, madam," was the reply. "It is one of Nature's simplest forms of surgery. When the brain becomes suffused with blood, dizziness ensues—we become top-heavy, as we say;—the feet stumble; there is a fall; a bit of jagged stone or a conven-

ient stub does the rest. Sometimes, like an unskillful surgeon, she makes the cut too wide or too deep, and death results. Again, the flesh is only bruised, not penetrated, and the operation fails to give relief. In this case no harm has been done, and we have reason to hope for the best results."

By this time Twining began to manifest signs of returning consciousness. Turning to him, the doctor asked the cause of the syncope. A few words told him of Jack's sudden dash from the top of the bank to the place where he lay. He glanced at the sharp declivity, shrugged his shoulders, and said laconically:

"Too rough a road for fast driving, even by daylight. Lucky his neck is not broken."

He was continuing his scrutiny of Twining while he spoke. Suddenly he paused and asked:

"How happens it he did not go over the cliff?"

I explained the circumstances as briefly as I could.

"O, I see," said the doctor. "You stumbled in your attempt to perform an impossibility, and this brought your hand against the clothing of this poor dazed creature just before she reached the brink. As you instinctively drew her back

from destruction, Twining shot down against her as if discharged from a catapult, knocked her over upon you and rolled over both, an unconscious mass, toward the cliff. This shock disturbed—arrested, perhaps I should say—the abnormal action of the brain. Up to that time, she had been half asleep—somnambulistic we call it, though it is not really sleep, but rather an abnormal activity of brain accompanied by dormancy of certain powers. Sometimes, if not arrested, it becomes a permanent condition. A sudden shock is Nature's remedy. So an accident saved her from death, and another accident restored her to life—or to sanity, which is more than life. Such things are "happening" every day. Some call them the result of chance. Think of two such chances concurring! I find it easier to believe there is a God,—a God who brought you within reach of her by what you deemed a mishap, and overruled Twining's insane attempt to save her life and made it a cure for her malady. I may be a fool, but such things, which seem against Nature, are to me conclusive evidence of One that uses and controls Nature. Call it what you will. I love to call it God."

The old man was deftly exploring Jack's anatomy as he thus spoke, while that worthy lay

limp and pale within the circle of the dim lantern-light, breathing sterterously.

"Here is another instance of tender watch-care over fools," the doctor continued. "Suppose this fellow had not been stunned. Of course, I don't know yet how badly he is hurt. I do know he is not dead, and it is not probable he has a mortal injury. But suppose he had not been unconscious: lying there dazed and confused, he would have been sure to have wriggled over the brink, and probably have taken you with him, for you are one of the kind who would hang on till the last gasp. I don't blame you, but it is a foolish notion. Anybody can hang on. Wisdom generally consists in knowing when to let go. Perseverance is well enough, but knowing when to stop is better. You could hold him as a dead weight, but a little instinctive motion on his part would have made it impossible for you to have maintained your grip."

"But suppose Percy had not been here at all?" asked Hester sharply, evidently thinking her husband's merits were being ignored.

"Ah, madam, you are only complicating the problem," answered the doctor with a shrug. "Who but a mountain-climber could have made

the run he did? How many would have clutched the bit of flying cloth, and how many would have had presence of mind enough to catch one sweeping over him like an avalanche and prevent the otherwise inevitable leap into that gulf below? Your husband, Mrs. Reynolds, is the most remarkable part of that bit of luck, which is too remarkable to be known as anything but Providence, which we have witnessed to-night. This stupid fellow who seems determined to make us lug him down the hill was very fortunate in having a friend both ready enough and strong enough to save him from his own folly. Not many people meet such luck."

"A man is always fortunate in having a friend," I interposed, to prevent his monologue from becoming too personal.

"Yes," assented the busy philosopher, "if the friend has a good grip, a cool head, and can think of something besides himself. Such people make good friends, and that is generally about all they are good for. The world understands selfishness, and excuses when it does not applaud it; but self-forgetfulness it distrusts, if it does not despise. A man who takes the trouble to save his friends from falling will

never be rich or famous himself, which in our day is equivalent to saying that he will always be considered a failure. The man who would succeed should let his friends go to the devil their own way, while he pursues steadily his own advantage."

We all laughed at the pretended cynicism of the tender-hearted physician, whose life had been a constant denial of his philosophy.

"Confound it!" he growled as he rose, and whipped his hands about his shoulders, "is this fellow going to keep us here all night? I'm half frozen now. There don't seem to be anything the matter—no cuts or bruises. There's been a shock, of course; but he's too strong a man to stay in a dead faint like this merely because he is a little shaken up. I'm half afraid—take hold of him, Reynolds, and help me lift him up."

As the doctor seized his arm to lift him into a sitting posture, Twining uttered a groan, and I felt a tremor of pain in the hand I had taken.

"Hurts, does it?" said the doctor, gleefully. "Well, that's good news. Ease him down, Reynolds; we're on the right track now, and will soon know what's the matter."

He ran his hand quickly along the arm he held to the shoulder; moved it this way and that, eliciting more groans.

"Here it is; only a dislocation—painful no doubt, but not serious. We had better reduce it before he regains consciousness."

Twining himself soon recovered sufficiently to interpose a half-unconscious objection to this. A draught from the doctor's flask revived him, and he then insisted on the operation being performed without delay, declaring, with a man's scorn of physical weakness, that he would not mind it at all. The doctor took care, however, to fortify him with another dram, while we made Hester comfortable where she sat with the sleeping woman's head in her lap, before proceeding with his task.

It was a curious scene: the bright winter sky overhead; the shadow the western hills threw over us; the frozen ground; the echoing chasm; the little circle of light about the lantern; Jack with his coat off, his head in my lap, and my arms gripped tightly around him; the old doctor, his overcoat thrown aside, his white hands clasping Twining's arm, and his shining rubber shoe pressed against my arm where it lay across Jack's breast.

"Are you ready?"

The keen eyes glanced from side to side over the little group.

"Ready," answered Twining.

There was a steady pull; I felt the foot that rested on my arm thrust steadily forth; Jack's arm was given a quick turn; there was a sudden click, and the bone had slipped back into its socket. After allowing Twining a moment's faintness we bundled his coat about him, putting the disabled arm in a sling; and after another sip at the flask he scornfully rejected further assistance, stoutly asserting his ability to care for himself. The doctor said something about "Dutch courage," and the sneer thus skillfully applied was even more potent than the stimulant Jack had imbibed. He got upon his feet at once, and looked on at our preparations for departure.

The doctor again felt the sleeping woman's pulse and noted her respiration. Pouring some of the spirits upon a handkerchief, he wiped away the blood, and applied a bit of plaster to the little blue wound in the white temple. Then we carried her down the hill—Edgar and I, Twining following with Hester upon one side and the doctor on the other—and put her in the wagon, with her head resting easily in

Hester's lap, and piled wraps around them both. Then we went back to examine the scene of the night's adventure. On approaching the grave we found that some one had dug through the frozen ground almost down to the little coffin. There was a spade yet sticking in the bottom of the excavation, while a package lay beside the heap of earth which had been thrown out. The doctor lowered himself into the grave, and by the aid of the lantern made a careful examination.

"New tools and a green hand," he said thoughtfully. "I can't understand it. The body has long since disappeared. There were no valuables buried with the child, as all her little trinkets were left in my possession with the hope of some time identifying her. By the way, I must give them to her mother now that she *is* identified."

The doctor set his lantern upon the edge of the grave, took off his hat, and ran his white hand through his hair as was his wont when thoroughly nonplused.

"Might it not have been revenge—a desire to annoy the mother?" I suggested.

"I had thought of that," said the doctor; "but it does not seem a sufficient motive for such an act."

"Her husband is—" I began.

"As bad a man as you please, but certainly not a fool," said the doctor, quickly.

"Yet it is his work," said Twining, confidently, as he stood looking down into the grave, his overcoat loosely hanging over the arm in its extemporized sling.

"You recognized him?" I asked.

"I would not be positive in my identification. I thought it was he. But then he was in my mind, and I was expecting to find him when we heard the screams. I came in sight just in time to see a white figure and a dark one standing somewhere near this spot. The white one suddenly sank out of sight. I gave a shout. The dark one started, glanced quickly around, and then fled up the hill. I followed in pursuit. I thought I recognized the figure, and believed that I had witnessed the murder of a wife by her husband."

"Hester and I both recognized him as he climbed over the crest in the moonlight," I added in confirmation.

"But why should he be here, and why should he have opened the grave?" still queried the doctor. "He could not have known his wife was coming, and so have prepared it in anti-

cipation of her arrival. She must have come straight and swift from your house or you would have overtaken her on the way. Why should he be here? Why do we find the grave open?"

"Perhaps he wished to identify the remains," suggested Twining.

"For what purpose?" queried the doctor.

"I do not know, of course," responded Twining, "but there is some sort of controversy pending about her uncle's will. She has been unheard of for so long a time that the legal presumption of death has arisen. By the terms of his will, if she died without having been the mother of living children, the property descended to other parties at once, and her husband would lose all interest in it."

"But what could he hope to find here?" asked the doctor.

"I do not know," responded Twining. "Perhaps that was not what he sought."

The doctor lifted the spade toward the light and examined it critically.

"Hello!" he said, "there is blood on it."

"I thought he struck her," said Twining, excitedly.

"Not with this," was the reply. "The blood has trickled down on the front of the blade, and"—he stooped and examined the excavation carefully—"yes, it has run down upon the dirt, too, quite a lot of it. I had no idea she had lost so much."

"Perhaps she fell in and her head struck the corner of the spade," suggested Edgar.

"Young man," said the doctor, rising from his stooping posture and casting an approving glance at his grandson, "you deserve commendation. That is an hypothesis worth considering. Yes, that sharp corner," he continued, "would make just such a dull contused wound as that on her temple. Edgar, I congratulate you on having taken the first step in solving a difficult problem."

But that step did not make the next any easier. After another careful glance about the grave the doctor reached up to me his right hand, and with the spade in the other clambered out. I took the spade from him, and began to shovel the hard clods back. The others tramped them down, but they would not lie as close as they had done, and the ridge above was higher than the professional grave-digger usually leaves. When it was done Edgar

remarked upon its length, and the doctor quickly inquired of Jack and myself:

"Is your friend Compton one who would be likely to entertain suicidal proclivities?"

We could not answer, but inquired at once:

"Why?"

"Because, if he is, I should be half inclined to think he had dug this grave for himself."

We turned away from the mound with a shudder, taking the tools with us. A few steps from it Twining stumbled over some dark object. Edgar picked it up and handed it to his grandfather. It was a fur-lined coat of elegant make and rich material.

"Exactly what we need to keep you warm during the drive home," said the doctor, throwing it over Twining's shoulders. Jack shook it off angrily.

"All right," said the doctor. "It's just the thing I've long needed to keep the marrow warm in these old bones."

He drew it on as he spoke,—and wears it yet.

The late winter morning was just lighting up the hills across the river as we reached home. It was decided that the less said about what had occurred, the better. To avoid trouble-

some inquiry, therefore, Twining took the first train to the city. Mrs. Somers—or Mrs. Compton, as I should now call her, though the name never seems familiar to my ears—convalesced very rapidly; but that night remained a blank —or rather a fevered and indistinct vision—to her mind. Dr. Colton says her case, though a curious one, is hardly rare enough to term remarkable. This is his explanation :

" A brain congested by excitement and weakened by anxiety assumed the somnambulistic state, and while in this condition was relieved by the flow of blood from the temple, and the somnambulistic condition was soon after determined by a severe physical shock. Fortunately, exhaustion and the prompt administration of anodynes induced slumber, so that the nervous system received no serious shock on the return of consciousness. There is no reason, therefore, why her recovery should not be swift and permanent."

This was the explanation he gave me of her condition the next day, and his words were fully verified by the result. It was noticeable after her recovery, however, that she seemed to have lost her sturdy self-reliance and strained sense of independence. She relinquished her position

in the school, assumed her proper name,—of which, indeed, she strangely enough seemed rather proud,—and would hardly let Hester go out of her sight. So she continued to live at Cragholt, and very soon became an accustomed, as she had always been a welcome, presence among us.

A few days after these events a letter from George Hartzell informed us of his brother's death. "He had been to the country," he wrote, "to visit a friend, and on his return, leaping from the train while the cars were yet in motion, to catch a cross-town car, slipped, and was crushed beneath the wheels. Little as I love him," he added, "I cannot but feel very keenly his melancholy fate."

The train from which he alighted at the time of the accident had passed the station a mile back of Dwight's Landing about four o'clock on the morning of our drive thither. When I showed the letter to the doctor, he put his hand in an inside pocket of the fur-lined coat, and drew forth a loaded double-barreled derringer, and holding it before me asked, with peculiar emphasis:

"Was it accident?"

The question has not been answered. Mrs.

Compton was told of her widowhood a few days afterward. She said nothing at the time, but in a day or two informed Hester that, as her husband had not been an estimable presence in her life, she did not feel it to be her duty to assume a mourning garb because of his death. Yet I thought her dress became instinctively somewhat more severe, though her demeanor was brighter and happier as the memory of her wrongs and sorrows grew more dim with each recurring day. She devoted herself to Bobbie, and seemed happiest when ministering to his wants. The brown-haired boy appeared to have taken the place in her heart which the golden-haired girl would have held had she lived. Of her the mother never spoke.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOLD BY TO-MORROW.

A FORTNIGHT after the incidents I have related, I left home to put in operation a great mining venture in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. The following letter, which found me three months afterward busy, grimy, and contented, save for occasional attacks of homesickness, amid the crackling, roaring jets of a great hydraulic gulch, tells all that yet remains to be told of our Thanksgiving at Cragholt and what came of it. I sat upon a pipe that throbbed with the angry force of an imprisoned river, and read the crossed and crowded pages, while half a hundred yards away a mountain was crumbling before its furious impingement, and the clamor of its liberated waters shut out all other sounds, save now and then the roar of artificial landslides laden with golden particles which the floods had hidden ages ago, but not so securely that modern science cannot find them and compel the waters to unloose them again. Great yellow drops fell on the pages here and

there as I read, for I could not wait till evening for the news from home. This is what I read:

"CRAGHOLT, March 5th, 18—.

"MY DEAR PAPA: We are all well except Bobbie, who met with an accident yesterday. It was Saturday, you know, and very cold. March came in like a lion, and had been roaring up the river ever since, so that, late as it is, just the nicest smooth black ice you ever saw had made all over the river. Edgar was up the night before. In fact, he climbs the hill almost every night now. He and Allie are studying something together, or pretend to be. I have almost forgotten what it is, but Maudie and I have real good times laughing at them. Only a few days ago I learned the words of "Jeannie Morrison," the poem I have always been so fond of hearing you recite, just for the fun of repeating to them the lines:

"'We sat thegither on one seat,
Wi' ane buik on our knee;
Thy lips were on thy lesson,
But my lesson was in thee.'

"Well, I don't blame them, for Edgar is just as nice as he can be. If ever I do have a lover, I hope he will be like him. And as for Cousin

Allie, she is as sweet as a little rosebud, though I think I like Maudie best, after all. I am so glad you brought them to live with us, Papa—though, come to think, that was Mamma's idea, wasn't it? That is, she asked them, you know; though I am afraid she would never have thought of doing so if you had not come home with your head full of stories about them every time you went West.

"By the way, mayn't I go with them when they return home to Nebraska? You can pick me up on your way East, you know, and I do so want to hunt jack-rabbits. Allie says it is just splendid sport, and I think it must be very exciting to feel a horse bounding at its utmost speed over the prairie, see the greyhounds flying so fast they only seem a streak of light, and then a sudden turn, the baffled hounds stretching up their long necks, standing on their hind legs, hunting everywhere for the quarry, and the group of horsemen scattered, shouting, laughing,—everything life, eagerness, good-nature. O, it must be rare! Maudie says it's 'just horrid,' but she isn't a tomboy, you know. Please, Papa, say I may go, and be sure and write it to *me.* Mamma *might* forget to tell me about it, you know.

"O, I was going to write you about Bobbie. We all went down to the ice yesterday for the last skate of the season, even including mamma, who does skate beautifully. You just ought to have seen how sweet she did look, Papa, moving about so easily and gracefully, with her furs and gray hair and the sunshine lighting up her face, while we young folks skated about her, each one anxious to get nearer than the rest, all except Edgar, who had Bobbie in hand and was teaching him to skate by towing him along with a rope. Mrs. Compton—whom we still call by her old name oftener than by her new one —smiled placidly on us all, for we took her along on a sliding chair made on purpose for the occasion. Edgar had fixed a pair of runners on one of your great deep rockers (he says it won't take a minute to restore it to its former shape), and we wrapped her up with robes and bright afghans until she looked like a sweet tender princess watching her subjects' sport—Mamma serving in the picture as a dowager queen, you know. She insisted on pushing Mrs. Somers's chair almost all the time herself. I think she was a little afraid the excitement might be too much for the pretty invalid; for though she has seemed quite well since you

left, she has been so gentle and subdued that she doesn't seem like the Mrs. Somers you knew at all. I don't believe she could read Queen Katharine worth a cent now. Mamma keeps watching her very curiously, as if she was afraid she might be bad again. I don't think she quite wanted her to go out on the ice with us, but we all teased; and when Mrs. Somers herself said she'd like to go, Mamma made no further opposition.

"It was funny to see how anxious Mamma was about the ice, though. She wouldn't consent for us to go out on Friday at all, declaring that there was 'just no use of talking,' nobody could make her believe that 'black ice' was safe. I think it was only fear of the ice and anxiety for Mrs. Somers that brought her out at all.

"Well, we had a nice time for an hour or so, and then Mamma thought Mrs. Somers was looking tired, and they concluded to return. The carriage was waiting for them at the landing, and Mamma, having cautioned us to be sure to be home in time for dinner, started back with her charge. Then we all joined hands and skated up stream until we met Mr. Hartzell coming down. How perfectly splendid he did look,

standing as straight as an arrow, first on one foot and then on the other, as lazily and easily as if the ice moved under him instead of any exertion being required on his part to glide over it! When he came opposite to us he took off his cap, waved it over his head, and asked if we felt inclined for a race. So Maudie and I turned back and started to catch him, leaving Allie and Edgar with Bobbie in tow, to go their own way. I never saw anybody in such splendid spirits as Mr. Hartzell was. He just flew over the ice, glancing round and round, ringing us poor girls as if we had just been a couple of stumps, but going all the time toward Mamma and Mrs. Somers, who were on the way to the landing. Long before they reached the shore we had overtaken them, and nothing would do but Mr. Hartzell must take the chair and show the invalid what a ride on the river was like, as he said. Mamma protested, and seemed anxious to get Mrs. Somers to go home; but she said she was not at all tired, and if Mamma did not seriously object she would be glad to have Mr. Hartzell do as he proposed. Mamma looked hurt, and said coolly enough that of course Mrs. Compton could do as she chose. She didn't wish to remain longer on the ice

herself, but would send the carriage down to the landing again as soon as she reached home. So Maudie and I went on ashore with Mamma, and Mr. Hartzell and Mrs. Somers started up the river. Mamma didn't say a word all the way to the landing, but she looked very grave, and I thought was as near angry as I ever saw her.

"When we reached the shore, Maudie and I took off Mamma's skates, went with her to the carriage, and then turned back and soon overtook Mr. Hartzell and Mrs. Somers. They seemed very busily engaged talking to each other. Mr. Hartzell appeared to have lost all his gay spirits, and the spin he had promised Mrs. Somers was hardly faster than we girls had given her before. Maudie and I concluded we would not disturb them, so we joined hands and went up with just a bow and a smile so as not to seem to avoid them. Allie and Edgar were by themselves ahead of us, Bobbie having struck out by himself toward the shore. It was just where the big creek runs in—above Parker's. Bobbie was evidently trying to get a nearer view of the falls. The water was pouring over the big dam at a great rate, and I noticed that the sunshine formed a beautiful iris in the spray rising up from the rocks below. Maudie was laughing

about 'lovers to right of us, lovers to left of us,' and we were having a very good time, when all at once I remembered that you had cautioned me never to go near the mouth of the creek upon the ice, because you said its waters coming from living springs were much warmer than those of the river, and flowing into it just above the point made the ice in the bay unsafe. I had heard Edgar speak of this, too, in one of the disquisitions which he is almost as fond of making as you. I didn't think there was much danger so far as Bobbie was concerned, for he is only a light little fellow anyhow, but I saw he was going close in shore, and called to him to come back. I suppose I must have been a little excited, though I didn't know it, but Maudie says my quiet call was an ear-piercing scream. At any rate Edgar heard me, and looking around saw Bobbie, whom of course he had forgotten, as was natural enough, having Allie with him. No sooner did he note where Bobbie had strayed, however, than he gave a shout that might have been heard down at the landing, and then started for him like an arrow. I think he went faster than Mr. Hartzell could with all his skill. I was frightened then, for I felt sure that if he

went where Bobbie was, the ice, which might be strong enough for the boy alone, would break under the weight of both, so I screamed to Edgar to stop. I meant to scream this time, but he paid no more attention to my warning than a locomotive might. I was sure there was going to be an accident, and remembered your injunction to just stop and think what I could do. So I stood still, and looked up and down the river, thinking what might be done to help them out if they should break through, as I was sure they would. Just then Bobbie threw up his arms and fell. I don't know whether the ice really had given way under him or not, but Edgar evidently thought it had, and so did Mrs. Somers. She and Mr. Hartzell had come up while these things were going on. Maudie was wringing her hands, but never saying a word, and I was standing still, looking around and doing nothing. Just as Bobbie fell, Mrs. Somers shrieked like a wild woman, and would have jumped off the chair if Mr. Hartzell had not held her back. He spoke sharply to her, but she sprang up again, her face as pale as death, and started toward the boy, crying out:

"'Bobbie! Bobbie, my child! Mr. Hartzell save him!'

"I turned just in time to see Mr. Hartzell press her back into the chair, and observed that he said something to her, though I could not catch the words. His face was as pale as death, and his lips shut tight with so stern a look about them that I was really frightened.

"By that time Edgar had reached Bobbie, and there was no doubt about the ice having given way. They were both in the water. Edgar remembered your experience, for he had hardly come to the surface before he pushed Bobbie up on the ice; but the little fellow didn't seem to have sense enough to roll away. I suppose he had strangled, though I only thought then that he might be chilled. While I stood looking on, I saw Mr. Hartzell glide down toward them as if he had been a spirit. As he came near, Edgar raised his hand and motioned him back. Hartzell turned his toes out to stop himself, paused just a second, then lay down on the ice and drew himself carefully but quickly toward the opening. We all stood still and watched them breathlessly, expecting every minute to see the ice break under him. But he worked himself nearer and nearer until he caught hold of one of the boy's feet, and then gradually crawled back toward firm ice. Then he raised himself up, turned Bob-

bie over in his arms, looked in his face an instant, gave him a shake, and rushed like the wind back to Mrs. Somers. She held out her arms; he dropped the boy into them, turned the chair about, and sped down the river.

"When Maudie saw him coming back with Bobbie in his arms, she started toward him, and was standing beside the chair when he reached it. I think I was too frightened to move at all, and just stood and looked on like a dunce. Edgar watched Hartzell's motions anxiously, not making any attempt to get out himself until they went off toward the landing, leaving the rest of us looking after them,—Edgar in the water, and Allie and I on the ice. I think they must have got half way to the landing before I fairly recovered myself. Then I heard Allie scream, and saw her start toward Edgar. He had tried to get out, and the ice had broken under him just as it did with you. I caught Allie as she was rushing toward him, and told her she must not go any nearer or she would break through the ice, and Edgar would be a good deal worse off than he was already.

"While I was thinking when we first came on the ice what I ought to do in case an accident should occur, I remembered there was a fence close down by the river bank on the west side;

so as soon as I could quiet Allie I started across the river to get a board. It is an old fence, but I never did see nails hold as well, or posts keep so sound! I tried my best to pull off two or three of the long narrow boards, but could not start one of them. I saw a block of wood on the other side, however, and clambering over I got that, and soon managed to pound off one of the longest I could find. Then I crawled through the opening this left in the fence, scrambled down to the shore again over the loose stones, falling two or three times on the way, and made the best time I could across the river where Edgar was 'amusing' himself, as he said afterward, 'breaking ice,' while Allie stood a little way off, washing her hands with her tears. I remembered your instructions, and was very careful how I went near the thin edge. I didn't want to get in myself, and I did want to get Edgar out, especially because that was what my mamma did, you know.

"So when I came near I imitated Mr. Hartzell, lying down on the ice and pushing the board in front of me toward Edgar. It was no job at all, and no sort of danger, for the board must have been twenty feet long. So I easily got it within his reach and held the end of it,—though

the nails would have done that just as well if I had not been there,—while Edgar crawled out and crept along it for all the world like a big musk-rat on a log. I could not help laughing to see the water drop off from him and hear his teeth chatter as he came near. Of course, I was sorry for him, but it was awfully funny. He had not lost his head a bit, though, and before he had come half the length of it began calling to me to 'Go away! Go back!' This I was willing enough to do; and Allie edged off too, standing a few rods away, with her hands clasped, begging him to be careful,—as if he were not as safe on that board as if he had been on dry land! When he got off the board, however, he still kept on crawling until he got away back on the solid ice. Then he straightened up and began to feel about on his skates, as if he was not quite sure whether his legs were under him or not. I was about twenty steps from him, very sorry of course for his misfortune, but he did look so comical that I could not help laughing. Allie did not laugh, though; she just said:

"'Why, Bertha, how can you be so cruel?'

"Then she dashed up to Edgar, caught him about the neck, kissed him right there on the open

river, and started for the landing with him as if he had been a baby left in her special charge. They did not seem to have any further need for my services, so I skated along behind them and whistled 'Comin' thro' the Rye' for their entertainment.

"There isn't any use, Papa; there's no chance of my following in my mother's footsteps as you have so often predicted that I would. I saved my man; but he was the other girl's fellow, and I am sure I shall always like him a good deal better as a cousin than I ever should as a sweetheart. Still, he is very nice, and if I ever should have a lover, I think I should want him to be very much like Allie's.

"Edgar was very soon all right, and I think rather pleased with his part of the adventure, as he had a good right to be. We found Dr. Colton at the house, who berated his grandson in his comical way, without stopping to inquire about his health any more than if he had been a dog. In fact there was no necessity to do so. It didn't need the doctor's keen eyes to see how the land lay between him and Allie, but it was very affecting to see him clasp her hand, pushing back her cap and laying his other hand upon her golden

curls as if he were about to invoke a blessing upon her, saying in choking tones, his great black eyes twinkling through the tears:

"'So "deep waters cannot part them"! But you must take better care than that of him, Allie, my girl.'

"So we all say our Allie's engaged, Papa, but I don't believe Edgar's ever made any declaration at all.

"Mrs. Somers seemed to have just lost her wits over Bobbie. Mamma says that when Mr. Hartzell brought him to the door she caught the child out of his arms and said:

"'Get the doctor!' as if he had been a servant.

"She carried Bobbie up to her own room, and before the doctor arrived had him so nearly restored that Dr. Colton said it was just trifling with the dignity of the profession to send for a physician when he was not needed. Of course everybody in the house helped, but Mamma says Mrs. Somers was so masterful that nobody else did anything except obey her directions, and you know it takes a good deal of self-assertion to supersede Mamma under her own roof-tree. Mrs. Somers insisted on telegraphing for Mr. Twining without delay, though Mamma thought it quite

unnecessary, and Maudie drove to the station to send a dispatch, returning just in time to pick us up on the way from the river. So you see we brought 'the conquering hero' home in good style despite his frozen garments and chattering teeth.

"I drove down to the train to meet Mr. Twining, when he arrived, with strict orders from Mamma to tell him as soon as he set foot on the platform not to be alarmed. Maudie had simply telegraphed 'Come at once,' and we supposed he would be frightened half to death about Bobbie. When he got off the train his face was as white as a sheet, his hand trembled as he caught mine, and his voice was so hoarse I could hardly recognize it as he said:

"'What is it? Is anything the matter with her?'

"'*Her?*' I asked. 'Whom do you mean?'

"'Why, Mrs.—Som—Compton—of course!'

"'Why, nothing in the world,' said I, and then I told him what had happened.

"Don't you think he acted very queer?"

* * * * *

If I did, I never told Bertha; but when next

I saw Hester, I did hint that black ice was not so dangerous as some people thought, after all. She shook her head, and a sad look came into her eyes, as she said it seemed that true happiness could be purchased only by an equivalent of pain. I did not controvert her philosophy, but wondered whether the price we pay for happiness deserves always so harsh a name. Nature rarely makes the pathway to her hidden treasures an easy one, but he who has once found them, prizes his possession all the more, I fancy, for the difficulties he has overcome.

THE END.

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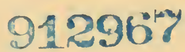

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