

ASPHODEL.

"Quinci si va chi vuole andar per pace."

DANTE.



BOSTON.
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
1866.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1866, by
TICKNOR AND FIELDS,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

UNIVERSITY PRESS: WELCH, BIGELOW, & Co.,
CAMBRIDGE.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	5
II. MORNING	11
III. FRIENDSHIP	18
IV. AN EXCURSION	34
V. COMMUNICATION	56
VI. COMPANIONSHIP	64
VII. AFFINITIES	71
VIII. SOLITUDE	88
IX. PRESENCE	116
X. AWAKENING	153
XI. COURAGE	164
XII. THE VOYAGE	181
XIII. A FESTIVAL	187
XIV. A WEDDING-NIGHT	201
XV. SUNSET	211
XVI. EVENING	218

207

ASPHODEL.

I.

INTRODUCTION.

IT is a fortunate lot to be born in New England; to find one's self stepping from the cradle out into the fore world of thought, stirred by breezes fresh with the freedom of humanity; to know that a hope rises with the morning for every one of her children, to set only in the night of those earth-sorrows, which the rich and poor, the wise and foolish, of all lands, may experience alike, in accordance with the divine economy of God. And for these, His chosen ones, the light of faith forever shines, breaking in glory upon the mountains of the future. The child of New England looks toward the East, saying, Now

is the high noon of the world; we will bid farewell to the mists of earlier hours, and lands overladen by the history of ages, gathering from these what we need, but leaving the rest to decay upon the parent soil. Hope and experience shall here be planted together, that our growth may be lusty, and the vast tree wave its benediction to the sunset. The old world bends a slow, wise smile over these youthful ardors, but the look is kindly; perhaps it is born of the knowledge that he who conceives daringly shall not achieve sparingly; perhaps the smile is tempered by the thought that all mortal conception is the germ of immortal fruition, upon which another sun shall beam, if not his own.

Herbert Gregory's reflections, which we have endeavored to express, however imperfectly, ran somewhat into this same channel of pride and satisfaction with his native land, as he passed through the college grounds, one early autumn afternoon, toward his father's house.

He had just come back from a tour through Europe, the immediate sequence of his academic career, and with the benefit of travel on one hand, and the happiness of return on the other, it was not a cause for astonishment that he should appreciate, with a far keener sense than ever before, the bounties and significance of his home. To the untravelled, if Herbert had been tempted at this time to unfold his feeling to any such, we can fancy the dispraise of wandering as affecting his listener with a kind of disgust, or even doubt of his sincerity; perhaps, with something of the same feeling which young readers have, when attempting to enjoy the translation of a classic, the favorite with their learned teacher, who delights himself daily over the original, while his pupils toil wearily as through stubble-land, perplexed by the enthusiasm they see inspired. But Herbert had just quitted his friend Russell, now soberly enough settled at home in con-

nection with the University. His European experience was an affair of the past, yet Herbert was pleased to discover that Russell agreed with him perfectly in regard to the superior incentive (and therefore the superior advantage) of life in America. It was possible that the simple old library, with its spacious window-seats, and broad windows looking out among the pines, the crackling logs on the hearth, and Edith's chair beside the fire, where she had been sitting with them that autumn afternoon, had some slight influence upon Russell's opinion, expressed decidedly in disfavor of American youth who give their valuable time to European travel; but whatever the reason might be, it was doubtless sufficiently good, since it was sincere. It was a favorite idea, also, with Russell, although an eccentric one, that even the romance writer could find no better groundwork and material than New England affords. "Where," he would say,

enthusiastically, "where can Spring tread more daintily than here! If we wait long for her, there is a rapture when she is at length unveiled, which the March anemones of the Pamfili Doria or the velvet green of England might well envy. And Summer, too, a season of rich surprises, with days which seem to be swept from the Orient, when the whole atmosphere palpitates, and man and beast yield to the midnight stillness of noon; and those other days, in quick succession, when the air breathes of icebergs, and the sky is pale pellucid blue from dawn till dark, when suddenly with another morning come the clouds, and rain, and odors of the sea, brought inland on the wings of northeast gales; and afterward Autumn, with the unspeakable splendors of his drapery; and Winter, with snow and firelight, long and dreary enough, except for the Fortunate Islands of home;—what more than these could a new enchanter desire?"

This ready eloquence of Russell, which he did not hesitate to express to his friend in the somewhat florid manner we have indicated, naturally served to confirm Herbert in the opinion he had already formed. Nor did the sentiment of patriotism, if we may dignify his half-developed feeling by such a name, grow less, but rather stronger, when, after a year or two of drifting in waves of uncertainty with regard to his career, he at last established his own library-fireside at "The Cliff," where, a few years having passed, we find him with his wife Alice and his children, — the stately ship of life riding with safety in its serene harbor, held fast by the divine anchorage of home.

II.

MORNING.

IT was a dawn of Spring. The early breezes catching the whisper of Day in the far east, awoke the sleepers of the world before his beams appeared, waving and swaying the cool mists which overlay the face of the dry earth, as the wind may play with and flutter the face-cloth of the dead. But soon the solemn morning purpled and broadened into heaven-wide circles, until at length it bloomed upon the sky, a vast rose-garden of Divinity. As in our narrow household world a lady watches through the lucent doors of her home garden the purpling and widening, and at length the rosy unfolding of the broad "Azalia splendens," so, for all Nature and the world of humanity, blossomed the slow morning, and widened into the beauty of broad day.

There was no mist in the soul of Alice Gregory when she awoke, only the full strength of the morning of love ; but as the fatal clouds which obscure the sun often arise after a clear unveiling of his beams, so came her after-thought, and the memory of approaching separation. Herbert was that day to leave her for a sea-voyage, in search of health (the true talisman of this world's good, which had been shorn from him by the modern Delilah, Over-work), and his early hour of departure was at hand. She arose hastily, and, while she gathered her abundant hair, memory came to tell her that thus far only the lights of life had shone upon her ; to-day its shadows would fall, and a touch of the white frost of care, which leaves silver threads in dark clusters such as she was then binding together, would mark their advent. Yet even these white threads, she remembered, serve to lead us in safety, with uplifted eyes, through the diffi-

cult passages of the world, out into a purer existence.

Clamorous nursery cries aroused her. She opened the door leading to her children's room, and found them already impatient to accompany her to the beach. She had promised this happiness, with her bedside kiss, the night before. She knew all children are happy on a beach ; it is their eternal wonder-world.

"Your father is going away, far away," she said, gently stilling their turbulence with a quiet manner native to her, "come with me to the shore now, children, and see his little boat."

They ran eagerly to her side, and danced about her footsteps as she descended. Herbert was at the water's edge before them, watching the safe conveyance to the ship of box and bag carefully prepared by Alice. He did not perceive her approach, until the clear voices of his children warned him ; then he started, as if

with pain ; but in a moment turned upon them with a warm, strong smile, such as had made the daily sunshine of his wife. Already she seemed to feel its brightness pale, and her own responsive beams to fade as dreams depart before one hastily awakened. He did not speak to her, but seized their boy, according to his morning custom, kissed his cheeks, and puzzled him by crying, "Here is honey-dew !" while Ernest clung closely to him, ready for the wildest frolic. Allegra, on the contrary, timid and tender as a spring violet, stood half hidden in her mother's skirts.

The little group waited a few moments by the shore, listening for the sound of the returning oars to break the stillness. Soon the dip and gurgle were distinctly heard, and shortly after the red shirts of the boatmen gleamed in the mist, and the keel grated on the sand. Last words were few, for tears shone in the eyes of Alice, and Herbert dared not speak either for

himself or her ; but the children's voices were now busy in a strange refrain of laughter, making the desolation of parting appear more profound than before. As he sprang lightly into the boat, little Ernest leaving his play ran towards him, shouting, "Papa, I'm a big boy now, let me go, too," but the oarsmen had already shoved away from the shore, and the rays of the newly risen sun were shooting their busy shuttles through the mist and fringes of the rippling waves, until with each oar-stroke the boat seemed to lose itself in a glamour impenetrable at last to the dazzled eyes of Alice.

Then she turned away, and calling the children, walked toward her home. As she ascended the cliff, she saw the distant sea was calm, and the fresh blue was waking on its face. But the slow waves breaking below her feet ; the knoll radiant with dew-strung grass, upon which she stood ; the garden gate ; and

the blooming, swaying branches above her head, — brought a deeper meaning in their loveliness to-day, eloquent of the happy, unreturning past. Soon she found herself under the broad awning of the hospitable piazza, whence she gazed wistfully out, hoping to see the departing ship. For a moment it was possible to discern the filling sails; then the winds seemed to bear the winged thing suddenly out of the world into the golden chambers of the East.

Alice looked abroad over the earth then, and watched the day. The dew of youth, and the mystery of morning had fled, and the approaching sun of noon was ripening the dim purpose they foreshadowed. It lighted the sharp edges of the world, and gave her pain, until she saw the great rocks of Love and Friendship fling their broad and kindly shadows over her weary land. How beautiful her morning had been! She asked her-

self, "Shall not the noon, too, be lustrous with its skies of deeper blue and fruit sunned by beams of the Orient, even though watered well by the storm-days of life?"

III.

FRIENDSHIP.

Alice ceased gazing at the wide horizon, now shut down silently over the absent one, silently as shuts the veil of death when the play of life is ended; then she entered the house through the long, low windows of the library. The place was redolent of flowers; heaps on heaps lay in one tangled dewy mass upon the table where Herbert had evidently thrown them, knowing this early morning labor would find due appreciation. Wild-wood favorites rifled from deep hidden nooks, garden companions, and the common wayside friends lay together in beautiful and unwonted proximity.

"Mamma," cried Ernest, who was standing by, eager to see his mother's delight over this

FRIENDSHIP.

19

endless mass of blooms, "may Ally and I bring you the vase to put them in?" and, before she could reply, the two had scampered off, and were again on the threshold with their chubby hands clenched over the delicate alabaster of the pretty Warwick model, both staggering under the weight and responsibility.

"Now, children," said she, when the precious freight was safely landed at her feet, "run to the south room, and tell the lady who came last night, that papa has brought flowers, and mamma would like her to see them."

A gliding step on the doorway arrested the children in their second flight, and caused them to look timidly towards the lovely person whom their father had told them was to be their friend and teacher.

"Erminia," said Alice, after their morning salutation, "I remembered the habit of early rising which you acquired during our school

days. It is not one easily relinquished, having been once thoroughly learned, and I was about to send the children to invite you to join me. I owe much to you, and not the least of my debts is a knowledge of those noble verses by Henry Vaughan, beginning,

‘When first mine eyes unveil.’

Have you forgotten them?”

“No,” said Erminia, as she rescued a blooming rose, entangled in a mass of Mitchella vine, “I love those verses still, and better that we first came to know each other, as it were, through them. But where shall I put this exquisite cluster?” and she held up, as she spoke, a little vase of flowers which her speedy fingers had already arranged.

“Surely that is beautiful enough for the western chamber,” answered Alice; yet, while speaking of the vase, she looked chiefly at her friend, who never appeared to her more lovely. The slender group of lilies and roses, relieved

against the deep blue of her dress; the sunshine streaming through her rich “Venetian” hair, causing the gold gleams hidden there to shine; and especially a sweet simplicity of manner, an unconsciousness which is the soul of beauty, made her inexpressibly lovely to Alice.

“That room is to be Russell’s,” she continued, “he is an old friend of Herbert, as you know well, and I wish his welcome to be kindly and affectionate at least, since his visit must needs be dull without his companion. His little daughter Fanny, who is her father’s only earthly joy now, shall have the cabinet adjoining for her bedroom. Ernest, you may tell Marion to show the way to the west room, and arrange it for our guest.”

Erminia heard Alice’s directions for the comfortable establishing of Russell undisturbed by feeling of anxiety with regard to his arrival. She knew something of his character and his

tory, and although she felt a sincere interest in his career, there seemed invincible barriers between them, which proximity must only widen. His genius (for the world worshipped it as such); his pride of family, and consequent position in society; the recent loss of a wife, lovely and beloved, eminent for talent and devotion to her home; the flattery of strangers, and caresses of private circles,—all these things, contrasted with her own estranged and unregarded existence, made Erminia feel not only the distance between herself and Alice's distinguished guest, but she saw that the cares of her position would not be slight if she were able to fulfil the duties she desired to assume. Much of Alice's time would necessarily be occupied with him, she thought, or with the friends he attracted to the house. She determined, therefore, to make it her duty and pleasure not only to guard the children's welfare but to oversee

the business of the household, so far as this should prove a possible and real service to Alice. These duties she felt would shelter her somewhat from the labor of receiving visitors, the present condition of her mind rendering her unfit for social enjoyment.

At this juncture of their lives the value of the school friendship they had enjoyed became doubly apparent to Alice and Erminia. They were not obliged to grope blindly, while endeavoring to adapt themselves to each other. Alice felt the presence of her friend as a continual balm and consolation; while for Erminia, left solitary in the world by her father's death, the delicate sympathies of her companion were ever ready to understand and shield her.

So different are the manifestations of grief, one could not easily divine from the appearance of Erminia that the floods of sorrow had gone over her. Habitually calm, and in-

structed under the watchful eye of her father, who lived the life of a recluse, she wore daily, over a spirit swayed by every wind of joy and every note of sorrow, a well-poised character, which enabled her to act without too great hesitation, and without subsequent regret; and where a superior judgment came to her assistance, she recognized its power and rejoiced in its repose. Her self-reliance became naturally more strongly accentuated when her earthly guide and instructor was withdrawn from her side. It veiled her from the eyes of the world, simply, yet as securely as the arts of Prospero could; and sometimes that was accounted to her as pride which was only the strength and height of true humility.

Erminia was scarcely twelve years old when her mother died, and two maiden aunts came to reside with her father and herself. They found the young girl somewhat restive under their unaccustomed restraints, and after a few

passages at arms in which, to say the least, they were but poorly seconded by her father, they were convinced that the tasks of subduing the child and comprehending her parent's idea for her education transcended the limit of their ability. They willingly resigned the father and daughter, after a few months of endeavor, to a loneliness which was evidently far too agreeable to satisfy the afflicted vanity of the two ladies.

In truth it was an unspeakably happy pair. The child who appeared so wilful and wayward under uncongenial control became with her father, what he believed her to be, the most docile of pupils, and humble as a lover. She surprised him by her precocity in certain branches of education, in those especially which she had chosen; for he desired to give her a certain freedom of selection, provided the study, whatever it might be, were performed with integrity and vigor.

Such was their life, while the moons waxed and waned, and the child became a woman, and the autumn grew to winter. At last a night shut down in which the silentness of death overspread the beloved features of the old man, and Erminia was left solitary in the quiet cottage.

After a time she was able to recall the happy hours of devotion and faith she might never know again, and so companion her dim solitude. And then came the old school friendship for Alice, giving color to her life once more. That, indeed, was like a calm harbor always, in the tempestuous sea of years which seemed to outstretch before her.

In a letter to Alice, at this time, she wrote: "Seven years ago, upon your marriage day, I grieved and wept. In my girlish weakness, I feared I had lost something, being ignorant of the divine mystery of married love to enlarge the possibilities of life. After these years

of experience I find how much I have gained, and when I think of you, I feel myself surrounded by loving hearts. You may perhaps wonder when we meet to see me wearing none of the habiliments of grief, and I must anticipate your surprise by explaining that it was the wish of my dear father to banish such array. A woman folded in crape always made him shudder. 'That person throws a gloom over my day!' he would exclaim, 'Does she mean to closet herself with death, and receive no higher companionship? Do these people believe all the sorrow of the world belongs to them?'

"'Erminia,' he said, a few days before his death, when hardly conscious of his words, 'I remember how she looked the day I asked her. She did not say, "Yes," but turned her face away, and the quick blush stained her cheek far down till the ruffle hid it, and a tear dropped on her blue robe as she laid her hand

in mine. Erminia, don't forget how much I like to see you wear blue; your mother wore blue!' I think, after this, he spoke little, but lay as if peacefully absorbed in reminiscence, until the last solemn hours, when he roused himself to discourse on holy themes.

"To-morrow I leave this old house. It seems like coldly forsaking all I love best; I suppose, the entire solitude is not good; at least so my aunts endeavor to persuade me, and for a time I must yield my wish to theirs. But I can confide to no one the joys of the divine companionship I receive while walking in the paths he made, and following his vanished footsteps through the little wood. Here we are not separated; he draws me to his supreme height, and every leaf, and the enlightening rays of each expiring day seem like whisperings of his spirit close to mine.

"I hardly know how I have been enabled to say this, even to you, dear Alice, but it shall

stand, that you may know when we meet and talk cheerfully on other themes, perhaps, that life has become possible, and my heart is at peace. Already received into the saints' rest through the love of my vanished one, my spirit cannot be disturbed by storms at any lower level.

"I shall soon return to this place, I cannot be away. Old Nancy clings to me as if I were her all, and will cajole blossoms into the dead garden before I see it again. Here she comes already with the first snowdrop. Farewell."

There were frequent letters between the two ladies subsequent to this; more frequent, perhaps, on the part of Erminia than of Alice, who found the cares and pre-occupations of her life too absorbing to make it easy to write often. Her delinquencies in this respect were made good, however, by a three days visit she found time to pay her friend in company with her husband and Russell and his wife.

What happy days they were! How often Erminia, afterward, sitting alone by her cottage window, overlooking the undulating meadows and the shifting shadows on the corn, would recall the sweet, pale face of Russell's wife, and his anxious loving glance; or at times would remember, less pensively, those long hours under the pines, when the new poem was first read which had since made Russell famous; his merry jests, too, would come back to her, and the dance of responsive light in the brown eyes of Alice, and Herbert.

Once, as the twilight faded from the landscape, so impalpably that day seemed to pause and invite the weary children of the world to rest their hearts in its ineffable beauty, she sat and looked, and thought upon her friends. Suddenly a voice like Russell's, crying "Edith," as if across the gulf of time, came to her. Then she knew Edith was dead, and that Russell stood alone.

FROM A LETTER OF ALICE TO ERMINIA.

"Do not refuse our request, dear Erminia; it is necessary for Herbert's health that he should go away, yet it will in a measure alleviate the pain of his departure, I am sure, if he feels you will be at home here during his absence. Beside, for our children's sake, I must urge it. I cannot send them away to school while there is a hope left me of your care and instruction. Perhaps this argument may prevail with you before every other. The necessity of occupation is the true spur to energetic life, and you are rigorous in the demands you make upon yourself! Therefore I feel you will find no uncongenial sphere for your labors here with my children. It has long been a part of my creed that the parent cannot make the best instructor of the child. A fresh mind impelling the intellect through unwonted channels, and a fresh heart whose

sympathies forerun the religious aspiration of the growing soul, may be like a torch and guiding hand to lead it through the mysterious passages of life, where else it may stumble blindfold. Perhaps the child fears to confide to one so wise as his parent appears to him, lest his fancies, and those strange winds of feeling which sweep across the sunny plains of being, may be regarded as mere foolishness. But what can he not lay in holy confidence upon the newly erected altar of friendship! Beside is not religion aspiration? And what can quicken a child's nature more truly than contact with a new individual, who speaks to him from a heart of noble endeavor? Thus is *reverence* awakened, that keystone by which the arches of life are strengthened and their beauty sealed.

"I must not omit to tell you that Herbert besought Russell to come with little Fanny and make his home here during the autumn

and winter. It is yet more than doubtful if he accedes to our arrangement, but we shall not allow this new plan, even if it prove feasible, to interfere with the retirement of your life while here.

"I hope for you and await you, my dear friend! Your presence will alleviate the weight of the difficult burden I must bear."

Therefore, Erminia went.

IV.

AN EXCURSION.

THE days passed swiftly and peacefully at "The Cliff." Alice had scarcely allowed herself to hope for the repose which succeeded her arrangements. They had been made with reference to the well-being of others, — the happiness of the result was felt by none more deeply than herself.

The skill and method of Erminia in her new duties were recognized almost immediately, through their effect upon the children. Her direct influence was exercised for a few hours of the morning only, but it was sufficient to render them more thoughtful and circumspect in their relations to each other during the day. The confinement of the school-room gave a zest to the freedom which succeeded, and she

joined the happy flight out into the air with as much rapture as either of her pupils. This rule for school hours as well as play, once quietly established, was seldom infringed upon; for Alice knew the advantage of a healthy routine was not to be lightly estimated.

One morning little Fanny ran into her father's room much earlier than usual, with all the impetuous eagerness of a child who has a story to tell, and finding him already seated at his desk, although it was half an hour too early even for the children's breakfast, she curled up on his lap, saying, "O papa, I am so glad you are ready, because now I can tell you a secret! Perhaps I sha'n't tell, after all, but you may guess, papa, if you can. I love somebody, — somebody beside you, dear papa; will you try to guess who it is?"

"Why, perhaps," he said, trying to make the difficulty appear as great as possible, "perhaps it is your teacher, Fanny."

"Well, papa, I don't see how you ever guessed; but you can't think how good she is, and when we have been obedient she will sing to us sometimes, and — O dear papa, how I wish you would ask her to sing to you, it is so beautiful to hear her! And what do you think she did for us yesterday, when we had stayed a little too late in the woods, and were hurrying home from our walk in the afternoon? Why, you see, there had been a great high tide, and the ocean had washed right over the short path and left a little pond. We tried to get round it, and tried and tried till Ally almost tumbled in; then at last she pulled off her shoes and stockings and tucked up her dress and carried us over one by one in her arms. Wasn't that kind, papa? My turn came last, because I am the tallest, so she gave me her shoes and stockings to carry. I thought I held on tight, but I *almost* dropped them once when I looked down and was thinking how pretty

the water looked splashing up round her feet. But good by, papa; there's the bell, and I must run, for I hear Ernest and Ally in the hall already." And down his little girl slipped and disappeared before she heard, much less answered, any further questions.

An hour later, when Russell came into the breakfast-room, he found Alice and Erminia had just entered. It was somewhat later than their customary season, and as he took Erminia's hand he observed it to be slightly hot, and that she wore a heavy shawl drawn about her; but her manner, which was more gay and sprightly than usual, forbade special inquiry after her health, and the three were soon busily engaged discussing a new path which Herbert had long contemplated and desired, to lead more directly to the shore, which Alice had determined, with Russell's assistance, to complete during his absence. It was not possible for Russell to banish the thought of Er-

minia, however, in connection with his child. It was she who had incurred the risk of cold and fever to save others, and so quietly that none might know of it. If it had not been for my thoughtful, affectionate little Fanny, he said to himself, this kindness would have been forgotten! He observed with deep feeling the slight hectic of Erminia's cheeks, and the signs of evident sleeplessness. He determined as soon as possible to find some opportunity to testify his gratitude, and in future to observe more closely a character which attracted him in proportion as he felt himself repelled by its reticence.

At this moment he remembered they had long been talking of a day's excursion to a famous rock-ledge in the neighborhood, called by the native dwellers near the sea, "The Pirate's Cross," and he concluded to ask the ladies immediately to appoint a time, the earliest possible, for their intended ramble. Then, at

least, he hoped to find opportunity, without too many words, to testify to Erminia something of the feeling with which her behaviour had inspired him; to approach her as a friend, that she might feel he would be ready to stand by her in any emergency her lonely life should present, a true responsible arm of defence in time of need. He would not say this to her, but he longed to win her confidence, till she should gently lean upon his judgment and his kindness. Almost as speedily as these thoughts flashed through his mind, he communicated his plan for the excursion to Alice, who acceded to it at once with pleasure for the sake of both her guests. She fancied Erminia had been too closely confined of late, — but at this first hint, as if the idea contained nothing which deeply concerned her, the one for whom they were both planning slipped quietly away to her pupils, leaving her friend as usual to answer for them both.

On the appointed morning Russell was in excellent spirits. Everything favored his plans. The neighbors, if such they might be considered, the nearest estate lying at least two miles distant by the road, had been asked to join the expedition, and were already assembled in their country wagons, suitable for rough woodland travel. The ladies of the house had not yet made their appearance, and the visible impatience of Russell was hardly exceeded by that of the children. Several times he arranged and re-arranged the shawls over the seats of the empty wagon waiting at the door. Once he walked quickly across the hall as if he would ascend the staircase and summon them, but returned as quickly to the piazza, and, gathering the children about him, seemed determined to make the best of a bad case, and to amuse himself in amusing them until the time for starting should arrive. He had scarcely resigned himself to this new occupation

when Alice ran swiftly down the stairs, her eyes aglow, and with a slightly heightened color in her cheeks. In a moment she was in the wagon and the children beside her.

"But Erminia?" said Russell inquiringly.

"She will not go with us to-day," was Alice's quick answer.

"Did you say Erminia would not go?" he replied, as if the possibility of this disappointment then first occurred to his mind.

He was about to question Alice more closely, when the thought suggested itself, that he had no right to demand a reason she did not choose to give,—and what was Erminia's absence to him farther than a disappointment, because he must defer still longer the expression of his gratitude for her constant and devoted care of his child. Therefore recovering himself almost immediately, he merely remarked, "I hope she is well this bright morning?"

"O, quite well, I assure you," said Alice;

"look up, children, and let us wave our farewell!"

The eyes of the little party were immediately raised to where Erminia, stood to watch their departure, upon the balcony over the piazza; and if any doubt with regard to her health remained with Russell after Alice's frank reply, it must have vanished speedily when he glanced up with the others to say, "Good morning," and met her glowing face, as she kissed her hand to the children. He did not fail to see the blush which threw its delicate color over her cheek, but he failed to see himself as the cause of it.

"Let us lead the way now," said Alice, and they drove speedily down the sweeping avenue, greeting their friends as they passed with an invitation to fall into an impromptu procession. And while the merry company whirled on toward the rendezvous, even the rear-guard forgot the discomfort of their somewhat dusty position

in the gleaming magnificence of the morning sea. But it was long before Russell recovered the tone of his spirits. He was disappointed his plan should have failed, and felt half inclined to blame Alice for its non-fulfilment. Yet her serene sunshine, together with the contagious gayety of the children, helped to disperse his clouds; although the chief enchantment lay perhaps, after all, in the exquisite loveliness of the autumn morning. In this aftermath of summer, one must indeed be unimpressionable not to discern that Nature claims certain days for her own, quite as much as during the heat of July or the jewel days of June.

As they passed a well-known farmer's house, Russell perceived two men just starting with their guns for a day's shooting. An easy lounging gait was the only expression of their enjoyment; but the boy who followed them, although evidently bent on a close imitation of

the *sang-froid* of his elders, could not restrain the gayety of his eye nor the occasional sharp whistle of a lively air.

At length, as the wagons entered the woodland where they were soon to stop, Alice could not but observe how pretty the effect was of the winding procession, now hidden among pines and cedars and now emerging upon cleared spaces, or suddenly coming upon trees with low entwining branches, and to see the arms of the young girls thrusting aside the stiff fingers of the evergreen, or pulling the long boughs of coralline barberries during their slow progress. When farther advance became at last impossible, no one was more active for the general good than Russell. He managed to send a party forward on foot with the baskets for their rural feast, and to interest Alice in conversation with one of her neighbors; and thus having performed what he considered his duty on the occasion, he escaped with the

children by a slightly diverging path towards a favorite point he knew well, near the sea. He felt a desire for solitude; and remembering a little cove where the children would soon become absorbed in play, he felt he could be utterly alone while watching them and the ceaseless dashing of the waves. He did not know how little he really wished for loneliness;—how he distanced himself from the friends he saw around him, only to seek the presence of another. It was wisely said by Jean Paul, "We could not endure solitude were it not for the powerful companionship of hope, or of some unseen one," and to-day the "unseen one," whom they had left behind, rose like a sun upon his spirit. He sighed to think her light might shine for other systems, but never, it seemed, upon his. To him it only gleamed from afar, as a distant planet may live and burn in the very radiance of our sunset, and tell us of strange limitless spaces made

glorious by beams which we can only distantly divine or know in dreams.

The hours of the day passed quickly with Erminia. Alice had urged her to accompany them as strongly as she dared; but those few words when they parted the night before, "Russell wishes you to go, dear Erminia," made it appear impossible. What could she be to him, she questioned, that he should ask her to go! To a person so lonely, and dependent upon herself, a spark of kindness was a flame, and she scarcely dared suffer one to alight upon her heart. She thought Russell could hardly find cause to occupy himself much about her; but he was Fanny's father, and she could perhaps make his burden less difficult by great carefulness for his child. She fancied between herself and one so justly distinguished there was a wide distance, yet she listened to no conversation with warmer enthusiasm than to his; and although she seldom replied, her

whole being was for the time absorbed in hearing and recalling his expressions. How happy she was in Alice's household! if only to be near a friend so beautiful, noble, and great as Russell, and able in any way to minister to him! Yet she would never willingly trust herself where his gratitude, which she could not but observe, should find any warmer expression than his calmest moments would approve.

She arose on the morning of this excursion strong in her determination and full of joy. The happiness of benefitting others, the feeling that she was in some dim way of use to one who had given much to her both from the inspiration of his books and from his visible presence, this made the light of every day more grateful to her eyes. To-day, when she felt how rich were her possessions, and when the instinct came with the strength to keep them as they were, if possible, untouched, unstained forever, what wonder she appeared beautiful to

Russell as she waved them good speed from the balcony, or that her quiet manner, as she moved about the house superintending some new domestic arrangement for Alice, contained a certain happy vigor which was scarcely native to her. She saw and did not forget the kindness of her friends, which had been testified that morning in Russell's look of disappointment and in Alice's tender persuasions.

The day had already melted into the misty gold of afternoon before she completed her labors. Then she lay down upon a couch which stood across the recess of the broad library window and watched the sea. It shone and glimmered under the broad cedars, which stood like sentinels upon the garden's edge, gradually burning and purpling in the sunset rays. And while she lay, in her fatigue she slept and dreamed.

She thought she was lying under the large cedar close to the verge of the cliff, and Russell

was by her side. The children were far below, chasing the birds upon the sand. Presently Russell said, "May I play to you?" and seizing a violin he played until they seemed to float together on a golden sea of music, and the violin to become a boat, wherein they lay rising and sinking to the harmony of the waves. Suddenly the sea dashed with a sharp discord. She awoke to find the breeze had swung the half-opened door heavily back. Then she arose and shook away her dream.

The gloom and white mists of evening were abroad, when the sound of horses' feet told of the return of the party. Erminia appeared to bring both light and warmth to the chilly group as she ran to welcome them, and throwing open the wide hall-door allowed the blaze of the bright wood-fire to stream into the dusk.

After the brief story of the day was ended, and they had finished the evening meal, they found their way into the drawing-room again,

where no one was inclined to talk, and Erminia fancied the silence was growing irksome. Therefore she went to the piano, which her late occupations had prevented her from touching, and played softly, almost as if to herself, yet for others too if their mood chimed with hers, while the glimmer of the half-risen moon began to pervade the darkness of the room. She played on and on, until the absolute quiet of her listeners and the dreamful absorption into which the music drew her, caused the consciousness of their presence at length to pass away, and she seemed again to float on that divine sea of harmony which rocked her in her dream. Alice's love for music would have kept her spellbound if the children had not required her presence, and caused her soon to leave the room; but Russell sat still as breathing marble in the broad window, watching the moon as she slowly arose out of the sea over the dim horizon and laid a bridge of silvery lustre almost to his feet.

Presently Erminia stopped, and her low, sweet voice, compounded of all gentleness, began a song of summer, while her fingers made the instrument speak like the rippling of streams to bear her company. Again she paused, and then the voice — surging as if a storm of passion had swept across its gentle strength, leaving its sad vibrations — arose once more. Russell listened, for this strange, sad tone thrilled him, and he heard these words: —

O tell me not so fair a sun may shine,
And pour his living beams alone on me;
Full well I know the glory is divine,
And all his undimmed path the world can see.

Ye happy lovers clad in ecstasy!
Sway in your bliss and touch the speaking heaven!
Garner joy's ray to illumine life's stormy sky,
Earth's shadows fall even where her love is given!

But I shall ever gaze upon my star,
And know the glorious lustre cannot pale,

Through present dark his spirit gleams afar,
Nor passing heavenward can such beauty fail.

The fountain of my love shall feel no bars,
But ever flowing ever be at rest;
For what am I that I should clasp the stars,
Or think their rays are only for my breast!

Yet I could sigh and lean my weary head,
And lose all self upon the heart of love,
And loving, live, as if the world were dead,
And every voice as sweet as notes above.

Then turn away from me thy glowing face!
My heart is weak; — this frailty is of earth;
No longer would I feel that tender grace,
Lest I must stifle joy in his young birth.

Alice glided noiselessly back into the room, while Erminia was singing these verses. Immediately to her clear vision their meaning was unfolded, and she shot one anxious glance towards Russell. The song was ended now, and he arose and came to the piano. As he

approached Erminia and spoke, she started. "How strangely pathetic that song is," he said gently, and almost tenderly, as if he would make amends for having disturbed her. "I think I did not quite comprehend it. Have you the words there? I should like to see them and to know the writer's name. Love and suffering find expression in them, and that pain of lonely, unrecognized affection, perhaps the saddest cry the voice of humanity can raise! Can you find them for me?"

"No," said Erminia, speaking very low, "they are not written. The words were my own. I did not think them altogether sad," and she turned from the piano as she spoke, with a clear, unclouded smile, which seemed to comprehend him in its sunlight and what might lie beyond.

Russell saw, as he had never seen before, the ineffable tenderness of her face, — a face that

knew sorrow, but knew the eternal power of love, and he became humble as a little child before the light of her spirit. He answered her in a tone as low as her own, and which even Alice could not hear. When Erminia arose a moment after to close the instrument, he said more audibly, "Will you teach me something of your wisdom? I would come to you daily, as the children do." And she answered, as she gave him her hand to say good night, "I have no wisdom. I believe my sympathies make me a child with the children, but I know no other."

"That is what I need to learn most, I think," he replied earnestly. "There is a joy too, deeper than the joy of children, which can outlive all sorrow, being immortal. Your song, sad as it is, shows me that you know what I mean. Teach me this also, Erminia, through your sympathy."

As he spoke he turned away abruptly, and

left her standing there. She listened to his feet as the echoes died upon the stair, and then turned lightly and passed through the moonlit hall to her own room.

B

V.

COMMUNICATION.

ERMINIA lay down upon her bed that night, happy, but sleepless. She allowed the wide window to invite the moonbeams, that, lying herself in shadow, she might watch the sea and sky. Was not this an instinct of her life to lie thus in shadow, watching and adoring the loveliness and glory which encircled her? To her wakeful fancy the moon became a living type of human purity, and the snowy clouds which blossomed in her path, the lilies of the heart which expand in answer to the touch of her silver rays, the messengers of her love. "For these lilies of life," she said, "above all blessings, I praise thee, O God, for now their fragrance fills my heart."

And Alice in her lonely chamber, not far

COMMUNICATION.

57

away, waited long for the benediction of the night. Her busy thought had also distanced the idea of sleep, and she sat for an hour by her silent window while desire cried, Peace! Peace!—But there was no peace. Indeed, she was strangely disturbed. A fear which had vaguely floated in the atmosphere appeared at this time to take form, and her mind recoiled before the picture it presented. She could not make the cause sufficient nor altogether clear; but the dread of pain, almost the dread of joy, for one so tender and impassioned, and of such lofty aspect as her friend, this, it seemed, she could not endure alone. "Erminia and Russell!" she said, half audibly. "Surely he does not know how strong his influence is! He must be careful, rigorous, with himself! If Herbert were only here, he could speak to him and all would be well. Ah, Herbert! if you were but here!" And Alice, habitually so controlled, the very abode of serenities, there

in solitude poured her sorrows out, and the need and agony of her heart found voice. But at length she was enabled to turn in humility to the only fountain of our peace, and the loving and lonely one slept, wrapped as it were in the arms of faith.

On the poet's study-table a candle burned till long past midnight. The fatigues of the day had been exorcised by Erminia's singing, and when he entered his own room for the night, the temptation to write to Herbert was not to be resisted. His dislike of letter-writing in general was forgotten for the time, because he wished to speak with his friend. Russell seldom wrote to anybody when he could help it, and his conscience did not always sleep before the unanswered letters on his desk; but to-night his pen ran lightly forward, as if to greet the heart that would come to meet it. At last, looking for a moment off the page, he saw the moon-rays gleaming on a silver dish

filled with dahlias, which in the early morning Fanny had gathered and placed upon the casement; thence the light glimmered down upon the floor and shone upon the brazen clasps and illuminated leaves of a disordered collection of precious old volumes he had left astray there. They seemed to rebuke his candle and his occupation. He put the light hastily out, like one suddenly discovered in an unworthy deed. When the beams expired and the weird moonlight brought sudden silence to his heart, he felt as if he had been drowning celestial music in dissonant cries, and he advanced toward the open window to enjoy the scene in its perfection. But as he turned, his glance fell upon a favorite portrait, now irradiated by the moon, where the face, although perfectly familiar, took a vigor of expression from the white light which startled him.

It was an ancient picture, the artist's likeness of himself; and yet no flattery of comeliness

was in it, but a kind of strength, like a vision of angelic might, as if the painter had once attained the summit of the mountain of aspiration, and stood there long enough to recognize the possibilities of his being. It was truthful too, neither hiding the signs of failure nor of pain. In the young, abundant locks, the white threads of sorrow, those blossoms of the eternal spring, were not altogether unseen. Over the pale square brow, as if upheld by Grecian pillars, through the fire and far-gazing of the dark-brown eyes, and in the firm endeavor of the mouth, not untried but resolute, Russell read now more plainly than ever before, "I will, I dare, I suffer, — I AM STRONG: for yonder lies my strength."

Then the poet replied, as in a vision, "I will, I dare, I suffer, — would that I were strong!" And desire rising into prayer drew a new peace down upon his being, and at length he too slept as God's children may. Temptations,

shrinking but not conquered, lurked and lingered. Only endeavor chained to aspiration can shame the Devil back to his grim home.

The moonlight became pallid in the dawn; the days moved round to nights. Waning and paling to the sight of earth, like many a joyless life, the moon faded and died. But the faithful stars only shone the brighter, and served to guide Herbert, the wanderer, back. He had grown restless and was bound towards home. Was it the call of that strange hour of a night heavy to Alice with new suffering, which touched him where he slept on distant seas, and drew him to his own?

The autumn sun was shining with undiminished splendor one October afternoon, when Herbert returned to "The Cliff." He entered the house unheralded, and, hastening to Alice's room, found her there, as he had scarcely dared to hope, alone. After the first shock of sur-

prise had passed, they rehearsed together the long hours of their separation, with their mingled experiences.

"I felt myself so well that night," he said to her, "that my conscience fairly allowed me to think of home. After the thought, the very breath of the earliest steamer was more spicy and healing than the airs of the Indian Islands themselves. But what of Erminia?" he said, when the first moments were past; "we have not spoken of her, nor of Russell; where are they both this fine afternoon?"

Alice seized the opportunity which this question afforded to unfold the history of her hopes and fears: she found there was not much to be told after all, except she explained her anxieties, which were perhaps unnecessary, for Erminia.

"What if she should learn to love Russell, while he, forgetful of all but Edith, could not see that his gratitude was misinterpreted!

Dear Herbert, do be watchful for them both, and put Russell on his guard if it be possible!"

"Don't be too anxious, Alice. It is fortunate I came home when I did, or I might have found my Mary turned into a Martha before my very eyes."

Alice laughed a little childlike laugh over her troubles, which seemed to disappear before the present sunshine as marvellously as the Genii of the Arabian Nights fade in their mysterious veil of vapor. She was half inclined to believe, with Herbert, that her fancies were but air.

"But we will be very careful and observe them both well," she said, as they gave their children a good-night kiss in the nursery: "we are but children of few more years and little more wisdom, and must help each other."

VI.

COMPANIONSHIP.

"DO you know this flower?" asked Russell that same afternoon, as he suddenly emerged from what Herbert had laughingly christened "The Forest," a small clump of evergreen trees not far from the house, and, stopping Erminia in her walk, held a spray of purple *Gerardia* towards her.

"Yes," she answered quietly, taking the flower he extended for her acceptance, and fastening it in her dress, "I know it well, but I have not discovered its favorite haunt yet near 'The Cliff.'"

"Let me show you where it grows. I see you are out for a walk this glorious afternoon."

"Thank you!" The words were simple, but her heart rose with a sudden surge of happiness, as if in answer.

COMPANIONSHIP.

65

They advanced a moment in silence, until suddenly the shore and far horizon broke upon their view, and with them all the dread and limitations of life seemed swept away. They ran forward swiftly now, towards the ocean, talking like two children, the healthy scene causing them to forget self-consciousness and every unnatural restraint, while they leaped from point to point upon the rocks, clambering down to the very edge of the sea.

Their voices chimed in natural cadence with the birds and waves as they called to one another from every new point to observe a filling sail or purple fleck thrown by the flying clouds. Above them towered the cliffs, below and afar stretched the sea. Presently, from sheer fatigue, they perched, to rest awhile, in a fissure where the red granite was still warm from the midday sun. Looking upward, the rim of the rocks seemed cutting the blue sky above them. Erminia thought

of Egypt, and said: "This is like a vision of Thebes." As she spoke, a short-billed curlew shot, with a wild, sharp cry, from a cleft vein not far from where they sat, and floated away, a speck of silver into the blue.

"The bird is jealous of your speech," Russell answered, "and would remind us that this is New England, our home."

They lingered in their warm shelter, until, looking towards the nearest cove, they saw a fleet of boats, resembling a flock of birds, emerging from their harbor. The fishermen were starting for a night at sea, each man in solitude with his lantern and his boat. The tiny skiffs clung together as long as companionship was possible; at length they saw them separate to seek lonely anchorage on the wide, inhospitable deep.

"We will not go for Gerardias to-night," said Russell, breaking the long silence they had kept while observing the boats, "it is time we

returned. These fishers tell me it is later than I thought; but the sun has so stained the earth with lustre that his yellow rays may still serve to light us home. We call these fishers lonely," he continued, half audibly, as he turned to go, "but they have homes in which their hearts can rest even while they themselves are tossed upon the sea!" He spoke these last words to himself, as it were, yet they were hardly uttered when he feared lest Erminia might have heard them. She was finding her way lightly over the somewhat difficult path, with her eyes fixed upon the glowing West. Certainly she did not respond, yet presently she rested a moment until her companion should overtake her, and accepted the hand he offered, in order to balance her steps, not as if it were necessary to her, but rather as a pledge of companionship to him.

It was altogether dark when they reached the house, and the lights from the broad win-

dows flung their welcome beams far down towards the shore. Herbert was lying in wait to give them a merry greeting, had not their approach been so quiet as almost to surprise him instead.

"Come in," he shouted heartily, when at last they appeared, "one would think you considered yourselves fit subjects for a romance. I have been trying to repeat the old proverb, 'Better late than never,' but it grew pretty musty after an hour's thinking of it from time to time. Alice has gone to put the purple beacon in the eastern window, fearing you had missed your way; I must tell her of your arrival." And having called to Alice and told her the good news, he drew them both under the hall lamp that he might "take proper diagnosis of their cases," he said, "and judge of Alice's good keeping."

The inspection proved remarkably satisfactory. Erminia stood with hat off and the

rolls of her shining hair half escaping to her shoulders, with cheeks aglow and her dark eyes uttering a gentle remonstrance against being looked at, a picture of happiness and health; while Russell, forgetting he was there to be gazed at, seemed to absorb the light into his dreamful face as he stood between his friends.

Herbert's quick glance did not fail to detect this unwonted and beautiful lack of self-consciousness in Russell. Formerly he had sometimes seen him in this mood, when for many days together he scarcely quitted his study, never wandering farther than the pine-trees upon which the room opened, and uninterrupted, save when Edith entered, or at evening, when he himself would occasionally join them and talk over days passed upon the "Wengern," or in olive-circled Perugia. Then his mind was pre-occupied with his work; but his ordinary condition was quite different. Sensitively alive to the presence and opinion

of others, conscious of superior talent and of personal beauty, he possessed a certain measure of vanity, which rather increased than lessened his general attractiveness, and seldom allowed him to be self-forgetful in the world of society. Herbert believed in his friend's genius as strongly as Russell himself, and liked to observe him as he was to-night, held by a power superior to his intellections; yet he questioned eagerly what that power might be, because with the thought, the suggestion of Alice returned uneasily to his mind.

"I will let you both go," he continued almost immediately, "when you have told me where you have been so long."

"Why, my dear fellow," said Russell, "the sunset has been a pageant, splendid beyond our imaginations, — a scene never to be forgotten," and while he endeavored to give Herbert some idea of the glory of it from the point of view they had enjoyed, Erminia slipped away to prepare for the evening meal.

VII.

AFFINITIES.

THE mysteries of affinity overarch our happiness like a blue heaven. The horizon expands around us, and the vulgar limitations of the day resolve and mix into a speck within our wide eternity. All is made ours. There is no reserve; nothing, however veiled, that shall not be revealed to the double sight of love.

Russell did not *say* these words as he walked across the neutral-tinted hills in the warm sun of an autumnal noon. The thought lay only half-fledged, as it were, in the sacred silence of his heart. He did not know that when he spoke he listened but for one reply, nor that the bleak November days seemed calm as summer because he walked with Erminia over the broad and glittering fields.

The days and weeks had thus far worn away, and a voice of winter whispered in the wind before Herbert could gather courage to tell Alice that a double reason prompted his return; and the hoar-frost traced, with his delicate white pencil, weird and vanishing figures upon Russell's balcony, before he questioned himself whether he loved Erminia and would ask her to be his wife, or if he must leave the hospitable home where she had become essential, perhaps, to his happiness. He did not believe Erminia loved him! Why should she? She knew his love for Edith,—could she understand the necessity of his heart which cried out for *her*, while his angel was forever with him unforgotten? Yet he was thirsting for companionship, for fireside cheer, for her calm presence. She was able to lead him to his better self; and when at remote intervals they had passed an hour together and felt a perfect unison, he became like one

renewed and strengthened. Her image lulled him when he slept and stood beaming with a lustre worthy of Edith's love when he awoke. It would be a second death in life to know he must lose her forever! Yet what claim, what hold had he upon her? How frequently she seemed to vanish at his approach! How slight were the opportunities she allowed for any speech! But each held little Fanny by the hand, and day by day the unconscious child strengthened an electric bond which Russell could not break, yet dared not think indissoluble.

"I will go and urge her to it with all the pent-up passion of my soul poured upon hers; yet,"—and the man became irresolute at the thought,—“if she should stand with her clear face and shining eyes, saying, ‘You are Edith’s!’—no! no! I cannot ask her now. Time must help me win; I will wait and labor for her love.”

The autumn sun was high that morning when this thought of Erminia had at last taken shape in his mind. Russell was already wearied with struggle and indecision, although he had just arisen. The early morning mail lay as usual upon the table, yet he left it unexamined until he was fairly ready to descend for the day. Then he tore the envelopes open carelessly and threw the letters down half unread, except one which he perceived among the last, from the shores of the Pacific. This was evidently of importance, and he read it thoughtfully. It was from a man who had taken the trouble, though a stranger, to inform him of the doubtful trustworthiness of the agent he had selected to superintend his business in that far land, and the letter urged him to come out immediately, to judge of the state of affairs for himself. What could he do? This property was Fanny's, left her by her mother, and must be guarded

more carefully than if it were his own. He stood long, revolving the subject uneasily in his mind. "And if I must go," he said to himself finally, "I must go in silence. At least, when I return, if ever, there can be no more indecision. We shall both know clearly then what is essential to our happiness."

Full of uneasy questionings he descended slowly towards the breakfast-room. As he crossed the hall, Herbert came out of his own room hastily and met him. "My dear lad," he said in his healthy, cheery way, always like an invigorating breeze to Russell, "I see we are both late together this morning. Of course the queen bees have departed long ago; but let us make the best of a bad case and have a bachelor breakfast by ourselves. Things could hardly have happened more conveniently in one way, however, for I have a plan which I wish to consult you about, and we shall not find a better time than the present."

Russell was only too happy to be rid of his own sad cogitations for a while, and listened willingly to what Herbert had to say.

As soon as they were fairly seated at the table, he said, "these quiet weeks at home, you see, have, together with my voyage, set me quite on my legs again. I am perfectly well and strong now, and Alice and the children could hardly be more comfortably established, especially while you are with them, than they are at present. I am convinced therefore that I ought," — here he hesitated.

"Why you seem to be making preparations for getting rid of yourself,—out with it, Herbert, let us have the worst as soon as possible."

"O, there's no 'worst' about it, I hope; only, to tell the truth, I feel bound to join the army. I had an offer of a colonelcy before I went away last summer for my health, and I decided then, if I recovered, I would do what

I could, when I returned, for the great cause. I told Alice about it this morning, and next to telling her I believe I dreaded telling you, Russell;—but her behavior made everything that should be done look easy. You know our life together has not been one of explanations, and I really think she was prepared for my resolution, and felt relieved after we had talked over our plans. She anticipated this when I first went away from home, and she feels as I do, there is nothing left for a true patriot in my position but to go. Yet the thought of our speedy separation is not easy. I have promised to leave for the camp two weeks from to-day."

There was a pause after Herbert had done speaking. Then Russell sighed heavily and said, "Perhaps I also ought to have done as you have, Herbert, but I have lived too much and too many years in my study to make an efficient soldier in the camp, or perhaps I try

to think so when I look at my little Fanny, who would be utterly lonely without me. Beside, I hope the work I have accomplished at home is not without its value. You are only to be congratulated upon your heroic resolve; the resolution alone brings you the finest laurels. As for Alice, I do not fear for her. I see from your face what a glorious support she has been. She is a woman worthy to live in this great spring-time of liberty! But now, Herbert, I ought in turn to unfold the plans to you which have been suggested by my letters this morning. We need to take counsel together to-day, if ever, and much more since your unexpected departure is so near at hand. Certainly I must do nothing which can interfere with your determination." And with a sudden half-defined hope that Herbert would not think his case an urgent one, he drew the letter he had just received from his pocket and laid it before his friend.

"I wish you would read it," he continued, "and give me your candid opinion."

Herbert took the letter and read it through in silence. Russell watched him eagerly, that he might not lose the expression of one spontaneous feeling its perusal should awaken, and he did not fail to observe a shadow of anxiety which at first overspread his face. But his clear, concise reply, true as Herbert was, gave him satisfaction with the pain. The demon of indecision was exorcised.

"I think you should go by the next steamer, for I see no real reason for delay. Perhaps in this way you may avoid the bitter cold and storms of winter on our coast. We shall leave a lonely household, it is true, very lonely, but I do not think the necessity for remaining sufficiently strong to counterbalance the necessity for your departure. Justice to the interests of your child calls for your immediate absence. You will be back probably before

midsummer returns," he added, observing the shadow which crept over Russell at the thought. "We shall count upon this. Indeed you can hardly be detained later than the early spring, unless matters are far worse than we believe."

Herbert said no more, waiting for a word of response from Russell. He was fully aware that some feeling beside the apparent anxieties of his position agitated his friend, and he lingered, hoping for a word of questioning or confidence with regard to Erminia. He had become at last entirely convinced of her feeling for Russell, and he could not escape something of Alice's disquietude, when he found himself the agent, as it were, dividing them perhaps forever. Russell, on the other hand, sat unconscious of his friend's thought, listening for him to speak again, hoping for one word which might keep him from this fatal voyage and give him time

to follow where his aspiration led; time or opportunity to dare.

They sat long in silence. Then Herbert suddenly remembered that affairs called him, and hastened to leave the room.

Russell felt like a doomed man when he saw Herbert depart. Hitherto the days had slipped away, spurred in their course by a fresh unconscious love which he recognized now, a joy he had never hoped to know again. He had wrapped himself in the glory of his dream, and had known no awakening save a disturbing fear which the reticence of Erminia's manner sometimes caused him to feel. Now the moment was come when he must lose her, perhaps forever. The future was black before him with clouds of uncertainty, the present a living torture. If he were only sure of her regard for him; if the perfect smile he had seen break like a morning of love upon her face, when in some happy mo-

ment they had talked together forgetful of restraint, — if that were his, were born for him, then he could find voice. He could not help observing that Erminia avoided him, and hedged herself behind her marble grace, saying, as it were, "If Russell would come to me it must be by a path of his own creating. I am not like Edith, one whom the world admires, and who is fitted to stand by his side among the worshippers who seek him." Yet by the fireside, and in the quiet ebb and flow of their daily life at "The Cliff," Russell learned instinctively to recognize the wealth of her simple life, and Erminia to see in him a growing distaste for the allurements of society and a longing for the continued shelter of a home. She did not think of herself, however, in relation to him, otherwise than through Fanny, who clung to her as if parting were a thing impossible.

Russell saw the river of time flowing on,

and he knew his departure was imminent. It was just that he, and not another, should tell Erminia of his journey. "Not Herbert, not Herbert," he repeated to himself; "*I* must tell her; beside, I must entreat her still to watch over Fanny, — to — to be a mother to her. I cannot take the child away."

In the struggle between his dread of an interview and the fear of delay, the morning of that day slipped by. When the hour of dinner was announced, Russell pleaded occupation as an excuse for his absence from the family circle.

He had returned to his own room soon after Herbert quitted him, and it was mid-afternoon before he again left it. Believing the house to be solitary as usual at that hour, he descended then, and crossed the library, with the intention of taking a rapid walk by the sea. As he stepped from the long window opening upon the piazza, Erminia stood there,

with her back toward him, where she had been occupying herself since dinner, apparently tying up the honeysuckle which the autumn winds had displaced. She had unfastened the body of the vine in order to arrange it more perfectly, and had thrown the tangled net of scarlet berries and sphere-like purpled leaves over her shoulders till they swept the ground behind her. The sun was glancing upon her radiant hair and sparkling on the berries and the leaves.

Russell stood still. How beautiful! was his first thought; and his second, "Yes, I see it all, this is my appointed time!"

He spoke to her then, and she, with a child-like gladness, told him she was happy to see him out of school at last, and feared he had a very hard master to keep him so long! But observing quickly that he did not respond to her mood, she waited quietly and continued her work until he should reply.

"I wish to tell you," he began, after a pause during which Erminia partly disengaged herself from the vine, "that I am compelled to go away from 'The Cliff,' for a long time. Business calls me, business for Fanny's sake! And I wish to leave the child wholly to your care."

As he spoke the vine slipped away from Erminia, and she stood motionless, looking far over the sea.

"I shall be gone until midsummer. May I leave the most precious treasure I have on earth with you? I must indeed travel westward, but I shall be ever turning to the east. I feel myself moored here where my child is, and —"

Ill-concealed emotions were already struggling in Russell's voice; again he asked, abruptly, "May I leave her, this treasure, to you, Erminia? May I think of her, for my sake enfolded in your arms?"

He waited eagerly for her reply, but she stood now with her face turned quite away from him, and simply said, "You may!"

How lonely the shore became that afternoon to the solitary walker. A creeping mist shrouded the distance, and the slow roll of the perpetual waves upon the beach was like Nature's metronome of silence. The solitude of death rushed upon him. The wind, playing over the pine-groves as its harp, whispered, "Alone! alone!" and the ripples, as they curved towards his steps, answered in their dim monotone. All was sad and low as his own heart, wherein there was no hope. Sadly he paced the sands, listening only to the chant of his worn spirit. Only that; no light, no hope.

But when at length the shadows grew the deepest, there arose a beacon on the headland. It stretched its glowing fingers out towards him, as if to guide the wanderer and rekindle his faint hope.

To-morrow passed, and still to-morrow; on the fourth day Russell was to sail. Alice and Erminia superintended the arrangements for his personal comfort, while he set the house of his affairs in order, for departure. Herbert had concluded after mature deliberation to close the establishment and leave "The Cliff" until summer should return, and had been sufficiently occupied himself in finding comfortable lodgings for his family in the city. As yet, however, there was no sign of removal about Alice's household. All was as usual, except a calm, like the calm of grief, and a sacred stillness seemed to pervade the place. When Russell and Herbert were at home, however, these two women, radiant with their love and endeavor, half cheated those others into forgetfulness by a courage which was sometimes insufficient for themselves.

VIII.

SOLITUDE.

IT appeared that Alice's own suffering was merged during those bitter days in the unspoken grief of Erminia, for whose comfort she felt she could do nothing. Not even Herbert could understand her friend as she could, and the tears sprang to Alice's eyes as she watched that marble pallor return, at one time native to Erminia's face, but lately driven away by the rosy dawn of happiness. None but Alice, passing late into her bedroom, could hear the heavy sob breaking on silence, and none but she knew the early feet which crossed the lawn and visited the shore, hoping for the morning. Nor could another know that the coming separation had revealed a truth hitherto concealed from all, even from

SOLITUDE.

89

herself. Why should Alice speak of these things, and to whom? Herbert needed cheer, therefore she might not speak even to him! Beside, would it not seem like betrayal? She murmured only, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness," and remained silent.

The morning of Russell's departure arrived. As he awoke, his first thought was, Erminia and Fanny are my world, and to-day I leave them both, without the courage to anticipate the future. If Erminia will but give me one ray of hope before we part, it shall be my happiness, my beacon, till I return.

O dark and blind! Where are the seeing eyes to perceive your child wrapped and sheltered in almost a mother's tenderness,—to behold the joy lighting the being of that woman at your approach,—to interpret the very reticence of her demeanor when you have been most rash? Do you then wait for speech, that dull and partial medium, when you feel the spirit within you vibrate?

Russell heard the voice and longed to act upon it, but the hours flew by and left him still irresolute. He could not know the agony they brought to her who was called self-sustained. In his after-life there came a period when he knew no mortal can be sustained in loneliness but by the grace of God, our selfhood is so weak, and that the birth from suffering, through grace, is peace.

The hour of departure arrived. The little group clustered around the porch to bid Russell good speed. He bade farewell to each, and took Erminia's hand the last, as if hoping till the latest moment for a sign, he knew not what. But when he lingered for a look, she stooped and kissed Fanny, who stood between them, and so veiled her eyes. Once more he pressed her cold hand;—at length, when she raised her head, Russell was gone.

In another week Herbert also took his departure; going proud and strong, with a noble

soldier's bearing. Then the women and children were left alone.

For the first time Erminia knew the shadowy wood through which the feet of the solitary may pass. It was not a solitude like that which followed her father's death, when every moment was peopled with the sweet memories of his life, nor that solitude of the child which is "the power of God, and the mystery of God; the echo of a far deeper solitude through which he has already passed, and of another solitude, deeper still, through which he has to pass; reflex of one solitude,—prefiguration of another." The way was dark and she walked gropingly. She seemed to be passing over a lofty, uncertain bridge, with a gulf of blackness reaching down infinitely on either hand, and there was none to help. And a voice said, This is the prefigured time, the true death.

Erminia often said to herself that she ex-

pected nothing from Russell; that he owed her nothing; on the contrary, she had derived much from him. She only remembered he was her ideal, no other was so lofty in her eyes; his presence was her life, his absence, — vacuity, solitude. He had often spoken kindly to her; why did he not say one word at least before departure? Why did he leave her in silence now, if his previous speech and manner signified anything? Could the sun be false in his course? Yet why did he leave her without one regretful word! Surely it would not have been unmanly to express his feeling!

One afternoon, as these turbulent thoughts rose and surged within her, and the tempest would not be allayed, a hand tapped at her door, and she heard a merry voice say, "Where is my pet? Here, — all alone, — may I come in?" and Fanny, half peeping as she spoke, sprang into Erminia's little room, looking out on brick walls, and nestled up into her lap.

"You are cold here, and must come with me, my darling," she said, with a protecting air, as if she felt herself the guardian.

Then Erminia wrapped the child in her wide opened arms, and dropping one hot tear upon the bright curls, knew she

"Touched God's right hand in that darkness."

* * * * *

It was strange for Alice to find herself living once more in town. Years had passed since she had known much of people or their habitations outside of her own family and her humble village friends; and when the inevitable bustle of removal was completed, the days stretched blankly before her, holding anxiety out as her dull companion. Soon, however, Herbert's letters, punctual as the morning, began to arrive, and they enabled her to live much in camp with him, while Ernest and Ally demanded also a large share of her attention. She must now keep double watch-

fulness over them,—must learn, suffer, and enjoy-with them. She discovered that she must live *with* her children as well as *for* them, and love and pray, aspiring to be one with them in childlike earnestness.

How shall we repeat the story, told in Herbert's daily letters, of his life in camp,—of its thronging occupations, its wild excitement, its vast solitude? All these elements made up the stirring history,—one that many of us know by heart. Why should I recount it here, rehearsing in cold words an experience, at the memory of which we hold our breath? Let me insert instead some verses written by a friend of Herbert, a Colonel like himself, which possess the merit of having been written on the spot, in the speaking silence of the night.

"Tramp! tramp! tramp! tramp!

As I lay with my blanket on,
By the dim fire-light, in the moonlit night,
When the skirmishing fight was done.

"The measured beat of the sentry's feet,
With the jingling scabbard's ring!
Tramp! tramp! in my meadow-camp,
By the Shenandoah's spring.

* * * * *

"Tramp! tramp! tramp! tramp!

The sentry, before my tent,
Guards, in gloom, his chief, for whom
Its shelter to-night is lent.

"I am not there. On the hillside bare
I think of the ghost within;
Of the brave who died at my sword-hand side,
To-day, 'mid the terrible din

"Of shot and shell and the infantry yell,
As we charged with the sabre drawn.
To my heart I said, 'Who shall be as the dead
In *my* tent at another dawn?'

"I thought of a blossoming almond-tree,
The stateliest tree that I know;
Of a golden bowl; of a parted soul;
And a lamp that is burning low.

"O thoughts that kill! I thought of the hill
In the far-off Jura chain:
Of the two, the three, o'er the wide salt sea,
Whose hearts would break with pain!

* * * * *

"Halt! Who comes there?' The cold midnight air
And the challenging word chill me through;
The ghost of a fear whispers close to my ear,
'Is peril, love, coming to you?'

"The hoarse answer, 'Relief,' makes the shade of a grief
Die away with the step on the sod.
A kiss melts in air, while a tear and a prayer
Confide my beloved to God!

"Tramp! tramp! tramp! tramp!
With a solemn, pendulum swing!
Though *I* slumber all night, the fire burns bright,
And my sentinels' scabbards ring.

"'Boot and saddle!' is sounding. Our pulses are bounding;
'To horse!' And I touch with my heel
Black Gray in the flanks, and ride down the ranks
With my heart, like my sabre, of steel."

Russell's experience during these days of winter must not pass unmentioned. The gloom of parting seemed to be pictured on the face of Nature as he left the hospitable doors where the flowers of life had blossomed again even for him. The sleet and snow pat-

tered against the narrow windows of the carriage, leaving small out-look except upon the black miry footprints around the stations as they passed. At length night shut down; and, utterly wearied with the excitement of the last few days, his brain confused by the jolting of the cars, he fell into a deadened condition, when his perceptions became inert, yet the restful obliviousness of sleep was absent. He did not fairly revive until he found himself the next morning actually standing on the pier and waiting to approach the steamer whither he was bound. Then the feel of the salt sea refreshed his senses. He saw the blue just breaking over the sky and scattering the morning mist, the harbor gay with white-winged boats, the pier crowded with hurrying men, anxious women, and wide-eyed children, with luggage and dogs in proportion. A parrot was screeching in a cage at his right hand, an infant nursing at his

left; in front he saw a vivid panorama of the bay, with its hospitals, islands, villas, and light-houses; while in the far distance, blue as the wing of a Brazilian butterfly, stretched the broad ocean. But he moved hastily forward to his destination now, hardly knowing that he observed these things. The steamer was already crowded, and his own state-room, engaged many weeks previously, he found in the possession of a lady and her daughter. What should he do? He went to the captain; but the poor man, already half-crazed with the number of like complaints, said he knew nothing about it, and could do nothing if he did. "More people want to go than there's room for, and they'll have to settle it among themselves." This answer, half to himself and half to Russell, was all the satisfaction he could get. It certainly was not an encouraging beginning. He returned therefore to the cabin, and there sat the same lady

whom he had seen in his state-room. He accosted her, after a moment's deliberation, and asked if number twenty-two were her state-room.

"Yes, it is," she replied, evidently a little surprised at the question.

"Excuse me," said Russell, "but it is the same one which was assigned to me three weeks ago, and I must endeavor to investigate the matter."

The lady looked perplexed. "If you will wait a few moments," she said, finally, "until Mr. Van Ranse returns, I am sure he will be happy to do what he can to assist you."

Russell waited, but finding the gentleman in question did not return, he determined once more to try his fortune. He first compared again the number upon his key with that upon the door of the pre-occupied state-room, and finding they accorded only too well, he was about to seek the proper authorities

for redress, if possible, when Mrs. Van Ranse again appeared.

"I would not keep the apartment," she said, "since your application was made much earlier than ours, except for my daughter Amy, who is rather delicate, and not a good sailor under the most favorable circumstances. I fear there is culpable carelessness on the part of the officials, which has been too commonly the case upon this line. We only applied for a passage five days ago, intending to have taken the next steamer, had not our affairs demanded the presence of Mr. Van Ranse as soon as possible; and we were somewhat surprised at our good success, which I discover, too late, is at the expense of your comfort."

Russell bowed his acknowledgments for her politeness, and said he would make one more effort to have the matter cleared up. He would not disturb the ladies, however, on any

account, as he could learn to be quite comfortable anywhere. Yet he felt, as he turned away, that the last alleviation of this intolerable voyage was gone when he had lost the possibility of retirement, which his comfortable state-room would have secured to him.

The inconvenience to which Mr. Van Ranse had thus unwittingly subjected a gentleman, and especially Russell, for whom it appeared he held an enthusiastic admiration, being a devoted reader of his books, caused him to make every possible reparation in his power. The daily attentions extended to him by the family proved the high esteem in which he was held. No kindness was omitted which might in any way lessen the discomfort of the journey.

Fortunately the weather, although cold, was often clear and invigorating. It was in the afternoon of one of those favorable days shortly after their departure that Russell found him-

self seated upon the deck, somewhat apart, holding a book as a kind of fence against intruders, which he had suffered nevertheless to drop from his hand, while his whole senses became absorbed in watching the monotonous rise and fall of the wide sea-plain. He was suddenly aroused from his aimless dream by the approach of pattering footsteps from behind. He turned quickly. It was Amy Van Ranse.

"Don't you need a walk?" she said, with a mixture of shyness and coquetry. "I am sure it would be good for your health, and I have tired papa out."

Russell obeyed her command gracefully; indeed, it would have required a person of far less natural politeness than himself ever to say "No" to the appeals of this pretty child-woman. Beside, it was refreshing to walk with any one who possessed such elasticity. Her trim little figure, enclosed in a thick

sack-coat of comfortable Quaker hue, with a dress of slightly deeper tint, just caught up sufficiently to reveal the hem of her bright petticoat, and nice feet in their strong, trim-laced walking-boots, seemed, under the new excitement of sea-life, to possess inexhaustible vigor. There was something about her, Russell thought, which resembled Erminia. *She* was as unlike as it was possible to conceive, and at first he could not discover where the charm lay. But that afternoon, as the sun fell upon her hair, where the small brown hat allowed it to be seen, he found it possessed the same golden hue as that other hair, to remember which was more to him now than anything the present could bestow, and which he loved to have suggested to his memory in this way, although Amy's locks were far less plentiful and beautiful than Erminia's. They were more like herself, a little crisp and unruly, yet very pretty too in their way. And the eyes;

— was there not something in them, too, like Erminia's? To be sure they were not brown, like hers! They were sometimes light gray; but just now, as he was thinking of them, they had caught, as he fancied, the blue sea color, deep and full. Yes, that was it; they seemed to fill with light to their very depths, as Erminia's did when she was earnest. And Amy, for a wonder, was talking earnestly then. He had discovered she could do that at times, when he led her on; but he must do it carefully. She would take fright at the faintest tinge of satire, and would start into such a broad career of nonsense as to preclude all possibility of further advance. That afternoon nothing came to disturb her mood,—she was talking of the home they had left behind.

“It was hard work to make up our minds to come. In the first place, you see, we had to leave our friends, and then,” with an arch look, “some people who cared very much

about us, whom it was n't so easy to get away from”;—and Amy blushed a trifle at this, intimating, as it were, Those were my lovers, you know; and perhaps you may as well know it, too; it does n't hurt me at all, and there's no reason why the whole story should n't come out, especially to you, who would never speak, or perhaps never think of it again!

“Then there was my piano, which stood in a lovely room for music,—an apartment papa had arranged on purpose. Of course we've brought the piano with us, but—we could n't bring the room exactly! And then the conservatory, and”—beginning to look very serious,—“I won't think of it a moment longer, or I shall be miserable!”

“I wish you would,” said Russell; “not that I like you to be miserable, but it is pleasant to hear of such a delightful home.”

“Ah, yes! but I did not think you were

cruel. Do you forget Dante's Hell has few worse pangs

'Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria'?"

Russell was fairly surprised, both by the depth of feeling Amy revealed to him in spite of herself as she said these words, and the perfect knowledge of Italian her pronunciation evinced. What a weird little sprite she was, to be sure!

"Do you know," said Russell, in a tone which hung on the narrow, inexplicable verge between truth and joking, "that my doctrine is, we sound the deeps of Hell in this world! Perhaps," he added, presently, as if half-musing, and with an uncontrollable touch of sadness, "perhaps we scale the heights of Heaven also."

"But," said Amy, "I am sure it is n't Heaven at all if you don't know it. There was I skimming off the thickest cream of life,

and lapping it up with about as much gratitude as a kitten, and never discovering where I had been till I found myself, 'Nella miseria.'"

She said this with such a half-mournful, half-comic expression, that Russell could not help laughing.

"Poor kitten! how miserable you do look this glorious afternoon! With nothing on the planet to enjoy but capital health, a grand sea view, inspiring air, and a companion, — h—m!"

"Who seems to have no pity for the sufferings of others!"

"People who lose their temper at once become unjust," Russell answered. It delighted him to watch the pretty, tempestuous little face while he teased her. "I only wished to discover the depth of your sorrow, that I might learn how to sympathize with it truly, you must remember."

"O — oh!" said Amy; and then, as if the most opportune interruption possible had come to a talk she was determined not to prolong, she looked seaward a moment intently, and exclaimed, "Dolphins! don't you see dolphins?"

"Dolphins," said Russell, derisively; "they are nothing but porpoises."

"No matter, I want to see them," she answered; "please give me your hand," and in a moment she had sprung upon the deck railing, and from thence into the life-boat, which was fastened high up where she could get a better view. There she sat quiet, and apparently content for a moment, and then turned round and smiled at her companion, as if she would say, "We are still very good friends, but I won't be teased."

He was piqued. The touch of true feeling she had revealed made him ready to know more of this strange little creature, but she

was as difficult to seize as the will-o'-the-wisp.

"Amy," said Mr. Van Ranse, who appeared on deck at this juncture, "Amy, what are you doing up there?"

"Only watching porpoises, papa; your friend down there helped me up."

The last words made it impossible for her father to administer the reprimand he had in his heart. As for Russell, he was vexed really at last. He would almost as soon have helped her to leap overboard, if he could have known what she was about to do.

There she sat, however, undisturbed, and watched the sunset, while her father and Russell paced the deck and talked together. But she also watched her chance adroitly, and once, when they were at the farther end of their beat, slipped down from her eyrie and ran away to find her mother.

"Amy," said Mr. Van Ranse, as it became

dark. "Amy," he called, finding she did not respond, "I wish you would come down now." But hearing neither movement nor answer, he clambered up into the boat, and, not finding his daughter there, he became seriously alarmed.

"She is not here!" he cried hoarsely to Russell, who answered quickly, —

"If you will continue your search about the deck, I will step below. She may have gone down when we were not observing her."

He flew to the cabin. There sat Mrs. Van Ranse, reading, with Amy coiled up fast asleep on the seat beside her. Before he could say, "Thank God, she is safe!" Mr. Van Ranse had followed him, and Amy was opening her eyes, ready to laugh over the excitement she had occasioned. When she saw the trouble in her father's face, however, she turned to him, put her arms about his neck, and kissed him with deep and penitent affection such as

words are powerless to express; and Russell felt the involuntary tears rise to his eyes at the sight. He quietly withdrew from the cabin, feeling he was no longer necessary, and left them alone together, while he returned to the deserted deck to watch with the stars.

He recalled the last vigil he had kept. It was after Erminia's singing: when he was stung by a hope too nearly like despair, yet laden with a sacred fruit. It told him he could love again; and when he slept at last, with the peace of that thought in his heart, Erminia came and seemed to beckon him into her sweet presence. Then indeed he awoke as now, to find himself alone, fearing to advance; but to-day the pain, the longing found no relief, until, as the morning of consolation ever awakes from the night of sorrow, a light came, when the new dawn arose.

He determined to send to Erminia from the

first port a ring he wore, as a silent expression of what he knew not how to say. She seemed so proud, so impenetrably hedged around by barriers she chose to raise, that he could not discover her feeling towards him. Poor Erminia! The pathos of her words he did not indeed comprehend. And when she sang, —

The fountain of my love shall feel no bars,
But ever flowing ever be at rest;
For what am I that I should clasp the stars,
Or think their rays are only for my breast!

who shall say that she comprehended herself, or the need, the hunger of her life!

At length the days and the nights were numbered, and the stately ship rocked on the Western sea. Then the weary voyagers were bathed in winds of summer, and the ocean became as glass, and the sunset became as rubies, and the mountains shone like pearl. They entered at last, by the Golden Gate, and Russell's ring had gone to Erminia.

Amy professed no talent for solitude. She did not like to be alone. Hers was a sweet, clinging presence, always ready with a laugh or a tear for her neighbor, and being apart by herself was her first idea of unhappiness. Therefore she considered it her responsibility "to take care" of her numerous fellow-passengers, and of her "papa and mamma and their friend" in particular; "the care," as she phrased it, consisting in the exercise of her simple childlike arts of beguilement. It was impossible to be annoyed by her, or ever to consider her arrival an interruption. Russell began to depend upon her gay presence before the voyage was ended. When his head ached she would induce him to lie upon the deck, saying she would bring him all he needed, which often proved to be innumerable dainties he did not need. When it stormed she insisted upon "a jolly time," as she said, in the cabin. In short, except that one

night of watching, Russell experienced little of the isolation to which he had left others. Now, however, the day of arrival was at hand. Mr. Van Ranse urged, nay, almost insisted, that Russell should come to live with them.

"The doors of our house are standing open to welcome you," he said. "Our excellent housekeeper has preceded our arrival by several months, and we shall be only too happy to take you there. We are two or three miles from town, certainly, but the road is a comfortable one, I hear, and the villa sufficiently attractive. We shall have a pleasant lawn and flower-garden, too; will not these tempt you?"

It was with difficulty that Russell refused this kind offer. He saw the necessity of immediate action with regard to his affairs, and wished to be as near the busy centre of men as possible. His whole thought was fixed upon the hour for return,—to do his

work and go back to his home. He was bent upon this end, for, with undivided attention, who could tell how speedily his labor might be accomplished. Therefore, with the promise of frequent visits at the villa, he separated from his devoted friends on the crowded pier of the great city of the Pacific.

IX.

PRESENCE.

HOW soon can Nature, by her loving skies and caressing breezes, by the uniform circling of day and night, each unfolding a fresh surprise of beauty, charm her lovers into reconciliation with much, even with exile! But she cannot shut "that inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude," and also is its torment. Russell sought Nature, and courted her for every new manifestation because it was new, and for all that was familiar because the past would rise before him then as if enshrined in it. But as the time approached when he calculated Erminia should receive his ring, nothing he had seen before could satisfy his restlessness. He desired to travel, — to climb the mountains and lay his

PRESENCE.

117

hands upon their changeful loveliness. He forgot the glory of the unattained, and that the glowing heights, built up of opal, jasper, and chalcedony, making the distance beautiful, are transmuted by the climber's step into rough rocks and frowning crags. He must go thence. The beauty of endeavor smiled for him.

It had become the habit of Russell's life, since they were fairly established in their new home, to pay a daily visit to his friends. When the labors of the day were over, he would join them and watch the sun fade away from the green valley, and linger on the shining mountain peaks, and die in purple shadow. He told them of his projected wanderings, one lovely afternoon, as they sat thus together on the terrace, — the early approach of spring in that kind climate already inviting travellers, and serving as sufficient excuse for journeying. To his surprise he found his host and hostess

almost as eager for change as himself, nor was Amy a whit behind them in her desire.

Even Russell's clear insight had not altogether penetrated the lives of his companions. Mrs. Van Ranse was a woman of exquisite tact and elegance, and, although possessing no particular "accomplishment," was quite as agreeable and useful a person in the world as if she had passed several hours every day over the Italian Grammar or Spanish Dictionary. Nevertheless, she was determined that Amy, whose life was not overcrowded with active duties like her own, should develop whatever talent she might possess, especially for music. Amy had not musical genius, but the vigor and impetuosity of her nature, and the devoted study of the best masters caused her to become an excellent musician, and to give her mother satisfaction. Her pure taste helped her to a perception of the finest in every form of art, and enabled her to under-

stand the music into which at times she flung the unexpressed and undeveloped fire of her life. A wayward child, Amy was neither to be counted on nor controlled. Her love of luxury savored of Orientalism; she needed purple cushions and soft carpets and flowers, —and she had them all. When the winds were chilly she liked a couch and a novel, and the house warm as midsummer. Of society, she was extremely fond,—not more so perhaps than society was of her, for this love may usually be considered reciprocal, like any worthier affection; (if I have not committed a sacrilege by applying the sacred name at all to anything so devoid of purpose or result!) Her gayety, wit, and, above all, her sweet affectionateness, fed every one with whom she came in contact with blitheness like that of the fresh, common air. Yet in the large society from which she had just stepped no one can reign as queen. Petty

jealousies, or fanciful exclusiveness, break up and mar the surface of private life by waves as healthful as those which stir the wide surface of political life, or the waters of the broad, salt sea. The stagnant placidity of aristocracy is now outworn, and there is no peace at heart save for those who wear the stars of Content, and the stripes of Humility. The more Amy expended herself for others, and the more hearts she conquered, so much the more would all turn shortly to dust and ashes in her grasp. Her neighbors would give a more successful party than herself, or she would find some house richer in paintings, if not in books, than their own. She thought she did not care for these things, yet the time lavished upon her fifty intimate friends proved that the demon of popularity possessed her, and left her no rest. It was not a cause for wonder that Amy grew thin.

"Going out again to-night?" Mr. Van

Ranse would say sometimes, when Saturday night came round, and for the sixth night in the week Amy appeared at dinner in her tasteful evening toilette.

"O yes, papa, it is not a party, you know. I am only going to meet a few friends at Ellen's;—she said I *must* come." And Mr. Van Ranse, who was entirely persuaded that the party would not "go off" well without, allowed her, for Ellen's sake, to go again. In this way the two winters were passed, after Amy had left school, before their departure from home. What change could be greater than to that of their present retirement!

Therefore we can readily understand why Russell's proposal for an upland expedition should have met with such immediate favor. He matured the plan as he walked towards "The Rosery" one afternoon, for so Amy had christened their new home, and it was accepted at once, with but slight modifica-

tions. The dreary season of continued rain was past, and the smile of spring shone in the sunshine. It was the smile of hope to Russell, and he could not linger quietly where he was, and wait. The conscious passing of the hours crushed him. But a load was lifted when, as they sat upon the terrace overlooking the pleasant rose-garden, watching the white peaks growing warm in the western glow, he found sympathy in his restlessness. Amy was ready to start immediately; and Mr. and Mrs. Van Ranse, sufficiently pleased with the satisfaction of their child, consented to leave home the following week.

Russell feared everything for his companions upon this adventurous expedition; but, after all their kindness to him, he could not start without proposing to Mr. Van Ranse to accompany him, little thinking, when he made the suggestion, that the ladies would consider themselves included in the plan. But he was

reassured, after the first day's journey, of their ability to make the trip. The climate and the healthful new life had already done much for Amy. Every day seemed to see her more round and glowing than the last, and when, near the end of their mountain climbing, he watched her one day, as, preceding them all, she was the first to reach the summit whither they were bound, he was rejoiced, for the sake of the others, at least, that the journey had been made. Even Mrs. Van Ranse, who had acknowledged a slight dread of novel experiences, proved herself an excellent horsewoman, and, as their plan was to rest during midday, riding only at morning and towards sunset, there was not much fear of over-fatigue.

Russell frequently chose to select early the spot for their noontide shelter, starting in the morning an hour before the party was in motion, and riding rapidly over the green inter-

vales, his horse's fetlocks steeped in dew, while he watched the grandeurs of awakening day upon the heights around. These holy hours when man awakes to greet the infant morning, and, after prayer, arises with the sins of yesterday past, and the unspotted page of the future outstretched in its purity before him, — in these hours Russell knew that manna fell, and he went forth to gather it. The wilderness through which he passed was beautiful as Paradise. The rapid mountain streams dashed across his path, sometimes glowing like amber, as if sunlight were perpetually imprisoned in the crystal flood, sometimes clear and white as silver; and as the horseman rode, he found one invisible sweet companion to accompany his steps, one presence forever in harmony with the scene, one who drew him up to the serener heights of her companionship, and for whom his fairest thought could never grow too fair. "You are my

Asphodel," he exclaimed, to that sweet vision, "and as I have seen you blooming once, so shall you bloom forever in memory's immortal habitations!"

Long before noon Russell paused and rode more slowly, searching on either hand for a halting place. He wished to select the noblest oaks, the clearest stream, the finest mountain aspect to enchant his friends, and frequently devoted hours to the choice. Sometimes before he had altogether made a decision he would hear Amy's laugh rippling through the forest, and see the quails rise with their wild cry, startled by the approaching cavalcade. Then he would hastily establish himself in order to bid them welcome.

He was always sure of a kindly greeting from the approaching party. While their people were preparing the noonday meal, Amy would have some merry incident to relate which had happened since the previous even-

ing, or a jest aimed at her father for his dauntless attack upon some phantom bear, although bears were by no means always phantoms in this region, and were the continued terror of her mother, who did not relish her daughter's jokes upon the subject. Russell felt as if his brothers and sisters were about him, such was the kind household affection manifested by his friends during the journey. They were not wholly ignorant of his lonely condition, and evidently felt a satisfaction, he could not but discover, in doing something to alleviate his exile. Nothing occurred to mar their enjoyment of the magnificent scenery which surrounded them. Their friendship, a possession which may be either made enduring or utterly destroyed under the test of travel, grew steadily day by day.

There was but one incident during the whole trip which gave him the slightest uneasiness. It occurred towards sunset on the

eight day of their absence. The noontide had been passed on the snowy mountain-top, and they were now rapidly descending into the valley for the night. Suddenly, as they turned a sharp angle in their descent, leaving the precipice on the right hand, Russell's horse, usually sure-footed, stumbled, slipped, and a less skilful horseman than himself would have been cast headlong into the abyss. For one moment he believed himself lost; the next instant he had regained his seat and the animal had recovered his footing. Fortunately, the ladies had preceded him, but a cry from the guide in the rear soon brought the party to a halt. His voluble tongue began immediately to relate the story to the others, while Russell quietly dismounted in order to tighten his saddle-girth. When he had finished the work he turned to speak to Amy, and to his surprise found her speechless, and white as the handkerchief she held in her hand. "If she

had *seen* the danger," he reflected, "she might well have been alarmed; but"—and Russell shuddered at the thought—"could it be possible, he questioned, that Amy should learn to *love* one so cold and hopeless as himself?"

A week afterward they were again established in the happy retirement of the "Rosery." Russell perceived at length, what his business friends had long ago perceived for him, that the labors for which he came were not to be speedily ended, and he endeavored no longer to demand querulously whether every week were the last, but tried to wait more patiently. If he had not altogether forgotten the shock of that afternoon upon the mountain, he found the method of life, arranged for him by his friends, too agreeable to be disturbed by a light fancy. The pretty, flattering ways of Amy were pleasant to him, and he could not find the courage to get on

without them. The exquisiteness of the whole establishment was congenial to his fine taste, and he saw this also was due in a large measure to Amy. Her faultless toilette, in delicate harmony with the blossoms she would select to wear, her sprightly, friendly ways, the social table on the terrace, overlooking the rose-garden, and in the distance the faint blue of the Pacific Sea,—all these attracted, and threw unseen fetters over him. He fancied this idyllic home to be a warm pillow of affection whereon to rest and calm his lonely heart, and he forgot life is but clay and man a sculptor. He had eaten of the lotus and was sleeping in the garden of a dream.

"You must not fail to come to-morrow, you know," said Mrs. Van Ranse one evening to Russell as he was about to take his leave. "We are to open the Rosery, you remember, for a *fête*. I think no season can be more beautiful here than the present." And the

lady glanced with satisfaction, as she spoke, upon the blooming beds of flowers at her feet, and at the lovely panorama beyond. Then she turned to Amy, who stood beside her.

The child looked like the queen of the roses this afternoon, — a blush-rose, — as she stood in her dress of tender shifting color like the sea in mist. "Yes," said her mother, dreamily, "we could hardly have chosen better."

"You'll be sure to come," said queen-rose, looking up, "for after we have seen enough of people, I must take you to look at the fire-flies in the thicket, which I never can do lately, because papa always wants you. And you have promised to go some time. They are almost large enough and quite brilliant enough to talk to."

The next evening found Russell driving quietly out towards the valley. It was two

hours later than usual with him, because he wished to come upon the scene after the day had faded, that he might enjoy the effect of the illumination. But the long lustre of mid-summer still shone as he passed over the well-known road where every live-oak, sycamore, and willow seemed to have a familiar nod or greeting for him. The pleasing sensation of going to a home filled his mind with calm. The mountain air, descending from the icy peaks still tipped with opal fire, stimulated him; and when, coming in before the other guests, he greeted Mr. and Mrs. Van Ranse affectionately, his unwonted happiness communicated itself with electric effect, and the keen joy of their sympathy and union flashed and bound them to each other by closer and tenderer relations than before. Amy had not yet appeared, and when she came was hardly like herself. She was paler than Russell had seen her of late, and her hair, usually dis-

posed to escape into any pretty waywardness in which she chose to allow it, was confined simply to-night in a shining net. Her dress, too, though of lace, was of plain fawn-color, fastened close at the throat, and unrelieved except by flecks of gold and a chain clasping an antique gem around her neck. She did not come at once to meet Russell, as was her custom, although she must have recognized his voice in the drawing-room, but, as if the air of the house were oppressive, she drew about her the little cloak he liked to see her wear, with its warm, white fur, and passed rapidly down the garden. Soon he could distinguish her through the avenue of noble oaks superintending the arrangements of the lights, removing them sometimes where they hung too thickly together, and placing others where the foliage threw too dense a shade. From the drawing-room they could see the shifting lanterns, and catch a glimpse of her sometimes

when the sparkling threads of gold upon her dress flashed in the light.

Presently she came towards them, through the garden walk, moving thoughtfully. She was Amy the woman now. She lingered among the roses, her sisters, as if their society was sweeter than that of others. To be sure, said Russell to himself, she has not the anticipation of meeting friends to-night; nearly all the invited guests must be mere acquaintances, and few of them can ever be anything else to her. Yet the pleasure of giving pleasure was usually quite enough for her. Even when the company began to arrive, although her part was performed with a grace and ease only rivalled by her mother's elegance, Russell could not but perceive her heart was elsewhere. He stood not far from her side, and once or twice essayed to rally her on her sobriety. But the duties of receiving for a while divided them. "Presently," he said to

himself, "the dancing will begin, and this will perhaps give me an opportunity."

Just as the music sounded, however, a newcomer, with whom he remembered having had some business in the city, approached the ladies. The stranger had scarcely made his salutations when it was necessary to make room for the dancing, and turning aside he suddenly perceived Russell close at hand.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed in a loud voice, "let me congratulate you sincerely upon your engagement. I am happy and proud to learn you have decided to settle upon this shore. 'Westward the star of empire takes its way,' sir."

"What do you say!" gasped Russell, whose strength and presence of mind seemed to forsake him utterly as the meaning of the man's speech, delivered in a stentorian voice, came to him. His first thought was, How shall I stop this man? his second was of Amy. Could

she have overheard that speech, or did the music drown it? Alas! her manner to-night was no longer a mystery to him. The cruel report had already reached her. Whether this particular voice had shocked her ear he could not discover. She was talking now with the gentleman at her side who asked her to dance, and they were about to begin a quadrille.

He broke suddenly away from his tormentor, and went out into the air. He must be alone until this dreadful dance was ended, and he could speak to her. The sharp sting of remorse overwhelmed him. Had he then in carelessness, and love of ease, and gratified vanity, suffered himself to wreck the happiness of this family? Did Amy love him? he asked himself,—and his mind reverted quickly, as in the hour of danger all the past will flash across our vision, to the countless proofs of her devotion, the meaning of which had until now passed unregarded. He had

fancied them to be the expression of the irrepressible affectionateness of her nature, which was ever ready to lavish itself upon the nearest object. Now he saw it all, and the remembrance became torture. Here was humiliation indeed! Must he then relinquish the aspiration of his nobler nature, having proved himself unworthy? Must he forego a love that was endeavor, but whose crown was woven of immortal asphodel, the perfect lily of love, fadeless and perfected?

Questions and prayers hurried in wild confusion through his spirit. His mind was like the face of the summer's sky when the storm-wind rushes over it. He walked backward and forward scarcely knowing what he did, yet striving to find light. Then he threw himself upon a seat, buried his face in his hands, and, benumbed with grief, became unconscious of speech or silence. How long he sat he could not tell, but the discordant clangor from

the house, for such the music seemed to his ear, untuned by misery, had not ceased, when a light hand touched his shoulder. He started, — it was Amy.

"I wish to speak with you," she said, half abruptly, her childish coquetry vanishing that moment, as it were, and becoming transformed into a frank and serious womanliness; "I heard you congratulated to-night upon our engagement, an incident which happened to me also this morning, coupled with the announcement that this innocent rose-fête was to celebrate our betrothal!

"I am sorry," she added, with a gentle dignity, under which her emotion was not altogether hidden, "I am sorry to say, I think we should part to-night. Afterward you shall find opportunity to explain all to my father. I cannot mention the subject to my parents. It grieves me that I must deprive them of — so dear a friend. For my-

self—" She could get no farther, her voice failed, and the poor girl burst into a paroxysm of tears.

What could Russell do? He rose, and, gently putting his arms about her, placed her by his side upon the garden seat.

"Dear Amy," he said tenderly, as if he were soothing a child, "why do you weep? Do not be so shocked at what people say." Then in pure pity he stopped speaking, for her agony seemed more than she could bear or he endure to see, and with every word he said her trouble increased rather than diminished. After a pause he added, "I shall not go away, Amy. I do not mind such foolish reports."

"Yes!" said she, starting up from the seat and interrupting him violently, "you must go, you shall not stay, I cannot bear it,"—and the poor unhappy girl flung herself down again, now upon the ground before

him, as if she would beseech him to leave her.

"Amy," said Russell once more, his voice full of tenderness, "my darling," and he lifted her, as he spoke, like a child from the cold grass and placed her upon the seat. "It is true this is not our betrothal fête, but we have hardly known each other yet as we might. I have never told you the story of my life, of my daughter, and the home that I have known; and you are too young, perhaps, to learn to love one who has suffered as I have done, and whose blue sky is now always shaded."

She lifted her head as he said these words, like a flower that has been beaten by the rain, and turned her tearful eyes upon his face.

"I sometimes think," she said, between her sobs, "that no one can suffer more than I!"

He did not smile as she spoke, her distress was too real. He simply said, "Dear Amy, do not be so unhappy, but answer me, may I come to see you, that we may know each other better? May I, Amy?" he said beseechingly, when she did not reply,—"may I?"

AND HE KISSED HER.

In a moment she had slipped from her seat, and, kneeling, flung her arms about him, and had drawn him down in one passionate embrace, drowning all sense in that deep ecstasy. There she lay, and neither moved nor spoke till Russell said gently, "Amy, I must take you to the house now, the air grows very cold. Let me wrap your cloak around you." Half supporting her tiny figure, he fastened the warm fur securely about her throat, and led her from the spot. She turned unresistingly to go with him. When they came to the rose-garden, Russell stooped and gathered a cluster of half-blown buds and put them

in her hand. Then they entered the house together.

There was a pause in the dancing as they reached the broad window of the drawing-room, and it was evident that Amy had been missed. When she made her reappearance Russell could not help observing the rapid glances exchanged by the merry groups of talkers. He now carried her cloak upon his arm, and she had placed his flowers in her dress. But she no longer observed or listened to what others were saying, for Russell was about to take his leave, lingering however a moment in order to ask her if he might return to-morrow, later than his custom, in order to ride with her alone. She hardly spoke when she answered, but turned her eyes upon him, full of a lustre he had not seen before, and smiled assent. He thought her beautiful then. The womanly tenderness awaking in her added a softness to every

line. The calmness of repressed joy caused her face to glow with subdued radiance, and the sculpturesque beauty of her appearance was at that moment enhanced by the floating back of her lace sleeve, which left her rounded arm unveiled to the very shoulder. As Russell went out at last, after a word of farewell, he heard on every side the universal praises of her loveliness. "Yes, she is lovely," he said to himself, "they all see it," and with a word of good night to his friends he drove rapidly away into the darkness.

He wrapped himself in his cloak, and sought obliviousness as the carriage whirled on, but every glancing thought became distinct as stars upon the black sky. When he reached his lodging he found the fire smouldering in the grate and the house silent. He heaped the wood till it blazed, then drew the couch before it, and flung himself down hoping for sleep. Instead of sleeping, he soon became

wakeful as at midday, and arose again and walked the room, until at last, utterly exhausted, he lay down again and suddenly lost all consciousness. He could not tell how long he slept, but when he awoke there was only a thread of light in the broad east, and he was unrefreshed as if the struggle of the previous night had continued till the dawn. The rumble of market wagons had broken his half-finished dream, and before he was aware he slept again, this time soundly and forgettingly. It was broad day when he at length became conscious. His servant had entered and shut out the brilliant sunshine, and placed letters on the table by his side. Among them were letters from home! He seized the pile eagerly, but they slipped from his tremulous hand, and he lacked strength and desire to look them over. In a moment, however, he recovered himself, and, turning them in his fingers as by some fine instinct, seized immediately

upon the one he wished and dreaded. The long-expected letter from Erminia! Again he hesitated, but why should he now fear what he had so long hoped for? He tore the envelope; there was a second enclosure. Still more impatiently he pulled this carelessly apart, and, as the paper yielded, his ring rolled with a sharp sound across the floor. On the inside was written simply, "The steamer sails immediately; your letter has been unaccountably delayed until now. I can only say I must not keep your ring; I will write by the next mail; dear Fanny is well."

Russell neither moved nor spoke. A day or two before he would have felt that the only desire of his life was dashed to the earth. Now the letter gave him a bitter sense of relief. If he could not hope to win Erminia, who had been his aspiration, if she was too high, too pure for one so weak as he, should he not at least endeavor to make another

happy? One who had daringly adventured all a woman can venture upon the stake of his affection! Who had merged every consideration of the world in the tide of her love for him! Who had forgotten her separate existence by his side! And above all, one whom he had allowed himself to approach as an elder brother, until he was awakened to find her passionate nature exhausting itself upon him with all the fiery fervor of first love. Dear, clinging Amy! should he not ask her to be his wife? She is gay and witty, he said to himself, and the world loves her, what wonder is it then that she loves the world; but all that will not matter since she loves me better. She shall be mine, mine forever. It is my first duty and shall be my true desire. In the next instant the memory of the home he had left came back to him, — the picture of those quiet days when in the stillness God's sunshine fell upon his spirit,

and Erminia's voice dropped in pure harmony through his world of thought. Under the shelter of that love he had seen all truth more clearly; the factitious crust of life was torn away, and he had been quickened to write and live "at his best and fullest." He shuddered now, — he must shut that vision out.

The day opening thus upon shadows became endlessly long to Russell, yet he could not forget many days had been the same of late. He had become restless. Sometimes he fancied it was because the rush of business life perplexed and disturbed him. He could not write now, nor had he found it possible to do so since the voyage. Sometimes he fancied the sea had disturbed his head, but he smiled at himself for that idea, when he remembered how few quiet hours had been reserved for the calm of thought or the melodies that lie behind it. He had given himself too much

innocent dissipation with Amy, ever since their arrival. Although a stranger, she could not live without people, and some plan was always on foot "for a good time." The memory of these days made him feverish. He could no longer endure the close room. He went out, therefore, and, turning his face towards the sea, in half an hour he found himself on the shore. How different was the scene from that lonely walk in the mists of afternoon, when he had already told Erminia of his intended departure. Then the familiar way was stern, and the majesty of grief was his; but the headland light, gleaming at last upon the growing night, became a symbol of hope. Now the blaze of noonday covered the broad sands with a vivid glare; the sea danced and sparkled fresh with spicy airs; the white pelican swayed upon the blue waves, and the unknown inhabitants of the vast Pacific came to the surface with their broad backs to fill him with new

wonder. All was weird and strange. The sands, white as silver, shone like a vast setting for the turquoise sea. There was no shade, no rest; the sparkling floor, the dancing waves, the flitting birds, quickened and stung his restlessness. The splendor of the scene heightened the fever of his blood, and with unallayed disquiet he returned wearied to his own room.

To-night, he said to himself, I must tell her everything. And while he revolved the question in his mind of how he should frame his speech, the hours fled and found him still uncertain, standing by his horse's side, dismounted, at "The Rosery." Then Amy ran, with her heavy riding-dress gathered up and her hat upon her arm, to bid him welcome. A blush flooded her face as she took his hand, and then faded back quickly, leaving, in spite of her gay ways, a look of wan anxiety, which Russell observed with pain. His calm manner, kind yet sad, made her nervous; and

it was a relief to both, when, after the slight bustle of departure, they found themselves riding alone through the wide green valley.

For a time neither of them spoke. The sun went down behind the snowy peaks and left the mountains shining in his stead. The nearer slopes grew purple in the dying light. The atmosphere was a golden mist, and the awe of beauty fell upon their hearts.

Presently bringing his spirited horse to walk by the side of Amy's gentle steed, Russell found courage to begin. He related firmly, yet without daring to glance towards her face, the history of his early life, his love, his suffering, his desolation. He was about to continue, fearing to look before him at what he must say, when she suddenly laid her hand upon his arm.

"Do not tell me any more," she said impatiently, her voice deep and harsh with the effort she made to speak, "I do not ask to

know more; I trust you utterly—if—if you love me, that is all to me to-night."

"Amy," said he, seriously, "you cannot know what strange experiences a life like mine may involve. From the time—"

"Ah, you do not, you do not," she cried piteously, "or you would not make me suffer as I do!"

He saw it was impossible. How could he tell her if she would not listen?

"Amy," he said after a pause, in a low tone, "dare you give yourself to one who has so little youth or joy to bring you in return? Will you come and give up your young life to me?"

He stopped his horse as he spoke, and laid his hand upon her bridle. It was well he did so, for she flung herself suddenly towards him, drowning her answer.

Far away in the deeps of our consciousness lies a power which rises and overwhelms

the tumultuousness of passion, and stills our speech. Sometimes it comes in music and sways us by inward melody, sometimes the ecstasy and exaltation of prayer involve us, and sometimes we recognize the voice of the Spirit speaking plainly in us, saying, "Peace, be still!"

We cannot tell how the power shall sway another, we can only copy the silence of those moments, leaving these indications for each one to interpret.

A half-hour later Mr. and Mrs. Van Ranse watched from their terrace the approach of the two riders, as they cantered briskly up through the avenue of oaks. The fire-flies were abroad, making almost a network of light as they rode on. But they advanced rapidly, and the happy parents saw through the twilight how Russell lifted Amy like a child from her horse, and kissed her as he placed her on the ground.

A moment after, Amy's blushing face told the story as she advanced towards them, holding Russell by the hand, and he received the crowning proof of the confidence of his friends in the joy of their fond greeting.

X.

AWAKENING.

IS there any one so deeply rooted in doubt with regard to himself and his existence as to fancy his life involuted to such a degree with the lives and thoughts of others as to make him always an actor and never a spectator in the great drama of the world? Ask the most hurried face haunting our streets, or the mother overladen with her cares, and, if the story be told truly, we shall find that they and all of us must stop and look from some crag more solitary than those that Dante knew, solitudes where no Virgil can accompany, upon the surging river of our life.

Now, when it seemed Russell had at last found companionship, he stood apart from his own career and looked upon himself and Amy.

He saw the happy weeks glide by, and his bud expand under the new sunshine. He walked by her side, and with tender devotion gave her flowers and gentle words. He saw her cherishing but one thought, the thought of him. Then he wrapped himself in the mantle of her affection, and said he had found rest. But the lonely figure in the awful distance sent a ghostly voice to haunt him, crying, "If thou art beloved, what is that to thee?"

Latterly, however, the sad vision somewhat faded, perhaps because he was really learning to love Amy. Indeed, it needed sterner stuff than Russell not to do so; and in the afternoon, when she would run to greet him, and he held the little ethereal creature in his arms, her light dress fluttering, as if the bird would fly if he did not cling to her, he felt himself absolutely blest, and desired nothing further.

Amy had awakened to a new existence. Those cunning Greeks, with their Pygmalion fable, only gave their tale a name that so it might float more securely on all the tides of time. The delicate color flashed and faded on her cheek, and her voice in singing learned a pathos which only the power of Love can teach. She would sometimes sing his songs, — perhaps she liked them best; and then it might be that the tears would conquer, and she would find herself sobbing on her lover's breast. A perfect April in her changing moods, Russell at first could hardly understand her, till he discovered that his manner, oftentimes preoccupied, and his face, with its many shadows, were incomprehensible to her and filled her with alarm. Then her piercing "Do you love me, Russell?" restored him to his duty and his tender ways, until she smiled again and found no flaw in his perfection. Even her father and mother were satisfied

with Russell's devotion to their darling. He returned daily at an early hour to "The Rosery," bearing something new and beautiful to delight her; every day he found it more difficult, for his own sake, to absent himself, even for a short time. Perhaps he feared a shadowy hand might tear them apart forever, and snap his slender blossom.

It was late one night when Russell was returning to his lodging. The calmness of the hour, and the stars, drooping and swaying, in their apparent nearness, from the concave sky, brought him peace, and gratitude for his present happiness. He resolved to conquer any opposition Amy's parents could suggest, and to make her his wife as soon as possible, that the old feeling of home might come back to him again.

He thought of his shining flower as she might bloom for him alone in some retirement. The new influence swaying her life

and developing her womanhood had so transformed her that Russell believed he could secure her happiness. He must claim her from her parents and take her wholly to himself. This was no easy task certainly. But had they not given him their promise?

With this determination he entered the house, and stirred the fire, which the night-winds made comfortable even at this season, and prepared to write to Herbert. He could advance no further in his plans until he had told his friend everything. The logs flamed and sputtered while he reflected what he should write, and presently, by their unequal gleam, he discovered the mail, which had arrived and been placed on a side-table. He lighted a candle, therefore, and hastened, instead, to read his letters. There was one from Erminia, punctual to her promise. He broke that seal first.

"My friend,—dear Russell," it began, "I

could not keep your ring, because I knew not what it signified. Its arrival startled me and I could not write. Now I feel I must speak with you. I did not require a mere proof of your esteem and confidence, for is not Fanny mine?—yours and mine? Did the ring mean, then, ‘I love you’? O Russell, I cannot, I dare not believe it. You never *said* that to me, by look or sign, till the ring arrived, and I am not fitted to be your wife. But my confidence in you is so deep and unshaken, that I have made a resolution, if you are detained beyond the appointed time, to go to you with Fanny. It is the child’s idea as well as mine. She droops and fades at the thought of longer separation; and I—I *must speak* with you face to face, Russell.”

Here the letter ended abruptly. He sat still as stone where he had first broken the seal, the cold drops suffusing his forehead. He neither moved nor seemed to himself to

think. Presently the thought of Erminia’s coming aroused him. The picture of her presence, vivid as reality, advancing, full of faith, through Amy’s rose-garden, was painted, like a warning vision, before his sight. He looked and saw her sad, reposing eyes; then he heard a low, mournful cry, and the scene had vanished. Pressing his hands upon his head, to assure himself that he was awake, he murmured, “She shall not come! Heaven forbid her coming!” Snatching a pen, he wrote hurriedly, “Erminia, do not leave ‘The Cliff.’ Comfort Fanny; but tell her she must not follow me. Do not come, do not follow, but wait.”

That was all. Then he rushed out to speed the missive on its way. Wandering long, after his errand was accomplished, under the clear, mild sky, he passed suddenly beyond the rows of tall stone houses into the wilderness of the hills. The late moon hung

pale and waning, a symbol of departed joys, above his head, and in the far east he saw, before he was aware, a dim and languid line of light. He returned to his lodging at that sign, as if the finger of day shamed his dark spirit. Although he lay down utterly exhausted when he arrived, he could not sleep; spectres with sad, loving eyes, and forms he knew only too well, crowded around his couch, crying, "No sleep, no rest!"

At length the dawn was unveiled, leading in the day without a cloud. How those sleepless eyes longed for the dim, shrouding mists of his native shore. He could not bear the glaring eye of the sun. Each ray seemed to burn the wrong he had done, in upon his soul. He must arise and put all thought of Erminia, as he had put all hope, behind him. She was no longer to companion his quiet hours. He must see his lily from afar, abloom in other gardens, prodigal of perfume for the purified.

He only repeated the sad old words, "It might have been"; — then with deep lines upon his face he walked out to gather strength from the day, if possible, for the work which lay before him. He must do it quickly now, that, when there was no undoing, he should be able to return and carry Amy to his friends, and let her presence tell them all that was needful to be said.

But he feared to think of her at "The Cliff." It was like fancying one of her own fawns shut away from the free range of the park; or to picture her in his own lonely house, with Fanny, with the library, and the sighing of the yellow pines for sole companions during many hours of each day; — that was equally impossible. What would his little butterfly do but beat and bruise her wings in such a solitude! It was not to be thought of. Beside, could he take this darling of their eyes away from her parents, and leave them

desolate in their exile? No; he must stay with them for a few months, when, haply, it would be possible for them all to return together. In the mean time he must write to Herbert, to Alice, and — to Erminia. He repeated the words, as if dreaming, “to Erminia.”

“I need not write either to-day or to-morrow, — not until Amy is mine,” Russell thought. He had done his best, and had written, telling Erminia not to come. Now all was safe, and he could put away anxiety with regard to her movements. If he had proved himself unworthy of her devotion, Amy loved him well, and would forgive him when the time came for explanation. He could not be unhappy with these thoughts now; it was time to go to “The Rosery.” But a voice whispered, Have you so soon forgiven yourself?

The passing days and weeks, each a jewel in the circlet of the loving one, crowned

Amy with new brilliance. Her parents moved before her, as it were, to put aside every thorn and make her every path a way of flowers. Her wish was theirs. Therefore, when one night she whispered to them, “Russell says when the next moon is grown he shall claim me,” they did not wonder at his haste, but gave her generously.

And again the days revolved, and brought the two — youth and maturity, rapture and desire — before the awful gate of marriage. For her, the gate was built of flowers, rising and winding to a lofty arch. She would keep them always fresh, wreathed with bright new buds! But Russell shuddered, knowing the iron limitations of that way, and bowed his head, stooping in sign of humility and reverence as he passed through.

XI.

COURAGE.

“**S**EE, mamma, he has taken the biscuit right out of my hand,” Ernest exclaimed, the color flaming in his clear bright cheeks; “but see, Ally, she’s afraid! Why, the deer would take it right out of *her* hand, too, if she were n’t so frightened.”

Alice and Erminia walked together past the deer-park in the city garden, watching the endeavors of poor Ally to find heart to let the creature put his big nose so near her little hand, while Ernest exulted over her and thrust his arm, full length, between the palings.

“There is a good contrast,” remarked Alice, “between bravery and courage, in those children. Where the latter is needed Ally is strong. I wish I could feel as sure of Ernest.”

COURAGE.

165

And while the children amused themselves with the deer, the two friends strolled on. Presently espying a touch of white like a snowflake among the greening grass, Erminia knelt down to look more closely. “Alice,” she exclaimed; “we have lived through our winter!” And as she spoke she smiled upon her friend, who felt the look a benediction.

“He whose face gives no light shall never become a star.”

They took this snowdrop as the signal for their departure from the town, where, although many friends and pleasant neighbors urged them to remain, their household rest beckoned them away, with desire not to be resisted. They longed to follow the footsteps of the spring, and to give themselves more entirely to the children, and to lead them again to Nature.

This had been Alice’s first experience of the irreligion of the city with regard to children. These heaven-taught democrats she

saw clad, by ambitious parents, in velvet frocks, and taught to become "respecters of persons." Holy Paul did not speak of *dis*-respecters of persons; but where respect is paid to worldly distinction, the converse—disrespect—is shown to the lack of it, and thus an irreligion is instilled which finds its daily expression in bad manners.

She was inexpressibly shocked by what is fitly styled the "bad breeding" of many children whose parents were quite able to guide them differently, if they did not allow themselves to be absorbed in fashionable labors for Kansas, Port Royal, or Timbuctoo (for we would not quarrel with any form of charity), or, what is still more degrading, in fashionable labors for society's sake simply. They told Alice they feared their children could not have companions or "desirable acquaintances" enough if they educated them by themselves. She did not reply to these

remarks, but when she returned to Erminia they talked them over together.

"Any way, I can do something by example," she said one day, half-despairingly. "I could n't bear to hear them talk so, but what good would discussion do? Let us take our children and return to 'The Cliff.' What they need is health and development, and to find resources for themselves, not excitement. As for friendship, children of eight, ten, and twelve do not understand the word as we find it diluted here. It is something quite different from the rapturous affection Fanny holds for Ernest and Ally and they for her. To be sure, the innocence of children sweetens everything, even baby parties; but I do not see what is gained by three afternoon routs a week, except the increased danger of losing their precious jewels of simplicity and unconsciousness. I think our children will neither learn to become unsocial nor selfish."

and Alice smiled at the thought. "It was delightful to see Hettie and Charlie rush out of the house as I went through the village last week, on my way to 'The Cliff.' They thought our children had come, and their happiness knew no bounds."

"How glad I shall be to see them again," said Erminia. Yet as she spoke a swift shadow, like those that sheet the "windy gleams" of March, overspread her face. She felt it would be hard to live once more where every spot was haunted by vanished footsteps.

"Yes, indeed!" and Alice answered without one reservation. "Our schools in the village, both on Sunday and Wednesday, repay us for our trouble admirably. I suppose this town experience has been good, dear; it is almost nothing but pleasure to teach at home. The children there are cleanly and curious to learn. Here the terrible poverty and degradation seem

to fix a gulf between us. Alas that it should be so! What a sin if we suffer this fleshly soiling to divide soul from soul! When we all wear the purified garments of eternity, some who appear fair here must be bidden to the lowest place."

"Yes; but I believe this labor has nearly overpowered me. I long now for 'The Cliff.'"

And Erminia spoke with such a sad, worn manner, that Alice looked up surprised. She wondered that she had not observed before how much Erminia needed change and the freedom of her old life. Her face was very pale, and the sorrowful drooping lines about the mouth were unrelieved by any smile.

"We will return to-morrow, dear. 'T is no matter if the place is not quite ready. Everything will go on the better for a little supervision. We will send the maids early, and we ourselves will arrive at sundown." She looked up as she spoke, hoping to catch

Erminia's smile, but the sad face seemed unconscious of her words, like one listening to voices others could not hear.

Alice did not know Russell had written to Erminia. The story of the ring could be divulged to no one, not even to her friend.

"I must bear it alone," she said to herself. Therefore the ring came and went, and the letter followed, while Alice marvelled that Russell wrote so seldom, and hastened back to "The Cliff" partly because she anticipated his speedy return. Erminia did not undeceive her. His name never passed her lips except to Fanny, and then in a manner the child could not comprehend, as though necessity compelled it. Sometimes at night, after she had kissed the downy little cheek and tucked her charge well into her snug bed, she would say, "There has been news from your papa to-day, Fanny; he is well, and sends a kiss to you, his darling."

"Is he coming home soon?" the child would respond quickly.

"He does not say so, dear."

"Then we will go to him. Will you write him a good letter, and say that we will come?"

One night, the child becoming inconsolable at her father's long absence, Erminia could not soothe her to sleep until she had half confessed her own determination, and promised to go, if, after writing, no message were returned in answer which should prevent them.

Alice was right. They were all happier at "The Cliff." For herself, who knew the birds as they came with every succeeding day and week of the opening spring, absence was a continued homesickness, a separation from good friends. She wished her children to find where the first hepatica hid itself, and to watch the buds of ash and willow, beech and birch, in their unfolding. For Er-

minia, whose happiness as well as sadness lingered around the place, Nature stood, as ever, ready with a tenderness which seemed full of sympathy for her tired heart and the smothered fire which consumed her.

But this repose was not long to be theirs. It was only to them, what it should ever be in this fleeting experience we call life, a period when we hold ourselves ready to answer the calling for which we are ordained, a pause, a gathering of the forces and a clearing of the vision, that we may see how poor is our own power, how mighty the spirit of God working within us.

Therefore it was, one day, when Alice went to Herbert because he needed her, and went she knew not precisely whither, that she departed calmly, girded with true courage, for she stood like the virgins of old, with her lamp trimmed and burning.

When Alice departed, Fanny watched the

carriage quite out of sight, and then turned to Erminia, her eyes filled with tears.

"Kiss me, please," she whispered, as her beloved companion pressed her close, "kiss me and comfort me a great deal, for Aunt Alice has gone now, and Uncle Herbert, and dear papa, and we are very lonely, and must love each other very dearly. I thought we should go to papa soon; but we cannot leave Ally and Ernest, can we, darling? We must wait till Aunt Alice comes back."

Erminia caught Fanny in her arms and felt herself comforted as she embraced her. How like Edith's heavenly self-denial was this child's thoughtfulness for others, in spite of the one absorbing desire to follow her father! How like Russell was that tender, passionate expression of grief and disappointment!

The silent days moved past, leaving the diminished household like a ship becalmed. No breath of news came to waft them into

the port of hope, until at length a word of cheer came back from Alice; and before late violets had departed another carriage slowly advanced towards the house, and Herbert's room was again thrown open. There he entered and lay through the ripening spring and the perfecting summer, utterly calm and content.

"I feel that I should never have returned, except for her," he said one day to Erminia, glancing, as he spoke, towards his wife.

Alice seeing the look, and fancying he wished her, came towards them, and Herbert said no more upon the subject then; but once, when she was away with the children, he took occasion to recount to Erminia the long story of her wanderings and endeavors in his behalf.

"She suffered so much," he continued, "from anxiety and the terrible scenes she passed through, that I do not like to recall

the incidents to her mind; for the grief of earth passes and does not touch our immortalities, except as purification, but the beauty of life is tarnished when we suffer ourselves to dwell on the obscurities of pain."

The winds of spring were at last lulled into the sighing breath of summer; the sun lingered westward and blossomed early in the east once more, and brought the infinite magic of midsummer, with his lengthened presence. The joyousness of Alice lay deep and pure within her, a quiet sea where the heavens were reflected, an unending fountain of peace and happiness for others. "I was born for this," she would say, "to bring sunshine; I feel sure of it, for the light shines even when I have cause to be most sad."

That household calm and never-failing unison of Nature jarred on the unresting heart of Erminia. She had written to Russell she

should sail with Fanny if no answer came. Was he not already awaiting them? The idea haunted her. When she walked and watched the sea, the waves told her they had left him lingering on that other shore, and their restless feet returning and returning ever, with the same low murmur urged her to depart. "He will not write; he waits, he waits!" Then first she knew the sickness of irresolution. The wavering lights which beckoned her, changed sometimes, as she rose to follow, into marish deceit. She would walk then and pray upon the sands, and ask for guidance, until new strength would arise within her. One day, as a wild sea-gull darted through the thick mist and flew with strong, determined wing far over the waves, where no eye could pierce his distant course, Erminia said, "The bird shall be my emblem. I will take the child and follow. Shall not a mustard-seed of faith bear me even as the sea-winds bear the bird?"

When evening came, she knocked at Herbert's door. She knew Alice was by his side, and it would be better, she believed, to tell them of her determination, as they sat together, rather than expose herself alone to Alice's frank questioning or manifest disapproval. It was a difficult task. She felt herself grow cold as she touched the handle. But her resolve was perfect.

"I have come to tell you," she said, after a few words had been exchanged and when the first pause gave opportunity, "that I have decided to take Fanny to her father. He has been detained, as you know, beyond his intended absence and the child mourns for him. The voyage may benefit her health somewhat, even though we should return immediately. Beside," she added slowly, in a clear low voice, a slight blush staining her brow for an instant, "he has written to me upon a personal matter once since his absence, to which I can only

answer fitly face to face. Therefore I confess," she said, looking up for the first time with a gentle smile, "that *I* am going to Russell as well as Fanny."

Herbert was lying on the couch as she entered, his face turned towards the window; for, although it was quite dark, he liked to watch the glimmer of the light-house returning through the mist, and listen to the low-voiced women as they were accustomed to sit and talk beside him. But to-night there was something in Erminia's tone which caused him to turn towards her when she first began to speak, and before she ended he was leaning forward, reclining on his hand with a look of anxious wonder.

She was silent a moment, and no one broke the stillness. Presently she added, "You are nearer to me than any the earth holds, therefore I wish to tell you what there is to tell. I do not go with any definite plan for myself; I wish to understand *him* more clearly."

"Erminia," said Alice, her womanly instinct rising in revolt, "do not go!" And her voice pleaded so earnestly in the words that Erminia rose and walked across the room, as if to break the force of the appeal. Then she returned and stood before Herbert.

"May I go?" she asked with a strange mixture of imperiousness and childish impetuosity. "It rests with you more than with Alice. Russell is your friend. If he is a man of honor tell me now to go."

The sick man fairly quailed before her intensity. Her eyes burned as she fixed them eagerly upon him, trying to read his answer by the lightning of a look before the words could come.

"You are a woman," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "capable of deciding upon this matter better than we are able to do, who cannot entirely understand the reasons for your departure. We shall not question

your decision. Russell is a man of honor, and you our household friend and companion. We do not lose you willingly, but we will not keep you, Erminia."

Again the color flashed over her fair face and tears stood in her eyes. She anticipated struggle, opposition, and remonstrance. But this loving confidence seemed more than she could bear. She sank slowly down, buried her head upon the couch, and wept convulsively.

XII.

THE VOYAGE.

FANNY stood with her arms about her friend, and both looked silently back upon the pier. There was no friendly face to say farewell; their eyes were fixed beyond, and their hearts were away with the dear ones they had left. Erminia was absorbed in gazing on the vision of the past, but the child came between her and it, flashing the joy of youth and the magic of the present over its vanishing pictures. When the shore had at last faded to a line, she took Fanny by the hand, and turned bravely towards her future.

They had many companions in their voyage, many who liked to talk and question and while the hours away in harmless speculation

upon the affairs of their fellow-travellers, upon their position and purpose and relation to the world. Although they desired to shun observation as far as possible, the sweet grace which marked Erminia and the nestling love of Fanny did not suffer them to escape comment. The two were almost inseparable, for one purpose and one interest served to beacon and absorb both; and while the favoring winds blew the ship lightly on her way, Erminia merged all shadows in the light which was to come, and talked with Fanny of her father through long afternoons till the child's face grew radiant. Her very eyes drank into themselves something of Erminia's beauty, as if the woman breathed upon her living form as the prophet did upon the dead, of old. Once it happened, when the winds were cold and she had sent her little companion below for thick shawls, a fellow-voyager came and talked with her about "her child," and

said how strong the likeness was between the two, and asked the age of Fanny. Erminia, careless of his words, answered his question kindly, but found no voice to say, "She is not mine."

Thus the days fled with them until they too sailed upon Pacific seas. How like the calm of passion glimmered those pure depths! Erminia would hang in happy silence, gazing, and rocked in peace by the long, placid waves; feeling herself upborne like the snowy birds around her, yet never careless in her flight as they. She was centred and at rest; resting in a light of which this glory was but a dim foreshadowing, since nature can but feed the fire of love and be its wide expression.

"Tell me what it means," the child would say in wonder as she looked upon the unknown sea. Then Erminia told her the story of the fragrant winds; how they came from afar, where the glowing islands lie waving

with trees of spice which fling their heavy perfumes out upon the moveless air; and how the breezes come and fetch away the odors, and bring them in their gentle arms to wave them "over sailing ships" toward the western shore.

But the mystery of this new beauty remained forever unexplained to her young listener, who would sit while hours bloomed and faded to hear the legends of the Orient seas; of the purple islands rising from the deep; of springing palms unfolding to the sun; of coral beds glistening with red and pink, that yesterday were not, and to-day gladden the eyes of wanderers, in those unknown, mysterious waters.

Nor was that other tale forgotten, wild and sad, of a marble city, with its carven spires and solemn chiming bells, that rose and blossomed into beauty and grew in mystic grace, until the silent waves arose transparent and

drew it down into crystal deeps, while the solemn bells still chimed. And even now the brave adventurer, it is said, can discover those glimmering spires shining like shafts of opal beneath the ocean floor.

And the child replied: "Shall we also seek that city after we have found my father,—we three?"

And while she told the legends which invest those gorgeous seas, and the sunsets stained the watery world with brilliance such as they had never before known, the glowing light of hope and love beamed upon Fanny's life, making each tale more glorious, each vision more divine. This inexpressible lustre seemed to irradiate itself from Erminia over the being of her charge while they stood together as if enfolded by one great joy.

Again the circling days die into happy nights, and with the blush of a new morning

the stately ship lifts her head joyfully as she comes into her port. The crowded pier glitters with shifting colors; many men of many races hurry to and fro, but all is weird and strange to the pair who "stand and wait." Erminia smiles at the thought that she expected Russell here, for how should he know they had come; but Fanny cries, "Papa, papa, where are you?" and one fellow-passenger as he passes them asks if he can serve them, and another if he can help her find her husband, while she stands irresolute, unregarding what they say, as if listening for one voice, her only compass.

It was too late to listen now. The voice expressed within a little folded sheet was hidden where she would never see it,—on the door-way of their deserted city home. She must go on blindly; there was no light, no guide to beckon; they were children together, gone astray.

XIII.

A FESTIVAL.

There are festivals of life and of death.

HOW beautiful was that summer morning at "The Rosery!" Amy awoke with the early waking birds, and her heart sang with them. She said, "To-day he comes and will go away no more." She knew no fear, pet of fortune that she was, nor even what to fear. Everybody's darling, she did not find it strange Russell should love her! She accepted it simply as the rounding of the sphere of her life's happiness.

The hours of the morning passed, every moment leaving its record on her quickened consciousness of beauty and of gladness. For the culminations of joy and sorrow teach us what is eternity, as labor or as speech can

never do. When at length the symbolic robe of white fluttered about her, the maid who placed the crown of blossoms said, "She had served many brides, but never one who held the flowers for her with so steady a hand." And they were hardly arranged before Russell came, pale and nervous. The shadowy days that lay behind had brought their spectres up till he felt unequal to his fate; they would not let him sleep of late, and the dark finger of unrest had drawn black lines beneath his eyes. Therefore he came early, earlier than even Amy looked for him, and at last grew quiet under her petting ways.

She was like her old sweet self. The air of happiness, often intoxicating to others, was native strength to her, and now all anxiety, all pain was gone,—for what could touch her further? The little household caught the contagion of her spirit and became calm and cloudless as the afternoon itself before the wedding guests arrived.

Through the long hours of that day, brilliant with a sky burned to deep lustre through long cloudless weeks, nature was at rest, save for the throbbing of the heated airs like the earth's visible pulse. But our wanderers rested not. Unwearyingly they searched the wide, strange city for one who was their world. They forgot fatigue, and when at last they found a person who could show them where *he* lived, they were excited by a new fire of anticipation which made the former hours look pale. It was already noon before they reached the dwelling. They passed the porter swiftly, as they entered, asking with eagerness for the master of the house. A kind face presented itself in answer, but glanced uneasily upon them, as Erminia made her inquiry. It was not possible to mistake Fanny; she was his child;—and the lady? Yet the man answered kindly, saying this had formerly been the home of the gentleman she men

tioned, and his books yet remained, although his guest had gone. He was about to live out of the city; but, if the lady would wait and dine, he would send a messenger to fetch him.

"No," said Erminia gently, "I thank you, but, if you please, we will refresh ourselves for an hour and then go to him. Will you have the horses ready in that time?"

The man led the way as she spoke towards Russell's apartment, now deserted, and, having ushered them in, bowed in silence and retired. In a moment he returned.

"May I not send for your friend while you rest here?" he inquired once more, "you — you will find the drive fatiguing, perhaps."

"No, thank you," said Erminia again brightly, "we shall prefer to go. We are not at all fatigued."

She spoke the truth, for, when the man re-opened the door, he thought he had seldom seen a more refreshing picture. A little worn

copy of Dante lay upon the floor, which he had often seen in the pocket of the poet. This the child had espied, and was in the very act of catching up and kissing it when the lady turned the loving face up to hers as if she too would kiss something of his, and had only been prevented by that sudden re-entrance.

Asking pardon for having disturbed them, he again shut the door. He had done his best to clog the wheels of destiny, but he found himself involved instead in their swift and perilous course.

It was mid-afternoon before they were on their way, the good man of the house himself accompanying them. Although he had made the best speed possible, the difficulty of procuring any vehicle seemed at first to be insurmountable.

"There is to be a wedding this afternoon," he remarked, by way of apology, as he opened

the carriage door, "and all the good carriages have gone."

"This will do," said Erminia, as Fanny followed her lightly into it, "if the horses will not linger."

She did not observe the uneasy look of the man as he sprung up to his seat. She only knew that his horses flew over the road, and that he urged them on to their fullest speed.

The sea-breeze fanned her lovely hair as they drove. Fanny kissed her and said, "How beautiful you are! I remember papa likes beautiful persons."

A color like pink sea-shells shone on her cheeks, and the long white plumes of her hat were lifted in the breeze, and her heavy blue dress seemed no longer close and warm, but cool and fitting for the time. She was glad that Fanny thought her beautiful! Would he think so too?

Still they drove onward; the country be-

came more wild and the hills drew nearer on either hand. "Do you know how far it is?" she asked by and by, with a shadow of anxiety in her voice, as the level rays of the sun warned them of his departure.

"I thought I was near it long ago," said the man doubtfully. "I'm afraid we've passed it. I'm sorry, for I wanted you to get there soon."

As he spoke he turned his horses, and, seeing something which at last he recognized, they drove in another direction till the sun had fairly set. Then suddenly he stopped.

"There's the house where he is, I believe, over there; but they've got company, and the avenue is filled with carriages. Suppose I stop here by this grove while you walk up by the footpath towards the house."

Erminia thanked him for his kindness, and leaping out, followed by Fanny, she started to find Russell.

The shadows had fallen on the fragrant garden, and all was silent, except the creaking cry of the crickets and the hoarse blurt- ing of the frogs from a short distance, which only made the stillness more profound. But noise and stillness were one to her. She heeded neither. They advanced swiftly over the gleaming thread-like path, skirted on one hand by vast primeval trees, which had been suffered to stand with their dignity unshorn, like stately warders of the place. Suddenly they emerged upon the rose-garden, where for the first time the splendor of the gayly-illu- mined house burst upon them.

Then indeed they felt the utter silence, for their very hearts stood mute. Erminia stopped one instant and pressed her hand to her head, as if to regain her dazzled sight, and then darted forward to within a few feet of the long, brilliant window, where, standing in the deep shadow of a thorn-tree, herself unseen,

the whole interior and every spoken word were revealed.

Under a lamp of sparkling, drooping crys- tal she saw a woman standing, young and fair, with the tenderness of angels on her face (she saw that first), — then, by her side —

The holy priest had raised his loving hands in benediction, when a loud, long shriek, the one cry of a smitten heart, cut with its sharp agony into the peace and stillness of the room.

The guests started tumultuously, for the ceremony was now ended, and Amy turned to Russell, bewildered, like a half-awakened child. But he stood unmoved apparently, feeling as if grown to stone; for he heard the voice of Fanny now, above the idle ques- tionings around him, crying, "Papa, help me!"

"Amy," he said presently in a low, stern

voice, which startled her, while the guests began to crowd around them with gay congratulations, endeavoring to drown the memory of that dreadful cry, "Amy, do not follow me, — I am not well," — and he rushed suddenly from her side, out into the darkness and the shadows of the grove.

Again he heard the voice of his child appealing to him, as the angels of the sinful ones may cry, leaning out of heaven, pleading with them in their hours of weakness; with such plaintive eagerness the tone came to him.

He ran forward till he reached the well-known path, where it opened on the rose-garden, to the very spot where he had looked for Amy's sign of welcome through so many months, — a sign that never failed and a joy that never wearied.

There on the damp ground, with her hands thrown up over the huge root of an oak-tree,

where, as she rushed away from the garden, she had fallen, there he found Erminia, and, sitting by her side, his weeping child.

Fanny sprang to him as he approached, and threw herself upon his neck, and laid her cold wet cheek to his. "O papa, papa! now it is all over," she sobbed. "We have travelled, we have waited, and I thought we should not find you! But now all is past. Do you think it will kill her, dear papa, to be so glad? She ran almost up to the house and saw you first, because I was caught by a bramble; presently she gave a cry, and then came running back to me, and — dear papa, do kneel down! Let us help her! Perhaps she is hurt." And the child laid her cheek, drowned in the tears of grief and joy, close to the chilly face of the fainting woman, as if she would urge her back to consciousness.

Russell stood a moment gazing down irresolute. He dared not touch that sacred breath-

ing form, his victim. At last he stooped, and gently drew the drooping head and tightly-clenched hands away from the damp earth up into his strong arms.

His touch aroused her. She sprang to her feet, staggering away from his embrace. "Fanny, we do not love this man," she said wildly, "do we, child? But I'll tell you whom we love," and she laughed with that weird, cruel laugh of a distracted mind, "we love this person who is coming."

Her senses, sharpened to unnatural quickness, had caught the sound of Amy's light, uncertain footstep on the walk, before the others had suspected her approach.

"Papa!" said Fanny, weeping, and hiding her face as Amy's ghost-like form appeared, "what is it? I am frightened, papa."

"Russell," said Amy, moving past Erminia still as moonlight, "look at me and tell me if this woman holds a claim upon you?"

Her voice was very deep and hoarse, and at its sound Russell's agony visibly increased. Her lace dress swayed in the fatal wind and her waiting feet were stayed among night-dews. Yet she stood as one who would wait forever till his answer came.

"Little girl," said Erminia, violently seizing Amy's hand, who became somewhat alarmed, in spite of the calm which possessed her, by the wild eyes she turned upon her, "this man is nothing to me, O no! Let us come to the house together and join the dance; and then we will go, Fanny and I. You shall dance with Fanny; she's about your age, you know, and I'll take this gentleman."

"Hush, hush!" said Russell, trying to still the torment of her words. "Amy," he continued, turning to his wife and holding Fanny still clasped to his breast, "she has indeed no claim stronger than that of gratitude. She has loved Fanny much, and to-night I must

go with them and protect them. They cannot remain here. You must trust me, Amy, and return alone. Can you do this for me?"

She did not speak, but stepped to where he stood, half-reclining against a tree, holding his trembling child. Then she kissed him, and, without look or sign of wavering, passed, faithful, back towards the house.

But Erminia sank as their lips touched, and lay like death upon the cold ground.

XIV.

A WEDDING-NIGHT.

THE slow moon had ascended, and now silvered the mighty tree-tops, her light falling in broken gleams upon the road. The landscape, with its tawny hills and brawling streams, and the savage wildness of the valleys through which the travellers passed, grew more wild and more savage as the white rays made the dead black shadows blacker than in the darkest night.

The chilling winds talking in the branches were the only sounds except the moving of the swift wheels. The cold white face of Erminia was pillowed upon Fanny's shoulder, and the beautiful hair, straying down, lay tangled and damp on the thin, relaxing fingers. Russell sat opposite, bowed and stunned; he

saw himself, the worshipped of the world, among vain praisers of his beauty both of body and of mind; he heard the changes rung upon his learning and divine genius, until, cloyed and wearied, he longed for something worthier; then he saw himself again, yielding to the satisfaction of this praise, and forgetful of one, who, walking nobly herself, asked for nobility in her beloved. He had indeed gone down into the valley of humiliation. No one perhaps would ever know the failure of his life. But was it therefore less a failure that it was known to none save himself and his God?

The agony was his to bear alone. The sighing trees moaned as they passed, and in their moaning he seemed to hear the old Scripture fiat, like the dirge for his soul, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," — *Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.*

As they entered the room where he had

passed so many restless nights a horror thrilled him. This experience had been foreshadowed, and he had despised the warning. Yet perhaps he was not now awake, and what appeared so real was possibly but an ugly phantom of his dream. A lethargy seemed to take possession of him; presently, however, arousing himself, he found Fanny's head resting upon his lap, where she was sleeping as children sleep. He bent his worn, sad face over the round and rosy child, and stooped to kiss her, but she stirred and said, "Papa, happy," and slumbered on, while he shuddered as if stung to new torture by her unconscious prattle.

Where was Erminia! He had seen her, as in a vision, step from the carriage with something of her old pride of bearing, and enter the house. Yet where was she now? Were there still deeper gulfs of grief for him to know? And, while his mind pursued the

various roads of misery, the door turned gently on its hinges and she stood again beside him.

The new dawn was painting the sky with purple, and the moon rays were fading in the glory when he looked up to see Erminia there. Neither the new dawn nor the fading beams were typical of her then. The blaze of noon was on her cheeks, and her eyes shone with a deep, unwonted fire.

"I have come for my little girl," she said, almost gayly. "We are travellers, and we sail away for home this morning. Perhaps we shall sail forever, she and I; we are looking for one — no, no," she continued, making a sign of impatience to herself, "we are going home, looking for home. I had almost told you a foolish secret. Perhaps you thought we were looking for you!" And again she laughed a painful laugh which echoed through the room.

It aroused Fanny. The child put up her arms as if to embrace Erminia, and the little gesture seemed to work a sudden change upon the spirit of the suffering woman. She knelt beside her charge, stroked her hair, and looked into her eyes with a mother's tenderness, quite forgetful apparently of the presence of another. Presently she said, "Fanny, shall we be always together, shall we go away again together to-day?"

"O yes, with papa; and let us go far out together, far away where we saw the sun rise; shall we, darling?"

At these words the wild light burned again in Erminia's eyes. She raised them quickly and met those of Russell, looking pityingly upon her. Then, starting up with a sharp cry, she fled out of the room and far away from the house, before he thought to follow her.

An hour later they had traced her to the

quay, where the sounds of preparation showed the hour for the ship's departure to be near. They saw her slight figure rapidly pacing the deck, regardless of the busy scene around, regardless even of herself, and with the bearing of one mindful only of the presence of a great sorrow.

"Papa, I must go to her," said Fanny, as he endeavored to restrain his child. "Will you not come too? I love you, papa, but I must go with her for she has long taken care of me, and you say she is ill now, so I must leave you and take care of *her*, if you will not come home with us."

And, hurrying away from his side, she left him no alternative but to follow, and see those slender hands once more clasped around his little one. But he dared not meet the eyes already grown so strange to him.

"Will you not go, papa?" were the last words ringing in his ears as he turned desper-

ately from them. For the thought of Amy and his wedding-night came now like an avenging spirit to tear him from the place.

He saw the curious harp of a loving soul lying shattered before him, and a child playing with the fragments! For him, the destroyer, a wild discord rang forever from the strings, which no music through all time could wholly silence.

The broad sun had travelled half-way toward noon, when Russell reached "The Rosery." Leaping from the carriage he ascended noiselessly to Amy's room. At the threshold he paused, as if the next breath held his future, then knocked and quickly entered.

It was a spacious apartment, beautiful with white and gold, and resplendent still with a blaze of lamps. The closed shutters and folded crimson curtains forbade the light to enter, and no one had been suffered to invade the silent room.

Amy lay on a little lounge, with a table of gorgeous flowers by her side which she had arranged while waiting for her lover; but at length, drawing the white cloak he knew so well over her bridal array, she had dropped asleep where he found her now, with a flush upon her cheek like any tired child.

His rapid step awakened her. "Russell," she said, starting up and flinging her arms about him with a rapture of utter confidence and joy, "you see I have waited for you,"—and she smiled gayly as she tried to shake the sharp creases out of her beautiful dress. But when she spoke her voice came with difficulty, and a hoarse cough stopped her speech.

"O Amy!" he said, his tone sharp with anguish, "have I killed *you* too?"

She looked at him with surprise, and laid her hand upon her side, as if attacked by a sudden pain.

Her piteous look was enough. He took

her lightly in his arms and placed her again upon the couch, where, kneeling by her side, he, who had been the pride and worship of the world, unveiled the weakness of his unworthy heart before youth's trusting love. At length he ended his confession, saying, with a smothered intensity she only half understood, "I love you, Amy, as I have never loved before, because I know now how unworthy I am, how vain and weak! how little I deserve anything, yet how much you give me when you give me all your faith, all—"

Seeing no longer through a "glass darkly," but face to face, and standing as they stand forever who have gained the immortal, Russell was abased by the remembrance of wrong, yet felt himself safe, saved perhaps by Amy's womanly devotion. That was highest to him now. He considered no longer communion of thought, labor, and aspiration in life as the only paths of attainment, but was lifted

by the simple devotion of a woman into the divine rest and insight of love. He knew himself forgiven,—forgiven by both. How could he win forgiveness from himself?

He looked at Amy. She seemed radiant with rapture and with peace. Once, a tremulous flitting shadow passed over her when a doubt whispered, He is far above me; what can I give him every day? But again the glory irradiated her paleness, and she said aloud, "I would live for you, I may die for you, Russell."

XV.

SUNSET.

WALKETH in hand with the morning
 Abroad on smiling hills,
 Breaketh with fulness of noontide
 From the cold running rills,
 Speaketh from clover and pine
 When the odorous winds incline.

From green and golden meadows,
 From knee-deep asphodel,
 From the awful gray-haired mountain
 And the thrush's dark-green dell,
 Breaketh one chorus supreme,
 Chant of no wandering dream.

Breaketh when mists hide the mountain,
 Breaketh when white lilies fade,
 Breaketh when winds tear the rainbow,
 And death hides both lover and maid.
 When the maples and clover die
 And the autumn breezes sigh.

Breaketh in silence and shadow,
 Breaketh in glory and gloom,
 Breaketh in night as in morning
 Over the birth and the tomb,
 When we gather flowers to strew,
 And the summers come and go.

Dost hear it when bells toll the loudest?
 Dost hear it when rain-drops fall?
 When day is but night at its fullest,
 And the soul sleeps under a pall?
 Then listen while grief shall unfold
 The Love universal, untold.

This chant was one Erminia had framed and loved, and its half-concealed meaning held an attraction for Russell. The words lingered in his memory, and he found himself repeating them in mournful cadences, during the days of sorrow which came to him, and gathering truth and peace from their suggestions. He could not tell whether consolation lay in their melody for those who had never known Erminia, but for him, now that his

heart was sad and his footsteps weary and unaccompanied, her living faith shone from the words upon his spirit, and the Omnipresence of Divine love became a reality even to him, even to such grief as his!

Amy had passed the bounds of our mortality. The fatal dews of that wedding-night brought the chill of death to her. The days of growth, the weeks of rapture, the months of perfect unity, were past. They could lose nothing of their permanent beauty, but they were beautiful only as the stars, forever shining, forever afar; her airy grace and elusive charm, becoming more airy, more elusive, had fled at length into memory's dim chambers and become a thing that was! Later, a ray of the great Dawn streamed to him from the morning of his beloved, and the crown of sorrow rested on his painful head.

Russell returned to Fanny and his friends,

and arrived at the period he had long before indicated to Herbert. The time which then appeared so short,—the young months of married happiness, when the world appears new born, and all things moulded to fresh beauty for the twofold being to enjoy and comprehend,—these few months had lengthened, in his fiery experience, till Russell felt like one who had almost crossed the gulf of Time, and, though still struggling in the vast sorrowful tide, believed the shore beyond to be his only resting-place.

Long before, Alice had written to him on Fanny's page, and told him their brief history at "The Cliff"; how the child returned leading "her darling" by the hand, changed, fearfully changed to all except her charge. How, when Erminia looked on Fanny, the ungoverned fervor of her gaze grew soft and melted into tearful tenderness, and the restraint she put upon herself proved often too great for her failing strength.

"'She is better to be much apart from the child,' our wise physician said,—and so," wrote Alice, "it was my sad privilege to watch her while the fluctuating waves of life rose and fell. One day the fire of her unhinged reason seemed to ascend and touch the gates of heaven; for they turned suddenly and the flame of her being vanished, leaving, to us who knew her, only the dim socket and the memory of her brightness."

That was all. Never a word of reproach, never a sound of the truth which Alice must know, yet which it would crush him to endure from her lips. Only love and silence!

Therefore Russell hastened towards "The Cliff" once more, and longed for it as the weary sailor longs for home. Was he not a wearied voyager traversing the vast ocean of life's mystery?

Amy's father and mother returned with him as far as the city of their youth, and there

reluctantly relinquished his companionship. He was to them Amy's idol, the lamp of her happiness, her protector, *hers!* Therefore they clung to him. He was without fleck or flaw in their eyes. They little knew what pain their worship gave him, or how his spirit was humbled and cast down by their efforts for his welfare. They fancied they could fathom his grief or measure it by their own; but we move veiled, like the prophet of old, and trammelled by the unspoken, the inexpressible,—and the daring one who attempts to scale the savage height of another's sorrow only becomes bruised in impotent endeavor, and falls, weeping and faint, with his arm around his brother, at the foot of the sacred Cross.

They parted then, each bearing a separate burden; the parents never to understand the grief of Russell until the veil be lifted. But he bore his sorrow as one might bear a most

precious possession, for therein lay the jewel which had lighted up the decaying kingdoms of his life, realms of riches, all his, to be redeemed.

XVI.

EVENING.

THE afternoon was spent, and the sun far descended, when Alice folded her work and ran down into the library, determined to go to the piano and endeavor to recall an old chorale Erminia loved. But as she entered the room, she found Russell and Herbert still sitting where they sat two hours before. They were not talking; they were rather resting like tired soldiers who had suffered kindred experiences, and to whom the repose of evening and the feeling of companionship were sufficient for their needs. Fortunately she felt their presence before her fingers touched the instrument, for she knew those saddening strains were not best for either, at that time. They needed *her* with the healthy

EVENING.

219

sunshine she always brought. "Come," she said, seizing a warm garment from the hall as she spoke, to show herself in earnest, "come out to the knoll with me to-night, dear friends, where I hear the children's voices."

Her appeal was not one to be resisted. They wandered out and climbed the grassy height, while the deep orange of the October sky defined the piny sentinels on the western horizon, and the boundless sea glimmered faintly in the east. The almost waveless tides washed the silent sands beneath their feet gently, as if endeavoring to wash away the sorrow of the world and bring it peace.

Presently through the unbroken stillness the children's voices came to them. They had descended and wandered to a farther point. But now the increasing distinctness of the tones indicated their speedy return towards the house over the rocks below.

"I sent Ally home," they heard Ernest say,

"partly because she was cold, of course, but partly because I had something to say to you, which I thought she would n't understand. I want you to marry me, Fanny, when we get a little older; won't you, for I love you better than anybody else I believe in the wide world, and you have no mother and I will be your protector! Will you promise, Fanny!"

They had been walking apparently just below where the friends stood, for, as they passed on, Fanny's answer was not heard; but Russell turned in silence towards his companions, and, holding both their hands, showed in the tears which filled his eyes the speechless gratitude of his heart.

The tides of time flow swiftly, even through what appear the eternities of sorrow. "The Cliff" was the chosen abode of Russell. The subtle quality pervading the household, and rendering it a home indeed, reminded him

sadly it was not his own. But he lived for others now, and Fanny was happy, and sheltered under that kind roof. A sting lay in his grief too deep for any consolation of the world. The knowledge of his unwithered affections, and of a Mercy stronger than our weakness, alone sustained him.

He said to Herbert one evening, as he found himself choosing, in his friend's company, the same path he had often followed with Erminia, that his sorrow led him, as the Israelites were led with fire by night and cloud by day, out of the snares and flatteries of the world. "I believe," he continued, half veiling his meaning in the ancient symbol, "that I live now to water the asphodel and to rear it into beauty. The spirits who love us are said, you remember, to be nourished by this lily. It means remembrance, and remembrance signifies growth, to one who has loved truly."

Herbert's answer was scarcely audible. He

feared to disturb the current of his friend's thought. He knew there was no happiness for a mind like Russell's in diversion. Meditation and brave companionship with grief were alone for him.

Alice and Herbert made it the loving duty of their lives to win back something, if possible, of the natural joy of common days into the calm of Russell's existence. They observed the method of his daily life was changed. He found it impossible to write as usual, and the absence of expression was a pain to him. Not otherwise could he learn, perhaps, how deep the shafts of sorrow may be sunk in the human heart; how the inexpressible remains, forever, as far beyond all possible expression as the stars beyond the limits of the hills. He grew more patient and human, and at length almost serene. For out of his new life was born a new speech, deeper and more contained than the old, rendered near and sacred to all hearts

by its humility;—a speech flowing from his presence as well as from his books, for his intercourse with men became more simple. He could afford to be accessible. "I have loved selfishly," he seemed to say; "now, if any remain who care for me, let me love generously, and be thankful for the precious gift they bring! Is not the good-will of my friend worth more than the little learning or wit or wisdom can be which he may fancy me to possess?" He could not love his art less; but the pure streams which fill the rivers of song were followed more closely by his devoted feet. He was no longer cheated by the voice of fame, nor by the enchanting murmurs of the crowd; but wherever there was sacrifice, or tenderness, or truth, or any nobility which touched the hem of Love, he was ready, sitting at the feet, and learning there with children and with saints.

Thus the measure of days was fulfilled, while

by the good light of every hour was nourished the sacred flower which is planted by the rivers of the world. One who had pressed life's fading blossoms to his breast, and felt their cool frail petals, had learned from them that even he and such as he may hear from afar the coursing winds as they fan the Asphodel, and, listening, know that the true lily of love waves forever to the faithful in those far, unfading gardens.

THE END