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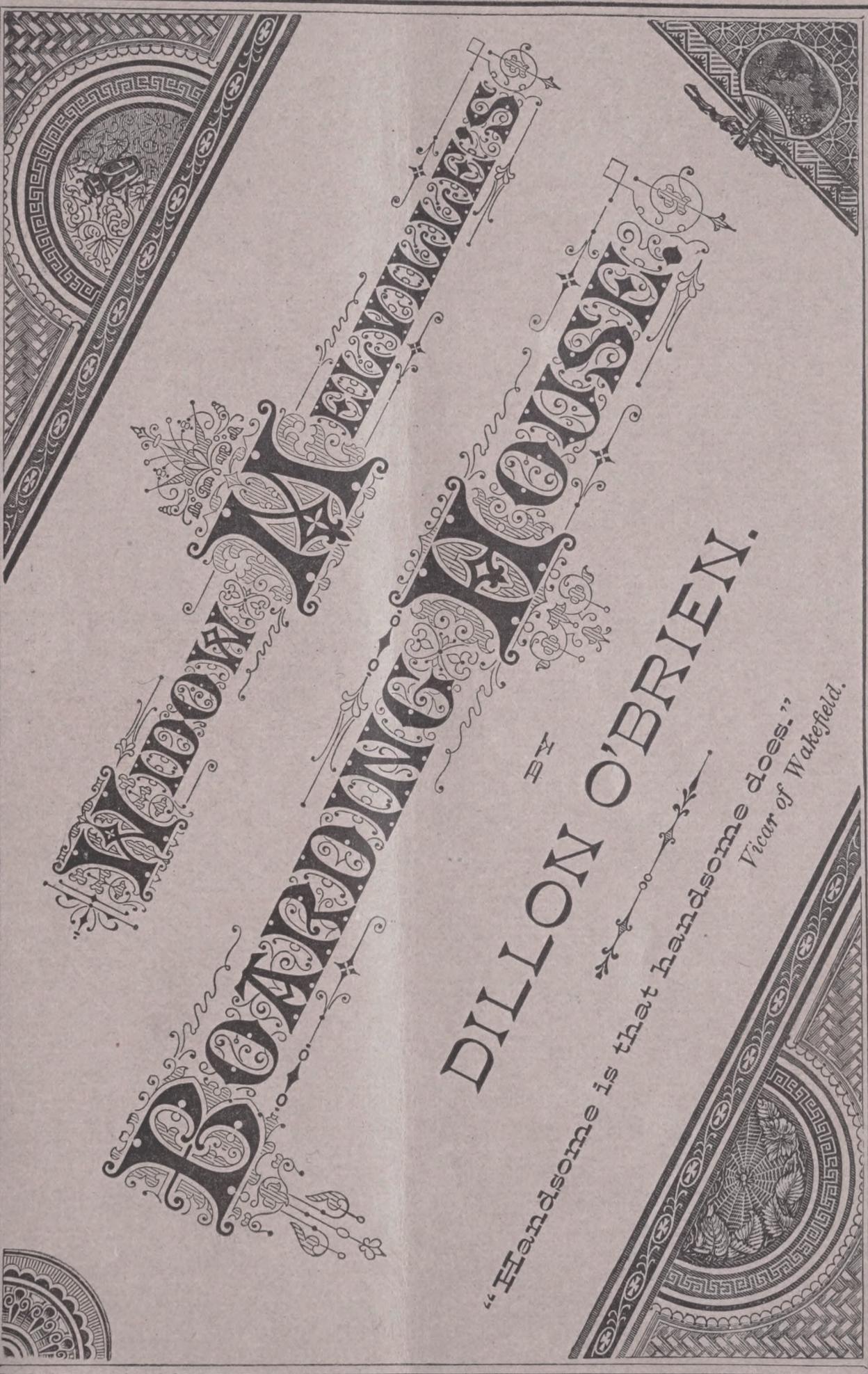




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BY
DILLON O'BRIEN.

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Vicar of Wakefield.*



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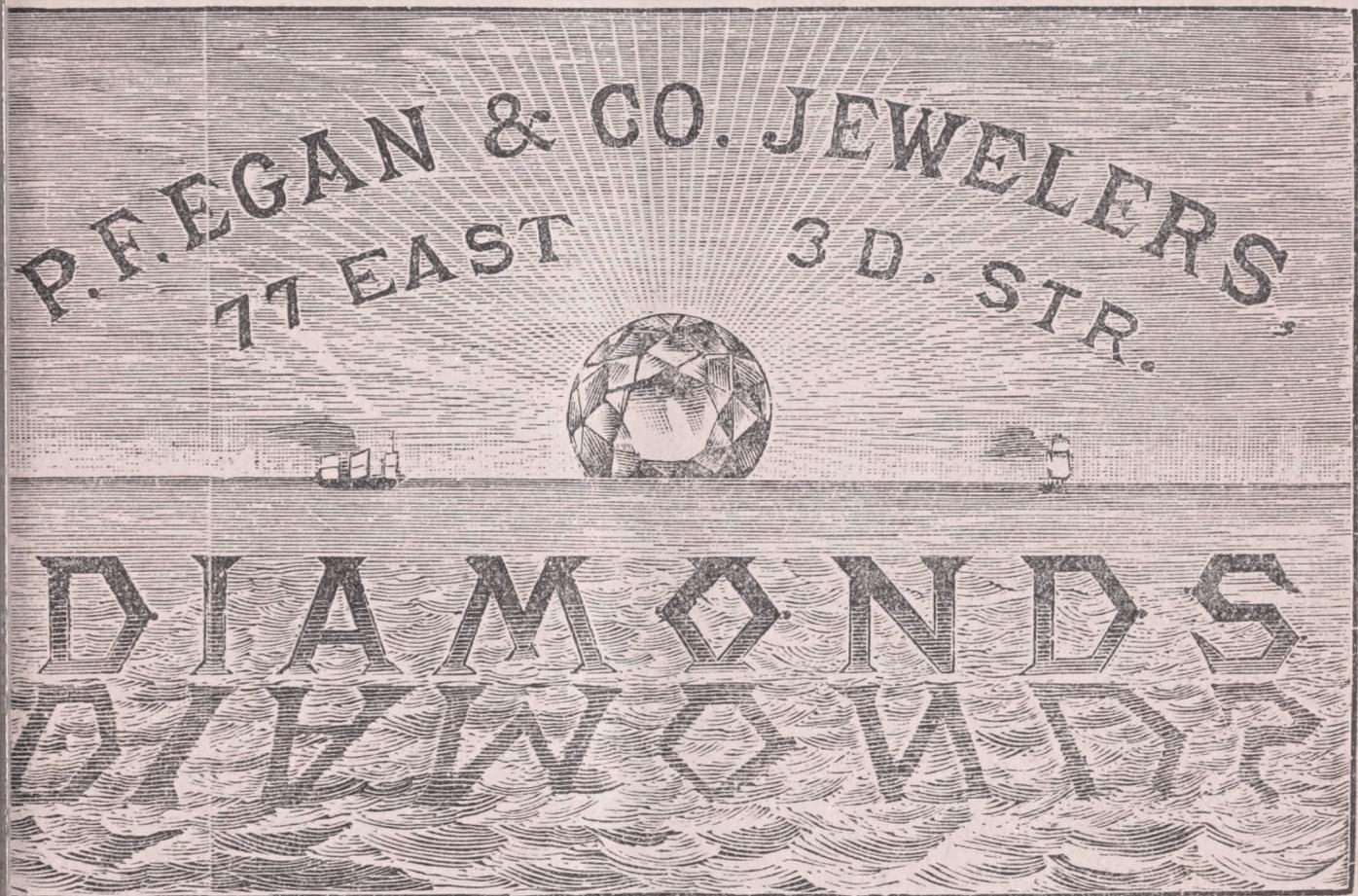
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BOARDING HOUSE.

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DILLON O'BRIEN.



ST. PAUL:
THE PIONEER PRESS PRINT.
1881.

[1880].

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WIDOW MELVILLE'S BOARDING HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.



MRS. MELVILLE; this was the name on the brass plate which ornamented the hall door of Number "48," a private boarding house in Fair Oaks, an orderly town of about three thousand inhabitants, in one of the Western States, and the Widow Melville, the owner of the name on the brass plate, had lived in this house from childhood up to the time of her marriage; indeed she was born in it. As a girl she was pretty rather than handsome, with light-brown hair, gentle, beseeching eyes, that corresponded well with the soft mouth; a face that a brave man might love from its very feminine weakness, and that a strong-minded woman would despise for the self same reason.

Her father, an Englishman named Joseph Adams, had been a lieutenant in the English army, and received, during the siege of Sebastopol, a thrust from a Russian bayonet, and the Victoria medal. Returning to England invalided, a grateful country conferred upon him a pension of fifty pounds a year, together with the half pay of a lieutenant.

Shortly afterward he married, and after two years of housekeeping, finding it rather a difficult matter to live in England on his income "like a gentleman," which means being of no earthly use to yourself or anybody else, he accepted a grant of land in Canada, and bade good-bye to friends and country.

The poor gentleman's experience in Canada was depressing. His grant, which appeared to him in England "a big thing," was, when he came to take possession, rather too big a thing, but in a different light altogether. It was a section of land in a dense forest; and after two years Lieutenant Adams found himself disputing the right of way with numerous stumps that still kept possession of his clearing

of three acres, and seemed good for at least another generation; so when a speculator, with an eye to the pine wood on the section, came along one day and made him a bid for his property, he eagerly accepted it, and cleared out of his clearing, with a far lighter heart than he had when he left his native land.

The dense forest, and, as it appeared to him, the impossibility of doing anything with it, had been a heavy weight on his mind, and now that it was removed the rebound of his spirits was very exhilarating. Mrs. Adams too, had been, during those two years, fully impressed with the belief that sooner or later she was to be devoured by those hungry wolves that, night after night, howled around the little log house in the forest. It may be fairly surmised then that if the speculator was satisfied with his bargain, his satisfaction did not equal that of Lieutenant Adams and his wife at getting rid of their property and the wolves.

The question now was where they should go to.

"Go to the United States," said a friend.

"I should like to go somewhere that I could have an expansive view," said the lieutenant. "I am tired of not being able to see farther than the length of a fallen tree."

"Then go to some one of the Western States," replied his friend. "Grand expanse, not a stick between you and the North Pole."

Whether or not it was this very flattering description that influenced him, Lieutenant Adams came out West shortly after he had disposed of his property in Canada; bought with the proceeds of his sale the house No. 48, with its large lot, furnished it with good, plain furniture and settled for life to read the English Army and Navy Gazette, and struggle with the problem of how to live on a small income without getting into debt.

In the early days of his residence in Fair Oaks, he was known as Lieutenant Adams, and then, as his straight military figure, with a single-breasted blue frock coat buttoned up to the chin summer and winter, became familiar on the street and the circle of his acquaintance enlarged, he was promoted to a captaincy; by the will of the people, "Capt. Joe."

He had at first protested against the title, modestly assuring those who addressed him by it, that he merely ranked as a lieutenant in her Majesty's service; but his protest went for nothing, and he was man of the world enough to fall in with the humor of those among whom he came to live and to accept his captaincy from them.

As he paid his bills with great regularity, interfered not at all in politics, and was always affable and gentlemanly, "Capt. Joe" became

a great favorite in Fair Oaks, a popular character, that the citizens were rather proud of, and sometimes pointed out to strangers—"That's Captain Joe Adams, that military looking man on the opposite side of the street, a distinguished English officer, who has selected Fair Oaks as his home."

The year the Adams settled in Fair Oaks a baby was added to the family circle, and Capt. Joe had her baptized Lizzie Victoria Adams. The captain and his wife had both passed the bloom of youth before their marriage, and as they had lost their first child before leaving England, the birth of this baby gave them unmixed joy.

When the little thing was able to toddle about, she caused delightful interruption to the reading of the Army and Navy Gazette; as the captain on fine days marched about his front yard, with head erect and military step, and Miss Lizzie kicking with her tiny red shoes the top buttons of his single-breasted coat. Then when she was tucked in her bed for the night, kissed and watched until she had fallen asleep, what numerous plans were discussed for her future bringing up and happiness: dreams, loving dreams, that the waking realities of life were to dispel; yet they conferred a great deal of happiness for the time being.

Children and men find far more happiness in the anticipation of possessing their toys, than in the actual possession.

It was settled, that at a proper age Lizzie should be sent to school in England; but when the time came there was neither the inclination nor the money to send her. The child was too timid, the Captain said, to go away from home, so she went to school with her young playmates, had of course her special dear friend amongst them, and by and by they too had their day dreams, which they told to each other on the green hill side, while the river beneath, toying with its variegated pebbles, broke into rippling laughter.

Time sped on and Lizzie Adams had attained her eighteenth year, when Frank Melville, the son of a southern planter, on a summer pleasure tour through the Northern States, visited Fair Oaks.

He had intended to remain only a day or so, but having been introduced to Capt. Adams, the latter invited him to his house to spend a quiet evening. The invitation was accepted. Lizzie sang some old English ballads, great favorites with her father, and the latter gave his guest a vivid account of the siege of Sebastapol. It was midnight when Frank returned to his hotel, and his first act on entering it was to counteract the order he had given that he should be called in time for the morning train. He had evidently become interested in the siege of Sebastapol, and wanted to hear more about it.

CHAPTER II.

“There's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.”

SO the poet has sung, and so young hearts will sing till the downing of the curtain.

After the first evening at Capt. Adams' house Frank Melville indefinitely postponed his departure from Fair Oaks, and on a calm summer evening, during which “Capt. Joe,” sitting out on his porch with his family and his young friend, had made his grand final assault on the Malakoff tower and hauled down the Russian flag, Lizzie Adams surrendered her virgin heart, with all its rich treasures, to her southern lover.

Frank Melville was a fine, gallant, young fellow, worthy of the love he had inspired. The next day he had a private interview with “Captain Joe,” told him frankly how he was situated as to means and position, and asked him for the hand of his daughter.

The old soldier gave his consent, not without emotion, which he endeavored to hide as unbecoming a veteran wearing the Victoria Cross—as if a piece of ribbon or a medal on one's breast can stop the throbbing of the heart beneath—stipulating, however, that this consent was given on the understanding that the match should be equally acceptable to Frank's family, and that he should be assured that his child should receive a loving welcome in the home her young husband was to take her to. In due course this assurance was given, and then there was nothing to prevent the naming of the happy day, selecting the bridesmaids and groomsmen.

Surely, as some one has beautifully said, “the veil which hides the future from us was woven by the angel of mercy.”

Could the gentle bride, blushing and weeping in her happiness, as she crossed her father's threshold leaning on the arm of her husband, who was bringing her to a new home; could she have foreseen under what circumstances she was to enter the homestead again, how pale would have become that face, now suffused with soft blushes; how horror-stricken those eyes now sparkling through tears.

Would she have turned back? No; to love and be beloved by one true, honest heart, even for a brief space, is worth a life's suffering.

The house was very lonely after the young bride's departure. Mrs. Adams, in the early days following that event, often found herself listening for the light step that would hurry to help her in her domestic duties; then, with a sigh, resume her occupation, and Capt. Adams sorely missed the sweet face that was wont to watch at the window for his return, and the deft hands that used to set aside his hat and cane.

The old couple indeed were cheered with the thought that they would see Lizzie the following summer; she had promised to visit them then, and they were, in return, to visit her, in her southern home, the following year. But those promises were never fulfilled; parents and child never met again.

When the time for Lizzie's visit home arrived she had a baby, and feared to risk the long journey North, and the problem of how to keep out of debt, which "Captain Joe," all through his honorable life, was arduously and successfully working out, caused him to postpone the family visit South. Thus year after year one cause or another necessitated the putting off of the promised visit for four years, and then the civil war broke out; North and South stood face to face in battle array. Lifelong friendships, kindred ties—glorious memories of days when North and South stood side by side, one flag over them, one battle cry inspiring them—liberty—were all swept away by the tempest of civil war; and the Republic lived through those dark days, only because the God of freedom had willed that it should not die.

The battles, the victories, the gallant deeds of that war, are recorded in history, to be known to generation after generation. Its deepest sorrows lie in the graves of broken hearts, fast mouldering into dust, and the grasses and flowers overhead are dumb, giving no sign of the tragedies beneath.

At an early stage of the war Lizzie's husband had joined the Confederate service. Distracted letters came from her to her parents, who beseeched her to return to her old home, and "Captain Joe" had made preparations to fetch her, when he received a letter stating that on no account would she leave from where she had a chance of seeing Frank from time to time. Both duty and affection prompted her to remain. As the war progressed, intercourse between the North and South became more difficult; the mails uncertain, with long intervals, during which all communication was entirely suspended at different points.

Just near the close of the war, after a gap of three or four months, during which Lizzie had not heard from the North, a letter with the Fair Oaks post-mark came to her. It was from Dr. Pembroke, an old

friend of the family, announcing the death of both her parents (of typhoid fever,) but a few days having intervened between the death of each. Lizzie read this letter in a Southern hospital, beside the cot where lay her dead husband; and one of the nurses passing by a little after, found the poor lady lying across the cot as pulseless as the dead.

Weeks afterward, she found her way back to her Southern home; her child was there. Her child! This was the talisman that snatched her back from death; a mother's love can be stronger than death. Ruin, desolation, and poverty were visible in and around the house she had entered nine years before a happy bride.

A tall, stately old gentleman, with uncovered head,—his white hair alling over his shoulders,—came down the porch steps to meet her. Taking both her hands in his, he kissed her pale cheek.

“Harry, my child,” was all she was able to say.

“He is well, Lizzie; he and I, old Tom and his wife, are all our household—(he had lost his three sons in the war)—a small one, but nevertheless your Northern friends have made it somewhat difficult to keep house.”

His voice was so changed and harsh that Lizzie gave him a quick, frightened look. His face had grown hard and haggard, and his full, blue eyes, that in their brave frankness had given a charm to the old man's countenance in days gone by, were now sombre and cold as steel.

As he stood there, within the shadow of his desolate ancestral home,—the wind moaning through the trees and tossing the grey hair around his massive head,—still erect, he was a striking emblem of the proud, vanquished, ruined South,—the last of the Southern chivalry.

Lizzie, weary, weak and tearful, felt herself shivering in this cold presence, when there came bounding through the shrubbery a bright boy, and with one bound he was in his mother's arms. Oh, the glory, the healthfulness, the warmth of a young life,—the sorrowing widow inhaling it through the rosy lips of her boy, grew strong and flushed.

That night, with her child's arms around her neck, and his warm breath fanning her cheek, her crushed spirit revived, and she began to think and plan for the future.

She would leave this desolate South and return to the North,—to the home of her childhood. Death had been there too; no living voices to welcome her back; yet she felt that all the memories hovering round the old homestead would be gentle and sweet. She yearned for its protecting shelter, and so longing fell into a calm sleep, in which she imagined that the breath of her child was the perfume from the lilac bushes growing in front of her Northern home.

CHAPTER III.

“**I** REALLY find it very difficult to advise you, my dear Mrs. Melville. This homestead sold, the sum you would realize would fall very short of giving yourself and your boy an income, and you are so entirely inexperienced that to put it into any kind of business would be too risky; still I fear that you are equally unsuited to open a boarding house.”

Thus spoke Doctor Pembroke as he sat with Mrs. Melville in the parlor of Number “48,” in the town of Fair Oaks.

“But, doctor, I must do something. All that is here you tell me is mine, and even if it would be for my benefit I cannot part with this old homestead; it seems to give me a protection that no other place could. I have brought nothing back to it but the picture of my poor, dead husband, but I must do something for myself and Harry till he is able to do for himself.”

“How old is he?” asked the doctor.

“He is in his ninth year,” replied Mrs. Melville. At that moment Harry entered the room.

“Come here, Harry,” said the doctor. “What would you like to be?”

“I’d like to be a soldier,” the boy replied.

The mother placed her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out the horrid visions the very name conjured up.

“Well, my boy,” said the doctor, smiling, “you are not the regulation height yet, and when you are I hope we shan’t have much soldiering in this country. What can you do now, Harry, do you think?”

“I can ride a horse, snare rabbits and trap foxes.” The doctor laughed.

“Harry must go to school, doctor,” said the widow. “I taught him a little, but you may judge that it was not much, amid the fears and distractions of the last four years.”

“Of course not,” replied the doctor. “Yes, Harry must go to school; that’s settled.”

“May I go to the river to fish, mother, with Fred Browne,” broke in Harry.

"I suppose you may, Harry, but be very careful."

"Oh, pshaw!" replied Harry. "I could swim across that little river over and over again;" and he was out of the house to join Fred Browne, who was waiting for him round the corner.

"He is a fine, manly little fellow," said the doctor, "but one who will require a firm hand to guide him, or I am mistaken."

"He is truthful and affectionate," replied the fond mother; "but, doctor, my poor child has been running wild on the plantation for the last few years, and I find him restless under restraint."

"Natural enough, Mrs. Melville," said the doctor. "But all will come right. Truthfulness and affection are grand points in a boy's character; no matter how he may kick over the traces, he is sure to get back on the track and down to his work. I do not believe that a truthful boy can become a bad man, unless the appetite for strong drink takes possession of him. Then, indeed, everything good and noble is likely to go overboard. But let us return to our subject—the boarding house project."

"It is the only thing," replied the widow, "that I can do. I will have no rent to pay, and tho' the furniture in the house is plain, it is substantial and abundant; there are whole chests full of linen and bedclothes up stairs. I want to be independent, doctor, and work for my living. Don't you think I can do so by opening a boarding house here?"

"Yes," replied the doctor; "very many poor ladies like you, thrown upon their own resources, maids and matrons alike, urged by a brave spirit to earn an honest living, have gone into this business under far more difficulties, and succeeded. But have you an idea of what you will have to go through?"

"I am not afraid to work, doctor."

"Oh, I am not thinking of the work: hired help can be got to assist in doing that. Do you know the humiliations you will have to undergo?—the difficult task you will have in endeavoring to please people of different tempers, habits, and dispositions?—that you will have to bear patiently the slang of brainless puppies, who will retail at your table the stale jokes about boarding house hash and boarding house tea; who, having jewed you down to the lowest penny, will sneer and scold because you do not give them the board of a first-class hotel; that your female boarders, dressed up in all their finery for the evening, will giggle, whisper, and point you out to other boarders, wondering 'why it is that Mrs. Melville cannot keep herself more tidy,' when a good portion of your time has been taken up in remedying the untidy litter in which they left their rooms? Then I am afraid that

you would be greatly imposed upon, and that a great many of the boarding house wits would play off a very practical joke by leaving without paying you."

"Your picture is not encouraging, doctor."

"No, and perhaps I am a little daft on the subject, trying to make atonement for a past error—a misconception of character."

"How was that?"

"I will tell you," said the doctor. Before I came to this State I practiced my profession in Michigan. I was a young man then, and my office was a favorite place for my friends to lounge in. Two or three of those boarded with a maiden lady named Flight. She was certainly very unprepossessing,—tall, thin, and worn. On the hottest day in summer, to look at her face, you would think she was suffering from cold. What stories those young fellows used to tell of their landlady,—of her stinginess,—her meanness. What miserable puns on her name, and what additional names besides,—Ogress, Sal. Brass, the Witch of Endor, being the least objectionable. Do you know, I got to hate this woman; used to join in ridiculing her. Fine, manly work, wasn't it, for young men? D—n fine,—ahem, beg your pardon, Mrs. Melville.

"Well, one morning one of my friends came laughing into the office: 'Your future is made, Pembroke; the Witch of Endor has sent for you.' He handed me a note, which read, in a neat, delicate hand:

'Miss Flight presents her compliments to Dr. Pembroke, and would be pleased to see him professionally.'

"When I reached the house, the witch was in a high altercation with a boarder who was trying to sneak away without paying her, and as I entered the hall she slammed the door on his heels and said to me in not very mild tones, 'Come, doctor.'

"We entered a back room. An old, paralyzed man sat in an arm-chair, propped up with pillows, before a bright fire. The room was scrupulously neat and cheerful looking.

'How do you feel now, father?'

"I actually started. This was not the voice I had heard a moment before in the hall. It was now low and gentle. I looked at the woman, bending over the chair so lovingly. As I live, the whole expression of her face had changed!—its hard lines gone, and in their place a patient, sad, pitying look.

'How do you feel now, father?'

'Better, Deb. I think the cough does not rack me so much.'

'I have brought Dr. Pembroke to see you, father.'

The old man bowed.

'He has been paralyzed for years, doctor;' she continued, 'but he is now suffering from a cold, and I wished you to see him.'

"When I was about to write a prescription I found that I had forgotten my memorandum book. So Miss Flight left the room to get me paper and pen.

"When she closed the door I said to the paralytic, 'You have a good daughter, sir.'

"The old man's eyes glistened. 'Oh, you don't know,' he said. 'all she does for me, all she has given up for me! God only knows her as she deserves.'

"And this was the woman we used to abuse, to ridicule, to slander: why there was not one of us worthy to tie her shoe-strings!

"We meet such independent, self-sacrificing women every day; we jostle them out of the way, as they stand huckstering with the butcher and market people. We see them standing on one side as Mrs. High-blow gives her order to the obsequious grocer, and we do not recognize how bravely they battle, single-handed, against the adverse currents of life."

Whilst telling his story Dr. Pembroke had kept walking up and down the room; he now paused opposite Mrs. Melville and said, with a pleasant smile, "Have I cured you of your boarding house scheme?"

"You have not encouraged me, doctor," she replied. "But don't you think that here, where my poor father was so well known and respected, I could get a few quiet, respectable boarders?"

"Well, yes," said the doctor; "that's true enough, and I think I can get you one or two myself if you are determined to make the venture. I will call to-morrow, and we will talk over our arrangements. Perhaps it would be well to put an advertisement in the newspapers."

And so it was arranged. Mrs. Melville's name appeared on a polished plate on the door of number "48," and the house was soon known as Mrs. Melville's boarding house.



CHAPTER IV.

IT appeared for some time after Mrs. Melville had opened her boarding house, that it would be an exception to establishments of the kind. The sunlight was permitted at times to enter her best rooms, and beneath its genial influence, the house lost that cold, gloomy look so habitual to establishments of the kind.

Dr. Pembroke kept his word and found some very nice boarders for the widow; former friends too had called to see her. They were kind and cordial, so that in the return to her old home, where every object was familiar to her, and in the active life she now led, she found, if not happiness, at least for a time tranquility of mind. Happily the cares of life draw us away from the graves that open along its path.

But there was one old acquaintance who evidently avoided a renewal of the intimacy which once existed between herself and the widow when they were both young girls. Kate Summers and Lizzie Adams had been schoolmates, playmates, inseparable as girls. Lizzie had confided all her little secrets to Kate and Kate as many of hers as she deemed advisable. In those youthful days it was an advantage to Miss Summers to be on intimate terms with the Adams. She was one of Lizzie's bridesmaids, and at parting they had vowed eternal friendship in each others arms, and sealed the compact with innumerable kisses. All this was sincere on the part of the bride, who was greatly pleased when some time after she heard in her Southern home that her dear friend Kate had married Mr. Browne, the richest man in Fair Oaks, and it was a pleasant thought to dwell upon, on her sad journey to her old home, that she would be again near her dear friend.

As a general rule, the friendships of young girls are about as lasting as their fashionable hats, both delightful when they are new and becoming, but very apt to be exchanged at short notice for a newer hat and a newer friendship; nor is a similarity of tastes and dispositions at all necessary in the forming of such friendships. No two could be more unlike than the gentle, mild-eyed, timid Lizzie Adams, and the bold, showy, frivolous Kate Summers. Mrs. Browne, who in her efforts to become a fine lady, had developed into a vulgar, osten-

tatious, purse-proud woman, was away at a fashionable resort when Mrs. Melville arrived at Fair Oaks, and the boarding house of the latter had been opened some months before her return. When she did return and the former friends met, the pleasant anticipations with which the widow had looked forward to their meeting were entirely dispelled by the cold reception her affectionate greeting met with, and it needed not the bungling hints Mrs. Browne favored her with to make her understand that their former intimacy was not to be renewed.

"Mr. Browne is so particular as to our circle," she said. This was not true. Mr. Browne was an honest fellow enough, immersed in business—not caring a fig for society, who had fallen in love with a young girl's eyebrows, and found out too late that there was very little else about her to admire.

"By the way, continued Mrs. Browne, "perhaps my husband can send some of his clerks to board with you."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Melville, "but my house is full. Good day." She hurried off, for she felt her face burning, and knew that the tears were not far off. Not for "a king's ransom"—kings have not their old value in this age of the world—would she permit one to fall in the presence of that woman.

But although Mrs. Browne had tabooed her former friend from her select circle, she made several disagreeable advances to patronize her. She had been to England and had, parrot-like, picked up some phrases of society there ("the higher orders," "the lower orders,") spoke of the duty of the higher orders to care for and elevate the lower, and was president of a society for the relief of the deserving poor.

From the reports of the visiting committees of this society it was really surprising how very few deserving poor were to be found in and around Fair Oaks.

"The poor you have always with you." Oh, yes; vagrants, tramps, castaways, that the tide of life casts, all ragged, upon its shores; such as those who sat by the wayside in Judea when the sinless One passed by and found favor in His sight. But I am speaking of your moral, picturesque pauper, who prefers to read a chapter in his mother's Bible to a dinner of corned beef and cabbage, and this class was scarce around Fair Oaks, so that the funds of the society for the relief of the deserving poor were mostly applied for the publication of tracts freely distributed among the undeserving poor.

This system worked satisfactorily, for those who applied for relief to the society and got tracts, seldom, if ever, returned. ●

"It would be impossible to estimate the good our tracts have

wrought," said the secretary on one occasion; a very true remark indeed.

But though Mrs. Browne did not visit at Mrs. Melville's, she called from time to time at No. "48" to complain of Harry Melville, whom she asserted was constantly leading her son Fred Browne into all kinds of scrapes. The two boys, almost the same age, became great friends; both were wild, idle and continually getting into trouble. But while their methods of getting into scrapes were very similar, their way of getting out of them was very different.

Fred, whose nature was weaker, less truthful and far more cunning than Harry's, when brought to task for his misdeeds by his parents, did not hesitate, when he could do so with effect, to lay the greater portion of the blame on Harry. Hence Mrs. Browne's frequent calls. Harry, on the other hand, always stood up to the rack; to excuse a fault with a greater one (an untruth) never entered his mind.

Truly penitent for the moment, not so much for the fault as for its consequence, namely, fretting his mother, he promised amendment, kissed her into forgiveness, and was ready for a fresh scrape. Inside the schoolroom he was attentive because he liked his teacher; but outside his rows with other boys were frequent. Brave and unusually strong for his age, he never hesitated to face a boy much larger than himself; hence he got worsted as frequently as he came off victorious. I have said that inside the schoolroom he was attentive; but I must confess that his attendance was very irregular. He was a boy of fine parts and affectionate disposition, but thoughtless and impulsive; one that required a wise, firm guide, and he had but a weak, loving one. Gentle love indeed can do much with the young; it is immeasurably superior to rough command, but this gentleness should have firmness allied to it.

You cannot collar a boy day in and day out and shake him into a good man, though you may make him a hard, sharp fellow, who will shake the other fellow when his time comes.

The really greatest fault in Harry Melville's character was a love for idleness, so fostered by a wayward childhood and boyhood that it had become a second nature, a tyrant hard to shake off, by the time he was approaching manhood.

He was always a great favorite with Dr. Pembroke, who cheered Mrs. Melville by telling her that Harry would come out all right; but when he had passed his sixteenth year, was still idle, and had got into one or two serious scrapes, the doctor's faith in his own prophecy began to be shaken.

“I will speak to the widow,” he said, after hearing of Harry's latest trouble. “She must send him some place where he will have to work and take care of himself, otherwise he will go to the devil—and it is a pity. I can't help liking the young fellow.”

And how did the boarding house at No. 48 prosper during those years that Harry was growing up?

Not very well of late. Fair Oaks and its society had changed since Mrs. Melville's return to her old home; both had come to have more pretentious notions. Fair Oaks was getting rid of—by fire, mostly, securing the insurance—her frame buildings, and replacing them with brick ones, and the circle in which Mrs. Browne moved had gone up several rungs higher (in their own estimation) on the social ladder.

One of the new buildings, with bay windows and fashionable shades, had been opened as a boarding house, in the same street with No. 48, and the old-fashioned front of the latter, sadly in want of fresh paint, contrasted but poorly with its stylish neighbor. The furniture, too, had become shabby and out of date; and, like her house, the widow's boarders had become second-class and more exacting. Poor little woman, how bravely she battled just to live; how unceasing were her efforts to please, and with what doubtful success.

With what poor acting she seemed not to understand the stupid, ill-natured jokes the boarders indulged in at her expense. Oh, they knew full well that she understood; she could not deceive them with that patient little smile; their vulgar ill-nature would have no zest for them did they not know she felt it.



CHAPTER V.

BREAKFAST is over at No. 48, and the boarders have gone to their daily occupations. Miss Snap (spinster) has retired to her room and opened her desk to write a letter to a dear friend East, who has, as she says, her most secret confidence; telling the dear friend the present interesting state of a flirtation going on between herself and a Mr. Sharpe, another boarder, a clerk in a lawyer's office at Fair Oaks, or, as he terms it, "reading in a lawyer's office."

Adolphus Sharpe always speaks of his father as a very rich man, who is just keeping him on a small allowance to break him in, but who may any day get out of his way. "Dad has an awful short neck, and threatens apoplexy," remarked Adolphus, speaking pleasantly and in confidence of his future prospects to Miss Snap, and consequently Miss Snap (who has been obliged for some time past to get the bloom of youth from her druggist, nature's stock being nearly exhausted,) takes an interest in Adolphus. "A dangerous interest, I fear, my dear Lydia," she writes to her friend.

This morning the two have been very merry at the expense of poor Mrs. Melville and her surroundings,—so merry, indeed, that they had gone from the breakfast table into the hall, laughing, where Adolphus had given Miss Snap a parting hug; consequently she was in the best of humor as she sat down to write to her friend.

Left to herself, the widow commences her daily task of setting things to rights in the parlor and sitting room. With but one servant to do the cooking—she cannot afford more now—she has to do all the housework herself. She begins her work to-day with a nervous excitement and hot face, for whether it is that she is more nervous, more weary than usual, or that Adolphus Sharpe and Miss Snap have been more witty and severe; she felt their rudeness more. In such a state of mind, the very work she is engaged in is likely to call up old memories, and to embitter the present by contrast. Every corner of the room, every piece of furniture had its reminiscence. She is now dusting the old high-backed arm-chair Capt. Adams was wont to sit in as he read the Army and Navy Gazette. It is in its old place, opposite the fire; and there, too, is her own low seat, close by it. She sat down in the latter, resting her head on the arm of the larger one, and

closing her eyes, she could almost imagine she felt her father's hand smoothing down her hair while he read. Alas! it had become streaked with grey since that loving hand had gently caressed it. After a little, with a sigh she resumed her work, to pause again as her eyes rested on the portrait of her dead husband.

This room, now the common sitting-room of her boarders, was to her in those hours when she was alone, a shrine holy in its memories. As she stood there, the contrast of the handsome, youthful face, looking down at her from the canvas, and her own pale, worn one seemed to strike her, for she turned and looked into a pier-glass on the opposite wall; then again at the portrait. "You loved me, Frank," she murmured, "when my face was fresh and fair, and you would love me still, darling, in the change. In heaven, my beloved, there is no change."

She gave a little start as the door suddenly opened, and then smiled as she saw who it was that entered—a tall, broad-shouldered, handsome young fellow, with large blue eyes, short, crisp, curling hair, and a well-shaped head. In features he resembled the portrait hanging from the wall, but the expression of each face was altogether different. The calm, refined look which the limner had given to the face on the canvas was wanting in the other, and in its place a rollicking, "devil-may-care," western look, pleasant enough to look at when lighted up with good humor, but growing dark and dangerous in fits of passion.

"You frightened me, Harry," said Mrs. Melville. "I thought you had gone down town."

"So I had, mother, but I met Fred Browne and some of the other boys, and they have made up a party to go out shooting ducks this afternoon, and camp out if it is too late to return home. They will have lots of fun, and were coming up for me. May I go with them, mother?"

"You scarcely ask my leave, Harry, lately," replied his mother. "I don't want you to go with those wild boys, and perhaps meet with an accident."

"Oh, pshaw!" he said.

"Mrs. Browne is telling everywhere that you are ruining her son Fred."

"The old rhinoceros," broke in Harry; "browsing around and sticking her nose into every one's affairs."

"I believe it is the other way," continued Mrs. Melville. "Fred Browne's father is a rich man and can afford to have his son idle if he

likes; but, oh, my child, what will become of you if you do not learn to do something for yourself?"

The good humored expression which it wore when he entered, left Harry's face. "I did not think," he said, glumly, "that it was any great harm to go out for a day's hunting; and the boys are all clubbing together, so that it will only cost a couple of dollars apiece; but I don't want the money now—don't want to go." And he left the room whistling.

The widow sat down on a sofa, and placing her hands before her face, wept. Presently Harry returned, saying, "I believe I left my cap here;" then in a moment he was by his mother's side, his arm around her waist.

"Mother, dear mother," he said, "what is the matter? Oh, what a brute I was to fret you. I was disappointed and vexed for a moment, that's all. But I don't want to go, and will try to do better, mother, if you forgive me." Then his fresh, red lips were pressed to hers, and he held her in his strong, young arms until she grew calm and courageous.

"I have been nervous and worried dear," she said as she fondled his hand, "and Mr. Sharpe was downright rude to me this morning and—"

"The white-faced whelp," broke in Harry, "he had better look out;" and the handsome face grew dark.

"Oh Harry, you frighten me. We cannot quarrel with those we are dependent on; but I was going to say that perhaps I took a wrong time to speak to you, but indeed, Harry, it was for your good."

"I know it mother, you have spoiled your boy, but I will strike on some settled plan (he was great for planning in his repentant moods) that will enable me to help you.

She had heard some such promise many a time, always with fresh hope. Kissing the young fellow's cheek, she resumed her work, going up stairs presently and leaving him sitting on the sofa, a plan just developing in his mind, when unfortunately it was all knocked of a heap by the recurring thought of the proposed hunt.

"It is too bad, thought he, that I can't go, its that Sharpe that has put mother so about this morning. I'll kick that fellow some of these days." Then he drove his hands into his pockets, stretched out his legs and fell into a gloomy sulk.

"Poor fellow," mused Mrs. Melville, as she moved from room to room. "I am half inclined not to disappoint him this time, though I know it is wrong, very wrong, and weak in me; two dollars he said it would cost him. Let me see," and she opened her thinly-lined

pocket book, "I have four dollars for the milkman, I suppose it will do to pay him next Saturday." She counted the four dollars two or three times over hesitatingly, then replacing two dollars in the pocket book, she hurried down stairs. This woman who had grown prematurely grey in life's battle was still a child in her warm impulses. She found Harry sitting where she had left him, in gloomy reverie.

"When did you say, Harry, that hunting party was going out?" she asked.

"At noon," he answered.

"And when will they return?"

"Perhaps to-night, but Fred Browne is bringing out his tent and buffalo robes in the wagon, and if it is too late to come back, they will camp out until morning."

"Well, Harry, here are the two dollars, and you may go this time." The boy's face brightened and flushed.

"Oh, no, mother," he said, "you can't afford it. Don't mind it,—I can stay at home."

It was but a poor attempt at refusal on his part, and when his mother again offered him the money, he eagerly took it, and, with his face all aglow with pleasure, caught her in his arms. "You are the dearest mother in the world," he said, as he kissed her. "I'll go this once, but mind, mother, I'm going to turn over a new leaf, and work for you; see if I don't."

He was soon out of the house and passing down the street with a quick step, waving his hand cheerfully back to the pallid-faced woman, who watched him from the door.



CHAPTER VI.



TIME—the afternoon of a hazy Indian-summer day; the scene—a hillside but a short walk from the town of Fair Oaks; an old man sitting on a fallen tree, playing a flute, a small scarlet cloak thrown at his feet; and a little girl lower down the hill, busy gathering autumn leaves from the scattered trees and underbrush around.

Presently the girl, with her apron full of leaves, came climbing the hill, and as she drew near, the old man ceased playing. The anxious, watching expression his face assumed, and the way he turned his head to listen, would tell one that he was blind, although his eyes were open and but little disfigured.

“Oh, grandfather!” exclaimed the child, as, panting and all aglow from exercise, she sat down beside him. “I have such a beautiful lot. I wish—” and then she stopped.

“That I could see them,” he said, with a sad smile; “but tell me all about them, and grandfather will see them through his little girl’s eyes.”

“Oh, they are like everything. The whole hillside has changed since we were here last, and it is just downright beautiful.”

And so it was: with a beauty beyond the gardener’s genius, yet so common on every wayside when the leaves are rustling over the grave of summer, that we pass on our way, scarce giving such scenes a glance.

The short, well-cropped grass was still green, thickly studded with oak brush, that shone like burnished copper, light and dark, as the sun’s rays and the shadows fell upon it.

Amid this gorgeous setting was the glowing scarlet sumach, the russet oak, the graceful maple—with its delicate shaded leaves of green, pink and gold, the countless hues and dyes of autumn’s glory. All this, with a background of dark pine, a rapid river in front, chafing against the grey rocks that stood in its shallow bed and hiding amid the green willows that grew along its banks.

“Like everything,” said the old man, with a chuckling laugh, “what an answer!”

“Yes, like everything,” repeated the little maiden, playfully tap-

ping the back of his hand; "because every color in the world I have here in my apron at the present moment. So, grandfather, just play a little more while I sort these leaves and take what I want of them to bring home."

They made a pretty picture that autumn afternoon on the hillside. The blind man, with his sad, patient face, absorbed in his own music; the child, with her plump sun-burnt hands, deftly selecting leaves from the pile she had gathered, and now and then keeping time with her tiny foot to the air played.

She quickly got through her task, but the musician still played on; and, with her hands dropped in her lap and her eyes turned to the countenance of her grandfather, she listened in silence.

As she did so, whether from the effect of the music or love and pity for the blind man, or a blending of both, her face—laughing and joyous a moment before—assumed a grave, spiritual look.

With no home companions but this old man and a middle-aged aunt, there was, in her every-day life, much to foster the imaginative and the practical.

The constant companion of her grandfather in his walks, when the weather permitted, sitting beside him when he rested, as to-day, and played some grand symphony of Mozart's, the solemn music of Haydn, or the inspiring patriotic national airs of Himmel; listening to some old weird legend that the music brought to his recollection, heard by the camp fire in those distant days when he was a soldier of the Rhine. The child's nature drank in the beautiful and romantic; brought up by a careful, thrifty aunt familiar with the struggles and self-denial of honest, independent poverty, taking an active part in the household duties of their humble home, she had—child as she was—learned the necessity of labor, the value of industry.

When the blind man ceased playing, the girl said:

"Grandfather, listen! the birds have joined you in a grand chorus to-day."

"No, no, they are only mocking my poor music. Have you got through your work?"

"Yes," she answered, rising up and shaking the broken leaves and dust from her apron. "I have selected all I want."

"Then we had better be going home," he said, as he disjoined his flute. "The sun is getting round to the west, is it not?"

"Yes, and it is making the old pines not to look half as glum and dark as they did."

"Well, give me your hand, Mina, and we will set off for home. Aunt would scold us if we kept her waiting supper."

"Oh, grandfather, you know aunt never scolds you!"

The old man laughed. "She only scolds Mina," he said,

"Not much," she answered. "I can stand all the scolding Aunt gives me; it does me good."

"Just so," he answered. "Well, then, the good aunt who makes my little girl good, we must not displease by keeping her waiting supper for us; so come along."

He had risen from his seat, and now stood with his face turned in the direction of the town, his hand slightly stretched toward his grand-child.

"Wait for a moment," she said. Untying her apron, she wrapped it round the leaves; then donning her scarlet cloak, she placed the bundle beneath it and gave her disengaged hand to her grandfather.

Hand-in-hand they passed down the hill, into the suburbs of the town, and on to their home, receiving friendly greetings as they passed along, and Mina—a great favorite in Fairoaks—many a pleasant smile.

When they reached their house, the door was opened by a woman whose age a stranger would guess to be over forty years, although in reality she was not more than thirty-four or five. Hard work, not time, had added the other years. Her figure was angular and spare; her face, with strongly marked features, only redeemed from downright homeliness by two honest, grey eyes.

"I hope you had a pleasant walk, father," she said, taking the old man's hat and cane and leading him in to their family sitting-room.

Her voice was sweet and low. God had not given beauty to her person, but to her voice, and so fitted her for her work. She was beautiful to her blind father through her voice.

The room they entered was but plainly furnished, but exquisitely neat. Some German prints and landscapes ornamented the walls. A portion of the room seemed devoted to feminine work, as one might judge by a sewing machine and several unfinished dresses around; but this work-shop stood in an alcove, and did not interfere with the tidy look of the room. A small table stood in a corner, on which was a violin case; also a flute case, now empty, and over the table hung a cage with a canary, giving forth his most joyous notes.

An arm-chair was placed a little distance from the stove, in which there was some fire, for the evenings were apt to get chilly, and the table, on which was a snow-white cloth, was set for supper.

"Here, Wilhelmina," said the blind man, when his daughter had placed him in the arm-chair, "take this flute and put in its place; it idles myself and Mina, and keeps us out too long."

“And grandfather said that you would scold us, aunt,” said Mina, looking over her shoulder with a saucy smile from where she was busy placing some of the gathered leaves in small vases.

“And grandfather will be right if you do not leave those leaves for some other time and help me to get supper. Come, Mina.”

When the two were in the little kitchen, Wilhelmina Tapfer continued: “Mina, you must attend to getting the supper, while I finish the dress I have in hand; and, look, little one, here is a mutton-chop, just enough for father; you and I are not to touch it, but to make believe, if we find him questioning us, as he sometimes does.”

“Oh, I will ask you to help me two or three times,” said Mina, laughing.

And now—while Mina is getting supper ready, her aunt busy sewing, and the old man thinking in his arm-chair—is a good time to tell what I know about the family: not very much, to be sure, but what I do know is good.

Theodore Tapfer was a musician in the Austrian service when his eyes grew weak and he was allowed to retire on a small pension. Coming to America with two daughters—his wife being dead—he sought employment by giving lessons in music. This brought him a competency, while he could attend to it, but shortly after his oldest daughter's marriage he became completely blind. There is an old saying that “misfortunes never come alone.” It was so in the case of Theodore Tapfer. His daughter had been married a little over two years, when she and her husband, Brune Mannlich, died within two weeks of each other, and their orphan child was added to the blind man's household.

It was now that Wilhelmina Tapfer, at the age of twenty, putting aside those dreams of love and marriage which come to all young girls, bravely set about her life's work.

She had been for some time before learning dress-making, but it was impossible for her now to go to the establishment she worked at, so she solicited work to make up at home.

Through sympathy first, she got employment as much as she could do, with the care of a blind father and a baby just beginning to toddle around, but by the time the little one could partially care of herself and even be trusted to take her grandfather for short walks in the neighborhood of their home, her aunt had by industry, punctuality and moderate charges, secured steady employment, so that her earnings, added to her father's small pension, enabled them to live in humble independence.

But it was constant work for the brave woman. The blind man

could not see the weary face that often drooped over the task the tired hands were busy with; he could only hear the sweet, pleasant voice, and he was content.

Sometimes Wilhelmina Tapfer, when retiring for the night, worn out and nervous, after a hard day's work, thought with a sudden dread, "what if I should break down, get sick, or die?"

At such times she would kneel by her bedside and pray to her Heavenly Father for health and strength, not for herself but for those He had given into her charge, then with little Mina nestling in her arms, her weary eyes would close in a deep, dreamless sleep, to open refreshed at morning's light for the battle and the victory.

It was not likely that a woman so faithful to duty, would neglect the education of her orphan niece. Mina was sent to school when she was of a proper age, the only break upon her regular attendance being, when she staid at home on pleasant afternoons to take a walk with her grandfather.

After school hours she helped her aunt in the house, or went on errands, indeed of late she did much of the household trading, and did it well.

People liked to trade with little "Red Ridinghood," the name which the color of her cloak had procured for her; liked to see her bright young face over the counter, and to note with amused interest the business air the little maiden assumed. The gravity of the grey eyes, and how the firm, well-rounded little chin corrected any lightness on the part of the pouting red lips.

Mina was now taken from school and was learning dress-making from her aunt, who, with the old dread returning, from time to time, that sickness or death might incapacitate her from being able to support her father, was anxious to fit Mina for the duty as soon as possible.

Theodore Tapfer was a greatly afflicted man in one sense, but greatly blest in another,—he had a good, loving daughter.

Perhaps in no period of his life had he enjoyed more repose of mind than now when he was so helpless to provide for himself.

It might have been otherwise had he known the incessant work, the long apprenticeship to toil, with never a holiday coming in, by which Wilhelmina was able to give him a home, but the hardship and the drudgery were carefully concealed from him.

He could not see the spare figure, that work had robbed of every line of beauty, the face grown aged and homely before its time; he only heard the sweet, cheerful voice, and with a loving fiction she had made the blind man believe that his small pension, which would not

have supported them for two months, was the great stay of their little establishment.

During the long winter evenings Theodore Tapfer played his violin in the cosy parlor, and when the birds came back and sang in the woods, he joined their choir with his soft-toned flute.

Thus tranquilly the blind man journeyed on through the darkness, in the evening of life—on towards the light and the morning!

CHAPTER VII.

IT was a dreary, wintry afternoon that Harry Melville was getting home from his hunt. There had been in the morning a slight fall of snow. The weather had taken one of those sudden changes that come in the fall to remind us that winter is at hand, after which we generally have, in the West, a long spell of fine weather.

The young fellow was out of humor. The look his mother wore the morning he left her, the nervous tremor in her voice when she bade him good-bye, came to his recollection and would not leave him during the whole hunt.

He had gone through many such scenes; had frequently fretted his mother, had idled his time, had gone about amusing himself time after time when he should have been helping her, had teased and coaxed her for money when he knew she had none to spare; he had done all this many a time without thinking much of the matter after he had once joined Fred Browne or any other of his companions.

He was subject to spells of remorse, it is true, and resolves to do better, in which loomed up gigantic plans for making a fortune, and having his mother, whom the wayward fellow loved most dearly, to out-shine Mrs. Browne in grand equipage and costly dress; but such spells were of short duration, and never bothered him when he was actively engaged in mischief or sport; but all through his last hunt, in the midst of young and joyous companions, his thoughts were such as to take away all zest for the sport he was engaged in. For the first time in his life he saw himself pretty much as others saw him, and he frowned at the picture.

To some natures the knowledge that they have passed from boyhood

to manhood comes like a sudden revelation. Some such feeling was in Harry Melville's mind as he walked down the street on his way to his home, and gave to his face a thoughtful look.

Presently there came tripping toward him a little figure in a scarlet cloak, the hood up and tied under the round chin, giving to the young face a cozy, bewitching look. It was Mina, on her way down town, to do some errands for her aunt. On her arm was a basket,—none of your make-believe baskets, but a basket made to hold things,—a housewife's basket, in which tea and sugar, spices and candles, and many other domestic necessaries could be packed away and no one the wiser, when the lid was shut down, as to what was inside.

It was sly fun to Wilson, the grocer, as he packed this basket, to note the grave, business face of the little maiden, as, with pencil in hand, she checked and priced the things put in, and the careful way she examined the change he gave her, before putting it away, for her aunt.

Wilhelmina Tapfer did not run any book account; what she could not pay for she did without. Although she had not, very likely, ever heard of the witty Dean of St. Paul, she agreed in his view "that ready money is a great check on the imagination."

When Harry Melville saw who it was that was coming toward him, his face lighted up, and the old rollicking air came back to him.

"Little Red Ridinghood, I'm delighted to see you!" planting himself right in the path before her. "Your presence, or your cloak, or both together, take the chill out of this horrid day."

Mina looked up into his handsome face, not with a displeased look; then she said, "Let me pass, Harry, I am in a hurry to do a message for aunt. You have been out hunting, I see," noticing the gun on his shoulder.

"Yes," he replied, "and had no fun. I wish I had stayed at home."

"You ought to have stayed at home," she said, in a very decided manner. "If I was a big fellow like you I would be ashamed to be going round amusing myself, and have my mother picking up chips in the yard on so wet a day as this."

Harry's face flushed up to the roots of his hair.

"You are in one of your lecturing moods, little woman," he said.

"Well, that's the work I found her at when I called at the house a few minutes ago, with a message from aunt. I stayed a little while to help her, for the girl was too busy inside to do it; and that is why I am in a hurry now. The green wood that was split would not light; then the stoves were smoking, and your poor mother had to stand all the ill humor of the boarders.

"But I told a man to come to saw and split the load of dry wood in the yard."

"Well, I suppose he went off hunting, like other people. Those awful boarders made your poor mother cry: I am sure of it, though she said it was the smoke that made her eyes red. I'll never, never, keep a boarding house."

There was something so comical in the determined look that came to her baby face as she said this, that Harry, despite his chagrin, laughed outright.

She answered his laugh with a pleasant smile, perhaps to make amends for the hard things she had been saying; and, giving him a friendly nod, passed on.

Harry Melville stood looking after her as she tripped down the street. He and Mina had gone to school together, their homes were near each other; he had hauled her on his sled many a winter morning to school when she was quite a child and he a sturdy little boy. They had their quarrels and making up like older lovers, and as Harry was the handsomest boy in school, Mina Mannlich was envied by many young ladies of the mature ages of nine and ten.

A very friendly intimacy existed between Widow Melville and Wilhelmina Tapfer.

In her troubles and vexations Mrs. Melville would seek the advice of her neighbor, the weaker nature seeking support from the stronger.

Sometimes, too, Harry would be sent over by his mother to ask Theodore Tapfer out for a walk.

The wild but warm-hearted boy always did this cheerfully, though on such occasions he was very apt to receive a mild lecture from the blind man, which he bore good-humoredly, but unfortunately never remembered.

"Well," thought Harry, as, with head bent, he made rapid strides for home, "what a mean, good-for-nothing fellow Mina thinks I am, and I suppose she is not far wrong."

When he reached home he found things pretty much as Mina had stated. The smile his mother gave him when he entered was sad; the lips that pressed his young, warm lips were cold, and, whether from weeping or not, her eyes were red.

"What's the matter, mother?" asked Harry. "I met Mina Mannlich on the street, and she flew at me like a little wild cat."

"Dear little Mina!" said Mrs. Melville. "We could not get the green wood to burn, Harry, and—"

"But I engaged a man to come and cut the dry wood before I left," broke in Harry.

"He did not come, dear," replied Mrs. Melville, "and everything has been going wrong on account of this sudden change in the weather, and Mr. Sharpe—"

"Sharpe again!" said Harry, setting his teeth.

"Oh, well, dear; all the boarders have been complaining, and we cannot blame them, for the sitting room was terribly cold and both breakfast and dinner were late. Bessie was busy in the kitchen and Mina found me in the yard picking up a few chips to help to make the green wood burn, in a minute she had her cloak off and a whole basket full of chips gathered and set by the stove in no time. Have you had your dinner, dear?"

"We had some lunch on our way in," replied Harry.

"Well, I'll get you something now, Harry."

"I'm not hungry mother," he said, and then without further waiting, he passed out to the yard, took off his coat and went to work at the wood pile.

From time to time, his mother came to the door to talk with him and tell him not to work so hard, but the kinder she spoke the harder Harry worked, and by the time the shades of evening were gathering he had quite a pile of good dry wood cut and split.

Then he returned to the house and went to the room his mother had reserved for herself, where he ate some supper.

After this, at his mother's request, he went to the parlor and endeavored to brighten up the fire in the stove, but even with dry wood this was a partial failure, for the chimney needed cleaning and did not draw well.

Giving up the task, Harry sat by the window and was partly concealed from view by the curtain which hung down.

By and by, the boarders came dropping in; they were out of humor from their experience in the morning, and finding a poor fire before them now, they vented their ill humor in sarcastic remarks not at all complimentary to boarding houses and landladies in general.

Two young gentlemen who were particularly indignant, "had method in their madness," for they saw a good excuse for leaving their present quarters without paying their bills, and "going to pastures new."

Hearing their voices, the poor little widow hurried into the room to make all the apologies possible, and to endeavor for the twentieth time to make the fire burn, but her presence only made her boarders change their tactics and give, in stage whispers for her benefit, their opinion of the whole "shebang," as Mr. Sharpe elegantly expressed it.

One would suppose that the timid, anxious little woman so ner-

vously endeavoring to excuse herself would have disarmed the flippant insolence of even the *habitués* of a boarding house, but in this instance it was not so; and Mrs. Melville with a weary sigh left the room to bring in lights, for it was now getting quite dark.

Harry, tired of his hunting trip, had fallen into a doze at the window, but was awakened by the loud, metallic laugh of Mr. Sharpe, who was enjoying his own wit.

Miss Snap, too, in her attic *boudoir*, heard the grating sound, and hurrying down stairs, entered the room with a large shawl tightly drawn over her shoulders, and, with a little shiver, advanced to the stove. Touching it with the tips of her fingers, she said, "Oh!" and then, with another shiver, looked around for sympathy.

"Oh, for a fire," said Mr. Sharpe, with another laugh.

"I knew you were saying something funny down here," said Miss Snap, "as I heard you laughing."

It was necessary for Mr. Sharpe to laugh when he said funny things, else no one would ever know that he had done so.

"I really do not know what is coming over Mrs. Melville," said Miss Snap, "that she can't attend to her own business."

"Whisky," replied Sharpe, "that's what's the matter; I am sure the Melville drinks."

These words were hardly spoken when Harry Melville, leaping from behind the curtain, struck Sharpe a square blow right between the eyes. He went down without a stagger, and striking, as he fell, his head against the corner of the stove, he lay senseless and immovable on the floor, Harry standing defiantly over him.

"You have killed him," said one of the young men, hurrying forward.

Harry turned fiercely on him. "Do you want to take his part?" he asked. "No," replied the other, kneeling down and lifting the senseless form, "one murder, I think, should satisfy you."

Murder! the word struck a chill to the boy's heart, and his face grew white; still he stood defiant, with his hands clenched, and glared round at the others.

In a moment all was confusion. The screams of Miss Snap, who threw herself on a lounge, and in her agony kicked a deaf old lady off it, brought the entire household into the room.

"I loved him, I loved him," screamed Miss Snap, kicking wildly about her. "I am not ashamed to tell it, now that he is gone, and there stands his murderer."

At that moment Mrs. Melville entered the room. A glance at the still unconscious form of Sharpe, who was supported in the arms of

his friends, the blood flowing freely from a deep gash on his head, and one look at Harry, who still stood where he had given the blow—his hands still clenched—shaking with excitement, and the horror that was creeping over him as he thought Sharpe was killed, told the whole truth to the poor mother.

“Oh, Harry! Harry! what have you done?” she exclaimed.

“He abused you, mother,—said you drank,” he hoarsely muttered, “but I only struck him with my hand.”

Then fearing that he might show the fear that was fast mastering him, he left the room to await results, with a palpitating heart.

It is very strange how strong and calm a timid woman, whom a mouse might frighten, may grow in the presence of actual danger, or sudden calamity. The only one in that room who seemed to have any presence of mind, or know what to do, was Mrs. Melville.

“Go, Mr. Simons,” she said to one of the boarders, “go at once, pray, for Dr. Pembroke; if he is not at home, get Dr. Moss,—go at once. Here, carry him into this room, and Bessy [to the servant] get some water and some pieces of linen; you will find them in the upper drawer of my wardrobe. Oh, thank God, he is opening his eyes! There, carry him gently, and lay him on the bed.”

And so Sharpe was borne away, all the other boarders crowding into the room to which he was brought, Miss Snap bringing up the rear and confiding several little theatrical sobs to her handkerchief.

Mr. Simons found Dr. Pembroke just returned home, his buggy at the door.

Without much delay the doctor got into it. “You will come with me?” he said to Simons.

“No, doctor, I have another place to call at, but I will follow you immediately.”

The truth was that Mr. Simons was determined to hunt up a constable and inform him that Harry Melville had killed a man and was trying to escape; in fact Simons derived much more satisfaction in going for the constable, than for the doctor.

Constable Tom Roache whom he met a minute or two after he left the doctor, was a very stupid, lazy, good-natured man, with a sluggish vanity—fed by the awe in which he was held by little boys—in being an officer of the law and a most exalted idea of the scope and importance of his duties.

He loved to use before an admiring crowd, some of those Latin phrases common in law, which he had picked up and committed to memory, and as he had no idea of their meaning, his application of them at times was ludicrous in the extreme.

He listened to Simons in gloomy silence, as the latter told him his story and requested his presence at No. 48, where the murder had just been committed, then knocking the ashes out of his pipe and putting the pipe in his pocket, he told Simons he was ready for duty and proceeded with him to the house. On arriving at No. 48 Mr. Simons went in at the front door and the constable entered at the rear.

Here he found Harry Melville sitting alone in the kitchen, watching to catch every sound in the front part of the house.

The boy's face if possible, grew paler as he saw who it was that entered.

"Have you come to arrest me?" he exclaimed, jumping up.

"I have no warrant against you, Harry," replied Roache, "and the coronor has not yet sot on the corpus, but if that little ferret Simons tells the truth, I suppose I must keep my eye on you."

Harry bent his head and covered his face with his hands as Tom Roache, rekindling his pipe, contemplated him with compassionate solemnity.

Next to the law, this lazy giant admired physical strength and courage, and the muscular, spirited boy was a favorite of his, notwithstanding the many official reproofs and warnings he had found it necessary to give.

"I never saw Harry Melville do anything mean," he would remark, "and he'll pitch into a fellow twice his size or age, and whip him, too."

Harry Melville and Roache had sat opposite each other in silence only a short time when the inner room door opened and Dr. Pembroke, Mrs. Melville and the servant entered the kitchen.

Harry jumped up, and, catching the doctor's hand, said: "Oh, doctor! how is he?"

"He will not die this time, Harry," replied the doctor, "though the stove has given him a bad cut."

"Is he out of danger—all danger—do you think, doctor?" queried Mrs. Melville, the nervous strength called forth for a little while fast giving way to tear-dimmed eyes and trembling lips.

"I can't say that, ma'am," replied Dr. Pembroke. "Miss Snap is with him, and I know nothing about the strength of his constitution; but if he dies now I will be willing to swear in any court in Christendom that he died of too much Snap. She would kill me in a very short time, I know, if I was at her mercy."

A deep, chuckling laugh, and Dr. Pembroke turned round.

"Halloa, Tom Roache," he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

"That little Simons called me in, doctor."

"He did, eh?" said the doctor, dryly. "Now, Harry, tell me how all this came about. I know I will get the exact truth from you."

Then Harry told him how he was dozing asleep at the window, when the laughter and voices awoke him to hear Sharpe say, in reply to some remark of Miss Snap's, "Whisky, that's what's the matter. I am sure the Melville drinks." "Then I jumped up," continued Harry, "and knocked him down."

"Quite right," said Dr. Pembroke. "I think I would be inclined to knock you down if you had not done so."

"I know that I have not been a good boy—not worked for mother as I should have done; but I could not stand by and hear her abused by that scamp Sharpe." Harry's courage came back to him when he found that he had not killed his man. "I knew it was coming to this. I knew I would have to give a black eye to some of those mean, cowardly scamps who are always sneering and tormenting mother."

Another deep chuckle of mirth from Tom Roache. "I don't see that I have any business here, doctor," he said, addressing Dr. Pembroke.

"I don't think you have, Tom," replied the other. "But wait for a minute and I will bring you down town in my buggy."

Writing out a prescription he handed it to Mrs. Melville, saying, "Send Harry to get this made up. Cut my head and put a plaster on it—you know, Harry."

"You need not be in the least alarmed, Mrs. Melville. Mr. Sharpe will perhaps have a headache for a day or two, and it serves him right. I will call in the morning: good night. Come, Tom. Good night again.

As the doctor neared his home he said, somewhat suddenly—

"That boy must leave this town."

Tom Roache turned square round and looked full at the doctor. Was it possible that the majesty of the law was fooled, bamboozled in the person of its officer Tom Roache, that he had been laughed out of his duty—kidnapped into a buggy to give a criminal an opportunity to escape?

"Doctor," he thundered out, "have you deceived me? Is it a case of *felo de se* after all?"

The doctor laughed so heartily that he was wiping his eyes as he answered—

"Tom! Oh, no; it is not. Tom Roache, you'll be the death of me. A case of *felo de se*? Oh no, Tom; nothing like it; a common assault!"

"And battery?" added Tom.

"And battery," repeated the doctor, again laughing. "But I think, Tom, that the stove should be made answerable for the battery. What I mean is that Harry will not do any good until he gets out of Fair-oaks; he is spoiled here,"

"Now you are saying nothing but the truth, doctor," said his companion, "and you'll excuse me if I mistook your meaning. Let me down at the next corner, doctor; it is the nearest to my house. Good night, and I'm much obliged to you for the ride."

"Good night, Tom," answered the doctor, driving off; but more than once before reaching his home his jovial laugh was renewed.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOCTOR PEMBROKE, on calling at No. 48 the next morning, found his patient much recovered, but sulky and evidently somewhat ashamed of himself.

"I want to get out of this to-morrow, if I can," he said to the doctor, after the latter had dressed the wound in his head.

"There is nothing to prevent you from going to-day," replied the doctor, "so far as your health is concerned. But had you not better wait for a few days, to let the discoloration get away from your eyes? Is Mrs. Melville attentive to you?"

"Well, yes," and I don't blame the young fellow for doing what he did; I blame myself. I said what I knew was false, and the boy was right to take his mother's part. There now, doctor. I know you are a great friend of this family; have I said enough?"

The doctor shook his hand warmly.

"You have spoken like a man, Mr. Sharpe," he said, "like a gentleman, and I admire you for doing so."

"You must see, doctor, how disagreeable it would be for me to remain in this house; and at all events I made arrangements yesterday, before this happened, to move when my week was out. So this evening I will go to my new boarding house."

"Well, perhaps it is as well you should do so," replied the doctor.

When Doctor Pembroke left Mr. Sharpe he passed directly to Mrs. Melville's private apartment, where he found Harry Melville waiting for him. The widow had gone out, to return within a short time.

Harry Melville was dressed in his best suit; he looked handsome as ever, but the usual bright, boyish expression of his countenance

seemed to have given place to a thoughtful one. Within a few hours his face had acquired character.

"Doctor," he said, "I want to speak to you for a little while; you were always my friend, and I wish to ask your advice. But, first, how is Sharpe?"

"Oh, he is all right," replied the doctor, sitting down.

"Doctor don't you think it would be better for me to leave this town and go to some other place to try and get some business or employment?"

"I do Harry, and I intended to speak to your mother about it this very day. I candidly tell you I don't think you will do much good here, old associations and habits will be too much for you; pushing you back every time you take a step forward. But have you any idea of where you would wish to go, or what business you would like to engage in?"

"Not much, doctor."

"Well, now, I've been studying the matter ever since last night, Harry. I have an old friend in New York, a broker who knows every one. He can get you employment in some house until you look round and fix upon something permanent."

"It would cost too much, doctor, to go to New York."

"Not much; I would not make the proposal but that I expect you will allow me to lend you the money for your fare. I have been vexed with you Harry, very vexed, but I never lost faith in you, because you always tell the truth and do nothing sneaky or mean. I always said you would turn right side up yet, and so you will if we can get your poor mother to consent to part with you."

The poor mother did give her consent, albeit it nearly broke her heart to do so, but it was for her boy's good, that was enough. What matter about her suffering, her loneliness, her listening for the young step that made such music in her heart. Oh, she must not think of herself at all. So she gently moved about, making preparations for her child's journey, packing his little trunk with her own hands and dropping sprigs of lavender and tears between the folds of his clothes.

Mina Mannlich found her thus engaged.

"I have brought," said Mina, "this bunch of autumn leaves, as a keepsake for Harry. Will you put it in the trunk, Mrs. Melville?"

"Place it there yourself, my love," replied the widow.

And the little maiden, kneeling, stooped over, and carefully laid away her little present.

When she arose Mrs. Melville saw that her eyes were overflowing with tears and clasping her to her bosom, the sorrowing mother and child sweetheart wept in each others arms.

CHAPTER IX.



THE day that Harry Melville left his home for the first time, Wilhelmina Tapfer spent a large portion of it with his mother; not idly, for she had brought over her sewing with her, and as she stitched away, her sensible, cheering conversation did much to comfort her poor friend.

Mina, too, had been much engaged out of doors this same day, delivering work sent home by her aunt, so that the blind man was left more alone than usual.

Very unfortunately Mrs. Browne had set apart this day for paying some "charitable visitation," as she termed it, and prying into her poor neighbors' affairs in general; and still more unfortunate was it that Theodore Tapfer's house lay on the line of her rounds. When she rang the bell, the door was opened by the blind man.

"How do you do, Mr. Tapfer?"

The blind man at once recognized her voice.

"Wilhelmina is from home, Mrs. Browne, and so is Mina. I am alone in the house."

He held the door, expecting her to go, but she answered:

"It is yourself I wish to see, Mr. Tapfer; therefore I will go in."

He moved aside, and then followed her into the combined sitting-room and workshop of his home. Groping with his outstretched hand, he said, politely, "Pardon me, madam, if I ask you to sit down without handing you a chair. You see I am slow at finding one."

"Why, Mr. Tapfer, I am sitting," replied Mrs. Browne, with a careless laugh.

A slight color came into the old man's face, as, without making any reply, he moved across the room to where his own chair stood, and sitting in it, he turned his face toward his visitor, and waited for her to speak.

"Mr. Tapfer," said Mrs. Browne, "I am very glad to find you alone. Where is your daughter? I have been planning for her good and yours, and I could not rest until I came to tell you my idea."

"Wilhelmina is at Mrs. Melville's. Poor woman, she is taking Harry's going away sorely to heart."

"Yes, I hear her son is gone: the town has a good riddance of him."

Theodore Tapfer flashed indignantly. "You don't know that boy, Mrs. Browne," he said. "He has a noble heart, and will turn out well yet."

"Well, Mr. Tapfer, we will not discuss him now. Your daughter, you say, is at Mrs. Melville's?"

"Yes, she brought her sewing over with her. Wilhelmina does not sit long idle."

"I should say not," emphasized Mrs. Browne. "That is the very point I have come to speak with you on. I deem it my duty to tell you what I think is *your* duty in this matter."

Theodore Tapfer sat silent and wondering.

"Do you know, Mr. Tapfer," continued Mrs. Browne, "what a slave to work your daughter is?"

The old man sat erect, his hands grasping the arms of the chair as if about to start to his feet.

"I know," he said, "that Wilhelmina is industrious; so was her mother before her, and so are all German folks. But—slave—what do you mean, woman?"

Mrs. Browne's manner became at once fearfully subdued. "I beg your pardon, sir," she said, "if I have annoyed you. In the performance of one's duty one has often to bear insult. I am accustomed to it, Mr. Tapfer; I don't shrink from it; I court it."

"I have not insulted you, madam," replied the tortured man. But let me know what you mean? What is your business with me? What plan is this you talk of for our good? What interest have you in us? Why should you meddle with us? Have we asked anything of you?" He spoke rapidly, excitedly, which had the effect of making Mrs. Browne angelically mild and cool.

"My interest in you and your family, Mr. Tapfer," she replied, "is that of a Christian woman who has duties to perform toward her fellow creatures. No matter how different our positions may be, Mr. Tapfer, I recognize you, I assure you, as a fellow creature."

The blind man stirred restlessly. "Oh, if Wilhelmina would but come in."

"It is my conviction that your daughter is killing herself with overwork," continued Mrs. Browne. "You can't see it because you are blind; but she is worn out, looks ten years older than she is. How can it be otherwise when she has to support you all, quite in comfort too, I am told, with one woman's labor."

The blind man had fallen back in his chair, the lids of his sightless eyes moving rapidly, his attitude was that of one fearing a blow without any means of defense. "There is my pension," he said.

"A few dollars," she replied.

"Wilhelmina says it goes a far way."

"That is one of the ways she has of deceiving you; and you and that grandchild of yours go picking flowers and enjoying yourselves in idleness all day while your daughter slaves for you all. In the name of womanhood, I object to this."

The old man had changed his position, his figure was now bent forward, his head bowed, his sightless eyes turned to the floor.

"What would you have me do?" he asked in a subdued voice.

Mrs. Browne took a mental canter to refresh herself. This was really becoming a very interesting case—one she would draw up a report of for the next annual meeting of the Woman's Rights Association. The canter over she returned to the post of duty.

"Now, Mr. Tapfer," she replied, "I believe you are coming to take a right view of this matter, and to understand my motives. You ask me what I would have you do. You mean, I suppose, what could you do to assist?"

Tapfer nodded.

"You are a musician?"

"Ah, yes; but I cannot teach now," putting his hand nervously to his eyes.

"But you can play?"

"Old pieces for myself alone, they are my happiness."

"Why not advertize to play at balls and parties? Your misfortune would create great sympathy in this community, so given to frivolous amusements, and you would make plenty of money."

A hectic spot came on each side of the old man's face.

"I never played for dancing," he said, "ah, I know no music fit for it."

"But I suppose you would quickly learn by ear, if you had some one to play the airs for you?"

"Ah, yes, very true; I will think over it. I thank you, madam. I have been, I fear, forgetful, selfish; my poor, good Wilhelmina."

The old man had risen from his chair and was now groping about the room, seemingly objectless, taking up things his hands touched and laying them down again.

Mrs. Browne rose to go. She had performed her duty, and she trusted, quickened Tapfer's sense of duty effectually.

"I wish you good day, Mr. Tapfer," she said, in her blandest voice, "and I hope you will think well of the suggestion I found it my duty to make to you. Don't stir, it is unnecessary."

He had made a move toward the hall, but Mrs. Browne had the door open and was outside and gone before he left the room.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Wilhelmina Tapfer returned from Mrs. Melville's to prepare the family supper she remarked, as she bustled about, how silent and thoughtful her father was, she had little doubt but that he was thinking of his favorite Harry Melville and that he would feel lonely after him.

"But it is all for the better, father," she said as she concluded a touching account of the parting between the widow and her son. "Harry will do well I hope where he is gone to."

The old man made no answer, she looked at him sharply. Something had happened besides Harry's going. She would find out by and by.

Presently Mina said, "I met Mrs. Browne when I was out; she told me she had called here, grandfather."

"So she did," he replied. "A good woman, a very good woman, I believe Wilhelmina."

"Is she," said Wilhelmina. Another conclusion reached, Mrs. Browne had said something to fret her father. Well, she would wait and find out all about it.

Presently the blind man said—

"I would be glad if Mina could go over to Mrs. Smythe's and ask her to send young Karl here this evening. Is it too late for Mina to go out, Wilhelmina?"

"Why, no, father; go, Mina. Ah, untidy one; look where your cloak and hat are."

When Mina had gone on her errand, her aunt went into the kitchen to cook the supper, leaving the old man in the parlor, with his troubled, sad face.

"What can father want with Karl," Wilhelmina thought, "that he should send for him right off, and not wait till he met him or walked over to see him?"

A pause. Then a brisk stirring the contents of a saucepan on the stove—a savory morsel for father—and another right conclusion reached at.

"Mrs. Browne has bestowed one of her many plans for father's benefit. What a pity it is that this woman cannot find something to do at home that would keep her there."

Young Karl Smythe came in the evening as requested, and after a little the blind man brought out his violin and asked Karl to play—

“I want to hear some of those pretty waltzes and other tunes you play at balls, Karl,” he said.

As Karl played the blind man would at times interrupt him with, “Let me try that, Karl,” and then he would play the air nearly perfect, returning the violin to Karl, with remarks such as—

“It is very easy—a pretty jingle, but nothing grand, nothing inspiring.”

Mina waltzed round the room to the music, young Karl laughed and cried bravo, the blind man stood dejected. The livelier the air, the easier he found it to master, the sadder grew his face.

Wilhelmina sat silent and attentive, studying out Mrs. Browne's plan almost as perfect as if she had been in the room when that good woman paid her visit.

The next morning Welhelmina Tapfer went to Mrs. Browne's house and asked to see her.

Mrs. Browne received her graciously and asked her to be seated, but Wilhelmina remained standing.

“You were at our house yesterday, Mrs. Browne,” she said. “What did you say to father?”

“Has he been telling you?”

“No, but I think I partly guess.”

“Well, my dear Miss Tapfer, I felt it my duty, as a woman and a Christian, to point out to your father a way in which he could employ himself with advantage toward his own support.”

“What did you advise him to do?”

“To hire out to play at balls and parties.”

“What else did you say to him?”

“I told him how worn you were with work.”

A spasm of pain passed over Wilhelmina's homely face, and the honest grey eyes flashed fiercely at Mrs. Browne. The latter turned pale.

“Why do you look at me in that horrid way,” she said, “I spoke for your good, for your happiness.”

“My happiness,” replied Wilhelmina. “Do you know what my happiness was? It was to labor for my poor blind father, to feel that he was all dependent upon me, and still to cheat him out of the knowledge; to know that I was helping him over the dark road he was traveling. Oh, how often I thanked heaven that he could not see my tired looks; and how often, when he returned from a walk with Mina, his poor sightless face refreshed and cheerful, I have rested

in his cheerfulness. This was my happiness; this is the happiness you have taken from me. I know father well; he will be ever thinking now that he is a burden on me—for he shall not play at your balls. He will say little; but I, who can read his every look, will witness his unhappiness.”

Here was an interesting case Mrs. Browne could make no notes of. She, so artificial, so deceptive—even to herself—so shallow in real feeling, so babbling in expression, stood humiliated, awed, in the presence of this strong, humane heart, with its pulsing arteries laid bare before her.

“I am sure,” she said, in a somewhat humbled, doubting tone, “that I have labored to benefit the industrious poor, to lighten their sorrows.”

“What do you know of their sorrows?” answered Wilhelmina. “You, a trifle on the surface of life, what can you know of the hidden springs of their sorrows or their joys?”

The storm had blown Mrs. Browne completely out to sea, her bearings lost far out of sight of the little artificial placid bay she was wont to paddle around in so self complacently, in her small patent humanitarian punt. She began to weep.

The expression of Wilhelmina Tapfer's strongly-marked features changed from anger to contempt.

“Poor, weak creature!” she said. “I suppose you did not know the harm you were doing; but it is done, and you at all events can do nothing to remedy it. So keep away from me and mine.”

Without another word Wilhelmina left the room and house.

For fully two days after this Mrs. Browne was in a subdued mood, but before the week was out she was in her punt again, which looked lovely in fresh paint and the flag of Duty flying from the stern.



CHAPTER XI.



MRS. MELVILLE sat in Doctor Pembroke's office, an open letter in her hand, and her tears falling on it. It was a letter from Harry. The friend to whom Doctor Pembroke had given him a letter was in Europe; but Harry met at the hotel he put up at, the skipper of a whaling vessel, just going off on a cruise, and he had given Harry a berth. The boy was to keep the skipper's accounts, learn to keep the log, have a place in the cabin, and his fair share of the profits of the voyage. They were to winter at Newfoundland, and sail north in the spring, and Mrs. Melville was not to expect a letter until the return of the vessel.

All this was told in a boy's letter, embellished with golden dreams, great promises, and warm love. The conclusion was touching and manly: "Mother, dear, loving mother," he wrote, "pray for your boy. I will return to you when I am worthy of all the love you have given to me,—not before."

"And she would not have more than this for a whole year, or might be two; perchance she would never hear more."

This was the thought that was crushing against her heart, and forcing out the tears as she sat opposite to Doctor Pembroke in his office and watched his countenance as the trembling culprit searches for some ray of hope in the face of his judge.

The doctor, stunned at first at the news, quickly rallied.

"I admire the boy's spirit, Mrs. Melville," he said. "I went on a whaling voyage myself when I was a youngster; no danger in it; lots of fun and blubber. Harry will come out all right,—mark my words for it."

It is a blessed gift the strong, cheerful spirit has, to be able to impart a portion of its nature to the weak and desponding.

Mrs. Melville left the doctor's office, not feeling half so wretched as when she entered.

In his rounds of visits, in the course of the same day, he called in to see her, and found her much calmer than he expected. Mina Mannlich was with her; the little maiden doing all she could in her bright, calm, sensible way, to comfort the widow. She had been sent over by her Aunt Wilhelmina, who was to call in the course of the evening, after Mina would get back.

But however resigned the widow might become, she was from this time wholly unfitted to manage a boarding-house.

After the *fracas* between Harry Melville and Sharpe, there was a general stampede of the boarders, and within six months afterwards she gave up the business altogether, parted with her one servant, and undertook plain sewing for Wilhelmina Tapfer.

Wilhelmina, who proposed this plan to the widow out of pure kindness, made a great ado about it to her father.

“Her business was increasing so rapidly that herself and Mina could no longer do it, so she had to get additional help;” but Mrs. Browne’s revelation had brought doubts and fears to the blind man’s mind, and their shadows, visible to the anxious mind of Wilhelmina, were continually passing over his gentle face.

A great comfort was Mina Mannlich to Widow Melville in those days. Mina could make dresses now, after her aunt had cut them out, without any extra instructions; so she frequently, when bringing work over to the widow, brought her own along also, and spent a great portion of the day at No. 48.

Often in his daily visitations, Doctor Pembroke would call to see Mrs. Melville, to find Mina with her. The all-absorbing thought with the poor widow was her son Harry, and she never failed to speak of him during the doctor’s visits. Then the good doctor would cheer her up with his own healthy hopes. “Harry will turn up all right,” he said during one of those visits. “He is manly, truthful, and affectionate. You don’t think that he will forget you?”

“Oh, no, no, doctor; but the danger.”

“Danger,” repeated the doctor, “where is your trust in Providence, Mrs. Melville? Do you not know that He who walked upon the waters, and whom the winds obeyed, can save your child from danger out upon the sea as easily as here in your parlor?”

Mina generally sat silent and busy with her sewing during those conversations between Mrs. Melville and the doctor; but now, as he chanced to look at her, he met her eyes,—bright and intelligent, fixed on his face, her sewing lying in her lap, her red lips partly open, and the round, firm little chin asserting itself.

“There is one believer,” said the doctor, smiling and nodding over to the little maiden. Mina smiled and blushed, and then resumed her work. Presently a tear dropped upon it,—the baptism of her faith in God’s providence, never through life to forsake her.

CHAPTER XII.



WINTER passed, and spring—ever a new revelation from God—returned. The flowers quickened into life beneath the warmth of its breath, the birds came back and sang praises to its beauty, and nature, awakening from death, moved over the earth with a young, joyous face.

Theodore Tapfer had failed during the winter. Wilhelmina said it was because he was shut up in the house, so Mina was taken from her work to take him out to walk every fine day. “Bring him where he will hear the birds, Mina,” said Wilhelmina Tapfer. “Romp and play, and make him laugh as he used to.” And then she sat down to do double work, her own and Mina’s. But her reward came not to her as of old. The blind man could no longer be got to loiter in the woods or on the hillside. He was always anxious to get back, saying to Mina constantly, “We have gone far enough; we had better return, Mina, so that you can help your aunt. She works too hard.”

Then they would return soon, much to Wilhelmina’s disappointment, the old man’s step languid, his face unrefreshed; and a bitter, bitter feeling would rise up in Wilhelmina Tapfer’s heart against that good woman Mrs. Browne.

Before the leaves had again become variegated on tree and shrub, Mina was not on the hillside to gather them, for Theodore Tapfer lay on his bed of death. Without pain, or any defined sickness, he had turned his sad, dark face to the wall, and was dying.

It was midnight. Wilhelmina, working all day and now sitting up in attendance on her father, nodded in an arm-chair close by the bed. The stillness in the house made the ticking of the clock seem quite loud.

The eyes of the blind man were closed. Suddenly they opened wide, and a joyous, wondering look came to his face.

“Wilhelmina, Wilhelmina,” he said, in a strong voice, “I see! I see all that is beautiful!” She was at his side in a moment, leaning over him.

“Kneel down, my good child,” he continued, “until I give you my blessing.” How many years had gone by since he had called her child? Not since she sat upon his knee—a child.

Wilhelmina knelt, and the blind man, stretching out his hand placed it upon her head, and his lips moved in prayer.

After a little, when Wilhelmina raised her head, the hand fell upon the counterpane of the bed. Theodore Tapfer had passed away, giving his good child a father's blessing.

Wilhelmina attended to all the details of her father's funeral; made her own plain, black dress, and then resumed her daily work. She had made no demonstration of grief, and the neighbors thought her rather heartless—"though, to be sure, the old man must have been rather a drag on her."

Late in the fall a letter arrived from Harry Melville. So sad a letter. He was alive, that was all; still this was a great deal to his poor mother, who had almost despaired of ever hearing from him again.

On her homeward trip, with a profitable cargo, the "Saucy Polly," the vessel he shipped in, was wrecked on the inhospitable shores of Belle Isle, which lies like a black serpent at the head of the Malabar coast, and though all hands were saved, the entire cargo was lost.

From the Malabar coast, Harry had made his way to Newfoundland and wrote his letter in the house of a fisherman, who had given him shelter and employment.

It would have been a great comfort to Mrs. Melville, if she could now write to her son, but like a great many foolish young fellows of his age, Harry, in over-wrought self condemnation and unhealthy heroism, resolved not to send his address home, lest his mother should importune him to return, or as in his present plight, send him money she could badly spare. With the sanguine assurance of youth, he never supposed that any change could occur at home, but that every thing would go on as usual, until fortune permitted him to return.

Six months more elapsed and another letter from Harry. He and a young shipmate were in San Francisco on their way to the mines. "He would work hard to make some money;" his great expectations had come down to a modest sum, "which would allow him to return home."

The closing sentence of the letter gave Mrs. Melville great comfort.

"I am in first rate good health, mother," wrote Harry, "can work all day, but never forget that I am a gentleman, and that my mother expects her son to act like a gentleman."

"Good," said Doctor Pembroke, handing back the letter Mrs. Melville had given him to read, and in which there were many warm remembrances to the doctor.

"Good; have faith Mrs. Melville, Harry will return to you, and you

will have reason to be proud of him. A young fellow with confirmed good principles; what is there to fear for him? Be proud of your son, Mrs. Melville; thankful for him, though you should never look upon his face again."

The poor widow required to have faith to support her in the dreary time coming, when no news of Harry reached her, and makeshift poverty was her portion.

Not but that she had friends who would be willing to assist her; one friend always anxious to find out how he could do so without hurting her feelings; but with a sensitive pride, she shrank from all assistance she was not in a position to pay back; turned and re-turned her black dress which held out wonderfully; lived as best she could, on the few dollars she earned from Wilhelmina Tapfer; was very poor but independent.

And how was it with the brave, hard-working Wilhelmina? In all outward appearance after her father's death she remained the same; the same homely face bent over her sewing; the same honest grey eyes looked the world squarely in the face; the same active, industry kept her independent.

But strange to say, after a little, work began to tell on her. Her strongly-marked features seemed to lose character, she complained often of pain in her chest, and when she rose from her sewing, frequently pressed her hand to her side.

The truth was she had over-worked herself during her father's life time. The great object of her life to make his declining years tranquil, had, in a measure, been thwarted by the impertinent inter-meddling of a foolish woman—that was the first blow she received—then with her father's death passed away her great incentive to work, the reaction came, and with it the debility. Yet she held on bravely, not working as of old, no need of it now, giving much attention to instructing Mina in her trade. Ever thoughtful for others, she made it a point that Mina should have plenty of exercise in the open air.

Mrs. Melville no longer did her sewing at home, the three—the two sad-eyed women and the blooming maiden—sewing and cutting in the parlor we have already made mention of as made up in part for a work room. It remained the same after the old man's death. Wilhelmina's sewing machine in the alcove close by the window, the blind man's chair in its old place, with the home-made rug for the feet spread before it.

Sometimes while busy with her needle, Wilhelmina would look over to where the empty chair stood; after doing so she would tell Mina to get her hat, and either send her on some errands that would

keep her a considerable time out, or make her take some young companion out for a walk, or ramble on the hillside. "She was so accustomed to it with her grandfather," Wilhelmina remarked to Mrs. Melville.

So passed two years, during which Wilhelmina Tapfer grew feeble, rallied, grew feeble again, until at length she lay on her bed of death, her life's battle coming to a close.

Sickness had refined her features, her voice weakened was still exquisitely sweet, and her grey eyes now unnaturally bright, scintillated with intelligence.

"Go, love," said the dying woman to Mina, who had just opened the window to let in the fresh morning air to the room, "Go, love, to Mrs. Browne, and ask her, with my respects, to come to see me. Bring her with you if you can, for there is no time to spare, and I must see her. When she comes, Mina, show her up, and leave us alone."

In half an hour after Mina said to her aunt—

"Mrs. Browne is here."

"Let her come in, and leave us alone," said Wilhelmina.

Mrs. Browne entered the room and approached the bed. She was not accustomed to look upon the dying, and Wilhelmina's bright eyes—now unnaturally large—and wasted features frightened her. She grew deadly pale.

The dying woman marked the frightened look and gave her thin hand to the other to reassure her.

Mrs. Browne rallied.

"You sent for me," she said. "I would have come before if I thought you would see me. What can I do for you? Do you want consolation? Shall I read for you?"

Wilhelmina made a gesture of dissent;

"That is all over," she answered. "I hope I have made my peace with my God. I have asked him to forgive me as I forgive others. I had a bitter feeling against you in my heart; it is gone. I forgive you, and ask your forgiveness.

The visitor was greatly moved.

"I thought I was doing right," she said, "and—"

With a gesture of her thin hand, Wilhelmina interrupted her.

"It is Christian forgiveness I want to have between us," she said, "that neither requires explanation nor excuse. Stoop down and kiss me."

Mrs. Brown stooped as directed, and kissed Wilhelmina's lips. As she did so she shuddered.

"Good-bye," said the weak voice, "send Mina to me."

Silent and awe-stricken, Mrs. Browne left the room.

The night of that day, the clergyman who had been in attendance on her, Mrs. Melville and Mina stood round Wilhelmina Tapfer's bed. Calling them by name she bade them good-bye; then, smoothing the front of her hair with both hands, she placed the palm of one on the back of the other, put both under her head, as one often sees a child doing when weary of play, and going to sleep.

One long-drawn sigh and Wilhelmina Tapfer slept too, to awake in heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

“**W**ILL come and live with you, Mrs. Melville, if you will have me; we can help each other.”

So spoke Mina Mannlich in her own quiet, thoughtful way to Widow Melville, as she sat in the parlor of No. 48, a few days after Wilhelmina's death.

Mina was dressed tastefully in black; black became her. Sometimes it has a very soothing effect upon grief, when a fashionable woman knows that black becomes her; but Mina was not fashionable, and indeed whatever color she wore seemed at the time to become her best.

“My love,” replied Mrs. Melville, “it would be altogether too dreary for you here, you are young, Mina, and should live where there are young people. I am not fit company for you, or indeed for any one.”

“You must not put me off on that score, Mrs. Melville; if I did not prefer to live with you, I would not have spoken. If you reject me it must be on your own account not mine; my wish is to be here, no where else.”

Mrs. Melville went over to her, kissed her, and as she did so said: “My love, having you with me is all the happiness I will have.”

So it was settled. Mina made her home with Mrs. Melville, and they “pooled their earnings.”

There never was such a mite of a pool since “pools” and “rings” came to trouble the world.

It could not be expected that Mina would earn as much as her aunt formerly did, or retain to any great extent, her aunt's customers.

Fairoaks too about this time got a crushing set back. It had grown to its present proportions with the most positive promises and san-

guine hopes that a projected railroad, the building of which was a foregone conclusion, was to pass right through it. Several surveys had been made and all hit plump against Fair Oaks, so that almost every man in the town who owned a corner lot, had made minute calculations over and over again as to the sum he would charge the company for a site for its depot.

But all this prospecting, hoping and calculating came to naught in a very silly way.

When the new railroad was fairly on its way to Fair Oaks one of the directors visited the town and got a tough beefsteak for his supper at the hotel. This brought on a fit of indigestion, from which he suffered during the night.

Coming down in the morning, in a very ill humor, he ate his breakfast, and waited around for some time, expecting that the leading citizens, knowing he was in town and what a big man he was, would call on him. But they neglected to do so, and the indigestion told him that their not calling on him was an intended slight, so he shook the dust of Fair Oaks from his feet, and at the next meeting of the board he clearly showed that it would be for the advantage of the company to leave Fair Oaks about three miles out in the cold, and build a town of their own.

Great was the indignation of Fair Oaks at this want of good faith. When the new town, three miles east of Fair Oaks, was actually laid out and the first house put up, the citizens of Fair Oaks held protracted indignation meetings, and resolution after resolution was passed, amid the wildest excitement.

Shortly after this some of the movers of the resolutions commenced moving to the new town and putting up buildings. Even the houses of Fair Oaks caught the infection, and went moving off; and the next thing known of them would be that they had settled down in the new town of Tomkins—named after the director to whom Fair Oaks had given indigestion—rejuvenated with paint.

In fact the majority of the well-to-do citizens of Fair Oaks moved to Tomkins, giving the pretty town a deserted look, and reducing the business so much that employment became very slack and wages low.

In this way Mrs. Melville's property, had she wished to part with her old home, became almost worthless. Broken-spirited at not hearing from Harry, she could do but little; and in her sorrow and distress Mina Mannlich became a daughter to her, her stay and comfort.

Good, sensible little Mina—never sulky, never boisterous, but calm, cheerful and hopeful. Surely God had sent you to the poor mother, sorrowing, waiting on the shore for her ship to come sailing into port.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT is Christmas Eve — the short day is drawing to a close; the calm, frosty air reverberating with the music of sleigh-bells.

Boys and girls who have not waited for Santa Claus to come, are hauling sleds along the sidewalks (regardless of the heels of the pedestrians,) new sleds loaded with parcels continually falling off; the stores are crowded; everybody is laughing and shaking hands with every other body. For a brief time care is put in the background, and good humor is the order of the day.

Men whose whole lives, and almost every thought, are devoted to business, leave their offices and counting-rooms early this afternoon, travel from store to store, and as the shades of evening are falling, enter their houses clandestinely, their pockets and arms filled with paper packages, which are quickly hidden away by smiling mothers. By and by Santa Claus will claim all these things, and, loading his sled with them, will whip his antlered steeds up to house-tops, and descending, through flues and stove-pipes, fill all the little stockings that have been hung up in expectation of his visit. The sun has moved over to the pine trees, and they send their tall shadows trailing along the scintillating snow that covers the hillside.

Down the western slope speeds the orb of day—a glowing ball, and as it dips beneath the horizon the sky becomes all aglow with gold, purple and amber light.

The light fades away, the pines become a black indistinct mass, and the snow lies cold, shadowless and ghastly upon the hillsides.

Widow Melville sits in the old family parlor of No. 48. She has changed within the last few years; her hair is quite grey and her figure more fragile. Yet she is not old, nor does she look old; her gentle face is smooth, calm and sweet; but, oh, how hopeless in expression.

Hope belongs to the young and strong of heart.

The sleigh-bells are merry out in the street, so are the children. There has been a snowball war going on, and now that it is over the boys are calling out to each other and hurrying off in twos and threes, the crisp snow sounding beneath their quick steps. One noisy little fellow, as he passes by the window, makes the widow start; his voice is so like what Harry's was. Harry, her boy; she has thought of him

all day. Christmas-time—it brings so many memories. She dreamt last night she held him in her arms, a little child. Oh, the sorrow of awaking to find them empty!

The boys and the sleds have left the street, and the noise has given place to silence outside.

The fire burns low; the cold of the room rouses the widow from a long reverie. She looks up, surprised; the room has grown quite dark.

Wearily she rises to light a lamp. A jingling of sleigh-bells up to the front gate; and then they stop. A voice calls out "all right," the gate swings open, a man's step on the crisp snow along the walk leading to the hall door.

Trembling in every limb, with a sudden pallor overspreading her face, her hands pressed against her side and her eyes wildly open, Widow Melville stands in the middle of the room. There's life or death for her in the next two moments.

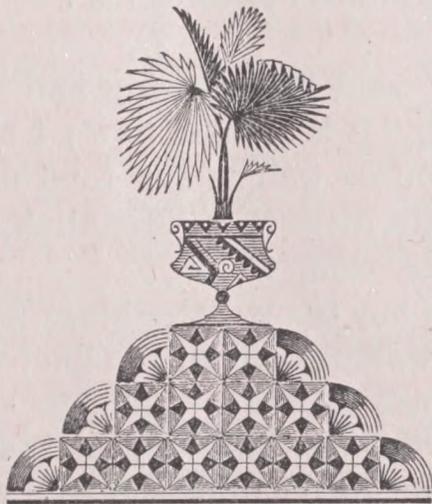
The door opens.

"Mother!"

Life, life! Her ship has come in.

"Little mother," says Harry Melville, lifting her in his arms.

Her arms are entwined tightly around his neck and her lips pressed against his. She does not faint, but, as of old, grows strong as she feels the healthy breath of her boy warm on her face.



CHAPTER XV.



HER first wild joy subsiding into a sense of exquisite happiness, as the tidal wave leaves the fresh odor of the sea upon the shore it recedes from, Widow Melville sat in the old family parlor of No. 48, her son's hand clasped in hers, and her hungry eyes feeding upon every feature of his handsome sun-browned face.

With Harry Melville it was different. The happiness of coming back "with glad tidings" was for the moment clouded by the change he witnessed in his old home. From his mother's simple answers to his questions he realized how hard her struggles had been and how assuredly she would have long since succumbed to them but for the energy and love of Mina Mannlich.

He recognized now the great error he had committed in not giving his mother an opportunity to correspond with him.

While fortune frowned upon him, while his life was but a battle for daily bread, won by hard toil, it was natural enough that he should not see this mistake in its true light, and when good fortune came to him he lost no time in hastening back to share it with her.

"How was it," he said, "that I fooled myself with the idea that all was going on here just as usual? And you never got the letters I wrote to you from the mines in California?"

"Never, love."

"Well, no matter," said Harry rising and imprinting a kiss upon his mother's forehead, "it is all over now; I have come back to care for you and to love you as well as any fond mother was ever loved. But where is this dear little Mina Mannlich, who has been to you a son, daughter and every thing?"

"She is gone out to buy some little things for Christmas."

"Pooh, I wish she would come in, she knows nothing of providing for such a Christmas as this one is going to be. And you must tell me, mother, who have been kind to you, that I may go and thank them. Our good friend Dr. Pembroke is well you tell me, that's good news."

"He always said you would return Harry."

"The brave old fellow," said Harry, rubbing his hands and looking out of the window. "I wish this little Mina would come back."

"Mina, too, always cheered me," said Mrs. Melville, "by the perfect confidence she had in your return."

"Dear little Mina," said Harry, "always such a good, sensible little thing."

Mrs. Melville smiled; it was evident that Harry thought of Mina as a child still.

Click! The gate has opened and swung back. "Quick, Harry," says Mrs. Melville, "hide, here she is."

Harry jumps behind the parlor door, when *little* Mina comes in he will catch her in his arms, but when a tall, graceful girl enters, his courage fails him.

Mrs. Melville, her face all flushed and smiling, meets her. One glance, and Mina says, clapping her hands, "you have heard from Harry?"

"No."

"Then he is here," says Mina, turning quickly round as Harry emerges from his hiding place and catches both her hands in his; then he sees the sweet face of the little Mina of old looking up at him as she says, "Oh welcome, welcome, Harry, I knew you would return." Harry's courage comes back to him, and for a moment he holds her in his arms and impresses a kiss upon her forehead.

An hour after, Harry, unannounced, entered Doctor Pembroke's parlor. As he stood at the door, smiling, the doctor looked toward him. "Harry Melville! by all that's glorious!" he exclaimed, jumping up and upsetting the chair he had been sitting on. "Harry come back right side up; I knew it, I knew it. Welcome, my boy, welcome. Why, stand at arms's length, and let me look at you. Aye, success, manhood, and honor, I read in your face, Harry. What a happy Christmas for my poor friend. Sit down, sit down, and tell me everything."

"Not to-night, doctor," replied Harry, "for I have a long yarn to spin. After knocking about for five years, luck turned, and now myself and partner, who has been with me all through, have a good paying claim in Leadville."

"Leadville," repeated the doctor; "I think I have heard something about it."

"Of course you have; it is the new El Dorado. Our claim turns out richer every day, but I only waited to put a little money together to hurry home, not a day too soon, I find, doctor."

"No, my boy, not a day too soon, but just as soon as you could, I have no doubt; and such a happy time to come, too."

"Ah, that reminds me," said Harry. "I was near forgetting, I am

going to play Santa Claus to-night, doctor, and must be off, after you grant me a favor."

"What is it, my boy? You know I can't refuse you, Harry, I am so glad to see you,—so glad to know that I was not mistaken in you."

"Will you eat your Christmas dinner with us to-morrow, doctor?"

"Indeed I will; be off now, and get the turkey. But look, sir, don't you go buying Christmas presents for Mina Mannlich, for I intend that girl for myself," and laughing, and shaking hands continually, Doctor Pembroke accompanied his young friend to the hall door.

There never was such a ridiculous, happy Santa Claus as Harry Melville on this Christmas Eve. When he left Dr. Pembroke's house he went to the nearest livery stable, and getting a horse and sleigh drove around to different stores buying all kinds of Christmas gifts for his mother and Mina. If his selections were not very judicious, the variety was most abundant. Nor did he forget the substantials for the Christmas dinner, which left Mina's humble preparations all in the shade.

Of course wherever he went he met old acquaintances, who recognized him, or to whom he made himself known. They were all glad to see him, asked him a hundred and one questions, and by the time he and Widow Melville and Mina appeared in church next day it was known all over Fair Oaks that Harry Melville had returned home, dame rumor setting down his fortune at a round million.

What a proud, happy woman was Widow Melville that Christmas morning, as, leaving the church leaning on the arm of her handsome son, she received the hearty congratulations of friends and neighbors, and what a scene of hand-shaking Harry had to go through to be sure.

Always popular as a boy, his popularity now as a successful man and a good fellow "who put on no airs," grew so immense during the holidays that it was proposed he should be invited to give a public lecture descriptive of his adventures. This is the great safety valve of American enthusiasm, and every intelligent American citizen is supposed to be able to give a lecture at the shortest notice.

Accordingly a committee, headed by Dr. Pembroke, waited upon Harry and tendered to him a formal invitation. He would have declined, for the idea appeared to him most ludicrous, but that the doctor whispered to him, "Accept, Harry, for I have a piece of news I will give you to tell them, which will make your lecture a perfect success."

"But, doctor, I never made a speech in my life."

"No matter, just tell them of your adventures as you have been

telling me, and with my news coming in at the end, believe me, you will make a great hit."

Accordingly, with much misgiving, Harry Melville accepted the invitation; and when, a few evenings afterwards, he appeared on the platform, and was introduced by Doctor Pembroke, he was greeted with a round of applause from a full house.

It is easy to please people in a mood to be pleased, and that was the mood of Fair Oaks on this evening.

He commenced by telling them how glad he was to get back to his old home, and "beautiful Fair Oaks" [loud applause,] and then went into a racy description of his adventures since he left, sometimes exciting their sympathy, and then again their mirth.

Toward the close of his remarks he spoke of the changes which had taken place in the town since he left, and the growth of the town of Tomkins, within three miles of them. Fair Oaks held its breath to listen.

"It has sprung up, my friends," said the speaker, "like a noxious weed from the foul hot-bed of bad faith." [A round of applause. Fair Oaks always knew that Harry Melville was a bright fellow.] "It has a railroad, beginning nowhere, and going nowhere." [Fair Oaks shook its sides with laughter at Harry's wit.] "But, my friends, I have glorious news for you," continued the speaker. "You will pardon my good friend, the chairman, if he has held it back for a few days, in order to give me the pleasure of telling it to you. Fair Oaks is going to have a railroad,—none of your little cross-roads, running south and north,—but a main line, connecting with the East and running direct West, until it laves its terminus in the sparkling waters of the Pacific. The company is formed, the directors elected, and a large portion of the stock subscribed for."

Then, indeed, Fair Oaks rose upon its feet, and the hall shook with wild applause. The band struck up "Hail Columbia," and amid cheers and waving of handkerchiefs our hero made his bow, to give place to Doctor Pembroke, who confirmed Harry's statement by a business statement of the new enterprise, confessing that he had kept the news secret for a few days in order to give his young friend an opportunity of telling it.

Fair Oaks went home jubilant that night, with Harry Melville elected her "favorite son."

The next day was calm, bright, and bracing, with diamond fringes of hoar-frost heavy on the trees, as Mina Mannlich took her seat beside Harry for a sleigh-ride, widow Melville watching them from the parlor window of Number 48, with a pleased and far more know-

ing look than one would have expected to find on the little woman's face. They drove out of town, and on to the road skirting the hill where they had so often played as children. Harry drew up close to the pine trees.

"Here is our old playground, Mina," he said. "How cold and lonely it looks."

"Yes," replied Mina; "poor grandfather's log seat is hidden in the snow."

"When we were children, Mina," continued Harry, "I loved you with a child's love; now, as a man, I love you a million times more. Will you love me, Mina, and be my wife?"

She did not answer in words, but taking her warm hand from her muff, she placed it in his and looked frankly and trustingly into his eyes. And that was all the wooing that passed between them, but it will suffice, we prophecy, for a long life of wedded happiness.





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