

A BIT OF FINESSE

A STORY OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

BY

HARRIET NEWELL LODGE

INDIANAPOLIS

THE BOWEN-MERRILL COMPANY

1894

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Hist. Surv. 11-18-15

2-25-12

THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO
MY MOTHER

Donna . 25

*Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day*

TENNYSON

A BIT OF FINESSE.

CHAPTER FIRST.

It is a high, solemn, almost awful thought for every individual man that his earthly influence, which has had a commencement, will never, through all ages, have an end.—*Carlyle*.

The sad, pensive twilight of an October day enfolded the towering summit of Wachusett mountain. The sun had lingered to caress the hoary head, and reluctantly faded from view. It was as though some patriarch of old had peacefully fallen asleep, with his countenance illuminated in his last moments with the glory he would presently inherit. The villagers, accustomed to the beautiful sight, had grown to mark the close of the day's duties by the disappearance of Wachusett into the cloudy retreat. Even the boys gathered their marbles from the unfinished game and hurried whistling down the street as "Old Chusie" donned his "night cap." Mothers, maidens and children bade good-night to the stately presence, and busied themselves about the evening meal.

So a grand old character unconsciously controls and directs the affairs, yes, even the hopes, of those who fall within the radius of his salutary influence.

The gentle woman who sat upon the brow of one of

the low-lying hills that encircled the base of the mountain, bowed her head for a moment before resuming her walk homeward. As she lingered watching the dying day, her soul had drifted on the tide of the placid river, as it flowed before her, ever increasing, ever widening, ever bearing its tribute to the great ocean. The departing rays of the sun covered it with fiery, quivering lances, and as quickly flooded it with a crimson glow, as though each quivering lance had pierced a throbbing heart, and the pulsing current had yielded its offering to the great life stream. Brave souls go forth to meet the future, averting, if possible, all sorrow, and reaching the ever-lengthening arm of hope, if haply they may touch one living germ to crown their loved ones. The dusk of the evening had covered the houses, and quickly the trees faded into shadowy specters; and as the mist claimed each familiar object, her eyes climbed higher and higher, until they rested upon the gilded cross of the slender church spire. How bright it was. How like a beacon of hope it hung, as though suspended from an unseen hand. In after years the golden symbol slowly and surely appeared, whenever all her desires, hopes and anticipations seemed veiled in uncertainty; and when sorrow deluged her fainting spirit, the same unseen hand lifted the shining wonder and a soft voice whispered, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is staid on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee."

No gloomy introspection possessed Mrs. Ellinwood as she entered the lovely solitude of the twilight; she had learned to steal away from the daily care, and enjoy its reposeful calm. To her the watch-word of life

was "Onward and Upward." This night, as she sat looking forward, there was a new star in her firmament, an added glory to her full-orbed life. Childhood had passed for her like a beautiful spring blossom, which was scarcely faded before she was crowned with the halo of motherhood; a joy which filled her soul with an ever-increasing glow. While yet the full warmth of her mother-heart drew into its center all the sweetening draughts and yielded them again purified and intensified in the silent fueling of her daughter's life, the holy temple was opening wide its boundless arms as she thought of the new and precious responsibility of a little granddaughter just two weeks old, lying in the same room where she had lain as a child, and where her own first born had been laid beside her. What a tumult of feeling to a fervent, consistent heart! Dying for the new-born child appeared a simple thing, but her love demanded an infinitely greater task, that of living for it.

Approaching doom sometimes heralds itself by an unconscious reinforcement of the physical nature; the ingathering of the calm that nerves for the coming storm. Walking homeward Mrs. Ellinwood's step assumed the movement that knows no resistance from without, the impulse of inspiration rather than the quick movement of a nature accelerated by a sudden impetus.

The twilight repose still hung about her. Occasionally a belated dandelion detained her for a moment, and as often she turned from the roadside into the edge of the woods, where wintergreen berries peeped like bright fancies from among the dead leaves and long, matted

grass. Plucking a small cluster, she glanced about, that she might recall the place in the event of her desire for more. A few steps from the roadside a wounded sparrow limped disconsolately. Lifting the timid creature, the tiny leg was found to be broken by the luckless shot of some sportsman intent on truer game. The uneasy movement and faint cry of distress, as the fledgling tried to free itself, brought the mother bird to the vicinity, when even its agitation was soothed, as with quiet unconcern Mrs. Ellinwood examined the wound, and tearing a narrow strip from her handkerchief, made a tidy bandage about the frail little leg, and crooning in happy mother way over the tender, brown morsel, she placed it on a limb not far from the mother bird, and resumed her meditations.

Forty-two years had fallen very gently upon Mrs. Ellinwood. The calmness of the New England village life rippled in unvarying regularity over her simple existence. Golden hair was drawn loosely aside from a perfectly oval face. Clear blue eyes and a soft flush in her cheek betokened a buoyancy of disposition that scarcely found its fullest expression in the homely duties devolving upon the village physician's wife.

Dobbin shot across the lane in front of her. He usually increased his speed as he neared the manger, but this haste was unusual. She recognized it as the response to some subtle communication of Dr. Ellinwood to his faithful motive power, when life and death were at issue.

"Dobbin going home in this way. Oh, heart be still!" The words fell scarcely audible, made tremulous by the apprehensive throbbing.

An hour before she had left her daughter lying calmly happy in the sweet dignity of wifehood and motherhood. The young father sat by the bedside holding his wife's hand, and thought the soft pressure and low breathing incident to the occasion.

A slight bowing forward and a closer drawing around the erect figure the folds of her shawl, which had fallen in graceful lines about her, Mrs. Ellinwood soon stepped across the threshold of their own home. Dobbin whinnied piteously when his mistress passed him without perceiving his agitation. Poor brutes, to whom do you go when human sympathy fails you? A resistless force led the mother to her daughter's room. At the side of the bed the father stood, holding his child's hand in the most anxious way. Approaching them, a signal from her husband caused his wife to withdraw to the lounge standing near. Dr. Ellinwood laid the already chilled hands upon the coverlid, and moving to his wife's side, said:

"Wife, our daughter is dying, can you tell her?" No tears, no tears, but a great welling of motherly love as she stepped to the bedside and with a vigorous will, threw her own life into her daughter's veins.

Some natures surcharge the atmosphere about them with love, some with energy, some with hope, and all of us with something. Would it were always the breath of heaven.

Mrs. Raynor revived as she looked into her mother's face, and with a bravery born only of sweet self-forgetfulness, said, "Mother dear, how weary you look; your long walk has exhausted you; lie down and rest awhile. Father seems tired, too." The bright eyes

looked away to the window where Dr. Ellinwood had wandered, being unable to control himself.

The effect of anguish was deep and almost uncontrollable upon Mrs. Ellinwood, but she gathered strength from the exalted look in their daughter's face, and hoped much from the concentrated energy which the dying body received from the parting soul—an energy with which the hearts of those most dear are often strengthened for the unspeakable wonder.

Lifting the pallid hands in her own firm ones, she breathed the blighting words, "My child, your father says that you are very ill, very ill indeed, and that even now your Heavenly Father is waiting to receive your sweet spirit."

"Mother, do you say that I am going to die?"

Grieved almost to dumbness, again fell the blighting words: "My child, your father says that you have but a few moments to live. I wish you heavenly joy."

With perfect composure Mrs. Raynor turned to her husband, who had remained quiet during the interview, and, as if eagerly hoarding the precious moments and swiftly passing opportunity, whispered in the fond ear, bent to catch the faintest whisper, "Give her to me, John."

Mr. Raynor turned to the cradle, and as he returned to the bedside his wife had raised herself from her pillow. Again came the dying mother's words: "Give her to me, John." Mr. Raynor laid the sleeping infant in the mother's arms, while a solemn hush pervaded the room.

One eager, fervent caress, and the heart burst forth in prayer:

"Thou blessed Savior, Thou who didst come into

this world as a little child, to comfort, strengthen, love and control the tides of the earthly lives, even as this little child has come into hearts that would be stronger, holier and more enduring for its gentleness, we implore Thy loving care for its earthly life. Lead her in paths of purity, unselfishness and love. Surround her day by day with Thy watchfulness, and fill her heart with Thy tenderness. In Thy presence envelop her. Father, keep her. Oh, keep her as a little child until Thou shalt call her into Thine eternal rest."

It was like the flowering of a germ which had lain long in the soil of a young heart, watered with the dewy tears of youth that ever cleanse and brighten, causing the blossoms to burst into beauty; or as the golden grains of Truth were bound, where cloistered walls held secluded souls, who yearned for Divine guidance and fanned with their dying breath the flickering embers of Faith until God's love released the blessed light never to fade again. *Thus the crisis of despair discloses a spiritual bloom.* The prayerful nurturing of a godly mother is the one inestimable blessing of this life, and far above rubies; what precious inheritance may be compared to it!

Mr. Raynor laid the babe in its grandmother's arms, then laying his wife back on the pillow, pressed a kiss on the cold brow, for the guileless spirit had passed away, so far as one so strongly tethered to this world may go. But the life was gone, the full rich affections had been burned in simple incense before her child.

"There is no death; what seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but the gateway to the life Elysian,
Whose portal we call death."

Mrs. Ellinwood aroused to sooth the cries of her grandchild; the life work must begin anew and the sad solemnities of departure must be mechanically performed. Each to his duty, and all to the one who had dealt so mysteriously with them.

CHAPTER SECOND.

Go forth little maiden, shod as with fire! Angels will guard thee, and if earth grows dark and clouds blinding, know that thou art baptized with the dew of dying love. No harm can come nigh thee for the lineage of the faithful is thine.

As Mrs. Ellinwood was laying away the sacred garments that had clothed her beloved child, she found beneath a robe of exquisite needlework, fashioned for the baptismal day, a soft cushion on which was wrought in tiny pinheads, "Abigail, a father's joy." An added bequest from the sainted mother. Why flowers are plucked from the very source of their being and laid in other hands must ever remain unfathomed; yet, we all know that the agony of death is the crucible of that we deem most precious in this life.

Abigail's childhood was a repetition of her mother's; thus, a double impress of fortunate adorning crowned the young life, as it slacked its thirst at the same fountain whose sweet streams already pulsed through the delicate veins. So we all turn to the rudiments of knowledge we fancied mastered years ago.

Artless and free was she, knowing little beyond the garden walks that were shielded from view by a high, board fence. Long, narrow beds of marigolds, canterbury-bells and mignonette, were bordered by well-

trimmed box, glossy and dark in its firm growth. Choice hybrids and monthlies grew over the doorway, and as the garden sloped away to the pasture land beyond, annuals nodded here and there, and still farther on a wide solid mass of hundred leaved roses could be seen, fragrant and pink as Abigail's own cheeks. The odor of these roses was always about her. The home, winter and summer, was filled with the fragrance. Wardrobes and chests exhaled the same rosy breath, so when the little girl was allowed the freedom of the garden, she unconsciously moved into the region of their fragrance, as maturer natures pass from the gayer attractions of more modern ways to the influences that recall their early home lives.

The mysteries of a latticed summer-house, almost concealed from sight by the unrestrained growth of the bushes, ever attracted Abigail.

"We must brighten the rose-still and make rose-water, Gail," aroused the merriest glee. Then the child, full of buoyant, happy life, tossed the pink blossoms that grew in bursting confusion on the laden bushes, and, with tiny hands clutched full of dewy beauties, she bore them to the floor of the summer-house, in the midst of which stood the long-used rose-still.

As Mrs. Ellinwood watched the little maiden moving among the roses the past appeared as a dream, and she was young again; but when the merry child came bounding in, flushed and radiant beneath her blushing burden, calling gleefully, "Oh! grandma, what beauties! Don't they smell good?" and then burying her face deep in the petaled cushion, and emerging again

a perfect nymph of summer bloom—at these moments came an indescribable feeling almost akin to pain, caused by the mild surprise of being greeted by a pair of large, dark eyes, instead of the violet blue ones, into which Mrs. Ellinwood had been wont to gaze, as spring time after spring time the same pleasure had been so quietly enjoyed, years ago.

“Abigail, my child, where did you get your eyes?” she exclaimed. “They are very bright.”

A soft breath of concern invaded Mrs. Ellinwood’s heart as to whether she could mete full justice to this new element which had slipped into her very fold. The same sweet love, added to greater activity and light-someness of spirit, caused her much earnest reflection.

“Why, God gave them to me, did He not, grandma?”

Thus the artless child hung her sweet trust on the arm that is over us all—still tossing the dewy petals over her head, or pelting grandma with rosy balls in a merry, girlish way, yet, in a way so new, so unfamiliar to Mrs. Ellinwood, that she scarcely knew whether to chide or approve.

The bright bloom of her cheek gave promise of longer life, and, perhaps, more usefulness. A tinge of uncertainty gave its hue to all of her meditations, but love is very hopeful and trustful. “God will care for the little one, and I am but His humble instrument, trusting to His goodness.” Amid the vapory perfume that rose and filtered through the winding worm, to the receptacle below, a winging prayer, silently implored the distilling joy of heavenly love to fall in ceaseless benediction upon this new life whose tendrils had clasped so firmly about her own. Oh! the years, the

precious years of childhood, when the child is the center of solicitous care!

Thus Abigail's years increased and she became the center of the physician's home. Travel and business occupied Mr. Raynor, who was serenely happy to leave the training of his little daughter in such unselfish hands.

Magic toys from the outside world gave their influence to an otherwise simple existence. And at the close of eight precious years, that were gemmed with glittering jewels, firmly imbedded in golden counsel, the full heart swelled to bursting one day as she beheld her father going away, just as he had done many, many times before. Running excitedly down the path after him, she threw her arms about his neck, and, clinging so, begged to be taken with him. "Father, do, do, take me!" And the child clung tremblingly to him as he looked into the wistful face, puzzled to know why this sudden fancy had possessed her.

"Some other day, girlie, father will take you; run back to grandma now." Kissing the moist forehead tenderly, he watched the springing form as she suddenly dried her tears, and bounded clear and radiant into grandma's room. But a new purpose filled the little life; a heart so endowed with love must burst into bloom or die.

Mr. Raynor fell into serious reflection as he walked to the station, thoughts that he repulsed as quickly as they invaded his hitherto peaceful consciousness. He did not dare to think, so fell to whistling a tune, that no sooner flooded the morning air with its careless melody than its startling significance roused his swing-

ing stride into a brisk run. How he ran, for a hundred yards or more, as though escaping a pursuing enemy. In reality, however, he was barely in time for his passing stage. Two minutes delay is excuse enough for unusual agitation, so Raynor's friends railed him on having been caught napping. Resolutions weaken and die away when nature reasserts herself, while progress and humanity demand continual sacrifices of sentiment. The time was full. A new hearth-stone was established, with Mr. Raynor, a sweet, cherished woman, and Abigail as the delight of both.

Frequent visits to grandma soothed whatever homesickness asserted itself, but the new responsibilities and complete change of surroundings seemed to satisfy the childish nature that had never heard a complaint and scarcely knew how to utter one. A peep into the summer-house, with its happy memories, a keener perception of the perfectly ordered home, grandma's loving caress, and the childhood stood pre-eminent.

But, it was over the grave of her mother, with sweet imperiousness, that she claimed complete possession, and faithless indeed would have been the heart that did not at once perceive the alert bound of the little child as its soul, with unclouded countenance, leaped into a silent, ministering embrace. Subdued, though never saddened, she would return, and as the gate closed behind herself and her companion, she would slip her hand into the warm clasp, as though linking herself with the outside world again.

Brothers and sisters came to the new home. The first one a perfect joy, its helplessness and winsome ways arousing Gail's warmest love, but, as the family

increased, the head and hands realized that the heart demanded more than they were able to perform. The bright receptive mind had easily passed her mates in the village academy, and won their hearts in the happy going and coming in roomy sleighs, robed and muffled in defiance of snows that piled high and white, against the very eaves of the houses.

Adulation does not truly strengthen. One day an uncle of whom Gail had heard, but whom she had never seen, came in his sleigh to carry her to spend Thanksgiving Day with his family. Eager were the preparations, and the anticipation delightful. The disappointment that would come to Grandma Ellinwood did not cause one reflecting ray to fall into her heart. The glad expectancy of something new and untried was ever a joy, and instead of riding toward grandma's caress and loving counsel, she assumed an entirely new manner, more befitting, she thought, the new scenes she was about to enter. Merrily she chatted of the bright day, and the glistening purity of the snow, reaching far, far away to a beautiful, blended horizon, where the faint blue of the winter sky appeared to be gathering to itself the gift so recently bestowed, with her uncle and herself following.

Uncle Herbert asked of her home, of her little brothers and sisters, and of her school life, to all of which inquiries she replied in an unnatural, affected tone; a tone so evidently assumed for this occasion that her uncle ventured a little well-timed rebuke in the gentlest manner, indeed, just as he would have chided one of his own daughters. "Is your throat sore, Abigail? Let me muffle it up closely, there! Scarcely a breath

can touch you. Not cold? It is a pretty sharp day, and I am pledged to take the best possible care of you."

"You are surely making me very happy, as well as very warm, and my throat is not at all sore. I am proof against such ailments, and even attempt to prescribe for the children." Though she drew a trifle closer the ribbons of her green silk calash, adding a piquancy to the small portion of her features that remained visible. The mask was gone, melted like a snow-flake, under the wisdom of a true friend. A happy visit was spent among new faces and true hearts, for the atmosphere of sincere hospitality may be breathed with perfect freedom.

Now, a heart less affectionate might have gone on always enjoying, and caring little to enrich its store. But the demands of the increasing family made heavy drains on the father's health, and not too abundant means. Perhaps ambition stimulated her, but love purified and beautified it, thrilling the hearts of her family, who had been unconsciously tutored by her. A few years' instruction away from home roused dormant ability, and to her father she confided her desire to teach.

"But where and what will you teach, Gail?"

"The village school, father. Mr. Worden, one of the trustees, says that I may have the position for next winter, if I may accept it, and I would like to very much, if mother would not care."

Mrs. Raynor smiled vacantly, bent to her sewing a little more closely, and without lifting her eyes to meet those of this secretly feared daughter, said that she had been looking forward to the time when Gail's schooling

would be finished, that she might receive some assistance with the little ones. Care for the little ones, and indeed for all, had been the impelling motive, but Gail was silent, knowing that education is as necessary to appreciation as performance. A few years' constant ministering to young life caused serious inroads upon a temperament so self-denying. So when an invitation came from Uncle Walter to visit him in his western home, the preparations were commenced as eagerly as they had been for the Thanksgiving Day a few years before.

One last visit to Grandma Ellinwood, "Until I come again," said Gail, in the old care-free way that had ever surrounded her in that sacred place. "Dear, dear 'Bamma,' good-bye!" And the strong arms caressed the now frail woman, wondering why the dear old life was such a source of strength to her, which separation and years could not diminish.

No, no, love for your own only purifies and strengthens with time! That holy touch was the last that ever came from those cherished hands, but it was a foretaste of the divine love that awaits us all.

Yes, Abigail had gone from that sanctuary of love that reached forth its hands in silent yearning and blessing, as her living presence passed from its flowery portal. Mrs. Ellinwood laid her weary heart against the great Life Heart, and implored His guiding care: "May the dear life go forth as a harmony, as a comfort and solace to every living creature! Loving and blessing, loving and blessing will save the world."

The lonely mask at once crept over everything. The clock ticked a mournful strain, as the mellow hue soft-

ened its features, and through the glistening blur, a remote vision of a slender church spire lifted her over the weary trial. In the following days the pleasantest duty became wearisome, while to the fading eye-sight nothing appeared so distinct as the chest which contained her own and her daughter's wedding garments.

"Gail will need them!" she exclaimed abstractedly, her soul bearing away toward a marvelous reawakening of youthful joys that surged to comfort the fading life they had loved to adorn. Softly rustled the rich fabric as from its long resting place the brocaded gown was lifted. "Why it is as bright as Gail's eyes! Gail would better wear white; yes, I should like Gail to wear white, my rosy-cheeked girl! All this brilliancy was required to woo the color to my cheeks, but Gail is endowed with bloom." So the shining gown was laid away to gather to itself the sweetness of the lives it had adorned and tell its tales of love and joy amid rose-water and memory to coming generations.

CHAPTER THIRD.

A city is a confluence of energies. As night closes about the thronging multitudes that surge restlessly through the avenues of our great cities the thoughts born of the day's activities are garnered into a snowy sheaf, and before the dawn of another morning the winged energies speed restlessly into the outlying districts, falling into slower pulses, rousing and touching the dormant strength awaiting the watchword, "I have need of thee!"

In the low-lying regions of the Northeastern States two placid streams lend verdure to the sloping banks that confine their ambitious surfaces. Many years have passed since they were choked with a riotous growth of willow bushes and tangled grasses; since greenish patches of mossy slime looked enviously at the fleecy shadows that were now and then reflected from a clear depth of living water. The ax and sickle have been faithful in converting useless logs and branches into rude homes, cutting the undergrowth from the banks of the streams, allowing the pure sunlight to accomplish its mission of purifying the stagnant pools and widening the would-be rivers by drying away the spongy soil. Children played along the merry courses; young men and maidens told their secrets to the happy tide; flowers, filled with a tale of

joy or woe, glided out of sight, and as the filmy clouds sped overhead, their reflections slipped away freighted with desires, longings and ambitions that would not be quelled. Silent resolves, day after day, drifted down the sunny ripples, till one long midsummer day, men, women and children, unconsciously drawn by the mysterious forces, floated away from homely, rustic ties, tossing and whirling in happy Bohemian fashion, stopping here and there along the gentle rivers, meeting other equally adventurous souls where the foamy waters met, and human and liquid forces were mutually strengthened.

Still following the impetus of united endeavors, they preferred even a watery grave rather than relinquish their cherished ambition, which found perfect culmination on the banks of the beautiful Ohio, where it paused for a moment of adorning rest. The hills join hands on either side of the now majestic river, and girt the town as effectually as these strong souls were knit by the bonds of mutual resolution and accomplishment.

Little wonder that the thriving town of Promise speedily outgrew its modest proportions, too swiftly, indeed, for the telling of those busy, eager folk, more intent on successful performance than the chronicling of events. But when the natural songstress, who braved the wide ocean to awaken melodies in Occidental hearts, stood on a rustic branch that overhung the young, ambitious city, and trilled a melody, more luscious, more clear than her own pulsing heart knew, the vibrant air and still more vibrant souls echoed and re-echoed every delicious tone, till the melody

arising from a myriad hearts was like a pean of wildest joy! In those who heard her, it is still resonant with its limpid sweetness; May festivals tempt them not, and the time-worn answer comes with a sprightly grace, "Ah, there is a song in my heart and its tones will ring tenuous and clear to my dying day!"

Art can never displace the memory of one heart throb.

To this bustling little city came Abigail, into a care-less freedom of living, of which she had never dreamed, and bringing with her a lady-like grace of manner that erected a bold front of criticism to every action. Genuine truth and piety proved a barrier that increased day by day, like the fortifications built about some sacred fortress by unwilling and unconscious laborers.

Still the life-stream was flowing deeper and clearer than ever through the pure Puritan veins; as a deep stream of water, conscious only of its higher destiny, throws about, all unconsciously, the defractions and reflections of passing objects, smiling from a myriad of laughing dimples into the sun's glowing countenance, bearing merry seekers of pleasure on its broad bosom, and yielding its hidden treasures to those in pursuit of daily sustenance. To be useful, and to be good, was received only as a rebuke by those intent on purely personal advancement; yet the brave heart never quailed nor became discouraged, but gave life eagerly to the present demand, and the heart's only refrain was, "Dear grandma." Was it the prayerful echo that her darling might be kept unspotted from the world; or the piteous appeal to a higher power from a timid creature amid unfamiliar sights and aspirations and their accompanying gloom?

Evidently a chill encircled her heart, which the most exalted desires could not dispel, and the irresistible longings found consolation in the hills and valleys that were wrapped in such enticing freedom. For the lover of nature, Promise afforded perfect and never failing enjoyment. The hills, enshrouded in "pensive glooms," encircled the town quite to the water's edge, rose again on the opposite shore, and seemed to form a crown of plummy foliage. Flowers and ferns of the most varied and luxuriant kinds grew along the easy slopes, and so quiet and undisturbed were these retreats that one might wander through them unmolested as in the narrower limits of private grounds, a boon yielded long ago to our advancing civilization. The city authority had chosen a sequestered spot that lay between the base of two of the hills for a cemetery, which was the sole ornament of the town. Its roomy approach and broad avenues were the solace of pleasure-seekers, who sought its quiet influence at the close of the day; *noise yields the victory to death alone.*

Hither came the quietly happy maiden, finding a singular consolation in a cheery word to a weary mother, still flushed with her day's toil, or a passing salute to bright little faces, whose eager straining after the gaudy town's women relaxed to gaze at the different bearing that hung like a reposeful mantle about Gail. Little hearts responded to the gentle voice and were beguiled by the promise of a pretty story into huddling little groups about the seat which she had chosen. Mothers, and even fathers, sat quietly listening to the simple strains of a Sunday tune or fragment of a Bible story that awakened memories long since obscured in

the rush and bustle of western life. So unostentatiously were the overtures made, that the careless passer-by gave little heed to this simple wayside ministry. However, the next day's toil in many homes and at many workbenches moved more easily than it had done in long, weary months before. Employers returned to their homes conscious of less friction at the shops. Children discovered that their mothers knew the pretty stories the kind lady had told them, and the family tie was beautified and strengthened by the revived knowledge twined in and about the household work. Those who cared for the public good and common order welcomed the unusual influence and dashed away a tear as their innocent boyhood beckoned them to the tender spot still heaving in their manly breasts.

Mr. Walter Raynor, the Mayor of the city, became conscious of these influences, and, although his instinctive manliness recoiled from the slightest aspersion on his niece's behavior, he as jealously guarded her against the criticism of others. One day at the table he suddenly paused in carving and looked at Gail interrogatively; but seeing no denial in her countenance, indeed, nothing save the eager acquiescence she invariably accorded him, he experienced the faintest self-depreciation. For doubt quickly conceives distrust, and when that ugly phantom is dispelled by an unclouded ray from the suspected one, the shadow falls upon its original source. A slight shrug dislodged the unwelcome visitant; so a sudden gust of wind sometimes discloses an effective lining, if it be only in the ear of a donkey. Mr. Raynor placed a generous slice of beef on Gail's plate and remarked, with the faintest

twinkle in his eye, something about rumors that had reached the office of a little preacher who was staying at the Mayor's.

"Why, who is it Uncle Walter?" asked Gail.

"A preacher," said Aunt Raynor, flashing a look at Gail full of half defiant scorn. Uncle Raynor, well into it, now heartily wished that he were well out of it. "They say that it is Gail," responded her uncle. "I know that it is all right Gail, but you would better not do it any more."

The fond look that had accompanied the words was compensation enough for any self-denial." "I preaching?" she smilingly rejoined. "They must have mistaken me for some one else."

"Well, never mind, Gail, if I were you I do not believe that I would go to the cemetery any more. Stay with me, for I am always glad to see you." Meanwhile Gail was flushing painfully, and, laying her hand on her uncle's arm, offered no explanation, saying instead, "Dear Uncle Raynor, you are so like my father, always espousing my cause." But she lapsed into reflection over her unconscious "showing off."

"Gail, perhaps I have not done as much for you as I should have done," and, leaving the table with an uneasy laugh, Mr. Raynor was followed by his niece into the hall, who implored him not to bring any callers. She had met them all and had not acquired their ways, as yet. "Promise me, Uncle Walter," she pleadingly continued, "do promise me—I have Jemmy and a great many people who really need me."

"Good-bye, Gail, you are like your own mother." With a tender look at the serious face, the door was

closed by the only being in the wide-awake country who understood her. The sound of the closing door was like the drawing out of a new combination on the organ; tones, inflections and actions were all completely changed, and well Gail knew that nothing but the blessed sound announcing his return would restore the harmony he fancied prevailed in his household.

As she stood in the hall the odor-laden air swept through the doorway, and, sweetly, like a heaven-born vista, came visions of a peaceful home, surrounded by long lines of roses, and a dear old lady seated by her rose-still, the pungent odor of which seemed to steep her senses and suddenly envelop her with caresses of love and tender solicitation. She saw grandma bend over her and kiss the throbbing brow, her father, her own mother and the first little one that came to the new home all standing about in sweet ministration, calming and soothing her; and instantly her arms reached out to the dear, bent figure with a silvered halo about her face, her heart bursting with a rush of bereaved anguish. She exclaimed "Grandma," and the vision vanished. The afternoon wore away to its dull, heavy close. The heat had been intense. Just before retiring to her room from the supper table her uncle placed in her hand a telegram saying: "Mrs. Ellinwood passed away this afternoon. Her last words were a prayer for Abigail." Gail replaced the message in the envelope and asked to be excused for the evening, though she longed to throw her arms about her dear uncle's neck and rest her aching head for a moment on the beloved arm. A clear strain of one of grandma's hymns floated on the air:

"Help of the helpless, oh abide with me!"

"Poor Gail," said her uncle after she had left the room.

"Why, I should not think that she would care for that old woman. Wasn't she awfully old?" asked one of the daughters.

"Oh yes, daughter," Mr. Raynor's face kindling at the happy recollection, even her death could not temporarily obscure, "but she was a true Christian woman and devoted to Gail. Her only child died when Gail was scarcely two weeks old. A sweeter spirit never lived, and at her death the old people poured out a wealth of affection on their grandchild."

"Did they have anything?" pursued the unsympathetic tone.

"Oh, they lived very nicely. Dr. Ellinwood was a fine physician. Mrs. Ellinwood and Gail were adored by the poor and comfortless, the two carrying flowers as well as substantials to some invalid was a familiar sight. Their grounds were filled with roses and Mrs. Ellinwood kept her own rose-still. Their home was always balmy with the odor; the old lady looked like a rose leaf in all her daintiness. Gail enjoyed many happy days visiting at her Uncle Winton's. They were wealthy people and a residence of some ten years in Paris afforded them delightful opportunities. Mr. Winton represented the United States at the marriage of Louis Napoleon with Marie Louise and they love to show the shoe and knee buckles that he wore then. I remember distinctly when they entertained La Fayette; the children formed a procession to welcome

him and the girls carried yellow silk parasols. Gail was one of them. I can see her now right in the front row. The Dresden china came out on that occasion, and they regard it as an heirloom in the family."

"Why don't she ever tell us about these things? One would suppose that she had never seen anything to hear her talk, especially if we have callers, and I can not think of anything to say." Mrs. Raynor's voice subsided gradually, as she received no encouraging glance from her husband, and was completely lost amid the clatter of the cups and saucers on the tray which she began nervously to re-arrange.

"Gail's quiet, gentle ways would prove her a lady wherever you might find her, and moreover, she has been taught not to boast, but to gain her pleasure from the present moment. Perhaps she thinks you do not care to hear her talk. I confess that I often think so myself. The coffee is excellent to-night. Gail has not tasted her's, poor child! Won't you go up to her, my dear?"

Mr. Raynor's retrospections were stimulating. He left the table and walked to the hearth-rug: "Ah, yes, Winton's was a fine place to visit! When I was singing in the Park Street Choir we could not do a nicer thing than to go out to Malden and make a call there. Their home was quite a mansion for those days, and you could not find seven prettier daughters in the whole country-side."

"Seven daughters!" gasped Mrs. Raynor, looking helplessly at her own. "Were they all married?"

"Oh I believe so, wife. I was not fortunate enough to secure one."

"Humph!" interpolated Mrs. Raynor, "they might have done worse."

"I am quite sure of that, my dear, but they all married rich men from the cities—New York, Boston and other places. Winton controlled the lace trade of the country at one time, and during his residence abroad he made an especial trip to America to consult President — on some foreign policy that was adopted at once."

Mrs. Raynor was entertained. Grief discloses some joy, but to the joy she clung, giving little heed to the lonely, bereaved girl who was weeping softly to herself and being comforted in a blessed way; mortals have not as yet learned to yield.

When Gail ascended to her room she dropped into a chair by the low window, through which the heavy odor of an ailantus tree poured, filling the room with its noxious breath. As the sun had lowered, the air became heavy and oppressive, acting as an opiate upon a brain already charged to exhaustion; yet, through it all, sweetly like a dear benediction, came memories, precious memories of a tender love that never dies—never; no, no, not a single heart throb is ever lost—fall where it may, the ennobling influence goes on in its invisible path.

"Help of the helpless, oh abide with me!"

Scarcely above her breath rose the tender strain and when sleep closed her eyes she was comforted by sacred harmonies not made for the unhearing ears.

"Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver: I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

Mrs. Raynor bustled around, putting away the tea table and its appointments, arranging her cap at the clock mirror, stepping out briskly to the neighbors, and before noon the following day the greater portion of the neighborhood knew of Mrs. Ellinwood's death and of her niece's aristocratic connections.

Gail came down to breakfast earlier than usual in a black dress with a simple knot of ribbon at her throat. She was touched by a softer greeting than usual and turned her eyes toward her uncle's face in recognition of the change.

Most acceptable was the seclusion of the ensuing months. The little charitable duties were gradually resumed, especially visits to little Jemmy, a sadly deformed child with a wistful, intelligent face, who repeatedly attracted Gail's attention until she found where he lived. At various times she had carried him bright pictures and books filled with jolly stories, and, indeed, in the frequent going she had taught him to read. Mrs. Brien said that Gail did him more good than the doctor. An inquiring glance at an elegant miniature coach brought the information that Brien was the foreman of the large carriage manufactory of Mr. Neville, who was kind enough to give him the materials, from which Brien made it out of hours. Gail thought it would be like Mr. Neville to do this, but she forebore to say so. However, she abandoned even little Jem after Aunt Raynor said that it must be very disagreeable to have people prying around after your unfortunate children; that it was surely bad enough to

have them, let alone other people, asking how it happened.

But the woods were still beautiful, and youth, lovely, happy youth, is elastic and lends its charm to the most untoward circumstances.

CHAPTER FOURTH.

Wachusett's brow extended his peaceful blessing far and wide. More enhancing than the beauty of tropical bloom or graceful tendril growth were the loving looks and heavenly aspirations that ascended as a cloud of incense from the devotional hearts that encircled his patriarchal skirts and united in a transfiguration of glory at the haloed apex. In some such way,

"Heaven comes down our souls to greet,
And glory crowns the mercy seat."

Men whose lives are spent in mountainous regions realize the sense of superior force, which summons all that is best and purest within them, to arise and shine with the verities of life, and subdue the less inspiring part of their natures.

Summer, the great leveler, had come, distributing her caresses with generous equality over cottage and mansion in the humming, manufacturing town of West-bridge. Huge chimneys breathed smoke from living green columns. Factory windows, draped with tendril creepers, vied in attractiveness with the lace-adorned ones of their owners.

"Morn amid the mountains, lovely solitude."

So sang Charity Neville as she stepped from her

cottage door to view the long sweep of verdure as it rose and fell in billowy loveliness. A mist veiled the first penetrating ray of the sun as it glorified the scene; so an unaccountable dimness sometimes covers the eyes as a prescience of holy joy. This medium, which lies between heaven and earth, as well as between the good and evil in human nature, is ever transfused with primal hues, and is the penitential dew that shields from the severity of justice until the beautiful verities fructify, watered by its tenderness.

"Gushing brooks and fountains murmur God is good."

As Mrs. Neville finished the matin song her soul perceived a radiance new and strange, an almost conscious approach of a subtle force, that she felt, weighed, and partly, though vaguely, understood.

"The world moves on under His marvelous guidance!" Deeply reverent a prayer almost monosyllabic in its brevity escaped her and fell audibly on the morning air.

"Guidance, my Father, guidance for this day's emergencies."

What was consuming the joy that trembled a moment before on the verge of her soft blue eyes? Does the sun assuage his thirst with the dew that crowns the morning blossom? Rather it falls into the heart of the blossom that it may be refreshed by its own tears. So Mrs. Neville's fond heart was renewed for the next blossom love's hand demanded.

"Chester, you have been away one long year. What has the attrition of the world done for my first-born?" she soliloquized. "True and manly you

always were, but the difficulties and perplexities of life come to the strongest; yea, they are the very source of their strength and give positive grandeur to their souls."

One year before Mrs. Neville had watched Chester's retreating figure, beautiful, so beautiful, to her fond heart, as he walked over the low-lying meadows, yet with Spartan firmness she had bade him leave the paths his father had trod and plant his vigorous young manhood in fresher fields and amid untried pursuits. He seemed equipped to control and influence men, having had ample opportunities for the exercise of these faculties in the manufactories that buzzed and hummed in ceaseless activity within the circle of towns called Westbridge, Southbridge and all points of the compass in due succession. The restless nature incident to development needed only the touch-word of his mother's consent for old ties to be severed and the great beckoning unknown eagerly embraced.

He had said: "In one year I will come home, mother," and the cottage echoed no more to the beloved footfalls.

Mrs. Neville had long been widowed, but her resolute nature still invoked the activities of life and unremitting diligence was her gospel.

The looms of an hundred mills throbbing night and day with incessant toil fill the atmosphere with ceaseless pulsation and so charge the lives that breathe it with persistent momentum that rest appears a physical impossibility. Oh! the weariness of it, and how few step aside from the useless commotion to enjoy a life of serious contemplation.

The matin hour had passed. Duties were clamoring for attention. The soul remained without while the body turned dutyward to be greeted by Polly's "Good-morning!"

The usual "Here Polly" had been omitted in the joyful expectancy of Chester's return, but the abused countenance of the bird induced a faint invitation which was quickly accepted by Polly's alighting on Mrs. Neville's shoulder to croon itself into a blissful satisfaction.

"Chester," said the bird, perceiving its caresses were not returned.

"Yes, Polly, and now to your perch."

The bird reluctantly left its favorite place to occupy the loneliness of perchdom, now talking, now singing and calling most plaintively, "Chester, Chester!" while Mrs. Neville carried on the welcoming preparations.

Nothing so quickly and so accurately reproduces the vibrations of a home as this remarkable bird. To know Polly was to know Mrs. Neville.

When the soft twilight hung over the brow of Wachusett enshrouding his majestic presence in vapory gloom and lending a blessed calm to the rustling growth of the perfect June day, Mrs. Neville sat looking into the far west. Her vision alternately narrowed and lengthened in accordance with the humid lens that introduced its unwelcome mist before her eyes until she saw through a telescopic vista, radiant, changeful and happy. It was a vista of years. Chester an infant, a child, a lad, a youth; in every way her own conception of a manly, Christian boy. Manhood

had not changed his thoughtfulness, nor dimmed his high hopes of life, and in his full and perfect development lay the sum of all her desires.

"Mother!" rang out on the evening air. "Not looking for me? I feel quite aggrieved! My hat has been waving to you these dozen yards and I do believe that you are asleep, and little wonder mother, dear, amid this mysterious calm which I am convinced exists no place else in the country."

The eager, boyish nature had bounded up the low hillside in springing leaps, nodding now and then to a familiar teamster, and calling across fields a cheery "Hello!" his spirits rising with every step until he would have rashly declared that the trees were welcoming him, and the long shadow from the forgotten sun was silently heralding his advent. In this breathless condition he dropped by his mother's side to find her all dazed and surprised into speechlessness.

"Why, Chester, I had hoped to greet the smallest speck of your appearance."

"And you failed to see the whole of me," came in bright response from her boy. "Why this is no greeting at all; ask me in and make a visitor of me." Scanning the beloved face that unmistakably had grown older during the year that was chilled by the absence of his sunshiny countenance: "Are you really well, mother?"

Mrs. Neville smiled as the eager face dispelled the vague alarm of the morning, but she awaited confidences; meanwhile the affectionate questioning back and forth lapsed into the practical.

"Do you still have your Bible class, mother?"

"Yes, indeed, my son ; I told them last Sabbath that I stood upon the promises ; yea, even walked upon them.

"And your occupation, Chester—are your investments satisfactory, and does the manufactory pay, or begin to?"

"Oh yes, fairly ; that is, if we can fill all of our orders promptly, and I think we can, at least we have done so up to the time I left."

"Will you make that your home?"

"Why this is my home, mother mine; are you tired of me? Let me be your boy a little longer, won't you? Then, too, you have bundled up a dozen questions in that last one. I will surely have to go to some of your Bible classes to learn how to answer in such a wholesale manner."

"Why that is a simple question, my boy."

"And will a simple yes or no answer it?" Chester's eye was surveying the home-like scene, and the catechetical teachings of his boyhood were invisible witnesses to his eager enjoyment, and awakened to distinct utterance the once familiar words, "You know there is a way and the ends thereof."

"I hope not death, my boy. Do not use the Bible flippantly ; it is God's own word."

"If my levity was irreverent I sincerely regret it." Chester closed his sentence by laying his strong hand over the clasped ones, which instantly folded about his own with the sweetest pardoning clasp.

"Tell me about your friends, the people out in your western home," said Mrs. Neville reassuringly.

"Oh, the people out there are just jolly and good-

natured, for the most part, but there is one young lady, mother, that would just suit you, Abigail Raynor, quite an unusual girl. The name is not an American one. She has large brown eyes, but her ideas and ways are decidedly Puritanical."

"Abigail Raynor," Mrs. Neville was pleasantly impressed, and when Chester told of the little lame boy she was completely won.

"Laura must wait until to-morrow for an introduction, she is a fine girl and quite fascinating," mentally ejaculated Chester. But observing his mother's weariness he suggested that she should go to bed and then they could enjoy one of the early mornings of the olden times.

Before entering the house a passer-by might have heard a tremulous voice, accompanied by one whose deep tones were modulated so as to support the feebler ones—the pliant strength still so ready to yield its undiminished allegiance.

"Softly now the light of day
Fades upon my sight away,
Free from care, from labor free,
Lord I would commune with Thee."

All through the hymn they sang, scarcely conscious of anything but the precious calm of their own hearts, and as the last stanza died away Mrs. Neville took the proffered arm and they sought the quiet of the home room before the voices offered a prayer of thankfulness for their reunited lives.

Morning unfolded in a bewilderment of glory. Mrs. Neville, accustomed to the gradual dawning of the day, awakened almost startled by its enveloping brightness.

Closing her eyes for a moment she caught the penetrating tones of a clear, emotional whistle. It was still a strain of the old devotional hymn. Such revelatory glimpses into the uncovered heart.

"Now the shades of night are passed,
Now the morning light appears."

"Chester," came from Polly's perch.

"Chester," echoed Mrs. Neville. "Yes, why how late I have slept!" Again the low whistle fell upon her ear like a slender, succulent root of a great truth seeking to lay in the deep soil of her heart the impress of the life it indicated from the upper realm.

"The great God of love is surely forging a new link in the chain of my human destiny, may it be wrought with His own strength and peace." Hastily dressing she came from her room to find Chester quite at home, Polly on his shoulder and the old favorite chair tipped back on the porch. Life was a calm delight to this mother and son, neither of them faultless, but quietly content in each other. After the morning's greeting, Chester said, "I have been looking about the place, mother, and, with your consent, we might make a few repairs. The next time that I come home I may bring some one with me, eh! Mother, how would you like that?"

But the mother was absorbed in the joy of her son's presence. Mothers do love their boys so; and the tangible life, how precious it is!

"A prudent wife is from the Lord, my son," was the quiet response.

"And an imprudent one is from where, mother?"

"We will trust that imprudent ones do not exist, and if any such could be found I pray that you may not have one. Yet, do not think that I object to your taking a wife, for I really desire it."

"All right, mother, we will not talk about a wife just now. Let's talk about this stairway; it might be brought around to the parlor door, and with a square landing and a newel post it would not be so steep. I'll have old Jessup up to look at it, if he is still about." Chester drew his arm about his mother, holding her to him in a strong embrace that bore the pang of parting. Ah, yes, the alarm of the morning returned as she observed a number of trifling courtesies and attentions bestowed in a persuasive manner as the conversation went on, and she felt, yes, at last she knew, that the heart was divided against itself—that is, if "itself" were the boy in him, and the stronger, fuller power was asserting supremacy.

Be that as it may, the proposed improvements were promptly carried on. Each executed project suggested another, and that one complete, merely proved the incompleteness of the contiguous portion. Yet the days passed most happily and joyously and the brooding promises of the future were not rosy enough to pale those present joys. Young woman! do not deride this holiest love. "A man's a man for a' that," and the affectionate son invariably makes the fond husband.

To his mother's eye Chester was transforming the boyhood home under the promptings of filial love, that love that erects itself upon our own, thus bringing us nearer the heavenly places.

Out of doors were new trellises for the vines and

new borders for the walks, and to add to the convenience within was an indoor pump, every swing of the handle of which echoed the patter of willing feet, and every drop of flowing water reflected the bright eyes and glowing countenance of the growing lad, not dead, but gone!—folded in the eternities. Old Anchises sent the boyish feet on a ceaseless patter down the ages.

When soft, new carpets had been laid over it all and the son's presence seemed to touch every nook and corner with a loving radiance, the mother-heart swelled to an exalted womanhood, and laying her hands upon the manly curls, she said, "God bless you and yours, my child!"

In the soft twilight of that love Chester began: "Mother, I have not spoken to you about Laura yet, Laura Winthrop; I think she is more to me than any other young lady I know."

"Why I thought it was Abigail, Chester."

"Yes, as I told you, Abigail is true and sincere, but in some way I find myself oftener with Laura."

"Is she a Christian, my son?"

"Oh, I think so, we often go to church together."

"Does she ever speak about religion?"

"Not often; she says that it is too sacred. Gail talks it as though it were her native breath. It is irksome sometimes, I'll admit. The truth is she lives so much as she talks that it is really wearisome."

"And how does Laura live?" queried the mother.

"Oh, just jolly and lively, ready for anything that promises a lark. It is quite an exhilaration to be with her."

Mrs. Neville was silent for a few moments. At length

in an almost indifferent way she asked, what was fun? and if he found himself whirling in the usual gayeties of a western town?

"I have not come to cards yet, mother, though they say I have lost by it," volunteered Chester.

"Lost by it! What would you lose? They surely do not play for money." Mrs. Neville was really alarmed.

"Oh no—not money, mother, but you see you meet so many more people who are rich and active in business circles, and in that way you increase your own business acquaintance."

"Then you win the money by it indirectly, if not directly. Now you might quote most appropriately, 'There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.'"

"But, mother, your way would be death to all trade, and, indeed, everything that moves the world."

"You know, my boy, that a higher power than man's devices moves the world, trade and all. 'The love of money is the root of all evil,' while love is the root of all good—yes, my son, the very source of it!" Mrs. Neville was growing emphatic, a delicate flush kissed her cheek, and an unusual sparkle illuminated her eye. Chester whistled softly, not irreverently; it was simply a refuge he had acquired to help him through difficulties, and though it was very low and sweet, the sacred air fell into his mother's heart, warming and thrilling it beyond the benumbing influence of doubt.

"Chester, good-night, my precious boy, you may give my love to Abigail though I remember perfectly

that she did not send hers to me ; but Laura shall have a little gift for her loving message."

"Good-night, mother, you are the best woman in the world !"

Finding himself alone, Chester lay back upon the porch floor and was soon lost in serious reflection. The world was ensphered in a silver glow. An overhanging elm tapped the window-pane with muffled verdure—a "sesame" to boyish delights that recalled the stories he had listened to, affectionately seated upon his grandfather's knee, while he related the hardships and delights of his Revolutionary service—how coming into peaceful fields, with imagination and memory crowded with bloody warfare, he had stopped at the very doorway where Chester was now reclining, bearing a tiny sapling over his shoulder, which he planted with the same resolve with which he had shouldered his musket, and thus secured an heirloom of shade to future generations.

Almost unconsciously the prostrate form reached for a twig, as it swayed tenderly toward him, and placed it in his vest-pocket to carry into the warfare of life. Light and love were ministering to the awakened soul. The earth seemed to be slowly arising as if obedient to the resistless influence of the absorbing whiteness. Chester, in yielding to the universal embrace, was drawn toward the spirit of the night. The sympathetic elm swayed in the passing breeze, recalling the swaying spirit, just as a vision of two ethereal forms appeared, rising and falling in the misty silence. And while he gazed with increasing wonder, the form which was descending with outstretched arms toward him,

had the countenance of Laura Winthrop, and the spirit with the bearing of Gail Raynor was ever ascending from him, while his soul longed for Gail to turn and look at him, but she did not.

Morning dawned with unpinioned glory, investing the home with an unwonted transcendency—joy after joy, resurrecting precious memories that served to tether Mrs. Neville more securely than ever. It was the Master's hand increasing and multiplying the pitiful remnants of a multitude of delights. The little brass-nailed trunk stood on the porch flanked by Polly's cage, and Polly herself, ruffled and expectant, trod the perch with very evident dissatisfaction. Freedom was her bird soul's delight, and the necessary restraint preparatory to a larger freedom was unappreciated.

As soon as Chester reached the front door he beheld the parrot by the side of the trunk, the cage shining and filled with a double portion of Polly's favorite diet. He at once protested against the information that the bird was a gift to Laura.

"Not Polly, mother!" said Chester, "you could not live without Polly and it would render me perfectly unhappy for you to attempt to do so. No, no; you must not think of such a thing."

Polly regained her composure, and stood quietly looking from mother to son. "No, no," echoed the bird.

"Polly is a very small part of my life, Chester. Don't you think Polly would be an acceptable present to Laura? Pretty Poll, Polly! Pretty Polly, good-bye; be a good bird. Polly! Polly! pretty Poll—not like the cage, Polly? Never mind, good Polly. Any one

would like Polly, don't you think so, Chester?" Polly clung to the side of the cage, pecked affectionately the kindly remonstrating finger, and dropped back into humiliated acquiescence.

Chester in the meantime was viewing the scene abstractedly, both hands thrust deeply into his pockets and resolution nerving every angle of his attitude. "Don't you, Chester? She is a beautiful bird." Mrs. Neville looked with a longing affection at her son.

Quickly the whole body relaxed with a genial accord. "Oh yes'm! that is, I think so, but I can not take her from you. I'll buy her one! Come, mother, let me—do let me—you are making me miserable." Softly she pressed a kiss on the unrelenting brow. "Mother," and then he proceeded to release the bird.

Mrs. Neville as quickly intercepted the movement. "No, no! take Polly Neville. Laura will learn to know me through the bird. Come, Chester, you will be late; there, good-bye again, may you have a safe journey."

Consenting reluctantly, Chester started off mystified concerning the parrot and wishing that Gail had looked at him only once, but he was sure of a hearty welcome from Laura. "What will she say to the parrot?" The mother's last words were ringing in his ears: "Chester, beware of a girl that is 'before instructed of her mother,' they are dancing men's heads off like Salome of old."

"Abigail has no mother, but she did not even look at me in my dream, but my soul lifted toward her." The air suddenly became vibrant with a low, tremulous

whistle, which evoked from Polly, unaccustomed to being caged—"Chester!"

"How are you, old girl?" said Chester, as a swing of the cage brought the bird on a level with his face. "Why in the world did mother give you away?" Polly was abused and vouchsafed no reply, but walked back and forth on her perch, muttering to herself.

Baring his brow to the morning breeze, he observed the first signs of decay upon the autumnal foliage. The moorings were effectually loosened: a heavenly mirage veiled stern realities and beckoned with a rosy calm to the brave barque floating onward toward an undiscovered haven.

CHAPTER FIFTH.

"And their webs shall not become garments."

Three distinct classes of people may be found in a prosperous young city: Capitalists, eager to reap with their golden sickles the first fruits of youthful energies; men whose energies are their sole capital, and equally distinctive, if not as distinguished, farsighted mammas. The qualities of the last named class Mrs. Winthrop possessed in no parsimonious degree; indeed she was able to distinguish a desirable *parti* at an unaccountably long range of vision and with a distinctness that justified pursuit.

A reversal of fortune had left the luckless daughters slim opportunities, and a residence in a western town was bounded with matrimonial visions, and, to speak the truth, these visions had materialized—the eldest Miss Winthrop was already domiciled as second wife in the home of Mr. Grandor, the banker, and Laura's future seemed quite secure. Young Neville was devoted, and Mr. Grandor, whose judgment was unflinching, pronounced him the rising young man of the town.

"Mrs. Winthrop," he had declared at the last family council, "Neville is sure to succeed! I would back him with an hundred thousand myself; such unrelent-

ing industry I never beheld, and his carriages are most tasteful. His repository at Lennox is well stocked, and he received only to-day an order from a lady in mourning for a nice affair, to cost some thirteen hundred dollars. The fellow has a spark of genius, you see—yes, indeed! I would call him brother-in-law with considerable pride. A second repository is under construction at Fenworth, and his future looks bright—very bright, indeed!”

Mr. Grandor's eyes penetrated Mrs. Winthrop's to an uncomfortable degree, as the latter sighed submissively. “Why, my dear, surely the girl is not insensible to such advantages; pardon me, my dear, but it seems too absurd for our politic Laura,” continued her son-in-law. “I really can not divine her motive,” he added with some impatience, which was but a spark of the determination in reserve. A scarcely perceptible wave of hauteur swept over Mrs. Winthrop, as if resenting the slightest depreciation of Laura, but her voice lost none of its seductiveness as it rolled out her stilted reply:

“Oh yes, indeed, Mr. Grandor, Laura sees an advantageous move in a way that is quite worthy of her, but obstructions are sometimes difficult to surmount. The Puritan maiden, you know, renders the situation somewhat uncomfortable.”

The questioning eyes relaxed not for an instant, though Mrs. Winthrop's profusely ringed fingers had obscured her own quite often during the interview and she proceeded unawed by his severity. “Both from the same state, you know, with perfectly according

tastes, for we must admit that Mr. Neville is a trifle straight-laced."

"Just the foundation for success!" broke in Grandor, while a fine line of tobacco juice at either corner of his mouth indicated his intense abstraction. But still this failed to intimidate Mrs. Winthrop, and she proceeded as before.

"Oh yes, yes, I agree with you perfectly there, Mr. Grandor, and their ideas concerning marriage are so sacred, that when the ceremony is once performed he can be brought into subjection very readily. Laura's little whims will prove most effective because Mr. Neville is evidently as much in earnest as his serious-minded life will permit." So confidently will people speculate upon uncertainties. However, the Puritan maiden still hung like a pure white cloud over this otherwise promising future.

"Who is this Puritan maiden?" Mr. Grandor asked loftily.

"A niece of the Mayor. Mrs. Raynor tells some remarkable stories of her connections. Her grandmother was a friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson's family, and La Fayette was entertained in the connection, and what not. All bosh! of course, but Neville is credulous, and one can not sacrifice dignity by doubting another's veracity."

"A miserable course to pursue," responded her son-in-law, "but your tactics, Mrs. Winthrop, are inexhaustible. Why, I would wage war against the Greeks with you for my Major General. And a simple Puritan maiden—tut—tut—this is a farce! Invite her to tea, I can fathom her if you fail."

Grandor arose on the crest of this proposal, but before he was borne far upon its tide he returned with a sinuous ebb. Mrs. Winthrop greedily awaited his refreshing utterance. "My dear, we'll give a party! Throw a little dust in their eyes, ha, ha, ha. We'll list up this evening." His merriment ended in a sarcastic smile as Mrs. Winthrop warmed to social preparations. A party was her "throne of felicity," and the interest preceding one dispelled every gloomy recollection of the past or the overhanging future. Nevertheless, Mr. Grandor walked away gratified. He really liked the Winthrops now that he was one of them. Their little fibs were used as bibs, and he occasionally saw them bibless, and life was comparatively smooth. Mrs. Winthrop remained in her chair. She knew perfectly well that Grandor understood her, but it had to be done. Love seemed so far away, quite out of date, you know, a thing of the past. Oh, yes, she had found it convenient when she was young, but she had shed pinafores long ago and robed herself in ability. "I wish that I could banish that girl from my sight—she is a lady beyond a doubt, but is simple and unassuming withal."

Looking from the low broad window of the library, a single terrace bounded the garden laid out in geometrical designs, each devoted to a special variety of blooming plants, regular, precise and in perfect order. Jerry routed disorder and weeds with relentless zeal. The maid was equally industrious indoors, leaving Mrs. Winthrop's hands free and soft for her exquisite embroidery. The establishment was Grandor's, and Esther, his wife, carried out his behests to the letter.

Mrs. Winthrop, in some discomfort, for she was stung by Mr. Grandor's desire to be rid of Laura, fell to gleaning what comfort she was able to find. "Yes, Esther, was well married, but she was always more plastic than Laura, and runs in a groove as though it were oiled," as certainly it was. Indeed any opposition to her mother required more energy than Esther was mistress of, and ineffectual attempts had at length taught her comparative submission. The garden usually bounded Mrs. Winthrop's vision, but that day she was apparently unconscious of it, or disagreeably conscious, that, hateful as her position was, the one escape was drawing mercifully near. As she sat looking up the street, attractive with its double row of shade trees, her attention fastened upon a colored man bearing in one hand a note, while from the other swung a caged parrot. He had scarcely passed when a loud ring at the door aroused her, and she awaited, with some trepidation, the return of the maid, who came bearing the note and the parrot.

Mrs. Winthrop instinctively drew herself together, though she outwardly evinced the greatest satisfaction, sending for Laura to come to her at once. After some delay Laura appeared, receiving the note in a languid manner.

"Oh! mamma, it is from Mr. Neville. He has returned from Boston and his mother has sent me this parrot. Isn't it superb?" Laying aside the note, Laura modestly asked Dobson to bring the bird to her.

As to Mrs. Winthrop, she began to reason within herself whether generosity or calculation had induced

the gift, but in consideration of the primitive upbringing of the donor, which she declared was simplicity itself, she attributed the offering to the narrow resources from whence it sprung, and unhesitatingly pronounced it generosity of the highest order.

"How very considerate in Mrs. Neville, my darling."

"Dobson, will you please go to the attic and bring a disused perch that you will find in the southeast corner just beside the Britannia chafing dish. How tired Polly must be, caged so long." As Mrs. Winthrop concluded her caressing remarks she closed the door after Dobson's retreating figure, and, drawing close to her daughter, whispered in her ear, "Laura!" at the same moment throwing up her hands and rolling her eyes until the pupils appeared like ominous crescents emerging from the upper lids.

"What is it, mamma?" gasped the girl in great alarm. "What is it?"

"That is a bird of omen, my child."

"Why the hateful old thing, take it away, take it away!" shrieked Laura.

"Don't be so agitated, Laura, you're acting like a fool."

"Take it away, take it away!" still screamed the girl, assuming the most fantastic attitudes.

"Laura Winthrop, compose yourself; there is nothing the matter and we will let it stay for awhile. We may learn something from it, and who knows but it may have the olive branch in its mouth to bring you love, my dear." Mrs. Winthrop chuckled at her own cleverness and smiled reassuringly at her daughter.

Mollified by the sentimental turn her mother had given to the situation, and admiring the really beautiful plumage of the bird, Laura speculated on the harmonious coloring in reference to millinery effects and gratified vanity yielded its soothing balm. This accomplished, she addressed the bird, "Why you pretty Polly, introduce yourself to me, won't you, Polly?" Laura then approached the parrot winningly, and was surprised to find it friendly and affectionate after her burst of unrestrained petulance. The bird was so gentle and harmless that it was soon allowed to fly all through the spacious rooms, and its soft voice and peaceable ways were surely a credit to Mrs. Neville, Mrs. Winthrop said one day in a burst of confidence.

Chester had seen Abigail oftener since his return. The ingenuousness of her manner impressed him with a persistency that he was beginning to acknowledge. A gentle demeanor to which he had hitherto been insensible, he suddenly regarded, and with this change in himself he saw through a medium that diffused the sparkle of her eye over her entire countenance—as the hidden sun ignites the stellar countenance for the illuminating of our darkened pathway. His mother's kind regards had been duly presented, though the parrot had not been mentioned.

Just at this juncture a home letter enclosed the following note:

"My Dear Mrs. Neville:

"How very kind of you to send me this beautiful parrot. Are you quite sure that you did not rob yourself? It is such a remarkably fine talker that we are

beginning to know you through it, and your very self seems to speak when it calls 'Chester!'

"Again please accept my most heartfelt thanks. My mother wishes to be kindly remembered to you.

"Very sincerely yours,

"LAURA WINTHROP.

"91 Blanchard Avenue."

As Chester folded the note Laura's face seemed before him smiling and radiant. Standing with the envelope still in his hand, looking from the window, far beyond the beautiful hills into the future, the angelic ladder again appeared with Laura descending and Gail ascending, as before.

Laura was very apt to be on the street at this hour because a morning walk freshened her roses, besides affording ample opportunity to chide her derelict callers. However, she was engaged at home that day, and upon returning to his room in the evening Chester found an invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Philip Grandor for the following Friday evening. The brief moment of abstraction was quickly atoned for by hastily dispatching an acceptance, after which an evening with Gail was decided upon, apparently, for him. But active, impulsive natures soon return to their regular line of action.

The evening of the Grandor party was all that could be desired for the fulfillment of the elaborate preparations. "Esther," Mr. Grandor said a few days previous, "a thousand dollars spent in this way will yield a handsome return." So the orders were recklessly given.

Mrs. Winthrop, who naturally wished for the best of

everything for her daughter, was equally sensitive of her inability in this direction, and as a lash to the unwelcome fact, declared there was no possibility of doing anything with Laura when she had one of her brother-in-law's checks in her hand. He was simply ruining her, and she for one would be heartily glad when she was finally settled.

Grandor had replied "ditto," and the arrangements passed on under Esther's skillful management. The effect was brilliant in the extreme. Caterers from abroad had the supper in charge—"and all went merry as a marriage bell," Mrs. Winthrop triumphantly exclaimed. Canvas covered the floors to "protect the ladies' dresses." Laura said, however, "it was to facilitate the dancing," but her mother clung to her Virginia ideas, that it was the privilege of a hostess to allow no possibility for the soiling of beautiful toilettes when guests were kind enough to accept *her* hospitality. Mrs. Winthrop always spoke in the first person.

The crystal chandeliers, glistening from their ammonia bath, reflected in the mirrors at either end of the salon until the distance failed to accent their brightness. Nothing gay or startling in the furnishings marred the perfectly blending tints of elegant costuming. The dining-room was resplendent with sparkling glass and snowy linen. Camellias covered the entire center of the table, at either end of which stood a slender pyramid of egg kisses and macaroons, enveloped in a misty veil of spun candy, each silvery thread of which wound its own glistening ray in and about the enchanting scene. Two butlers stood at the sideboard where the gentlemen were expected to refresh themselves.

Laura floated down the stairway like a beautiful apparition, surveyed the parlor and dining-room, touching here and there in graceful commendation of Esther's exquisite taste.

A swift glance in the mirror reflected an object seemingly an offspring of the surroundings, a creature so palpably in harmony with the ensemble that she accented and illuminated the very flowers, as if the roses lifted their petals to look at her. Tall, slender, graceful in movement, with the gentleness of a fawn. Dobson pronounced her the most beautiful young lady in the world. Mrs. Winthrop joined her, dressed in a lavender silk with point lace at her neck and hanging from wide angel sleeves. Diamond clusters adorned her ears, and a subtle odor wafted from the sandal-wood fan that scarcely succeeded in cooling her flushed face. But Laura's beauty was ample compensation for her own diminishing charms.

Mr. and Mrs. Grandor stood in the second room extending a genial welcome to the guests after they had passed the rigid ceremonial accorded them by Mrs. Winthrop and Laura.

Soft and low were the courtesies extended from guest to guest as they passed into the swaying, gliding movement of perfect social intercourse.

As the formality was wearing away Chester joined Laura, congratulating her upon the buoyant manner with which she received her friends. Her beauty was undeniable, the soft flush in her cheeks challenging the hermosas at her belt, and signaling victory to the tremors insidiously gaining upon her.

The field so outwardly her own had never seemed so

insecure as now, and an inward rallying of her spirits gave zest to her movements and led her away from a distrust that was at once unusual and unwelcome to her.

Mrs. Winthrop's enthusiasm was more generous, including her entire face in its gratifying hue, allowing an over-supply to her tiny ears.

Laura turned a caressing smile upon Mr. Neville. As she was standing with her back to the door and her whole manner thrown open to his smiles, that appeared to be smiles of amusement rather than of admiration, Mr. and Mrs. Raynor and Miss Raynor entered. Laura, while talking in a most animated way, lost Chester's attention for a moment, which caused a quick change in her countenance, and the friendly familiarity was exchanged for the airs of the injured hostess. He had glanced over her shoulder, a fatal indecorum for a gentleman, and Laura at once perceived who had entered the parlor. *Inward revenge heightens beauty though its ashes fall into the heart.*

Gail, all unconscious, passed Mr. Neville and Laura with a frank recognition and was soon lost among the guests, a little wave of pleasure following her as she mingled cordially with them, showing equal deference for all. Mr. Neville recovered himself at once. An illumination is always enlightening! Laura Winthrop saw no fault in him, no indeed!—"The lovely fellow, but, I'll fix Gail Raynor for that sly look," was her mental resolve. "Ugh! ugh! those Yankees," she whispered shudderingly.

Softly came the strains of music, the volume gradu-

ally increasing, sending its inspiring strain through all who were present.

Laura glanced reflectively about the scene, every nerve quivering with the enchantment of the music, but, like a true hostess, she subdued her longings for higher aspirations. Just a little throb of delight compensated her as she realized, amid all the excitement, that Chester was still at her side, and, turning toward him, she said: "Mr. Neville, you do not dance, do you? Well do you know that is awfully nice for me, I have to do penance at my own party." Looking uneasily across the room, and then posing herself for an instant like a pointer, suddenly discovering game, she turned her lovely head toward her companion, touching him ever so gently upon the shoulder, and said, "Ah, I see mamma wants me. Won't you please take me to her?" Laura slipped her hand through the extended arm and they passed the length of the parlors. Mrs. Winthrop had been seized with a violent spell of coughing. George Burton, a West Point cadet, had dropped on his knees at once to fan her, which nearly drove her to strangulation. Gail, who was standing near, renewed a spirited conversation with Mr. Rydon and Mr. Randolph to relieve the embarrassment, thinking that she would have sought seclusion under similar circumstances.

Laura approached the circle in the most winning manner. "You are adorable this evening, Gail," and, laying her hand upon Gail's arm, she turned aside to offer her vinaigrette to her mother, all the while imploring Mr. Neville to fan "dear mamma."

Instead, Chester offered his arm, which was accepted

with most voluble thanks, enunciated between the attempts to stifle her cough without crushing the dainty handkerchief which was held by a delicate chain from a ring that encircled the fourth finger. Mrs. Winthrop suffered herself to be led to her room, and Laura followed closely to see that "dear mamma" was relieved, or that Chester did not escape. False hope! if indeed it occurred to him at all. A hook with a thousand dollar bait on it is not to be trifled with. And Chester re-entered the parlor, Laura still clinging triumphantly to his arm.

* * * *

"Close the door!"

"Yes, ma'am, yes, ma'am," faltered Dobson, closing the door as speedily and noiselessly as possible, hastening again to her mistress' side.

"Are you ill, ma'am? there ma'am, let me loosen your slippers, ma'am." The maid dropped on her knees at the side of the luxurious chair, into which Mrs. Winthrop had thrown herself, for once regardless of her draperies, and far too agitated to resent Dobson's indignity to her feet.

"Those horrid, abominable Yankees! Dobson, that girl will kill me yet, and Mr. Neville," in a softer tone, "has stranded me up here. How shall I ever get into the parlors again to-night! Grandor won't come for me. He is simply ferocious. I have scarcely dared to lift my lids to him this evening—says that he feels that everything is going to the deuce. 'The old fool,' and here I am."

"Dobson, stop fondling me that way! I never felt better in my life. Put on those slippers this minute—

they are a full size too large. Wetherall always sends home a larger pair than I select, as if I did not know what fits me. There, Dobson, they are almost on. A little more powder on the heel and that slender silver horn. Now," utterly disregarding the maid's vigorous attempts to coax the swollen moist feet into them.

"You know that cough, Dobson?"

"You do it beautifully, ma'am."

"Well this is the best I ever did it. I know that I shall never do it so well again. George Burton fell on his knee; he's a gentleman, and Mr. Rydon and Mr. Randolph were just going to offer me their sympathies when that detestable Yankee turned their attention upon herself. Laura, my own, vindicated me. She came and laid her lovely hand on *that* arm—isn't she the loveliest being you ever saw, Dobson?"

"She is, ma'am, and I am sure there could never be a lovelier one." Mrs. Winthrop's countenance relaxed at the ready homage as she resumed her account of Laura.

"And she told Gail how beautiful she was this evening, at the same time handing me her vinaigrette. Mr. Neville, in league with that other one, I suppose, offered me his arm and led me up here—the odious fellow! Dobson, you don't care a *son*!"

"There ma'am, I do, sure's the world I do—the ras-cal!" Quickening the soft strokes she was applying to the throbbing, though perfectly erect head, the maid continued:

"Oh, ma'am, you did that beautifully, you did indeed. I never saw Lady Pounseford do it any better, ma'am."

"Dobson, how do I know that you ever lived with Lady Pounseford?" Mrs. Winthrop replied quiveringly.

"Oh! I did, ma'am, yes, ma'am, and a fine lady she was too, ma'am. You are like her, ma'am, and growing more like her every day. Yes, ma'am, you are, and her hair was not as fine as yours, ma'am; it's shining like silver to-night."

Mrs. Winthrop, partially yielding to the ceaseless attentions, laid her hand on her head reassuringly.

"Nor her fingers so slender and tapering as yours, ma'am." A faint spark of the old loyalty reasserted itself to the maid—"though her nails were as pink and glossy." "How I used to polish them!" she added abstractedly.

"Why are mine not glossy, Dobson? You don't care a *sou* for me, I know that you don't, so don't say that you do!" Whereat the attention was immediately transferred to the nails.

"Dobson, you would not care if Mr. Neville was to marry Gail Raynor to-morrow, you would not! so don't say that you would."

"Mr. Neville! Miss Raynor! marry!" the maid exclaimed breathlessly. "Why, ma'am, I was sure that it was Miss Laura and Mr. Neville."

"So it is Dobson, you are a maniac! Who said that it was not? I did not, I am sure." Mrs. Winthrop sank back exhausted in her chair, dethroned by her own vehemence, and looked appealingly at Dobson, as though she could not bear it.

"There, ma'am, have a little brandy, there now. Aren't you most rested, ma'am? The music is enticin',

ma'am, won't you go down again?" The maid never wavering in her adherence to duty.

"No, Dobson, I'll stay here until Grandor comes for me, if it is until morning." Cautiously lifting her cooled feet to the hassock, "Try the slippers again, Dobson?" And Dobson applied the slippers as interestedly as if for the first time. Smiling at her mistress and telling her that she was the most perfect lady she ever waited on.

* * * * *

Laura returned to the parlor, immediately sought Gail and greeted her most cordially.

"How lovely you are to-night, Abigail, I am so complimented that you came. Charming!" An admiring glance swept to the floor and rested an instant on the toe of Gail's satin slipper.

"Is she not lovely, Mr. Neville?" Laura's extended arms, pretty pink palms upward, accented the generous utterance.

"I fully agree with you, Miss Winthrop," said Chester, with undisguised admiration.

"How formal!" insinuated Laura, wondering at the lack of genuine response her presence received; so, *coûte qu'il coûte*, she folded the pretty palms and bowed toward her guest saying, "Gail, dear, let's go upstairs," lowering her voice to a seductive whisper—"and powder."

"Mr. Neville, won't you please excuse us? There are Miss Malcolm and Miss Searle, and so many that you know. Come, dear." Gail followed, beguiled by the caressing tones and manner, and found a group of girls who had resorted to the dressing-room with the

same object in view. They were greeted by a perfect chorus of "ohs," and "ahs," and "lovely," and "you, Laura, you are perfectly stunning to-night. When I first saw you I had to shade my eyes you dazzled me so." Josephine Wrenthem's voice was in the lead.

"I see it is all right. You look well together. He is fully a head taller than you are. Invite us all, oh do! But you could not eclipse this evening if you were married fifty times, and of course there are fifty men pining for you. I think he's handsome."

"Really, Joe, do you? I'm so glad," said Laura, generously bestowing a dainty kiss on her friend's cheek, nor caring to conceal her exultation.

"Oh my! we are all dying of envy, I assure you."

Gratification almost disarmed the rising intention, but assiduous attention to details had taught Laura to leave no stone unturned that might conceal an ambushed enemy.

Smiling effusively, she turned to Gail, who was standing a little apart.

"Gail, dear, you have had no chance at all; come, girls, do move."

The merry group fell aside, each one admiring Laura's obeisance to this vanquished foe. Gail remained where she was, an unconscious contestant in the clash at arms.

"Oh, thank you, Laura, I never powder. I would forget and rub it off, it would tickle so. But it is very becoming to you."

"Not the tiniest bit? Come, do, and let me fix you," and away went the puff over Gail's face, generously

adorning the now impossible rival. "There! dear, you look like a lily. Sweet!" accenting the last word with a kiss on Gail's cheek.

Whirling around without looking at Gail, Laura exclaimed, "What will mamma say? I have staid so long! It is only a little joke, Gail; come on down, I'll promise never to do it again."

"Closing the door softly, Laura disappeared. A hysterical laugh faintly reached the prisoned ear, then all was as silent as doom.

On the instant a full burst of music swept through the hall. "Now I can dance!" Laura said petulantly, looking about for the pleasure the announcement must produce among her admirers. "Why could you not dance before?" came from an adoring bevy, who hung like a small court about her.

"Oh, I had so much to look after, but I'll make up for it now," saying which she waltzed down the hall to be rapturously encored by a coterie of gentlemen, all clamoring for the first waltz.

When Gail had bathed her face and smoothed her hair, after a fashion opposite to the prevailing style, she sat down for a while, little caring whether she went to the parlors or not.

Finally concluding to go, she stepped to the door and found it locked. She made no attempt to force it, but occupied herself with a book which she found beneath a pile of fashion papers. A cluster of Parma violets had been left on the dressing table. She lifted them and inhaled their exquisite odor, the memory of grandma's sweet lips touched her forehead and life was as fragrant as ever.

Mr. and Mrs. Raynor found her a prisoner when they came to the dressing-room. In answer to their inquiries, Gail simply said that she did not understand the latch.

As supper was being served to some of the later guests, Chester asked Laura if Miss Raynor had gone home, as he had looked through all the rooms for her while they were dancing.

Laura, sharing in some measure the confidence voiced so assuredly by the girls, answered :

"Oh no, Ches—Mr. Neville, she is lying down. She was quite overcome by the excitement. I presume that she is not very strong." So quickly does one falsehood require the support of another.

Chester looked annoyed, remarking that she had looked unusually well that evening and showed no evidence of fatigue.

Mr. and Mrs. Raynor were passing through the hall, wrapped, and Mrs. Winthrop, perceiving them, moved toward the door very gravely, but with inward amazement at seeing Gail. "Going so early, Mrs. Raynor? Good-night, Mr. Raynor. Gail, dear, are you refreshed? Laura told me not to have you disturbed, that you were resting. So very kind in you to come. Mrs. Raynor, Gail was such an addition, so sprightly in conversation, not a dull moment where she is." Then turning to Gail with an assuring smile and lifting an admonitory finger: "Think of the fluttering hearts behind you, dear. Good-night!"

"Do come and see us soon; bring your fancy work and stay to tea, Gail. Good-night, Mr. Raynor, you are an ogre to carry off one of my chief successes so

early," and, mistaking a certain aloofness for an answer to her facetiousness, she went on eagerly, "Oh yes, I'll forgive you. Ha! ha! ha!"

The parting guests ignored the volubility and thanked the hostess for her hospitality. Gail smiled and extended her hand. Mrs. Winthrop did not see it.

"How fond they all seem of Gail," Chester was thinking as he caught Laura's tones again saying:

"Yes, excitement is becoming to most of us, not excepting you, Chester."

A servant handed an ice. Chester offered it to Laura, who lifted the spoon, tasted it a trifle critically, then her whole face lighting with gastronomic anticipation, she regaled herself unsparingly, all the while bestowing the most persuasive glances upon her cup-bearer until she was refreshed and her escort was enlightened.

Chester excused himself, passed into the parlor, saying that he did not care for ices.

Laura controlled her aroused appetite, followed closely behind him, and, after seating herself confidently by Chester's side, she gave a little sigh. She seemed to distrust herself and everybody else for the moment, but a faint odor of sandal-wood floated over her shoulder, and the responsive nerve was set tingling. Arousing herself at this monitory signal, she addressed her companion:

"You naughty man, you're a real flirt! You know that you just wanted me in here all to yourself. Would you forego your champagne for the pleasure? I will turn Hebe and carry it to you. Shall I? Now don't run away again." After tapping him affection-

ately on the arm, Laura disappeared, a vision of shimmering white gracefully moving in and out the black coats lingering around the punch-bowl.

Seeing her haste the gentlemen fell aside, each one anxious to do her bidding.

"Oh, no, thank you, Mr. Caylor, this is a special favor, and I must do it myself."

Looking archly over her shoulder, Laura tiptoed to a small cabinet, and, finding a key, unlocked the lower door of the sideboard, brought out a slender bottle and filled a wine-glass from its contents. Another furtive glance and the door was closed, the key restored to its place, and the old confidence returned.

"There," she exclaimed triumphantly, as she turned to the parlor, and stood a perfect Hebe, to whom Ganymede himself would have gladly yielded the palm.

Showing the wine-glass with a graceful upward movement of her hand, "Isn't that delicious? We're not often allowed this! But for you I could not secure anything too good." She held the dainty glass in her slender fingers, and Chester saw her beautiful eyes sparkling through it. The pink palm, the pretty upward curve of the arm, and the slightest distrust of herself, contrasted with her usual archness, almost disarmed him. His artistic sense was charmed.

She said persuasively, "Take it, Chester, I've braved a good deal for this." Laura turned her arm and bowed gracefully toward him as she offered the glass.

Chester did not answer for a moment. He had arisen to his feet and stood looking at her seriously, even gallantly.

"What have you braved for me?" he said, looking

very tenderly at her, and then he calmly lifted her other hand to his lips and kissed it.

"I do appreciate all you have done for me, Miss Laura; come sit down and let us be friends." In the moment Laura had gone for the wine he had ample time to collect the self-possession which had been so speedily forsaking him. Now he was able to appreciate the sweet courtesy of her manner without involving one heart-beat.

A pair of protesting eyes still confronted him as they were both seated. The wine-cup had proved his ally. How many persons have been saved by the sight of that which they have been taught to abhor.

Laura's little coquetries had passed almost unnoticed, Chester feeling that his voice had assumed the cool enunciation of a reprimand, and that Laura was stung by it; but in so doing he was only sharing the dignity that every manly man feels when he knows that the sacred citadel is being stormed.

Laura seated herself, still holding the glass in her clasped hands, and continued looking into the sparkling effervescence as it was gradually dying away. So her own aspirations were slowly receding. Her antagonism to circumstances was chilled, and she lay unresistingly in this strong influence, that subdued all the self-will and defiance which so recently had actuated her.

The real foundation of Chester's life was his mother, the father having died before his influence could be appreciated by the small lad. However, the mother held the supremacy in all doubtful issues. He now felt that there was nothing in him to respond to this brilliant,

shallow creature. He had not actually refused the wine, though he evidently did not want it, and the quick retreat of Laura into quiet inaction led him into a friendly gentleness, and he had kissed her hand. He now arose to go. Laura smiled, said "good-night," and placed the wine-glass on the table untasted.

"Let me wish you good-night, Mrs. Winthrop," said Chester. Mrs. Winthrop's manner indicated her surprise at his departure. "Going? Ah! and where is Laura? The center of a circle, as usual. See her! Mr. Randolph is captivating to-night. The beauty!" Still showering admiring glances on Laura, the hostess replied, scarcely turning her face to her departing guest, "Good-night."

Shortly after, as Chester was ascending the stairs, a glance below revealed the most alluring vision. Laura was gliding the length of the parlors alone. Passing beneath the brilliant chandelier, she lifted her hand, like a lily suddenly bursting into bloom, and twined her slender fingers in and about the glittering pendants—a soft, tinkling sound fell all about her, like echoing joy bells; while the beautiful upturned face refracted the light as though she were grasping after an unseen ecstasy that the responsive scintillations threw mistily about her.

"Hello, Neville!" came from the dressing-room. "Can't tear yourself away? Got things in your own hands to-night, eh! Lucky chap to be in such clover." Chester replied, unconcerned, and turned to find his coat and hat.

"Chester!" The soft voice caused all the gentlemen to look in the direction from which it sounded.

The doors were thrown open, and the neglect of the past few days had subjugated Polly. Recognizing Chester's voice, she flew swiftly to his shoulder and cuddled closely to his neck.

"Howdy do, Polly?" and a strong, fond hand stroked the folded wings.

"Even Polly wooing you! I say, Neville, this is scandalous," whereat Rydon and Randolph laughed heartily at Chester's confusion, which, for the life of him he could not hide, but he continued stroking the bird, and it was deliciously content to lie against his curly head.

"It is so late I believe I will take Polly home with me; they will never miss her." So, amid the banterings of his friends, Chester walked out with the bird snugly under his buttoned coat, and with a quiet dignity which the ridicule of the gentlemen only served to heighten.

Polly cuddled in the warm folds that bound her and winked in a singularly incredulous way when she was released and found herself in unfamiliar surroundings.

Chester at once opened a conversation with the bird, and gently crooning over her, experienced a pleasure almost equal to a little visit from his mother.

Polly spread her wings, perched on, first his shoulder and then a finger extended toward her, and at last flew to a perch which proved to be the top of the mirror, sleeping there like Poe's raven, ominously croaking "Nevermore."

Mrs. Neville had written to Chester a few days previous to the party, "If a perfectly favorable opportunity offers bring Polly home with you. Her morning salu-

tation will be a sure indication of Laura's character." Adding her favorite maxim, "The love of money is the root of all evil, while love is the root of all good, yea, the very source of it." Industrious natures spend little time rehearsing pleasures, but commence ticking off their duties at once. Chester had been transported, and all care with him, to the old home, and he slept as sweetly as a boy, so sweetly, in fact, that the usual summons failed to arouse him. As he turned over in bed he was startled to hear, "Shut your mouth!" with a succession of grumbling and indistinct words proceeding from the mirror.

Chester lifted his head cautiously, to be again greeted with "Shut up, I tell you! I'm tired to death of it. Ches-es-es-es-es, all day long!"

Roused to the most uncompromising wakefulness, the man sat on the side of the bed observing the bird's ruffled plumage and doubting his own ears as the muttering still proceeded from the mirror.

"Polly, here Polly," he soothingly called, at which Polly turned her head distrustfully.

"Here Polly, pretty Polly," said Chester, endeavoring to imitate his mother's voice as closely as possible, and so induce the estranged parrot to her former friendliness. "Polly, pretty Polly," he called.

Polly stretched her wings, fluttered a moment, then flew to the floor and hopped nearer to the coaxing voice.

"Come to me, Polly. What ails you, Polly? Come, come on." The bird still advancing, Chester leaned over and picked up the trembling creature and carried

her to the window, where he succeeded in re-establishing the old relations.

Hastily dressing, a formal note was dispatched explaining how Polly had recognized his voice, and that he had carried her home for the night, adding that he hoped that they had not missed her.

The same messenger returned the bird, and Mrs. Winthrop, who was sitting at the window, espied them coming down the street.

With hands uplifted, Mrs. Winthrop exclaimed, "Laura Winthrop, what's to pay now?"

"What is it, mamma, what is it?" Laura replied with a curious irritability.

"What is it indeed! Here comes Mr. Neville's man bringing Polly home. She must have gotten out. Where in the world did he find her?"

Mrs. Winthrop threw herself back in her chair, wringing her hands piteously.

Laura trembled violently, more afraid of her mother than of any one else.

"What is the matter now?" she again demanded irritably.

"Matter enough, one would think! You have talked recklessly before that bird and now reap your reward!"

It was no passing disappointment to Mrs. Winthrop. She beheld a blasted purpose, a humiliating defeat, a return of Grandor's stringency, mercifully relaxed during the possible prospects. She was unnerved and burst into tears. Dobson bore the bird in quite crest-fallen. Laura read the note, passed it to her mother and rushed upstairs. Mrs. Winthrop quickly followed.

They sat looking at each other for some time, each afraid of the words trembling on their lips, lest the birds of the air should carry the doubtful tidings.

"What duplicity!" gasped the mother. "Who could have believed it of that old Yankee woman. These religious people! Ugh, ugh! There, never mind, child, you must be off to White Sulphur to-morrow. There, you are ruining your eyes; what if any one should call? Come, do be quiet, Laura. Grandor will rave, but we will fix it up with a note and let him rave. It will do him good, for he has been positively sluggish lately, and he may be led with a little activity into some new enterprise."

Laura sat sobbingly speechless, and no thought occurred to her by which she might extricate herself.

Helplessly dependent on her mother, she relied on her instructions for deliverance from all difficulties, and the shot once fired, she awaited the reloading with iron stolidity. Not so Mrs. Winthrop, who, with every nerve vitalized into conscious resistance, still bade Laura to dry her eyes, bathe her face in rose-water and lie down, and said that in the meantime she would write a note to Mr. Neville.

"I'm ashamed of you, Laura; your best paper, where is it?"

Stopping before the mirror, Mrs. Winthrop keyed her resolution to the look of baffled determination she beheld reflected there, and stepped with majestic dignity to her desk, to be startled by a tap at the door.

"Resting, Esther dear, come again in an hour."

"Never mind, mamma, I just stopped a moment before I laid aside my wraps. The drive was perfect! I

only wanted to tell Laura that I received the most gracious bow from Mr. Neville. Good-bye. Will you be down to luncheon?"

"Yes, yes," came sleepily from her mother.

Mrs. Winthrop's pen was very swift and her thoughts caustic, and they suffered no dilution by Esther's interruption. The note ran:

Dear Mr. Neville:

Polly is safe with us again. Such anxious hours as we have had since her escape; however, she has proved herself more valuable than our highest hopes could have desired. One night with you has taught her such dreadful language that Laura's merciful escape is our present consolation.

Respectfully,

MRS. WINTHROP.

91 Blanchard Avenue.

P. S.—The parrot is dead!

"There, Laura, I think I have dealt a clever shot. Now let the wound rankle where it belongs!"

Chester crushed the note violently in his hand and dropped a tear for the bird life that had redeemed his own.

CHAPTER SIXTH.

Two human tides, swaddled in prayer and praise and trained by the example of holy lives, were slowly and surely drifting into one, to journey on toward the eternal city of God.

Mrs. Winthrop swept into the dining-room, shedding her beams over the assembled table until their light reflected from every countenance save that of her son-in-law, who refused to receive the voluntary offering, or even to exhibit any consciousness of her presence. To her unwilling auditors Mrs. Winthrop merely addressed herself the more vigorously, especially if the information pertained in any way to her daughters. She gradually regained her confidence and used all her skill in refilling the rent sail that recently showed so fair.

"Dear Laura is slightly indisposed to-day. She must get away for a while; she deserves it after her triumph of last night. Does she not, Esther? Wasn't she beautiful? I never saw anything so perfectly lovely as she appeared waltzing beneath the chandelier. Some one was looking over the balustrade—in genuine admiration—too. She utterly eclipses anything that you ever were, Esther, save goodness. I will give you the precedence there." Lapsing a little reflectively as she perceived a slight change in Esther's usually passive countenance, she continued, "Laura's beauty

makes her a trifle arrogant, I'll admit, but, of course, she is all right to me." Looking up smilingly at Dobson, as she approached with a waiter, Mrs. Winthrop lifted her hand remonstratingly, as if to brush away discordant elements, of which she was half conscious. "No soup, Dobson. No, thank you; perhaps you have a salad left from last night. No! Well, a paté, then. No! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha."

"Just a cup of tea. You know my fondness for ruminating on by-gone pleasures, and just a taste of the dainties refreshes the memory."

Turning to her son-in-law, "Mr. Grandor, you were adorable last evening. Esther pets you too much, but who could help it with all this?" and her eyes surveyed the elegant apartment, and returned to rest upon Mr. Grandor's unperturbed expression.

The monologue would have moved on in its usual flow, but for Mr. Grandor, who, rising from the table, excused himself to his wife, saying: "My dear, we have had a robbery at the bank. Keep it very quiet. Thirty-eight thousand dollars simply gone!"

"Come, come, Grandor, this is a farce!" Mrs. Winthrop laughingly rejoined.

Grandor replied contemptuously, "I wish that it were."

The front door slammed, the ringing footsteps echoing far up the sidewalk before the silence of the dining-room was broken.

"You know that I never wanted to marry him and you made me!" sobbed Esther.

Regardless of Esther's accusation, a temporary gleam was illuminating her mother's face. Perhaps

this was what Grandor's quickened perceptions received last night, and Neville might not be lost after all. Then the thought of her note sent the hot blood hurtling to her face.

"Esther, don't tell Laura of this until she returns from White Sulphur or she will act like a perfect grump, and this is her third season, and you in tears!"

Mrs. Winthrop rolled her napkin with the greatest precision, slipped it into the ring and rose from the table with great dignity. With a swift glance at Mrs. Grandor, she said, "I'm ashamed of you, Esther."

"Well, mamma, what is the matter?" replied Esther. "One day it is Mr. Neville and a party and the next day it is White Sulphur. I don't understand you at all."

"Ah! I beg your pardon for my incoherence," was the haughty reply. "You never were clever, Esther, and in a sudden *denouement* you act like one bereft of his senses instead of letting your courage rise with danger. But now that my hands are clear of you, I beseech of you don't cloud Laura's future any more than your imbecility can avoid." A severe check in her mother's tone rendered Esther speechless. At length she left the room in a burst of tears. Reaching her room she fell upon her bed and sobbed her rage and disappointment into a violent headache, from which she had scarcely rallied when the summons to dinner was received. She arose and descended the winding stairway very languidly. At the first landing her eye caught a rosy glimpse of the river-bathed hill and a shadowy outline of a cloud, on which the sun had left its latest kiss and the edge was tearing away in vapory shreds to fall

upon his bosom. She went on down. She knew not to what. Misery and poverty she feared. But her fears were groundless—even though Mr. Grandor's return in the evening confirmed the reports of the morning. The money was gone, but his purse was deeper than he cared to admit—the loss occasioning no change in the establishment. "Yes, indeed," said Mr. Grandor, "If Mrs. Winthrop knew the extent of my fortune she would outrival Cleopatra in extravagance." As he paused he arose and glowered about upon the empty chairs and paced his indignation into the unresisting carpets.

"Laura had gone to spend the night with dear Mrs. Grier who was a hopeless invalid," Mrs. Winthrop ventured as an amicable restoration.

"Taking a mortgage on another fellow before his wife dies!" Grandor muttered. Bayed by mercenary hounds, he retaliated on the most defenseless creature at hand. Still this offered him little comfort in view of the fleeing hounds, weighted with pilfered booty, whose skill had eluded his utmost vigilance.

Mrs. Winthrop excused herself for the evening on the plea of a headache. Her son-in-law was heartless and avaricious, but she would show him that she was not to be trifled with. Far too wise for an open revolt, she appreciated the advantage of displaying herself and Laura in such surroundings, but she must maintain their self-respect at all hazards except eviction. Esther would soothe her husband, and they could remain out of sight until his equanimity was restored. The expediency of this was evident. Meanwhile the packing proceeded. Every ornament not too mature

was taken from her own jewel box and added to Laura's limited supply. Thoroughly absorbed in the present occupation, having learned by determined practice to dispel disagreeable subjects from her mind and attention, and with a desire to exercise the old spirit, Mrs. Winthrop fell to retrospecting. "Poor child! how different her life has been from mine. But death, what calamities follow in its train!" It seemed to Mrs. Winthrop that the sting of her husband's death was everywhere, and new developments only proved its inextricability. She was in tears. Resolutely dashing them aside, she drew from the lower drawer twelve exquisitely embroidered flannel skirts, the result of the last year with her needle. As she spread them out on her lap, smoothing the silken wool, a delicate perfume, wafted like a spring zephyr from a violet bed. Exhilarated by the odor—as anything refining always did exhilarate her—she resumed her monologue.

"Well, I really have enjoyed doing them—this one especially." Drawing one from the lower folds she threw it gracefully over the sofa pillow and bent to examine the scallops with a last critical look. Patting it approvingly, she rocked awhile in contemplative satisfaction.

"Those marguerites are as refreshing as a day in the woods; yes, and all of them are beautiful. Truly I have done well! These will go off the first week, especially if the Landor connection is there." Folding them in separate sheets of tissue paper, she continued: "People would be fortunate to secure Dobson's beautiful work, even at exorbitant figures." Muttering away to herself, "Some people have no idea of manag-

ing. I think that I might gather a point or two from that Yankee woman if I could only get at her." The excitement wore away as the covers concealed the beautiful garments. Closing the trunk, Mrs. Winthrop sat at the window far into the night; not a star appeared to cheer her. The clouds enveloped themselves in gloomy folds, darkness, impenetrable darkness, covered the world. Her tears began to flow afresh, and released the pent-up words that Grandor had so effectually checked. "I suppose Clay is getting in his work. He always said that he would be revenged on my children." Mrs. Winthrop addressed an imaginary companion and divulged the source of a stoutly contested controversy.

"George Winthrop and Clay Wilton were candidates for the nomination for Congress. Brother Clay said that I should use my influence for him and I used my utmost for George. Father had compelled us to do homage to Clay, who was a perfect tyrant. Yet we submitted, parties, dresses and jewels freely followed. Of course Clay was popular, with his family constantly sounding his praises; but George Winthrop was a formidable rival, as well as being my affianced husband. If Clay was chosen, Mildred Leydon would go to Washington as his wife. If George secured the nomination—for election in that district was certain—I would go. In justice to myself, my desire was about equally divided, so strong are the mandates of blood. But Mildred! that decided me. Consequently, I used every art that I was capable of and George secured the nomination. We were married, and," what a rush of the old delights flooded her poor craving soul! Resolute, impetu-

ous, haughty! yet underlying it all was the true motherly instinct, as, with anxious heart, she sighed for Laura's unprovided future.

"Clay has remained hostile ever since," she said tentatively. "I still think that I pursued the proper course. Surely every man has a right to expect that his wife will at once transfer her loyalty to him. If a woman can not hold her affections in fee-simple, she may as well decide to remain single. There was General Fountain, of Virginia. The entire connection was taught to bow the adoring knee as soon as they could lisp his name. The result shows the relationship to be a vortex of old maids." Her attention momentarily arrested, Mrs. Winthrop returned to the most needful emergency, and Laura's trunks were secured with the utmost care.

Laura left the following morning, with the parting injunction, "Not to bring one of those skirts home." And Mrs. Winthrop plied the needle during her absence with a baffled ardor that continued to mark the intervals of repose.

Mr. Grandor had vainly tried to fathom the Puritan maiden, at last declaring her a pure unsullied soul, who believes the world as good as it seems. "Would she were mine!" he exclaimed, and instantly resolved to buy Esther the necklace she was admiring in Brayton's window. "She considers it too expensive—a mere bagatelle! I'll tell her I took the bauble for a debt."

* * * * *

Sunday morning dawned clear and beautiful with its hallowed influences so suggestive of home to wanderers, of peace and rest to invalids, and a tranquillity of spirit

to most mortals who fall beneath its ceaseless benediction.

Gail had thrown crumbs a number of mornings to a flock of robins that came to the south window of her uncle's library. Among the flowers that bordered either side of the walk, mignonette claimed the precedence that morning; its tiny blossoms tossed off burst after burst of fragrance, like a Liliputian rank of musketry firing sweetening odors, until the house was redolent with its spicy breath. As she watched the birds her uncle walked up and down the path with an easy, swinging gait—a lofty-souled man, with gracious dignity emanating from him rather than finding expression in courtly manners.

The boldest of the robins darted for a long crust and flew to an arbor immediately under the eaves of an adjoining shed, from which water fell in soft, cooling drops. The crumbs quickly disappeared before the voracious fellows, and they joined the provident one, who still held the crust in his bill, his eyes gloating over what he was unable to eat. For some time he watched the rapidly diminishing morsel, and with the resolution worthy of a mortal, let go, whirled instantly about, and lifted his parched throat just in time to receive a cooling draught from the eaves overhead. Straightway he caroled the blithest song of the morning! The lesson was obvious; when a soul relinquishes all hold on earthly affections and lifts itself for a drop of the water of life, that soul shall never thirst again.

The walk to church was calm and peaceful, the services grateful and soothing. On the way home the

appearance of Mr. Neville at her side occasioned no surprise to Gail. She had not seen him since the Grandor party. Indeed, she had thought very little about any of them, so full of quiet resources was she, that a life apparently commonplace to many a looker-on was most eventful to her.

After the usual greetings had been exchanged, Chester spoke of a little sufferer that he would be glad to have her go and see. When Gail asked the name it proved to be her little lame friend.

"Oh! Jemmy, my little friend; is he worse than usual? I am so sorry that I have not been to see him lately, poor child! How inexplicable child-suffering is, Mr. Neville. Where does it begin and where does it end, and who can alleviate its sorrows!" With an involuntary burst of sympathy, Gail said eagerly that she would go at once.

"Yes, it has all been very sad," returned Chester, "but there seems to be no help for it. Brien worships the boy and he has been the making of his father. There was some talk, you know, about a blow Brien gave the little fellow when he was under the influence of drink, and that caused the hip disease. Of course, he never refers to it, but fortunately for all concerned, the spreeing was stopped. Rather a severe lesson, don't you think, Miss Gail?"

"The poor father," uttered Gail. "It is inexpressibly sad. The second commandment is unrelenting to the children."

"Oh no, Miss Gail," Chester replied, suddenly revealing the inner chord of him. "It is the parents who are unrelenting, and the ball once started down

the hill of posterity, who can overtake it? Alas! no one."

"The real truth is," Chester went on, almost surprised at his own vehemence, "The violation of a parent's trust sets the true man to thinking, if anything will;" and the quiet attention of a woman, added to a mind just released from the stress of a sermon, has led many a man into expressing himself upon equally obscure topics. "No, I believe willful ignorance of God's laws is the real difficulty. Man must submit, and the limitation is really his freedom. Be that as it may, Miss Gail, Jemmy is now a very sick child, and as he wants to see you, I am sure that you will go."

"Oh! certainly I will go. You know I care very little for metaphysics, but a suffering child arouses my whole heart. Good-morning, Mr. Neville; it is very kind of you to let me know."

Chester walked briskly on, having bade Gail good-morning at her door. She had unknowingly lifted his burden, and a new opening through which life was ministering forced itself upon him. A conflict of feeling pressed him onward and kept him silent. His own anguish added poignancy to the foreman's grief.

"Poor Brien!" Chester said pitifully. Yet the innocent, suffering child proved to be one of God's surest refuges.

The river! Yes, the broad, glistening surface arrested Mr. Neville's attention. The trees dipped their parched leaves in an inlet stream, about which the cows blinked lazily and cropped the scant, short grass. The sequestered nook seemed like an embrace of soothing calm, and he fell quickly into the repose.

"Mother!" he cried, "Oh, for one glimpse of your face this day!" The sward served as a pleasant couch, and, lying beneath the sympathetic branches, the struggle was met, and before the shadows fell a quiet, resolute strength possessed the troubled heart, and he arose dauntless and free. The clear, true eye and swift sympathy for suffering humanity had released his own imprisoned soul, and the manacles fell away as his eager spirit sprang into an exalted freedom.

A message was awaiting Gail as she came down to tea the same evening.

"It was Mr. Neville's foreman, I think, Gail. He wanted you to come and see his sick child."

"Yes, auntie, Mr. Neville told me of it as we came from church, and I promised him that I would go to-morrow, but if he is still worse I will go immediately. How the poor child has suffered, and the poor mother more than he has, if possible."

The family was gathered about the bed when Gail entered the open door. The pale face lighted up for a moment, reflecting the pleasure to his mother's.

"She will tell you about it, mother," came in short, painful gasps from the sick child.

Mrs. Brien bade Gail welcome, offering her a seat near the dying child. The father held the boy's hand in his own, administering from time to time some needless attention the heart could not withhold. Death was very near—an appealing look caused Gail to bend closer. "Sing just once more," came in a faint whisper from the fading spirit.

The song he loved best rose softly on the palpitating

air, and before the plaintive sound died away the heroic little soul had won its last victory.

Brien sat holding the brave little hands, and Gail, with instinctive delicacy, turned away. During the pathetic scene, Chester had stood just outside the window. He had called at Mrs. Raynor's to accompany Gail to church, and, learning there that she had gone on an errand of mercy, followed on, arriving at the little cottage a few moments after Gail entered the door.

Passing around the house, he stopped beneath a tree not far from the open window, and, unseen, had observed all that had transpired within the sick-room. Gail had appeared in her truest light. Alone and unaided she had carried into that sorrowing home the sweetest consolation that mortals ever give, and as she stood in the scantily furnished room, simply clad in a soft clinging dress, over her appeared a halo, the crown of a ministering love, clothing her with the lustrous radiance of the soul.

Brien laid the cold little hand across its fellow and moved to the window. Chester at once stepped forward and offered his assistance, and then stood talking some moments before he went home.

"I'll attend to it, Brien," he said. "Perhaps you would rather not, so just stay at home and everything will be sent." As he was leaving, the pity of it all came over him. He turned again and offered a warm, sympathetic hand-grasp to the foreman. The men were friends ever after.

The streets of Promise run far between the hills, so that in going from one to another a shorter way may

be obtained by at once ascending the low wooded slope than by skirting it. The gathering gloom covered the valleys an hour before it concealed the hills. Mrs. Brien's home lay in a perfect bower of thrifty growth, composed of fruit trees and trailing vines.

When Gail found her way over the hill she was greeted by the sinking sun, which bathed the western side in a cheery glow. The sudden change was vivifying and enabled her to stop and rest after the emotional stress which she had undergone.

A confirmation class was just coming up the hill to vespers. They had passed the house in the forenoon, twenty girls robed in white, a short veil about the temples and each carrying a candle to be lighted at the moment their souls would glow with the mystic union of their divine Savior. The Cathedral was built into the hill, the sills of the transept window being level with the hillside, while the entrance could only be reached by a long, inclined, stone walk terminating in a flight of stone steps. Very picturesque the scene appeared. The soft glow of the windows, the procession of eager, strained faces passing up the steps, and though they cared not to "cast one lingering look behind," four sable-garmented nuns followed closely in the rear, the pure faces bent in tender solicitude over their sacred charges.

Gail watched them until they had passed under the high arched door, her soul following the low chanted service and the joyful strains of the "Venite adoremus." The gentle modulated tones of the reader became inaudible, and her senses were quickened by the faint fumes of the censers. The river flowing in the

distance was gathering the last rays of the setting sun. A robin twittered to its tiny nestlings just over head. The sweet robin song of the morning returned, Gail hoping this was its gentle crooning mate, for the nestlings of such a happy pair would doubtless sing celestial songs.

Anon, the prelude to the first hymn came through the faintly rustling branches like an Æolian echo, tremulous, low and ineffably tender. The air was vibrant with wings that were whist in the harmony. Familiar as her native breath, Gail joined the precious hymnal service.

" By cool Siloam's shady rill,
How fair the lily grows,
How sweet the breath beneath the hill
Of Sharon's dewy rose."

Chester's footsteps fell upon the parched grass and fallen twigs. The vesper hymn had caressed his soul, as he emerged from the gloomy valley. The transition was marvelous. A new hope leaped in his breast as he beheld Gail looking off into the brilliant wonder, her fair form glorified by the rosy effulgence.

Only a few steps lay between them. Gail's attitude, like a priestess of nature, her averted face and complete absorption in the dying of the day, made a scene not to be ruthlessly invaded. The solemn hush of the twilight held its protecting arm about her. At length the distance was passed; how he knew not, and he faltered: "Gail, may I come?" Immediately a strong hand was laid over the clasped ones, and so they staid until a slender ray of the dying sun fell like a sweet annunciation on the folded hands, touching, as it with-

drew, the lower lights of the fleecy clouds shepherded in its rosy fold—then, as if lingering in silent blessing, it slipped beneath the darkened shadows.

The rose of love had burst into bloom! Gail's heart yielded itself, a fragrant censer, before the great love so unmistakably beaming upon her. The melody of the silent gloaming was a note of holy joy. A soft star twinkled overhead, the lone robin twittered to its nestlings. Gail placed her hand within the beloved arm, and so they entered the Sanctuary of Love, the most blessed bourne this world can offer. Thus they walked in the evening shadows to Uncle Raynor's home. An unusual tenderness, added to the always gentle greeting, was the only acknowledgment of the tidings. Love's wisdom sends the messengers on before, heralding the fragrant wings and preparing the way for its welcome advent.

For while one loves the light will glow
For altars dim,
And borne along in tireless flow
Glad cherubim
Alight unwooded on fireless thrones,
And soft beneath
The folded wings a song intones
The waking breath.

The morning was filled with a luminous joy. The robins came as usual, and as the songster of the morning before flew into the yard he alighted on Gail's shoulder, drooping his wings in a dejected way.

"Where is my joyous song this morning, robin, can't you rejoice with me?" But the bird only sat and shivered, and Gail did not know that its song was in her heart.

"Poor Jemmy, no weary body to clog your soul this morning." Gathering her hands full of the fresh blossoms, Gail carried them to the little cottage, going over the hill and finding the house bathed in the morning rays of the impartial sun.

Mrs. Brien sat at the door. "Come in, Miss Gail, and do take a seat. The house seems like heaven this morning; it does, indeed, Miss Gail, and don't Jemmy look like a little angel, Miss? Ah! he was that fond of you, I could never tell you what a comfort you was to him." Mrs. Brien had taken her visitor by the hand and led her into the front room, where lay all that was mortal of the little cripple. The distorted body, covered with a white flannel slip, seemed purified by the awful suffering that had at length released it.

Gail placed a broken lily in his hand, laying the roses in the lower corner of the coffin; and bending, she kissed the pallid brow.

"Oh! Miss Gail," cried the broken-hearted mother, "you was the only one in the world besides me and Brien that cared for him. I know that he feels that kiss in heaven. He said that he would like to go to heaven if they was all like you." The voice was lost in a convulsion of sobs.

"Dear Mrs. Brien," said Gail, "it is Jesus who came into this world to teach us that the only way that we may follow Him acceptably is to try and help those who need." And amid the sobs of the mother, Gail sat down and talked in her comforting way.

While she was still there Brien came in from the garden with his arms full of flowers, double white holly-

hocks and pure phlox. Jem and he had planted the seeds and watered them out of hours, and now he was bringing the first perfect blooms to Jem, who could not go to them. Seeing Miss Gail and the roses he at once guessed that she had brought them, and he turned to put his own on the mantel-piece; but Gail quickly intercepted the movement, and, lifting the blossoms out of the father's trembling arms, laid them by the little fellow, at the same time removing the ones that she had brought and putting them on a table near the head of the coffin.

"See, these are much prettier than mine, Mr. Brien, and then, too, Jemmy would love to know that his father had laid flowers about these poor lame feet; and there is one thing of which I am quite sure, that these helpless feet have led you nearer to the Savior than if they had been able to tread the highest paths of life. Isn't it so, my friend?" Gail looked wistfully at the bowed man. "Perhaps so, Miss, perhaps so," and the stricken father turned away as if to avoid further conversation. Gail looked about for her hat, which Mrs. Brien had taken in charge, that she might have another word when her husband should be through.

Gail thanked her tenderly, and, after promising to come the next day to the funeral, she bade them good-morning.

Brien followed her to the door—leaning against the door frame, his quivering lips made an effort to speak.

"What is it, Mr. Brien; can't I still do something for you?" said Gail, looking at him intently, and really sharing his sorrow.

"I was only waiting to thank you for those words,

Miss. They will comfort me all my life. I guess we was too proud of him when he first came, and since that hip disease took him we have only tried to make him happy like, you know, that was all, and our hands are empty now."

"Mr. Brien, will you promise me one thing?" said Gail, returning to the step and taking his hand a moment.

"Anything you like, I'm sure, Miss."

"After a little while," she said very tenderly, "take Jem's books and toys and give them to some sick child, and it will do your heart good."

Gail looked earnestly at him, for she perceived that he thought it a very cruel thing to do, and in his effort to please her his heart failed him.

"Not the carriage, Miss Raynor?"

"No, no, not the carriage, unless you could loan it to some one and receive it again. You see it would be as though Jemmy were still doing good for others."

"I never thought of it like that before. Jemmy still doing good and he dead. I'll think about it. Good-morning."

Gail smiled a response and passed out into the clear sunlight. Sweet thoughts dipped their wings in her very tears and bore her spirit away to "heavenly places."

Mr. Brien stood in the doorway a single moment. His crowing baby was in his arms. "No," he cried, "I never thought of it like that before; my boy doing good and he dead. Well, well, I knew she could help us through somehow, and she not knowing it. It just comes out on her just like them hollyhocks bloom, but bring them in and they are soon gone, while words that comfort you, you can keep always. 'Jemmy

doing good and he dead.'” The father had walked to the little coffin, and, bending over it, the great tears fell on the cold forehead.

“Jemmy, my boy, you don’t seem near so dead as you did. We’re going to let you live again, and do lots of good to other boys, my laddie. We’re glad you come to show us how, and we having you all the time and couldn’t see for the love of you. Yes, Miss Gail is right, I know, and I’ll just put her flowers right in with these hollyhocks, for she has made it all clear to me.”

Mrs. Brien, hearing voices, as she thought, came into the room and saw the Hermosas sending their quickening gleam through the colorless group.

“Maggie, you won’t mind the color, will you? Miss Gail brought them, you know. And Maggie, we’ve had him to love, and we can love him just the same.”

“I told you,” she said, almost whispering and drawing closer to him, “that we could always love him.” And the happy light in her husband’s countenance was quickly mirrored in her own.

Mr. Neville sent the little white hearse to the funeral and Gail came and sang Jem’s favorite song.

After the brief services Chester and Gail walked over the hill, their hearts filled with highest hopes. Life was crowned with radiant promises, calm, sweet and pastoral. A home their very own and life before them to choose the best the world could offer. “A Christian home,” Chester had said, “to grow and become strong in.”

Blessing and honor would surely follow where purity and constancy had made their abode.

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

Laura Winthrop returned from White Sulphur relieved of all commodities save herself. Inducement had been strong, but takers were obdurate, and she returned once more to the hospitality of the Grandor establishment. A few of the more impecunious of her admirers, who followed at a safe distance, loitering around the hotel lobbies and spending their evenings with Laura, took account of the financial situation, which proved the game too heavy for their impaired nets, and led them to seek other retreats where they might refresh their languid personalities and effete manhood.

The Grandor home had been regarnished for the winter. The crimson glow of the dining-room harmonized more effectively with Esther's colorless face than with Laura's still buoyant beauty. "However, Laura," admonished her mother, "it is a charming background in the morning and toward evening, when your color heightens, the parlors claim you. Ah, here comes Mr. Grandor!" Mrs. Winthrop smoothed her hair with her palms, and straightening herself, looked keenly at her son-in-law as he approached the house. "He appears agitated, Esther." Then as he entered she addressed him. "Good-morning; good-morning, my dear. How you brighten us all up by your cheery

entrance. I'm thrilled to my finger tips. Just let me take your hat. There! Do be comfortable. You have buoyed me like a glass of champagne. Yes, indeed, your spirits are your fortune. Ha! ha! ha! ha!" Mrs. Winthrop settled herself into a fairly merited complacency, only to be unmercifully aroused the following moment by a shaft from her son-in-law. Grandor appeased and Grandor unappeased were two distinct personalities, and the unappeased quality was evidently in the ascendancy at the moment.

"I see Mr. Neville is putting up quite a decent brick house! What is it for?" he now cried, marveling inwardly at his own temerity, but outwardly showing fight enough to extend the encounter indefinitely.

Mrs. Winthrop displayed evident agitation. Grandor's skill in eluding her was a constant revelation, though it never resolved itself into a conviction that she was no match for him. Ah, never!

"A house," she replied. "Girls, have you noticed any building going on? It must be quite out of town or we would have noticed it." And yet she wished such issues might be avoided in some way, for she was unable to parry them as successfully as she desired.

Not without a glance of mischief in his eye, Mr. Grandor resumed the train of thought that he had precipitated into the circle, much as a shuttlecock drops on a well poised battledoor, only to be thrown whence it started. The second bound was toward a less wary victim.

"Esther, I see Mr. Neville is putting up quite a decent house. I hear that he is to marry Miss Raynor. What, the deuce! did Laura let that slip through her

fingers? You see things can not go on in this way always. We will go abroad for a year or so, and, perhaps, if she is thrown upon her own resources she will not be so fastidious." Mr. Grandor wanted an answer, and he said so in an unmistakable manner.

Let Mrs. Grandor display her morning robe as best she might, and flash her diamonds never so attractively, she failed to secure a single compliment. Indeed, for the moment she was as far from influencing her spouse as a collector of an uncertified check would be. She arose and put a few finishing touches to the table carefully prepared for luncheon.

"Well, girls will be girls you know, my dear, and it is hard for Laura to be satisfied after living in the house with you. She often says: 'Of course, Esther, I never can find a husband like yours,' and mamma, too, says that I am a perfect queen in my own home, and she can not imagine what kindly star marked my destiny so fortuitously. 'Poor Lollie!'"

Grandor was coerced as usual. The table was faultlessly laid. Laura had arranged her brother-in-law's favorite flowers and greeted him most affectionately as she entered the low, broad window that frequently served as a door to the terrace that led to the garden below.

These friendly overtures from Laura were always gratifying to his vanity, and at once transformed him into the charming host that he could be when occasion required, and, claiming a kiss from either cheek, with native gallantry he led her to the table.

Laura began, quite consciously, as one who feels the propinquity of attack yet is capable of averting it. All

men have their natural conceits, and Philip Grandor would have been scarcely human if he had been insensitive to his sister-in-law's pretty homage. Arts she did use, but honest ones, and beguiling to any one's impoverished spirits.

"Oh! Mr. Grandor," she commenced quite gaily, "I have not seen so charming a man since I have been gone. It is really a delight to be at home again, for one has a thousand trials in a hotel, but here! living is a luxury. Isn't it, mamma?" And Laura turned her pretty face toward her mother for a moment, but quickly sought her brother-in-law's again. Mrs. Winthrop acquiesced charmingly. In the meantime Laura had called for a delicately tinted plate, and fell to making a mayonnaise—"perfectly new," she said. "Just learned it from Mrs. Dothan—she coaxed, and I assure you that it required a good deal of coaxing too, her *chef* to write it down expressly for mamma. She's renowned for her elegant dinners." Pouring the creamy dressing over a crisp lettuce, she bade Dobson carry it to her brother-in-law.

"You know, my dear," she continued, and following the plate with her eyes, "harmony of coloring tempts the palate as well as harmony of ingredients, and a harmonious companion excels all else." Laughing lightly, Laura began to tell of some funny escapade at Old Point, adding mischievously, "Mamma would have been shocked, I'm sure."

Esther replied that a little frivolity was expected at such places, and for her part she never could tell who were the husbands and wives. They all appeared to be "*en famille*."

Grandor was partially reconciled, but he was becoming wearied. The ceaseless incense was stupefying, making him long for a good combative encounter. Again he ventured, "I see Neville is putting up a house. I hear that he and Miss Raynor are to be married. She is a fine girl."

"She is a deceitful thing, and together they will make a pair. Ugh! she's sly, always poking around among the poor and making herself conspicuous."

Pushing away from the table, Laura threw herself in a most nonchalant manner into "mamma's big chair," where she declared all the affairs of the family were laid out with magic rule.

"Oh! dear me," she began with a merry chuckle, "a wedding! ha! ha! ha! How do you suppose they will do it? Mamma's æsthetic sense will be crucified, no matter what they do. It only needs her ordering to be perfect, you know, while everything else is out of taste. Mamma, how do you suppose we will live after you are gone?" Laura collapsed tragically, peeping from the half lowered lids at her mother's discomfiture, which she failed to find as amusing as usual. Then with a merry attempt at reconciliation, she sat up perfectly unabashed. "Well, mamma, what will we do? I for one am beginning to realize that I am weaned. How is it with you, Esther?" Laura extended her pretty hand toward her sister, assured of constant allegiance there. "Don't mamma treat us as though we were still in her arms?" she continued persuasively.

Esther vouched no reply. She was absorbed in some new enterprise which her husband was explaining to

her, and the words "Neville" and "carriage" indicated a new purchase that put all discord to flight. Mrs. Winthrop, not so easily diverted from her own meditations, threw a half defiant look at her youngest daughter, which was like throwing a shaving into partially extinguished embers, that might have consumed themselves quietly and harmlessly, save for the sudden replenishment.

"Laura, you are a heartless child even to imagine my death, but it will be a mercy that I shall not have to witness your failures." Mrs. Winthrop was as certain as her mother had been that no one else could do anything properly.

"Failures!" cried Laura, "How distracting you are, mamma. Failures! Did a Winthrop ever make a social failure? Come, do vary the tale a little and tell of one ignominious defeat;" and a little ripple of haughty laughter dispelled further contention.

Laura still held possession of the luxurious chair, tapping the soft carpet with her dainty foot in incipient rebellion to home rule. Mrs. Winthrop's equanimity returned as she saw no concession in her daughter, and she resorted to the usual balm.

"You have the Winthrop foot, Laura. Scott would have gone down on his knees to it, and it is a great delight to me to see it reappearing in undiminished beauty."

Mr. Grandor smiled at the outcome; Esther beamed; the mystified countenance of the dowager relaxed to bid adieu to her son-in-law, who disappeared amid the fragrant fumes of his Havana.

Esther patted Laura's soft hand, thrown carelessly

over her head, outlined with the distinctiveness of a Parian marble on the rich plush.

"You have routed the enemy, as usual, Lollie. Your words fall into those old ears like honey into a honey-comb, and I admit it requires an enormous amount to fill the abysmal depths, but I commend your industry."

"How doth the busy little, tra, la, la, la."

The group of easy chairs and sofas about the bay window tempted the family to linger in the dining-room and enjoy the view of the street as it stretched its full length before them. Laura, suddenly filled with the keenest interest in external affairs, exclaimed:

"There come the Jenner girls. Look, Essie, what a dowdy Louise is in that same old blue dress, airs of a duchess, too. Well, after all, the airs had better out-shine the gown than *vice versa*! My, they are coming in!" Mrs. Winthrop laid her palms on her hair, Laura pinched her cheeks and Esther displayed her morning robe more effectively, concealing a side panel that she was sure they were coming to examine with a view to modernizing their own toilettes.

A ring at the door, a chatter in the hall.

"How are the ladies, Dobson? Are they visible so early? Ha! ha! You are a faithful old soul, Dobson. Every one envies their having you, you keep them so beautifully."

Dobson threw open the door. The ladies rushed in.

"What lazy, delightful people! Oh, dear, do you actually subsist in such luxury as this?" Dobson provided chairs for the newcomers, each of whom lifted one by the back and placed it nearer the hostess before sitting.

"No, no, Louise," cried Laura, as one of the visitors tried to eject her from her sumptuous seat.

"Oh, no, I don't often get it myself. It belongs to the queen regent over there," smiling graciously at her mother. "Being particularly clever occasionally results in an advantage to me, and mamma has for once abdicated in my favor."

"Oh, yes, perfectly delightful time. Tired to death of beaux. It is a treat to have such charming femininity about me. Do sit more closely and tell me all the news." Questions shot from every direction were answered in the most engaging manner. Smiling, graciously receiving the adulation of everybody, *Laura was a very tidy little hub if she did lack the felloes.*

"Come, do tell me something! These folks are as poky as possible. We are fairly entombed in this old house. Ugh! it is like a vault after the luxuries of Old Point. What a realm of sunshine and charm that place is!"

"Oh, mamma, Mrs. Dotham missed you so. She said she came on purpose to see you, and the disappointment of not finding you there almost induced her to go straight home. She said June at Old Point without Mrs. Winthrop was like—Oh, tell me something new. I'm tired to death of the Hamlet comparison. I feel as I do in a last year's gown. Well, she missed you awfully anyhow. I could see that myself. I did my best for the good old thing. She is deaf, you know. I rode with her. I don't mind holding on to that tube in a close carriage, but she is such a bore, besides being so deaf. However, one can stand a good deal with her fine luncheons in view, and she can not monopolize the

gentlemen from sheer stupidity. I pity her! She delights in mamma."

Mrs. Winthrop asked if Mrs. Coulton was there?

"Yes," in a subdued tone.

"Yes, mamma, she was there." Observing a reprimand in her mother's voice, Laura straightened herself and began to tell of Mrs. Coulton.

"Well, mamma, what shall I say for her? She was there!"

Imagination easily supplied the rest. Mrs. Coulton, the most beautiful woman, established in a charming cottage, with liveries and gowns that defied any one's else, as she moved amid a coterie of admirers. She usually brought with her some sweet bud of a girl, a foil to her own beauty, and coached beyond eclipsing her hostess. The gentlemen came ostensibly to see the bud, but the fragrance of the rose was not forgotten.

"Laura, you spent one season in her cottage," came in happy exultation from her mother.

"Yes, mamma, I had a turn. No one expects Mrs. Coulton to have friends. She plucks young girls and wears them, just as young girls pluck flowers and wear them, and they must be of the choicest variety too. No bleached ones from the refrigerator for her. She insists on going to the roses and has the perfect ones cut before her eyes, and then carries them home in her coupe. She is just as fastidious about the stems of her girls." Laura surveyed herself approvingly.

"You were one of her selections," Mrs. Winthrop interrupted with maternal triumph.

No archæologist ever delved into the antiquities more zealously to lay before an admiring audience the spoils

of his quest than did Mrs. Winthrop revive, bit after bit of family history by which Laura's lineage might be embellished—hieroglyphics as unintelligible to her auditors as those which adorn Cleopatra's obelisk are to the casual passer-by. She saw her daughter as the descendant of a once aristocratic and wealthy family, and nothing could cause the glory to fade from her resurrecting eyes, though she began to perceive that the remaining glitter was very dimly appreciated by others. The human desire—old as the race—to be like gods, is no stronger than the readiness with which some persons perceive in themselves a similarity to great personages.

"Not a successful one, mamma." Laura was restive. She had discovered that adoration was seldom responsive and the void that it leaves gnaws its own vitals.

"I'm a worshiper at her shrine no longer. I'm wilted!" A hysterical laugh betrayed the agitation the confession cost her.

Mrs. Winthrop could not allow one of her best customers to be dismissed so trenchantly. Bending with an interrogative gaze upon the willful creature, she discovered her surveying four pink finger tips.

"She's the most charming woman, girls! I sincerely wish there were more Mrs. Coultons in the world." And she at once fell to embroidering prospectively.

"Charming at a distance!" Laura was unappeasable. Home was so sweet after the social restraints necessary to move in Mrs. Coulton's orbit. Absolute abnegation of one's self was the only passport—every breath must fan her circling censers. Fetish worship

was no more self-renouncing—so, as the fetters began to slip, Laura's spirits rose a trifle beyond their prescribed limits. It was clearly advisable to change the topic.

"Louise, how is your mother?" said Mrs. Winthrop suavely.

"Very well, thank you. She wished to be remembered to you, Mrs. Winthrop. It is a long time since you have been to see us."

"No, no, I'm neuralgic, the girls must do my visiting."

Esther looked approvingly at her mother's hands and the sparkling clusters that filled her third finger to the second knuckle.

"Oh, Laura," Louise began, "Mr. Neville is putting up such a nice brick house. He and Gail Raynor are to be married right away."

"Chet Neville," cried Laura testily. "Is Gail going to marry him? I should think Mrs. Raynor would look higher than that. A mechanic! Mamma says never look below a Congressman, and then there is some hope!"

Mrs. Winthrop replied that she might have done much worse. Increasing age can not disguise disappointment any more easily than it can wrinkles.

She could control her tongue, but how small a portion of our lives that active member succeeds in concealing.

"Congressmen are desirable," Mrs. Winthrop continued, "but really, girls, you ought not to let these strangers carry off all the prizes. You really ought not," and she shook her head at them admonishingly.

"Oh, she's welcome to him," cried all the girls in a breath, "house and all." Yet a perceptible depression

fell upon the conversation that no one seemed able to rescue it from.

Mrs. Grandor and the eldest Miss Jenner had been enjoying a quiet chat about new dainties for the table, and had paid little heed to the chatter between the younger girls. She now graciously arose, and, coming nearer to the group, who had risen to go, received their parting compliments upon her house with an indifference that plainly said: "Oh, I know how beautiful it is far better than you can tell me."

After the guests had departed, Mrs. Winthrop showed great depression. Laura would have liked to satisfy her mother's laudable ambition, but an intrusion of emotion just then seemed absolutely unbearable.

"I could not help it, mamma, so do let's drop the unpleasant subject forever," said Laura, more alive and resistant than ever. She knew that she had thrown and lost, but to be the cause of such a hubbub was more than her pride could endure.

Her mother, who was dumb without a quotation, said: "Ah, well! the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley."

"Women did not plan in those days, mamma," suggested Esther, attempting palliation toward her mother.

Mrs. Winthrop looked mercilessly at such inanity, saying: "You are like your poor father, Esther. He wanted to name you Cleopatra."

"Why didn't he, mamma? Esther is much prettier, but if I had been in your place I should have done it. Why not?"

"You are a dutiful wife, my daughter, and Mr. Gran-

dor's indulgence justifies any concession on your part. Yes, yes, you are right, Esther. I am different. I could never yield my will to another." Mrs. Winthrop felt herself utterly alone in the world. Rising languidly, she said: "I think that I will go to my room. I have a frightful headache."

"Poor mamma!" said both girls in a breath as Mrs. Winthrop swept out of the room.