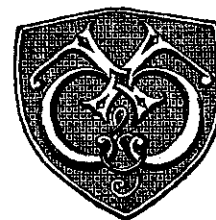


13457
FROM FOURTEEN TO FOURSCORE.

BY

MRS. S. W. JEWETT.

Linonia.



NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY HURD AND HOUGHTON.
Cambridge: Riverside Press.
1871.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1871, by
MRS. S. W. JEWETT,
in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

IX
J555
871

R.L.C.

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY
H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.

INTRODUCTION.

I WILL preface my book with an excuse for having undertaken at my age to become an author. I should be very glad to throw off all responsibility in the matter, and say I wrote at the solicitation of friends or relatives. Anything, it seems to me, would be easier than to tell the truth, which is simply this: I wrote this book to please myself, and at the suggestion of my granddaughter, who, in ransacking an old book-case brought from its hiding-place my journal, which had lain mouldering on an upper shelf for years.

She asked permission to read it, which was granted; but such was the confusion into which it had fallen, by sundry movings and upturnings, that she gave up, after a few unsuccessful attempts, trying to make out a connected story.

As one after another of its pages fell into my hands, it seemed to awaken a new interest in the old times; and, almost unconsciously, I found myself arranging into a regular series, the chapters of my life, which at last I decided to preserve in this form.

This is my introduction and my apology; and the

following pages are the results of my efforts to amuse myself and to gratify her.

Very few persons have eventful lives or extraordinary experiences, and mine has been in nowise an exception; but, "as in water face answereth to face," so does "the heart of man to man;" and the story of my life, however uneventful, if spoken truly, may reach other lives. In some points all human experiences touch each other. "Deep calleth unto deep," though the outward lives may seem to lie apart; and if there is nothing in mine that can win its way to the hearts and experience of others, the fault is not in the story, but in the telling of it. But lest the old aphorism, "He that is good at apologies, is good for nothing else," should be applied to me, I will make no more excuses, but proceed with my story.

FROM FOURTEEN TO FOURSCORE.

CHAPTER I.

My first distinct recollections are of a small, dingy house, under the shadow of a high hill. The front windows looked off upon the west, and my earliest studies in art were the varied pictures of gorgeous sunsets, and the purple and azure of distant mountains.

There was nothing beautiful or attractive outside my early home, and nothing gay and cheery within it. The atmosphere in which my first youthful life expanded was one of affection, — but anxious and sad affection. There was no joyousness, no cheerfulness in it. I felt the absence of everything that savored of gayety and mirth, and the presence of a mysterious something forever brooding over me, — something depressing and repressing the natural buoyancy of my temperament.

My father was an invalid. As I recall him at this distance of time, with the knowledge of what he suffered in himself and of the bitter disappointments which gathered darkly around his last years, there comes over me the tenderest and saddest of all human yearnings, — a spiritual longing to penetrate the great mystery of the unseen world, and to give to those we love an assurance of that love.

Yet, while he lived, how fondly my child-heart clung to him! and now that in years I have grown beyond the term of his earthly life, I feel that I have grown nearer and nearer to his immortal heart.

I was but five years old, when my parents went to live at Maplewood, in the little brown cottage I spoke of. I carried with me there, the dim recollections of an elegant and luxurious home, amidst the gayety and excitement of a crowded city. I remembered a house filled with paintings and books, and ornaments of choicest art; dinner parties at which my mother presided in elegant dress and sparkling jewels, a retinue of servants, carriages and horses, and all the appurtenances of wealth. I remembered my father's merry laugh, his delight in his children, — my brother George and myself, — how he lavished upon us gifts and indulgences; in short, I remembered, as though it had been a dream or a fairy story, my first home, and I felt the difference when all was changed.

It is the nature of childhood to be happy, despite the absence of wealth and its belongings; and I was happy, despite the change in our circumstances and surroundings — despite the unhappiness of those about me, — happy, but not jubilant.

I was allowed to run wild, with the neighbors' children, in the fields and by the brooks; to climb the hills, and wander for hours in the wide, unpeopled forests. Thus the enjoyment of a sound and vigorous body was secured to me; and only at times, when compelled to remain within doors, did I feel the mysterious presence and pressure of a nameless anxiety.

The only family in the neighborhood with which we were on terms of intimacy, was that of the minister, Mr. Breton. He had a son and daughter, the age of

my brother and myself. The son's name was Paul; the daughter's, Ruth. We were daily together. We went to the same school in winter. In summer, our teachers were the woods and hills, the sunshine and the free air of heaven.

Ruth Breton sickened and died just as she had entered her twelfth year. Two events of that year made a deep impression upon me. In the autumn, after a very warm and rainy summer, a fearful epidemic prevailed, and almost every house was smitten. It was then that my sweet Ruth was taken. There had been, for a few weeks, what was called "an awakening." As one after another passed into "the valley of the shadow of death," the broken hearts which were left cried out for the Comforter. Above all creeds and catechisms, the voice of the Shepherd found its way to their sorrowing souls.

The revival went on. The excitement had in it something appalling to my imagination. The greater number of the inhabitants of Maplewood were Methodists. There were protracted meetings; there was shouting and praying, groans and glorifications intermingled. Ruth had died in an ecstasy of joy, seeing heaven opened; and after her death Paul, before so gay, the very embodiment of mirth and frolic, became converted. My mind was strangely exercised. Fearful and trembling, I lay on my bed at night, asking, or rather repeating mechanically, the question so often asked by the anxious ones around me, "What shall I do to be saved?" My Heavenly Father was suddenly transformed into an angry and terrible God. I had believed in my innocence that I loved Him: I was told that I hated Him. I had believed that He loved me: I was told that He could feel for me nothing but wrath.

In agony of mind I went to my father. He forbade me to attend any more meetings. For a time I avoided Mr. Breton's house, and Paul, my dear companion and friend. Of course my remaining away became a subject of inquiry.

The minister called to learn the reason of my absentsing myself from his house. Ostensibly, this was his object. Really, I believe he made it an excuse for a visit to my father, of inquiry into the religious condition of the family.

I had been reading to my father the story of the Prodigal Son. I always read aloud to him from the Bible every Sunday afternoon, and this was his favorite chapter. I could repeat it by heart.

I had laid the book aside open on the table just as Mr. Breton entered. His eye fell upon it, and a look of surprise passed over his face, which said, as plainly as looks can speak, "Is it possible that you study this book?"

I think my father observed the look, and answered it with a plain and direct statement, after exchanging the usual compliments and inviting him to be seated.

"My little daughter," he said, looking at me with his sweet, sad smile, "has just finished reading that story of inimitable pathos, better than all creeds and dogmas, than all so-called 'plans of salvation,' or commentaries or evidences, the ingenuity of man ever devised."

The minister nodded, and father went on. Every word comes back to me as distinctly as though I heard it but yesterday. I am convinced he spoke with a twofold purpose, — to forestall the necessity of an argument, at the same time that he defined clearly his spiritual position.

"I have had very little to do in my life," he said, "with what is called theology. Even if in my days of health and activity it might have been a satisfaction to attain intellectual certainty of the truth of certain creeds and doctrines, that time having passed, I think I can consecrate the short remnant of my life here to better results. I am a man, sir, without a creed, and with no time to examine into the multiplicity of those on which contending sects build their faith. Faith! what is it, sir? Faith in what and in whom? Ah! my dear friend, what is it but confidence, childlike confidence in God, such a God as is depicted here in this very story, which the simplest mind can understand, and the most profound cannot exhaust."

The minister nodded again and added, "Very true, very true."

"The dealings of our Creator with us," continued my father, "furnish that portion of our soul's experience which we ought properly to hold as strictly confidential. I mean just what I say, sir. We cannot go about, prating of our experiences. Every one of us, sir, must, like our Great Master, 'tread the winepress alone.' All of us wander more or less distant from our Father's house. Some of us seek to allay the gnawings of a hungry soul with the husks that the swine do eat, before we turn back — before we come to ourselves. But when the time comes, and we do repent, do look back with longings to return, what then? He comes out to meet us. He doesn't come with creeds and formulas and doctrines to bewilder our intellect, but with tones of fatherly love and forgiveness He speaks to our sinful hearts.) And when we have once heard that voice, all human utterances seem like empty sounds. Human intelligence, human research

and invention, can do nothing more than awaken us to hear the voice of God in the depths of the soul."

There was a long pause after my father had finished speaking, in which I looked from one to the other with a vague impression that something extraordinary must follow. I was mistaken. The conversation was resumed by a question on the part of my father respecting Mr. Breton's intentions with regard to his son's future career, after which it flowed into the ordinary channels. I cannot help believing, notwithstanding, that the minister's original intention had been frustrated, that the result of the interview was to give him a juster appreciation of my father's character, and perhaps a humbler estimate of his own spiritual attainments.

I had puzzled my brain to understand much of the teaching and preaching of the clergyman who spoke from house to house and from the pulpit. I inwardly resolved from that moment to follow my father's example, and get the truth unadulterated from the lips of Jesus.

When I went to my room that night, I fell asleep, the first time for many weeks, with a sweet consciousness of the protection of a Heavenly Father. I found myself repeating these words over and over and over, until they melted into my dream: "He fell on his neck and kissed him."

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning I awoke with a lighter heart than I had known for many weeks. Since his conversation with the minister, my father seemed in some mysterious way to have come nearer to me. He had never talked with me on religious subjects; neither had any one, until within a short time, during the revival, when, as it appeared to me, everybody went about talking with everybody on this all-absorbing topic. But from the short and earnest expressions of my father, which I now believe to have been addressed to me quite as much as to the minister, I felt assured of the fact, which, when I compared him with those about me I had begun to doubt, that he was a good man and a Christian, although he did not attend Mr. Breton's church or any of the prayer-meetings held in the school-house throughout the week.

"Yes," I said to myself, again and again while I was dressing, "whatever other people may say or think, I know my father is a Christian, and will go to heaven when he dies." I wondered whether he would ever talk to me about religion, or tell me anything more of his own experience and his own feelings. I recalled the expression of his face when he spoke with the minister, and from that hour it was transfigured before me. He never after seemed the same man or looked to my eyes the same as before.

His place was vacant at the breakfast table one morning. My mother said, in answer to my inquiry where he had gone, that he had slept poorly, and did not feel like getting up. He met us at dinner, as usual, and I did not perceive any change in his appearance from the day previous. He asked me to drive with him in the afternoon, and, as he left the table, turned to my mother and said, "On the whole, my dear, I think you had better write to Rebecca to come at once."

My heart stood still for a moment at the mention of that name, — a name familiar to my childhood, but now almost forgotten; a name rarely spoken in the family, and for that reason probably invested with a sort of mystery. I recalled the dim image of a woman beautiful to my childish conceptions as a picture. I remembered a day when, entering suddenly the family sitting-room, I saw my Aunt Rebecca in tears, and my father with his head bowed low and his face buried in his hands. I stood gaping with undisguised astonishment in the door-way, until he looked up and bade me go out. I recalled the strange expression of his face, which was deadly pale, and the unnatural sound of his voice, so unlike the voice of my father.

I went out as I was bid, and straight to my mother's room. The first question I asked her, was, "What ails father and aunty?"

She turned round and asked me hurriedly what I meant, and where they were. A suspicion that I was guilty of tale-bearing came across me, and I did not answer directly.

"Speak, child," she said, angrily, as I thought then; but I know better now.

"O, nothing," I replied; "but father is shaking all

over as though he were cold, and Aunt Rebecca is crying as hard as she can cry."

My mother left the room in great haste, brushed past me, and went down-stairs. I heard her open the sitting-room door and close it after her. I knew nothing more. Aunt Rebecca left us the next day. Her name was seldom spoken by any of us. And now, she was to be sent for. What had happened or was to happen? I pondered over the matter in my own mind, and awaited the arrival of my aunt with a strange sort of curiosity, and a vague feeling that something was soon to take place that would astonish me.

I had not long to wait. Aunt Rebecca came the following day; and so short is the nine days' wonder of youth, that long before that period of time had elapsed, it seemed so much a matter of course to have her with us, that I felt as though she had always lived in our home.

Nevertheless, familiar as her presence seemed, she did not look to me the same person that my childish recollections had pictured her. I remembered her with rosy cheeks and sparkling black eyes. I remembered her beautiful dress, the sparkling of her jewels, her proud and queen-like walk; I saw her now pale, thin, quiet in manner, plain in dress, her voice low, her step soft as a falling snow-flake. To me, as a mere child, she seemed old. Twenty years after she looked no older.

I loved to have her with us, for I saw that her presence was grateful to my father. My mother also seemed pleased, and fond of her.

She had been with us just a fortnight, in which time nothing more extraordinary than her arrival had disturbed the quiet of our lives.

She used to sit of an afternoon in the office with my father. This reminds me, I have omitted to mention the fact that my father was a physician, and the room where he usually sat, and which was filled with his books and papers, we called the office, in memory of what had been in our city home, where he was distinguished among the profession as a man of science and skill.

It was in this room he used to sit and write for hours; nor did my mother ever permit us to interrupt him during the time he was thus employed. In the afternoon we were cordially welcomed there.

It was the close of the afternoon, that, as I loitered on the door-step outside, I heard the voices of my father and aunt in earnest conversation.

It did not occur to me at the time that I was an eavesdropper; scarcely could I have been accused of intentional listening at first; nor until I found myself drinking in with profound interest every word of the conversation, did I feel convicted of meanness or wrong. When I was thus convicted by my own conscience, to my shame I confess, I continued to listen and drink in every word. Equally to my shame it may be, that I repeat it here; but as it is necessary to the development of my story, I must do it. I will give the substance of their conversation from the moment my attention was fixed upon it.

"I begin to think," said my father, "that my strength will fail before my work is half accomplished."

"O! I hope not, Theodore," said Aunt Rebecca. "You ought not to stay here. It is too narrow, too monotonous a life for you. It was too much of a change, and too sudden. You need more excitement, more intellectual companionship."

My father sighed as he replied, "You forget, Rebecca, you forget, or rather you do not know."

"I know all I need to know. Common sense, common observation and experience, tell me that a sick soul should not be left alone with its wretchedness, to brood over and exaggerate every symptom of suffering and unrest. Your wise physician and friend was not as wise as I am in this respect. Suddenly to take away from your ambitious and aspiring nature every motive for exertion, every satisfaction in success! You, to whom the fellowship of congenial minds and hearts is a necessity, to isolate yourself in this way, taxing your brain, exhausting your nervous energy, growing every day more morbid for lack of the outside influences which had become a necessary condition of mental health! to me it seems suicidal."

"I think you are right, Rebecca; but the evil is done, and can't be helped now," said my father mournfully.

"I will not believe it, Theodore. Let me prescribe for you. Leave this place. Go back to the city. Don't be timid. Don't doubt your ability to resist. Resume the place you are fitted for in the world, the society congenial to you. Refrain from what to you is evil, and begin life again. You are a young man yet. You owe the world something as well as yourself. Do not disappoint those who have expected so much of you."

"You among the rest, Rebecca?"

"Me among the rest. Your wife, your children, foremost of all."

"My children are yet too young. Ah, Rebecca, my children will never know their father."

"It need not be so, Theodore. Live to make them proud of your name."

"It is too late now."

"Why harp on that sad, hopeless string? Why is it too late?"

"Because, Rebecca, I am dying."

"Dying!" she exclaimed. "Dying! what can you mean?"

"The truth. Did not my wife tell you?"

"She told me nothing, but that you were more unwell."

"Nothing of the hemorrhage?"

"Nothing, as I said before, but that you were very weak."

"And yet she knew it was doubtful if I lived twenty-four hours."

"She did not wish to believe it, I suppose. She knew you were depressed. You have often said that you should not live twenty-four hours or even one hour. Yet you still live. Theodore, give up this dread of dying. Believe that you will live forever."

"I do believe it, Rebecca."

"Then live as though you believed it. Forget that which we call death."

"I shall, when it is passed."

"O Theodore! Why will you give me so much pain? Why will you not get strength and courage from me?"

"I will. Strength and courage to die — belief that beyond this I shall live forever. We need not waste words, Rebecca. I am not a coward to dread death. Life I should dread. Better that I die while those I love have faith in me. Admit the fact, Rebecca; it is a fact. Of what use is my skill and science, if I cannot understand my own symptoms? Admit the truth, and we shall both be happier. We need not keep it

constantly before us. That would hinder our accomplishing anything? I said just now I thought my strength would fail before my work was accomplished. It is true. I can never accomplish what I at first projected, in the manner it ought to be done. Promise me that if I die before the work is completed, you will fill up the outline. You are fully competent, for you know me better than any human being."

Then followed a pause in the conversation in which I distinctly heard sobs from my Aunt Rebecca. Then my father's voice, clear, and O! so sad, broke the silence. "Sometimes, Rebecca, when I look around on the lives of others, and back upon my own, I can see nothing but failure and disappointment everywhere. Not one human heart is satisfied. Not one human experience is what the dream of youth pictures it. Our affections, our ambition, even our best aspirations, deceive us. Believe me, Rebecca, I do not wish to live, for I know I should never attain anything that would satisfy me. My life-long disappointments end here. My frailties, my infirmities of purpose, end here. When the grass has grown over my grave in yonder burying-ground, you may feel that I am happy, that I am progressing under more favorable conditions, and that the clogs and hinderances I never could have escaped, are left behind; and, if you will take up my unfinished work with your high and pure motives, my disenthralled spirit may be permitted to assist your labor. You shall have inspiration from me. Nothing can come between our souls then but sin. We may be nearer than ever in mortal life."

Still no answer came from Aunt Rebecca. I heard my father walk to and fro across the floor. I knew from the sound of her voice in what part of the room

she sat. I knew that when my father stopped, it was beside her chair.

"Most faithful, best of friends," he said, "I have lived so long with that unsaid which honor and loyalty forbade me to utter. I believe we know each other's lives. I believe the ages will make all clear to us, and bring us, all of us, who are faithful, peace and felicity. The silence between us cannot be broken here. I bequeath to your care my loved ones. I long ago ceased to question and to doubt the Divine Providence. I die trusting myself and all those I love, dear Rebecca — sister — friend, trusting you and all to that Divine Providence. Now let us live as though indeed and in truth we were to live forever, as we know we shall."

It was tea-time. I slunk away like a guilty thing. So intently had I listened to every word that was uttered, that I had no consciousness of right or wrong in doing so, and woke as from a dream to a feeling of utter humiliation.

CHAPTER III.

WE all gathered at the tea-table as usual. In outward aspect there was no change. My father talked cheerfully; mother was quiet and gentle as ever; there were no traces of tears on Aunt Rebecca's face. George came in, boisterous and boy-like, and took his seat beside me. I was the only silent one; and, as I usually took the greater part of the conversation upon myself, my silence did not escape the observation of my brother, who insisted upon knowing what ailed me. I thought my food would have choked me, in my efforts to keep down my tears. O! why had I listened to a conversation never intended for my ears? Now that I was in possession of the dreadful secret, for a secret I believed it to be, committed to my aunt's keeping alone, I should know no rest or happiness.

I looked at my father's face; I saw no change. "Can it be possible," I asked myself, "that what he said to Aunt Rebecca is true? Can it be possible that he is dying?" The idea of death and the grave was terrible to me. I had a horror in looking at a corpse. Even the image of my dear, dead Ruth, as I saw her laid out, and in her coffin, haunted me nightly for a long time, and was only dissipated by the sympathizing and rational attempts of my father to divest my mind of its superstitious fears. I tried to persuade myself that there was no reality to what I had heard; that I

had fallen asleep on the door-step and dreamed it all. "How," I asked myself, "if my father is dying, can he look so exactly like himself?"

Tea over, we all went as usual to the little parlor. It was a lovely June afternoon, and the sun had just set. I stood by the window, making cloud-pictures in the west. I saw great processions troop along the sky, and thought of funerals and the grave.

"What makes my little girl so silent?" inquired my father, stealing up behind me and drawing me close to him.

This was too much. My only answer was a flood of tears and hysterical sobs, which fastened upon me the anxious attention of every one present.

"Why, what does this mean, Maggie?" he asked. "Mother, aunty, what does all this mean? Our baby crying and sobbing as though her heart was broken! Ah! I know. Some of these revivalists have had hold of her. You have been to some meeting, where you were frightened to death."

"No, father," I exclaimed in a voice broken with sobs, "I have not been to meeting; nobody has been talking to me about religion. I will tell you what ails me, if you will come with me alone."

"That I will then, my lamb," said he, drawing me with him to the open door, and seating me beside him on the porch. "Now make a clean breast of it, darling. Keep nothing back from your father, child."

And I told him all I had overheard.

When I had finished, he was silent for a moment, then, pressing me to his bosom, he kissed my forehead, and, speaking low in my ear, said, "Since you have heard the truth, you must learn now to bear it. I should not have told you; for it is soon enough to pre-

pare for sorrow when it arrives, and no good ever comes of anticipating it. You did wrong, Maggie, to sit and listen to a conversation which you must have known was not intended for your ears. By so doing, you have brought trouble and grief to yourself. (Our Heavenly Father does not deal so harshly with us, as to make us aware, long before they arrive, of the sorrows in store for us.) On the contrary, He expressly forbids our trying to look into the future at all, or give ourselves any solicitude about it. He knows that we should never have a happy hour, if we habitually lived in apprehension of evil; so He, through the lips of our Lord, commanded us not to do so; and this unnecessary grief which you have brought upon yourself, will impress upon you this lesson, and with it the memory of what may be your father's last counsel to you. Never forget these words, 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"But why then," I asked, "did you tell Aunt Rebecca you were dying?"

"Because it was necessary that she should know it, in order to receive and execute my last wishes. I will now explain to you how I know that I am soon to die. I have, what is called, a fatal disease. It cannot be cured. It is a disease of the heart. I cannot live long, and I may die at any moment. You see I am perfectly calm in speaking of it. The only pang I feel, is in leaving those I love; but, believing in the wisdom and goodness of God, I comfort myself with the thought that He will take care of you all. Now, Maggie, when you see me calm and cheerful, can't you try to be so too? If I am not afraid to die, you surely need have no fears for me; and when I have ceased to live here, don't think that I am dead, don't look at my

poor lifeless body, in which I, your father, suffer very much, and say, 'O, how cold, how frightful he is, lying here, speechless and motionless!' I shall not be here, but alive, active, happy, and loving you just the same; and one after another you, dear George, mother, Aunt Rebecca — all will come to me. Now let us go back with bright, cheerful faces and spend a pleasant hour together before it is time to go to bed; and remember, my darling, if ever you find yourself in a situation to hear what is not intended that you shall hear, remember this lesson, and either go away or come forward. Don't let curiosity get the better of your sense of right. No matter how deeply you are interested, even if you yourself are the subject of conversation, close your ears at once, run away, anything, but never be a listener."

He kissed me, but shame and sorrow were gnawing at my heart. I promised him solemnly. I hung about him till bed-time. So great was my love that I would gladly have died, to go with him. When he bade me good-night, and pressed me close to his heart, it seemed like tearing my own heart out to separate from him. It was our last good-night. I heard a moving about the house in the early dawn, and the murmur of suppressed voices; and, while I sat up in my bed bewildered, trying to collect my scattered thoughts, a light footstep approached. My door was opened, and Aunt Rebecca came in. Seeing me awake and sitting up she came to me, threw her arms around my neck, laid her face close to mine, and told me, through her sobs, that my father was dead.

CHAPTER IV.

I WILL not attempt to describe the bitterness of that, my first real affliction. The last week of my dear father's life had opened up to me a new revelation of himself — of that inner life which now, grown wise by the experience of grief and desolation of heart, I was able more fully to comprehend. My sorrow was the key with which I had power to unlock that inner nature, to look beneath the surface, to understand, by a common bond of sympathy, that great reality of human life, its capacity for suffering.

That he had causes of unhappiness of which I knew nothing, his conversation with Aunt Rebecca clearly proved; and, while this knowledge drew me closer to him, and hallowed more tenderly his precious memory, I yet felt a consciousness of guilt, in being possessed of a secret not intended for me.

I confessed to Aunt Rebecca what I had done, repeated to her the conversation I had overheard, and my father's deserved rebuke. She did not add to my self-reproach her own disapproval, but told me to forget for the present everything except what was sweet and pleasant in my father's life, and that by and by, when I was older and better able to understand his character, she would tell me more of his early history. She cautioned me against yielding to my feelings until they became morbid, and assured me that my father could not but be happy, since he had laid aside his sick

and suffering body, which was but a clog and a burden, and must have continued to be so, even if his life had been prolonged.

"And you will tell me some time," I asked, "what the work is which he has left for you to finish?"

She promised, and bade me throw aside all idea of mystery connected with it. "There was no mystery," she said, "nothing covered up or dark in your father's character, nothing that you need not be proud of; for even his faults were those of a noble and generous nature, and his mistakes injured no one so much as himself." And then she described him to me as he was when a young man; told how he won the hearts of all, both young and old, by a strength of mind, united to such gentleness as drew toward him the weak and timid, by a generosity that knew no limit, save want of larger means to bestow, and opportunities to help; of his respect for and love of humanity, reverencing even the poorest and humblest, and never voluntarily causing pain to any one. I loved to listen to his praises from her lips, and always, as I listened, renewed my assurance to her that I would try to be worthy of such a father.

My mother in her bereavement sought solitude and retirement. She was a silent person always, and seemed to have no desire to talk of our lost one, but rather to shrink from the mention of his name.

Not many weeks after his death, my aunt told me, that at my father's request we were to remove to Eastfield, my mother's birthplace, where still lived the families with whom her early years were associated, and where we, my brother George and myself, could have the advantage of better schools than the little village of Maplewood afforded.

In the anticipation of going to a new place, and the preparations for our departure, I was diverted from my grief. My father's death occurred early in autumn. It was thought best to remain in Maplewood till the following spring.

I had just passed my fifteenth birthday, when we took leave of the little cottage where I had spent many happy and many sad hours, and the village, every part of which was familiar to me; and when I went to say good-by to the few families with whom we had exchanged hospitalities, I felt sorry to think I might never see them again. Especially did I grieve in taking leave of Mr. and Mrs. Breton and Paul. Paul Breton was my dearest friend. He had been the companion of many a long ramble in the summer days, and many a winter evening beside the cheerful fire, both at his own home and mine. He was but a year my senior, although serious and thoughtful beyond his years; especially since he had united himself to the church, he seemed much older, and in every way my superior.

On many occasions after my father's death, he had manifested a desire to talk with me about him; but I was so fearful of being drawn into a lecture on religion, or of being questioned with regard to my faith and my hope of salvation, that I avoided every opportunity of being with him alone, and always changed the topic of conversation when I thought it was likely to tend that way.

Let not any one imagine that I did not feel the importance of religion; on the contrary, my mind dwelt long and sometimes morbidly, on the great and terrible questions of death and judgment. But I had a terror of a renewal of the revival sermons and teachings, and

was fearful of losing the memory of what my father had told me, and of that blissful night when, between sleeping and waking, I had a vision of the returning Prodigal, and repeated over and over the words which had lulled me to rest, — "He fell on his neck and kissed him."

The very last night of our stay in Maplewood, the night that I bade Paul good-by, he drew me away from the family assembled in the sitting-room, towards the door; he begged me to walk with him up and down the path. I consented, and yet I hesitated.

"You seem afraid of me, Maggie," he said; "what have I done that you should be unwilling to speak with me alone?"

"I am not afraid of you, Paul," I replied, "but" — I hesitated.

"Do be frank with me," he said earnestly.

"I will. There, you shall know it. I do not want you to try and convert me. I can't experience religion your way. I tried, and couldn't."

"I was not going to try to convert you," he said.

"Nor talk to me about my soul?" I asked, still holding back.

"No, Maggie, but about your heart, that I might find out if there was any chance, any possibility, that you could love me as I love you."

"I love you very much," I said. "I thought you knew that."

"I used to think so, but you are changed," he said. "Is it, can it be, because I have an interest in your eternal welfare that you shun me?"

I felt ashamed. I could not make myself understood, nor did I quite understand myself. If he loved me so much, as he seemed to wish me to believe,

wasn't it natural that he should care for my soul, and oughtn't I to be very grateful to him for caring for it? But there it was again. The horror of hearing a repetition of those solemn talks which made the subject of religion so disagreeable to me! I too had thoughts about my soul. The awful mystery of death bore heavily upon my young heart. The only relief I found was in the healthful teaching of my aunt, who never assumed the solemnity with which the minister always spoke on these subjects.

"He wished," he said, "to speak to my heart." I allowed myself to be led by him. He put my hand within his arm, and repeated the story which generations have spoken before, and generations will continue to utter while the world stands, and hearts are human, — the story of a love which to him seemed greater and deeper than boy or man had ever felt before. I listened, only to be bewildered, and to say nothing satisfactory to myself or to him. I did not know my own heart: how could I make him comprehend it?

"You say you have always loved me, Maggie. Do you think you will continue to love me, and not forget me when we are separated?"

The more earnest he became, the more I shrank away from him.

"I see you do not understand me. You cannot return my affection, Maggie," he said sadly. "You love me as a friend and brother."

"Yes, you are right," I replied. "It is just so."

"I will wait," he continued. "I won't risk my all now, for I could not bear to lose all. I will wait. You are not going far away; and when I enter college, I shall be still nearer your home, and I can see you sometimes. You will let me see you, won't you?"

"O, yes," I replied, "I shall be glad to see you always." My words and tones sounded very cold even to myself.

"And never forget what I tell you here to-night. I love you better than I love my life."

This avowal, the first declaration of love I ever had, gave me anything but pleasure. I felt relieved when we separated. Often before, he had kissed me good-night, and I received it as a matter of course. This night, I drew back. He felt the difference, and turned away, wringing my hand, and hurrying off into the darkness.

The next day we started on our journey to Eastfield, by wagon to the county town, distant some twenty miles, and thence by stage-coach to our place of destination.

Eastfield now is a large, thriving, business town, traversed by railways, and the centre of a high civilization. Eastfield then, in contrast with the village of Maplewood, was to me what London or Paris would be to the inhabitant of one of our inland cities. It was, however, then and is now, the shire-town of the county. It had then a court-house, town-house, and Masonic hall, on a line with the tall-steepled meeting-house. It had a row of shops on the opposite side of the street. It had long streets lined with pretty dwellings, with yards and gardens in front, and orchards in the rear. It had public houses of various grades, and, what distinguished it from the villages round about, — the pride and boast of the State, — it had a young ladies' seminary, at the head of which was Miss Rosina Parsons. The country people pronounced her name Rosiny, with a long I. The élite, who had a smattering of French, spoke the word mellifluously, *Roseenar*.

The Parsons family were among the oldest settlers of Eastfield. They had been wealthy, and in Miss Rosina's young days she had been one of the queens of society. She played the piano, when there was only one instrument in town, an old Clementi, imported from London, and a tinkling, wiry old trap when I first heard it. She treasured it as an heir-loom. How many enamored young men had hung over her, the belle, the accomplished, the enviable and envied, as she sang "Auld Robin Gray" and "A Highland Lad my Love was born," the fashionable songs of her young ladyhood!

I will try and describe her as she appeared to me the first time I saw her. She must have been nearly sixty years of age. My mother had been one of her earliest pupils, and that was twenty years before I entered the seminary.

She was tall and slender, straight as an arrow, and had a complexion of clear pink and white, though very much wrinkled. She wore a snowy-white turban, and a plaited frill passing under the chin and fastened on each side, beneath its folds. She was always dressed in gray or black, and wore no ornaments, except a pin containing her father's and mother's hair, with which she fastened the snowy folds of her muslin neckerchief. In the day-time, and during school hours, her hands were covered, either with mitts or gloves from which the finger-ends had been removed; but in the evening, and in full toilet, we were permitted to look upon her snowy hands — hands never soiled by drudgery, but ever busy with lady-like embroidery and worsted work.

Her manners and appearance were in perfect harmony, — lady-like, dignified, cold. She would not per-

mit herself to be angry, to speak in a loud tone, to manifest impatience. In short, she never forgot herself; and no one could be unconscious of her presence in a room, or even in the house.

Everybody respected her. Nobody loved her. She prided herself upon being perfectly just, but was never generous. Scrupulously faithful in every department of duty, there was no avoiding, or evading her scrutiny. One after another her pupils succumbed to discipline. The most mischievous and mirth-loving ceased after a time to attempt any mischief or deception, and became, while under her jurisdiction, well-behaved and exemplary.

Miss Content Parsons, the second sister, was the moving spring of the domestic economy. She was the artist of puddings, pies, and sweetmeats; a simple-hearted, loving, out-spoken, womanly woman; intellectually superior, and a nice discerner of character; but inelegant in expression and homely in manner; the idol of the school-girls, and of all the children and poor in the village.

Miss Hetty, the younger of the sisters, seems hardly worth mentioning, except by name. And yet she filled faithfully her little sphere of domestic duty. She lived in and by her work-basket. She knit and darned the stockings, stitched the shirt wristbands for her brother Ezekiel's shirts, disappeared early to her little chamber, slept no doubt the sleep of innocence and child-like trust on her little bed, ate her little breakfast in silence, and so through the day, and day after day, was always in her place, and that place so seemingly unimportant, that when one morning she was missing, and the rocking-chair empty beside the table in the corner of the sitting-room, and the work-

basket piled with work and no one to finish it, no one felt the difference outside her home. Miss Hetty's lamp went out suddenly. It was but a rush-light here, but to such as she these prophetic words may apply: "Thou wert faithful over a few things; be thou ruler over many things."

Last, though not least, I must speak of Mr. Ezekiel, the deacon and pillar of the steepled church before mentioned. We girls sometimes called him, in familiar parlance among ourselves, Uncle Zekiel, or Deacon Zeke. Outside the house he was known by his title of "The Deacon." Within he was "Brother Ezekiel." Respect for his high office and his personal righteousness forbade a more endearing name. But as the mention of him recalls a little romance I learned at the period of my first introduction to the family, I will leave it for another chapter.

CHAPTER V.

THE little romance to which I alluded at the close of my last chapter, was communicated to me by Miss Content Parsons. I must mention, however, a fact of some importance, that we — Aunt Content, as I always called her, and myself — became bosom friends after our first introduction. It was love at first sight with both of us; but not, as is too often the case with a sudden fancy or passion, transient, in proportion to its intensity.

I loved her as long as she lived, and I love her memory now. She always seemed to me to be of my own age, and I find myself even now lamenting that she should have died so young. She lived to be over fifty, a little child in affectionateness and trust, but with treasures of understanding and wisdom such as few ever attain. I owe to her simple, out-spoken teachings more than to any preacher or teacher in the world.

Dear Aunt Content! I foresee at the outlet that no description of mine can do her justice. Even if I were able to transcribe word for word her sayings, there would still be lacking the unction which her peculiar manner and form of expression gave them, and the magnetism of her presence. And since I cannot pretend to do her justice, I will not attempt to paint her picture, or define her power over me, but will give

in dialogue our many talks, and, as nearly as possible, her own language. As it is essential, however, to the right understanding of many talks between us, I must, as a sort of preface, state that at the time of our removal to Eastfield, the religious world was in a state of excitement never known before in the annals of New England history. Eastfield had been, to a degree at this day scarcely appreciable, consecrated ground. The great pioneers of orthodoxy made it their head-quarters, and exercised a sway in no way inferior to that of Romanism in its most triumphant period. But a fearful heresy had in some mysterious way crept into the church and divided the congregation. The words of the prophecy were literally verified. "The father was divided against the son, and the daughter against her mother."

A handful of independent freethinkers, as they were called, swarmed from the old society, and established an organization of their own. Bitterness of denunciation followed them to their humble place of worship, and even to the sanctuary of their own homes. It was the old story repeated of martyrdom and persecution, with more zeal on both sides than Christianity.

Mr. Penfold was the minister of the tall-steeped church. He had the reputation of being one of the greatest revival preachers of the age. He had been for some years the colleague of old Parson Mildman, who dying in a fit, while ascending the pulpit stairs, one warm Sunday in July, Mr. Penfold, by general consent, became his successor. To celebrate his introduction to office, he inaugurated a revival among his congregation, which, added to the secession of the small band of heretics before mentioned, created an excitement the like of which was never known before,

and never has been repeated in that quiet town to my knowledge.

I have no disposition, in looking back at this distance of time, to criticise or condemn either the spirit or the manner of this controversy. Both were what might have been expected of infirm human natures, and both were opposed to the temper and spirit of Christianity. But it has been the case in all ages, so far as religion is concerned. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." But the lapse of years has so far softened the bitterness of discussion and restored the inviolability of that freedom of thought which is the birthright of every human soul, and the spirit of Christian liberty has so far overcome the fiery zeal of sectarianism, that those who were alienated, and divided, — sects, families, friends, and neighbors at variance, — have become reunited, and grown more tender, more charitable, in proportion to the removal of intolerance and bigotry.

In the season of religious excitement to which I have alluded, every mind, whether young or old, was unavoidably awakened, — some, to find rest and peace in believing the creeds and the dogmas of the Church, and joy in the assurance of salvation; others, to be stirred up and exercised with doubts of everything in heaven and earth and under the earth; others still, to be harrowed by unrest, and driven to a state of infidelity.

In our own family, my mother became a convert to Mr. Penfold, through the medium of Deacon Parsons's teachings. George, my wild and wayward brother, goaded to frenzy by compulsory attendance upon the meetings held daily and nightly for the unconverted, with a desperate and determined wrench "plucked their bands asunder, and cast their cords from him," and would "none of their instruction or reproof."

I steered, comfortably to myself, between the two. My time had not come for deep excitement of any kind. I used to read my Bible attentively and religiously, believing that it contained the words of eternal life, although I might not be able to understand them at once; and I seldom closed the book, without turning to that narrative of the Prodigal Son, which brought my earthly father living before me, and renewed my trust in my Heavenly Father.

Great happiness it was to me, at this period of my life, to sit down in social chat with Aunt Content, wherever she might happen to be at the time. Many of our most interesting conversations were in a corner of the large kitchen, where her special table stood, at which she manufactured the delicious pastry and cake, some of which found its way to my mouth, and some was carried off in my pocket.

Miss Rosina was to give a party to her pupils, and Aunt Content was busy at her craft, making "*cymbals*," rolling, cutting with a "jagging wheel," twisting in fantastic shapes, and walking to and fro from the table to the frying-pan. I sat tilted back in my chair against the wall, hindering her work, but, I am confident, lightening her labor. This may be taken as a sample of our "familiar conversations": —

"Aunt Content, why don't you join Mr. Penfold's church?"

"Lor me, child, what a question! 'Tain't no use tryin' to answer, 'cause you couldn't understand me."

"Did you ever experience religion?"

"Wall, yes, dear, I think I did; yes, I'm pooty sure I did, though 'twasn't accordin' to rule exactly; that means, it wasn't with the help of anybody else's preachin' and prayin'."

"Well, how did you get it then?"

"Lor, child, what questions you do ask! 'Twas a long time ago. I was in great trouble and sorrer. I'd been what you may call a wild girl. Not wicked, but amazin' fond of fun, — dancing and the like, — something such kind of a girl as you are, I guess, lively like. I couldn't help it no more'n you can. Well, I met with a loss, a heavy loss, child." Here she paused and almost broke down.

"What kind of a loss? Money?"

"O, that warn't nothing. My pa lost all his money afterwards, but I didn't feel it. No, I'd met with a loss heavier than that. I lost a dear friend I sot my life on, but God took him. I s'pose I experienced religion when I learnt to say 'God's will be done,' but I was a great while learnin' on it. I thought I never could say it, for I wouldn't make b'lieve I felt it when I didn't. But one night it came to me, quite unexpected like. I had wrastled and wrastled with my sorrer, and couldn't get the better of it. I was clean beat out wrastlin'. That night I threw myself on the bed jest as weak as a baby. I was worn to a shadder, I hadn't a grain of strength left, and I jest lay back on the pillar, and I says to myself, "'Tain't no use. If God don't help me, I may as well give up and die. I won't fight any longer. God may do what He's a mindter with me.' And I gave up that minit. Wall, He'd been a waitin' for jest that. Jest for me to give up. 'Now,' says He, 'since you put yourself in my hands as 'twere, I'll do for you. I knew you couldn't cure yourself. Jest trust your case with me. If you really b'lieve I've got the will and the power, why should you be afraid to trust me? Didn't the lepers have faith in me, and wasn't they made clean?"

Didn't the man whose little daughter was sick b'lieve I could cure her, and didn't I cure her? Didn't the woman who had grown poor payin' doctors' bills believe if she only touched my clothes she'd be healed, and wasn't she healed right off when she did touch 'em? And that man whose little boy had fits, and came nigh bein' killed a fallin' into the fire or into the water, — didn't he come, after tryin' everything else, and only half believin' then, that I could help him, yet wantin' and prayin' to believe more, — didn't I help him, and don't you spose he went home a believin' man? Now what's the reason you haven't been to me before? P'r'aps you don't quite b'lieve, but that's no reason you should keep away, and jest wear yourself out tryin' to do what you never will be able to do."

"'Wall,' says I, 'Lord, I give up. What you say is jest the truth. I don't get any better, or any more reconciled. I'll give up tryin'. Jest take me and do with me what's best. I don't know what is best. Somehow I can't help thinkin' it would be a comfort not to have any mind or will of my own. Haven't I tried to keep up, as they say, and don't I go staggerin' on from one day to another, and not able to see the way I orter go? I'll jest give all up now.' And so I did, child. I was clean beat out, and couldn't help it. That's jest what God wanted. He wants us to know for sartain that we haven't got much of any wisdom and strength of our own, and need Him to help us. That's the pint: we've got to feel our need of Him, and to distrust ourselves. I don't think all the preachin' or exhortin' in the world 'll make us feel this before the time comes."

"I am glad to hear you say so, aunty, because, notwithstanding all Mr. Penfold's preaching and Uncle

Zekiel's added to it, I can't get a change of heart. I think when the right time comes for me, I shall experience a change, don't you?"

("We're all God's children," said she; "and all He asks of us is to come to Him. He wants us all to love Him, but it's for our own good, — mind ye, child, I say for our own good. 'Tain't for His glory; it's our glory to love and serve Him. What can such as we add to His glory? It's for our own good, child, and He ain't a goin' to leave us. We can't get away from His love. He'll find some way to our hearts. But" — and here her countenance assumed a solemnity which awed me — "we must be careful that we don't turn a deaf ear when He speaks to us. Sometimes He comes in storms and tempests, sometimes in the peaceful sunshine, sometimes with the voice of judgment, sometimes with the pleadings of tenderness and compassion. He takes His own way to bring us to Him; but we can't resist Him, child, without peril.")

"If we could only be sure it was his voice, we might believe," I said: "but we can't believe always that He speaks to us through Mr. Penfold."

"There's no better way, child, that I know of, than to do as I do."

"And how is that?"

"Go straight to Him and ask. The best preacher that ever spoke from the pulpit can't go to any better source."

"But then, you know, aunty, even the ministers don't all hear alike."

"Wall, we can't help that. The reason I s'pose is, because they go to His Word to confirm their own notions. 'Tain't the way. Religion ain't a set of notions. Religion ain't a creed; it's a life; that's what 'tis.

'Tain't whether what Mr. Penfold says is true, or what Mr. Somebody else says is true. It's livin' as Christ lived. It's love. But we won't talk about that. You asked me if I ever experienced religion. Yes, dear, I did. That night when I gave myself up to God; poor, ignorant, heart-broken cretur that I was, that night was the beginnin' of a new life. I've never seen a reason to doubt Him or to 'be afraid with any astonishment.'"

"Was that friend you lost a lover, aunty?"

"He was, child, to have been my husband."

"Tell me all about it."

"It's too long a story for now, but some time I will. You see I've done fryin' these 'cymbals;' and I must roll out some pie-crust, and bake while the oven's hot. But you needn't go. We can talk jest as well, only I can't begin on a long story till I have time to go through it."

"All right, aunty. You may be sure I shan't forget. I hope the right time will come very soon. I'll tell you what you can do while you are making the pies. You knew my mother and Aunt Rebecca when they were young, didn't you?"

"To be sure I did. Didn't their pa live on the hill yonder? Wan't he the greatest lawyer in the State? and wasn't his wife a perfect beauty? and didn't Zekiel come jest as near dyin' as could be, when your mother jilted him?"

"My mother jilted him?"

"Wall, you know what I mean. We used to say she gave him the mitten."

"Gave the mitten! What, pray, does that mean?"

"Wall, if it means anything, I s'pose it means she refused him; but there don't seem to be much meanin' to it."

"But do you mean my mother refused Mr. Parsons? Was he ever in love with her?"

"Wan't he though? I guess you'd'er thought so, if you'd seen him pine away after she agreed to marry your father. Some folks blamed her, but I never did. If she could a loved him, we should all a been glad; for she was a sweet pooty cretur. But she couldn't, and there it was."

"And now about my father's marriage. I am impatient to hear all about it."

"So ye shall, all in good time, but I can't be hurried. Your father came to Eastfield to pass the summer months. He was a handsome young feller and sot the girls e'en a most crazy, for there wasn't many young men in our town, and them that was here had got to be an old story. As I said before, your father came here on a visit, and after a little got to be a pooty constant visitor at Squire Lee's, your ma's father. They liked him, the Squire and his wife both. At first he seemed to take to your ma, for she was the pootyist; but afterwards people said he was after your Aunt Rebecca. However that may be, I don't pretend to know for sartain. He married your ma, and altho' your aunt seemed jest as usual, people did say it hurt her bad, and folks speculated, as they allers do about such things as is none of their bizness. Jest as soon as the weddin' was over, your aunt went down South as governess, and didn't come back for a long spell."

"Of course folks will talk, women folks 'specially, and 'tain't no fun talkin' unless there's somebody to blame. In this case, some folks blamed your pa, and called him a heartless feller, makin' love to two girls at once; and others said your ma showed out her feelins

so your pa couldn't help marryin' her. As for poor Zeke, it near about killed him. He was sick, but he fit against it as well as he could, and finally went off to Injy. Your Aunt Rebecca didn't marry, as I s'pose you know, though she had offers plenty, to my knowledge. Is it possible you never heerd a bit about it?"

"Never," I replied, "and between you and I, aunty, I can't be too thankful that Mr. Ezekiel Parsons was not my father. Though he is your brother, I must say I don't think I could have loved him. But poor Aunt Rebecca!"

"Yes, poor cretur! sech things is tryin', but she's a saint anyhow. Your mother was a pretty cretur, but she hadn't an intellec like your aunt."

"I wonder if father ever," —

"Hush, hush!" interrupted Miss Content, anticipating that I might ask questions she was not authorized to answer. "Some things ought never to be spoke aloud. Your father was a good man. He loved your mother, and she loved him. 'Tain't worth while tryin' to speculate about what might a been, if things had worked different. We don't know nothing about it, and 'tain't our bizness, anyhow."

"Still, I can't help feeling glad that Deacon Ezekiel Parsons ain't my father. I s'pose we may be grateful for things as they are," I said mischievously.

Aunt Content laughed. "'Twould be about as hard to think a young cretur like you could ever have been anything but your own father's child as to imagine what kind'r a cretur might have called Zekiel father. I only wish he'd a been married long ago, and he wouldn't a been so sour. You can't imagine what a dashin' smart young feller he used to be! You ask

your aunt some time. She'll tell you. But don't let on what I've told you. It might hurt her, you know. She'll tell you herself some time, p'raps, but we can't calculate, any of us, how long these heart sorrows wrangle."

"You think I am more like my father than my mother, aunty?"

"The very image of him."

"What if Aunt Rebecca had been my mother?"

"You'll jest kill me dead with supposin' this, that, and t'other. That's what you call, in school, metaphysics, I s'pose. I took up one of the books Rosiny uses in her classes, and tried to understand what it was all about. It went on supposin' and supposin' things never likely to happen, and that never could happen. Supposin' you was Aunt Rebecca's child! Well, ain't you her child, and my child, and everybody's child! Ain't you God's child, and that is better'n all the rest? All other relationships may be broken, but this one'll last to eternity. Don't puzzle your head with supposin's. Be thankful you're just what you are and where you are. D'ye hear that?"

I kissed her. She put a "cymbal" in my pocket, and I went my way home.

CHAPTER VI.

EVERY school-girl has her confidential friend. There may be here and there an exception; if so, it is a sad one, for when a young heart passes alone through the first years of life, it betokens some outward misfortune or inward want, which compels to premature reflection and unnatural reserve.

Let no one say or believe that these silent ones, who neither seek or give sympathy, are happier in their isolation, or that they feel no need of companionship. If so, they are all the more to be compassionated. Let no one call them cold and ungenial, or cruelly leave them to themselves without trying to reach the softer part of their nature.

Blessed is the gentle touch which unseals the pent-up waters of sympathy. Blessed the outgushing of those waters to the heart which had ached in its loneliness!

There was one girl in Miss Parsons's school who had no intimate friends; who neither sought nor gave companionship. She had been a pupil for three years before I joined the school, and was fitting herself for a teacher. She was always plainly but neatly dressed. Everything about her told of poverty and privation. The springs of youth and joyousness seemed to have been repressed within her from early childhood.

She did not bear her yoke with meekness, but with

a sort of dogged defiance. The school-girls called her "that hateful Laura Thirkield." She was as much alone in the midst of her schoolmates as though she were in a desert.

The frolics, the excitements, the chattering and often meaningless babble of a swarm of giddy girls around her, had no more in common with her nature apparently, than the whirling sands of a desert would have had; only the power to hurt and torment her.

I had seen Laura Thirkield every day for three months without even addressing her by name. I had thought over her strange, silent ways, recalled her impassive features, speculated, wondered, and resolved that I would find out something about her. But face to face with her in the school-room, I had not courage to begin the acquaintance.

Miss Content, in answer to my inquiries concerning the family, told me that Mr. Thirkield had the reputation of being a hard, stern man, who kept aloof from society, and repelled all the advances of his neighbors.

When his wife died, two or three well-meaning persons proffered their help and sympathy, but were repulsed.

No one knew whether he was rich or poor. His manner of living was parsimonious in the extreme. His children were meagrely clad and fed. He kept no servant. His place, one susceptible of the highest cultivation, and combining more natural advantages than any in the neighborhood, was permitted to run to waste. The aspect of everything around the home was hard and ungenial; within, cheerless and repelling.

There were four in the family, — the old man, the eldest daughter, who took charge of the household, Laura, the second daughter, and a little boy.

All but Mr. Thirkield were constant attendants on Mr. Penfold's ministrations. "People do say," she continued, "that the old man's an atheist. But nobody knows anything more about him than that he chooses to keep to himself. I'm minded to say often how nat'ral 'tis for human natur in folks to come down on their fellow-creturs the worst kind o' way, when they don't choose to let on about themselves. You'll always see, if you look round you, that it comes easy to human natur to b'lieve bad about a feller-cretur; a great deal easier than to b'lieve good. I don't know why it's so, but 'tis. Now, if Mr. Thirkield likes to keep to himself, whose bizness is it? Why can't people be let alone, 'specially when it don't harm anybody else?"

"I never would jine anybody in settin' him down as an atheist. I don't b'lieve there is such a cretur anywhere as don't hold to some kind of a God — and, between you and I, child, I don't see which is worst, not to b'lieve in a God, or to make Him out sech a dreadful bein' as some folks does, and them not very fur off either. Nobody need tell me God is what some of our ministers try to make him out. Why, child, we should hate and abhor our nat'ral fathers if they took the same course with us as the ministers say God does. I don't find any warrant for such preachin' in the Bible, and so I cuts clean rid of it, and have my own way o' thinking. But some folks think it's their dooty to believe everything the minister says is law and Gospel. Law it may be, but sech law as they makes of their own ingenuity; but Gospel t'aint, not a word on't. You can't find it in Christ's teachins anywhere, and I approve of goin' to the fountain-head. Folks tell you what the 'postle Paul says, but mebbe Paul was mistaken some time. He was a human

bein', and the best of human bein's may be mistaken. Paul was only a man, after all. He made one mistake, that we all know. Didn't he expect the world would a been burnt up in his day, and ain't it standin' yet? That goes to prove even Paul ain't infallible: so, as I said before, it's best to go to the fountain-head — and if we do that, child, with a humble, lovin' spirit, we shan't come away with any sech notions of God as Mr. Penfold's."

"Why, Aunt Content," I exclaimed, "I am astonished that you dare to differ from the minister. I thought" —

"Well, what did you think, honey? I guess I'd got the New Testament pooty much by heart before Mr. Penfold knew his A B C's. It's all well enough, mebbe, these young men settin' 'emselves up explainin' and expoundin' Christ's words to us; but somehow, I often think they'd do a heap more good, if they waited till they got older before they began. What do they know about the dark and stormy ways of life? What do any of us know before we've tried 'em? It's a mighty sight easier to stand in the pulpit and tell folks what they orter to do, and how they orter think, than it is to go out in the world, and take right hold of the Lord's work and do it. But, after all, that's what gives the right seasonin' to preachin'; and nobody can git that seasonin' that hain't lived amongst all sorts of folks. And it takes a good many years, child, to git acquainted with your own heart, let alone human natur in general. I don't mean to say anythin' agin the ministry. It's a holy office. It's a great work; but you can't learn the human heart out of a book. You've got to see it in all sorts of lights as it were, and shadders too, as to that matter; and that can't be done in a few

years' study in colleges and libraries; and you'll see these young saints, who talk as if the Almighty had taken 'em into His councils, deal out the hardest kind o' judgments on their fellow-creturs in His name. Now I don't see a warrant for it in Scriptor; but I do read how the blessed Lord reproved it time and time agen. It's only the young saints that preach so. When a man of God, born of God I mean, gits old, he gits tender and lovin' like. He's passed through temptation — he's been overcome by it — he's known sorrers and losses, and enters into other folks' sorrers and losses. He knows human natur, and he grows more and more pitiful as he knows more and more on't."

"I wish you would turn preacher, aunty. I think you'd make people better."

"I know you're joking, honey; but for all that, I ain't so humble as to think I mightn't help my feller-creturs, if I had learnin' and could git at 'em. I've got that in me, I feel would do some folks good as needs it; and I b'lieve if I could jest git near enough to that sorrerful-lookin' set yonder, that poor afflicted old man, and those motherless girls, I could help 'em. I tell you, 'honey, there's more behind than folks knows on. There's somethin' preyin' on that man's mind that he can't tell nobody. And as to Miss Laura, she's one in a thousand, Rosiny says, about her lessons."

"I don't think she's happy, Aunt Content," I said, "and somehow I feel drawn toward her. I want to know her. I think I could make her love me."

"Supposin' you try," said Aunt Content.

CHAPTER VII.

I DID try. At first it was a mere exchange of good-mornings; then a walk together to the corner where our separate roads diverged; then an invitation to extend her walk by a roundabout way home. At first there was restraint on both sides, an awkwardness which neither of us knew how to overcome; but by degrees it wore away, and the "string of our tongues was loosened." Day after day, week after week passed, but I got no further. I was beginning to feel discouraged. I had many times asked her to come to our house, and had told her how much I desired that she should become acquainted with my Aunt Rebecca and my mother; but she invariably declined, and not once, had she extended an invitation to me to visit her at home. Even my natural curiosity had begun to subside, and my interest in her to wane, when one day, of her own accord, she asked me if I would walk with her to "*Aunt Sally's*," to get some roots for a medicine her sister prepared for her father.

I accepted with readiness her invitation, at the same time inquiring if her father was ill.

"He has been an invalid ever since I remember anything," she said sadly.

"And you don't think he will ever be any better?" I asked.

"Never, until he goes out of this world," she replied. "O Miss Maggie" —

"Don't call me Miss Maggie," I said, interrupting her. "Do say Maggie, and let me call you Laura, for if you will let me, I want to be your friend. I like you, and I want you to like me."

"I think you don't understand your own feelings, Maggie," she replied. "You cannot like me, for you know nothing about me; and if you knew more about me, you wouldn't like me. Nobody does. Nobody can. I am not lovable, and nobody knows it so well as myself. I think it is pity and curiosity you feel. It can't be love."

I assured her that if I knew my own heart, it was something more than either pity or curiosity, although I confessed there was a sprinkling of both in the interest I felt for her. "You know," I said plainly, "that you are odd; that you are unlike other girls."

"No, I do not know this," she replied. "I may appear different, but in my heart I am like all girls. It is only circumstances that make me appear as I do. I love the things that all young girls love, and more perhaps because I can't have them."

"What things do you mean, Laura?" I asked.

"Everything that you love, and that all girls love, as I said before. Ask yourself what you love. A pretty face and form, pretty things to wear, a pretty house to live in, friends a plenty to love me, beaux a plenty to admire me, dancing and amusements of all sorts, plenty of money to spend on myself and plenty to give away, somebody to wait on me, and do all the nasty drudgery of life for me, accomplishments to make me pleasing, and no need to work for a living."

"Do girls want all these things?" I asked. "I'm sure I haven't so many wants."

"People that can have pretty much all they want,

don't stop to think about it; but a girl who has nothing, and does nothing she likes, and is obliged to do a thousand things she don't like, is pretty apt to wish her life could be changed, and to feel ugly and envious of those who are better off."

I laughed as I replied that it did not seem to me she was either ugly or envious.

"That is because you don't know me, as I said before. I am telling you the truth. I always tell the truth, if I speak at all. I am ugly, and I am jealous. Sometimes I try and fight against it, because I know it's a sin; but oftener I give up to it, because there is, after all, a certain kind of pleasure in feeling hateful. The reason you never saw these ugly traits in me is simply because I have all my life long been forced to conceal my feelings, and it has become a habit now. Of course, nobody knows me, and nobody cares enough for me to care to know me. What does Miss Rosina care about me? If I get my lessons well, which I always do, she don't scold me. She never praises me. Nobody praises me for anything, at home or in school. I really think I should be much happier and a better girl if I was praised. I know I am a good scholar; I know I have something in me that would make a fine woman; but there's nobody to help me or take any interest in me. I know I'm smarter than most girls; I know I've got talents; I feel that I could be something great,—something distinguished; I know I've got a power for music in me; but there it lies: I can't learn to play the piano or sing, because I have no money. Money, money, money,—that's the one great want. If one has that, one can buy all the rest,—beauty and friends, and everything one wants."

"But, Laura, aren't you mistaken? Money don't make people beautiful."

"Don't it, though?" she asked bitterly. "Won't money buy handsome clothes, and don't the plainest people look better to be dressed well? What's the advantage of a fine form, if you have to make your own clothes out of anything you can get, and never have 'em fit right? How easy it would be to move about gracefully, if you were sure your clothes set well and looked well on you! and how awkward a girl is when, every time she moves, she feels conscious that her clothes are mean, and look as though they were made for somebody else! Do you love me now, Maggie? Now, that I've talked out to you just what I am and how I feel, do you love me?"

"Indeed I do, more than I did before," I replied.

"Well, I haven't told you half how hateful and bad I am."

"I wish you'd tell me more. It amuses me to hear you talk about yourself. I like your truth, but I think you make yourself out worse than you are; I know you do."

"There you make a mistake, Maggie. I could not, if I were to try, make myself out worse than I am. When Mr. Penfold preaches his 'total depravity' sermons, I always take them home to myself. And yet, I feel almost sure that I don't stand alone in my badness. Circumstances don't bring other people's faults out as they do mine. Perhaps you are just as vain as I am, but you have friends, and money, and admiration; and these advantages make you pleased with yourself. There's just the difference. People's hearts are alike all the world over. The Bible says so. In that very psalm we read to-day in school, don't you remember the verse, 'He fashioneth their hearts alike?' It puzzles me, Maggie. We are just what we are, and

why? Why, because He made us so. Then if He made us so, what can we do about it? This puzzles me, only I don't quite believe it."

"What! not believe the Bible!" I exclaimed with very natural horror; and then it flashed across my mind, "Her father must be an atheist." I pitied her, although it did not fully enter into my comprehension what an atheist was.

"I suppose I do believe the Bible," she said. "I wouldn't doubt the Bible for anything, if I could help it. My poor mother lived by it and died by it; and if for no other reason than that, I should try to believe it. But somehow it puzzles me. It always sets me thinking about things too deep for me to fathom, so I don't read it much. I keep it near me, and I reverence it as the word of God. Still I can't understand it. We won't talk about these things any more. I'm tired of talking about myself. Are you sure, Maggie, that you love me?"

I assured her with great earnestness that I did.

"And are you sure you will continue to love me, notwithstanding that I am hateful?"

I gave her that assurance also. By this time we had reached the gate which opened into the front yard, and the path to her own door.

"Then, Maggie, if, knowing me so far, you care to know more about me, we will take another walk some time, perhaps many; for, indeed, we are all so forlorn at home, I really need a friend. It might help me to bear my lot. It might help me to save my soul."

I felt an impulse to kiss her as we separated, but she either did not see or wished not to observe my advances. I walked home thinking intently. I had ob-

tained new views of life. I had been admitted to a new phase of human nature. My feelings were deeply interested. It seemed to me I had grown wiser within the past hour, and that my heart had grown kinder, my vision more extended. I scrutinized my own character, and asked myself many searching questions. Was I, after all, so unlike Laura Thirkield? Under similar circumstances, should I not display the same faults? Should I have the courage and truthfulness to confess them? Had I not often felt the promptings of vanity, the desire to eclipse my companions? Had I not exulted in my good looks and fine clothes, and enjoyed the triumph of being better dressed than my poorer friends? I came to the conclusion that, after all, one was not much better than another, and that none of us had much goodness and religion to boast of. I communicated to Aunt Rebecca, before I retired for the night, the most prominent points of my interview, and asked her to tell me, in all sincerity, if she really supposed Laura Thirkield to be as bad as she represented herself. She did not give a direct answer to my question, and added with a smile, "I see at least one hopeful symptom in your friend's case, — an abhorrence of hypocrisy. This, with a conviction of her own imperfections, and the sorrow which will inevitably result from them, will help her to become a true, good woman."

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER this, my first satisfactory approach towards an intimacy I had long desired, I saw no more of Laura for several weeks. Her father's illness kept her at home. In the mean time matters of greater importance to me were in progress, and the state of excitement and indignation certain discoveries and suspicions had created in our household swallowed up, for the time being, every other interest.

I had for a long time been annoyed by the frequent visits of Deacon Parsons at our house, — visits not only repeated day after day, but often prolonged into the evening; visits I at last perceived to be intended exclusively for my mother. When this fact first dawned upon me, my only impulse was one of sympathy for her, as a party very much imposed upon, and too gentle and well-bred to rid herself of the annoyance; but on consulting with Aunt Rebecca as to the best manner of giving the gentleman a broad hint to depart, she advised me to do nothing of the sort, and if I did not enjoy the Deacon's society, to sit up-stairs with her. "Your mother," she said, "is old enough to take care of her own affairs, and to keep what society she pleases."

"But, Aunt Rebecca," I argued, "she certainly cannot like or choose the society of that man."

"If she did not," my aunt replied mildly, "she certainly could find some way to rid herself of him."

"You don't mean that she likes him," I exclaimed indignantly.

"Just that, my dear child; and what is more, and harder for you to hear, is the fact which she communicated to me to-day. He has offered himself to her, and she has accepted him. My poor dear, your mother is going to marry Mr. Parsons."

It was in vain that I tried to speak a word. Astonishment, indignation, rage, struggled within me, and choked my utterance.

"I have wished for some time to prepare your mind for it," she said, drawing me tenderly towards her, "as I saw long ago to what point all this frequent visiting, this earnest care for your poor mother's spiritual well-being, was tending. But, my darling, I could not bring myself to speak of it. I tried not to believe it myself."

"And did you tell her it ought not to be?" I asked.

"I reasoned with her," Aunt Rebecca replied, "which is all that I or any one can do. Your mother is of an age to judge for herself."

"And my father but little more than one year dead!" I exclaimed. "O Aunt Rebecca! My heart is broken! What can we do? We must do something. I cannot have it so. To forget him so soon, my poor, dear, noble father, — and for him, that sanctimonious, hypocritical, old —!"

She interrupted me by placing her hand over my mouth.

"Hush, child, don't call hard names."

"How can I help it?" I asked, frantically seizing her hand. "How can you help it? Isn't he all and worse than I can call him? Isn't he an old death's-head? He looks as though he had been dead and

buried for ages, and just dug up. What shall we do about it, Aunt Rebecca? We must not let it go on! How George hates him! How I hate him! And you too, Aunt Rebecca, although you are too good to say so, I know you don't like him. Can't we do something?"

"My child," said Aunt Rebecca, drawing me to her, "sit down, and let us talk about the matter quietly. I need not try to conceal from you that I am fully as much pained by the course matters have taken as you can be, although, perhaps, my personal feeling of dislike for Mr. Parsons is not as strong as yours. But I must tell you my candid conviction. Your mother will marry him. He has, as I say, already proposed, and she has accepted him." I groaned aloud. "Poor, dear child! let us, since we cannot alter the fact, see if there is any light in which we can view it with less bitterness to ourselves. That is all we can do now."

"No, Aunt Rebecca," I said, interrupting her, and speaking with an angry determination to put aside the fact, and annihilate the possibility of such a catastrophe as I believed the marriage of my mother to a man we all disliked would prove. "It is not all we can do, to sit still and let this thing go on. Shall our home be turned into a hell? our home, in which dear father to all of us still lives, — a blessing and a joy to us all. Haven't we rights here? Didn't he leave our mother to us, to care for and to love, and haven't we every one of us been devoted and fond of her? Hasn't George often said that he longed for the day to come when his mother would be proud of him? O! how happy we were! How happy we might still be! But if this hateful marriage takes place, where will our home be, and what will it be? I couldn't stay here;

I couldn't treat him with respect even. Aunt Rebecca, I hate him. It may be very wicked in me to say so, but I hate the very sight of him; and to see him here every day, — to meet him every morning at the breakfast table, — to have to hear his long grace before every meal, — to go through the mockery of listening to his drawling prayers morning and night, — to know that he had a privilege to order this or that, and make what changes he thought best, — to meet him on the stairs, — to feel that he had a right in my mother's room and to my mother's confidence, — no," I exclaimed with energy, and stamping my foot, "it shall not be! If I cannot prevail upon mother to dismiss him, I'll torment him till he is forced to keep away. I won't leave him alone with mother one instant. I'll — I'll — O what can I do that's bad enough! How can you sit there so calmly, and say nothing can be done? O Aunt Rebecca! Don't you pity us, and can't you think of something which will rid us of him? for I say nothing more than the truth, if Deacon Parsons enters this house as its lawful master, as my mother's husband, I shall go out of it forever. I will not live in the same house with that man."

I sank down exhausted, and burst into a hysterical fit of crying, which not even Aunt Rebecca's soothing ministrations could relieve, until it had spent itself. She tried to reason with me, but it was in vain. It was only reiterating the same commonplace arguments with which we strive to meet the inevitable, and find in it some compensation wherewith to solace ourselves. But I refused to be comforted; I could see no compensation. I did not desire to make the best of it, but was determined to view it in its most hideous aspect.

I had passed my seventeenth birthday, and in a few

weeks more my education would be finished. I had built many an air-castle, laid many bright plans, painted many gorgeous pictures of what my life would be when I left school. I had my heroes of the imagination, and my beaux among the young men in the village, to say nothing of lovers, who, I did not doubt, were only waiting for the time when I should be a young lady and a belle, to give me the opportunity to choose or refuse as suited my fancy. Paul had promised to spend his vacation, or a part of it, in East-field; and, although I did not imagine myself very much in love with him, I nevertheless had a romantic preference, and had grown so much more of a woman than when he made his first declaration, that, without reflecting upon the possible unhappiness which might result to him, I thought, with an innocent sort of glorification, of the triumph it would be to my pride to have so handsome a young fellow devoted to me at our picnics and parties.

All these and troops of bright-winged fancies took flight before the awful fate which threatened us. It was with difficulty that my aunt restrained me from rushing down-stairs to do something, I hardly knew what. If I could have thought of anything so annoying, so positively awful, as would drive the man I detested out of the house, and bar the door against him forever, I believe no power on earth could have withheld me from doing it. But the melancholy fact stared me in the face—my rage was impotent for either good or evil. Only cold-blooded, cautious people know how to cut deep. There is very little to fear from violent, blustering anger. It consumes itself. Before I went to bed I was tolerably reasonable. My wrath had given place to despair. Every word

was true that Aunt Rebecca said, and I was compelled to acknowledge that it was so. Mother was old enough to do as she chose, and we all knew she would do so. I have said very little about my mother. I loved her, for she was always gentle and kind to me. I was not her favorite. She idolized my brother George. She loved me, but the bond between us was not so strong as had been that between my father and myself. Every one must know, among one's circle of friends or in one's own family, individuals outwardly gentle and apparently yielding,—so yielding that it seems a breath might sway them; until some unexpected circumstance proves them to be obstinate and opinionated to a degree never even dreamed of. Looking back, we discover, for the first time, that these same gentle beings, who never appeared to demand anything, whom we always felt were ready to give up everything, in fact never did give up, but quietly took their own way and kept it.

There are many such characters in the world. My mother was one of that class. Never stand much in dread of those who insist upon carrying their point with great noise and bluster—those who make a fuss, and get irritated in dispute, and talk largely about independence. Be assured, they are the easiest people to get along with in the end. They are the people who make the most sacrifices, who, while they purse up their mouths, simulating firmness, and wonder how any one dares to expect them to yield, do nevertheless go on yielding as long as they live. Perhaps not with the best grace in the world, nevertheless they do it. In fact, "a little child may lead them."

Such were my characteristics.

I said I would do everything I could think of to

break off that hateful connection. I did little or nothing. My indignation found vent only in words. I said I would go out of the house if Mr. Parsons came into it. I did no such thing. And yet I was in earnest; but when the tempest had subsided, I thought better of my resolutions. Besides, where could I go?

But I will not anticipate. As I knew that what Aunt Rebecca said was true, — I could do nothing that night, and I had better go to bed and sleep upon it — I followed her advice. I woke the next morning very wretched. I did not go into my mother's chamber before breakfast, as had been my habit hitherto. There was so much to remind me of my father in the room — his dressing case, his writing-desk, and the little glass at which he used to shave of a morning. I inwardly resolved, as I passed the door, to remove them, that they need not be polluted by a look from the cold gray eyes of his successor.

I did not know whether mother had authorized Aunt Rebecca to tell me how matters stood; but as I took my seat at table, I could not look up at her. Neither could I eat anything. I loathed everything and everybody; and after the meal was over, and George and Aunt Rebecca had left the room, I asked, looking away from her as I spoke, "Is it true, as Aunt Rebecca told me last night, that you are going to marry Mr. Parsons?"

"It is, my dear," replied my mother in her gentlest voice. "Are you sorry?"

"Sorry!" I exclaimed, while the blood rushed to my face and my voice could hardly articulate. "You know I hate and despise him. You know I think him a canting hypocrite. You know that here, at this very table, he slandered my own father's memory.

Of course you will do as you please. You are my mother, and I hope I shall never forget my last promise to father, to treat you under all circumstances with love and reverence; but I tell you now, that you may be prepared for what will certainly follow. I will never look upon Mr. Parsons in the light of a father, and never call him by that name. He dislikes me as much as I dislike him, only he is so pious, or wishes to be thought so, that he may pretend to you he has a fatherly interest in me and my salvation. He tried that dodge with me himself once. I can see through it now: it was because he was cunning enough to know it would be better for him to make friends with me on some ground or other, for *your sake*, not for mine. He knows I hate him. I never even pretended to like him, and I know he hates me. Mother, you have spoiled this home for your children. You must not be surprised to find it spoiled for yourself. Perhaps you love him, this new-comer, this interloper, better than you do us; but will he make up to you for our loss, if we should be driven away? Do you suppose George, your idol, will stay here to be lorded over by Deacon Parsons? I know he won't stay, and if you love that man better than you love your children and your sister, you will probably have him all to yourself."

I had not given my mother time to put in a word, until, quite exhausted and thoroughly unstrung, I stopped for very lack of strength to say anything more. There was a silence of some moments. I saw that my mother's eyes were swimming in tears. I tried to think I was proof against them. I knew at that moment that my words, bitter as they were, would produce no other effect than to make her temporarily uncomfortable. My mother was of a kindly nature, but

her feelings were not deep. She said something about my liking Mr. Parsons better when I knew more of him, to which I replied that I did not wish to know more of him, and she added, "He has loved me a long time."

"What right had he to love my father's wife?" I asked. "I don't believe a word of it."

"He asked me to marry him when he was a young man," she added.

"And if you loved him, why didn't you marry him then?" I asked indignantly.

"Because, my dear child," she replied hesitatingly, "I thought I preferred your father."

"Thought you preferred him! Didn't you *know*, mother, whether you preferred him or not?"

"Yes, I really did; at least" — here she hesitated. "No matter, mother," I said. "Don't try to explain anything to me. Let me at least have the happiness of believing you loved my father as he deserved to be loved."

"That much you need not doubt, Maggie," she replied with some bitterness. "I do not mean to say aught against the dead. Your father, I know, was a good — a noble, good man, and I loved him. He was kind to me, as kind as he could be, but he did not love me as" —

"Mother," I said, taking advantage of a slight hesitation on her part to break the thread, "don't breathe to me a word against my father's love for you or against his honor. There may be something in your early life I don't understand thoroughly; but don't, I beg of you, — don't tell me there was ever a moment when you could have wavered in your choice between my father and Mr. Parsons."

"You reproach me, Margarette," she said, with a sudden flush of indignation mantling her cheek. "Do so if you choose, but ask your Aunt Rebecca. Talk with her. Perhaps she will convince you that it is not so strange, after all, if I should accept a whole heart, after having tried to be satisfied with a divided one."

I said nothing more. I felt that there was an unexplained mystery in that early life and that first marriage. There had been sorrow and disappointment all round. I recalled the conversation between Aunt Rebecca and my father in the library. I recalled many things which once seemed strange in my mother's intercourse with Aunt Rebecca. I remembered the afternoon, while my father's body lay in the coffin, the day before the funeral — I stole in to take a good-night look. Aunt Rebecca was there alone with the dead. Her back was turned towards me, her head bowed down, and deep sighs came from her like groans. She called him by name, and kissed him, repeating over and over again these words, "The first and last time." I stole up to her unperceived, and we wept there awhile together; then she gently laid the white napkin over his face, and led me from the room.

All these things came back to me now with a meaning, together with what Miss Content had told me about the early love passages in their lives. I saw it, or thought I saw it all. Aunt Rebecca might have been my father's choice. She had loved him. Why, then, had he married my mother, and why had not my mother married Mr. Parsons when he was young?

I left the breakfast-room determined to know all. I sought my aunt in her chamber, but she was not there. I then resolved to learn the whole truth from Miss Content.

This, then, was to be the shadow over my life — this the grim skeleton in our closet; and there was nothing for me to do but get reconciled to it the best way I could. Alas! our misery was not complete until the announcement was made to my brother George, upon whom it fell like a thunderbolt. In a moment, all his plans and hopes were swept away. Headstrong and reckless as he was, my poor brother worshipped his mother. Her slightest wish had been law to him. He was not a boy of many words, but bore his trials with a dogged resolution, and refused sympathy. In short, we were a miserable family, and so it seemed to me we must ever be in future. Time only proved in our case what soon or late is proved to all suffering, vexed, and disappointed mortals, — that we get over trouble in spite of ourselves.

After relieving my overburdened heart occasionally to Aunt Rebecca, both of us came to the wise decision not to canvass the subject when we came together. She had tried earnestly to see, and to help me see the bright side; and, difficult as it was for me to understand the possibility of my mother's affection for Mr. Parsons, I did her the justice to believe that she had an affection for him. Revolting as to my romantic nature seemed the idea of such a lover, I was compelled to admit, that love alone could have inspired his attentions. Methuselah could not have looked older to me than did Mr. Ezekiel Parsons; but I fell back upon the story of the past, and tried to make excuses for him, tried to be tolerant even while I avoided him, for in my heart I abhorred him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE nine days' wonder had subsided. Everybody in the village knew that Deacon Ezekiel Parsons and the widow Hudson were to be married; and what was a still greater wonder than the fact itself, everybody outside seemed to be pleased and satisfied. Their contemporaries, who remembered the early romance of their lives, kind-heartedly rejoiced that constancy and fidelity had met its reward. The very pious rejoiced, that the new convert, who was what might be termed a lukewarm disciple, not of Christ's, but of Mr. Penfold's, would, under the Deacon's training, become a shining light in his, — not Christ's, but Mr. Penfold's church. The young people sympathized with George and myself, and did not think it strange that we should shudder at the prospect of so severe a step-father. I did not permit any one to congratulate me, not even Miss Content, although she promised to tell me something "one of these days," which would make me more reconciled.

And now I would fain leave the subject; but I foresee that it is my duty, since I have begun my story, to dwell a while longer on this, the most severe discipline I had ever passed through.

My term of school-life being over, I was prepared to enter society as a young lady. It may seem absurd to speak of society in Eastfield, or to talk of "coming

out" in connection with the uneventful history of that time and place. Yet, my readers, Eastfield, some fifty years ago, was a place of considerable note, and the resort of many distinguished people. Men whose names have become historic in the records of the nation, received their preparatory education there. Old families from Southern cities, as well as from New York and Boston, congregated there during the summer months. Tea-parties, picnics, fourth of July orations, cattle-shows, balls, all these and many rural amusements made Eastfield the pride of the county and of the State. I will not permit myself to dwell upon the sectarian differences which alienated members of the same family, and arrayed families against each other. The flame of persecution burned fiercely for a long time, and denunciation was sharp and bitter among disputing Christians, but subsided after the lapse of years.

The foreign element was too strong during the summer months to allow the towns-people proper time or leisure for much wrangling. There were the rites of hospitality to strangers to be gone through with, for which Eastfield was noted. There was the aristocratic element to be nourished, of which no place in New England laid claim to a larger share, and which the advent of so many distinguished strangers from all parts of the Union encouraged to the utmost. And, better than all, there were the hosts of young people to be amused, whom neither orthodoxy or heterodoxy, bigotry or persecution, could wholly repress. What would Eastfield have been, after all, with its family pride and awful respectability, its Puritanism, its stern dogmatic theology, were it not for the young people? The young men of the academy, — the young idlers

from luxurious city homes, — the sons of prominent statesmen, whose biographies at the present moment adorn the libraries of many a student, — the embryo judges and divines who congregated at Eastfield!

I am an old woman, and must be permitted to pause on those happy days of our country. They were the days of Union. Our consciences had not been aroused to the curse of slavery. There were no hard names bandied from North to South and from South to North. Senators had not stooped to blows, to vilifying and defaming each other, or if so, the degrading story of such degrading acts had not reached Eastfield. I can see at this moment those fair and beautiful women, indolent but kindly, and those troops of little children led and carried about by their Mammys and Auntys, — little white blossoms who had no prejudice of caste or color, nestling lovingly in the arms and on the bosoms of their foster-mothers.

But it will not do to dwell on these pictures. I know there was goodness, kindness, mutual love, and mutual trust; I know there was gratitude and happiness, even under the curse. Farther than this I do not choose to look at present. I have lived through all that my country has lived through since those golden years when we were a united people; and my prayer is, that I may live to say again, behold our happy and glorious Union, from which the curse has been removed. This is the beginning and end of my politics.

There were many families among the summer residents at Eastfield, with whom I became intimate; only one with whom my after life became closely connected.

On the brow of a hill but a few rods distant from

our own house, there stood the loveliest of lovely cottages, built by Mrs. Sinclair, a Southern gentlewoman, who married a wealthy New York merchant, and every summer came with her family, and generally two or more friends in addition, to spend the whole season in Eastfield.

This lady was the bright, particular star of my girlish idolatry. But I shall say no more of her at present.

The month of October had opened gorgeously. The woods and hills were dressed as for a festival. It was my mother's wedding-day.

I once heard Miss Content describe a wedding which took place on this very month. Why should it have been in the autumn? Why, when youth and love meet together, and begin the journey of life, should they not choose the June of the year? But these did not so. They suffered the June of the year to pass by, because I fear the June of their love was clouded. They waited until autumn, and were married, — my father and mother. And now after almost a score of years, in the same room of the same house, guests were assembled again for a wedding-festival.

The bride still looked young. Her face was of a character that cannot grow old, — a lovely, child-like face, with a complexion of pink and white delicately shaded, soft brown hair, in which the few silver threads were scarcely perceptible. There were no traces of deep thought or feeling on that face — no strong lines. It was the index of an inner life, which could not be deeply stirred, because it had no depth.

Opposite her, hanging against the wall, was a picture of the husband of her youth. Beside her stood the husband of her maturity. I will not attempt to

describe the contrast; for, in sooth, it was inadvertently that I turned from one to the other, and only once.

Well, I won't linger over the scene. They were married, — Deacon Parsons and my mother. The wedding passed off as most weddings do, and nothing extraordinary happened. It was not in the least extraordinary that George should have esconced himself doggedly in the corner of the room, remote as possible from the bride and bridegroom. It was not in the least extraordinary that I should have almost strangled in the effort to keep down my mingled feelings of sorrow, anger, and shame. It was by no means extraordinary that my Aunt Rebecca should have stood, calm, self-possessed, the very embodiment of sweet but heroic womanhood, near her sister's side.

Something passed through my mind as I stood looking at her. I knew nothing then of spiritual philosophies or illuminations. I had never read "*Spiritual Affinities*." There had been no published accounts of travels into the realms of the departed. It was simply a passing thought, which for a moment occupied my mind. *She will be his wife there. She, my Aunt Rebecca, who I felt loved him, lost him for a time, to find him in eternity.* Then, of course, this second marriage of my mother with her first lover must be eternal also. I could not reconcile myself to the idea of more than one mistake.

I confess there was a sort of comfort in the assurance I felt, that "all things would work together for good" in the ages. At the same time, the puzzling question presented itself, to whom should I belong? With whom should I best love to dwell? As my brain began to grow dizzy with these abstruse speculations,

I was not sorry to be recalled to tangible objects by the cutting and dispensing of the wedding-cake.

I have no desire to linger over the scene. The guests departed. Aunt Rebecca and I remained together in the little parlor after all had retired. I flung myself down beside her on the sofa and exclaimed, "Thank goodness! it is all over!"

"Maggie," she said, rising and going towards my mother's work-table, "I asked permission to show you this;" and she took from the drawer a miniature, and handed it to me.

"What a splendid man!" I exclaimed. "Who is it?"

"Can you guess?" she asked.

"I cannot," I replied; "but if such men are extant now, I hope it will be my good fortune to meet with one."

"Even such men change and grow old," she said significantly.

"You cannot mean that this is—no, I know it never was intended for"—

"Well, who?"

"Mr. Parsons?" I asked.

"No other than he," Aunt Rebecca replied. I looked at it long and attentively; then, closing the case, I handed it back to Aunt Rebecca, saying, "I forgive my mother. She must have loved him, but why—I cannot understand it, Aunt Rebecca—why did she not marry him then?"

"It is not a long story," replied my aunt.

"But a sad one?" I asked.

"Somewhat sad, at least so it seemed at the time," she replied.

"Will you tell me all about it?" I asked.

"Some time, perhaps, but not now."

"Why not now?" I entreated. "We cannot sleep: why should we go to bed? Why not sit up and talk? Besides, aunty, I am not wholly ignorant of it."

"Of what?" she asked in surprise.

"Of your love for my father, and his for you." The moment the words had escaped my lips, I would have given much to recall them. She was so agitated,—apparently so distressed.

"Who has told you?" she inquired.

"Miss Content," I replied.

"She did wrong, very wrong," she said with some sternness. "I am surprised! What did she tell you?"

"Simply what I told you,—no more and no less. I don't think you ought to blame her."

"Perhaps not. It was natural. I did not suppose the story was in everybody's mouth. We cannot live our own lives, nor keep our own secrets."

"But, as I know so much, why not tell me more? Yet not if it gives you pain," I added soothingly.

"It does not give me pain. You shall hear it. It is not a long story, nor is it an uncommon one. I lament nothing. I am satisfied to wait until the dealings of Providence can be made clear to us, and I confidently believe they will. I can wait. Even what we call our greatest mistakes, even our wrongs, may in the end prove to be our choicest blessings. Maggie, child, I loved your father, but not until, by his attentions to my sister, he had led our father to believe that his purpose was to marry her. I was absent from home for some time. In the interval, your father came to Eastfield, a physician of uncommon promise.

Wealthy, gifted, handsome, he turned the heads not only of the young girls, but their parents also. Not more susceptible to flattery than other men, he was nevertheless gratified with the attentions poured upon him from all quarters. Your mother was a beauty and a coquette; not from badness of heart, but rather from want of heart. Your father was fascinated. I do not think he was deeply in love, but he certainly manifested a marked preference for her, and our parents both encouraged him and influenced her. From childhood Mr. Parsons had been in love with her; and until your father appeared, she seemed to favor him. She was not wholly to blame. I know my father persuaded her to dismiss Mr. Parsons, and to accept Dr. Hudson.

"I do not like to use the expression, but I think your father was drawn into the net farther than he anticipated, and felt that he could not in honor retreat. He was treated by both my parents as your mother's acknowledged lover. They were engaged. Just at that time I returned home, innocent of all share in what had passed, and eager to offer my sisterly congratulations. I need not say more. If I did wrong, I shall know it some time. I have expiated it by many sad, lonely years. Even at this day, I cannot condemn myself. I struggled to do right, I relinquished everything. I will speak the truth to you. I think my nature was better suited than my sister's to understand and to meet the wants of your father.

"I should not have acknowledged this to you, but since, as you say, you know a part, it is better that you should know all. You will not understand, from anything I have said or may say, that your father trifled with your mother's affection, or that she coquettishly

sought merely to captivate him. No: they were pleased with each other, and my parents looked upon a union with Dr. Hudson as eligible in every respect. My father's failing health and fallen fortunes made him anxious to see his children well settled in life. Mr. Parsons had his own way to carve. He had no money. Your father was rich. Had your mother been deeply in love with Mr. Parsons, of course she would not have been so easily influenced. He was deeply in love with her; and as you have doubtless been told, her engagement to your father was a dreadful blow. He exiled himself from friends and home, and came back after an absence of many years, the wreck you see him now. Although he looks much older, he is in fact a year or two younger than your father would be if he were still alive. I suppose you may wish to ask me how I could have fallen in love with your father, knowing as I did that he was engaged to my sister. Alas! my child, I cannot answer the question. I saw him day after day, with a feeling of perfect security, growing out of the very fact that he belonged to her. As we became better acquainted with each other, we found constantly increasing pleasure in an interchange of thought and experience. We were not aware of danger. You cannot wish me to go into detail. I awoke as from a dream to find myself on the brink of a precipice. I had courage and strength of will to go away from temptation. I left without knowing exactly what I should do, but determining to do something. I think my mother understood the cause of my sudden departure. What else could I have done?"

"And do you think he had begun to love you?" I asked.

"I knew it, my child. Do not accuse him unjustly. I think now that what the world calls honorable in such matters, may be productive of much greater unhappiness than the simple avowal of the truth. (I believe no marriage was ever happy begun with a falsehood and deception.) Who of us would accept a divided heart if we knew it? I believe we might all have been spared much sorrow if we could have lived and spoken the truth. And yet it is hard to know what is right. One thing in the end was plain to me. I had no right to love my sister's husband, and it was only needful for me to know, and then to do my duty. I believe each of us acted from unselfish motives; and whether our judgment was erroneous or not, I do not trouble myself to question now. God judges us by our motives, my child. If they are just and pure, we can bear even to learn that our actions were mistaken."

"But my father and mother were happy together, were they not?" I asked.

"Yes, my child, as the world counts happiness."

"And you, dear, precious aunty, are you not happy also?"

"Yes, my child, I am happy. Do you doubt it?"

I looked into her sweet, placid face, and answered, "No; how can I doubt it?"

"Then we will not talk on this subject again, dear. Neither of us can doubt that he is happy whom we both love, and whose memory is hallowed to us all, and let us believe also that your mother too is happy, and that in an atmosphere of affection and kindness Mr. Parsons may lose some of that asperity which has grown out of adverse circumstances and a disappointed, lonely life. Lay aside all bitterness towards him. I don't ask you to love him; I know you cannot; but for

the love you bear your mother, treat him with respect. Will you try to do that?"

I assured her that I would, but I feared what George might do. "He says little," I added, "but he feels deeply. I have a presentiment that we shall have much trouble with him."

"Much will depend on Mr. Parsons's treatment of him," said Aunt Rebecca. "I hope he will deal gently with the poor boy."

We bade each other good-night; and as I left the room to go to my chamber, she called me back. I have never forgotten the earnestness of her look and manner as she said, "Maggie, my child, from what I have told you this evening, and what you may have learned from Miss Content, I fear you may have received a wrong impression. Young and romantic people, like yourself, are very apt to permit their imagination to dwell morbidly on what are called heart-sorrows and crosses in love, and to fancy there is something poetical and interesting in life-long, sentimental regret and disappointment. My dear, no healthy soul can be forever miserable. God constantly bestows upon us so many blessings, points out so many ways of doing good to others, reveals to us so much that is bright and cheering in this life, and promises us such fullness of joy in the life to come, that if we close our eyes and our hearts against His providence, we sin against Him. Unless we nurse up and brood over our griefs, we shall, in the natural course of things, live above them, and be happy in spite of them. It is a false and sickly sentiment to dwell upon broken hearts and blighted lives. Do not set out in life with the feeling or the fear that you may succumb under trial."

"But, dear aunty," I said, "people do break down under trials, and Christian people too. How can you reconcile the fact with what you tell me?"

"I know it, child," she replied sadly. "I know it only too well. But what I wish to impress upon you is the need of courage to meet and bear inevitable trials, and to resist the tendency of all imaginative natures to create and exaggerate unreal ones. If sorrow, or wrong, or even sin overtake you and overcome you, do not think there is anything to be gained by dwelling upon it. Look away from it and up to God; and buckle on your armor with renewed courage. Do this again and again, hopefully and courageously.

"I told you simply the truth when I said I was happy. How do I know that I should have been happier under different conditions? Do not waste any sentiment on the story I have told you; for believe me, my child, if we could have for the asking what we desire, and all we desire, we might be the most miserable of all God's children.

"Now good-night, darling. My sermon is ended."

"It may be all true," I said to myself as I mused over the events of the past few months, and life as it appeared to me, — "it may be all true, as Aunt Rebecca says; but she doesn't remember how many weary steps she had to take before she gained the calm, serene heights from which she sees and judges.

"It does very well to preach cheerfulness and courage; but trial is trial, and even youth is not exempt from it. However, it is best, no doubt, to look away from it, if one can; and I shall try and not forget that Deacon Parsons is the rightful lord and master of this household, and not call him a usurper."

CHAPTER X.

IN rummaging over an old writing-desk in search of some particular data to assist my memory, I came across a manuscript carefully folded, and labeled "Miss Content's Sermon." After reading it over, it recalled to my remembrance so vividly the events and trials of that period of my life associated with my mother's second marriage, and was interwoven with so much of my inner experience, that I cannot resist the temptation to transcribe it, verbatim, to the pages of my story.

But, in order to the fuller comprehension of the circumstances which conspired against every resolution of my better nature to be resigned and cheerful under my heavy dispensation, I must relate an occurrence which took place a few months after my mother's marriage with Mr. Parsons.

I was beginning to congratulate myself upon having obtained a truly Christian spirit of forgiveness and toleration, when, suddenly, I was overtaken by temptation, and so overcome by it that I fell considerably lower in my own estimation, than in my previous exaltation, I had risen above my true level.

I need not multiply words, — rather let me come straight to facts. Here they are.

On returning home from one of my daily visits to my friend, Mrs. Sinclair, the moment I entered my

own door, I heard loud and angry words, emanating from the family sitting-room. I could distinguish the voices of Mr. Parsons and my brother George in loud and angry altercation.

Without stopping to reflect, I rushed into the room, just in time to see Mr. Parsons's hand uplifted, but not in time to prevent the catastrophe which followed, — the descent of the blow which sent my brother reeling to the floor.

The room, the very earth, seemed whirling round. I do not remember now what I did or said. When I came to consciousness, it was to find my hands clutching at the angry man's arm, to see his eyes glaring at me and his teeth chattering, and to hear my brother, with doubled-up fists, pouring forth such a volley of imprecations as made my blood curdle.

I expected every moment he would rush on Mr. Parsons like a young tiger, and demolish him utterly. I am sure one blow from those square fists of his, would have laid the poor, shattered old man low in the dust. I have often thanked God that something restrained him, — something stronger than his own reason or foresight; for these were certainly overcome by passion.

"What is all this about?" I asked as soon as I could find a voice to utter a word. "George, speak to me! Tell me what you have done! What has happened?"

"Ask *him*," replied my brother, pointing his finger at Mr. Parsons.

"Leave the room," said my step-father, shaking my hand from his sleeve as though it were a viper that had stung him.

"I shall not leave the room, until I know the meaning of this miserable, disgraceful business, — what it is, and who began it," I said resolutely.

"And who constituted you a judge? By what authority do you dare question me?" asked Mr. Parsons, holding me at arm's length, with a grip that would have made me cry out with pain, if I had not been too angry to be conscious of physical suffering.

"Our right here, sir," I said with a calmness and impudence that astonished myself, "is prior to yours; and if you haven't understood that before, it is high time that you should know it now. You may be my mother's husband, but you are no father of ours. You are a usurper, and I step on your authority:" suiting the action to the word, I stamped on the floor, as if his assumed prerogative were under my feet.

He laughed, — a cynical, mocking laugh. This was more than I could bear. It was a thousand times worse than his rage had been. Yet I could do nothing, — say nothing. Fortunately for all of us, George found the use of his tongue at that critical moment, and came to my rescue.

"There's nothing the matter, Maggie," said he; "only Mr. Parsons has undertaken to manage me by force, and I won't submit to it. I'll let him know, if he tries it, which is the stronger, he or I. I never had a blow in my life before, and he'll never give me another. I could knock him down there, where he stands, as easy as I can upset a nine-pin. Why don't I do it? I'll tell you why: because he's my mother's husband, and" — here his lip quivered — "and I love my mother, though she has given me up for him."

This little touch of softness did its work. I was completely subdued.

"Let us go, George," I said, taking him gently by the arm. "You will tell me all about it when we are together. We are left to each other now. We must

not fall out; we must hold each other up." Then, turning to my step-father, I said, "The sooner you understand that we do not recognize your authority, the better it will be for us all. Take what comfort you can in the love you have stolen from us, but leave us to each other. Come, George," and I drew him with me to the open door.

"Let us go up-stairs," he said. "Mother might come and find us, and—see here"—he removed his handkerchief from his temple, and I saw, with horror, it was stained with blood.

"It was not the force of the blow," he said; "but I stumbled. Maggie, what held me back? I wanted to fly at him! I might have killed him, I am so strong, and he is so feeble and old. What do you think held me back?"

"I'm sure I can't tell," I said, "but I thank God anything did."

"'Twas something outside of me," said he with an agitation of manner I never saw in him before. "Maggie! It was father's hand!"

The solemnity with which he said those words filled me with a strange awe. "Come to my room, George," I replied; and he followed me quietly. I closed the door.

"George," I asked as we sat down side by side on the bed, "do you believe in spirits?"

"I don't think I do," he replied.

"I once read in a book of father's," I continued, "a book that he had been reading, which told about such things, and which he had marked all through, something that he had written on a fly-leaf. I remember it, because it impressed me strangely at the time. You know how we used to frighten each other with

ghost stories. Well, once I asked father about ghosts, and he phoo-phooed, but did not make me much of an answer. But, wait a minute. I can put my hand on the very book; it is in Aunt Rebecca's room. First let me bathe your poor, dear head, and wash away the blood."

"It isn't much of a hurt," he said. "I'll wash off the blood while you go and get the book."

I found it where I expected,—in Aunt Rebecca's book-case. We sat down again and read together the following passage, written in my father's handwriting, on a blank leaf of the volume:—

"There are some people who seem mysteriously allied to spiritual beings with whom, under certain conditions, they are *en rapport*, as we may say. I have myself, at different periods of my life, been so impressed with the consciousness of a spiritual presence and a spiritual influence, that it would not have surprised me at any moment to have had it take a visible form before my eyes. I see no philosophical reason to doubt the theory of direct spiritual agencies. I hope I shall live long enough to examine into the subject without prejudice. Surely we cannot believe that our love dies out with the body. Our care and watchfulness over those who are bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, is not obliterated by death. Then why may we not exert an influence over them for good or evil, always subordinate to the overruling Providence, when we become spiritual existences?"

When we had finished reading, we looked at each other with wondering awe. George was the first to break the silence.

"It was my father who held me back," he said, his face radiant with satisfaction.

"I think it was," I replied. "O George, it makes my heart glad. We have not lost our father!"

"And only to think," he continued. "I might have killed Mr. Parsons. But, Maggie, I can't live at home."

"What will you do?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered sadly; "but I can't stay here. Whatever I may do, and wherever I may go, don't lose your trust in me, and don't fear I shall disgrace you. Father will be with me. If I should go away,—mind, I don't say I am going, I haven't any plan, only this,—if I do go away, make it as easy for mother as you can."

"But I hope you won't go, George," I said pleadingly. "Things will get better, or we shall get used to them. I hope you won't go." And yet I felt in my heart he would, and I thought also that, were I a boy, I too would run away.

A week or more had passed after this affair, when one morning George was not at breakfast. My mother became worried, and sent to his chamber. The room was deserted. George had gone. He left a few lines for my mother, saying that he was going with George Bates, of the barque *Quickstep*, a voyage to Bombay, and should not be at home for two years.

The shock was terrible to us all; and yet in my heart I did not lament it. "He always hankered after the sea," my mother said tenderly; "and Captain Bates is a good man."

After a time we became reconciled, as all of us naturally do, to what is inevitable.

Still, I often felt that life was very much changed for the worse to me. Care and anxiety troubled the waters; fears and apprehensions darkened the heavens.

In my restlessness I used to go to Aunt Content and relieve my overburdened heart. There was that in her homely manner, so hearty and so child-like, yet withal so wisely human, that I could talk to her without fear. She met me on my own ground as it were, and there is where we need to be met. That is what makes the religion of Christ so satisfying, so much above all other religions. It comes down to help us where we are. When we haven't learning and intellect, or even the disposition to soar to heights of metaphysical speculation; when we are too weak and childish to comprehend philosophies, and can't bring ourselves to study the plans of salvation which doctors of theology hold up to us, then we learn the meaning of the incarnation,—God with us,—the Father come down to the apprehension of his poor sorrow-stricken, disappointed, timid, and weak children.

Aunt Content always impressed me with that great truth, "Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

I never for a moment doubted, not only that she would, but that she had entered there.

It was on one of these occasions, when I sought refuge and comfort from her, that she preached to me the following sermon:—

"Now, child, you sit right down here side o' me, while I'm restin', before it's time to mix the waffles for supper, and I'll preach to you. I see you need it, and preachin' does a sight o' good when it reaches the sore spot. Now your aunty knows the sore spot in your heart jest as well as if you'd put her finger right on it. It all grows out of your mother's marryin' a man you don't love, and having to see him in the place of your dear father whom you did love. It's nat'ral

enough, but, after all, you can't help it, and you must jest look to the grace of God to help you bear it. Now, if it's any sort of comfort to you to talk out to your aunty, talk jest as much as you've a mind to; but mind ye, child, as a gin'ral rule 'tain't prudent to talk to everybody as pretends to be friendly. There's a deal of harm done in this world by tattlin', and somehow or other the ginerality of women can't keep anything to themselves. Still, as I said before, it's next to impossible to keep in, when you're bilin' full, partik-erlarly when you're young; only try to be cautious, child. It's a fault you'll get over soon enough, this trustin' and believin'. More's the pity, I say. But I'm forgettin' my sermon. I s'pose I orter take a text, so I'll choose this, — 'My grace is sufficient for you,' which of course means God's grace."

"Well, aunty," I said, "you've hit on just the text which above all others I should have chosen. I hear so much about grace, that really I should like to understand exactly what grace means."

"Well, dear child," continued Aunt Content, "I don't pretend to preach as the ministers does who've studied grammar and all that sort of thing; I jest speaks from my own experience. Now, the case is with young folks, when they first begin to find out that life's a rough journey, they thinks their trials are more'n they can bear. Then they fall to complainin' and worryin', and old folks shake their heads and draw down the corners of their mouths, and this is the sort of comfort they offer 'em. You may take this as a sort of sample of what they offer in the way of consolation. They says, 'You think you've got trials do ye? Why, you don't know what trial means. Wait till you git to be fifty years old, and have buried those you love

best in the world, — wait till you get sick and helpless, — wait till you find out that all the world has to give is holler and unsatisfying, — wait till you find all you've got by the hardest, — strainin' every nerve as it were to gain it, and then findin' it dust and ashes, — before you begin to talk of trouble.' Well, that's the kind of comfort you'll get when you're young. Now that may all be true enough in one sense, and yet 'tain't true nuther. Trials is trials, and sorrer is sorrer, and every age has its full complement, and what we all need is grace to help us. We can't git along without grace, young or old."

"But, dear aunty, what *is* grace? You haven't explained that yet."

"Who ever heard of interruptin' the preacher, child?" asked Miss Content good-naturedly. "You never should speak in meetin'. I must take my own way and my own time of doin' things. You know, dear, I never got much of my religion from preachin'. I was sot against it, and against ministers once in my life. Circumstances which I can't explain now, gave me a sort of prejudice against 'em. It's a long story, but I'll tell it to you some day. To go back to grace: I don't know as I can explain it any better than by sayin' it's God's love shinin' in on our souls, as the sun shines on the earth. The sun can't help shinin'; it's accordin' to natur that it should shine, and it must. God's love is jest the same. It's his very natur; and, like the sunshine, his love falls on all alike, "the evil and the good." Now in order to keep us, and do us good, we've got to believe it and turn *to* it, not *away* from it. I can't explain to you how it makes me feel to see human creturs bracin' themselves up against a great calamity, as if they could stand the shock by

their own strength. I allers want to say, 'Taint no use; you better give in and let God take the burden from you, as He says He will, and as He's quite able to do. And did you ever mind, what hard sort o' people they are who nerve 'emselves up as it were to bear up without showin' any weakness to outsiders, and how they bear down on their weak-hearted feller-creturs? They are the well folks as don't need the great Physician. Grace can't do much for them. I allers keep out o' the way of sech folks. When sorrer comes, it comes by God's permission. We all need it, and that's why He lets it come. I don't believe what folks say about his sendin' it as a punishment. I can't reconcile that with God's justice, to say nothin' of his mercy. Sorrer is jest as much in the order of his lovin' providence and tender mercy, as joy is.

"I wish the ministers would take that view of it oftener. It would make a good many hearts tender, so that grace could take effect. Now I'll tell you how it happened to me when I was in trouble. Of course the fust thing was to go to the minister for advice. I felt as though I must get converted somehow. I was in a terrible state. Wall, I went to the minister and laid my heart bare to him. I wanted to find the straightest and shortest road to the Saviour; and what did the preacher do, but put himself right in between us, and sot my head a workin' instead of easin' my heart? It jest sot me a most crazy thinkin' about things past findin' out, and yet I thought I must find 'em out or be miserable forever.

"Well, child, I passed through the furnace of affliction. I agonized, I wrestled, and I conquered: not through preachin' or signin' a creed, but through the grace of God. I was all alone. The church rejected

me; they wouldn't let me go to the communion, because I couldn't in conscience sign the paper. I left off talking to everybody, and shut myself up alone with my Saviour. 'I was sick and in prison and He came unto me.'

"Now what it took me a good many years to learn, I want you to learn now. I might have preached more 'cordin' to order, if I had set up my fustlys and secondlys, as kind o' guide-boards in the beginnin'; but I didn't, and now I've got to the finally without hardly knowin' how.

"I'll go back to my text, for that is the beginning and the end of the whole matter: 'My grace is sufficient for you.' Jest believe that, child, and trust it. Don't stretch out to anticipate troubles as may possibly come, and think you can lay up a stock of grace aforehand. God's grace is like the manna which was given to the children of Israel every morning. It came jest when they needed it, and jest as much as they needed. Some of 'em, prudent, savin' sort of folks, thought they could keep a stock on hand, notwithstanding God told 'em not to do it. They were kinder distrustful, I s'pose, and thought the supply might give out, and so they hid some away for future use. We all know what come of it, — how it got full of maggots, and they couldn't live in the house with it.

"Now if that ain't a lesson, I don't know what is. There's a deep moral to that, child, and you'll see it run clean through the Lord's teachin', in the Old and New Testament. All we want of anything is jest enough for the time bein'. We must ask for our bread daily, and we shall allers git it. It's jest so with grace; if we want it, there it is with the dew of his love on it. When great sorrers come, He'll send

great supplies. We can't exhaust 'em; and, my child, the bread *He* gives is *livin'* bread. We've got to b'lieve this, and it's best for us to begin early. You'll hear a deal said about faith. We must have *faith*. Now, what does it all mean? What is faith? Well, I'll tell you what I think it is. It's confidence in God, — confidence that He means jest precisely what He says, and allers keeps his word. He tells us to go up *boldly* to the throne of grace and claim his promises; and I reckon He'd rather see us comin' that way than to come sneakin' as if we wasn't quite sure He meant what He said; and however poor, and sinful, and weak we may be, and know it too, if we've got confidence in Him and his power to help us, He'll do it. That's what I call faith, — confidence, belief in what He tells us.

"Now I must go to my waffles, and you shall stay and eat 'em, for Aunt Content's waffles can't be beat here or anywheres, if I do say it, as hadn't orter blow my own trumpet."

I thanked her for her sermon, and followed her to the kitchen, where, in my favorite seat by her table, I watched the mysterious process, the results of which, as I sat down at the tempting tea-table, gave me almost as much satisfaction as the sermon. A good digestion, both physical and spiritual, enabled me to be benefited by both.

CHAPTER XI.

THE change from girlhood to womanhood, in ordinary cases so gradual, with me seemed almost instantaneous. I date its commencement from the moment I comprehended fully the awful fact that my mother was to become the wife of Deacon Parsons, and the consequent change in all our domestic and social relations. I was no longer a thoughtless, light-hearted girl. I struggled against a daily and hourly annoyance; and the conflict chafed and irritated my spirit. I became morbid and unreasonable.

There are persons in whom the poetic element largely predominates; and if, in addition to this emotional temperament, they have a gift at versification, the chances are that at some period of life, and under peculiar conditions, they will aspire to poetic achievement, and possibly with tolerable success.

This temperament and these aspirations belonged to me, and the commendation and flattery I received from partial friends quite set me up in my own estimation. I felt sure that I was born to be famous, and to achieve a brilliant career. I nursed up my morbid fancies, and exaggerated my trials, and then gave them utterance in rhyme.

I wrote for the "Book-Club," a literary society, of which I soon became the shining light; and from time to time my effusions appeared in the poet's corner of the "Eastfield Gazette."

It was very fortunate, at the beginning of my career, that I found a wise friend, who was not afraid to tell me the truth about myself, and who took down my conceit by a discriminating criticism.

I have spoken before of my paragon, Mrs. Sinclair. Although several years my senior, she both sought and enjoyed my companionship. Of course I was flattered as well as pleased with her affection and confidence.

I wish I could describe her, instead of simply saying that she was beautiful. But I am not an artist in word-painting, and therefore could not do her justice, if I were to attempt it. Doubtless somewhat of the charm and fascination of her person and manner was due to the elegant appointments and surroundings of wealth and taste, and to that quiet self-possession which grows out of long familiarity with good society. Still, stripped of all conventional advantages, she was inherently beautiful. She had an inimitable ease and grace of manner which drew all classes of people towards her, and made the most diffident satisfied with themselves. But, superior to all outward attractions was her native kindliness of heart, which flowed forth towards the humblest of God's children.

Her friendship not only flattered my vanity, but satisfied my heart. She used to talk to me sometimes of that, to my fancy, great world, in which she played a prominent part; and she promised to take me with her, if my friends would consent to her doing so, and bring me out in that charmed circle which, as she painted it, seemed, to my imagination, gorgeous and glittering as a court.

Sometimes she amused herself with arraying me in her beautiful and costly dresses,—decking me with

jewels, and showing me to myself in the glass transformed, like Cinderella by her godmother. I will not disguise the fact, nor apologize for the vanity of confessing that I saw that with the aids and appliances of dress, I too was beautiful; and I was conscious of a love of admiration, which, although I feared it was a sin to indulge in, I nevertheless did cherish in a little corner of my heart, at the same time congratulating myself that the time would come when I might hope to be as much admired and as fascinating as she was. Not in Eastfield. Even now, by my newly acquired airs and graces, which were, in fact, simply the outward workings of an inward and deeply rooted love, not created but developed through Mrs. Sinclair's training, I felt that I had made many enemies. I had an innate love of things beautiful, which grew apace in an atmosphere where everything was outwardly beautiful. I had a native taste, which Mrs. Sinclair not only approved of, but educated. Dress with her was a fine art. At the little gatherings in the summer festivities, she helped me to arrange my toilet effectively; and the evidences of that sort of culture could not be kept out of sight. Some of my companions openly displayed the ugly trait of jealousy, and treated me with marked contempt. Others, struggling to put down their natural feelings of envy, tried to appear, and to be friends with me, and succeeded so far as to deceive me if not themselves. But it is hard to be outshone, as I learned to my own mortification, when I found myself eclipsed by many and many a resplendent beauty in the larger sphere to which I was introduced by my friend, who asked and obtained leave to take me with her to the city of New York for the winter.

The triumph of one summer in Eastfield—which was,

after all, only the silly, girlish triumph of having the larger number of beaux at the picnics and parties, and the exclusive devotion of the city gallants, who came to the country to amuse themselves in harmless flirtations with its rustic beauties, and to enjoy and perhaps ridicule their unsophisticated pleasure in being thus flattered and flirted with — had no malice in it. As I said before, the illusion was but temporary; for in a larger sphere I very soon found my level.

But let me snap the thread which will lead me, Heaven only knows into what prosy and tedious digressions, and step out upon the piazza of Mrs. Sinclair's cottage, where we used to pass so many of our summer evenings, — Mrs. Sinclair, Mr. Yorke, and myself.

Who was Mr. Yorke?

No stranger to me, dear reader, at that time, although I am aware I have never mentioned his name before.

Mr. Yorke was an intimate personal friend of both Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair. He came every summer to Eastfield, and occupied the same room at the fashionable public house of the town, called, after its proprietor, the "Johnson House."

Mr. Philip Yorke was a wealthy bachelor; a merchant from New Orleans and a slave-holder, as all Southerners then were. Born in Vermont, he struggled through college, with the help of occasional school-teaching, and, after graduating with high honors, went to the South, first as a school-master, and afterwards became a fortunate, prosperous business man.

I think I have told enough of his antecedents to answer my present purpose. I am not apt in describing the personal appearance of any one. Such descrip-

tions never give me any accurate impressions; and, as I said just now, I have no gift for that kind of portraiture. I will simply say, Mr. Yorke was a fine-looking man. This was the commonly received opinion, even of those who did not like him; and there were many, even in the little town of Eastfield, who did not like him. My step-father was one of the number. Aunt Content, I am sorry to say, was another. Of course I suspected then, what I now know, that this dislike was founded in prejudice; and, taking into account the character and manners of the man, I must admit that the prejudice was very excusable.

I saw him more intimately. I confess, I admired him. But how can I make this appear reasonable, since I have not described him? Yet, I will repeat it — to my poetical imagination he was a hero. He had just enough peculiarity to be interesting. Although the writings of Lord Byron were then the rage, Mr. Philip Yorke affected none of the Byronic heroes. On the contrary, he eschewed all sickly sentiment, and prided himself upon being a matter-of-fact man. I stood slightly in awe of him, admiring him at a respectful distance.

When I stepped upon the piazza of Mrs. Sinclair's cottage that particular evening to which I alluded just now, Mr. Yorke was sitting there alone, reading a magazine.

"You are the very person I was thinking about," were the words with which he greeted me. "I'm very glad to see you."

I was both flattered and fluttered. "I have just been reading something I suppose the author would call poetry, and I should like to have your opinion of it."

"I am no judge," I replied. "Read it to me, if you please, and give me your opinion."

"Do you think me qualified to judge of poetry?" he asked.

"Why not?"

"Have I not reiterated again and again the fact that I am a man of hard common-sense?"

"Yes, but I never believed you."

"You should believe me, for I always speak the truth. Do you know, Miss Maggie, there is no person in the world so misunderstood and misjudged as one who lives and speaks the truth? There is something so persuasive in a lie well told and well acted, that almost everybody believes and prefers it. Now, how do you account for it?"

"I don't admit that it is so."

"Nevertheless, it is true, whether you admit it or not, as you will learn to your sorrow some day."

"Well, perhaps so. But about the poetry. Will you read it to me, and, after you have done, will you tell me *the truth* as to what you think of it?"

"On one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you on no account interrupt me, while I am reading, with any exclamation or opinion of your own."

"I promise it. I will not open my lips."

"Then sit down, there, where you are. Don't come nearer—it might embarrass me. I am a diffident man. You smile. Don't you believe that either?"

"I should never have imagined it."

"Well, you believe it now I have told you, I suppose? so pray sit down. You promise not to interrupt me?"

"I do."

"On your word and honor?"

"On my word and honor."

And he began to read a poem, — my last contribution to "The Book-Club." I kept my promise, and did not utter a word, but I suffered unutterable things.

SUNSET.

The earth in breathless silence waits
The promise of night's soft embrace,
For day hath closed the amber gates :
Behind him, and with royal grace,
In robes of regal splendor dressed,
Walks slowly down the glowing west.

The vapory clouds dissolve in flecks,
Like waifs borne onward by the breeze,
And strew the purple heaven like wrecks
Of phantom ships on pathless seas ;
Which plunge and float, as fitful gales
Play wanton with their rifted sails.

A filmy veil spreads lightly o'er
The waveless surface of the stream,
Which gives the outline of the shore
The shadowy vagueness of a dream,
Blending in soft obscurity
The tranquil depths of wave and sky.

Weird, ghostly spectres moan along
The frescoed arches of the wood,
And sudden bursts of jocund song
Steal out amid the solitude,
Borne onward with the ebb and flow
Of winds that idly come and go.

And down among the garden-beds,
The languid blossoms, dew besprent,
Droop sleepily their shining heads
Beneath the arching firmament,
As though its vast and starlit dome
Were but a curtain for their home.

O blessed hour! so sweet! so calm!
 The fevered pulses of my brain
 Drink up your cooling dews like balm,
 And life grows pure and sweet again;
 And the wild fancies of the day
 Like hues of cloud-land melt away.

He closed the book with the ejaculation, "I don't like that last stanza."

"And why?"

"Because it isn't natural—it isn't healthy—it isn't true."

"How do you know it isn't true?"

"I think I may say decidedly, I know it is not. I know the author of these verses. I have been acquainted with the author of these verses for some time; and I would stake any amount against anybody who came to me and declared the young woman who wrote these verses to be a morbid, sickly, sentimental young woman. Why, she isn't yet twenty years old! she never had a heavy cross in her life, not even a cross in love,—I don't think she was ever in love. What can she know of '*fevered pulses*?' If her brain is disordered, better send for a doctor at once. What has she to do with '*wild fancies*?' Why, reality ought to be enough for her,—youth, health, the faculty of enjoying everything—friends, lovers, beauty—no cares, no anxieties, no degrading poverty. Why, in Heaven's name, can't she enjoy herself! What business has she to let a troop of '*wild fancies*' into her soul to disturb her peace? Tell me that, young lady."

"I am sure I can't answer for her. Besides, you forget that you made me promise not to give an opinion."

"Until I had finished reading, you will recollect. Well, I won't press you. You may be in her confi-

dence; but if you are her true friend, you will try to get all this morbidness out of her. Now I want you to go to her from me, and tell her that I read her verses, and liked them. They give promise of better things; and just so far as they are natural and healthful, I consider them excellent. Tell her all this as coming from me, in a fatherly sort of way, and then urge that, when she feels brain-sick, and fancy-sick, she had much better go out and take a long walk—better flirt with one or more of her lovers, or sit at home with old Content Parsons; better take a nap; in fact, better do anything—than write under such conditions. Tell her the world is full enough of false and sickly sentimentality. If her emotions boil up unhealthily, and must have vent, tell her to go off into some great, dense forest, and talk it out all by herself. Words spoken are air, but written are—what shall I call them? Falsehoods, very often; at any rate, if they are not true, health-inspiring, hopeful, cheerful words, they had better never be preserved in this or any other form. Will you tell her this?"

"I will."

"Don't do it harshly, now. Do it just as I would if I could come near enough to her."

"And how can I know how you would speak? Why don't you tell her yourself?"

"Simply, my dear young lady, because I am a tender-hearted man, and I am afraid of hurting her young feelings. You look incredulous. I see the lurking spirit of ridicule on your lips. Nevertheless, it is the truth. If there is one thing on earth I am afraid of, it is of a young, beautiful girl, particularly when she writes poetry, and has '*wild fancies*.'"

"Perhaps you are afraid she may let loose some of her wild fancies on you?"

"Heaven forefend! But we won't argue that point. You promise to do what I ask you? You promise to give her my messages, with my love?"

"I promise; and now, if you have done with *her*, please tell *me* two things. Where did you get the verses, and where is Mrs. Sinclair?"

"I found the verses neatly written on a sheet of gilt-edged paper, and laid between the pages of this magazine which I hold in my hand. I asked your friend and my friend, Mrs. Sinclair, if I might read them, and she granted me the boon. She went out about an hour ago on a mission. All women must have a mission, you know. Hers seems to be "to heal the broken-hearted, and bind up their wounds." I know of no person so skillful in that kind of missionary work as she, although she may not have the credit of it among the very select and elect of the community. You and I know it is true. She has now gone on a mission of love to that gloomiest of all gloomy places, Mr. Thirkield's den. I believe if she were to carry her gentle presence into a den of lions, they would crouch down at her feet. Still, I should be sorry to have her risk it. You know the Thirkields?"

"I know Laura; she was my companion at Miss Rosina Parsons's school."

"I have seen her also. Terrible young woman, that Miss Laura Thirkield! Aspiring young woman! Full of genius! full of power! She is going home with Mrs. Sinclair, as governess to the two little girls."

"I am surprised! Mrs. Sinclair never mentioned it. I am delighted! How happy she will be!"

"Who — Mrs. Sinclair?"

"No, Laura. Poor Laura! She has had such a hard life!"

"And do you think it the highest happiness an ambitious young woman can aspire to, earning a living by teaching two undisciplined little children?"

"O no, but" —

"But she can't help it; she must live, — everybody must, be he or she ever so proud and ever so aspiring. Still, I think the poor girl will be happier than she can be here."

"I can't understand how Mrs. Sinclair gained access to Mr. Thirkield's family. So many have made advances, and been repulsed."

"Probably no one before was so fortunate as to hit upon the right way of approach."

"It never seemed to me there was a right way."

"There is always a right way, my dear young lady. Never despair of finding it, where you feel that you can do good or impart happiness. It is the cursed meddling with private and personal matters, from curiosity, Miss Maggie, not charity, that makes people so often fail of doing good. We know that Mrs. Sinclair has tact; we know she has everything kind and womanly in her nature. We can testify to that, can't we?"

"Indeed we can."

"And we always will testify to it, when we hear any one say aught to the contrary?"

"Of course we will."

"Now don't forget it, Miss Maggie. There is a sin of silence, as well as a sin of slander. It is difficult to decide which is worse. It is, to my thinking, as heartless, as dastardly a thing to listen to a false report or judgment of our friend, without speaking boldly in his defense, as it is to go behind his back and malign him. Never forget, my dear young lady, that there is

a sin of silence, though it may not be so common among your sex as the opposite one of slander. But it is quite dusk. You must not go back alone. I will escort you to your domicile."

We walked together for the first time alone.

"You will speak a good word for me to your friend, the young poetess?" I promised to do so. "And, be sure not to forget my love, when you deliver my messages. They might seem a little harsh; for I presume that, like all poetesses, she is somewhat sensitive to criticism. Here we are at the gate, and there stands a very handsome young man ready to greet you the moment you enter. Good-night."

Mr. Yorke turned back, and Paul Breton came forward to meet me.

CHAPTER XII.

THE moon had risen as I parted from Mr. Yorke at the gate, and its light fell full upon Paul's face as he advanced to meet me. I greeted him with the cordiality of an old friend; and we walked arm in arm to the house, and entering the little parlor, which was vacant, sat down together by the window. He told me of his father's death, which had been long looked for, and alluded in a delicate manner to the changes in our household, which he knew must be painful to me, but which he hoped would not make me permanently unhappy.

I confessed that it would have been painful under any conditions to see another in my dear father's place, but that Mr. Parsons had always been personally disagreeable to me, and of course it was hard to be reconciled to his constant presence. He was aware, he said, that I did not fancy Mr. Parsons, which was not surprising; but he hoped that when I came to know him, I might esteem him for his excellence of character. Report, or rather tradition, asserted that he was handsome as a young man; and he supposed my mother must have looked upon him with that romance which a woman never wholly disconnects from the man who has loved her. "I hoped," he said, "the fact of that early love might have redeemed him in your estimation, particularly as he is a thoroughly good man."

"I do not admit even that," I replied. "He stands high in the church, I know; but for all that, I prefer men who have not such a reputation for sanctity. From what little knowledge I have of Eastfield saints," I said, with considerable irritation of manner, "I confess to a decided preference for sinners."

Paul looked very grave, and said, with a solemnity which seemed to me quite uncalled for, "I think you are talking at random."

"No, indeed I am not," I replied. "I have had so much of what is called religion talked to me and at me, heard so much backbiting and abuse, seen so many lank, long, vinegar faces, after the pattern of my step-father's, it has brought me to the conclusion that what goes by the name of religion is either a counterfeit, or people have made some great mistake about it. I find those who are called sinners, among my acquaintance, do as much good, make those about them more happy, and are a great deal happier themselves, than the righteous."

"And who are the sinners, as they are called?" he asked.

"Well, Aunt Rebecca for one, Mrs. Sinclair for another, Mr. Yorke for another, and myself, perhaps the worst of all."

"Who is Mr. Yorke?" he asked. "I have never heard of him."

"Mrs. Sinclair's friend."

"And yours?"

"Yes, and mine," I replied. "I like him very much. I like him, I think I may say, better than almost any man I ever saw. It was Mr. Yorke who accompanied me home from Mrs. Sinclair's this evening."

"I should like to know him, and Mrs. Sinclair also. Do you think I should like them as much as you do?"

"That depends upon what you mean when you talk about good people. You see, Paul, there's such a difference of opinion about these matters. Now, you know the pious people of Eastfield keep Sunday very strictly. Every family, as a matter of duty, begins at Saturday night to prepare for Sunday. And this is what preparation for Sunday means. All work is put aside, all cheerful, pleasant talk hushed up, Bibles and sermons and tracts got out; and by and by every one gets sleepy over them, and goes to bed an hour or two earlier than usual; which only goes to prove that their religious duties are very wearisome, and make them stupid, and don't agree with them. Then Sunday morning, in order to make the day shorter, I suppose, every member of the family lies in bed an hour longer than usual, gets up with a long face, reads sermons and tracts till meeting-time, goes to meeting, and comes home looking more solemn than ever. Then the different members, old and young, take up their tracts and sermons to read till meeting-time in the afternoon; and after meeting is over, all come home, and those who can sleep, do sleep; because, you know, tracts and sermons, indulged in too long, make one very heavy; and Sunday being a very long day, the only way to shorten it is to take a long nap, sleep perhaps till sundown, when every face relaxes, and the young people's become very short, because Sunday is over."

"Now, Mrs. Sinclair doesn't keep Sunday after this fashion. She goes to meeting always in the morning, and sometimes in the afternoon; but she is just as bright and cheerful Sundays as on other days, and for

ought that I can see, she is just as good, and does as much good in the world, as any member of Mr. Penfold's church."

"Is she a professor?"

"If you mean by that, 'Does she belong to Mr. Penfold's church?' no, she doesn't. I am not quite sure she belongs to any church. Perhaps we had better not discuss these subjects, Paul. We never shall agree."

"Never, Maggie? It would make me very unhappy if I thought so."

"You are not likely to come to my way of thinking, Paul, and I know I shall never grow to yours. Every feeling of my heart revolts at Mr. Penfold's and Mr. Parsons's religion. I think Miss Content Parsons is worth a dozen such men; and yet they shut her out from communion. But don't let us talk about it. Positively I cannot. I have my own thoughts; very serious thoughts too. I am not indifferent to religion. I want to be good, and to go to heaven when I die; but I want to be happy here. I want to enjoy all there is to enjoy in this world."

"You do not think religion would hinder your enjoyment of everything innocent, do you?"

"But what do you call innocent? You say, or rather Mr. Penfold says, 'It's wicked to dance, it's wicked to go to parties, love dress, or to love the world at all.' In fact, it's wicked to do anything we especially like to do. Don't let us talk about it any more."

"Suppose, then, we go out for a walk. The moon shines as bright as day. Will you go?"

"I shall be delighted, if Aunt Rebecca will sit up for us. I will call her."

I went to her room, and she promised to do as I wished, but cautioned me not to stay out long.

We walked through the village until we reached the outskirts of a grove, the favorite resort of the young people of Eastfield.

"Shall we enter?" Paul asked. "O Maggie, don't draw back. I must talk to you. I could not stay away from you any longer." All this time he was gently forcing me into the wood until we came to a rustic seat, upon which he begged me to rest a little while, and sat down beside me.

There was a painful silence of some moments. To me they seemed hours. I remembered the declaration he made to me the last evening of our stay at Maplewood. We were then but children. Now, I felt myself a woman, and I saw he was no longer a boy.

I dreaded to hear what I knew he was going to say. But he said it, repeating over again the story of his love, with a manly earnestness that compelled me to listen. Alas! there was no response in my own heart. Nothing, nothing but sisterly affection. When he told me that his studies would soon be finished, and that he hoped to be settled over his father's parish at Maplewood, and in the same breath poured out the love which had grown within him from earliest boyhood, and which had become a part of his very life, I felt only sorrow that it should be so. Very, very different was my present ideal of life than to settle down, the wife of a poor minister, among the plain, homespun people of Maplewood. Not that I felt any certainty of attaining my high ideal; but to have relinquished the possibility of it would have been worse than death. Unconsciously, and even while reproving myself for doing so, I compared Paul with Mr. Yorke. Yet

what was Mr. Yorke to me, more than a friend? Was he not old enough, nearly, to be my father?

Then, humiliated in my secret soul that I had dared to let my imagination suggest other than the relations of simple friendship for Mr. Yorke, I tried to bring myself to the present reality. Here beside me was a noble, true heart, which had been wholly mine for many years. Of the future I knew nothing. It might and it might not realize my expectations. The past — those years associated with my early home and affection for Paul — was something real. I wished for the moment I had never met Mrs. Sinclair or Mr. Yorke, for truly I knew that association with them had destroyed my relish for simple pleasures, and made common life insipid. I could only repeat, which I did in all sincerity, the language of my heart. "Paul, you are too good for me."

"You told me a little while ago, Maggie," he said, "you loved sinners best. If you knew me for what I am, and as I really am, you might love me more. If you knew me as I know myself, you would know that I was enough of a sinner even for you to love, and perhaps you would love me. Don't say I am too good for you. Don't humiliate me. With you, I feel that I can aspire to all goodness; without you, I scarcely dare think what may become of me. You talk about saints, and you look at all the long, lank faces around you, and think religion made them so unlovely. No, dearest Maggie, it is not that, it is the want of it — the want of it in life's terrible struggles and disappointments — that leaves such hard lines on the face. It is because men *have* made a mistake, and *haven't* found the genuine thing, and have let disappointments gnaw their very heart-strings. O Maggie, can't we help one another to be truly good and truly happy?"

"Paul," I replied, "I am going to talk to you plainly. I don't wish to make myself out a whit better than I am. I confess I am strangely bewildered when I try to make clear to my own mind what right and wrong are. As I said before, Mrs. Sinclair seems to me a good woman; and yet she lives in and enjoys the world. She seems to love God, and to be governed by principle; and yet she loves dress, and all the beautiful things that money can buy. She is, in short, what my step-father calls worldly; and yet I know she goes about doing good, and making people happy. I don't think she spends more time and thought in dressing well, than some of our good people in dressing ill; but she does not think the exercise of taste in dress a sin, which they do; at least one might reasonably infer so, from the severe criticism passed upon her, and which she does not deserve. It is a strange world. Who is to know — indeed, how is any one to know — the right way to live? The only way to settle the question is to live it out, and that is what I hope and mean to do. I have a presentiment that I shall suffer a great deal in this world, and buy experience very dearly; at the same time, I know that I can only learn by my own experience, and I think I am willing to take the suffering. I know that I must take it, willing or not. I should not be contented to marry and settle down in Maplewood, and I am not fit to be a minister's wife. Let us continue to be what we have always been, — friends. Don't ask anything more."

He replied sadly, "It shall be as you wish. I will say nothing more of love at present. We are both young, and both need the test of experience. I thought I could not leave you without a final decision,

but now I do not wish to ask it. I will not even ask you to give me hope. I ask nothing but that you will think of me as a friend, meet me as a friend, and that you will forget my presumption. I will not keep you here longer. Your Aunt Rebecca will be waiting for you."

I saw it was only by the strongest effort that he spoke so calmly. I did not know whether to be glad or sorry that he did not ask me to permit him to hope. We parted on the door-step. He left Eastfield the next morning, and I did not see him again.

Restless and troubled in mind, I strolled over to see Miss Content. I did not exactly propose to myself to make her the depositary of my secrets; but when my heart was full, I turned as by a natural instinct to her.

It was my habit to run in to the old Parsons mansion whenever I passed that way, and, in fact, I passed that way whenever I went out for a walk. The house occupied a central position in the very heart of the village; and, whatever the errand or the apology which led me from home, whether a shopping expedition or a rural stroll, I must needs pass that well-known corner, or go a long distance round to reach my destination. There was a welcoming look in that massive street door, and the broad, cheery, sunshiny windows, I could not withstand. I loved the odor of the lilac bushes and syringas that grew in the front yard. I loved the beds of mignonette and sweet-pea that bordered the graveled path to the front door. I loved the tall hollyhocks and sunflowers that adorned the kitchen garden, and the beds of asters and dahlias which were Aunt Content's pride and glory. I loved all these the more, from their association with her. While Miss Rosina was busy within doors in teaching the young idea how to shoot, Aunt Content was train-

ing and petting and crooning over these children of the summer hours, and reaping her reward as she went along.

But for a few days she had been missing at the hours when she was wont to be with her darlings. Two or three times I passed, and had not seen her. Now I entered at the open door, and could not find her. On inquiry, I learned that she was not quite as well as usual, and kept her room. In her room I sought her, and was admitted. She sat in her high-backed rocking-chair, reading — not the Bible, not the volume of tracts which from time immemorial had lain on the light stand at the head of the bed, but — a novel. "I have caught you, aunty," I said. "You can't hide it now. You are just as silly and just as sinful as we young girls, and you may as well own up. What would Mr. Penfold say, if he knew it? To pretend sickness, and steal off up stairs with a novel, — a love-story too, I declare, — nothing more nor less than a love-story! Ah, dear, old, foolish, cunning aunty! How could you answer Mr. Penfold, if he should remonstrate with you? What an example to set a simple young girl like myself!"

"Wall, since you've fairly caught me," she replied, "I may as well confess fust as last, I'm the greatest hand to git hold of sech books you ever see. I allers did like 'em, and I allers expect to like 'em, and I don't see as there's any harm in't. They never hurt me as I'm aware of, and they do go right home to a cretur, some of 'em. Whose concern is it if I do read sech books?" she exclaimed, with an earnestness, that looked like defying the whole world. "Ain't I old enough to know what I want, and what's good for me? And it's so pleasant like to jest forgit every-

thing that's kinder hard and dull; not that I mean to complain, you know, but there's a dreadful sameness in life somehow, — jest goin' on the same round every day, and day after day, — nothin' very hard mebbe; but kinder tiresome like, and wearin' on the spirits. Wall, everybody gits out of conceit with life once in a while, and then it does a heap of good to git out of the old rut, and make b'lieve you're somebody else. And then the kind o' folks ye meet in books somehow fit inter your own notions, and it's pleasant to make their acquaintance. Sometimes I fancy I'm one, and sometimes another, jest as I happen to feel. And it's so good to hear the thing brought out in words that you've tried to say a thousand times, and couldn't. I tell ye what it is, child, I've got that deep sometimes in these 'ere scenes and picturs, and so mixed up as 'twere with the people I'm readin' about, that I forgit who I am and where I am. I forgit how time flies; and if it happens, as it does now and then, that somebody calls out it's time to stir up the cakes, or pare the apples, or something of the sort, why I seem to wake right up out of a dream, and it's like coming back from some other world. Now if there's any harm in't, I hain't found it out yit; and I guess I'll keep on till I do, jest now in particular, while I'm feelin' kinder weakly. I think it's good for me to forget my aches and pains."

"I agree with you, aunty, I think so too. And who has a better right to the indulgence than yourself? Your life has been pretty much all work."

"Wall, it's been a good deal after that sort, I'm free to confess, tho' I don't complain. It's better all work than no work. Now, I wouldn't really change places with any of these creturs that I like to read about.

There's something in everybody's life, hard as it may be, that makes 'em like it better the longer they hold on to it; and, what is stranger still, the longer a cretur holds on to life, the better they know how to prize it. We're curious bein's; and I'm glad to feel that He who made us, comprehends us, for I'm sure we can't comprehend our own natur. The feeblest of us has got something too deep for human comprehension. Now in this ere book, although I am all wrought up with the story, and the ins and outs of it keep my mind on the stretch, it's the human natur in it, after all, that makes me like it. All round the world, wherever we go, there's a heavin' and a wailin' like as of a great ocean of human life, a goin' up and up, to meet somethin', and to git an answer to the question, What are we, and where are we goin'? Now here's this young girl I've been readin' about till the tears jest rolled down my old cheeks like rain, jest to see how great her natur grew when she began to love, and how that love carried her through everything. Now there's something in every human heart as must answer to such love as that. 'Tain't no make b'lieve — it's a mighty power; words can't paint it, but the few touches they give's enough, — the heart'll fill up what's wantin'. But how I run on, like an old simpleton as I am! I warrant you're laughin' at me."

"No, indeed, aunty," I replied. "I'm drinking in every word you say. It's all as true as gospel, only I dont quite feel it yet. I suppose I'm not old enough."

She turned to me with one of her quizzical looks, and said, "Now, don't try to throw dust in yer old aunty's eyes. Hain't I known what's been goin' on? Didn't Rosiny tell me all about it? It's plain to see what's the matter with my pet this morning," she

added, with a very knowing look. "You're a pooty lucky young woman."

"I lucky?" I exclaimed. "How am I lucky?"

"In havin' sech a spruce-lookin' beau, and such a promisin' young man as he is too."

"For once in your life, aunty," I said earnestly, "you are all wrong. Paul Breton is a good, dear friend, but he is not what you call a beau."

"I'm sorry for it, child."

"Why so?"

"Because he's a nice, handsome young man, and loves ye."

"Even if that were true, and I didn't love him?"

"Why then, of course it wouldn't be right to encourage him."

"Aunty, I want to be rich. I want to live in the world, and have a nice time. I couldn't be a poor minister's wife."

"Wall, I don't know as that's strange. You're young. The world has a great many attractions to us before we've found it out, and we all of us have to find it out for ourselves; and, after all, that's the best way, though many folks find, to their cost, it's a pooty hard way."

"That is what I expect, dear aunty. I expect to find it out for myself, and perhaps to my sorrow."

"Wall, what can we say, who've done the same, or would have done it, if we'd had a chance. It's an awful solemn thing, how God lets us have our own way, though He must know where it'll lead us. He lets us stumble along, and He lets us fall, agen and agen, just 'cause He knows it's the only way to deal with his obstinate and ignorant children. And when ye look at it, don't it seem the best way? It's a great deal bet-

ter to let the evil in a cretur work out than to smother it up. 'Tain't no worse to do a thing sometimes than to hanker arter it; that is, if we can't subdue the will, and won't see that it's wrong. Of course, now, I ain't speakin' of sins. I'm only speakin' of the nat'ral loves of the human heart, and I'm only reasonin' accordin' to my own light, and what seems to me God's dealin's with us. He lets us have our own way when nothin' else'll teach us, and He lets us do wrong, and suffer for it.

"Now, it's nat'ral that you should want to have money. Money's a good thing, tho' it won't buy peace of mind. And poverty ain't pleasant. It's a cross, and it's a kind of a cross that chafes folks more'n 'most any other kind o' trouble, because it's a perpetual cross. There's no let up to it. It hampers ye all day, and haunts ye all night, till ye git used to it; and it's mighty hard for some folks to git used to it. As I says to Rosiny, 'Poverty's a curse.' Says she, 'No, 'tain't, if you know how to use it.' 'Wall,' says I, 'if you've found out a way, I wish you'd jest impart the secret. It's a pity ye couldn't bottle up yer experience and peddle it out to them that's flounderin' about, not knowin' which way to turn.' This was a great while ago, when we fust lost our property.

"Wall, I'll tell ye exactly what Rosiny said. 'Content,' says she, 'what's the use goin' round makin' up a poor mouth and lettin' everybody into yer private affairs? Hain't you got no family pride? Hain't ye got no self-respectin' dignity about ye? Don't ye know yer jest openin' the door to all sorts of impertinent curiosity? Don't ye know it gives everybody the advantage over ye to take 'em into yer confidence? Ain't there many a one at this minnit rejoicin'

at the downfall of what they call yer aristocratic pride? and you'll give 'em more nuts to crack, will ye? There's no use bringin' the skeleton out of yer closet, and settin' it before folks. Is it sympathy you want? What good'll it do ye when ye git it? Ten chances to one 'taint genuine; and if it is, it's a fountain that soon dries up if ye keep drawin' on it. No,' says she.

'The only thing to do is to put the best foot foremost, and respect yourself. It's gratifyin' enough to the pride of human natur to exult in other folks' misfortunes, and to set their own prudence and foresight agen you, and make out that it's somehow your own fault that you've been unfortunate.'

"Now jest look at Rosiny, child, how she's borne herself up, and carried us all along with her. 'I'll submit to God,' says she, 'and kiss the rod that smites me. I'll try to be humble towards Him, and I won't complain. I don't think He means to crush us, but to make us strong; and He gives us the mind to think, and the power to work our way out of our misfortunes, and to make our trials steppin'-stones, as it were, to better things.' Now I've lived long enough to see that Rosiny was right. She not only lifted herself up, but she carried us all up with her. 'Tain't everybody that's as strong as she is. Very few folks know that woman. And when she was young and handsome and admired, she was jest like you. Folks called her worldly-minded; and many a one that was jealous of her rejoiced in the downfall of what they called her pride. My dear child, I wish I was wise enough to give ye jest the right advice, but I ain't. Whatever ye do, and wherever ye go, don't forget yer Heavenly Father. Don't do anything the silent monitor within yer own heart disapproves of. Don't stoop to any

meanness or any falsehood. Don't be afraid of yer Heavenly Father, only afraid to sin against his love. O child, when ye grow to understand that love, you're all safe. Nothin'll harm ye then, and some time I'm goin' to tell ye a little story. I'm thinkin' of the old, times lately. I find myself goin' back to 'em very often and I kinder long to speak of 'em. But not jest now. You'll come again soon."

I promised, and went home, as I always did from her presence, with a genial warmth about my heart, that made me feel at peace with everybody.

CHAPTER XIII.

It wanted but one month of Mrs. Sinclair's departure. I had gained the consent of my mother and Aunt Rebecca to return with her to New York for the winter. Fortunately the final decision was not left to Mr. Parsons, or I should have been compelled to relinquish the project; for he was bitterly opposed, not only to Mrs. Sinclair, but to the social atmosphere in which she moved. But I did not think it necessary to consult with him, and it was not a difficult task to overrule my mother; for, I am pained to confess it, her influence over me was essentially lessened since her marriage, and she seldom offered any resistance to my wishes. Before entering upon that new phase of life, my heart was saddened, and my spirit subdued, by the illness and death of my dear Miss Content. As I wrote an account of my last interview with her at the time, I will transcribe it to these pages; for, although my recollection of the sad event is still fresh, and cannot be effaced, I experienced a peculiar satisfaction in reviewing the other day the minute details of those last few weeks in which I was with her almost constantly.

Several days had passed, in which I had not seen her, neither had heard of her increasing indisposition, having been so much taken up with my own affairs, and preparations for the winter, that I had no time or thought for anything beside. She sent for me.

I was very much shocked at the change which one week had wrought in her.

"You didn't know your aunty was sick, did ye, dear child?" she said; "wall, how should ye? Never mind, I'm better for the sight of ye. I keep about as well as I can, though I do feel pooty slim, and have for a long time, though I hain't said much about it. But, bless your dear heart, I'm better, jest for the sight of ye. And now tell yer aunty why ye hain't been here for so long."

I explained to her that I had been making up new dresses, and arranging my wardrobe for a winter in New York city, by invitation from Mrs. Sinclair.

"And ye're very happy to go, I s'pose?" she added.

I confessed that I was very happy, and that I expected to be very gay, and perhaps I should fall in love with somebody and come home engaged; "and then, Aunt Content," I said, "you shall dance at my wedding."

She shook her head. "No, dear child," she said, "I shan't dance at your wedding; I shan't be here when you come back. But we won't talk about that. You know your aunty's ready to go when the Master calls; so you won't feel bad when ye hear I'm gone."

"I hope, aunty, you are mistaken," I said. "Everybody must be sick sometimes, and you must take your turn. I don't see why you shouldn't get well as other people do. Now don't talk of not being here when I come back. I know you will. Why, you are a young woman yet!"

"Wall, we won't talk about it, for that ain't what I sent for ye to come for. I'm thinkin' so much about the old times that I get a kind o' longin' to talk about

'em. You asked me once to tell ye my story. Would ye like to hear it now?"

"Better than anything you could tell me," I replied.

"I don't exactly know how to begin," she said with a touching diffidence of manner. "I ain't used to talkin' about myself, and somehow it don't come easy."

"Then pretend you are talking about somebody else. I'll begin for you. 'There was once a young girl whose name was Content Parsons. She was lovely, and as good as she was beautiful.'"

"Hush, child."

"No, I want to get you started. Don't interrupt me just yet. 'Everybody loved her, but one person loved her better than all the rest, and his name was, — I forget what his name was'—

"Harry."

"Yes, Harry; 'and he was in every way worthy of her.' Tell me how he looked, aunty."

"Wall, child, sit down here, and I guess I can go on. Harry Lefferts was his name. His father was Squire Lefferts, and he was an only child. Our families was intimate, and we'd kinder grown up together, as 'twere. He used to come almost every day to see us, and father thought his visits was meant for Rosiny. She had allers been fust, and it came sorter nat'ral for all of us to give way to her. Now, if I wander, child, you must jest bring me back, for sometimes I git lost, as it were, thinkin' about the old by-gones.

"Wall, Harry Lefferts had been in love with me from the time we was children, when he used to drag me on his sled, and go with me to the singin'-school, and yit nobody at home ever guessed it. Other folks

did, but not the folks at home. I sometimes felt as if I did wrong to keep it dark, because, you see, if the truth had been told, Rosiny would have been saved a heap o' trouble, for she sot everything by Harry. There was another man in love with her, but she wouldn't so much as look at him. He'd been in the store from a boy, and father sot the world by him; but Rosiny allers thought so much of family. Don't ye know, that to this day, she keeps the coat-of-arms hung up over her bed? and she can tell ye jest what every mark on't means.

"Wall, Mr. Farley, — that was the name of Rosiny's lover, — had made a lot of money; and when father died we all were poor, because, ye see, he indorsed for a friend, and had to pay, which took most all his savins; and Farley offered to take the bizness and go on with it, and keep the family together in the old homestead, if Rosiny'd only say yes, which she wouldn't do. Now, the secret of it all was her love for Harry. Where was I? I keep lettin' down a stitch, and I'm afeerd you can't get the run of the story." I assured her that I could, and she proceeded: —

"It happened one night Rosiny went to bed earlier than usual with a headache, and left me to look round and lock up, as we allers did, jest the last thing. As I sat knittin' all by myself, and the winder open that looked out in the garden, I heerd a rustlin' in the bushes, and before I knew whether to be scairt or no, somebody spoke out close to the winder, and called me by name. I looked up, and there stood Harry.

"'Conny,' says he, 'I'm off to-morrow with the new recruits. There's goin' to be a big fight down somewheres round the seaboard. The British are massin' there in great numbers, and Cap'n Allen is

ordered off with his men to jine Turner's corps, and I must go along. I can't go without speakin' to ye, for God only knows what's to be the end on't. So jest come out, and we'll sit on the old stump by the side of the well, in the shadder, where nobody can hear the sound of our voices, for I must talk to ye. You can keep watch of the house from there; but if I come in, possibly we may wake up the family a-talkin'.

"I never thought of resistin' him any more'n I should an angel; so I went out and jined him, and we sot down there together. The candles went out one after another in the houses round, for the nine-o'clock bell had rung, and all honest folks was gone to bed except us two. What we found to talk about, I don't know as I can tell; but you can guess. Although he had told me many times before how much he loved me, it seemed as if I heerd it then for the fust time, for the impression it made on me; for it was 'love ye and leave ye;' and the joy and anguish was so mixed up, that between the two, I thought my heart must be torn to pieces. And yit I was happy, — yes, and hopeful too; for I thought, 'God is so good and so lovin', He can't separate us forever. He'll spare him to come back to me, and I won't borrow trouble.'

"And many, as ye may suppose, was a-trustin' and prayin' that night jest as I was — mothers blessin' their sons, and wives their husbands! Wall, what better can we do at sech times than jest commit those we love to Him as is the Father of us all? Nothin', child; we can't do nothin' else; and, after we've done that, we must try and not worry.

"'I want you to promise, Conny,' says he, 'that when I get home, you'll be my wife; and I want you should tell the truth about it to everybody, for that's

the best way. I'm afeered we haven't done exactly right, by not comin' out before folks, and speakin' plain about it. It was a dear little secret to keep all to ourselves; but I'm afeered it wasn't jest the right thing, and I want to make a clean breast of it before I go away. We can't undo any harm we may have done, but we can be wiser and kinder for the futur'.

"I knew he was thinkin' of Rosiny, but we neither of us said so. I promised to do as he wanted me to; and when we began to think it wan't exactly the right thing to be sittin' there any longer, we got up without sayin' a word and went back to the house, and he left me.

"There's no use tryin' to tell how hard that partin' was for both of us. I thought I couldn't live through it, and all that follered. But, my child, we can live through an incredible amount of sufferin'. 'Tain't easy to die, even when we long to, and pray to. God don't let us have our own way. He holds us up against our will, and after a time we thank Him for't.

"Dear child, it was a sad partin', but the meetin' was sadder yet."

"Then he came back?" I asked.

"Yes, dear, he came back, crawled back as I may say, to die. Poor boy! He was foremost in the battle, and escaped without a wound. But he took sick, and had only strength to come home. And that was so much harder than if he could ha' died full of glory from the wounds received in the cause of his country.

"I was at his ma's the very day he got there. I al-lers went there every day to keep her up; for she was a poor sickly cretur, and it eenamost broke her heart when he went away. One of his feller-soldiers came along with him. O! he was so weak! He fainted

clean away while we were gettin' him to bed. We thought for sure he was gone ; but after a little, he revived, and knew us all, and his face was beamin'. 'My prayer is answered,' says he. 'I've lived to get home. My prayer's more than answered, for, Conny, I didn't dare expect to find you here. You won't go away now,' says he, 'till I die.'

" 'Till you git well,' says I. 'Don't talk of dyin'. Don't give up. God ain't a-goin' to let you die?'

" 'O Conny,' says he, — and such a look of misery went over his face! — 'don't try to cheat yourself or me. I've gone through the agony once; don't try to bring me back, and make me go all over it agen. Don't spile the little time we have together. The doctors gave me over long ago. Love gave me strength to git home; but even love can't conquer all things; (it can't conquer death,) Conny. But I'll tell you what it can do; it can conquer the terror of it; for there's something in such love as I feel for you, that makes me sure of immortal life. There's something that makes me understand God, and trust Him.

" 'Conny, I shan't have much longer to talk to you,' says he, 'and I want to say so much. Stoop down, for I must save my strength.'

" His mother stood one side of the bed, and I the other. He turned and looked at her, and says he, 'Mother, I've nothin' to say to her which you can't hear. I want ye both to hear me say, I die happy. I say this conscious that I must soon appear before my God. Conny, you and I have often talked about religion, and about the solemn realities of the world to come. And now I'm brought face to face with 'em; and I tell you, I die happy, and let that comfort you when I'm gone, and don't judge them hardly as may

say I hain't no ground for justification, because I don't belong to the visible church. I've many a time heerd the voice of my Saviour in the deeps of my own soul. I sought Him on the battle-field when I prayed for you, Conny, and I heard his blessed assurance, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you," and what's more, I believed it. Kiss me, mother; Conny, kiss me. Don't cry, and remember my last words. I die happy. I believe in God manifest in my Saviour.' Then he fell back, and said he wanted to sleep awhile; and we sat almost without breathing, and watched him. He dozed a little, and all of a sudden he started up and called for me. I stooped down close to him, and he whispered, 'Conny,' says he, 'you mustn't think it will make me any happier in heaven for you to go through life mournin'. Don't try not to love again. If some good man asks you to be his wife, don't let the memory of our love come between you and happiness. I can't bear to think of your warm heart livin' alone, with no one to take care of you when you git old, and no children to rise up and call you blessed. Let me shut my eyes now, and kiss me. I want to die prayin' for you.'

" He closed his eyes, and his lips moved. We were both watchin' him, and yet we didn't know when his spirit passed away. We started up, and found him gone. My very fust thought was gratitude that I'd been able to master my feelins all through. I'd heerd somewheres, how the sight of weepin' friends round kept the soul wrastlin' as it were with death; and I wouldn't let him see me cry, so he'd nothin' but peace at the last."

She stopped talking, and seemed lost in the memories her simple recital had awakened. "I am afraid you

are too weak to talk any more," I said through my tears.

"O no," she replied. "But I have a shrinkin' from what's to foller. My child, the hardest part of the story is to come."

"Could there be anything harder than to part with Harry?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes, dear. I didn't part from him; I felt that he was near me. But the funeral! O child, the remarks made at the funeral!"

"And what remarks could be made," I asked with indignation, "that would give you pain?"

"My child, poor Harry had never come forward to jine the church; and so his life, brave and noble and kind as it was, was made to serve as a warnin', not an example.

"I can't begin to tell you what was said. I never in my life saw a poor cretur in the agony his ma was, because, as she said, he'd left behind no assurance of salvation. She was afeerd to take comfort. He hadn't experienced religion in the regular way, and she did'nt dare to hope for his acceptance. Notwithstanding his lovely life, full of devotion to her, and kindness to everybody, she took on, and sorrered as those without hope. I went and stayed with her, but all I could say to comfort her didn't go for much. At last my feelins riz to such a pitch that I jest talked out what I felt.

"Says I, 'Nothing that those folks may say as "darkens the counsels of the Almighty with words without wisdom," is goin' to supersede the light which God has given me, and you, and everybody as comes to it, willin' to be taught,' says I. 'If sech a life as he led, that offered himself up to his country, and never was

known to do a mean or low action from the time he was a boy, — if sech a son as he was to you, sech a friend to the poor, so good, so brave, so truthful, — if all this goes for nothin', why then I don't b'lieve in religion.

"But it don't go for nothin'. Religion ain't a creed, it's a life; and what kind of a life? Who's to be the judge? Ain't He who told us not to judge, the One as ought to know best? D'ye think God don't know the best time for everybody to die, and d'ye think He's a-goin' to take anybody out of the world before the right time? If livin' longer was a-goin' to make Harry more ripe to die, don't ye think God would let him live longer? Besides,' says I, 'though he didn't talk much about his religious experiences, that ain't no sign he didn't have any thought about it. 'Tain't in some naturs to say much about their deepest feelins and wants; but I know he did think, and he did strive and pray to enter the strait gate. Why shouldnt we take him at his word? He wasn't afraid to die. Why should he be? I may say now what I never said before. I knew him better 'n anybody else in the world. And how dare anybody stand up and say that he, a young man jest steppin' as it were on the threshold of life, with the mornin' light a-shinin' in his eye and the love of God warmin' his heart, — how dare anybody say, when God singled him out to die, that it was to send him to everlastin' burnin'?"

"Now,' says I, 'I'm sorry for those as can't see as I do. I'm sorry for those who won't b'lieve the words of the Saviour, and set 'em up higher than anything man can utter. I'm sorry for those who are too timid, and too distrustful of God, to seek light and truth at the fountain-head. I'm sorry for them as is afraid to

seek after truth. But I'm sorrier most of all for them who undertake to explain God's dealings with us according to their own notions, and who pile up mountains of difficulty on our way to Christ. I'm sorry, but I can't help it. As for me, I can't be made wretched any more by anything they may say; for I've made up my mind that God wouldn't give us a revelation of himself, without at the same time givin' us an inward light to understand it; and He wouldn't have sent a Saviour as required any man, or any set of men, to interpret his teachings.' Well, after a little, Miss Lefferts got more reconciled."

"And you, aunty," I asked, "how did you — how could you bear it?"

"I had many sources of comfort, child, as well as many drawbacks. Now, it helped me to bear up, jest to see how Rosiny struggled. 'Twas harder for her than for me."

"I can't see it in that light," I replied. "I suppose I am too selfish."

"Wall, you see, she knew only a little while before he died how it stood with him and me. That was a great mortification like to her pride. Howsomever, I've often thought how much she was spared in not seein' us man and wife. When God takes away our loved ones, we kinder get used to livin' without 'em; but when we are brought to see one we love belong to another, there can't be a much keener sorrier than that. Rosiny was spared that. Still, as matters stood, we couldn't be of much comfort to each other. I couldn't speak to her of Harry, for she was so proud, it would have jest about killed her to think I suspected it; and I couldn't have talked out my own feelins, 'cause that would have aggravated hers. And so, instead of

growin' together, we grew apart, and we've always lived kinder apart, jest because we knew each other's secret sorriers, and couldn't talk 'em over.

"Wall, I needn't dwell any longer on that tryin' season. I was comforted. I thought, as everybody thinks when the waves of sorrier roll over 'em, that I should never see the light agin; and I found, as everybody else finds, that the light shines on jest the same when the storm passes away. For many weeks and months it was jest as much as I could do to live on from day to day. But bime-by, it came over me all of a sudden, how I was a-wastin' my life instid of growin' up to'rds Harry by doin' good and makin' my fellow-creturs happy. My heart was very tender and lovin' after that; and though I hadn't cared to talk with the minister, yet I felt that I wanted all the help I could git to hold me up, and so I sent for him, and told him I'd like to go to the Lord's table, if 'twasn't required of me to assent to things I didn't fully b'lieve. He asked me what things, and I told him. "'Tain't no use goin' over the whole ground agin', says I, 'but I can't read the Bible as you do, and on some pints we must differ; but,' says I, 'that don't seem a sufficient reason for keepin' away from Christ's table, and I want to go with my fellow-creturs and confess my Saviour before men.'"

"Well, the end of it all was, he told me he couldn't in conscience permit me to jine, but he would try and clear away my doubts, and bring me to a knowledge of the truth.

"Says I, 'What truth? for if you mean the truth as it is in Jesus, that's what I've been strivin' and prayin' to come to many a year, and I b'lieve God has given me light on those pints which are essential to salva-

tion. I'm a-tryin',' says I, 'to lead a Christian life, and I don't know any better way than to go to Christ for light and strength to do it.' We had a long talk; and he was sorry, I know, to refuse my request. I b'lieve he was a Christian, and meant right; but he was mistaken. I was very bitter against him at fust. 'What bizness has any one of God's creturs,' says I, 'to keep one away that wants to come? Isn't it the Lord's table, and don't He invite all of us as love Him to meet in remembrance of Him?'

"It's many, many years ago; and when I git up and go out, instead of jining my feller-sinners round that blessed table, I pray inwardly, 'Lord, hasten the time when all these barriers shall be broken down that men have set up between each other, and between their own souls and Thee.' Now I am goin' to tell ye what I've been thinkin' of for the last few days. I don't know the new minister even by sight, but they tell me he hain't set up any sech barriers. They tell me, in order to be a communicant at his meetin', it's only necessary to confess Christ, and to try and lead the life He led, not trustin' to yer own strength, but b'lievin that He's more ready to give than we are to ask. Now, if that's so, I think I'd like to go to the Lord's table in company with my feller-sinners once before I die. I've a long time made it my practice on that solemn day to retire to my own room, and set apart an hour, while others was partakin' of the sacrament in company, to communion with my Saviour alone. Alone I say, but 'tain't so. The sweetest hours of my life have been the hours so set apart; for I've felt the presence of my dear ones with me, jest as real as if I'd seen 'em. Still I can't shet out the longin' I have, once on earth to feel that I belong

somewhere, and to jine hands with my feller-mortals round Christ's table; and I want ye to speak to yer Aunt Rebecca to come here and talk with me about it. She's been a great student in her day; and perhaps she'll tell me what kind of a belief 'tis that keeps the new church, as they call themselves, together. You'll ask her to come and tell me all about it, won't ye?"

I promised her, and then took my leave; for I saw a burning spot on each cheek, which showed plainly that my poor darling had talked too long.

Aunt Rebecca went to see her the very next day; and it was arranged that Miss Content should accompany her to meeting the following Sunday, and receive the communion with the worshippers of the new society. The service as described by Aunt Rebecca was one of touching beauty and interest. With a handful of earnest and humble followers of Christ, the dear old lady received the sacred emblems of his body and blood, and friendly hands pressed hers in sympathy and love. I don't think an attempt was made by the new minister or any of his congregation to proselyte; and I am very sure, if there had been, it would have disturbed the serenity of her soul.

When I went to see her again, she was in her own little chamber. She welcomed me with her accustomed smile, but I could see a change for the worse in her appearance. She had failed within the few days of my absence.

"I'm more glad you've come than I can tell," she said. "There ain't many things left to be done, for I've been puttin' my house in order by spells, as I felt able; but there's one thing I can't do for myself, and I don't know anybody I'd rather have do it for me than you."

"Aunt Content," I said, sitting down beside her, "have you really made up your mind that you must die? Haven't you the least bit of hope, that you can get well?"

"My child, all things are possible with God," she replied, "and our Saviour raised the dead to life, you know."

"Now, the reason why I wish to know, is because I never talked with a person near death, and I want to know if you are afraid."

"Afraid!" she exclaimed. "Why should I be afraid? Who should I be afraid of?"

"Afraid of dying," I replied, — "not of what's to come after, but of dying. I have such a fear of that, aunty."

"And ain't it nat'ral enough you should have, you that's young and well and strong? And why should ye trouble yourself to think about dyin', child?"

"Because Mr. Penfold says we ought to think of it, and prepare for it."

"Wall, I say that if we were allers thinkin' about it, we couldn't prepare for't. Now, we've got to live till the right time comes for us to die, and we've got our life-work to do while we do live; and in order to do it faithfully and well, we've got to put our mind and heart in't, — fust to find out our work, and then to do it, day by day, hour by hour, and minit by minit. But life ain't all work. There's a play-time as is jest as necessary to us, as work. But the main thing is to keep the heart right towards God and our neighbor. Now, child, I never — after I knew I loved God — I never troubled my head any more'n I could help, about the futur', here or hereafter. I never thought about dyin'; my chief concern was about livin'; and if folks

try to do their best, day by day as it comes, it's about as much as they can attend to, without pesterin' themselves about what they orter do, and how they orter feel, when they come to die. God 'll take care of that. To be sure, nobody can help a-shrinkin' from the separation of soul and body. It's a mystery; and the more we think of it, the more of a mystery 'tis. Now, child, when I'm gone, you jest remember what I tell ye to-day. I ain't the least bit afraid to die; only, if the Lord's willin', I'd like to die sudden. I can't bear to give folks the trouble to take care of me and wait on me through a long sickness."

"I hope when my time comes," I said, "I shall feel as you do. I am very fond of living, and I want to enjoy a good deal of this world before I leave it. But you said you had something for me to do. What is it, aunty?"

"I'll tell you, dearie. You jest look in the left-hand corner of the top drawer of my burer, and you'll see a bag tied round with a blue ribbin."

I did as she desired, and handed it to her. She took it tenderly, and with her poor, wasted, and trembling fingers undid the string, and opened it. It contained another bag of blue silk. She handed it to me, requesting me to look within it. A curl of brown hair and a plain gold ring, — these were the treasures it contained.

"This, darling," she said, putting the ring on her finger, "is my weddin'-ring. I want you to put it on my finger when I'm in my coffin, and this curl, — jest lift up my shroud and lay it on my heart. Will ye do this for your aunty?"

"I promise you," I said solemnly, "that I will do it. This is Harry's hair?" I asked.

"Yes, I cut it off the night he died. He told me to. I've worn it every day since in my bosom. The ring I didn't wear on my finger, because I thought it would keep things fresh before Rosiny that orte be forgotten. She'd seen the ring on his finger."

"And how long ago did he give you this ring?" I asked.

"More'n forty years," she replied. "Mebbe you think that's a long time. Mercy on us! I remember when I used to think fifty was time to die; but I didn't feel a day older when I was fifty, than when I was twenty. Time ain't nothin'. Years ain't nothin'. I guess we're all young in heaven: I guess there ain't no wrinkles on the angels' faces. I allers had a feelin', — of course 'tain't nothin' more than a feelin', — but allers felt as though I should be handsome when I got there. We have to take homeliness here along with our other misfortunes and trials; but I guess there won't be any pinched-up old maids, or any old folks hobblin' round Paradise. Why child, it's jest as real to me that we're goin' to live agin, as 'tis that I'm settin' here. It's jest as real to me that I'm goin' to see Harry, and know him! and why shouldn't I be glad to go? But ye mustn't stay up here in this close room. I'll see ye again to-morrow."

Ah, dear Miss Content! To-morrow came, but she had gone — gone to that world to her so real. I saw her after she was laid in the coffin. I went into the darkened room to perform the holy offices she desired. I put the ring on the wedding finger, and laid the curl of hair upon her bosom. I stood and looked at her marble face, from which every trace of age had vanished. I knelt down beside the coffin. "O," I thought, "how happy could I be, if the future world

were as real to me as it was to her!" I tried to make it so, and to picture to myself the meeting of the lovers.

I learned from Aunt Rebecca that she wished the new minister to perform the funeral services. Most tenderly and beautifully did he portray her simple, child-like, loving life; and yet how little he had known of her personally! I felt that I had indeed been a favored one. How I loved to think of her! Even her quaint, old-fashioned dress, her peculiarities of speech and manner, were sacred to me! But that marvelous unselfishness with which she had gone through life, not asking sympathy for her own great sorrow, but fearful of touching with a careless hand the heart-wounds of another! And then I brought them before me, — the sisters, so unlike and yet so true, so harmonious, performing their separate duties so faithfully, pursuing each their separate orbits, and I wondered how it would be hereafter. Would they grow nearer to each other in spirit, in their march through the ages?

It was very dull at the old house after she had left it. Miss Rosina kept on with her school, though every quarter she said would be the last. But Sally, the house-maid, Aunt Content's special charge, had no skill to work without her who was the head. When I went out in the kitchen to comfort her, she broke clean down. "My waffles is all heavy," she said; "my cymbals don't come out shapely. I can't see what I'm doin' half the time for the mist like that swims before my eyes. I only hope that God'll let me foller her soon, for life hain't nothin' to offer now." Poor Sally! Time brought its gift of healing, and she still worked on.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE day came at last in which I was to bid good-bye to Eastfield. A winter of enjoyment lay before me in anticipation. What I was to do or be, what part I was to play, as yet only existed in imagination. I was to move in an atmosphere of enchantment; I was to see the gay and fashionable world; I was to be admired. O what visions passed before me of heroes and heroines of romance! I am quite sure it would be impossible for me now to revive the enthusiasm and keen sense of enjoyment with which I began my career of dissipation. Such enjoyment, so fresh, so exhilarating, can be experienced but once, and continues but a short season. A second winter could not have renewed it; and had the first been prolonged, my capacity would have been exhausted. Even before the season of gayety was over, I began to languish. At first I could not conceive of the ennui with which Mrs. Sinclair prepared, night after night and day after day, for her necessary and accustomed round of visiting and receiving visitors. It was no longer the pleasure, but the business of her life. The demands of society! What slavery, what drudgery it had become to her! She had outlived the triumph, the gratified vanity, the pleasing consciousness of acknowledged superiority; but she had found no other resource, knew no other life. Excitement had become a necessity to her, consequently she could not withdraw from it.

It will hardly be credited that before the expiration of my first winter, I was forced to acknowledge to myself that all enchantment had vanished. It was a repetition of the same nothingness. The chief zest in party-going after a few weeks was in dressing myself; but in dancing and the theatre I found inexhaustible delight.

I suppose I can in no better way give an idea of my life and feelings at that time than by extracts from my journal. Aunt Rebecca requested me, as a favor to her, to write at least once a week a record of what I did, felt, and thought. To my shame perhaps, yet truth compels me to confess that the only spare time I had, that was not stolen from the hours of sleep and needful rest, was on Sunday.

My eye rests at this moment upon the first page of my diary, written after I had fairly entered upon the dissipations of the winter.

JOURNAL.

Sunday. — It rains, and I can't go to church. I don't know as I should go if it did not rain, for I am completely worn out, and need rest. Worn out with what? Why, dressing and going to balls, dinner-parties, theatres, shopping, calls, entertaining gentlemen visitors, et cætera, et cætera.

Now, I was brought up with the impression that I ought to put away worldly thoughts from my mind on this day. I doubt if I had what would be called worldly thoughts before I came here. Fancies I had, and dreams, and undefined longings to know the world; but surely I knew nothing of it. I don't think I shall ever regret having come here; for I should never have been satisfied with our humdrum life at Eastfield with-

out having tried for myself what my step-father calls "the ways of the ungodly." Not that I admit for a moment the justice of that term of reproach, as applied to my friends here. (Still I can't help the feeling that to prolong such a life to eternity would be undesirable.) I can't help feeling that human beings, who must live forever, ought to have higher objects to live for. Nevertheless, I repeat I don't think I shall ever regret having come.

I find my brain in a complete tangle when I try to decide, as a matter of conscience, whether, for instance, I ought or ought not to be writing about worldly things to-day. Worldly things are not of necessity wicked things. How are we to draw the line? This reminds me of a little anecdote of Aunt Content, dear soul! and it strikes me that it is applicable to people in general, and just about as definite as many of the distinctions drawn by right-minded and excellent persons.

I went with her to buy a bonnet at the milliner's in Eastfield. Her eye rested admiringly on one decorated with a long ostrich plume. It was to be her best bonnet, which means, she was to wear it to meeting on Sundays. Long she looked at it, turning it round and round delightedly, trying it on with a coquettish dip of her head from side to side, a perfectly natural motion, — I've caught myself doing it time and again. Finally she took it off, and laid it down with a sigh. "Wall," said she, "it's mighty hard to draw the line, but I s'pose we must draw it somewheres, and I puts it at feathers, — so I guess I'll take this one;" and she pointed out a bonnet covered with bows of yellow ribbon and artificial flowers.

There's something so whimsical and unreasonable in

these distinctions that they take away from the dignity of the cause which they are intended to promote. Why are bows and artificial flowers less objectionable to be worn by Christians than an ostrich plume? If anything, why should not the ostrich plume be preferred, as a specimen of God's skill, instead of ribbons and flowers, which are man's device, imitations, and very often poor imitations, of his handiwork? There's nothing for a human being to do, but to decide according to the light within. I put it to my conscience now. "Is it right or is it wrong for me to be writing in my journal?" "Wrong," reply old traditions, and the teachings of the people at Eastfield. "Why wrong?" asks the irrepressible individual consciousness within me. "Because Sunday is a holy day." "Is it then a sin, and do I convict myself of sin, by doing what it is wrong to think and write about?" This is too knotty a point for my logic. I must draw the line somewhere. Well, like Aunt Content, "I puts it at feathers."

Suppose I put aside my journal, and sit down to think, or read some good book, since I cannot go to church. I am afraid I could not, by an effort of will, withdraw my thoughts from the particular channel in which they are inclined to flow this morning, and fix them on higher themes.

Life has not yet brought trial and disappointment to me. Circumstances have not forced me to reflect seriously. No hard necessity compels me to exertion. No one in particular claims my sympathy. The little troubles of my life are but passing shadows. The natural joyousness of my heart has never been repressed, and I cannot force myself to be serious. I am happy, and grateful to God that I am so. I know that my time of trial is to come, for I see it comes to

everybody; and when it is my turn to suffer, I hope I shall use and bear my troubles rightly, with God's grace helping me.

Now, I do not intend to attempt any minute description of any particular party or ball. These details I shall reserve to talk about. I have no genius for details. I take a wide sweep, and deal only in generalities. The rooms are all brilliant, the guests all elegantly dressed, the ladies all fascinating, the gentlemen all polite, the suppers all magnificent, the compliments all silly, the attentions all flattering. My country awkwardness is wearing away, my native wit grows every day sharper. I have ceased to blush when I am flattered, and receive the homage of the gentlemen as a matter of course. And I have learned thus much in one short month.

The last grand ball which was "graced by my presence" — I simply repeat the expression which was repeated to me just fifteen times, by fifteen different gentlemen — was the most magnificent affair I have seen yet. Mrs. Sinclair had the sole ordering of my dress for the occasion, and I looked better than I supposed possible. I paraded up and down before the long mirror in my dressing-room, and tried on my company airs. Doubtless if I were to try them on in Eastfield, I should be called affected. I don't plead guilty to the charge. They are company airs, that is all. One puts them on with one's company dress, and takes them off with the same. I laughed in my sleeve when I first looked round on a room full of simpering ladies; but before I left, I was simpering with the rest. The simper is by no means peculiar to city society. Many a respectable matron, and many a silly girl, even in Eastfield, knows it by heart. I believe it comes by

instinct. I think it grows out of the want of something to say. When I began to be conscious of simpering myself, I ceased to observe the simpering of others.

I don't think ten people in the room acted naturally. I fancied it would be a very ridiculous farce if one could only stop one's ears and watch the grimacing and attitudinizing without hearing a sound; so I slipped behind a screen, and quite unobserved, as I supposed, put my fingers in my ears. The picture was too comical. I asked myself, "Are these harlequins, or men and women?" My step-father would say, "Are they immortal souls?" Now that is looking upon society in too solemn an aspect. I should be inclined to retort, placing before me the vinegar aspect of some people I wot of, and ask the same question. I can as easily imagine an immortal soul looking smiling and happy as sour and solemn.

Immortal souls don't eschew all enjoyment and mirth and wit, do they? I should be very glad if every human soul could come forth naturally and truthfully. But I very much fear we should see faces not half so agreeable as those that simper around us.

I said there were probably no more than ten people in that room who had not put on their company face, and assumed their company voice, with their company dress. Out of those ten I should single Mrs. Sinclair and Mr. Yorke as the most conspicuous for naturalness and entire self-possession.

While I am writing on the subject of parties, I may as well note down a little incident, which ought perhaps to make me ashamed of my vanity and affectation, but only amuses me with its ridiculousness.

After having surveyed myself in full costume before

the glass in my own room, I went down-stairs to wait for Mrs. Sinclair. As I entered the brilliantly lighted parlor, I was startled to perceive a lady in full dress advancing to meet me. Her face looked familiar, yet I could not recall where I had met her. She evidently knew me; so I advanced with a smile of half recognition, extending my hand. She extended hers at the same moment, and the next I was brought face to face with myself in the pier-glass.

I had not time to congratulate myself upon being alone before I heard a suppressed laugh issuing from behind the heavy folds of the damask curtain at my right.

"What a charming recognition, to be sure!" exclaimed Mr. Yorke, presenting himself with that peculiar smile, half good natured and half satirical, which I have often observed on his countenance. "I trust my unexpected presence will be no restraint upon the free interchange of feminine courtesies. You were not aware that you had a rival so near at hand."

"I am delighted as well as surprised to discover my counterpart, and to be able to pass an impartial judgment upon myself," I said. "It is not often that we can 'see ourselves as others see us;' but this instance has not only proved the possibility of doing it, but the fact that I have reason to be better pleased with myself since seeing myself with unprejudiced eyes. Indeed, I had no suspicion that I could look so well. I hope I shall make as agreeable an impression on my friends as on the mirror."

"Without doubt you will and do; and I only wish I could have been in the place of the fortunate being to whom you gave so cordial a welcome," he replied, in an earnest manner. "I would give, I don't know

how many years of life, to be met with such a beaming smile. But tell me, — be fair now, as though you were at the confessional, — were you deceived, or were you just trying on your part of this evening's performance?"

"To speak truly, then, I was really deceived. I did not know myself. But I am half minded to be vexed with you for asking the question, and for daring to intimate that I ever study my part."

"Yet I know you do. Company airs and graces don't come by instinct, though I acknowledge women, for the most part, have a readiness in acquiring them truly wonderful, and I may add truly admirable."

"I know you are quizzing me; but fortunately I am too well satisfied with myself to be annoyed. I dare say I appear affected. I am affected; but by and by, when company airs become habitual, they will fit well. I shall be adapted to them, and they to me; and then I can move about gracefully and unconsciously, as Mrs. Sinclair does."

"Mind now, I am not finding fault with you," he replied good-humoredly. "There's no necessity for you to make apologies for yourself. Can't you believe me when I say it is all very right and proper, as well as very pretty and graceful? Good manners must be learned conventionally, and according to the most approved standards. But then, to be perfectly irresistible, there must be something behind, superior to all conventionalities. I don't think, in your intercourse with the world, you will lose that."

"If you mean truth, I hope I shall not. But sometimes I am afraid I shall. I don't think it would be difficult, and I fear that many people find it only too easy. But why are you in an undress? Aren't you going with us?" I asked.

"I am not," he replied. "From henceforth I eschew parties. To me they are positively a bore, except an occasional dinner-party with just the right number, and just the right sort of people. I've done with such vanities as dancing and flirting."

"You will be very much missed," I said; "at least, I shall miss you."

"I am glad of that, but there will be plenty to fill my place. I ought, by good right, to make way for younger men. Now, there's young Sheridan, a dashing fine fellow, and generous as a lord. The lady who smiles on him, and whom he seeks to win, is a fortunate being. I caution you, Miss Maggie, don't flirt too seriously with Sheridan. He is a noble-hearted fellow. I wouldn't see him made unhappy by a woman he really fancied, for a good deal. As for Gregory, let loose all your weapons; he is proof against them all. You may think, because I tell you this, that it is worth your while to try. So it might be, if the game were worth the candle. By the way, what occult wisdom lies in that old adage? I never fully understood the meaning of it."

"I am sure I don't know; but I would prefer to understand why you dissuade me from undertaking to bring down Mr. Gregory. I never thought of trying it before, but now I am quite set upon it. Wouldn't it be a 'feather in my cap,' if I succeeded?"

"Not a bit of it. But you never will succeed."

"If you dare me to do it, I shall be only the more determined to try. I suppose I ought to be much obliged to you for the profound interest you manifest in my flirtations. How if I should take it into my head to try my batteries on you?"

"I advise you not. I know you too well ever to be

taken in by you. Besides, you have let the occasion slip. I am off in a week, to be absent the remainder of the winter. My last word of caution is, Don't trifle with Sheridan."

"Why not fall in love with him, if he is all you paint?"

"Why not, to be sure? only don't flirt with him. Don't advance to meet him the next time he calls, with that irresistible look and manner, unless you are really delighted to see him. And if you are, well—I don't know as I have any right to complain or feel bad about it, do you? Jealousy would be very unbecoming in an old fellow like me. Heaven forefend, that I should take on jealousy now, after having lived so many years with never a twinge to disturb the even tenor of my life!"

"I don't see any reason why you should take on anything of the kind where I am concerned. Didn't you appoint your own conditions when you first declared yourself my friend? Didn't you ask me always to look upon you in the light of an elder brother?"

"Confound it! I believe I did."

"And didn't I promise to do so?"

"Truly you did."

"Then whatever I do outside of that, where other men are concerned, is my own affair, isn't it?"

"Well, as I hear Mrs. Sinclair's step on the stairs, we must leave that question unanswered, to be repeated again perhaps at a future day. Till then you abide by the promise I exacted from you. I may hold for the present the enviable prerogative of brotherly regard."

"What! not dressed?" exclaimed Mrs. Sinclair, as she entered. "You are not going to back out at the last moment?"

"Most assuredly I am," replied Mr. Yorke, "and herewith bid you good evening."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Mrs. Sinclair. "I never knew so obstinate a man!" She spoke in a half disappointed and decidedly irritated voice; and I observed in her manner throughout the evening an abstraction and depression which I had never noticed before. I wondered —

CHAPTER XV.

JOURNAL CONTINUED.

A LONG gap in my journal. The last word written therein was *wondered*. I wonder now what it was that excited my wonder then. The truth is, I am in a constant state of wonderment at all I see and hear and learn of life. I wonder more than all at this present moment what has come over Mrs. Sinclair. I suppose time will unravel the mystery in season for me to begin a new wonder.

I was interrupted in my journalizing that Sunday by a call from Laura Thirkield. Sunday is her special holiday, and she always pays me a visit of an hour or more in my own room, after church in the afternoon.

She broke in upon one state of wonderment, only to throw me into another and deeper. She talked to me about herself. I love Laura, but she almost terrifies me sometimes with her vehemence. When she does talk about personal matters and feelings, every word makes an impression. I started her off on that day by asking how she got on with her pupils.

She replied that she supposed she did as well as any one could do a work which they disliked. "I hate teaching," she continued; "and what is still more unwomanly, I suppose, I am not fond of children. I pity every child, particularly every girl, that is born into the world. If I ever have children, I pray they may all be boys."

"But," I said innocently, and speaking from my own experience, "girls have a very nice time."

"You are welcome to think so," she replied. "Doubtless you have had a good time thus far; but I, who have never had a good time, must beg to differ with you. Besides, I plume myself somewhat upon my penetration; and as a looker-on in society, I have come to the conclusion that the majority of girls and women don't have a good time. Take, for example, a girl who is handsome and rich, even supposing her to be amiable and kindly disposed. How she is tried and tormented by the stings and frets of her girl companions! And then the poor and plain girl, who can't be amiable if she tries,—and very few can, for poverty and ugliness are not conducive to sweet temper,—what sort of enjoyment is hers? Nor is the case much better if she is poor and pretty; for you may be quite sure she will be pecked at by every homely girl of her acquaintance. No, you may take my word for it. Women and girls are to be pitied; and why there should be so many more of them born into the world than there are men, passes my comprehension."

"But you have a good time now, haven't you?" I asked. "Mrs. Sinclair is a true friend to you."

"I will answer that question by asking another, which I beg you will answer truthfully if at all: Would you be happy in my place? But I won't force you to answer; for you can't know how you would feel if you were in my place, nor can you understand precisely what my place is. You know I am here earning my living by teaching two little girls to read, write, and cipher, keeping their clothes in order, and walking out with them once a day. I do this because I have no other alternative; but do you think with my

abilities, my education, my tremendous energy, that I can be satisfied with simply doing this? I have a comfortable home. I have many luxuries; but do you think I can enjoy them and forget my family at Eastfield, who have no luxuries,—not even comforts? I know I have talent, and with it I have ambition. I feel capable of doing more, but I have no opportunity. I have every motive to improve the talents God has given me to the utmost, and to make them the means of helping and elevating my family; but I cannot take the first step, because of poverty and because I am a girl. If I were a young man, I would go into the world and struggle alongside of my fellow-men; but I am a woman, and I must sit still, chafing and discontented; and I can't help it. Society, custom, everything seems to conspire against a woman who has power and energy, and wants a larger field to work in. You can't understand what it is to feel every day and hour the dissatisfaction, the discontent, in doing next to nothing when you have the will and the capacity to do so much."

"Can't I help you?" I asked, with a consciousness of utter inability. "I will tell you," I added, "a bright thought strikes me: Mr. Yorke is the one who could help you. I know how highly he esteems you; he might suggest something better."

She smiled bitterly. "Mr. Yorke is a very good man, and if, as you say, he esteems me, I am very grateful; but he wouldn't trouble himself, nor would I ask it of him. I shall not ask help; I shall do what I am now doing as faithfully as I know how; but my heart will never let me rest satisfied with this, while those I love need so much. I shall stay where I am, and do my duty as well as I can. I never intend to shirk that.

But I will not be bound to any one. In this world we must look out for ourselves. People who are ambitious can't sit down contentedly in a peck measure, and a wide world outside. They mustn't be over sensitive to what others may say or think of them, if they once make up their mind to a thing. I believe we all have our destinies pretty much in our own hands. I intend to act as though that were the case. I expect to be thwarted, and to meet with disappointment after disappointment; but if I must fail, it shall never be through lack of effort. You, who have had every good dropped in your path so far, without trying and without labor; who have no wants beyond the present, and, if you had, would probably need only to express a wish to have it fulfilled; you, so pretty and attractive that without any effort of your own you win all hearts, — you cannot conceive of such a life as mine, such a determined will, such a settled purpose to accomplish something and to be something in the world. Do you suppose that I can sit down here year after year and teach A B C's?"

"Ah, if I only could! I know I should be happier. Haven't I seen enough wretchedness growing out of disappointed ambition? I need only look at home. Don't I know what a history of disappointment and cruel injustice my poor father's life is? And I am just like him. Still I can't grow wise by his experience. I can't; I must work out my own salvation; and if I fail and live to be the wreck he is, still I must do it. God knows it is the only way I can grow wise. Why can't I be satisfied with an humble sphere, like my sister? I worship her. I look upon her as but little lower than the angels. Her spirit of self-sacrifice is perfectly sublime, and yet it don't help me or anybody

else. It don't lift me up out of the slough. God gives some folks grace to bear, and others courage to work. Some He clothes with quiet submission, and others He permits to be impatient and restless, — all for some good purpose, I suppose. Somebody must climb the mountain, while others sit down quietly in the valley. I am one that must climb. My sister is like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus."

"You have never told me anything about your sister. I wish I knew more of her, and of all of you," I said, timidly, for I was afraid of appearing inquisitive. "I tried, when we were schoolmates," I continued, "to be intimate with you, but you always repulsed me, at least I thought you did. I may have been mistaken."

"No, you were not mistaken," she replied. "I did repulse you, in a measure. Not because I did not love you or wish for a friend; but I could not reciprocate your kindness. I did not go to your home familiarly, because I could not ask you to mine. I could not do it. I was too proud."

"But is not that confessing a weakness?" I asked. "You knew that I liked you for yourself."

"That may be; but I knew also that all your life you had been accustomed to pleasant and tasteful surroundings. I knew you could not help being shocked at the barrenness, the almost squalidness, which our four walls inclosed. To be a pauper is to have a certain independence of the world; but the degrading conditions of poverty to those who have education, taste, a love of beautiful things, — who feel the grating and jarring of the domestic machinery, always out of order and no means of setting it right; the discords of tempers harassed and tried and out of tune, wearing upon

natures strung, as the poet says, 'to fine issues,' and yet condemned to wear themselves out in vain efforts to bring the broken strings into harmony, — these are some of the trials of poverty which are easiest borne alone."

"But you permitted Mrs. Sinclair to visit you at your own house, and excluded me. The contrast must have been greater between her surroundings and yours than between yours and mine, for I was not brought up amidst luxuries."

"And do you want to know why she was admitted, and you not?" she inquired.

"I do," I replied.

"Then I will tell you what perhaps you never knew before. Mrs. Sinclair was not always what we see her now. She knows what poverty is by experience. She was poor when she married Mr. Sinclair. Has she never told you anything of her early history?"

"Never."

"I am sure I am not betraying confidence. She will tell you any time if you ask her; but, even if she does, you won't be able to comprehend the life I describe. She was able to comprehend it in part by her own early experience; and she understands me, because she has only to look into her own heart to read mine."

"Do you mean to say that you are alike in character?" I asked with surprise; for, long as I had known them both, I had never seen the least similarity. How could I have done so? I felt at that moment that in reality I knew little more than the outward lives of either of them.

"I mean to say just so," Laura replied. "I see your look of surprise and incredulity. Nevertheless we are alike. Ask her if we are not. And then let

me give you another surprise. Mrs. Sinclair knew my mother years and years ago, when my father was in a high position, and hers was on the lowest round of the ladder.

"So we go up, up, up,
And so we go down, down, down;
So we go backwards and forwards,
And so we go round, round, round."

But then you must know there are people who, when they are up, don't choose to remember that they ever were down."

"I am all amazement," I exclaimed. "I seem to be listening to a fairy story. It is strange she never told me anything about her early acquaintance with you."

"Did you ever ask her? Of course you never did. Well, ask her some time, and she will tell you all you care to know. Tell her how much I have already said. She will not be vexed."

"But if she understands your nature, can't she help you in the way you most need help?"

"She has done the best she can now. I thank her for it. She knows I am not satisfied, nor does she blame me. Her friendship has done much for me; but, as I said before, no person or persons can help me to what I reach up to. It is my destiny to climb, and climb I must."

"But what to reach?" I asked. "You must have some definite object before you."

"I have," she replied. "I cannot tell you or any one my necessities, or explain my motives. You could not sympathize with them. Certain things appear desirable to you, and you would be very glad to possess them; but you do not care enough for them to

work and struggle with all your life and soul to attain them. The probability is, you will have them without much effort of your own. But if you can't attain the best and highest, you will make yourself contented with the next best. All this from no superior virtue in you. I am not flattering you on that score. It is a matter of temperament; and my temperament is totally different. What I wish to attain, I would put forth every effort to attain. I look only at the one end, and am ready to put my whole life into the work. I can't be contented with the next best. If I am disappointed once, I shall try again, and so on to the end of the chapter, or until, like my poor father, I have no heart or courage left; and when that time comes, I pray God I may die."

"You positively fatigue and depress me," I said, "with this tremendous idea of work and struggle towards something, I don't know what. How do you ever sleep at night with this everlasting aspiration and this wearing discontent? I begin to think I must be an idiot, a thorough imbecile. The very thought of such an interminable climbing and reaching after something wearies me. What is the defect in me, that I am so satisfied with life?"

Laura laughed. When she laughs, it is, like everything else she does, with her whole soul. To see her then, no one could imagine she was ever unhappy. "I am sure," I continued, "you have made some great mistake, or else you have got into a morbid habit of exaggerating the trials, as well as the aspirations of life. What do they amount to, after all, these degrading conditions of poverty, as you call them?"

I shall never forget the change which came over her countenance, the intense concentration of her look,

as she replied to my thoughtless question. "You think," she said, "that perhaps I exaggerate. I can forgive you, for your views of life are one-sided. You may think mine are. I should like to draw a picture for you of a being I knew years ago,—not many years, although they seem to me a life-time when I look back over the changes and disappointments and cares which lie between this time and that. I should like to show you a beautiful picture, the angel of my young dreams. I wish you could see her as I remember her—as every one remembers her who ever saw her: brought up in the lap of luxury, sheltered from every storm, adorned with everything that taste could devise and wealth purchase, her every wish gratified, every faculty cultivated to its utmost, surrounded by a circle of admiring friends—herself its greatest ornament, worshipped by a proud father, idolized by the fondest and most tender of mothers, the beloved of all. Before her opened a happy future; for one who was believed worthy, if any human being could be worthy of her love, had won her heart, and she looked forward, as only such a tender, loving nature can, to a future of domestic bliss. And when you see her as I saw and knew her once, I would like to show her to you where and as she is now. I would like, if I were able, to show you the whole picture—not the outside alone: wealth, friends, family, lover, all swept away; her sensitive nature wounded at every turn; her tastes, her habits, her affections, turned into sources of suffering; helpless old age clinging to her, and mutely supplicating for comforts which were once necessities, but which now are simply luxuries, which must be gone without; still more helpless youth clinging to her, and asking food for mind and for faculties that will fit

them for the work of the world, which she can only give by robbing herself of the rest and food that nature demands; and then when all is given, and all is done, to look around and see only how much remains that she cannot do; to see her sit night after night, with fingers and brains alike busy, worn to a shadow, yet always calling herself well; sleepless, that she may make the pillow soft for those she loves, to sleep soundly; companionless, for she has no time for the interchange of friendship; her hands hard and knotted with household toil, her eyes hollow with vigils, her lithe form bent with labor too hard for her; no time to nurse her own ailments; or if at intervals she breaks down and sits helpless with the pains that she cannot conquer, she hasn't even the poor luxury of being able to give up to physical suffering, because of the sleepless consciousness of duties that are waiting for her. She must be up and doing; not one of all her early associations left to her; no hope, unless by a miracle, that there will come any change. If I could make you look on all this through my eyes and with my feelings, you would not think I exaggerate. This is the kind of poverty that people in general don't understand, — to want to work, to feel within you a power rusting out for lack of opportunity, for lack of tools to work with. O! don't let me talk about it. If anything ought to be sacred from the intrusion of the world, it is poverty of this kind, — poverty which people are educated to feel, but not to conquer. Do you think God ordains it, and that we should sit down contented, without trying to better our condition? I tell you patience under such circumstances is not a virtue. I don't want to rest. I won't sit down while there is strength in me to work, while I have talents that I can cultivate, and energy

to carry out my purposes. I may have made some great mistake. Yes, possibly I have; (but it has not been the mistake of weakness or idleness.) Time will show. I am willing to do the least, while at the same time I shall always be looking beyond for something better, something larger, something that will fill my soul; and when I can cease to work for those I love, O! I pray God that I may die."

"Poor Laura," I said tenderly, for I felt more than ever drawn to her, "forgive me that I hurt your feelings. I wish I could help you."

"I believe you; you cannot, however, except by loving me and bearing with me. I know I am not lovable. I told you that long ago. There are two sides to my character. One is unselfish and noble; the other is petty and mean. I am capable of great self-sacrifice, and the meanest and smallest of jealousies and suspicions. There is a perpetual warfare within me, and I fear sometimes that the contest is doubtful. I fear that the petty, the malignant, the spiteful, may triumph in the end. My only hope for myself is in the efficacy of my mother's dying prayer for me, and my sister's saint-like example. I cannot pray for myself. I am too faithless, now. O, the years I poured out my very soul in prayers that God would open up some way for me to help my poor father! Instead of which, one after another of the props of his old age were taken from him; little by little his strength of mind and body gave way. Once in a while a hope seemed to dawn, and we all sat under its smile, and congratulated each other that the way was opening; and suddenly it set in disappointment. We have sometimes lived months of suspense after having made some application for an office or position which would

give my poor father occupation and remuneration, even if only a pittance, that he might feel a self-respect among men, and be brought into companionship with his kind. As long as we had the least foundation for hope we built upon it; we thought of nothing else. O, the long days in which we planned what we would do if only this and that venture we had sent out should bring success to our hopes! But it never did. All our scheming and planning ended alike in disappointment, until we had no heart left. And all this time we could do nothing. Whichever way we turned, it seemed as though a great blank wall rose between us and every effort. We were not idle a moment; our brains were wrought up to feverish anxiety, always looking out for some good, something to do. Night after night, when the children were in bed, my sister and myself used to sit up and try to help each other to some new suggestion. Meanwhile I was studying to keep up with my class at Miss Parsons's school, and scarcely knew the blessing of a night's sleep. Do you wonder I had no desire to make friends?

"Yet, with all these trials, the longings of youth could not be quenched. I did not see the justice which shut me out from all the enjoyments of society. I had and I have a passionate craving for all beautiful things. Would you expect me to be amiable and pious, with my whole mental being in a condition of doubt and distrust, and almost of rebellion against God? But I won't go on in this strain. I am comparatively happy, because I look upon my life here as a stepping-stone to something better; and I am more contented since (I see those who have everything to enjoy, almost as dissatisfied as myself.) You alone, of all whom I meet, seem truly happy; and yet I do not envy you."

"I think," said I, "the secret of my happiness must be because of my shallow capacity. I have never lived very deeply; of course I have never suffered deeply. I suppose Mr. Penfold would put on a long face, and tell me my turn would come. Doubtless it will come; but isn't it as well for me to wait until it does?"

"You are right. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' I have found that to be true. I believe there lies within me somewhere, almost too deep to be of much present comfort, but still I believe there is within my soul a belief in God, and an effort to trust in his wisdom, which in the end may work out my salvation. But at the same time I believe there will be some pretty hard battles between the inward belief and the outward life, before they come into harmony."

"You may yet marry somebody you love very much," I suggested.

"I never expect to marry for love," she replied.

"I can't say I expect to marry at all, and yet I may; but it is impossible that it should be for love."

"But you wouldn't marry without love?" I asked.

"Yes, I would," she said, with an expression of perfect candor.

"I hope not for money," I added.

"If I give up the love, I must have some equivalent," she replied. "It may jar against your very romantic ideas to hear what I have to say; but since you seem desirous to make my acquaintance, you may as well understand me. I don't wish to mislead anybody, or give any of my would-be friends an impression that I am better than I appear. I made a vow to myself, when I was quite a child, that I never would speak, think, or act a lie, and I never have. I have a

perfect right to conceal as much of my inner life as I think best for expediency; but that is precious little. I would rather act out my nature, and I generally do so. I know I cannot marry for love. There is one obstacle in the way of my doing this, which makes it an impossibility. At least it seems so now. We don't know how we may change. I am not over anxious to marry at all: consequently I shan't be likely to throw myself on a poor man and drag him down; neither could anything tempt me to marry a man I did not respect; neither would I marry a man I respected if he was poor and inefficient. In all my plans of the future, others are involved whose welfare and happiness is the ruling motive of my life. Therefore I wish to be in a position to help them. It is impossible for me, with my experience of poverty, to have any romantic notions of love in a cottage. I don't believe there is any romance in poverty, in whatever light you may view it; and I believe persistent poverty is the destruction of all romance. I believe poverty is an evil to be fought against until either it or you are vanquished. I do not intend to accept it; and I don't believe it is a divine appointment, to be used as a discipline, while one has strength and courage to oppose it. Therefore, if I marry, in the first place I shall require a man whom I can respect, and a man who can respect me. There is such a sort of masculine energy about me that I know the common run of men would not fall in love with me; and yet I believe there are men who might love me even as I am. I know that I do not fascinate men. I have had no time or heart to cultivate the feminine graces, and yet I don't despise them. Mind now, I say the truth to you, I not only don't despise them, but I admire them. When I see them

in Mrs. Sinclair and in you, I feel within myself how peculiarly charming and womanly they are. I don't wonder that men are captivated by them. But they were not taught in the school in which I was forced to study; and the lessons I was compelled to learn there, pretty effectually crush out all such graces."

"I think you don't see yourself as others see you," I said, interrupting her. "I find a good many of the feminine graces in you, and you can lay claim to more personal beauty than one girl in a hundred can boast of. Mr. Yorke says so too. He says you have one of the finest faces he ever saw."

She colored crimson, and her dark eyes became suffused; but the next moment she took up the old strain, and, with something of a contemptuous smile, said, "I thank Mr. Yorke for his good opinion. He likes to be singular, and in calling me good-looking, he certainly is singular. I might be good-looking under certain circumstances; that is, people might think so, but I don't think the admiration of the crowd will be likely to turn my head. I believe I've talked out. I seem to have lost all spirit to go on."

"Don't say so," I urged. "I can't let you off without a description of the man you could marry. He must be one whom you respect, and who respects you. Now please go on."

"And one who has the magnetism to call out that hidden life which unfavorable outward conditions has repressed; one who has faith that there is something in me to love, who will not call my hardness selfishness, or my want of geniality coldness. It must be one who has suffered and struggled; it must be one one who has not labored and buffeted with misfortune for self-aggrandizement. I wish to marry a man who

has money, but who has earned it. Only such men are really generous. Many are lavish, spending on themselves, throwing away thousands; but those who have vanquished poverty, and achieved pecuniary independence, know best how to be generous. I would know what a man had been to his mother, his sisters, his friends, before I pronounced him generous. A man may be profuse in his own expenditure, and yet the most mean, the most ungenerous of men. There are some men who, beginning with nothing, amass a fortune by little savings and constant accumulations; and all the while their souls have grown narrower and narrower. There are other men who grow rich by giving. The world in general don't believe that; but our Lord did, when He said, 'Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down and running over, shall men give into your bosom.' I believe it. Do you think I should care to go out in the world and work, and struggle for myself alone, if I didn't wish to give? Do you think, when I rail against poverty, it is because I can't bear to do without luxuries, or covet them for myself alone? It is to give, that I would strive to get; and a man or woman who doesn't love to give, and to do for others, is the poorest of the poor. Defend me from a poor rich man! I will never marry such a one."

"I am afraid the free heart makes a lean purse," I said.

"Not always, not as a matter of course," she replied. "I shall not marry until I find the 'liberal hand that maketh rich;' and with such a one I could be happy to live and work, and living and working together, we should grow to love each other."

"Mr. Yorke is just such a man," I exclaimed.

"Mrs. Sinclair says that almost all his large means he spends on others. She says there is no end to the generous deeds he does; that he has lifted up every member of his family; that he helps poor artists, poor school-teachers, individuals whom nobody else helps; and she says, too, that the world never half did him justice. Now if you could meet another Mr. Yorke, might it not be possible for you to marry for love?"

Again her cheek burned crimson. "And why another Mr. Yorke?" she asked. "Why not that one? I don't believe there is another."

A thought flashed upon me. I did not answer for a moment, but kept repeating her words. "Why not that one?" Ah! why not? I felt sick at heart. She did not believe there was another. Nor did I. Did he love her? Did she love him? What was it to me? She broke the silence.

"When another Mr. Yorke crosses my path, I may believe in love," she said; "but until that time, I believe in work, and leave the romance of life to you."

I thanked her.

CHAPTER XVI.

I HAVE many times decided to lay aside the journal from which I have already made copious extracts, and adopt a narrative style; but I find my memory so deficient, retaining as it does only a general impression of the incidents of my first winter in society, that unless I were to pass over it very hastily, I must continue as I began, to glean, from the pages at my hand, passages which seem to me most worthy of note.

It is so pleasant to me to review these pages, and revive memories almost extinguished by time, and half buried under the accumulations of a varied experience, that possibly I may be tempted to dwell upon them too long. I fear also that I may be misled into believing that what contains so much of interest for myself, must of necessity be interesting to others, and that I may thus fall into the garrulous habit peculiar to most old people. If I do, there is no reason why my readers, if I am so fortunate as to have any, may not skip. It is a privilege I always take myself; and I must confess that in all my novel-reading, I have met with but few books which I had patience to read through without occasionally turning over a page here and there with a very cursory glance at its contents.

And if, after my book is finished, any reader should chance to come to the end without having the least conception what it is all about, or why I should have

taken the trouble to write it, I can only say to such, it was no trouble at all to write it; and I should be very much chagrined to learn that any one who found it a trouble should follow my story to the end. It is difficult — indeed, I believe it to be impossible — to impart freshness of detail to events and feelings long gone by. For this reason I prefer giving the account of them as they affected me at the time, and continue my extracts.

JOURNAL.

I have just returned from a visit to a young friend of Mrs. Sinclair's, who is soon to be married. Being very intimate with the family, Mrs. Sinclair and myself were shown into the apartment where the grand work and display was going on of making and arranging the bridal outfit.

Some half-dozen seamstresses were busy with their needles; and in addition to what was being done at home, there were quantities of work piled up in different places, which had been done abroad. Certainly provision had been made for the full measure of mortal life, so far as clothes would be needed. I was in a complete state of bewilderment, having never seen so many garments, and of such a gorgeous description, collected together.

The only person who seemed totally uninterested, and who exhibited no appearance of pleasure, was the young bride elect. Her mother was in a perfect ecstasy of excitement, and really one might infer that she was the person most interested.

After we left the house, I inquired of Mrs. Sinclair the reason of Miss Gertrude's utter indifference, and as I conceived it, absolute ingratitude.

She had not observed it; but she said, if it was as I

affirmed, the reason probably grew out of indifference to the affianced husband.

"Is it possible," I inquired, "that the poor girl is going to marry a man she doesn't love? How can her mother permit it?"

"Permit it!" she repeated, with a smile of contempt. "Why, she made the match. She compels it; and in order to bring it about, she broke off her daughter's connection with a young man whom she had loved for years."

"One not worthy of her?" I asked.

"One in every way worthy, but lacking wealth and what we are pleased to call social position."

"How cruel — how despicable!" I exclaimed with indignation.

"Not so fast, my dear, not so fast," replied Mrs. Sinclair. "You don't look at the matter from the right point of view, or rather you take a very one-sided view of it. Let me try to enlighten your darkness and ignorance. Gertrude Gray has been educated to every luxury and extravagance. She has never been taught one useful accomplishment, by which expression I simply mean that she has no practical ability to do anything that we call work. She has not the least grain of common sense to apply to the common affairs of life. With the best intentions in the world, she would be incapable of practicing the least economy. She does not know the value of money, only how to spend it. With an amiable disposition, and one of the kindest hearts in the world, she would nevertheless be a perfect incubus on a man who had to make his own way in life and cherish her as she has been accustomed to be cherished. Knowing all this, how could her mother, in conscience, sacrifice her to a sentimental idea?"

"Is love, then, a sentimental idea?" I asked. "Is there nothing real but money and position?"

"It is a sentimental idea, that one so brought up, so permeated with an artificial atmosphere, a life in which luxury is a necessity, can be happy and satisfied in the ungenial conditions of toil and privation."

"I thought love, real love, could fill the place of all these outward things," I replied timidly. I was almost ashamed to confess my unsophisticated and romantic ideas of love in a cottage. For the moment, life seemed stripped of its illusions, and love, a very commonplace affair. I suppose I experienced for a moment what grows to be the habitual state of mind among the worldly wise. I even found myself, as we walked on in silence, actually weighing the advantages and disadvantages of marriage with love and poverty, and indifference with worldly prosperity. Despite my poetical idea, I was not quite sure that I might not waver, if the two alternatives were presented me. So easily do some natures slip into luxury and self-indulgence.

I don't know what Mrs. Sinclair was thinking about; but we walked on in silence for some distance, when she turned to me suddenly and said, "Mark my words. That proud worldly woman, that most unnatural mother, will reap some time as she has sown. Sometimes, in my religious moods, — I have such moods, although my life may not seem to you to be much influenced by them, — I apply to that false, artificial woman a certain text, somewhere in the Bible, — I read it long ago and remembered it ever since, — 'Like a hungry man who dreameth, and behold, he eateth, and awaketh, and his soul is empty.' So shall we worldly people find when we awake, if we ever do

awake — so I think sometimes shall I awake; so rather have I already awakened, and found that *my soul is empty.*”

“You awake to such a sad truth as that!” I exclaimed. “How can you say your soul is empty, who give so much, and yet always have so much left to give?”

“Give, child! What do I give that is of any value, of any real value, to a human being?”

“Much,” I replied, — “much to me, much to all those around you.”

“I wish I could believe you,” she said sadly. “What can I, out of my barren life, have to give away, except it may be an example for others to shun?”

“You are low-spirited to-day,” I said soothingly.

“Yes and every day,” she added.

“Mr. Yorke will soon be back again,” I continued, thinking to present some pleasant anticipation, which might divert her mind from its gloomy ideas. “I think we all miss Mr. Yorke. He seems so like one of the family, and, although he is peculiar, he is so very kind and thoughtful, and cheerful too, for my part I am getting sadly impatient for him to come back.”

“You miss him, then, do you?” she asked, at the same moment fixing her eyes upon my face so intently as to bring the color to my cheeks. “Ah, you need not answer. I see you do, and so do I; but for all that, I do not see how his return will make this void in my soul less a void. No, my dear child, I cannot shut out from my soul the great fact that I am growing old, and what once seemed to fill my life satisfies me no longer. But here we are at home, — at home.” She repeated the words two or three times, as if uncon-

scious of my presence; and then, turning to me with that soft, tender look in her eyes which I never saw in any eyes but hers, she added, “It ought to be enough for me that I have a home to go to. I am afraid I have not looked in the right direction for something to satisfy this hunger. I dreamed that I was eating, when I tried one thing after another outside of home, and now I awake, and my soul is empty. From this moment it shall be otherwise, God helping me.”

The servant just at that moment opened the door. Mr. Yorke advanced to meet us from the drawing-room. Why should my heart have throbbed so violently? Why should my cheek have turned crimson? Why should I have trembled all over with excitement? It was so unexpected. Surely that is reason enough. I hope he did not notice my manner.

I scarcely remember how Mrs. Sinclair met him, whether she shook hands with him or not. I suppose, of course, she did; but the plain fact of the matter is, I was so much absorbed in my own surprise and delight that I had no perception of any thing or person besides. I was standing just inside the door, and my hand was clasped in his, when all at once I awoke to the consciousness that Mrs. Sinclair had left us and gone up-stairs to her own room.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOURNAL CONTINUED.

IF to be constantly learning new things, and stumbling on mysterious trap-doors and passages that conduct to romantic incidents lying far back in the lives of those around me, is likely to exhaust my capacity for wonder, I am in a fair way to reach that condition in which nothing can surprise me.

The explanation of my present mental condition, bordering on amazement, is in the fact that Mrs. Sinclair has become for the last few weeks much more communicative than usual, and I have been more in her society; consequently she has related to me many of the incidents of her past life. I don't think anything she told me created so much surprise, or seems, when I think it over, so very singular, as that she should once have been a pupil of Mr. Yorke's. It was thus that their acquaintance began. Now I infer, not from what she said, so much as from what she left unsaid, that pupil and master had a tender regard for each other. Farther than this I have no material for weaving any sort of romance; and yet I feel quite sure one exists ready made, and I should like to get hold of it. I have an insane passion for such things; and even without intentionally making up a story, I find myself always doing it.

She described him to me as he was at that time. I

remarked that I did not see how she could avoid falling in love with him. "If you had known my father," she replied, "you would be able to understand it. My father, though poor, was so proud, that if in our republican government he could have raked out a title for me, he would certainly have forbidden my falling in love with anything short of it; but that being impossible, the next best thing was to secure money. I was very young when I married, and had no opinions, scarcely a mind of my own. I married the man my father selected for me, at the mature age of sixteen. I certainly was not capable at that time of estimating my husband at his true value. I know him now to be one of the best men that ever lived, and worthy of a much better wife than I am."

I tried to say how good I thought her, and many like commonplaces; but she hushed me up, and sent me down-stairs to entertain Mr. Yorke, who was just announced, adding that she was not well enough to go down.

Nothing loath, I did as I was bid. I met Mr. Yorke in the entry. He had been talking with Laura; and as she turned to go away, I saw traces of tears on her face. He was always kind and thoughtful of Laura's feelings, and interested in her welfare. I had spoken to him of that memorable conversation in which she told me portions of her history and experience.

"We must think of something to make her happy," he said. "She is fitted for a wider sphere than this, and she needs to be more her own mistress. She ought to have a career; she is fitted for one; she is a noble, self-sacrificing girl. Such natures cannot develop under conventional limitations."

I don't know that I had any reason for feeling a

twinge of jealousy as I saw them together, and noticed the kind and tender expression with which he looked after her. I was ashamed of myself for it, and really at the moment I inwardly felt and acknowledged that hers was a much finer character than my own; and if he did see more in her to admire, what wonder? What should have set me off on such a train of thought I can't tell, but I couldn't help it affecting my manner. I felt half vexed and half grieved, as if somebody had used me ill. Of course I betrayed a feeling of annoyance; for I had no more than exchanged the customary courtesies when he asked what ailed me that I looked so pettish.

It may be supposed that this expression, *pettish*, roused my indignation. I must have appeared very hateful. However, as we went on talking, my ill humor wore away. We discussed the last evening's ball, and the day before yesterday's theatrical entertainment, and the brilliant star of the dramatic world, Miss F—— K——, who had just risen on our horizon.

From these topics we came down to more commonplace subjects, and ordinary men and women; and I told him of my great surprise in learning that Mrs. Sinclair was one of his earliest pupils. I begged him to tell me about her; and when he said she was more beautiful than any being he ever saw, I felt another and stronger twinge of jealousy, though for what reason I can't imagine. I have often said that she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw, and what must she have been then! And how could he help seeing it?

We tried one subject after another till at last it struck me that I should like to know his opinion of Gertrude Gray's wedding; for the grand affair had come off, and the happy pair gone off, according to cus-

tom. I was astonished to hear him say he thought very well of it, and pronounced it a very suitable connection.

This gave me an opportunity of relieving a little of my own vexation of spirit, by protesting against his worldliness in speaking thus of a marriage without affection.

"But," he said, "there is abundance of affection, only it happens to be all on one side. Since that is the case, I say again it is fortunate that the affection happens to be on the right side. That is, I consider it fortunate, if there must be an inequality, that the preponderance of affection is on the masculine side."

"As I can't see it so," I replied, "I wish you would explain. The sentiment you express doesn't at all accord with Mrs. Sinclair's ideas. Did you never hear her repeat that verse, which she considers the embodiment of truth—

"There is no lack to those whose life
In giving, not in asking flows;
Who love the best will grieve the least,
Though lacking all that love bestows."

"Well," he replied, after I had repeated the verse, "that is all true enough, though it is poetry. The long and short of it is, the one who loves best is happiest, even if the other does not return that love. And the one who does not love, and cannot love, must feel a something lacking. That is the idea which the author of the lines means to convey, but he takes a roundabout way of saying it. Now, to come straight to the point, I will explain to you what I mean, and how my words apply to this particular case.

"Miss Gertrude Gray is married. Marriage is woman's destiny. Love isn't her destiny. Doubtless

she thought it was, when she encouraged the young man who captivated her youthful fancy, and whom, I suppose, she thought she loved. But you see, if love had been her destiny, she would have clung to him in spite of every obstacle."

"But her mother compelled her"—

"Don't interrupt me," he said good-naturedly. "Who could compel a woman to go against destiny? Her mother did no such thing. Her mother is a very wise person. She saw the advantages on one side and the disadvantages on the other. She weighed them, as a wise woman ought. The children, or rather, I should say, the women, of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. The mother told her what was right and proper, and the girl acquiesced. Why? Because in her secret heart she felt that her mother was right. Her love was not strong enough to outweigh her worldly tastes and habits. Now, you will find, if you follow her up, that she will manage to be as happy as married people in general; and why? Because her husband loves her so dearly, and will do so much to gratify her every habit and taste, that she can't help appreciating it. Women have a capacity for gratitude, a kindliness, that men have not. Not one woman in a hundred but will be won in the end by kindness and devoted affection. It is a sweet, womanly trait. It is not so with men, the hateful monsters! If they do not love their wives, they are very apt to be driven away, instead of attracted, by the demonstrations of affection. They may curse themselves ever so much for the hateful contrariness of their natures, but they can't help it; and that is why I say it is fortunate that the preponderance of love is on the masculine side. Of course,

with your youth and inexperience, you are not capable of judging whether I am right or wrong. But I would advise you, before you commit yourself to the romantic folly of believing that love is woman's destiny, to be very wary of giving too lavishly of the precious treasure of your heart to that cold-blooded and exacting monster I have described, and called *mán*. To all young maidens, to all wives, to every woman in the world, I would say, *keep back*. The reason lies in the very nature of things. Therein lies your power."

I thanked him for his advice, though it only served to bewilder me; and without being exactly conscious what I was about, I fell to catechising myself very much after this fashion: Have I ever shown to any man that I was fond of his society? Too fond! Have I ever manifested any special preference for any one man? I wonder if Mr. Sheridan fancies I am in love with him! I wonder if Mr. Gregory flatters himself, when I listen to his flatteries, that I am delighted, and ready to fall in love with him at any moment! I wonder if Mr. Yorke thinks, because I always come down to see him when he calls, that it is because I am so fond of him! My indignation against the whole race of mankind grew more and more bitter, and I inwardly declared to myself that I hated every man on the face of the earth. I inwardly vowed I would never believe a word they said; that I would never marry, or, if I did, it would be some man who had money and position, who doated on me, but for whom I did not care a rush.

Do all he could, Mr. Yorke could not draw me out that evening, and left early, because, as he said, I was cross.

The next day something happened. I must tell it.

Mr. Sheridan called on me in the afternoon. I have a great admiration for Mr. Sheridan. If he could only have waited awhile longer, I think I might have decided differently. I fear I may regret it, but it is too late now. I have refused him. *There* was money, position, good looks, a generous nature, and as much love as any woman need desire, and I have let them all slip. I am afraid I may regret it. I can't get Mrs. Sinclair to say a word for or against. I am positively unhappy. I begin to fear that I shall be an old maid.

Mr. Yorke always insists that he is a matter-of-fact man. I begin to believe it, but yet he doesn't look so. I never shall understand him, — never. I don't know him as well as I did a year ago. I thought I should grow really intimate with him, instead of which, we seem every day wider and wider apart.

I am not as happy as I was two months ago. I am getting tired of this sort of life, — tired of everything but dancing and going to the theatre. Mrs. Sinclair is dull. Laura don't talk with me much. I dare say I appear absorbed in my own affairs, and so unsympathizing that I repel her confidence. I begin to long for home. But then how dull Eastfield will seem! I hate a place where there are no men. I am spoiled for what is called simple pleasures, and actually long for some excitement, even more than I have at present. What is the matter with me? At all events, I will stop writing in my journal until I am in a better mood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOURNAL CONTINUED.

GOING home in a week. Spring has come before I thought of it; and now that I know I must leave, my heart is heavy. Mrs. Sinclair will not go to Eastfield this summer. She wishes her husband to purchase a beautiful cottage on the Hudson. Laura Thirkield will make a short visit at home before going South, where she has an engagement to teach in a wealthy family, with quite a large salary. Mrs. Sinclair is doing everything she can to fit her wardrobe properly. Laura looks happy, and very much excited. Mr. Yorke obtained the situation for her. He says she is one in a thousand, — so gifted, so courageous, so persevering. I know he is right; nevertheless, it always makes me wretched to hear him praise her. It makes me feel like a nonentity, which I believe I am. (Why can't I be something or do something?) I wish somebody would help me to get out of this state of imbecility, and show me some great work to do! O, wouldn't I do it with all my heart and soul?

There is a sort of gloom in the atmosphere of the house. No one seems very cheerful. Perhaps it is because we are all breaking up, and going each our different ways. After I leave here, I shall not probably see any of these pleasant friends again. Of course Mr. Yorke will not go to Eastfield if Mrs. Sinclair is

not there. I said so to him the other evening, but he seemed to think I was talking at random.

He accused me of never saying anything in earnest now, of being very much changed, of having lost my girlish simplicity, of growing distrustful. The simple truth is, I am afraid he will think I am in love with him, if I seem very much pleased in his society. I am pleased, — more pleased than I care to confess; but I wouldn't have him know it for the world, after all he said to me the other day about not letting a man know how much you cared for him. He needn't be afraid that I didn't learn the lesson how to *keep back*. If he ever cares to know how much I think of him, he will have to get at the knowledge the very hardest way possible. Not that I think he does or ever will care; but if he should, then will be my hour. Won't I try his patience? Won't I have learned to *keep back*?

Well, in spite of many little annoyances, I do sometimes enjoy his society very much. The other evening, for example, when I came upon him unexpectedly, and found him reading a book of poems, Byron's "Corsair," matter-of-fact man that he is, or pretends to be, I bantered him a little on his newly acquired taste, whereupon he said he had only taken up the volume because he knew I had been reading it, and wanted to study the passages I had marked, that he might get a little glimpse at my heart. "By the way," he asked, as he laid aside the book, "you have never shown me any more of your verses."

"For the reason that I have not written any. Your criticism nipped my poetic inspiration in the bud."

"Indeed! Are you so easily influenced? Now, I make no pretension to superior judgment, and, in fact, am quite deficient in poetic sensibility. I believe I

accused you of a tendency to morbidness, not of temperament, for in reality there is very little morbidness in your composition, for which Heaven be praised! But if I recollect right, I found fault with something you said about 'fevered pulses,' and the like, and thought you had better have gone out for a long walk in the open air, rather than to have written that last verse. It was too much for you. Well, I suppose you were vexed with me. You won't agree with me that it is not best to write under such conditions, unless it be as a safety-valve. Doubtless you revel in such poetry as this," holding up the volume; "and if you could only meet with such a being, — I won't say man, for there is not such a man on the face of the globe. God never made such a one, and therefore I call it a creation purely imaginary, and an impossible being, this same Corsair. But supposing such a one possible, I doubt if an intimate acquaintance would be very gratifying to you. Yet I dare say you very often picture to yourself some such hero as this, with whom you might fall madly in love. Isn't it so?"

"I doubt if I should ever fall madly in love with any one; but if I did, it would probably be with a hero of some description, rather unlike the every-day men and boys one meets in society."

"That is not very singular or in any way a remarkable confession; but if you take my advice, you never will fall madly in love with any man living. I assure you not one is worthy; most men are utterly unworthy of such overwhelming devotion. If there is a creature on this earth to be pitied, it is a young, ardent, imaginative girl, who makes a demigod out of a common mortal, and then falls down and worships him. Don't do it, my dear young lady. But why do I throw

away my good advice on you? Don't I know it is the very thing you will do, and wake afterwards to find your idol clay? Now listen to me a moment. What I say to you is a most profound and indisputable fact. If it were possible to take this same fellow — forgive the disrespect, this Corsair — out of the poetic associations which surround him here, and which are the artificial creations of a wild imagination, and put him down here in New York, or in staid puritanical Eastfield, and let him live out his life, and utter his high-flown sentiments, you would shun him as you would a black snake. He would be, in the Eden of your surroundings, just as unpleasant a creature to stumble against as a black snake in Eastfield meadows. But the poet has dressed him up, and put fine swelling words into his mouth; and the common earth, common men and women, common every-day speech and action, are utterly displaced. In such books, the heroes are mounted on stilts. People don't talk: they make speeches at each other. Good heavens! what a tiresome place this world would be if there were not a thousand to one commonplace people in it!"

"Then you like commonplace people?"

"I dote on them. They are all that really bind me to life, and make society endurable."

"I can't agree with you. I think commonplace people are extremely tiresome."

"Not to live with, I assure you. It's your would-be heroes and heroines that wear out soul and body."

"I think you must enjoy my society vastly. I am commonplace enough to suit the most exacting requirements."

"Yes, I do. You are right. If I did not, why should I pass so much of my valuable time in your so-

ciety? It is to a hard wayfaring man like the music of a rippling brook in a bright, sunny meadow, to be with you. If he shuts his eyes and listens, he hears the pleasant music; and if he opens his eyes, he sees the sunshine glancing along the waves while they run rippling on with the same merry and sweet tune, — the same, and yet full of changes. Isn't it better suited to common life than to be forever within the roar of a cataract, or straining the eyes sunward, to some inaccessible mountain top, or sitting on the beach, day after day, looking off on the immeasurable distance?"

"Yet all that is sublime."

"But in its outward relations and ordinary conditions, human life is not supposed to be sublime. It is a commonplace, humdrum sort of thing."

"Your philosophy has a very depressing effect. I don't wish to look on human life as you do."

"Remember, I am speaking of ordinary conditions, not of those tremendous issues which come from the spiritual side. That subject is too solemn and too sombre to be brought up at this time; but tell me frankly, among the people you have met thus far, whose life looks, from your point of vision, sublime?"

I tried to recall among my acquaintances some heroic examples. Alas for me, I could not. In one was unselfishness, in another cheerfulness, in another patience; in many, lovely and gentle traits; in a few, striking charms and graces and fascinations; in all, much goodness; but I could recall no sublime life among my acquaintance. "You strip all the illusion from humanity," I said sadly, "and take away all aspiration and ambition."

"Do I so?" he asked; "then I do very wrong." He left the chair where he had been sitting, and took

the vacant place on the sofa beside me. "You don't understand me, Miss Maggie, do you?" he asked.

"I do not," I replied frankly. "Once I felt as though I were quite well acquainted with you; but every day latterly it seems we have been growing wider and wider apart."

"O, I hope not so," he said in a tone of deep earnestness. "We ought to know each other quite intimately by this time, and I flattered myself that I did understand you, I hoped you would understand me, but it seems I am mistaken. Grown apart! That must not be. I must look into that."

"I think you purposely try to confuse me. You say what you do not mean."

"Excuse me. I never say what I do not mean. Therein I may differ from many men of your acquaintance, and from many women also. You never were more mistaken. It only proves that what I have affirmed a thousand times before, is an indisputable truth. The more transparent a man's character, the more honest his dealings, the more true and straightforward his speech, the more is he misunderstood and misjudged. Now, in all I have said to you to-night, I have spoken precisely what I felt and believed, and from my experience have found to be true. Tell me, if you please, one thing in which we differ."

"You wish to make all the world and everybody in it matter-of-fact and commonplace."

"I don't make the world or the people in it."

"Of course I know you don't. I mean you see them all in that light."

"Well, how can I help it? There they are, and thus they are. If I choose to look through rose-colored or blue glasses, it might enable me to see things in a

more captivating aspect; but what we want is to see things as they are."

"I am sure there must be much that is noble and heroic and sublime in human life. History records it; we hear every day instances of great and good actions. We read great and noble thoughts, and it kindles our enthusiasm, and makes us wish our own lives to be great."

"Yes, but wishing won't make them so, or make the occasions for us. Our external lives are not made up of great occasions; and our greatness is not in superhuman and exhaustive effort, but in gradual growth, and this is nourished by little daily acts and sacrifices, and efforts which call into exercise every faculty of soul and sense; and the lives which most deserve to be called sublime, are those of which the world and history and poetry take little account. I told you how sweet to me was the music of a rippling brook in a green sunny meadow. But the life of the brook is not narrowed and bounded by the meadows through which it glides. It must flow onward, gathering depth and strength and fullness, overcoming obstacles, until it reaches the vast ocean. The sublimity is not in one part of its course over another, but in ceaseless, limitless progression; in life ever moving onward, ever growing in breadth and depth, — a life that nothing can arrest, nothing turn back. Looked at in this aspect, life is sublime. But, as I said before, the lives of men and women around us, their external lives, are for the most part commonplace; and we could not afford to have it otherwise. If all the men and women around us were reaching after occasions of rendering themselves sublime, how would the world's work be done? The world's work is toilsome, perplexing, uncongenial;

and sometimes, and for some people, of necessity it is disagreeable and very menial service; yet in the spirit in which this work may be conceived and carried forward to the end, there is a sublime purpose and consecration, be the external conditions ever so humble. And this sublime purpose and consecration lies on the spiritual side.

"If I draw any illustration from such an old-fashioned book as the New Testament, it will seem to you like preaching a sermon; but I know of no other example so suited to illustrate the position I have taken as that furnished by the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, — that external life in the world, made up of small acts of service to the humblest: healing sick people, comforting the sorrowing, teaching the ignorant, going about among the poor and despised, sitting to eat with publicans and sinners; disappointing everybody that looked for the sublimity of great achievement in their Messiah, ridiculed and despised by the high and mighty, who called him a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber because he ate and drank like other men. Not one of his contemporaries, not one even of his disciples, of those nearest him, not even his mother or his brethren, looking at his external life, his external associations, once thought of its sublimity, because the true spiritual sublimity surpassed their comprehension. But, my poor mystified young woman, how could I subject you to such a lengthy harangue, when doubtless you expected me to make myself agreeable and amuse you? You must forgive me."

I assured him that I liked to be instructed as well as amused sometimes, and that, frivolous as I might appear, I did sometimes reflect, and reflect seriously, but generally without arriving at any very definite

opinions about anything, least of all about life and religion. I was very glad to be talked to and reasoned with as if I had a mind, and perhaps by and by I should amount to something. However, I could not agree with him in liking commonplace people; and it troubled me to have all my ideas of sublime and heroic action questioned, and humanity brought down to such a dead level. I still maintained that we ought to be reaching up and after something high and heroic; and he still insisted that no height was ever gained except step by step, and that we must feel our way firm under our feet; there was no such thing intended for humanity as to make flying leaps of attainment; and the only safe and sure road to achievement was patient and plodding industry.

Now, while I sit and think over our long talks, which I do very often, and which I would love to do oftener if I had time and if my mind was not preoccupied with other matters of less grave import, I feel proud of his friendship. I do not agree with half he says, while at the same time I admit the probability that he may be right, and that he is wiser than I.

Occasionally I confess to feeling provoked with his lack of romance and sentiment. Not that I actually perceive the lack, only he says he is matter-of-fact; and sometimes, when I talk sentiment, he laughs at me most unmercifully, and it irritates me beyond measure. I find myself comparing all my gentlemen acquaintances with him. Many of them I like very much. One or two I could very easily fall in love with; but for some unaccountable reason, when I think of any young man as a lover or a possible husband, there is always a something lacking. But I shall be very cautious, and not betray too much preference. He is

twice as old as I am, and no doubt looks upon me as a child.

What puzzles me more than I care to confess, — for I have no reason to trouble myself about the matter, yet I do think about it a great deal, and it seems so strange, — Mrs. Sinclair is not so intimate or so friendly with Mr. Yorke as she used to be. They used to talk and laugh, and enjoy each other's society very much. Scarcely a day passed in which he did not run in, in a familiar friendly way, like a brother or relative of the family ; but now he comes less frequently, and sometimes she does not even come downstairs to see him. I am afraid there has been a quarrel between them. Then another thing puzzles me. Mrs. Sinclair has suddenly made up her mind to pass the next year at a country-seat on the North River, and to give up Eastfield. In short, there is a cloud brooding over the house that makes one feel all is not bright and happy, and I am infected by it. Time will surely unravel the mystery.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOURNAL CONTINUED.

I AM going home sooner than I intended, as Aunt Rebecca writes me that my step-father's health is failing, and she thinks my mother needs me. Mrs. Sinclair does not wish me to leave her, and Mr. Sinclair says the house will seem deserted when I am gone. I have made very little mention of Mr. Sinclair. He is one of the most silent men I ever knew, — not sullen, but silent ; and it makes my heart ache sometimes to see him come home tired from business and sit down alone in the library, perhaps for hours at a time. I am a little afraid of him, or I should go in oftener to sit with him. He seems very fond of his two little girls, and I think he is very fond of me ; but he is so silent and reserved, I cannot talk with him. I know I have no right to see anything more than what lies on the surface. Aunt Rebecca cautioned me not to pry into family matters and relations that did not concern me. She says every family has its own history, and that it is neither prudent nor wise for an outsider to attempt to comprehend the motives or to judge of the actions of its members, or to have any impertinent curiosity, or even to speculate about anything that may seem strange. "Above all things," she says, "never gossip outside about what passes within the family circle." She is right, and I would not for the world. I

only mean to say here that it seems as though Mrs. Sinclair does not love her husband as well as he loves her, or as well as he deserves to be loved. There, I have said it, but my journal will not tell tales. It is very evident that Mr. Sinclair loves his wife. He looks at her with such an intense fondness and pride, but always when she is not observing him, and when she is intently occupied with something or somebody else.

But I will not allow myself to say a word more on that subject.

My dear good friend sent for me last night to come to her room, to tell me how sorry she was that I must leave her so unexpectedly, and that she should not see me the next summer at Eastfield. "But you will come and make me a long visit some time in my new home," she said, "although it may be a little dull. I am going," she continued after a pause, "to begin a new life, and educate my children after Laura leaves me. I am tired of the city and of society. I am afraid you will not enjoy the quiet and tameness of my new surroundings."

I assured her I could be happy with her anywhere. She smiled incredulously. "Even Mr. Yorke will not be there," she added, "and you will not have the excitement of a quarrel with him."

"I shall miss that, to be sure," I said, "but I can live without it. But why will he not be there occasionally? You have not quarreled with him!"

"With him? Quarreled? Why, no, child, not exactly."

"But you don't seem as fond of him as you were a while ago."

"Fond of him! You are mistaken. I esteem him

as my best friend. The change is in you. You have learned to prize him so highly, that the friendship of other people for him seems tame. Isn't it so?"

I know I colored deeply, but why I should have done so is a mystery. She did not give me time to answer, but changed the subject, telling me how greatly he had interested himself in Laura and her father.

"I do not hesitate to say," she continued, "that Mr. Yorke is in some respects the best man, the most unselfish, the noblest man I ever knew. If a record had been kept of his generous and noble deeds, I don't know whether the world would most honor or condemn him; for he shows his kindness in ways so out of the ordinary rules, that a narrow-minded and less generous person would judge that there must be some selfish motive at bottom, instead of the unselfish desire to make others happy. I think he is one of the truest men that ever lived, and yet the least understood and appreciated. If ever you get thoroughly to know him, you will remember what I say to you."

"Why has he never married?" I asked.

"That is his own secret," she replied. "I doubt if he ever does marry; but happy is the woman who wins such a heart, even if with it he has not a dollar to give her."

I certainly must draw my pen across the last page of my diary, in which I believe I said something about a change in the relations between Mr. Yorke and Mrs. Sinclair. I evidently was mistaken; and yet he comes here less often, and, as I said before, she does not see him always when he does come.

I thought I must make some reply to her very earnest praise of him; so I said, "Perhaps he will fall in love with and marry Laura,—he admires her so much."

"Yes," she replied, "I know he does, and well he may. I have thought it not impossible."

How I wished I had not said it! But why shouldn't he marry Laura? Why shouldn't he admire her? And if he does, why should I feel injured? Laura is certainly very superior to me, and he must know it.

CHAPTER XX.

I HAVE closed and laid aside one volume of what I am pleased to call my journal, although it scarcely deserves the name, as the records it contains are fragmentary, and long intervals were wont to pass in which I had neither time nor inclination to open the covers.

I may as well confess a fact now, which I would not at that time have dared to acknowledge, even to myself, that a new interest had begun to deepen my life, not unmixed with vague misgivings and vacillating doubts and hopes, — an interest so undefined, and yet so delightful, when I allowed myself to float on the gentle current of outward circumstances, that I did not care to break the spell by an attempt to analyze its nature.

But while I found myself day by day looking more eagerly for the accustomed visits of Mr. Yorke, and enjoying more and more his society, I was very careful to cloak my real feelings under the disguise of coquetry. I was coquettish by instinct, as most women are. He always appeared amused rather than displeased with my "attempts to fascinate him," as he said. He liked acting when it was well carried out. He liked to see a woman that knew her power and how to use it as occasion required, but the danger was in going too far. There were limits beyond which co-

quetry was dangerous. Nothing, he declared, pained him more than to meet in society a young, confiding girl, who carries her heart on the outside. That kind of simplicity appears very interesting in novels, but is not suited to the world. It does not hurt men to be made a little uncomfortable occasionally. It is good to take the conceit out of them. The generality of young women have not the least idea of the amount of conceit in young men. A wholesome rebuff now and then is absolutely necessary. To impart a piquancy and zest to conversation, there must be, not only a knowledge of human nature, but the ways of the world. "After all," he continued, "I think I may have been mistaken in calling feminine coquetry an instinct. To know when it is proper to use it, is an instinct, but to know *how* to use it is an art. If any one doubts it is an instinct, let him watch a little girl, even before she knows how to speak. See the toss of her little head, and the pouting of her pretty lips, and the half-affected, bashful coyness of her manner, her innocent little speeches, made for effect, after she begins to know the use of her tongue."

"And do you like such affectation?" I asked.

"Most assuredly I do," he replied. "I am always captivated by it."

"I am not," I replied; "I prefer truth."

"Do you indeed? Well, and so do I; and, as I said before, woman only acts out her feminine nature when she acts thus. Now, confess," he said earnestly, "that there is an innate desire in both young men and young women in society to be attractive and agreeable to each other, — mind, I do not say, nor will I admit the intention of either party to deceive the other, though that is the grave charge preferred against them

by cynical people sometimes. A man who can give graceful compliments, and a woman who can accept them gracefully, and knows how to estimate them at their true value, can get a great deal of enjoyment of society. Above all things, superficial acquaintances had better be chary, and not commit themselves too far. Hold the best in reserve till the fitting opportunity."

"But how is one to decide when the fitting opportunity comes?" I asked.

He looked at me intently for an instant, — so intently that I felt the color mount to my face, and replied, "I think a woman may trust her womanly instincts in the matter."

Whether this, and many other conversations similar to it, sound silly or otherwise to a third party, is of as little importance to me now as it was then. Silly or not, they were enjoyable moments to both of us; and all the time we were seemingly amusing ourselves in a superficial manner, we were really drawing nearer and nearer to each other. And we knew it, — knew it even while we pretended not to know it, — knew it even at the moment of trying to appear indifferently good friends.

Only twice during those last few weeks did the affection within us express itself, and then not in words.

Once when he came to say good-by, we were alone. It was quite unexpected that we should have met thus. Our hands met in a clasp to which words could have added nothing. An intensity of life was crowded into that little moment; for while my hand rested in that strong, firm pressure, his eyes were seeking mine. If I had died the next moment, I would

not then have "*kept back*." I could not, for he drew my soul towards him by that look.

Another time was on his return. He had been told I was gone home. Such had been my intention, but I was delayed unavoidably. I was standing in behind the heavy draperies that curtained the western window. I saw him enter, looking so serious, so disappointed. Did my instincts err when they told me he was thinking of me? No, they were true to me. He drew near the spot as a matter of habit. Close at my side, surprise, happiness beamed in his eyes. There was no keeping back on either side, but there were few words spoken. There was no time for explanation, only the close pressure of the hands again, only a deep fervent look. The next moment Mrs. Sinclair entered, and he turned from me towards her. I felt with a woman's instinct, that the season of coquetry could not return to either of us. Those few moments were a life of intense happiness. So far from making pretty speeches, I had not been able to stammer the ordinary courtesies.

These, dear reader, were the first glimpses I had of the enchanted world of romance and love; and when they were passed, I lived them over and over again in memory. Do you ask, if I had never met Mr. Yorke again, should I have been unhappy? I have often asked myself the question, but I was never able to decide. I did meet him again; and now that I am fairly launched on this voyage of romance, I may as well go on. I look back with eyes dimmed by age, but I see the sunshine flooding that golden spring. I smell the odor of the flowers that we crushed beneath our feet as we wandered together through the old pine woods, where the pink-tinted *Epigæa* blossomed be-

neath the brown leaves. I hear the robin pouring the fullness of his joy upon the twilight stillness as we sat beneath the shadow of the elm trees. If I were blind and deaf to outward sights and sounds, this Eden of my life would be fresh and living to me. Then why not live it over again as I do now? Why not believe that this freshness of remembrance, that reaches far back of the years that are closest to our external lives, is an earnest of the immortality of a true love? I have long ago passed the freshness of youth. I recall it in its outward manifestations, as an illusion and a dream. Yet, even as such, I love to recall it. Illusions vanish. From our dreams there must come an awakening; but if, as the outward falls away and disappears, the inward and the true remain, there need be no pain in remembrance. My young reader will forgive me, and perhaps thank me, that instead of writing of the romance of love from my present standpoint, I extract again from my journal the living words that came from my heart at the time.

DATED AT EASTFIELD.

A month has passed, and I have not touched my journal, except to move it from its accustomed place, and wipe the dust from its covers. The little key has grown rusty in the lock from disuse. He has been here. He is gone, but only for a little time. Two words from me are sufficient to call him back, and those two words I have written. He said I need but say, "*Come back*," and I have just sent the letter, with only those two words written, "*Come back*." I blame myself that I did not say, while he was with me, "*Stay*." I might have done so. He wished me, he prayed me to do so; but I wickedly resolved to tease

him a little, and act upon his advice, keeping him a little while in suspense. I am afraid, or rather I was afraid, he might think me too easily won, and that I wore my heart upon my sleeve. So I kept back; and although it was tearing my own heart out, I let him go away without a definite answer. I said I must have time to think about it, and then he looked so sad. Still he made no objection. He would go away he said, and remain away one week. He wrote to his friend in New York that his business letters for the next week should be sent to him at Maplewood. Why, under the sun, should he go there? Because I used to live there? Well, it is so lonely there. How I wish I could be there with him! Shall I ever be able to tell him how at this moment I long to be with him there? Shall I ever be able to tell him — shall I ever dare to tell him — how much I love him? I have sent the letter which contains only the two words, "Come back." But what a world of meaning those two words comprise! He alone can interpret them. And now let me live over again the days in which we were together. Every day to see him, to read with him, to walk with him! Every night, between sleeping and waking to dream of him! Beside me lies the volume we read together. It opens of itself at the page upon which he has marked this passage. I will transcribe it first, and then think it over, and decide whether it is true or not.

"It is not in the presence of its object that a deep and passionate love manifests itself most clearly to our own consciousness. But when in absence the imagination calls up the beloved image, shapes opportunities that seldom occur in reality, painting the dear face with the expression we long to see, framing the tender

and passionate replies to questions never uttered, but only conceived, which in the presence of the loved one die on the lip, or find a language only in our sighs. It is this power of imagination, this faculty of idealizing, that nourishes the growth of love, and kindles sentiment into passion."

I can recall the expression of his countenance, the tone of his voice, and I feel the touch of his hand as it momentarily lay upon my own, which was resting on the table. "I wonder if this is true," he asked, as he closed the book; and I quietly answered, though my heart was beating so as almost to suffocate me, "Possibly it may be."

"Then you don't know from experience?" he added; and I as quietly replied, "How should I?" and he sighed as he laid the book down, and I thought of the "tender and passionate reply" I would like to have made, and of the feelings in his breast which found expression in that long-drawn sigh. He was not looking at me, and I stole a glance at him. He had not then told me in so many words that he loved me, but I knew it. I felt it. I knew also that every word he had read, and marked while he was reading, was true. Had I not lived in imagination, from the first moment of our acquaintance, every word and look of his, and had not this faculty of idealizing in the depths of my heart nourished the growth of love, and kindled sentiment into passion? Yet I would not have owned it for the world. And when he tried to tell me how much he loved me, how long he had loved me, even as far back as when I was a school-girl at Miss Parsons's, why did I not lead him on to say more? To listen to him was rapture. I might have led him on, but I *kept back*.

That last evening of his stay ! That long walk with him over the hill to Mrs. Sinclair's cottage ! Let me go over it again and again, minute by minute.

It seemed so a matter of course that when we went out for a walk together, we should take that direction, and that when on the familiar path, the old times should come back to our recollection, and that we should talk them over together.

Along the bank of the river, through the grove of pine-trees, up the winding road that leads to the house, in at the little gate, across the lawn, and we stood together on the piazza of the deserted house ; for no one has as yet purchased it, and Mr. Yorke says he never will see it in the possession of a stranger, even if he buys it himself.

The rustic seats remain precisely as they were when we sat there a year ago, but the blinds are fast closed, which opened into the pretty dressing-room. The moon was shining as it shone the evening he read to me my own poetry. We sat on the bench, side by side. Do I love him now better than then ?

He did not ask me, and we talked but little. Long intervals of silence filled in the golden chain with links sweeter than words ; and while we sat looking off into the distance, a murmur stole up from the pines, throwing just enough of sadness into the music of our souls to make us conscious of its sweetness. Up in the branches of the elms, the katydids bandied their never-ending dispute, and far off, among the reeds in the marsh, even the hoarse croaking of the frogs came softened to our ears, making the evening stillness the vehicle of all-pervading joy.

It grew late. I was the first to speak of returning, and with many lingerings by the way we sauntered

homeward, looking back now and then to the little cottage, silvered by the moonlight, and speaking lovingly of her whose presence first brought us together, and in whose gentle courtesy and grace we found so much happiness. Dear Mrs. Sinclair ! But for her, I had never met Philip, and never having met him, what would life be to me ! My Philip ! for he is mine. What change has one short week made in our relations, that now I dare say, "*My Philip !*"

I do not know how late it was when we reached our own door-step, nor how long we sat on the bench beneath the porch. I saw a light twinkling in Aunt Rebecca's room. My great happiness made me for the moment unselfish, and pitiful for others not so happy ; and I thought of Aunt Rebecca, sitting up alone, patiently waiting for me, and in her soul praying for a blessing on me, at the same time thinking — how can she help it ? — thinking of the sweet dream with which her womanhood began, and of its sad awakening. Now I know what she was compelled to relinquish, I can measure the loneliness of heart which she must feel sometimes.

The moment came at last which was to part us. I had not told him I would be his wife. I had asked for time to think about it. He took my hand in both of his, and said, "Maggie, I will not ask you again to make my happiness complete by the full assurance of your love. My destiny is in your hands. I will leave you for a week. What you say seems now to you unreal, will within that time take its true form ; and if you can write to me from your heart, 'Come back,' my heart shall receive in those two words an answer to its prayer."

For a moment I hesitated, longing to throw myself

in his arms and say, "Stay, my own Philip; never leave me again," but I did not. I think he waited, hoping to near it. "Then I must go," he said, "and until those words are spoken which give me the right to do otherwise, our parting must be thus;" and he kissed my forehead. I have written to him at Maplewood. This is the last day of the week. In an hour the stage-coach will drive up the street. In an hour I shall see him. I shall tell him all. O my Heavenly Father, make me worthy of this happiness! I cannot write another word.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOURNAL.

THREE years have passed since, closing my journal, I sat by the window to watch for the arrival of the stage-coach which was to bring back to me the joy which in mere wantonness, as it now appears to me, I had banished, although with full faith and in conscious triumph of being able, by the mere utterance of two little words, to recall it.

The words had been spoken. The hour arrived which should have brought to me the living answer to my summons. Breathless, I watched the approach of the stage, as it swept round the corner on its accustomed route, first to the post-office, and afterwards to the door of the inn. The walls of our little parlor, in which I stood alone, seemed to echo back every throb of my heart as I watched the passengers alighting one by one. But he was not among them. The stage was emptied, and the tired horses released to rest for the night. I could observe every movement of driver and groom from my post of observation; but it was as though I saw not, for he was not among the passengers.

Then I thought within myself, he must have got out at the short crossing to surprise me, and to tantalize me a little longer, in return for my coquetry. So sure was I of this that I schooled my features to com-

posure, in order to disguise my agitation when he should appear; and watching with my whole soul every human being that advanced in the direction of the cross-road, I stood motionless, I know not how long, but until darkness hid every object from my view. From that moment, everything seems vague to me. He had not come. A terrible apprehension seized me. My letter might not have reached him; and if so, there was but one way in which he could interpret my silence. The bare possibility of such a misunderstanding unnerved me completely. I heard the sound of footsteps approaching. I knew it was the errand boy, who brought our daily mail. I called to him from the window, and took from him the only letter he had brought, which was for me, in a handwriting not to be mistaken.

In vain may I attempt to describe the anguish, the agony of that moment, in which, like one in a dream, I held the letter in my trembling hands, not daring for a long time to open it, but breaking the seal at last and reading it over and over, until the words lost all meaning and distinctness; and then I passed into a world of disjointed images and bewildering confusion, in which I lived for weeks and months, the thread of memory broken and lost, and even the consciousness of misery laid at rest. In looking back, those months are a blank in my existence.

I woke at last, by slow degrees, to the recollection of my sorrow; and months of utter despair followed my restoration to reason. But by degrees this condition of mental and physical prostration yielded to a sound and healthy constitution of mind and body. I began to feel, at intervals, a newly awakened interest in life; fitful indeed, but steadily gaining through

many alternations, until I could forget, for a little, my great sorrow. Many a time I had prayed that I might die; and, in fact, the prevailing tone of my mind was one of longing for death.

Those of my fellow-beings who can comprehend the new birth of a soul long crushed beneath a load of affliction, and coming forth to life from the grave of its buried hope, will appreciate as I do the beautiful and true expression of one who said, "We cannot die when all the beautiful in life dies to us." No, thank God! we cannot die then. What would even heaven be to us then? Can we believe that simply the material change of death will take from us in a moment the consciousness of our human suffering and loss? Yes, we do believe this before we learn how the kingdom of God comes to us, and fancy we have but to enter into its blessedness, through the gate of mortal dissolution.

But God wills that we should live, even after the beautiful in life seems to have died to us. God wills that we should live to acknowledge that the beautiful in life never can die to us, and that underneath the crushing weight of affliction, slowly unfolding, there springs up a new life, destined to immortality. Therefore we do not die, we cannot die. He holds us alive even amidst seeming desolation; and all the time, unconsciously to ourselves, He is pouring into our hidden souls from his infinite fullness a life which shall gather strength, like the flowers that germinate beneath the dead leaves of winter, and come up to the light bursting through decay and death, a miracle of the wisdom and the mystery of love.

But we do not see it and feel it then; only in looking back we know it.

Perhaps it will be as well for me to copy here word for word the letter which the post brought me that evening, as to try to express my feelings on reading it; therefore I will transcribe it to these pages:—

“MY BELOVED, — A horrible calamity has fallen upon me, which I cannot now explain fully, even to you, but which has placed a gulf between us forever. My name is dishonored, my fortune gone; my hopes have set in utter darkness. I swear to you, as in the presence of God, that it is not through sin or wrong of mine, but in the consequences of another's evil doings I am so involved that I can never permit you to bear my name, or share my fate. You may hear my character calumniated, and happier in the end might it be for you if you could believe me guilty. Yet I cannot have it so. Before you I must stand erect in honorable manhood. How could you ever trust in man again, if after our long acquaintance, our friendly intercourse, if after the proffer of my soul's devotion, and my earnest pleading for your love and your trust, you could believe me unworthy and despicable? No, my beloved, my last prayer to you is to believe in me, and never, through doubts of my honor and principle, lose faith in man.

“I have been wronged by one allied to me by blood, and dear to me as life. I have nothing to offer you now with my love, but poverty and a tarnished name. I release you. It must be so. You are free, and I shall not seek to see you again.

“For one moment, let me forget all but that evening which now seems to lie ages back in the past. My only beloved, I knew you would call me back. Did you think I could have left you else? Acting in ac-

cordance with my foolish and worldly maxims, though uttered half in jest, you sent me from you, and made me the victim of my own unwise teachings. But do not reproach yourself. I loved you none the less, and I came here, to your childhood's home, where I might feed my soul with associations of you, and take up into my life all the early links of yours, that the very beginnings of your innocent thoughts and joys should be wrought into my being. I felt that you would bid me come back. I knew that the time had come in which we must stand in spirit revealed to each other.

“I cannot ask myself, Was it wise? Do we think when we put the precious seed into the ground, and tend and watch it day by day expanding into leaf and budding into beauty, that possibly the storm is gathering which may sweep over it, and lay it low, even before its blossoming? And if the storm unlooked for and undreaded arrives, and our bud is leveled with the earth, do we lament the days of hope and promise with which we watched and tended it? No, my beloved. The past belongs to us, — the past to me so over-full of happiness; the past of love which filled up the measure of my being, never truly filled before. Never more can life be empty to me.

“We once talked together about the sublime in human experience and action. We did not in reality differ; only you looked at the picture from one point of view, and I from another. In renouncing you, I simply obey a conviction of duty. I believe your generous nature would lead you to cling to and follow me. How am I capable of such self-sacrifice? In the spiritual side of my being love rises to the sublime, and conquers selfishness; and this grows out of a simple act of duty to you.

"But I cannot write. The moments fly. I will not mock you by saying, forget me; therefore I say only, in remembering me, do not waver in your loyalty to my honor and my good name.

"The last token of my love and my reverence for you I send with this. It is simply my note-book. No other living being has ever opened its pages. They are filled with you. They will show you how long before you imagined it, I loved you. There is no deceit, no hypocrisy, in the involuntary language of the heart. Read these pages, and you will read my life since I first began to live in loving you.

"And now, my beloved, there is little left to say. I cannot bid you be happy or forget me; but I pray you yield to the healing influence of time, and welcome every moment in which you can live cheerfully. Do not think of me as overborne by sorrow. Crushed for the moment I am indeed; but I have strength through God to bear, and to live, yes, and to work while I live. This I can do, conscious of my integrity. Only the guilty are eternally crushed and powerless. If you think of me, if you try to picture what and where I am, believe that with honesty and uprightness of purpose I am trying, with God's help, to do the best I can, and to bear my load manfully.

"I am weak and unmanned when I think of the bliss I compelled myself to forego in one fond kiss upon your lips, one close embrace at parting. With what rapture I looked forward to our meeting! My God! I cannot trust myself to think of these things. I ought not to write of them. Dearest, best beloved, I must say farewell. Some time you shall hear from me all. My pen refuses to write that word again; but in its place, God bless you.

PHILIP YORKE."

Three years after the date of this letter, I again take up my journal, which has been hidden from sight, with the purpose of resuming again a habit which had once afforded me so much pleasure. It seemed to belong to a past age, divided from the present by a fearful chasm, which even now I shudder to look down upon, and dare not trust myself to look over, to the green, smiling landscape beyond — the happy days of my youth and my love. Little by little, however, I shall accustom myself to write, until it ceases to be painful, and at length becomes a relief.

I must wake out of this living death. Yes, I feel that I am awakening. Sometimes I am quite cheerful for days together. Then some unexpected and unlooked-for reminder of him comes before me, like this little flower which just fell out from the leaves of my journal, and I am plunged into wretchedness. He plucked this blossom from the scented honeysuckle over the porch, that last evening of his stay in East-field, and gave it to me after kissing it. Poor little flower! Its fragrance and its color are gone forever. It does not mock me with a smile of imperishable bloom. It is like our short life of love, — faded forever.

O why did I let him go? I ask myself this question a thousand times. What evil destiny hung over me then, that I could send him away? Had he been with me, had I have given myself wholly to him, when that letter came, bearing its dreadful doom, I never would have let him part from me. He should never have broken the tie. I could have borne everything but separation from him. I would have shared his lot,

whatever it might have been. O! why did I send him from me?

How precious to me is the little book he left me, his note-book! How exactly like his every-day speech and manner, with now and then touches of sentiment and deep feeling!

I had been thinking for some time past that I might be happier if I had something to occupy my mind. God directed me what to do. A poor young creature, a wanderer, drifted to our quiet village, and died in the poor-house, leaving a little girl three years old. I asked permission of my parents to bring the child home and adopt her. They consented, and sympathized with my wish to do so. My dear mother, even my step-father, has grown tender towards me. My heart is softened towards him, indeed towards every one. Already I feel the beneficent results of this congenial occupation. The motherhood which is so strong an instinct in my nature, is drawn out and has its appropriate object. How I thank God the little waif drifted within my reach! I have named her Stella. I do not wish to think too much about blood; and yet the little creature seems of gentle birth. What struck me the moment I saw her were her lovely, large, lustrous brown eyes, so like my father's. She is beautiful, and has a type of loveliness that will not pass away with childhood. Surely she cannot be the child of grossness and sensuality. Born of love she must have been, though nursed in penury and sorrow. God help us! God help those poor creatures who love "not wisely, but too well!" O woman, whoever thou art, who hath known what it is to love,

be pitiful to those whose affection is lavished on one unworthy. How full of mystery the world seems, when we walk in the shadow of some great sorrow!

I do not write much or often in my journal, but I must record the arrival of my old friend, Paul. I dreaded to meet him; but I have resolved to live among my fellows, and therefore I must not shrink from meeting my old friends. I saw he was shocked at my changed looks. He is going away again to work in his missionary field, and is to be married before he leaves. He has forgotten his first love. It is well.

I have received a letter from Ingleside, Mrs. Sinclair's home, asking me to pass a month with her and bring Stella. I shall go. My heart longs for my old friend, and I have been neglectful of her in my sorrow. A few months ago, I would not have believed it possible to get up an interest in visiting even an old and dear friend. My mind now is in a more healthful state, for which I have to thank the little child who came between me and a despairing distrust of God's goodness. I shall go, and I shall talk of Philip. She has faith in him. She will not blame me that I cling to him. Perhaps I may learn of her something more than I know of him. I have been thinking of him all day, with a strange sort of consciousness of his nearness. I opened his note-book, or rather I took it in my hands, and it opened of itself at these passages, which I transcribe:—

"Ah! when we talk of wisdom, what do we mean, after all? Wisdom must be bought at a price, often the price of a terrible experience. It is no proof of wis-

dom, that we have a quick eye to discern the follies of others. True wisdom is not lofty, but humble. This is a truism. So, too, is the assertion that the most innocent are the most unsuspecting. Those from whom the foulness of impurity falls off most readily, leaving no stain, are the intrinsically pure of spirit. Innocence is not ignorance of evil. The readiest to suspect, to pounce upon impurity, are those whose souls are already polluted."

"Ideal beauty cannot satisfy human longings. The Venus of Milo, beautiful even in mutilation, lacks that in which the human and ideal blend and harmonize. The student of art, prostrate before the image, exclaims in bitterness, 'She has no arms.' Beauty, to satisfy us, must touch our human nature, and answer to our human yearnings. It is an absurd conceit to represent archangels and cherubs with wings in the place of arms; to lose out of love the subtle thrill which even the touch of our beloved can cause, — the rapture of her encircling embrace! My Venus must have arms, or I shall turn to and be better satisfied with human loveliness."

"Standing by the Falls of Niagara last week, I tried to discover in what aspect the grandeur and sublimity of this wonder of nature most impressed me. The rapids, boiling, whirling, terrific in unchained, headlong recklessness till they reach the final leap, — or the smooth surface overlying that infinite depth below. The difference is like that between an impetuous, turbulent, headstrong impulsiveness of character, and a deep, earnest soul, where passion boils far down beneath, and an outward serenity lies between it and the world."

"A friend on the eve of matrimony asks me how far mutual confidence ought to exist between man and wife, touching their past lives. It is a difficult question. We cannot separate our own thoughts and deeds from those with whom we have been associated, or reveal our own secrets, without implicating others, — without a breach of honor or confidence. I should say to my wife, if she placed me on a pinnacle of superhuman virtue, 'I am a man full of imperfections, and conscious of them myself. I shall not expect or desire you to be blind to them. My past life has been neither so pure, so noble, so manly, as now, for your sake, I wish it had been. The love with which you honor me begets in me a higher aspiration, a possibility of becoming high and noble. Impulsive confidences are not wise; we must take each other upon trust, and grow into each other's confidence. I set no limit to the power of a great and unselfish love. My life is attuned to higher themes through my relations with you. What we are, what we are capable of becoming, is of greater moment than what we have been and what we have done.'"

"I think there are few deep and permanent friendships among young women. That which bears the name is too often a weak sentimentalism. The friendship of men for each other does not degenerate into a too personal intimacy. The friendship of love between man and woman is not stimulated so much upon the comprehension of each by the other, as by the desire of each to comprehend the other, — a desire never fully satisfied, and always incited to new effort, or surprised by some unlooked-for manifestation.

"This sentiment, which I believe contains a great

truth, the merely sensual man would call twaddle; but it has at least this advantage over a more material estimate of the mutual relations of the sexes: it will not make that man ignoble who believes in it."

CHAPTER XXII.

My visit to Mrs. Sinclair was indefinitely delayed by the illness of Miss Rosina Parsons, my old teacher. I have made very brief mention of her in these pages thus far, not because she was undeserving of notice, but from a conviction that I should not do her justice. She was one of those women so folded up and locked up in herself, that very few, if any, of those among whom she moved with an external dignity and severe sense of propriety, could be said really to understand her. It becomes me, however, and affords me heartfelt satisfaction to say that among all my little circle of friends, no one seemed to approach me in my heavy trial and disappointment with so full a comprehension of my suffering as this silent and stately woman.

I believe she revealed to me, in some of our many interviews, more of the life of her heart than she had ever disclosed to any human being.

Every one familiar with old people must have observed a gradual softening of the hard and cold envelopes in which pride encases itself, the pity and tender charity which melts away the icy barriers of reserve, — the sympathy with suffering, which speaks with more pathos of the heart's bitter experiences than even the passionate utterances of grief itself. Sorrow teaches us that we are not made to stand alone. Mutual sorrow is a stronger bond than mutual joy. No one envies us our griefs.

Miss Rosina had been ill some time before she sent for me. She disdained everything that savored of the sick-room; and the last time I went to see her, I found her up and dressed, with the same exquisite regard to neatness as ever. No easy-chair or lounge was visible in her room. I ached to see her sitting there so straight and so spectre like; but she only smiled when I begged her to lie down. "It will be time enough to lie down," she replied, "when I am not able to sit up. I have lain down but little in my long life."

"Yours has been a very busy life," I said, "and in the main a happy one, has it not?"

"Yes," she replied, "happier, I am convinced, than it could have been without the absolute necessity of work. There was a time" (I give now the substance of what she said, and as nearly as possible in her own words) "when it would have been easier for me to lie down and die than to rise up and work. If there had been no necessity to work, I believe I could have died. But there was a necessity; and when I began to exert myself, I gained not only strength to live, but happiness in living. I have been called proud and cold. I think I am so. I came of a good old stock. I count men of talent and women of noble womanhood among my ancestors, and I glory in their spotless record. I do not hold myself above my fellow-creatures in the sight of God, before whom we are all equal, and all equally pensioners on his bounty; but I cannot consort with people of low tastes and groveling desires. I have no sympathy with ignorance in high or low places. Certain conditions of outward life are necessary to my happiness. Poverty would have deprived me of them; therefore I accounted poverty my enemy, and resolved to conquer it. I could not be comfortable, ill dressed and ill fed. Outward sur-

roundings have a great influence on my enjoyment, — on my health of mind and body, in fact on my self-respect. Therefore, to preserve these, I was willing to put my shoulder to the wheel. I regret no exertion that I have made. I have had my recompense. But, my child, there are some conditions of being which work can alleviate, but never wholly remove. I have had sharp trials. Perhaps, if I appear hard and cold, it may be attributed to this cause. I need not speak of any special sorrow. Your own may help you to understand mine. Poor, dear child! The cold, reserved woman — the old maid who dies unloving and unloved of husband or children — knows how to pity you."

I then talked to her of my own resolution to do something, and my happiness in the little child of my adoption. She sighed as she said, "I dearly love children. I wish I had taken one early in life. I should not have been so alone in the world now. However, it is almost over. I believe we shall have objects to love in heaven, which we shall feel to be peculiarly our own. Eternity must have something in store for us lonely women, something to fill our hearts. I have made many mistakes in life, but none which I so bitterly lament as remaining unmarried. I might have been a much happier woman if I had married. My child, do not nurse your great disappointment. Do not be an old maid."

"But if I cannot love?"

"You can love. The capacity of loving is not so easily exhausted. However, we will not talk about it. I sent to bid you good-by. I think I may die suddenly, as many of my ancestors have died; and I may not see you again."

We parted with a good-night and a good-by.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JOURNAL, DATED INGLESIDE.

I HAVE been here just one week, and my journal has not been opened. Mrs. Sinclair and her two daughters have gone to church, and I will obey this sudden impulse to write. Incidents, there are none to record. Feelings, I have no disposition to express. Convictions, alas! my whole inner life is so unsettled, that I have none, at least none that afford me rest and peace. I am in the effort to do my duty. I am willing to open the windows of my soul, and let the light flow in. But, alas for me! what chaos does it bring to view! What I once supposed was belief and trust three years ago, has slid from under me; and I stand firm on nothing. I ask with Job, "Why is light given to one whose way is hid?" My way is hid. I am drifting on with but one purpose, and that is to try to see and do my duty. I hunger for happiness; but I cannot tell, nor do I know, what would make me happy now. I can only drift on.

I have had great solace in talking with Mrs. Sinclair about Philip. At first I thought I could not hear his name mentioned, much less speak of him myself; but she has led me out of that morbidness, and I feel better for talking freely.

She asked me the other day what I should have

done, had I learned of his misfortune before our separation. "Of course," I replied, "I should have loved him all the more for his sufferings."

"Yet," she added, "he could have been in no situation to marry."

"It might have been some comfort to him," I replied, "to be conscious of my love and fidelity."

"If it had only been the loss of property!" she added. "But there was the disgrace. He could not have asked or desired you to share that."

"But he was only disgraced through others," I answered. "Ought I to have rejected him on that account?"

"I doubt," she continued, "I very much doubt, if the assurance of your willingness to share his altered fortunes would have been a source of comfort at that moment. It was providential that he should have received the news of his direful misfortune while away from you. It was easier for both."

"It is difficult for me to conceive of greater suffering than I have endured since," I replied. "To have been able to follow him in my thought, to have written, to have received communications from him! Ah! none of these consolations, these alleviations, have been mine."

"But he wished the separation to be final. Any proud and honorable man must have wished the same. No man would be willing to bring dishonor on the woman he loved. Poverty and disgrace were all he could offer you."

"No, not all," I replied. "Inward truth, nobility of soul, wealth of mind and heart,—these are something. And what have I had in place of these, all these bitter years of longing?"

"But even had you, in the enthusiasm of a first deep love, been willing to unite your fate with his, would your reason and judgment have sanctioned it? Penniless as he was, would not marriage have proved but a clog and burden?"

"But I might have worked with him," I argued. "I might have helped him to retrieve his fortunes. I might have helped him to build up his reputation anew. I should always have remembered with pride and affection that he was not to blame."

"Yours is the accustomed cry of woman's nature, before she knows the realities of life. It is a high and worthy sentiment. Many others have uttered and have believed themselves capable of carrying it out in life; some have carried it out, through good and evil report, to the end; others, with no less devotedness of affection, have faltered and fallen by the way; others have chafed and corroded under the friction of adversity, their outward and inward lives in continual conflict, too weak 'to keep the heights their souls were competent to gain' in moments of sublime enthusiasm, and have lived, self-condemning and still aspiring, — bearing and suffering, but never achieving. Only God knows how well the race is run. My poor friend, believe me, it was all well, it will be all well in the ages."

"It is a long time to wait," I said.

"Yes, but what avails impatience? who knows what may be in store for you? He may come again. You may yet be his wife. You could bear privation better now. You have been seasoned to adversity."

"I never expect to see him again," I said.

"Perhaps, now you have lived through the sorrow, you do not wish it," she added.

"I long and pray for it with every breath of my life," I said sadly; "but I have no hope, or next to none. God doesn't always answer our prayers."

"Fortunately for us He does not."

"Yet He bids us pray."

"Yes, He knows the soul must pray, — does pray unconsciously to itself. But He loves us too well always to give us what we ask for."

"We won't argue these topics, if you please," I said. "I have no room in my soul for any more doubts than harass me at present. All the waves and billows of skepticism and infidelity are rolling over me now."

"One who saw His disciples 'toiling in rowing,' and came to them walking on the sea, saying, 'Be of good comfort — it is I — be not afraid,' sees your ship of life on its stormy passage, — sees you 'toiling in rowing.' Wait, listen, and you will hear the same sweet voice above the tempest, 'Be of good comfort.'"

"But when?" I asked sadly. "I have been 'toiling in rowing' a long time, and my strength is almost exhausted. There was a time when the disciples found their Lord asleep, while the ship was in the midst of the sea, tossed in the waves."

"And then what did they do?" she asked.

"They woke Him, and asked Him this question: 'Carest Thou not if we perish?'"

"And then" —

"He rebuked the wind and the raging of the water, and there was a great calm."

"And thus it will be with you, only be patient."

CHAPTER XXIV.

YESTERDAY Mrs. Sinclair called me into her room, bidding me bring my sewing, for she was moved to talk to me about herself, and she knew, if she was once fairly launched on the theme, she should go on indefinitely. "I thought once that I should write my autobiography," she said, "believing, as I suppose many a conceited person believes, that if fairly and fully written out, it would make a very interesting romance. But after pondering the matter awhile, I convinced myself that it was impossible and impolitic to write it out fully and fairly. I should not dare do it, or, if I did, I should not dare have it read, and, if I undertook the task, should probably leave unwritten the only part worth reading; so I gave it up. But while the fever of egotism is raging, I want to talk; and of course, if I talk, I want a listener."

"I will be audience gladly," I replied; and, taking my sewing, I went to her room for an afternoon's sitting.

"I suppose," she said, "I ought to begin, as the children say, at the beginning. I was born in Charleston, South Carolina. My father was for many years a prominent member of the bar, and a man of large wealth, both by inheritance and marriage. Through the extravagance and dissipation of my elder brother he lost nearly all his fortune; and after my

mother's death, which occurred when I was five years old, he removed to a small town in Western Pennsylvania, where my mother had lived at the time of her marriage, and where he possessed a small farm and dwelling, of which we took possession, his sister taking charge of the family. My elder brother had died, and my elder sister had married unfortunately, against my father's wishes and commands; and from the time she left his protection, he persistently refused to see her, or to acknowledge her husband as a member of his family. I think she died of a broken spirit. I never saw her after she left us, but my aunt used very often to speak of her to me. She had been my father's idol and his pride, and bitterly had she disappointed all his expectations. I believe that in his heart he forgave her, but he could not bring his pride to acknowledge it. The news of her death, which seemed to have been an event wholly unlooked for, was an overwhelming blow, from which he never wholly recovered; and from that time he gradually lost interest in life, and became prematurely an old man. My sister left no children. My mother's death followed fast upon that of my poor sister, and I was all of his kindred that was left to the poor old man in his age and infirmity, except the maiden sister, who had no other home.

"My father, although irascible and capricious, was indulgent and affectionate to me when I did not thwart and contradict him; nor did he often interpose his authority. He permitted me to do pretty much what I chose. My sphere of action being very limited, little danger was to be apprehended from giving me a free rein. I went to school with the neighbors' children, and played with them out of school. Our nearest

neighbors were the Thirkields, whom, after having lost sight of for years, I met at Eastfield a short time before leaving there. They were wealthy at the time of our first acquaintance. The older sisters of Laura were my bosom companions at that time.

"But even in a limited sphere, danger may lurk unsuspected. Little did my poor, dear father think, when he sent me to school to help me out of mischief, that I should become entangled in a net from which it required the united tact and authority of both my nearest relatives to extricate me.

"My last teacher was Philip Yorke, then a young man of twenty-three, a fresh graduate from college, and as attractive and captivating as you can very well imagine. I was in my sixteenth year.

"To make my story short, I will only say, we fell in love with each other, as suddenly, as violently, and as unwisely as two such young and inexperienced mortals might very naturally do, placed in such dangerous propinquity. When the fact reached the ears of my father, he took me from school at once, and forbade Philip the house. On his first arrival, Philip had brought letters to my father, who had freely extended to him the hospitalities of our home, without a suspicion of danger; nor do I think he would have so resolutely put forth his authority to break up our intimacy, had he not designs of his own at the time. He had decided whom he wished me to marry. That man was Mr. Sinclair. Not long after Philip's banishment, Mr. Sinclair made his appearance. I was bade to treat him with unqualified respect. I did so, while at the same time I clandestinely met my lover, and vowed eternal fidelity. The school term was ended, and Philip left the village; our parting was anguish of

course,—protestation on both sides of constancy. He would make a fortune, and come back and claim me. My father could not withhold his sanction. I had told him I would never marry Mr. Sinclair, even to gratify my father. Philip left, and Mr. Sinclair remained. His attentions were not obtrusive. He knew nothing of my preference, had never met Philip. I neither liked nor disliked him. His generosity and kindness were pleasant. I should probably have given him my whole heart, such as it was, had I never met Philip. I must confess, however, that my heart at that age was not much worth having. It was a foolish, girlish heart, without depth and without purpose. I think my love for my father was the strongest and deepest feeling I was conscious of. My affection for Philip was a sentimental affair, kindled by his stronger nature. It was extravagant and violent in expression, but short-lived,—a sweet little dream of romance.

"When my father appealed to my affection and sympathy for himself; when he spoke eloquently of the happiness I might give to his old age, what comfort he should feel in the reflection that I was in safe hands after he was gone; when he spoke of his bitter disappointments, his heart-breaking disappointment in my sister's marriage, the ingratitude of my brother, his only son, and, last of all, his dreadful bereavement in the loss of my mother, and then asked me if I could deny that last consolation to his old age,—I answered as I felt, 'I will do as you wish.' He clasped me to his heart and blessed me. I was happy. I had made his last days happy. I silenced the questioning and the reproaches of my own heart. I shut my eyes against the image of my young lover, which ever and anon presented itself, with an expression of sorrow,

upbraiding my inconstancy ; and I married Mr. Sinclair at the age of sixteen.

"We sailed after a few weeks for Europe, remaining there three years. They were three years of enchantment. I lived in an atmosphere of adulation, surrounded by every luxury that wealth could purchase. My mind expanded, my æsthetic tastes were stimulated, my intellectual advantages were unlimited. I made the most of time and opportunity, and became a woman of society, craving its flatteries and excitements, and educating myself to demand and deserve them. In these years I was not a loving wife or companion. I loved myself too well—I loved the world and society too well—to be able to appreciate the wants of the heart, or the treasure of affection within my grasp.

"I was summoned home by the illness of my father, and returned in time to see him once more and receive his last blessing. After the season of mourning was over, I began once more in New York the life of excitement I had led in Paris. I was determined to take the lead in society, to have my claims acknowledged, to reign without a rival.

"For a little time I enjoyed my triumph, but by and by it grew 'flat, stale, and unprofitable.' It was while sad and dissatisfied with myself and everything around me, that one day I was surprised by a call from the lover of my girlhood.

"When I tell you that my heart wanted a new object,—a new excitement,—I do not wish you to understand that there were not near at hand objects worthy of my highest aspirations,—worthy to fill my noblest effort. But I did not see things near at hand. They were too commonplace. The simple loves and duties of domestic life were beneath my notice. My

husband, failing to find the happiness he craved in his home, lived more and more in his business and in himself. He perceived that I did not love him so well as I loved the attractions of the outer world. He did not remonstrate,—he did not upbraid. He simply left me to myself. He never withheld from me the means of self-gratification, from whatever source I chose to seek them.

"With this first visit of Philip Yorke, I welcomed the dawn of a new interest in life. Fortune had smiled upon him. Time had added new beauty to his personal appearance, had ripened his fine qualities of mind and heart. I was piqued at the self-possession of his manner when he met me. He betrayed no emotion. There was no indication that he remembered the past,—that the fire of his early passion still lived. He met me as the wife of Mr. Sinclair,—with the deference and respect he considered her due. I will bring him to my feet, was my mental resolve. He shall at least own the sway that so few have power to resist. As yet, I had escaped slander, my attentions were so generally diffused. I thought it would give a zest to life to indulge in a little flirtation,—just enough to produce a new excitement,—in which I would not tempt my fate too far, but inflict just pain enough on my victim to make my power felt and acknowledged.

"Are you tired with listening?"

I answered her I was not.

"Are you beginning to despise me?" she asked. I did not answer immediately. "I see how it is," she added. "I wish you would have courage to speak the truth."

"I wish you would go on," I said impatiently.

"I will do so, and perhaps disarm contempt before I have done." She continued: "Filled with this intoxicating and novel enjoyment, I was nevertheless wary and cautious. Our acquaintance by degrees ripened into friendship. We had read the same books, traversed the same ground, had a sympathetic appreciation of music and art. We sang together, we read together. He was a frequent guest at our house, and I met him often in society. The conquest was not an easy one, but that only gave greater zest to the efforts I put forth to fascinate him. We called our intimacy by the name of friendship. I perceived that his society was becoming a necessity to me. I felt a void when he did not come. Yet I was perfectly secure of myself. I would go thus far, and no farther.

"The first summer of my stay in Eastfield, he followed me. I congratulated myself on my success. He knew how to frame gallant speeches, — how to talk sentiment. I said to myself triumphantly, It is the same all the world over. Men are the veriest puppets in the toils of a fascinating woman. Why should we set them up as demi-gods? Do we not see that they will go just as far as we encourage them? What is all this talk about honor and nobility of soul?

"You may remember when I first met you on your way home from school. Mr. Yorke was with me. From that moment, my vanity received its death-wound. Youth and innocence triumphed over the blandishments and allurements of a woman of society.

"A cry of pain went up from my empty soul, — empty, it seemed to me, of all things pure and good; a cry of terror also, — terror at what I suffered. I saw on what an abyss I had been standing, — saw how a thousand fold more dangerous to my peace than to

his, had been my tampering with treacherous weapons. An angel came between me and the abyss. But you must not think I was grateful, or that I loved you then, or that even when I learned to love you for yourself, I cheerfully relinquished my right and title to him who once had been my lover — once when I was free and guileless like yourself, who had given me his heart, who had gone out into the world to work for me, with the troth I had spoken by my lips and broken by my deeds. The poetry of my life was gone; henceforth there remained to me but plain prose. But my heart was not wholly comforted. I saw my danger, and thanked God for my escape; but I was far from being at peace with myself, as you well know, who were with me the following winter.

"Now I am going to make a long story short. Many passages of that winter's experience need not be gone over. You were ignorant of them at the time, and it is best you should remain so. But I am going to make a confession which costs me much shame, but which I think it advisable to make, as it explains much that may have seemed mysterious to you at the time.

"Please to recall the evening you went to hear Kean in 'Hamlet' with Mr. Sinclair, leaving me at home alone. A malign star reigned over my destiny that evening.

"I was sitting in the library, by the light of a flickering fire, my mind filled with morbid fancies and misgivings. I pitied myself for having been robbed of the transcendent glory of life — an all absorbing passion, in contrast with which, the commonplace realities of my existence were dull and lifeless. I might have loved like you; but I relinquished, and now I felt that strong necessity of loving, without which a woman's

destiny is incomplete. Thus brooding, and alternating between the demands of duty and the pleadings of passion, I was aroused by a light tap on the door, and Philip entered.

"He had come, he said, in search of a book, which my husband had told him he would find on the shelves. It irritated me to have him say, 'Your husband.' If he had ever loved me, could he speak with such nonchalance of my husband? What was I to him now? 'Off with the old love, and on with the new.' He had forgotten all the past, and I must see his triumph and my own defeat. I did not doubt but he despised me at that moment. I had cast him off, it was true; I had proved fickle; I had chosen the man of wealth without love; and now I must reap as I had sown. My heart had only begun to feel the wound; his was healed long ago. Well, I had deserved it. He had not renounced me, but I — I had renounced him, and now he was happy, and I was miserable. Perhaps he had come at that very moment to confide his love to me, and to ask my sympathy. I followed him with my eyes, as he listlessly took down book after book, without seeming to remember what he had come in search of. It was but too obvious that was not his errand. Why, then, did he not make the real object known? Why keep me there in silence and suspense?"

"I was right. He had come, knowing me to be alone, to confide to me the tender secret of his life, — his love for you. And must I sit and hear from his own lips an avowal that could but throw me back upon my own folly and emptiness? Was it not enough that I knew it, — had known it long, — had tried religiously to accustom myself to the thought of it, — had absented myself more and more from his society, — struggled,

fought, been overcome time after time in strivings after better things, in buffetings with the temptation of a hungry soul? And now must I be subjected to the humiliation of betraying my real feelings, my conscious degradation? I did not ask him to be seated. I hoped he would comprehend my silence, and leave me alone. He did not. He took the book which he had been seeking down from the shelves, and, walking towards me, stood looking down upon me, as I sat gazing into the fire. I could not see the expression of his face, for I looked steadily into the blackening embers.

"There was no light beside in the room. In the mood which sent me to that retreat, darkness was less oppressive to me than light. I said nothing. I knew the silence was awkward to him, and I had no idea of breaking it. Was I to stoop and make it easy and pleasant to him to confide to me his love?"

"He laid the book on the table, and seated himself at my side. He called me Elizabeth. Only now and then he called me thus. Once I was his Elizabeth. I did not reply, and he said again, 'Elizabeth, I have come to talk to you as to a sister, and my best friend. I have come to avow to you' —

"I interrupted him almost fiercely. 'You need avow nothing. I know what you have to tell me. You have chosen a singular time to intrude on my privacy.'

"He started. I looked up at him, but said nothing more. 'I will go,' he said; 'I will not trouble you.'

"'No,' I said, 'you will not go. I would have avoided this; but since you thrust it upon me, let me hear what you have to say. You love Margaret Hudson. Did you think me really so blind as not to see it, — not to feel it? or do you wish to be the witness of your lordly triumph over a heart too easily misled, too easily deceived?'

"O! the terrible silence that followed! It was done. It might have been prevented, — all my humiliation, all my weakness. It was all apparent now. Nothing now remained to me but to be revenged, — to avenge myself. This I determined to do. I looked fixedly at him. His face was pale as death. 'Now is not the time,' he said, 'for me to confess that I have done wrong, that I have been false to my better nature; yet I must say it, for I leave the city to-morrow. I would part from you in peace and love.'

"'Love!' I repeated. 'Surely that is a word that ought not to be spoken between us *now*. That has to do with our past. Surely you do not intend to mock me with any unmeaning sentimentality?'

"'No; I mean to be and I am sincere. Elizabeth, my true, good friend, I must speak to you now, and speak the truth to you. I will not say we, but speak only for myself. I have been in the wrong.'

"'And what has so suddenly aroused you to the consciousness of it?' I asked contemptuously.

"'I carried the consciousness of it through my whole course of wrong, and persevered in spite of it, as thousands of men have done before me. What avails it to retrace the steps backward, or detail the process by which this consciousness of wrong prevailed over the temptation to continue? For my own part, and for your sake also, Elizabeth, I can but thank God that anything roused me from the danger to which I had yielded, and into which my selfishness was dragging you.'

"'What if I do not admit the wrong or see the danger?' I asked.

"'So much the more reason,' he replied, 'that I, who did see it, and knew how to measure it better

than you, a woman, with a woman's warm nature, would have done, — that I, sworn by the honor of my manhood to protect, and not to debase the woman I honored, should rescue and protect her. Mrs. Sinclair, we are not children. Once we loved each other in truth and innocence. After that love was past, after you had assumed other relations, to love each other with the old love could not be innocent. You know that as well as I; yet, knowing it, we tempted our fate; we laid ourselves open to the base scandal of the world. Were you happy? I was not. I despised myself that I could so dishonor you. Can you now lay your hand in mine, and trust me as your friend? Will you forgive me?'

"'I have nothing to forgive,' I replied, melted at the moment by the attitude in which he stood before me. Then rousing myself, lest he should think me altogether too humble and penitent, I said, 'Well, and what does all this amount to? We have been amusing ourselves, and playing a fool's game for a time; we have grown tired of it, and want a new excitement. Now, what avails moralizing and sentimentalizing about it? The world have gossiped about us. That we can't help. The best way to make the world forget one slander is to give them a new subject to gossip about. Why not let things take their course? Why such a scrupulous conscientiousness?'

"'If it suits you better or makes you happier thus to regard it, let it be as you wish. In so far as I have intermeddled with your happiness, or disturbed your peace, or interfered with the hallowed relations which ought to exist and do exist for your protection amidst a carping, gossiping world, I wish to ask you once more to forgive me.'

“‘And once more, Philip Yorke,’ I replied, ‘I say emphatically I have nothing to forgive. Now I am going to be heroic, and make a confession. I declare to you the solemn conviction of my heart that in this passage of our lives I have been the one to blame; and if either of us deserve to suffer, it is I. I deliberately planned to entrap you, and to make your proud and honorable nature bend to my sway. My first grand impulse was vanity; my next, love of excitement. Behind it there lay a tender recollection of our early love; for, Philip Yorke, I did love you as I have never loved another man. O shame on me, that with a generous, noble husband, who believes in me, I should dare to say this! Yet, O yet, amidst the unmeaning, the bewildering vanity, the treacherous excitement of my worldly life, how that sweet, pure dream of early love comes back to me. And I was unfaithful. You come to say good-by. You have forgotten all that early dream. Another love has crowded out the first. Your heart is exulting in a new hope and a new promise; and you look at me coldly, and prate of duty, and loyalty, and honor. Don’t I know the truth of all you tell me? Don’t I know that I am living a lie? and don’t I sorrow enough over my poor, mean, miserable attempts to do my duty? How can you stand there and mock me with your superior strength and wisdom? I only wish that Heaven had made it as easy for me as for you to relinquish; had given me helps, instead of hindrances, a certainty of reward when renunciation was complete. But what have I to fall back upon? Can I hold myself up by the love I have rejected and sorely tried? Can I return to the confidence I have betrayed? Can I solace myself with the tenderness I have spurned? Whose is the charity that will cover up my weakness and my imprudence?’

“‘Shall I answer your questions, my dear friend, as I feel and believe to be right?’ he asked.

“‘Yes, — do so,’ I replied.

“‘I answer, then, that you can return; and all that your heart requires, it will find in your husband’s love. A noble man’s noblest attribute is his capacity to love, to protect. You can find no nobler man than your husband. Trust him. We have spoken as I never supposed we should speak to each other, — frankly and plainly. I am glad that we can speak so; glad to be able to tell you that in proportion as I truly honor you, I despise myself, that I could ever have played recreant to my principles, and disloyal to my faith in womanhood, for I was false and weak in doing so. I knew there was danger in every step. I knew there was a boundary which friendship could not pass in safety, and yet I yielded to the intoxication; and I satisfied my conscience with sophistries, knowing them to be sophistries; knowing that the injustice of society would condemn you, and suffer me to go unpunished. I can say no more; but, as I said in the beginning, thank God we are saved. Let us both begin a nobler life, — a nobler friendship.’

“‘You prescribe impossibilities,’ I replied. ‘Life is not made up of disjointed fragments patched together after any pattern we may fancy. Ugly, defaced, hateful as the actions of our past may have been, there they are; and time cannot make them other than we leave them. I look back to our first acquaintance, to our early love, our sorrowful separation, the renewal of our intimacy, the faithlessness, the fickleness, the fool-hardiness of my actions; all remain for me to weep over and condemn myself for. O leave me now, Mr. Yorke. You have been diverted from the real object

of your visit; but I know well what it was. Believe me, at heart I sympathize in your happiness.'

"He rose to obey me. Weak woman that I was, when I saw him prepared to depart, it was with a sort of desperation that I exclaimed, 'O! not yet. Don't leave me so.' He came back. He took my arm, and led me to the sofa. He placed himself beside me. Who was the stronger then? God knows it was the moment of my greatest weakness. The world seemed to shrivel away, and I only felt that I was to lose him forever. Who was the nobler then? The hand that clasped mine trembled. I felt his breath warm on my cheek; and on my hand, that lay powerless beside me, a drop fell. I looked up, — our eyes met. He rose, and left me sitting there alone. I have never seen him since that hour, but I have thanked him a thousand and a thousand times that thus he left me. I heard the street door open and close. I knew he was gone.

"My dear child, you have suffered during this recital, and perhaps you may wonder at my telling you so much. There is nothing left for me to confess."

"Are you tired?" she asked again.

I again assured her I was not.

"And you will bear with me a little longer?"

"Gladly," I answered.

"Now, having confessed my weakness and wickedness, I want to tell you of my reformation."

"Do so, I beg of you."

"Well, then, since you are willing to listen, I will go on. Soon after Philip went out, Robert came home with yourself and the girls from the theatre. You went directly to bed, supposing, as a matter of course, that I had retired at my usual hour. The girls went

with you up-stairs. Robert came into the library, and was naturally surprised at finding me there alone. He sat down a few moments, and then, kissing me good-night, said he was going out to meet a friend who had just returned from China, and might be out two hours.

"Going out to-night?" I exclaimed.

"I must see him to-night," he said, 'for he leaves to-morrow for New Orleans. He has been here a day or two, but I was not aware of his arrival. The truth is, Lizzie,' he said tenderly, 'I may leave you in a day or two for a long time. I have been thinking of it seriously for some months past, and expecting letters from this very friend which would decide me one way or another. He was at the theatre to-night, and came over to our box. I made an appointment to meet him. You remember you told me, some time ago, you would like me to purchase the cottage on the Hudson that you took such a fancy to a year ago. I have done so. The cottage is yours. I have made all needed repairs, and have furnished it for you, because, my dear wife — farther concealment is needless — I have decided to go to India.'

"To India!" I exclaimed, 'and for a long time! What does it mean? why do you take me so by surprise?'

"I have been thinking of it long," he replied, 'though my resolution at last was sudden. I shall be absent for two or three years.'

"Going to India!" I could only repeat his words.

"Yes, business requires my personal supervision. I shall leave everything arranged for your comfort, and for the happiness of our dear girls. Good-night. I will see you in the morning, and explain particulars.'

"The morning brought my husband, and with him

his friend. I saw but little of Mr. Sinclair. He was overwhelmed with preparations for his departure. He left on the day appointed. I was indeed alone. Early in the spring I removed to the cottage where we are at this present moment. It was fitted up with elegance and taste, and left me nothing to wish for, — no alteration to propose.

"If he had studied a life-time to learn in what way my heart could be taught to love and appreciate him, he could not have hit upon so wise an expedient as leaving me thus, with the tokens of his generous devotion spread around me. So wayward is woman, that any personal manifestation of that devotion at a time when my mind was in an unhealthy and unhappy commotion, might have defeated its object. But spread around me everywhere were the eloquent deeds of love, — more eloquent than any words or protestations, and O! so grateful, so touching to my sick soul. I grew in love with him from the hour he left me. My heart beat as never before at thought of meeting him. My life was buoyed up with great resolves, and my heart solaced itself with prospective happiness in my husband's love.

"He came at length. He came, and found what he never had before, — a home. Before he had slept one night in his own house, I determined to empty my bosom of 'the perilous stuff' that weighed upon my heart. We were sitting together in this very spot, — Robert and I. I wish I could describe his expression of honest rapture and astonishment at my demonstration of affection. It made him appear as diffident as a boy to know that his wife loved him. I could easily shed tears at this moment at the recollection of it.

"But to go back. How to begin my confession I

did not know. Upon one course I was resolved, which was not to let the twenty-four hours pass without doing that first duty. After planning for a few moments the best way to begin, I made a spasmodic plunge into the subject and personally towards him where he sat. 'Robert, I have a short story to tell you,' I said, 'which I think you ought to hear. I have been waiting very impatiently for many months to tell you, first, that I love you dearly, and, secondly, that I mean to be worthy of your love.' I looked into his face. It was very grave, and I almost lost courage. 'I have a confession to make,' I said timidly.

"'Spare yourself the pain of a confession, Elizabeth,' he said gently. 'I know all that you wish to tell me. Let the past be forever buried, — that part of it which causes you regret.' Then he drew me toward him, and held me to his heart, as he said, 'I never doubted you.' O! Maggie! how my conscience smote me. 'I knew,' he said, 'the time would come when you could find rest here, on your husband's breast. Our marriage was too hastily entered upon. The fault was mine. I did not give you time to know your own feelings. I was so fearful of losing you! so selfish! But we need not look back. I am still what I was from the moment I saw you, — your lover; and my happiness is no less, because long deferred, in hearing you say at last that you love me. You shall never regret it. We will begin our married life anew from this moment.'

"It was the happiest moment of my life. We have been happy ever since, perhaps happier than if we had not been so very wretched before."

CHAPTER XXV.

A LONG gap in my journal compels me to draw upon my recollections of incidents and changes which occupied the space of three years, during which interval I had neither time nor inclination to open its covers. In adopting a narrative style, I feel conscious of a lack of arrangement, and an uncertainty with regard to dates, and a natural inability to describe in detail. Nevertheless I will do my best.

A few days after having listened to Mrs. Sinclair's story, which I recorded while every word was fresh in my recollection, she called me to her room to admire with her the golden sunset, which had dyed the waters of the Hudson with an amber glow, and fell in showers of radiance on the hills beyond.

We sat on the veranda for some time in silence, — perhaps in thoughts widely separated, though visibly present and near in body.

"Robert will soon be home," she said, "and I long for his return more than tongue can tell."

"You are growing sentimental as you grow old," I said. She smiled, as she replied that she had a long waste of time to make up. "And you say you must return to Eastfield very soon," she added. "How soon, or rather, how long will you remain with me?"

"I must leave this week," I replied, "for Stella ought to begin her school. She has lost too much time now and will fall behind her classes."

"And what will you gain by going," she asked, "in comparison to my loss when you leave me?"

"I have little to gain or lose either by going or staying. Not that I mean to be ungrateful," I continued. "I have gained by staying in health, both of mind and body. And I must thank you, my dear friend, for a tenderness and charity which has suffered long, and is kind."

"But as yet I have done no good, that I dare promise myself will be permanent."

"You have encouraged me to talk out my troubles," I replied. "You have led me to speak of him. I cannot express how much good it has done me."

"If I could but have done more!" she exclaimed. "If I could have brought you into real communion with Philip! Ah, how little we can accomplish for our friends! Don't you hear the sound of wheels? Robert must be coming. It is past the hour."

I wondered at her restlessness and visible agitation. "If I believed in presentiments," I said, "I could almost fancy something was about to happen. You make me superstitious."

"Nothing can happen," she replied, "that is, nothing comes by chance or accident. If Robert comes home safe and sound, we don't call it accidental; if he does not come at all, if he comes alone, or if he comes with a friend — well, I hardly know what I want to express. He is coming surely, for I hear the near approach of wheels; and I have put off to the last minute what I ought to have told you before because, dear child, I did not know in what words to tell you" —

"For Heaven's sake," I cried, "go on!"

"That Philip Yorke is coming with him. Perhaps

it is best that I have no time to prepare you for it. I doubt if I could say anything even if I had time — bear up — don't faint."

"Does he know?" I articulated faintly.

"Yes, he knows that you are here. If you have any other questions to ask, he will answer them. If any one is to blame for this meeting, it is myself. Now I will leave you just here, and he shall come up" —

"O no, no!" I cried. "Dear friend — dear Mrs. Sinclair, I am so unprepared" —

"You would be no better prepared in a week. The best time is now: I am going — I shall leave you no time to think — good-by," — and the next moment his arms had closed around me, my head was on his breast.

"Did our friend tell me truly?" he asked.

"I do not know what she may have said."

"That you were constant, — that you had not lost faith in me. Speak, Maggie; are you sorry that I came?"

I could not speak, but my silence was more eloquent than words. It was no time for reason, for prudence, not even for memories of the past; far less was it a time for speculation into the future. It was a present joy, a present, infinite satisfaction, rest and peace after the storm. Neither was that meeting such as can be described by words. Explanations followed in due time, and these I will relate in their season.

By little and little, as the consciousness that all was real — that we were not living in a dream — settled down upon us, we were able calmly to review the past. We did not dare send our thoughts into the unex-

plored future. We read in each other's faces what havoc time and sorrow had made. We felt, each in our inmost heart, that nothing could ever separate us again. For my own part, I would gladly have left unspoken "the things that were behind," — all at least that was painful, all that belonged to the dreary interval of separation, — and have taken up the links broken at our parting, joining them to the blissful present indissolubly and forever. But this could not be. There was a recapitulation of experience to be accomplished; there were explanations to be made. There is no real break in the chain of events. But to go back over those sad years was like a requiem amidst the glorious anthems of heavenly music, a minor tone made up of the jarring notes of earth-born misery. Yet we knew that there could come no sleep to our eyes or slumber to our eyelids, no peace or rest to our souls, till that mournful interlude was over.

He was the first to allude to the painful theme. I had assured him over and over again that nothing could divide us now. I did not wait for him to speak. I answered the cry of his soul. I did not *keep back*. I permitted him to know that poverty and loss shared with him, were more to me than any imaginable life of luxury and self-indulgence could be without him. I linked my destiny with his, not as a child or a plaything to be cherished and tended, and shielded from storms, but as a woman schooled by suffering, and strong in spirit to give as well as to receive help and sympathy.

It was hard for him to speak of the trial and shame which had overshadowed his life, through the wrongdoing of one he loved as a son. He told the story simply and briefly. He had been the victim of a

brother's treachery. He had, so far as possible, cleared his own name and fame, but the grief and the sting must ever remain in his heart. His outward circumstances were changed. He had no hope of retrieving his fortune. He had begun again at the lowest round of the ladder, but the ambition and energy of youth was gone. Even at that moment he felt that he ought to relinquish me. I would not permit him to utter the word.

He wished me to look the facts in the face. I recognized but the one great fact that I loved him. He knew me well, and read me to myself. I acknowledged the truthfulness of the picture. I had a native love and longing for the refinements, the luxuries, of wealth. These, if I united my destiny with his, I must forego; and they shriveled into nothing, compared with the happiness of living always near him and sharing his fallen fortunes. He knew that I had a pride of birth and ancestry, and that this pride had been gratified by associating my name with his, and that from henceforth the lustre of his name was tarnished. It was not a foolish boast of aristocracy, or glory in a pedigree, but a proud sense of satisfaction in being able to look back on honorable names recorded in a nation's history. I knew he once shared with me this honest pride; and who so well as I knew how to feel with him the humiliation? In every aspect of life, as associated with him, I saw only the immense preponderance which our mutual love created over all worldly advantages or disadvantages. How lonely the three past years had been! Rather would I have died in that blissful season of reunion than live them over again! And so the final result was reached, and sealed forever, in a chastened, but fer-

vent kiss of love, which made us then and there forever one.

There was little of passion and intense rapture in that surrender of myself to him, but in its stead a feeling of perfect rest, of peace unutterable.

A week passed, in which he remained with me at Ingleside. It was a week of happiness. I love to recall it—our walks amidst the lovely solitudes, the long moonlight evenings, those full communings of hearts united by so many pleasant memories to the past; for from these we did not exclude our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair. A true, great love does not make us selfish and exclusive. The nobler, the truer the love, the wider becomes the circle of one's sympathies; the deeper and purer the love of one, the more intimate will be the knowledge of the human life which yearns and suffers and enjoys everywhere; we were at peace with the whole world. All discord, all dissonance, had temporarily died out of the music of our souls. We were happy.

Of course I wrote to my friends at home of what had occurred, and of my changed relations in life, and received such kind and satisfying replies from all, even from my step-father, that my happiness was augmented fourfold. We may sometimes set at naught the approval of friends; but in the most important crisis of our lives, our hearts yearn for the clasp of a friendly hand, in token of sympathy; nothing can wholly make up to us for the absence of mingled good wishes and benedictions from those who are dear to us. And these helped to deepen our capacity of happiness.

Philip accompanied me to my home. How proudly I stood by his side, walked with him the familiar paths, sat beside him in the family pew at church! I would

not listen to a suggestion of doubt as to a possible want of foresight. We had lost happiness enough out of our lives. I was also convinced that nothing was to be gained by our living longer apart. Where should we plant our home? That was decided for us by necessity. Enough remained from the wreck of Philip's fortune, which was freely at his own disposal. It was small, but it was certain. His ideal life was a farm in the luxuriant Southwest; to sit under his own vine and fig-tree. Just such an Acadia was within his grasp. A business acquaintance had offered him several acres at a very low price. The house was built; the vineyard was planted: would I go with him there? It was not many questions, it was one. So was the answer, unequivocal: "I will go; I will share your fortune or misfortune, whatever it may be." It was with no feeling of sacrifice on my part. I knew that he considered it a sacrifice for me. I would prove to him the contrary; and there the subject ended without many words, and on my part with not a few happy tears. One drawback to our happiness remained. Business required his presence for a few days in New York. How I shuddered at the thought of an hour's separation! I reminded him half mischievously, half in earnest, of his caution to "keep back." Had I learned the lesson thoroughly enough to satisfy him? I could not make him smile, and I did not feel like smiling myself. I only assumed playfulness to hide anxiety. "I recall that, and many other worldly maxims now," he said sadly. "They are not suited to the backwoods."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER Philip was gone, I had leisure to sit down alone and think. I could look upon the prospect before me rationally and calmly. I was, as he said, going beyond the limits of civilization, to comparative isolation, without friends, without the companionship of intellectual and refined people. We were too far from any city or large town to think of journeying thither, except on urgent business. We had no money wherewith to go pleasuring. What were my resources for enjoyment and improvement? Of what help or satisfaction would my education be to me there? I could paint a little; I could play the piano, and sing passably; I could read and try to write poetry; I could do needle-work and worsted-work. I was an amateur artist in fancy cookery. I had a marvelous love of pretty things, — the refinements of the toilet, the adornments of dress. Should I require these accomplishments there? Philip had a library. We might read and study together in our leisure hours. I might prosecute the study of French, and make myself familiar with the literature of other lands; with Philip as a teacher, how charming that would be! Perhaps I might renew an old and half extinguished desire to be an author. I should have no interruptions; but for materials — O! I should be obliged to draw on my own ideality. I could give my imagination free

rein. An occasional suggestion from the common-sense side of the subject brought before my rational perception homely duties to be done, household toil. Philip had a vineyard to tend. Who was to tread the wine-press?

The day of our wedding had been decided upon. The event was to take place immediately after Philip's return. I should not require an elaborate outfit. All the hands in Eastfield, whose business it was to make garments of purple and fine linen, were hard at work for me. I had a small sum of money left me in my father's will. This I determined to leave safely invested against a possible time of need. It had been sufficient to supply my wants, and to gratify my tastes in dress, and also to clothe and educate my Stella. Of course she must go with me to her new home! We shall see.

I felt sad at the thought of parting from my dear mother and Aunt Rebecca. My heart had grown tender even towards my step-father. We were both changed, softened, humanized. Poor old man! His was one of those cases of protracted illness which gradually, almost imperceptibly wear away the corporeal integuments, until the attenuated thread of mortal life snaps asunder, and lets loose the soul. He had a soul, he had a heart, — that poor wreck of humanity. I can testify to his kindness of nature. I was deeply touched by my last interview with him. I was passing the chamber door on my way down-stairs, when he called me. "I want to talk with you," he said. I entered his room, and sat down beside him. •

"I was very harsh — I was unjust to you once, when you were a little girl," he said, "and to your brother. I confess my wrong. I did not understand

you, and I don't think I understood myself. Have you forgiven me?"

"Long ago," I replied. "I think we did misunderstand each other. We know each other, and like each other better now. We are older."

He smiled. "You are older," he said, "but I think I am growing younger. You know our Master told us that 'unless we became as little children, we could not enter the kingdom of heaven.' I understand his words better now." There was a moment's silence, for, notwithstanding that I feel quite affectionately towards him, I cannot overcome a certain awkwardness in his presence. "I was, as you know, in my early life a disappointed man. Perhaps you can understand the nature of such a disappointment as mine."

I answered that "I could and did."

"I think it changed my whole nature, from a kindly, cheerful, confiding youth, to a malignant and embittered man. Prematurely — prematurely. And it poisoned the healthy current of my blood too. Our religious views partake very much of our physical condition. We don't realize it when we are sick. The God of a disordered digestion, of an oppressed brain, of a distempered imagination, is not the God manifest in Jesus Christ. I look back over that perverted, miserable passage of my religious life with deep sorrow. I had studied the letter which killeth, but I trust now the spirit which giveth life. Like Paul, I thought I was doing God service in my fiery and unhallowed zeal. Like him, I had a vision of 'a more excellent way.'"

"I am glad for your sake," I said. "The sorrows and disappointments of life are hard enough to bear, with all the love and trust we can obtain; but with-

out love and trust, or, as dear Aunt Content used to say, confidence in God's love, how can we ever live through them?"

"Very true."

I took his poor, wasted, trembling hand in mine as I said, "I was a very naughty, willful little girl, and tried you sorely. But I have had my turn; I have been sorely tried."

"You are happy now?" he asked.

"Very happy," I replied.

"Then God bless you, my child. You must not let your brother hold hard thoughts of me. I wronged him. I lament it deeply. You will see him again some time. I feel sure that he will come home, but perhaps not before I am gone. Tell him I bequeathed your dear mother to his care."

"I hope he will come back," I said, "but I fear" —

"He will come back," he said impressively. "He is already here in spirit. I saw him last night, as plainly as I see you now."

I knew it was but the phantasy of his disordered nerves. I thought his mind was slightly wandering.

"He came into this room last night, and looked upon your mother's face as she slept. I called him by name, and the sound of my own voice awoke me; but I know it was a vision."

"Did you tell mother?" I asked.

"I did not," he replied, "but what is very remarkable, when she woke, she said to me, 'I have had a strange dream. It was so vivid! I saw my long-lost son. He is dead.'"

"Dead!" I repeated. "What reason have you for thinking so?"

"I saw his spirit. There was a great roar of a

tempest. A ship was dashing against huge rocks. Suddenly it disappeared, — swallowed by the waves. I stood looking on a long, desolate shore. Great palm-trees spread their leaves against a lurid sky. My blood curdled. On that desolate shore, beneath that dreadful sky, walked my dear boy, the only living thing on that lonely waste. George is dead."

"I tried to comfort and calm her. 'It was only a dream,' I said. 'You are superstitious.'"

"After a time she became calm. She has forgotten her dream, but I have not forgotten mine. When George comes back, if I am not here, tell him or write to him that I left for him my blessing, and your mother to his care."

I promised and went my way. My father, I remembered, had an undefined belief that in some condition of body or mind, the spiritual sight might be unveiled, and those who had passed the boundaries of flesh and sense be manifest to spiritual vision. I had many times taken that mysterious book, which I have once before spoken of, in connection with the little incident that determined my brother's course in life, and lost myself in its wonderful narrations of the spiritual world. I had studied my father's notes, penciled through the volume. This is one: "The belief in the supernatural has always existed, and never to my mind been satisfactorily accounted for. When the disciples saw our Lord walking upon the sea, they thought it had been a spirit, and cried out for fear. Why did they think it was a spirit, and, thinking thus, why should they have been afraid? What are we but spirits clothed with bodies? Why should we tremble at the thought of beholding a spirit unclothed? I am convinced that all science, all philosophy, all theology,

is founded on ignorance of spiritual laws. Who will unfold them?"

After I left my step-father, I felt disposed for a walk. It was a golden autumn twilight, and I strayed off by myself in the direction of Mrs. Sinclair's cottage. It was quite dark before I turned back towards home. When about a quarter of a mile from the house, I was overtaken by a man, a vagrant apparently, who petitioned for a night's lodging in the barn. I refused this request, and offered him money to pay for accommodations at the inn, which he declined, still following me. As I could not hope to avoid him by running away, I determined to intimidate by confronting him. I turned round hastily and looked full in his face. He met my gaze with one equally earnest. A mist suddenly passed before my vision. I heard my name pronounced in a voice never forgotten. I saw two arms outstretched, and I fell on his neck. My brother had come back. It was no dream. No disguise could conceal that loved face and form, — my father's face, my father's stalwart frame. The wanderer had returned. We did not walk on. We sat down on the crumbling stone wall together. We saw the evening lamps gleam out from the overshadowing elms. "Tell me," he said, "tell me in as few words as you can. Is all well there? Does my mother live?"

"We are living and well," I replied, — "all but Mr. Parsons."

"I don't care for him, living or dead," he said impatiently.

"You ought to," I replied, "for he cares for you. It was but little more than an hour ago that he spoke of you, and said that you would soon be at home."

"How did the old scoundrel learn that?"

"He saw you '*in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men.*'"

"He did, did he?"

"And my mother, she too dreamed of you the same night."

"What night? How long ago?"

"Last night."

"I was travelling on foot all night towards home. Are you married?"

"No, but I have a little girl six years old."

"A widow, then. Ah, my poor sister, I dread to hear what changes may have taken place in my absence."

"I am not a widow." He looked puzzled. "There's nothing worse than this: A wandering star fell to earth, and I picked it up. I found it was a human soul enshrined in the dearest little casket you ever saw. I am a foster-mother."

"Whose is the child?" he inquired, with an earnestness which quite startled me.

"Don't be alarmed," I said; "I have stolen no one's treasure. God sent her to me."

"But whose is the child?" he repeated, with a gesture of impatience.

"I do not know whose child she was. She is mine now. Her mother died in the county poor-house. The child of some one unworthy of a father's name."

"My God, Maggie!" he exclaimed. "Tell me all you know. Don't keep me in torture."

"George, I have told you all I know. The child of sin and shame, no doubt, left an orphan and penniless."

"Maggie, let me ask you one question more. Tell

me if you can trace a resemblance in that child's face to any person you know. Tell me quickly, I beg of you."

I looked up in his face. It flashed across me vaguely, dimly. "She has your eyes, — our father's eyes."

"It must be, Maggie; nature tells me it is so; I am that child's father."

"Her mother died in the poor-house," I said.

He shuddered. "And where" — the words almost choked him — "Maggie, where was she buried?"

"In the Potter's Field."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

"It is now your turn to answer me, George," I said gently.

"That I can do," he replied. "I will make a long story short. The mother of your adopted child was my true and lawful wife. I came home from my first cruise, and remained in Boston but a few weeks. I married the sister of the second mate, at whose house I put up during my stay on shore."

"And why, brother, did you not come back to us?" I asked reproachfully.

"Don't torture me now," he replied. "I was poor. I married, leaving my wife money enough for her support while I should be absent. I did not calculate upon the disasters that followed."

"Our ship was taken by pirates in the China Sea during a fearful storm, rifled of its cargo, and left to the mercy of the winds and waves. I was carried away and landed on a desolate shore." I felt a shudder creep over me, remembering my mother's dream. "It was but a few days ago I arrived at Boston, but all trace of my wife and of her family was lost. I

searched everywhere and inquired of every one who had ever known them — in vain — in vain. There was no one left who could give me the information I desired. Night and day, I wandered through the streets and by-ways of the city, but could learn nothing. The ship was soon to sail; I determined to go with her if I could hear nothing of my wife. At the very last moment I met an old friend, who told me all he knew of Mary. She had been left homeless and poor. She supported herself and her child by sewing for the shops as long as she had health to do so. When she knew there was no help for her, — that she must die, — she resolved to carry her child to my relatives."

"And died before she reached us?" I added.

"Died a wretched beggar in the street," he exclaimed.

"No, George, she died in the only asylum provided for the poor and friendless, but kind hands smoothed her pillow."

"Thank God for that! O my poor, dear Mary! If she could have lived till now, I could repay her for all she has suffered. I am not poor now."

"Nor is God poor," I added. "He can repay her. I think He can and will."

"We must believe it is so. And the child?"

"Many beside myself were eager to take the little girl," I replied. "But the lot fell upon me. Your child calls me mamma."

"Mary blesses you from the heaven where she is living now. And now tell me of our mother. Is she changed? Let me go to her."

"We must be cautious, George. The surprise might overcome her. I will precede you. Remain

outside, and when you see the light move from right to left, enter."

I rushed home.

"What ails you, child?" my mother inquired.
"What has happened?"

"Where is Aunt Rebecca?" I asked.

"With your father, reading aloud to him."

"Mother," I said, "a man followed me home. He asked me if we would give him a night's lodging in the barn. Shall we do so?"

"Do so? No, child. Give him money, and send him to the public house."

"But, mother, I offered to do that, and he won't go to the public house. He insists upon coming here. He is waiting outside."

"Hold me up, Maggie," cried my mother suddenly.
"The room is turning round." I ran to her. She leaned on me and looked up. "I can scarcely speak," she said, "but my heart tells me my boy has come home."

"It is true. Bear up, mother,—in a moment you will see your own George." I knew she would be no better prepared an hour hence than at that moment. I made the signal, and the next moment she was clasped to his heart. She could not speak through her tears.

Aunt Rebecca came in, and there was another meeting—another breaking down. I thought of a little child unconscious of this new presence, sleeping soundly in her little bed. No one knew this part of the story but myself. I forbore at that time to speak of it. I saw George looking round anxiously, and whispered without being overheard, "By and by, George;" and he sat down beside mother on the

sofa, and tried to be patient. There is a voice of nature in us stronger than every pleading of affection. The mother's heart could have told what it was as she sat gazing on the face of her boy. The father felt it for the life of his life which as yet he had never beheld—that voice of nature forever reaching forward and not backward. I could not keep him from her. I arose to go, and he followed fast after me. "It is our little secret," I said, looking back as we went out. "We will return in a moment."

I led the way on tiptoe to the little bedroom where Stella was sleeping the sound sleep of innocence and health. Many were the tears that fell upon her golden curls. His heart was lightened, and I let him weep. "Wait until to-morrow," I said, "and she shall embrace her father."

Again we went to the little parlor. Aunt Rebecca and mother were still sitting where we left them. Long we sat and talked; for we had much to talk about.

In spite of his homely garb, George looked like what he was,—an inborn gentleman. He came back to us poorly clad and weather-beaten, but not poor. O! how happy we all were! The invalid who could not come down to join our little group rejoiced no less in our joy. And when, the following morning, bright and early, the little Stella came down-stairs, and was lifted on high in her father's stalwart arms,—and by degrees awoke to the reality that it was her father,—our cup of joy and contentment seemed too full. And yet it was not too full to hold one drop more.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I CONGRATULATE myself on being able once more to make use of material close at hand, and to quote from my journal again. I have to deal with sentiment and poetry; and a record of events present and real will serve my purpose better than a tame narration of them when long passed.

JOURNAL.

I have been married just one month. This is the first evening that I have been left alone, and I will improve it by living over again the past month. I shall try and imagine I am writing a novel. What an enviable talent novel-writing is! I wonder if, by way of relief, these authors do not give vent to some of their own depravity, and create some scape-goat to bear the burden of their own spite and malignity. I am too happy to need any such scape-goat at present. It seems very natural that the soft and tender emotions, which we are afraid to breathe to human ears, should find utterance through some ideal being, for whom opportunities are so happily disposed that we can endow them with our own consciousness, and remain ourselves in the background. That would be delightful. I will try it. In this way I shall be able to avoid the everlasting *I*, constantly recurring when I write of myself, and yet have the blissful consciousness that it is *I* myself. What a luxury it must be to a poetical and im-

aginative nature to create just such a hero as she would worship, enjoying, with an intensity she might never experience in life, a communion of soul entirely satisfying!

And then again, if in the retrospect of their own lives, women authors feel at times a little bitter,—and who can blame them if they do?—when they are left high and dry and alone on the sandy shore, with woman's highest destiny unfulfilled, and the ship freighted with their hopes far out at sea, what a relief it must be sometimes to recall examples of infelicity in the married destinies around them, until they can almost congratulate themselves upon what they have been spared,—what they have escaped!

But to return to the wedding. The villagers were assembled in the pretty parlor of a certain house in Eastfield. The minister was there,—not old Mr. Penfold, but the new minister. He was always called the new minister, albeit his hair was already silvered with years. In proper time the bride came from her room, arrayed simply. The bridegroom stood waiting to escort her in, and she entered the room leaning on his arm. He whispered to her a few words as she went along, which brought the color to her face, but which were evidently intended for her alone. Therefore it is not becoming for me to pry into the matter, or, even if I knew, to make them public. However, as I do know more of the facts and feelings of the affair than any person else, I shall not keep silence, even at the risk of being called a tale-bearer.

The ceremony was short, and, directly after, a carriage was at the door. There were leave-takings and the usual quantity of tears; and towards the close of the afternoon the married pair set forth on their wed-

ding journey. The bride had never asked, had never been told, where she was going, nor did she much care, so that she could stay close by her husband, and feel that she need never leave him again.

Through a lonely and picturesque country the travellers passed along, until they reached a village twenty miles distant from Eastfield, and equally distant from Maplewood. It was nine o'clock at evening, October, and the harvest moon had risen. "Shall or shall we not ride farther?" This question was asked and answered in the same breath. "We will go on, it is so lovely." And they took fresh horses and drove on, in the direction of Maplewood. Descriptions of scenery are always unsatisfactory, sometimes tedious. It was but a three hours' ride from Farrington to Maplewood. They reached there about midnight. Not a sign of life in the village. They passed the post-office. The bridegroom gave a shudder, and his wife looked up at his face. "I took your letter, bidding me come back, from this office," he said. "The extremes of happiness and misery came to me here. There was another letter handed me at the same time, but I did not open it until I had read yours. Then, scarcely conscious of what I did, for my thoughts were full of you, I broke the seal. My eye and my heart were arrested at the same moment. We will not dwell on it. You know all now." His wife again looked up at him. The cloud had passed away. He stooped down and kissed her twice, — once for the time he recklessly threw away, when they parted at Eastfield, which loss he said he had never ceased to deplore, and again from the fullness of happiness in his right to do so then.

On they drove. The hills rose abruptly on either side of the road. The brook crossed and recrossed,

like a gleeful child at play, and then glided off far out of sight.

On they drove. Not a light in the village but one, and that one, like a tiny star, twinkled in the windows of a house familiar to both. It was the early home of his beloved. He had seen it before. They drove towards it nearer and nearer. Turning a sharp angle of the road, they came in full sight of the house. She began to point out each separate room. "That, on the western corner of the house, was my father's library," she said. "Above it was my mother's bedroom, and on the opposite corner, mine."

"I know every spot well," he replied. "That light in the window is from your room. I can tell you the exact place of every article of furniture. It is just the same as when you occupied it."

She was surprised. "I did not think you had been there," she said.

"How could I help going there?" he inquired. "It was the first spot I sought out. I represented myself as a friend of the family, and thus gained admission into the sacred precincts."

"But how did you know my room?" she asked.

"By an unerring instinct," he replied. "Your spirit had left its influence there. I went in and closed the door. The bed, draped all in white, stood in the same place where it ever did. I kissed the pillows where your pretty golden curls had lain, and where, though the gold is changed to brown, I hope it will rest as sweetly again."

"It seems strange to me that you should ever have thought of coming here," she said.

"Does it?" he replied. "Is it strange that I should wish to gather into my life the golden threads of your

youth, that I may never look back to feel there was a time in your life in which my soul had not met your soul? Think it over, and see if it was not the most natural thing in the world that I should come here to await my doom."

They had reached the gate. The door stood open, and they entered. The good woman of the house was prepared for them, and led the way before them to the house, for the present their own.

They remained in Maplewood a month, until the October days grew chilly and dark. They renewed their vows of love and fidelity as they stood beside her father's grave. They returned the next day to East-field, and thus ended the first month of marriage, called, for what reason tradition may explain, though I cannot, the "honey-moon."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE cannot write a faithful biography. I am convinced of that. Even one's journal is but a patched and imperfect history of one's life. If it were otherwise, — if one dared to tell the truth, and the whole truth, — if, secure of perfect secrecy, one dared commit all to paper! But it cannot be. Who does not feel what a power in the world, in society, in human experience, one faithfully written human life would be? We are never satisfied with biography or autobiography. We know that the one cannot, the other dare not, be true. We know that what is left out of the one because it cannot be known, and out of the other because it dare not be uttered, is the deepest, the truest, the most real part of life.

O! if there lived one human being who could be true to himself, to his friends, to the world! Alas! alas! and yet, if such a one did live, still more might we say, Alas!

But I intend as far as I go to be true, — as far as I dare to speak out. I do not write simply to make a pleasant or an interesting story. Underlying the desire to gratify my grandchild by granting her request, is a longing to do her good. Therefore for her sake will I lay bare many of the deepest experiences of my heart. The most external lives — those apparently thoughtless and frivolous; those outwardly full to

overflowing of happiness, prosperous, unclouded by cares — all have their moments when, touched by the great mystery of life itself, the everlasting significance of human destiny presses upon the soul's consciousness. If for such moments a language could be found, how would human longing and human endeavor reach up, and grasp the teachings of a universal experience! But this cannot be. Each individual soul stands isolated, dimly recognizing and doubtingly acknowledging a common bond of brotherhood, and drawing from it but little help, and but doubtful happiness.

I will break off without a word of apology or explanation, and return to my journal. I perceive many a gap in the record. I open the book at this searching question: —

"Are you happy?" We will find the answer somewhere farther on.

JOURNAL.

I have been getting accustomed to a new state of things. I have been in a measure unsettled, in mind, body, and estate. I have been whirled through unfamiliar sights and scenes. I have traversed miles by land and water, and am now set down in a wilderness, which, by the help of love and obedience to duty, I hope to make "blossom as a rose." Am I happy? Are my anticipations realized? I had no definite anticipations. The better for you, Margaret Yorke. (It is always better to have no definite anticipations. Yes, I am happy. Now let me go on in my own way. After a year of married life, I think I may safely look back over the ground we have travelled together, — Philip and I.

My husband once said to me, in one of his despond-

ing moods, "The longest life on earth was never yet long enough to live down calumny. Kill it in one place, it starts up in another. Trample it down here, and it breaks out anew there. Contradict it to a friend, it has been whispered to a friend's friend. There is an aptitude in human nature to believe in evil, — a universal reluctance in being persuaded of good."

I called him cynical. He simply replied, "It is true. There was once a man," he continued, "by the name of Yorke. He obtained money under false pretenses. He feigned his brother's name, — a name honorably known before. The guilty man was imprisoned, but escaped. The innocent man can never escape."

"Probably the guilty one is dead," I said.

"I hope he may be, but the story of his crime is not dead. The consequences of his guilt remain."

"But why should the innocent suffer?" I asked.

"By an unalterable law," he answered. "But let us talk of other things."

We tried to talk of other things, but the mood was on him, and he could not talk. After a few ineffectual attempts to divert his mind, I was forced to give up, and presently he left the room and the house. Before I married Philip, I thought I knew how proud he was, how sensitive; but I was mistaken. I thought I knew how noble he was, how good, how kind. But I was mistaken even in that.

Frank's name is seldom spoken by him; never by me. When he asked me if I was willing to take his boy to our home, as his mother had left him, and gone no one knew whither, I said I was willing. The boy came. We love him as our own. His name is Philip Alexander. We call him Aleck.

Does any one know what it is to go to a new place; to occupy a log-cabin in a wilderness?

Here we are planted in the midst of a forest, with only one outlook towards civilization. The turnpike, which I can discern through the clearing away of a few tall beeches, stretches on some hundreds of miles to a distant city, which I have never yet seen.

Our house has six comfortable rooms. Our grounds are immense.

I remember a large and elegant mansion, filled with everything rare, and beautiful, and luxurious; floors covered with the richest carpets; walls hung with the choicest paintings; niches where gods and goddesses, nymphs and graces, kept watch and ward; servants to start up at my call; guests honorable and honored, to share my elegant hospitality. Yet I knew that even all this would be incomplete without the gracious presence of my king. It was an air-castle once, it is a ruin now. In the place of it, behold —

Four rough walls, inclosing our simple, but pretty home. I look out, taking in a wide sweep of forest, and, through a vista just large enough for my eye to traverse, I catch a glimpse of what I know to be a vast rolling country, through which runs, deep and strong, a majestic river, bearing on its bosom many a sturdy pioneer, to plant his home also, and rear his sons and daughters in this new world.

But let me look close at hand. These hens picking and scratching; that lordly cock strutting in their midst, — do they belong to me? Most surely. Those cattle grazing yonder, — are they ours? No other landed proprietor dares to claim them. That clumsy wagon, with its shafts up in the air, and its one wooden seat askew, — is that our family equipage? Modestly

I reply, It is. That middle-aged woman of all work? She is an *inmate*, not a servant. We keep no servants. She is an inmate of my family. She kindly came to help me do the work, and I give her what I can spare, with nursing and instruction gratis.

That man yonder, in a farmer's coarse dress, — is he my king? Yes; thank God he is! he is my king; and as such, my heart loves and honors him. No less a king than when I first gave him the title. Am I myself? The words of the old song come back to me with a new meaning.

"If this be I, as I do hope it be,
I've got a little dog at home, and he knows me;
If it is me, he'll wag his little tail;
But if it isn't me, he'll bark and wail."

"Come here, Tony. Do you know, you dear little dog, who I am?" He looks wistfully and strange at me as though he wanted to wail. "Shall we go to walk, Tony?"

His eyes brighten. I will put aside my journal. I have written enough. I will put on my bonnet and join Aleck and my king; and we will go all of us together through the wood and over the open country, and fancy we can see the towers and spires of the city that lies somewhere beyond.

Weeks ago, no matter how many or how few, I abruptly left off writing in my journal that I might take a long stroll with my husband. The vastness of these forests, the uninhabited aspect of the country, sometimes oppresses me with a sense of solitude. I cannot help it. I cannot help sighing sometimes for society, — for neighbors, — for some one to gossip with or about, — for somebody to peck at and quarrel with.

I am a poor, weak human creature, not yet regenerated wholly; not yet — shall I ever be? — superior to outward circumstances.

Worse than all this, I am troubled and anxious on account of my husband. I am often separated from him, for he has learned the way to that far-distant city, and goes there on business as often as once a month.

He has planted his vineyard, and I wish he would "let it out to husbandmen," and go, not to "a far country," — Heaven knows we are far enough now from the pale of civilization, — but to a "city of habitation."

It suits my mood to pity myself a little to-day. Philip is away, and there is no necessity that I should compel myself to be cheerful. Philip is troubled and perplexed. That is the reason I am so distressed. His plans have failed. He has made unfortunate investments. He has lost money. Alas! we had so little to lose! Confidentially to my journal I whisper, I distrust Mr. Millet, Philip's partner. I think I saw through his smooth hypocritical manner at the first glance. He has cheated my husband. The honest old farmer who is our nearest neighbor, only about three miles distant, told me ours was a sickly place, and Mr. Millet knew it. Now Philip has caught the chills, and looks so pale and so broken down! Love in a log-cabin, with fever and ague for a permanent guest, will chase all romance away in the end.

Philip asked me the other day why I did not amuse myself with writing. Without reflection, I answered, "What have I to write about?" I saw his looks change like a flash.

"What have you indeed to write about? I didn't mean to mock you, darling," he said, and he began to

shiver. He can't bear the least excitement, and I did very wrong to answer him so. I am afraid I am getting the chills too.

I wrapped him up as warm as I could. I ought to have known the fit was coming on, — it was the day for it. I gave him a tremendous dose of quinine. He shivered, the once strong man, like the veriest coward. Human courage avails but little before that terrible enemy, fever and ague. After the chill had passed, then came the fever and the delirium. He always talks of Frank then. It breaks my heart to hear him. When he comes to himself again he says "Maggie, we must leave this place. You and Aleck will be taken down next, and then what will become of us?"

"Well," I reply, "I am ready; where shall we go?" I long to hear him say, Back again to the old familiar place and the old friends. But in vain. He never speaks of going back. When I ask Where? his reply usually is, "God only knows." Poor Philip! He seems utterly despondent.

"We did not conceive of a life like this," he said the other day, as we sat looking out of the window late in the evening. The owls, our only sentinels, sent up their melancholy note at intervals, which made the solitude without us seem only the more forlorn. I say without, for within, and near him, I cannot feel forlorn.

"You did not picture a life like this when we parted at Eastfield on a certain night when you sent me away, that you might take time to make up your mind whether you loved me or not. You would not have said, 'Come back Philip,' if you could have foreseen this. I could almost curse myself for coming back. After bidding you an everlasting farewell, I ought to have held to

my resolution. Mrs. Sinclair meant well, but she erred in judgment."

"Then you would have been happier without me?" I said reproachfully. "You had bought this place, you tell me, before you came to Ingleside. You meant to come here and live. Think of shaking here all by yourself."

He tried to smile, but I saw it was an effort. "If I could only get this cursed incubus off my hands! Everybody tells me now that it is unhealthy. Why didn't somebody tell me so before?"

"Who was there to tell you?" I asked. "If you had made a circuit among the neighbors of some hundreds of miles, you might have learned some of the facts of the case; but you believed in Mr. Millet, who was only too glad to get rid of the place himself to speak the truth about it. Farmer Dodge told me the other day that Mrs. Millet and all the little Millets were nearly shaken to death. You will believe my intuitions by and by about that man. I hope you will never trust him again."

"And if I do not, I am already involved with him past redemption. I must trust him or be ruined."

"I know you are wise, my dear husband," I said, "but unfortunately you are unsuspecting. You are honest and true, and therefore liable to be deceived. I am sorry you have any business transactions with Mr. Millet. I believe he is a scoundrel—a wolf in sheep's clothing. I wish you could be rid of him."

"I wish I could, and yet he seems all right."

"He may seem," I replied. "There is the mischief. He is all seeming. There is not a streak of honesty in his composition. He is made up of chicanery and deception. He is totally devoid of principle

and honor. If we could see him intimately, when he was unconscious of our scrutiny, I believe we should find him a tyrant in domestic life; a man devoid of affection for any human being but himself. I can read all this in his face, in his voice, in his every motion. If I am not right, I will never trust my instincts again."

"I shudder," replied my husband, "to admit the possibility that you may be right. I can only hope and pray that you are not."

"I would rather be found wholly in the wrong than that you should suffer farther injury through him."

"I wonder," said my husband after a long pause, in which we had both been so intently thinking as not to observe the silence, "I wonder if I am not losing my mind. My memory is wholly unreliable. I can't carry on a connected train of thought. I have no head to plan, nor strength of body or mind to execute, any important work. Maggie, do you observe anything peculiar about me?" His lips grew pale and quivered, so that he could hardly control himself. "Maggie," he repeated, "tell me the truth. I will try to bear it. Have you ever observed anything in me that looks like breaking down? O my God! If it should be so! So soon! with so much to live for! Tell me the truth, Maggie."

"My own dear Philip," I said, drawing his poor, overtasked, bewildered head close to me, till it rested on my bosom, "I will tell you the truth. I do not see in you the least indication of breaking down, other than we might expect of a person shaken out of your wits, as you are every few days, by this relentless tyrant, who goes by the name of Chills, but to whom

I would give the worst epithet that could be coined, if I only knew what it was. Now, I adore courage in a man, when there is anything to be gained, if only the courage to endure, when you *must*. But to stay here and fight against an insidious foe, like that which lurks in this miasmatic region, who will be sure to conquer in the end, — one whom you cannot even meet in fair fight, and who takes every undue advantage, disarming you first, and attacking you when you are down, and the less power you have to resist, dealing all the harder blows, — is, as Aunt Content used to say, ‘flying in the face of Providence.’ Therefore, for once in your life, be ruled by a woman. Let us pack up and leave this paradise and the serpent behind, — we can neither ‘scotch nor kill it,’ — and pitch our tent elsewhere. And believe this, my darling and my king, wherever you may decide to go will be to me a heaven on earth, if you are there; even here, if you *must* stay.”

“We will go!” he exclaimed. “We will run away from the enemy. In this case, ‘discretion is the better part of valor.’ It is not cowardliness! But — O Maggie! This head of mine won’t work as it used to. I have a shuddering apprehension, — I am afraid almost to speak it out, — I won’t speak it out. You know what I mean. O my poor child, my poor child, if it should be so!”

“It will not be so,” I said tenderly. “You are sick; that is the most that can be said; bad enough to be sure, but not hopeless. When you are well and strong in body, you will find no lack of ability to work and plan. In the meantime, let me work and plan for you. It will make me feel of some importance in the world. It will call out my dormant energies. It will give me what you once said I lacked, —

passion in the pursuit of an end in life. It will make me more worthy of being your wife. I have always mourned in my secret heart that I could do nothing to prove my love, that you might feel, beyond any possibility of doubt, that the whole world could offer me nothing of any value, unless shared with you. Confess, now, you never have believed this; you scarcely believe it now.”

All I said seemed only to make his heart the heavier. I understood it all. He had reached a depth of discouragement which shut out all hope, and took away all courage. O! how sad, how fearfully sad it is to behold a strong man thus laid low by physical suffering and mental dejection! What to me, at that moment, were the allurements and luxuries of wealth? What the advantages of social position? What the indulgence of æsthetic taste? How much more glorious seemed the ability to labor, the privilege of planning, the strength to execute, the faith to triumph over hindrances! How small and paltry appeared the objects which the mass of human beings were pursuing, particularly those of my own sex, whom the necessity for thought, for work, for discipline, had not reached! For the moment my soul soared above all minor considerations, and swelled with heroic determinations. In that exalted condition I framed my resolves. Alas! alas! We cannot long remain unmindful of our human limitations. The conflict with poverty, with uncertainty and suspense, with the countless obstacles in the path to worldly success, with that universal leveler of all self-glorification, sickness, is no child’s play.

The noble resolve may be taken in some sublime moment of consecration to duty; but, as Philip told me long ago, it is only step by step that we can work

out the heroic achievement. The sublimity is on the spiritual side. It is well that we should admit the truth, accept it, live by it. Not *for* doing, but *in* doing our duty there is great reward.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I AM compelled at this point in my story to fall back on my recollections of the past, for again was my journal laid aside for a time. I am aware that if I touch at all upon the events of those years, it ought to be with perfect fidelity to truth. It was what the history of the Egyptians typifies, — a journey through the wilderness, beset with many trials, temptations, and dangers, and not without many lookings back, and sighings for much that I had left behind; not without a quivering of the heart-strings as one after another of the pictures of my youthful imagination dissolved and vanished; not without its mortifications to my vanity and my pride, for the conditions of poverty do not minister to these attributes. In short, it was not without sharp and severe combats with myself and with circumstances that the lessons of experience were impressed upon me.

And even now that they are so long passed, and I survey them from serene heights overlooking the battle ground, I am not prepared to say that the sorrows and the sacrifices were only bitter in imagination. I see them as they were and what they were, — real, tangible, wearing to both soul and body. But I would not be without the experience; I thank God for every part, and for the whole.

I see others, whose lives glide pleasantly onward, —

beautiful lives they are, too, — fertilizing all the land through which they flow. I cannot solve the problem of these strange contrasts, but I will not arraign the wisdom that appoints such differing conditions. We must learn that faith which is the evidence of things not seen. We cannot, by intellectual searching, find out God. If we begin life by trusting Him, I know we shall end with thanking Him.

But if there is a moral to my story, it is better that my life should teach it than my words. That is the way I was taught. A very small part of the faith I have attained, has been gained through preaching. Preaching is a feeble reed to walk with. We old and gray-headed ones listen to the words of truth and experience, and we say, "They are true, for I have lived and found them so." The young listen to the same words. We look at them, wondering that they turn away and forget the holy oracles. They say within themselves, "*It may be so*; I cannot tell yet." They will not reflect; they will not look at life with its struggles and sorrows through our eyes. Well, what if it were possible? Only this, — they would cry out, "O God! give us death. Life is too hard for us!" Why will we not be wise, and let the courage, the patience, the unselfishness of our lives preach to the young around us, and let alone so much talking?

He is a poor divine who cannot follow his own preaching. Let me at least try.

After the conversation with my husband, transcribed from my journal to these pages, I immediately set to work to prepare for our removal.

Early in the autumn we bade good-by to "Owl's Nest." By that name we called our cabin in the wilderness. Not without regret did we denude its walls

of the few pictures and adornments which had made it seem like home. Not without many tears did we look off, that last night of our stay, into the depths of the grand forest, stretching farther than the eye could see. How much there was to love, and how we loved our little home! Farmer Dodge bought our live stock. My tears started in spite of me, when I saw our gentle cow driven away; for as she turned back her mild eyes ever and anon, and lowed plaintively, I could not help feeling that she was sad at parting.

The old gray cat refused a long time to make acquaintance with the farmer. She had been educated like a modern fine lady, with nothing in particular to do, but to look pretty and enjoy her leisure, petted and played with, — the darling of us all.

"I don't reckon she'll stay with us," said the old man. "Cats git so attached to places, I shouldn't wonder if she found her way back."

"Do you think," I asked timidly and half ashamed of my weakness, "that your wife will let her sleep on her own bed?"

"Sleep on her bed!" he exclaimed with horror. "Why, my wife'd have a fit, if she see a cat in the house! We shall have to keep yourn in the barn. But I guess she'll like it, for there's rats plenty, and she'll have too much to do, to take on."

"O dear!" I exclaimed, "I'm afraid she'll be unhappy, poor thing! I don't think she ever caught a rat in her life."

"Well," said the farmer, "she'll have to do it or starve, when she comes to our place. We hain't no idlers there. We're all work folks together, young and old."

I did my best after our pet went away, to forget her.

One would have thought it might be easy amidst so many more serious anxieties. But our weaknesses are a part of our personality. I always had a weakness for cats.

Our destination after leaving "Owl's Nest," was to the city toward which I had often strayed in imagination,—not backward, as I had hoped and inwardly prayed. Philip could not make up his mind to go back. All his business connections were severed. His social standing was changed. He told me his feelings without reserve, and I agreed with him that for the present we had better continue *out West*. "The place is fast growing," he said, "into a thriving, populous city. If all else fails, I can fall, back on my, profession. There will always be some legal work to do. I have no fears, if only I can get well."

I dreaded every recurrence to the subject of health. It always made him gloomy. Besides, I was apprehensive that he was in the right, that his constitution was undermined, more so than I was willing to admit to him.

And so it proved. I could perceive that his memory had failed,—was failing day by day. He tried to force himself to mental labor. It was of no avail. "What shall I, what can I do?" This was the cry that went up from my soul. I was more helpless than ever, for I had a little child of my own, in addition to the care of Aleck. It was born two months after leaving Owl's Nest. Still I was well and strong,—better and stronger for this new object in life, and happier also, if only Philip could have been happy.

The physician, in answer to my inquiry, what could be done for my husband, replied, "One thing will save him, and only one. He must break away

from business, and go abroad. If he can take a voyage, and be absent a year, he will come back with a new lease of life."

"Then," I replied, "it must be done."

At first thought, the project seemed to me as impossible as to attempt to climb to the nearest planet, and travel there in pursuit of health. To go abroad would save him. "Well, then," in my despair I said, "he must die. God means he should die. With all my ingenuity and will, I cannot hope to circumvent God." I thought till my brain seemed ready to burst; and when I could think no longer, I knelt down and prayed, "Lord, open the door and send help to us." It was all I could say. For a moment I was calm; I had done all I could. Perhaps God had heard, and would send the help I needed. But had not many a heart, as sorely tried as mine, prayed as fervently for help? and were they helped? I said within myself, "God does not always answer the prayers of his heart-broken children. He withholds his blessing. He lets them suffer, and mourn, and agonize, while those they love best drop helpless and lifeless at their side. What avails praying? I must go forward and work in a blind belief that all is right, though I cannot see it—I cannot feel it." And my brain seethed as I repeated over and over the physician's words, "Nothing can save him but to go away."

After all our unavailing attempts, help sometimes comes from unlooked-for sources. Thus it came to me.

I was sitting quietly by the window on a certain evening, when I saw Mr. Millet coming down the street and towards our house. With my instinctive repulsion to him, I left my seat, that he need not see me as he passed. The next moment, I was aware

that he had entered the street door. There was no escape. I must meet him face to face.

He entered the room, and with his accustomed bland manner offered me his hand. He sat down at a respectful distance from me. I perceived by his manner that he had a special object in his visit. I was not compelled to wait long in suspense. "Your husband seems very unwell," he said. "You must be anxious about him."

"I am so," I replied.

"The doctor tells me nothing but a sea voyage will restore him. I came to urge upon you the necessity of his going away at once. He will not listen to me, and says he can get well here if anywhere. To be frank with you, I must add that he fears it might be detrimental to his business interests to be absent so long a time as the doctor considers necessary. I cannot convince him to the contrary; therefore, actuated by the kindest motives, I came to-day to beg of you to give him the assurance that the business interests in which we are mutually involved will not suffer by his absence. I will take the responsibility on my own shoulders. Madam, he must go away at once, or we cannot answer for the consequences. Permit me to act as his friend, as your friend, in the matter."

"You are very kind, Mr. Millet," I replied, touched by the respectful courtesy of his manner, which bore the impress of sincerity. "If, as you assure me, my husband's interests will not suffer by his absence, I will try and induce him to go."

"You may take my word, madam," he replied, "it shall be no detriment to him. He can draw from the concern sufficient for a year's absence, and I can manage to get along that length of time without him. He

will return a sound man, and with health and vigor may soon become a prosperous one."

I looked at him as he spoke, and my poor, discouraged soul saw only what it longed to believe, — the fair side of his character; and for the moment I trusted him. Wonderful indeed was the magnetism of that man's presence! He could persuade one, even against prejudice and conviction, that he was the kindest, the most unselfish, the most benevolent of men.

It was for my happiness, for my salvation, to believe in him; nothing could be lost, everything might be gained by it. "If he were the Evil One in disguise," I said to myself, "I will take him at his word. All evil recoils upon the doer in the end. It cannot harm the innocent." I revolved the subject over and over in my own mind, after he had gone. That some cunning lurked somewhere, that all was not fair and above-board, I feared; but, after all, was not this a foregone conclusion? Might I not have been prejudiced? True, he had cheated Philip into purchasing a place which now lay a dead weight on his hands. Well, such transactions were occurring constantly. Was there, in fact, strict honesty and undeviating fairness in business? To be successful, must not one be sharp, and shrewd, and unscrupulous? For self-defense, must not one keep the weapons of warfare ready for use?

I will not say I was convinced of his honesty, or convicted of my own prejudices; but I wavered. "Whatever he may be at heart," I said to myself, "he has made an honorable and a kind proposition. It lays me under no personal obligation; we have no right to arraign the motives of our fellow-creatures. If his are evil, they hurt him more than me in this case. I will believe in him while it is for my happiness to do so."

It was with this determination that I set myself to the task of persuading my husband that there was no other alternative but to give up business and go abroad. This was no easy work; for, with the despair which accompanies an utter prostration of the nervous system, he could not be convinced that there was any hope, any use in making further efforts. Better die; I could not be worse off if he were gone. I could go back to my family and my friends, — to the comforts and advantages of refined life."

It was useless to remonstrate or reason with him. "If you wish to send me away to die, I will go," he said despairingly. "It matters little from what spot on the globe we take leave of it. You will be spared much misery. You cannot go with me."

Alas! and there was the great agony. I could not go with him to nurse and cheer him. He must go alone.

Once resolved, I knew there was no time to be lost, else his courage might fail, even at the last moment. So I went to work with all the energy I possessed to hasten his departure, — to send him far from me. I was cruel, that I might be kind.

I need not recapitulate the anxieties, the struggles, of that trying period. Prostrated and enfeebled in mind and body, seemingly a wreck, without a glimmering of hope that it could do him the least good, — that anything could save or help him, I had the courage to say to him at the last dread moment, "God will bring good out of evil." I had not dared to give myself time to think until he had gone; Mr. Millet accompanying him to New York, with the assurance that he would see him safely on board the next packet bound for England.

His kindness during that trying season of preparation awoke my heartfelt gratitude. His attentions to all of us were marked with a delicate sympathy which I could not question. I despised myself for ever having questioned the innate kindliness of his heart. From New York I received a few lines from my husband, characterized by more cheerfulness than I had even anticipated. Conscious of having acted wisely, I was calm and contented.

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER I had become in a measure reconciled to the separation from my husband, and encouraged by the tidings of his improving health, I set myself in serious earnest to a process of self-inspection, in order to ascertain if there was material enough within me to turn to any good account. To be a drone, quietly to sit still, and be taken care of, or die, was no longer possible. I must have some scope for my newly awakened energies ; and I resolved to write. But where was the time to come from, with my baby to tend, and my little boy to be educated, and my household cares in addition ? This was work enough, to be sure ; but I had ability to accomplish this and more, and this brought no tangible and present compensation. It brought its own reward in the joy of the affections ; but I had become sordid. I wanted *money*. I had learned the value of this commodity by the inconvenience of going without it. Poverty was detestable to me, and I saw no merit in sitting down and being contented in it. I was resolved never to be contented in it while I had unused faculties crying out for action, and sharpened by necessity.

I would write. To stimulate this resolve, and revive the talent I had so long buried in a napkin, I rummaged over all the relics of my youthful attempts at verse, and reviewed them, one after another.

How strangely they sounded in contrast with the

sad *miserere* of my riper years ! How their light, laughing melody rippled away off into fairy-land, and was lost amidst the deep organ tones, the solemn psalm, of a sorrowing and a chastened soul, reaching after goodness, after truth ; trying to comprehend life, trying to unravel its web of mysteries, to reconcile its contradictions, to interpret its prophecies.

That little poem he had criticised, and called morbid ! How hollow it seemed ! What a senseless jargon of words set to a pretty measure and with a pleasant jingle, but after all meaningless, because unreal !

Yet all that I reviewed did not strike me so unfavorably. There were touches of earnest feelings, breathings of a love fond and believing, moanings of a stricken heart wanting him, the life of its life, the soul of my soul.

I laid the manuscripts aside with a tender yearning. Another volume of experience was opened for me. I recalled a remark Philip had once made when I asked him if he thought I should ever become famous.

"I do not think you will, Maggie," he replied. "There is one ingredient wanting in your composition, and that is personal ambition. What you have written thus far is simply a transcript of passing emotion. No one can draw from that source long without exhausting it and also the vital energy of the soul."

Yes, he was right. I did lack personal ambition. I had hitherto lacked a strong, absorbing passion, an all-powerful motive. "Ah !" I said to myself, "if these are essential to successful authorship, how can I ever hope for success ? Personal ambition ! what place in my heart can that motive hold now ? Passion ! what part or lot have I in that intense self-concentration ?" The springs of my being had been touched by

many sorrows, — real sorrows. I could not unveil these to the world. How could I write? What would tempt me to write? Nothing but the hope of gain. Poor, pitiable degradation of Heaven's gifts, to set a money value upon them!

Still, there seemed no other way open to me, and we were really poor. Philip might not recover, — might not return; or, if he should return, might never regain his former energy. I speak of poverty relatively; I do not mean pauperism; I do not even mean destitution in the common acceptance of the word, but destitution in so much as we were totally unable to live according to our tastes, our habits, our æsthetic desires; destitute of luxuries, and the means of providing them; destitute of the means of being generous, even charitable, of educating our boy to the position we would have him fill. I felt as my poor friend Laura once so bitterly expressed. "I could bear pauperism better than respectable poverty." I would accept daily labor with a pittance sufficient for my material wants, if I had no longings beyond them, and could therein be content. There is no conscious poverty, when one's measure of satisfaction is filled, be it ever so small a measure; but a large measure, — old habits and desires and associations hungering for their appropriate nourishment, which, reason with and try to bring into subjection as we may, will not submit, will not be silent, will not be put down, — this is the kind of destitution which I mean to describe. Only those who comprehend it by experience, know what it is. It lies as far without the pale of sympathy from the lowly as from the lofty.

From this destitution, I was resolved, if effort of mine could avail, that I would free myself. I would

not narrow my soul by tamely accepting its limitations, and by devoting my faculties to the practice of a rigid economy, a relentless denial of every generous impulse of my nature. Some people might be able to do this. I did not choose such examples for imitation; for I had no liking, no affinity with them. Only when incapacitated for work, or crushed with repeated failures, could I consent to bring myself down to the study and practice of petty economy.

Many a night my uneasy head found no rest upon its pillow; for in night and silence, all of us who have suffered and been perplexed, know how every trial is exaggerated, and what a refinement of torture comes to the fevered soul through imaginary apprehensions. To all this the wise man may say, the inspired Teacher did say, "Take no thought for the morrow." But in the long, dark hours of sleepless nights, we cannot shut out all thought for the morrow.

What if Philip should die? What if he should never regain his health? What if his worst fears should be fulfilled, and he should come home with health gone, and mind irremediably shattered? The virtue of calm faith and unquestioning trust comes not by nature, but by the grace of God. Like all plants of undying growth and immortal blossoming, its unfolding is slow — scarcely perceptible. "Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but God gives the increase."

CHAPTER XXXI.

My home in the city which I have designated, and to which we removed after leaving Owl's Nest, was a very simple one. But there were few homes of luxury within the city's narrow limits; therefore one source of annoyance, so common among the inhabitants of larger towns, did not exist among us. I am glad to be able to say that no petty ambition to vie with my richer neighbors disturbed the sanctity of my home. I am not sure that in some secret corner of my heart, I did not congratulate myself upon a certain superiority, which could thrive very well on its own self-satisfactions. I carried with me pride of intellect and culture, which, all the world over, distinguishes the people of a certain little State in the Union, which I claimed as my birthplace.

Whether these characteristics are indigenous to the soil, perpetuated by hereditary transmission, or the result of education, I cannot tell. I know that so many of them pertained to me, and clung to me in spite of contact with others, and, if the truth must be told, were petted and cherished by me to my own injury and despite, that I made at first few friends, and many enemies. From my conscious superiority, however, I derived no benefit to myself, and conferred no dignity on others.

My disposition, in fact, was social, and I craved com-

panionship with my kind. So one day I resolved to take off my adventitious habiliments, and meet my friends and neighbors on their own level. The result was, I soon learned to value expressions of kindness and sympathy, even if they were not couched in the choicest of English, and to accept the outspoken language of the heart, without criticising its grammatical construction. After all, were *Yankeeisms* more elegant than *Westernisms*? "Doubtless," I said to myself, "*we* New Englanders *are the people, and wisdom will die with us*;" but goodness and truthfulness may live and flourish even where there are as yet no high schools and universities.

I had only to manifest my willingness to receive kindness, when it poured in upon me from unlooked-for quarters. My life became more cheerful and wholesome from association with others, and my mind wrought more genially and became less introverted. I neither barred the doors of my house or my heart against communion with others, and I grew larger-souled thereby. I heard but seldom from Philip, for there were no steamers then, and no cheap postage; but what I did hear was encouraging. I had letters also, from time to time, from Eastfield, from my dear home, and those I longed to see. All was prosperous among them. Even the Thirkields were lifted out of poverty, and placed above the necessity of hard work and cankering care. To Laura they owed all. But I will speak of her another time. She had visited her father, and had spent a summer in Eastfield. The old homestead was beautifully fitted up, the grounds were tastefully laid out, the farm reclaimed from ruin and desolation. The beloved sister was reaping the reward of her patient toil and self-sacrifice, the aged

father descending in peace and quietness to the dark valley, and the one only brother was fitting for college.

And all this change was due to her, who, fretted and tried beyond her capacity of endurance, resolutely "kicked against the pricks" to some purpose. Doubtless it is the intention of Providence that these restless, energetic natures should thus chafe and struggle in the harness, and for some wise end. I recalled the time when Laura repeated to me the words of the old song. It was my turn now to say, —

"So we go up, up, up,
And so we go down, down, down;
So we go backwards and forwards,
And so we go round, round, round."

Well, why should not my time come? How could it be otherwise in this interminable seesaw and fandango of fickle fortune.

My brother George had taken to himself a wife from among the daughters of Eastfield, and thus my little Stella had found a home. His ship had come back from sea, while so many others had drifted away and never been heard of more.

Deacon Parsons had passed through the "everlasting doors" into the vast unknown, and my mother and Aunt Rebecca were living together on the old place. The new minister had grown old, his congregation slowly increasing, and the gulf diminishing between the old and the new; for a Christianity older than the oldest sect, and broader than all creeds and catechisms, had found its way into some hearts, and had sprung up, bearing the fruits of love and charity.

Mrs. Sinclair, with her husband, still lived at Ingleside with their children, now grown to womanhood;

and many and earnest were their entreaties that we would come and live among them. Like all who wander far from their early home, I felt the certainty that some day I should return, at least to sleep with my fathers; but the time when, lay in dim obscurity.

With my determination to become an author, I also resolved to keep a servant, who might relieve me of the care of my children, and thus enable me to command quiet and leisure.

There came to me one day a young woman, rather delicate and fragile in appearance, but personally very attractive, who, having heard that I was seeking a nurse, applied for the situation. She was neatly but poorly clad, and I was drawn to her by the refinement of her manner and address.

"You are an American?" I said.

"Yes; I was born in Louisiana. I have been unfortunate, and I am poor. I am not equal to hard work, but I can sew neatly, and I am very fond of children."

I could perceive that she possessed that inborn love of children which immediately attracted and drew them to her; for when she reached out her hand to my baby, she went to her at once, and Aleck crept to her side, and looked up wistfully in her face.

"I know nothing of you," I said hesitatingly.

"That is true," she replied, "and I can bring you no references. I am almost a stranger here."

"Have you a husband?" I asked.

"I have," she replied, "but he is not with me. We have known better days. O my dear madam, I cannot speak of my misfortunes; do trust me, at least until you find yourself deceived in me."

"I will do so," I replied. "Have you children?"

"I had one," she answered.

"It will fill the void in your heart to have these to care for, even if they are not of your own blood."

"It will indeed; and yours are very sweet children."

"This little boy," I said, pointing to Aleck, "is not mine. I have but the baby."

"And the boy's parents?" she asked.

"Are dead to him and to us," I replied.

"Poor things! Poor little boy!" she said, "I shall love him all the more for that. I can teach him; I would love to teach him."

"It would be exacting too much from you," I said.

"No, I wish my time to be fully occupied. I am happier at work; only I would like you to promise me one evening in the week, and the half of Sunday to myself."

I promised, and she left me, to come again the next day. My thoughts were filled with her. Her sweet face was constantly before me. I had forgotten even to ask her name; but I longed for the appointed hour in which I was to see her again.

She did not disappoint me. I welcomed, not a nurse, but a friend in Katharine.

My life now flowed on evenly and quietly, with an expectancy of happiness to come, when the blue rolling billows should give me back my beloved.

If at times the natural restlessness of my nature got the ascendancy, and my mind became a prey to gloomy apprehensions, or some petty experience chafed and irritated me, I could fall back on the placid gentleness of my Katharine, and find relief.

I should like to describe her. She was so beautiful, yet so humble! Her devotion to me was untiring; her love of the children, greater, it seemed, even than mine. Certainly she was more patient with them.

Although I could not but recognize in her an equal, she never for a moment forgot the duties or the limitations of the sphere she had assumed, and only once opposed her judgment to mine. This was on the occasion of a visit from Mr. Millet, who, since my husband's departure, had called often, and proffered any assistance I might need, with the offer of his services at any time, and in any way they could be made available. I had convinced myself of his genuine kindness of heart and of my former injustice; therefore I received his numerous visits in a friendly spirit.

"I wish," Katherine said one day, after one of Mr. Millet's visits, "that Mr. Millet did not come here so often. I do not think well of the man. He is specious and plausible, but I am afraid he is treacherous."

"My husband trusts him," I replied.

"That may be, because he is so true himself. You must forgive me, but I cannot help saying what I feel. Besides, I know him. I know he is neither high-minded or honorable."

"How can you know anything about him?" I asked in surprise.

"Because I lived a few weeks in his family. Mrs. Millet is a very unhappy woman."

"You lived in his family!" I exclaimed, "and where? I did not even know he had a family. He never speaks of them."

"He is ashamed" —

"Ashamed! What is he ashamed of?"

"Ashamed of his wife, — of her ignorance, but not of his own infidelity."

"Why did he marry her, then, if their conditions of life are so unequal?"

"She had money. It is on her capital that he trans-

acts his business. Do not ask me more. I know this, or I would not have told you. I learned it through the merest accident. I lived with them in the capacity of nurse. I was not happy. I could not stay. It was there that I heard your name. One day, at dinner, he said to Mrs. Millet, 'Yorke's wife wants a woman to help her with the children. I don't know how she expects to pay for such luxuries, but let her go on; it will be all the better for me in the end.'"

"Did he say that?" I asked indignantly. "The villain! I always told my husband he was not to be trusted. The better for him in the end! What did he mean by that?"

"I do not know what he meant," Katharine replied, "but I tell you truly what he said. I did not know you, but I was impelled to seek service here. I did not intend to repeat this, but my fears for you will not let me keep silent."

"I will never see him again!" I exclaimed. "All my old hatred and dread of him has come back. I will never speak to him again."

"I advise you against that course," said Katharine. "It is not wise. Only be cautious. Do not trust him, but do not anger him, at least not now; not till your husband is here to protect you. Mr. Millet cannot harm you."

"But he may work evil to my dear husband," I said bitterly.

"I think not," she replied. "At all events, you can do nothing; only be cautious, and forgive me for daring to advise you."

"Forgive you!" I exclaimed. "I cannot thank you enough. I will be careful."

For some time after this conversation my mind was

very much exercised and ill at ease. Mr. Millet continued his visits; and when present, such was the magnetism of his person and manner that it was next to impossible to doubt his kindness or sincerity. I always entered the room with the determination to be cold and dignified, but, while in his society, felt the ice of my manner gradually thawing, until a genial heartiness took the place of an unnatural reserve; and although I doubted in his absence, I believed in his presence. The moment his back was turned, and the door closed after him, all my apprehensions returned, and my first instinct of repulsion asserted itself.

I did not know then that his boast was of being able to fascinate any one, man or woman, but especially woman. He had travelled over the world, and was possessed of varied information. He had read much, and could talk well. Still, his power of fascination was not due to any one peculiar quality of mind or attainment; it was, as I said before, the magnetism of his personal presence, his graceful and polished manner, his musical voice, which bewildered the judgment, and took the senses captive. But I have done with him for the present. My life had deeper interests; for I had, after repeated trials, actually begun a romance and lived in two worlds:—almost unconsciously in the world of realities, from which all care and anxiety, so far as actual service was concerned, was lifted from me by the willing heart and steady industry of Katharine, but consciously, and with an intoxicating delight, in the ideal, which, with the throng of beings imagination had conjured up, and ingenuity disposed in every conceivable situation as suited my mood at the time, filled up the void in my heart, and I revelled in an inexhaustible source of prospective enjoyment.

In writing, my every faculty was absorbed. The end was lost sight of, — the sordid end of money-making. I fully believed at the time that if I were above pecuniary necessity, even without the stimulus of success, without the appreciation and sympathy of a human being, I should still write, to satisfy an inward and unspeakable longing, a natural appetite of my soul.

How many an aspiring genius has passed through this experience, and, dying, left no sign; or, living, passed out of it into the actual and homely work of the world, with scarcely time amidst its driving duties, its harrowing anxieties, its repeated failures, to look back, or even to remember the smothered aspirations, the lofty aims, the generous impulses, with which the morning of life began!

Yet, as age steals on, and the work is done, or, for lack of strength, lies still undone, and the very objects for whom labor and struggle were sweet have ceased to need our care, perhaps passed beyond the reach of our love and our longing, — in the silent hours of reflection, of loneliness, inseparable from age, then it is that we go back to the golden spring-time and sigh over what we might have been; then it is we covet the vision of what eternity may unfold.

In my labor I was happy; but when it was done, when my story was completed, offered for publication, and rejected, I was miserable. I had believed in its intrinsic excellence. I loved it, for my soul's life was in its growth and development. But when it was sent back to me without a recognition of one grain of merit, I sat down in a blackness of despair, and a contempt of myself, as lamentable as it was ridiculous. From this condition, my ever dear and faithful Katharine

roused me, and almost shamed me out of my discouragement. That I should be cast down by one disappointment!

She brought up the early toils and privations and agonizing suspense of those who, goaded by necessity, worked on amidst poverty and positive want, until at last their names were wreathed with a halo of undying fame. I was comforted, but my enthusiasm was not rekindled. I appreciated what might have been the stimulus of success. I comprehended the earnestness of genius, true passion in art and literature, and I said to myself, "I have it not. On the border-land I may wander, and cull here and there some straggling blossoms — some pebbles that seem like gems, but are only feeble imitations; but in the enchanted land I cannot enter, nor penetrate the dark mines where, flashing from ruby and sapphire and all precious stones, is the undying fire of genius."

"Katharine," I said, "I have not genius. I may as well sit down among commonplace realities, like the pattern woman of ancient times, of whom it was written: 'She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. . . . She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. . . . She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.' I must be content with this."

I confided my disappointment to Katherine, as with mortified pride and keen sense of personal injury I hid my rejected manuscript from sight, and, turning the key upon it, declared I would never write another line as long as I lived.

She smiled and replied, "I think you will, though perhaps it is not best now."

"I suppose," I continued, "that at the time this Bible portrait was drawn, women did not aspire to authorship. But to me the picture seems tame and commonplace. It will not suit this nineteenth century of progress."

"And yet," Katherine replied, "in some lights the picture is very pleasing, at least it is so to me."

"In what lights?" I asked incredulously. She answered by repeating the following verses:—

"She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness."

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil."

"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."

"That is a sweet, home-like, loving light, Katharine," I said. "It portrays true goodness, true womanliness, doesn't it?"

"Yes," she replied, "and it touches a chord in my heart. It fills up my ambition."

"Does it?" I asked. "It does not satisfy mine. I want to be all this and more. And after all, even with what we both have gleaned from the chapter, there is something left which we have not touched upon."

"What is it, then?" she asked.

"All her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry. Her clothing is silk and purple."

"You see by this that even the model wife and

woman had her little personal vanity. She liked dress, and to see her children well dressed. She could not have been poor. She could not have been contented in poverty. 'She loved traffic.' She liked to make as well as spend, for read this:—

"She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant."

"She perceiveth that her merchandise is good,' and I suppose she convinces others that it is, for I see no mention is made of its being rejected. I suppose the demands of her age were not so exacting as now. But, my dear Katharine, you are poorer than I, and yet you are contented."

"I am grateful," replied Katharine,—"grateful to God. I have much more than I deserve."

"How can you say so?"

"Some time I may tell you. My dear Mrs. Yorke, you do not know the good you have done, the happiness you have conferred, by simply believing in and trusting me, by permitting me to fill this place in your family. It is a happiness beyond my power to explain or express. Just to be here,—to be with you,—to be with the dear children! Believe me, you will never have occasion to regret it. When the time comes in which I can disclose my past life to you, you will be able to estimate the extent of the service you are rendering me day by day. You have received me as a friend, and believed in my truth, without suspicion. I could not have blamed you if you had done otherwise, but I never can thank you enough for thus believing in me. I know the blessing of God will rest upon you. Your trials will come to an end. Your husband will be spared to you. Your children will 'arise up, and call you blessed.' Such is the Divine

promise. We may have to wait for its fulfillment, and perhaps grow impatient at its delay."

"And perhaps," I added, interrupting her, "we may not meet the fulfillment this side the grave, — which seems rather discouraging. Nevertheless, we see examples all around us of people who live and die waiting."

"It is true," she replied sadly, "and to look forward, the time seems long; but when we do gain the fulfillment, and look back, how short then a long life must appear."

"Perhaps — and perhaps — but we know very little of what or how it will seem hereafter, and I see no good in speculating about it. What I want, I want now; now, while I can enjoy it, while I can do good with it, and make others happy. Of what avail is good fortune, when we have no capacity to enjoy? Worn out with striving, of what avail is the reward, when we have learned to do without, and are ready to die, or must die, whether we are ready or not? Once, Katharine, a great happiness was within my grasp. I had but to reach out and take it. It was mine. One hour of rapture, such as we dream of when we are young, — such as the poets sing of, — such as enters into the comprehension of a human soul once in life, and only once! I mean the first mingling of two souls in the consciousness of mutual love.

"From that bliss I turned away, actuated by a foolish, silly caprice, not remarkable under the circumstances, for there was a reason for indulging the silly caprice; but I let the heavenly moment go by, I turned my back upon it, and it can never, never come again. Eternity can never renew it. It is something lost out of my existence; and, if I were the highest

archangel, and could look back through the gates of pearl to earth, to the youth of my mortal being, it would be with a bitter regret. You will laugh at me when I tell you what it is, for I will tell you.

"There was one evening in my life when he whom I worshipped, and had worshipped longer than I dared admit even to my own soul, told me his love, — poured out his heart to me, and asked for a return. The very heavens bowed in breathless silence in sympathy with that hour, as deep as the ocean of love in which the united current of our lives might have mingled. His arms were outstretched, but I did not fly to their embrace. To be clasped close, close to his great heart, my own heart longed, yet resisted; I might have felt his kiss upon my lips, but I drew back; I might have looked up into his eyes, till the life of my soul melted into his own, but I turned away; one kiss on my forehead, and thus we parted. Three days I lived in hope, — after that, three long years in sorrow; and then he came again. He came, but life was changed to both of us. We could not recall that last hour; we were changed. We loved, we were happy; but we were no longer young. Something was lost from our life; that something, neither time or eternity can give back. Sometimes I think of it with a deep passionate regret, sometimes with a fierce, rebellious spirit of resistance; but I can never get reconciled to it, — never. You wonder at me, I know."

"I do not. But I have an equally bitter recollection and regret, though of a different character."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

"Yes. Once there was offered to me a noble, generous, self-sacrificing love, with poverty, and a good

name. I rejected it, for I was haughty and worldly. Again it was so offered, and with it the wealth I coveted; and it was accepted. After a few years of extravagance and frivolity, dissipation and sin, the wealth had disappeared, the good name was lost; only the love remained, for though much was false, that was true. It was a love that hoped and believed, even while it remembered and deplored, knowing that all would be well in God's time, and willing to expiate and to suffer."

"Katharine," I exclaimed, putting my arms around her, "you are my friend and my sister. Let us help each other to grow good and strong. Never say you are my servant. Be rather my sister, for I never knew the happiness of that relation. I will not ask you of your past life. When you are ready, you will tell me."

"You shall know all some time."

"How strangely we have been brought together in this far-away place!" I exclaimed; "far away from the early associations of each of us! What good angel directed you to me? Such blessings don't come hap-hazard. How did you know I wanted a friend, a helper?"

"It is no mystery," she replied. "Don't you remember what I told you a short time ago? Mr. Millet mentioned to his wife that you were in search of a nurse."

"Yes, I recall it now. I remember saying to him that I was on the lookout for a servant. But what moved you to apply?"

"I liked the name, for one reason," she replied. "It is a familiar name to me."

"I thought it was an uncommon name," I replied.

"Well, it is useless to endeavor to penetrate mysteries. They deepen and thicken as we grow older; and the more we try to look into them, to account for them, and to explain them rationally, the greater one's perplexity. I wish I could just lift one little corner of the veil that hides the future. I should like to have two or three questions answered. I should like to know, for instance, if we are going to be prosperous or unlucky. I should like to know if Philip will be successful in business; if I shall ever write a readable book; if any of my many castles in the air will stand; but most of all would I like to know if Philip will return well and strong and cheerful, as he used to be before his great and terrible trial."

"What trial?" she asked.

"The ingratitude, the treachery of his only brother. O Katharine! I cannot tell you how he idolized his brother Frank. And to think of the misery he has brought upon us all! The loss of fortune alone would never have broken my husband's spirit. But the dishonor his brother brought upon him,—that was the blow which crushed him. It would almost break your heart to see him look at Aleck sometime. He says Frank's boyish beauty is brought living before him."

"Where is his brother Frank?" she asked. "Does your husband know where he has gone?"

"He knows nothing, absolutely nothing. We both believe him to be dead."

"And his wife?" she asked.

"Cruelly deserted her only child, and is probably leading a life of"—

"O, don't tell me that, for the boy's sake," said Katharine, interrupting me. "Perhaps you misjudge her. Perhaps she may be at this very moment trying

to expiate her faults. It is so easy to crush one already hopeless and forsaken. She was young, I think you said, — the wife of this unhappy man, this treacherous brother. May not Christian charity dare to hope that she will live to repent?"

"We ought to hope and believe," I replied. "We should be unfortunate indeed if God had not more patience with us than we with each other!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

JOURNAL.

MY heart is almost broken, or would be if I had not one hope in the near future, which shines so brightly as to gild even my disappointment. Philip is coming home. Katharine has gone away. My last letter from my husband reports him well, and ready to embark for home in a few days. But all I intended to accomplish before his return, — how can I accomplish it without Katharine's help? I did not know how necessary she had become to me. It seems as though the world had suddenly fallen upon my shoulders.

She came to me a few days ago, evidently in great trouble of mind, and told me that she must leave us for New York city as soon as she could make herself ready. "You have a right to ask the reason of this sudden determination," she said; "and I wish I could explain everything to you, but I cannot now. I promise you solemnly that at some future time I will do so."

"I don't wish to pry into your affairs, Katharine," I replied. "I love you as a friend, and I have perfect confidence in your worthiness of the trust I repose in you. I hope we shall meet again under happier auspices. Wherever you go, my affection and my respect go with you. I have long looked upon you as my equal socially, my superior in many respects. I feel that I am better as well as happier for your friend-

ship; but, my dear Katharine, you have spoiled me. I really cannot imagine how I shall be able to live without you; and what the poor children will do, I cannot bear to think of. I told Aleck the other day, that if he lived to be a man, he must always look after and provide for you. The children are both devotedly fond of you, but Aleck's affection is something remarkable."

"I am so fond of him,—of them both," she said, "it is not remarkable that they should reciprocate my affection." Then, with unusual agitation of manner, she begged me not to tell them when she should leave. "I wish," she said, "to spare myself and them the pain of saying 'good-by.' I firmly believe I shall see you all again."

"It shall be as you wish," I said. "But how soon do you propose to leave me?"

"This evening," she replied, "after the children have gone to sleep. I must hear them say their prayers once more."

"O my good Katharine!" I exclaimed; "must it be so? Can't you be persuaded that it is a duty you owe to them to stay?"

"I might," she replied, "if I didn't know that a higher duty called me away. I told you my husband was living. He has been many years absent, but has just now returned in feeble health. He cannot come to me, and I must go to him."

"Unquestionably it is your duty, Katharine," I said. "We shall all miss you. You will write to us; and if you need assistance, remember, we are not so poor that we cannot do something."

She thanked me, and promised that I should hear from her; she begged me to permit Aleck to write to

her. "Poor boy!" she said sadly. "Does he remember his own mother?"

"I think he has at times a vague recollection of his former home," I replied, "but very indistinct."

"When he is older, curiosity will lead him to ask questions which it may be difficult for you to answer. He knows he is not your own child. He will naturally be eager to know who and where his parents are. Have you ever thought what answer you should make?"

"I never have, Katharine. I do not know what I should say. What could I say?"

"You are a mother. Can't your own heart tell you what reply to make?" she asked.

"But his father was a condemned criminal, a fugitive from justice,"—she shuddered,— "and he was forsaken by his mother. What can I tell him, but that they are dead? I hope it may be the truth. It would be better for them, better for Aleck, better for all of us, if it were the truth."

"If so," she replied sadly, "God will not suffer them to live. If He permits them to live, we are compelled to believe it is not better that they should die. If their lives are prolonged, it is because 'God wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.'"

"You are right," I said; "but, poor wretches! What happiness can there be to them in living? What happiness in knowing that their child lives?"

"It is not whether they are happy or unhappy in this world. We can live for something higher even than happiness. One may be grateful to God for even a life without happiness. But you haven't told me what answer you would give to this poor boy. I think

of it a great deal. Night after night, I think of the poor child, when he shall have grown to manhood, and shall ask of his parents, who they were: and you cannot tell him they are dead, if they are not dead; you cannot wish them out of the world, if God chooses to keep them in it; and when he knows they are living, he will be all the more curious. Perhaps when he goes among companions of his own age,—at school it may be,—some of his associates may have heard the humiliating story of his father's crime and his mother's desertion. Boys are cruel to each other. Hints may be thrown out, with the intention of bringing down his pride and wounding his self-respect. He may have enemies who will rejoice to injure, to humble him. You don't know how much I have thought of it. I have brought the matter home to my own heart. Have you never thought of it yourself?"

I confessed that I never had; "but now," I said, "since you have brought it before me, I am utterly at a loss to know how to answer you. I don't know how I should answer the poor boy if he should question me. Can't you help me. Ought I to anticipate his inquiries, or wait until he questions me?"

"Wait," she replied. "Do you remember," she asked after a long silence, in which we were both probably thinking on the same subject, "our Lord's charge to his disciples when they should be brought before magistrates and powers? 'Take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for the Holy Spirit shall teach you at that same hour what ye ought to speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.' If that is true,—if we can so live, so act towards one another, that the Spirit

of our Heavenly Father can speak in us,—we may be sure that we shall have words of tenderness and forgiveness, even for the guilty. You could not teach the poor boy to despise his father, to curse the memory of his mother. Can you not believe that erring as they both were, they may have repented, and that God may have forgiven them? I am sure your husband must believe this. Love cannot believe otherwise. Does not the recollection of some noble quality, some generous traits, of that brother's nature come over him at times? O my dear Mrs. Yorke, you cannot keep the boy in ignorance of the sad story of his parents' wrong-doing, but you can teach him pity and forgiveness, instead of contempt. I feel as though I ought not to talk so freely to you, but you have no conception how my mind has dwelt upon this one thought. You will forgive me, won't you?"

"I certainly will and do. I only wonder," I continued, "that I have not thought of it more seriously myself. I hope I am not uncharitable. I think I can forgive my enemies. I do forgive—more than this, I pity them—this dear boy's father and mother. How wretched they must be!"

"May I, my best of friends,"—she began to speak; then, as if fearful of having gone too far, added, "no, I will not; perhaps my apprehensions are unfounded."

"You must go on now," I said; "for you have awakened my curiosity. I cannot permit you to keep silence."

She smiled. "I really think my fears are groundless, but it will at any rate do no harm to put you on your guard"—

"Against Mr. Millet," I said significantly. "I am as circumspect as it is possible for any woman to be."

"And beware also of your smooth-tongued neighbor, Mrs. Pettigrew."

"I did not think she had sense enough to injure any one," I said contemptuously.

"Yet she may do you harm. Don't think me over-suspicious. She is a gossiping woman. I learned that also while I lived with Mrs. Millet. She knows every time he enters your door. She knows just how long he stays; in short, she knows much more about your affairs than you do yourself. She would astonish you if she were to tell you all she knows. She will not be likely to make you her confidant. Mrs. Millet is the depositary of her secrets. She may work you evil, and she may not. Thank Heaven, your husband will soon be here to protect you! Thank Heaven, you love him with your whole heart!"

"That I surely do, Katharine," I said; "and he knows it also. No one could weaken his confidence in me, nor mine in him. What need I fear from such a little nonentity as my neighbor Pettigrew? I always felt it a waste of time to be obliged to talk with her. As to Mrs. Millet, I know nothing about her, and care nothing. I called once at the house, and she did not see me. She was indisposed. She returned the call, and I was not at home; and that ended the acquaintance. As a matter of form, I sometimes inquire of her husband how she is, but am so little interested in knowing, that I seldom listen to his reply. It is always the same old story of invalidism and domestic duty."

Katharine said no more; and I was momentarily vexed and annoyed at having my suspicions aroused, without any more definite knowledge of the facts in the case. But how could I be angry with my best friend?

The children's bed-time had come. Alice was tucked up in her crib for the last time by her faithful nurse. Aleck, being older, was permitted to sit up an hour later. He was full of life and spirits for a time; but by and by his eyelids began to droop. Katharine loves him the best. It is not strange. Women always love boys best. I think if I had a son of my own, I should be just as weak and foolish as other mothers are. She kissed them "good-by" after they were sound asleep, and then she came to take leave of me.

Gone to meet her husband! And who and what may he be, — a man who has left her all these years to shift for herself? What took him abroad? and what has he been doing there all this time? But I forget. May not the same questions arise in the minds of others concerning my own domestic relations? From just such impertinent questions the little seed of scandal is sown. I wonder if Katharine loves her husband. O, how I shall miss her! How glad I shall be to hear from her!

I have seated myself to transcribe to the pages of this book a letter. It was handed to me last night by a special messenger. The superscription was plain, — unmistakable: —

"MRS. YORK,
No. 6 ELM STREET."

There may be another Mrs. Yorke in the city, but she does not live at No. 6 Elm Street. After opening the letter and discovering the mistake of the writer, who had sent to my address a letter intended for another party, ought I to have read it? Perhaps if I had not caught sight of my own name on the very first page, I should not have read it. I feel no remorse as yet.

I have redirected the letter, and sent it through the post-office to Thomas Millet, Esq. He has received it by this time. I could not write upon it, "*Opened by mistake.*" I did not inform him I had read the letter from beginning to end. I defy any woman living to have opened a letter addressed to herself, to have seen ocular proof that the letter had reference to her, to feel a sudden and overwhelming conviction that the writer was a villain, and not to have possessed herself of its contents. I copied it. That may have been unwise. I don't think I shall show it to Philip, unless he requires stronger proof than has yet been necessary for his peace of mind, that he is deceived in me. And we are under pecuniary obligation to him! That galls my pride. However, that debt can be canceled, thank Heaven! I have the means, — I have the will; and it shall be done. It will leave us without a penny, but it shall be done. I have learned two very important truths, — sad truths. I wish it had not been necessary. I have learned to distrust human nature, to suspect appearances, and to imagine that selfishness is the spring and motive of all that looks most generous. Here is the letter. It bears no date.

"DEAR JACK" (Of course I know that doesn't mean me, and I excuse myself to myself by declaring, if my eye had not caught sight of my own name, written out in full, I do not think I should have read any farther. As it was, I read the following), — "You will scarcely expect me to offer you my congratulations on the loss of your freedom, having had reason to curse my own bondage, and my inability to throw off the shackles of matrimony. I tell you what it is, old boy, I made a wretched miscalculation when I

married a female in delicate health. Such specimens get a habit of living and taking care of themselves. It's just so with your chronic hypochondriacs. They won't die. There's Yorke, my pseudo partner, whom I sent abroad, not because I had any faith that he would get well, but just to get him out of the way, — out of my way, — so that I might have a flirtation with that handsome wife of his; and he writes me he's getting well. He lived through harder shakes than I had at Owl's Nest. I sold the place cheap, but it cost him dear. I hadn't seen his wife then. By George, I felt a pang of remorse when I saw her, and thought what was before her. There ain't so fine a woman west of the Alleghanies as this same Mrs. Yorke. I reckon he knows it too, and that's the devil of it. There was no getting up an intimacy so long as he was about. It's just one of those unaccountable love matches we used to believe possible. You know me, and you knew me when I was very innocent and verdant.

"After old Yorke was out of the way, I did my best to console his handsome wife. I don't think she liked me much at first. She's a keen one. I reckon she saw through me, and I began to think it was all up with me. However, I know game. There ain't many women that I can't get round if I set about it. They're vulnerable, and the way to Mrs. Yorke's favor is to pretend unbounded regard for her husband. It's been devilish slow work, but I think she likes me more and more. I vow, it makes me feel mean sometimes when she thanks me for my kindness to her husband. The old fellow will soon be home, and my game will be played out. Foiled, — foiled, Jack. Lynx eyes watching me at home, and a set of gossiping women dogging me. Well, I have one sin less to

answer for. I know I am a puzzle to the women, and I must own myself baffled for once. I suppose you will make me welcome to your terrestrial paradise as long as I keep the cloven foot out of sight.

"MILLET."

I hope the letter destined for me may be as highly appreciated by "dear Jack." I wonder if he read it and then sent it back. O Philip, Philip! how my heart longs for you!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JOURNAL.

YESTERDAY I returned a certain letter to its writer; to-day I have passed through another excitement. I don't know whether to be amused or indignant. My present feelings are of a mixed nature. I wish I could believe this was the end of the matter, but I have a vague apprehension that I have not heard the last of it. I would give all the world if Katharine were here now. However, I will keep up my courage, and not permit myself to be browbeaten. Who could have believed that I, of all people in the world, — that I should be drawn into such a disgusting and disgraceful farce? Farcical it seems to me, and yet it may be tragical before we are out of it. About sunset this afternoon I was started by a furious pull at the street door-bell. It roused me out of the sweetest little doze, and snapped the thread of a delightful dream so suddenly that I can't recall it. I must have looked like "a guilty thing surprised," when I opened the door; for the transition from the ideal to the actual world was so sudden that I was, metaphorically speaking, staggered in the transit.

What was my surprise, on opening the door, to be confronted by Mrs. Millet? She stood there enveloped in a costly shawl, and with a sun-bonnet on her head. Gaunt and spectral-like she is at all times; but as she stood before me then, she looked the very

shadow of a shade. Her great blue eyes rolled from side to side. She looked as though bewildered and surprised at finding herself where she was, and wondering how she got there.

"Will you come in?" I asked.

She pushed on before me into the family sitting-room, and, closing the door behind her, looked eagerly from side to side. I began to be afraid that I was shut in with a maniac; and, although I was too polite to betray any fear, I contrived to sidle along doorward while my guest made the circuit of the apartment without apparently noticing me. "Where is he? Where is my husband? You needn't think I don't know. Yer letter came when he was out. I had a mind to open it, only I thought he'd kill me if he found it out. I know yer writin'. I've seen it often. And now I want ter ask yer if you hain't nothing better to do than to try and decoy my husband away. Yer needn't deny it. Them as knows all about it keeps me informed. And now I won't stir one foot out of this house till I know where you keeps him." And she rose up before me, a head taller than when she came in, and looked as though she was drawing herself out thinner and taller every moment.

"If you will sit down and be quiet, Mrs. Millet," I said, "I will try to hear what you have to say, and to answer all your questions." Then, remembering that I had read somewhere that the only way to control and subdue mad people was to look them straight in the eye, I fastened my steady gaze upon her without winking until she fairly began to shake.

"Now sit down, Mrs. Millet," I said, not however leaving my post at the door. "You have no right to break into a neighbor's house in this sudden and vio-

lent manner. If you think your husband is here, you are at perfect liberty to search the house from garret to cellar. You may look in every closet and under every bed. I can assure you, if he is here, it is without my knowledge and against my wishes; for whatever you may feel towards him, I assure you that I despise him from the bottom of my heart."

"You — despise him!" she ejaculated, with a look of undissembled astonishment. "Despise Mr. Millet!" Then, suddenly becoming excited again, she cried out, "I know yer for jest what you be, — a deceitful siren."

If I had not been so frightened, I certainly should have betrayed my feeling of the ridiculousness of the charge brought against me. But, as the poor demented woman stood glowering down upon me in such close proximity that I should not have been surprised any moment to have felt her fingers in my hair, or hands clutching at my throat, my sense of the ludicrous was displaced by actual fears for my personal safety. There was no one within call; so I plucked up courage, and thought I would change my tactics, and try the effect of moral suasion.

"My good friend," I said, in as gentle a voice as I could command, — tremulous with emotion, but the very natural one of fear, — "do sit down here by me quietly, and tell me what troubles you." I laid my hand gently on her shoulders, and she began again to tremble violently. "You are ill," I said as kindly as I could; "let me give you a glass of wine."

"I never take wine," she said, shuddering. "He wants me to take it. He says it's good for the ager; but I'm afeered. He's wicked enough to put p'ison in't. He'd like it if I could shake the life out o' me. He wants to git me out of his way; and I know

what it's for," she shouted, stung to frenzy by the insane suggestion. "He wants to have *you*. He's in love with yer. He's mad after yer."

"Well, my good woman, if he is, what does he expect to gain by it? I am a married woman."

"And what does he care for marriage? Ain't he a married man? I tell yer, Miss Yorke, 'tain't such as that'll stop him when his head is sot on a thing. He don't fear God or man. He'd jest as lief kill anybody as stood in his way as not. And I'm in his way."

"But if you were out of his way," I said, trying to reason with her as I would with an excited child, "if he could put you out of his way, he could gain nothing from me. My only feeling for him is contempt. I never did like him, and he knows it."

"But Miss Pettigrew told me yer did. She's seen him come here day after day" —

"Then," I replied, interrupting her, "she's seen more than ever there was to see. Your husband does visit me oftener than is agreeable to me. Until very lately, I believed he was my friend, and my husband's friend. For what I believed to be his generous kindness to my husband, I tried to esteem him, and I felt grateful; and when he called, although personally he is not agreeable to me, I thought it my duty to treat him courteously. But will you sit down quietly and listen?" I continued, at the same time leading her, now quite calm and unresisting, to a chair; and, seating myself beside her, I went on: —

"I repeat emphatically, Mrs. Millet, I never liked your husband from the first moment I saw him. For some reason, I hardly know what, I had no faith in him. In the first place, he cheated my husband into buying that unhealthy place in which he could not live himself" —

"And where my little darlings, two of 'em, died," she said, rushing to and fro. "I told him they was dyin' and that we should all die there. What did he care? 'Twas jest what he wanted. He wanted we should die, but he didn't want to die himself. When he took sick he got so scared, he packed right up and was off."

"I can easily believe it," I said, "but we needn't talk over those times. Your little children are gainers by the change. You must think of them as in the keeping of a better Father. I have not much more to tell you, but you believe that I speak the truth, don't you? Look at me. I don't exactly know what a siren is, but I don't think I am one."

She looked full in my face as she said, "You don't seem as though you could be bad. I believe you."

"Well, then, I will go on," I said. "Something has occurred within the last forty-eight hours which has convinced me that my aversion to your husband was not unfounded. The letter you speak of addressed to him in my handwriting was a letter he had written to some male friend and misdirected, he having sent the one intended for me, no doubt, to the wrong party. That letter I read. It was an infamous, scandalous letter. In it he spoke of me in a manner wholly unwarrantable; but I am glad to be able to tell you from his own words, that, whatever his intentions were, whatever his deep-laid plot may have been, he acknowledged himself baffled, — completely foiled. I will read you the letter, for I have a copy of it." Then I read it to her word for word from these pages.

"Mrs. Millet," I continued, for I perceived that she was rational enough to listen to what I might choose to say, "I am not going to try to convince you

against your own reason and common sense that your husband is a good man, that you are deceived in him, that you ought to love him and to trust him. Do you in your heart feel an affection for him?"

"How can I, Miss Yorke? If I could tell you all, you wouldn't expect me to. You'd wonder how I've borne as long as I have. But O Miss Yorke, he's all I've got to cling to. It ain't singular that sometimes I try to cheat myself,—try to believe it's others as sets snares for him. I can't take in the b'lief that he don't care nothin' for me or the children. It don't seem to me that human natur can be so unfeelin'."

"And yet we must see that such is the case. Now, if you wish, I will tell you what I think I should do in your place. If he wished to go, I would let him go, and I never should trouble myself to go after him."

"Are you a Christian?" she asked innocently.

"I hope so," I replied. "Why do you put such a question?"

"Because I thought you couldn't be, or you wouldn't give such advice. When we was married, Mr. Millet and I, the minister talked very solemn. He said we was all in the presence of Almighty God."

"So we are at all times, are we not?" I asked.

It seemed a new idea to her. "I never looked at it so," she replied; "but we are, ain't we? I never thought of that. He seemed awful near me that time when I promised to take my husband 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer,' and 'till death do us part.' I meant every word I said. But since my troubles, God seems to have left me, though I try as hard as I ken, and I often says to myself, 'God must be dead or asleep;' and my brain gits dizzy, and I

don't seem to believe there is any God, or any other world, and I sometimes hope there ain't. I sometimes think I'd rather die like the brute beasts, and have an end on't."

"I don't wonder you feel so," I said kindly, for my heart began to flow out in sympathy for the poor woman. "It's very hard in such a case as yours to know how to advise. This, however, I venture to say. Let your husband go his own way, and find your comfort in your children. Don't make yourself sick with worrying about what you cannot help, for you need health and strength for the duty you have to do. Your mind is sick."

"I know that, Miss Yorke," she said sadly. "I know sometimes I ain't myself. I wasn't fully myself when I started to come here this afternoon. I had an awful chill yesterday, and a ragin' fever all night, and he a swearin' 'cause I kept him awake. He often tells me I'm crazy, and he'll get the doctors to swear I'm a fit subject for the mad-house. He holds it over me, till I can feel my blood freeze up. Think of it, Miss Yorke. I've got two children, one of 'em jest toddlin' round, the other goin' on ten years old. You may believe I love 'em. They're all I've got in the world. There was a time I had everything I wanted. My father, Miss Yorke, was a rich man, and I was his only child. We lived on a farm, and he couldn't think to spare me from home long enough to get an education, though he'd made up his mind to do it, 'cause my mother set to I should go. I was a delicate child, and that was another reason why he wanted to keep me at home."

"When did you first meet Mr. Millet?" I asked.

"Jest as I was goin' away. He owned land out our

way, but he hadn't paid for it. Somebody told him he orter take a rich young wife, and sent him to see us. It's a long story. The end of it was, I fell in love with him. He was so han'some, such a gentleman. Everybody said so. They said I'd made a great catch. He didn't love me, but I didn't know it till after we was married, and then he told me. He said he was ashamed of me, and never meant to carry me amongst his friends. I told him I'd go to work and learn, if he'd only help me; and I used to try, but he only laughed at me; and then, when the baby came, I hadn't time. And so it went on. I found out that what he said was true. He didn't love me, and never had loved me. He only wanted my money. The more I tried to be good to him, the more he seemed to hate me. Still it was a long time before I give up and got to hatin' him. It's only since I began to hate him that I took to foller him round."

"Well, Mrs. Millet," I said, "if I were you, I would never follow him again. You can't help him or reform him. One reason why you cannot is because he does not love you. Now just resolve you won't be made miserable by him. Try to make new interests in life. You've got to live, and you have two children to live for; and don't ever think there is no God, for I believe firmly that He is nearer to us in our trials than at any other time; we certainly have his word for it. Now tell me: is your husband at home? O, I remember, your errand here was to seek him."

"He left the house as soon as he had read the letter. He said he did not know when he should come home."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "he has left the city."

"That may be," she replied; "he does sometimes go down to Orleans, and stay weeks at a time. There's a gang of 'em."

"A gang of what?" I asked in surprise.

"A drinking, gambling set of blacklegs," she replied. "We've had 'em in our house, till I used to think the police would get 'em. At the time that young man Yorke came up from Orleans, — he wasn't no relation of yours, I reckon, — but he got into a sight of trouble, and Millet kept him hid here for weeks. I never knew the whole story. Half of 'em had names as didn't belong to 'em. When Millet goes to Orleans, he takes another name; and so did that young feller. I don't know what his real name was; but Millet got him out of the country somehow, and he hain't been heard of since."

She rose to go. I forbore questioning her further, although I believed that through her I might obtain some clew to Frank's disappearance. He had fallen in with a set of gamblers, — he had been robbed, he had been helped to escape. I began to feel as though we were all involved in some grand swindling operation. I felt that I should be afraid to have Mr. Millet know that his wife was in my house, and I said to her at the door, "If you believe that I have told you the truth, you will trust me for the future; but I think it would be better for both of us if you were not to speak of this interview. I pity you, and will help you all I can. Bear up, and do not break down." I was glad to see that she departed a happier woman than she came. I use the word relatively of course. I should have said, less wretched.

I don't think she will be able to act upon my advice. The moment she returns to the old surroundings, the old fears and feelings will come back. If he is absent, she cannot feel relief, because of the dread of his return. And now comes up the question, What am I to

do with Mrs. Pettigrew, my neighbor? Shall I go in and snuff her out, annihilate her utterly, or shall I treat her and her intermeddling with silent contempt? I will sleep upon it before coming to a decision. I wonder where Mr. Millet is! I am a Yankee, and I can guess. He knows I have read his letter to "dear Jack." He knows also that my husband may return at any moment. He knows that when Philip is aroused, he is terrible to encounter. He is a coward. That class of men are all cowards. They can strike in the dark, but never meet a foe in open fight. I doubt if either Philip or myself ever set eyes on him again.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE good ship came safely on her homeward course, and brought my husband back to his native shore, and after a weary journey (for there were no railroads then, where there are many now), he reached at last, in health and happiness, his own home. For a few days we gave ourselves up to the enjoyment of the present, looking neither before nor after. It was enough for me to see him so hale and hearty, so like the Philip of old. Still, ever and anon the question would intrude itself, What next? how? where? — suggestions that did not assume definiteness, but floated like disjointed fragments on the smooth sea of our happiness, which neither wished to point out to the other, and which both of us would gladly have put out of sight.

We were a joyous family for one week, — Philip, the two children, and myself. From Sunday to Sunday was a perpetual holiday. Once only Philip inquired "Where's Millet?" I fancied he would have been here before this." To which I replied, "He is out of the city, I believe," and the subject was dropped.

But it is impossible for two middle-aged rational human beings, whose destiny it is not only to live, but to earn the means wherewith to live, to thrust aside for more than a week at a time the important questions which grow out of such matter-of-fact conditions.

Therefore it was not to be wondered at that at the close of the second Sunday, at that calm and contemplative hour which precedes darkness, and with the knowledge that the next sun would dawn on Monday, when the work of the world must claim its peculiar consideration, that my husband should begin to wear an anxious countenance. With thoughts of his worldly affairs came thoughts of Mr. Millet also, as associated with them, and again he wondered aloud, "why Millet did not come."

"You forget," I said, "that I told you he was out of town."

"I did forget it indeed," he replied; "and it seems a little strange that he should have left just at this time. Ah, by the way, I wrote him I should leave by the *Dreadnought*, which sails next month, and changed my plans afterwards, — decided to leave earlier. That accounts for it."

"Of course it does," I replied; and I thought within myself, "It also accounts for his daring to send me the letter he did. He could not have laid any very deep plans, to take effect in so short a time. He did not expect my husband so soon."

"Well, Maggie," he said, as we sat down together in the twilight, "I should be very glad if I could sever my business relations with him, and do something else, but I don't see the way clear. There's the rub."

"You spoke once of practicing your profession," I said timidly.

"I know I did," he replied; "and if I were a younger man, I might hope to succeed. I'm too old, Maggie. If I were to tell you what occupation would suit me, what I should really enjoy, you would smile."

"I dare say I should, Philip," I said. "Whatever

you may choose to tell me will be very likely to make me smile now, because I am, as Aunt Content used to say, '*agreeable to anything*.' What would you like to do?"

"Teach a boy's school," he replied. "Get a fine country place, plenty of ground, a commodious old-fashioned house, like the Parsons mansion, and then have ten or a dozen boys under my entire control. If I have a genius for one thing above another, it is for teaching. I loved it when I was a young man, and compelled to teach in order to get through college."

"And after you left college," I added, "when you had girls and boys together; when you went to Western Pennsylvania, and Mrs. Sinclair was your pupil."

"Yes, you are right; I loved it then."

"Was that the last of your teaching?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "I made up my mind to get rich after I gave up my school there, and I succeeded. But, Maggie, joking aside, how does my plan strike you?"

"I like it. Anything and anywhere with you; only I would rather, if it suit you just as well, go back to New England."

"Maggie, darling, I wonder if you know how poor we are? If I could only sell 'Owl's Nest!' but I am too conscientious to offer it for sale without telling the facts of the case. People ask me if it is a healthy place, and I can't lie, so I say 'no.' Of course no one fancies the idea of being shaken to death; so there it stands. Nearly all I possessed of available funds I invested in the purchase of 'Owl's Nest.' Millet cheated me in that transaction."

"And yet," I said, "you might be induced to trust

him again. How do your business relations stand now? How much money have you drawn during your absence?"

"As little as I could; not quite as much as I put in."

"I should be very glad, Philip," I said seriously, "if you would dissolve your business connections with Mr. Millet. When I used to tell you at 'Owl's Nest' that I did not like him, you called it a woman's prejudice. Many things have come to light since that time, many since you have been gone, which prove my instinct to have been correct. I know he is a bad man, — a gambler, licentious, and unprincipled. I do not think you will ever see him again, if he can avoid it. I should be glad if you could get back into your own hands your proportion of the profits of the foundry; but rather than be brought into association with him again, I would go to New England penniless, and begin life at the very bottom of the ladder. I have proofs that what I tell you is true. We may both of us thank God when we are rid of him."

"You speak very much in earnest, Maggie," he said.

"Because I speak from conviction. Shall we go back? O! say that we can, Philip. I will help you. I can at least darn the boys' stockings, and sew the buttons on their shirts."

"Maggie, darling, must it come to this?"

"To what? I see nothing so dreadful. If I am not fitted for anything else, that ought to satisfy me, and if I can, you may be sure I shall find out my mission."

"My poor dear! don't I know what sort of life you are fitted for, and might have had, if I had only held to my first resolution? I knew I should never re-

trieve my fortune. I ought to have told you so. I did tell you so, but you would not believe me."

"I did believe you," I said. "I foresaw all the difficulties in our path, except the sickness; that I did not take into account. You dwell on the past morbidly, Philip," I continued, and was about to preach a sermon, when a ring at the street door interrupted me. It was a message for me. "Mrs. Millet would be glad if I could step over there a moment." My husband looked surprised. I hastened to relieve his curiosity. "Is she alone?" I inquired of the messenger.

"She is all alone except the children," the girl replied; "and I wish you would come, for I think she's pooty bad. 'Pears like she couldn't live the night out."

"I will go presently," I said to the girl. "Tell Mrs. Millet I will be with her in a very few moments."

The girl departed. "How long has Mrs. Millet been ill?" asked my husband. I replied that I had only known of her illness since the last month.

My husband walked with me to the house, and remained, at my request, in the room below, while I went up-stairs; for, if she needed my services, I determined to stay all night. On entering the chamber, I found my neighbor Pettigrew there. I had not seen her since my interview with Mrs. Millet in my own house.

"I think she is dying, poor thing!" she said.

If I had spoken as I felt at the moment, I should have said, "I hope so;" but when my eyes rested on the two children sobbing by the bedside, my conscience reproached me. Yes, she was indeed dying. She was unconscious of my entrance, unconscious of the presence of the angel who had come to release her.

It seemed sad that she should die thus alone. Yet better so than if her husband had been with her.

"I suppose the poor little dears will go to their grandfather," said Mrs. Pettigrew.

"Thank God if they have a grandfather to go to! My heart is greatly relieved. You are sure he is living?"

"She told me so, and asked me to see that they went to him. She was a very unhappy woman, ma'am."

"For which you may blame yourself in a measure. You probably knew better than any other person, where the sore spot was, and applied caustic to the wound."

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Yorke."

"We won't enter into explanations on this solemn occasion, Mrs. Pettigrew," I said. "I think that you do understand me; but if not, I will satisfy you whenever you choose to demand it; and if you do not, I will call on you with my husband, and explain myself fully. You needn't trouble yourself to reply. I came here to-night thinking I might be of some service, not knowing you had preceded me."

I had reached the door, when Mrs. Pettigrew came towards me. "Really, Mrs. Yorke, I don't understand you. You are under some mistake."

"Not so," I said. "Mr. Yorke is below, waiting for me. Good-night."

"Almost gone," was my reply to Philip's question, "How did you find her?" "but one neighbor is with her, and I can be of no service."

That night, after the children had gone to sleep, the great question was again forced upon us: "What are we to do? Where are we to go?" Very different

under different circumstances may be that all-important question. I do not know whether women are naturally more hopeful than men; but from many years' observation I have found that they do not yield so readily to despairing views of the future. They have an alacrity in planning, by which exercise of the imagination they seem to be buoyed up over the troubled waters of worldly anxiety. Many a strong man, suddenly brought low by pecuniary misfortunes, or worn by the slow attrition of adverse circumstances, has been borne over the stormy sea, when his masculine muscle and sinew availed him not, and his wife spread the sails, and with a womanly intuition perceived, beyond the breakers, islands of rest and happiness. There are crises in life when muscle and sinew avail not; when the call to work, with nothing to work upon, is as objectless as Hercules beating the air! when man's wisdom can invent nothing, — man's forecast discern nothing. Then is the time for woman's tact. Her lack of logical comprehension of the situation is supplied by prophetic insight. Some men are noble enough to admit this, and gracefully submit to follow in affectionate trust; others, I am pained to say, obstinately refuse to listen, — to accord to woman her prerogative, taking upon their tongue the old tradition, which "makes the Word of God of none effect" to her soul, except to add to her load the consciousness of being unappreciated.

The subject of woman's rights and woman's wrongs, which is agitating society at the present day, will not be laid at rest until some of the great questions involved in it are answered, and answered intelligently and satisfactorily. I welcome this agitation, although myself too near the boundary of time to desire to take an active part in the movement.

Still, old as I am, it does me good to see this widespread discontent among the intelligent women of all countries. Only through a consciousness of wrong, only through personal suffering from injustice and oppression, only through pain and travail, is the human race as a unit, or any portion of the human race, or even the most insignificant member of it, born into clearer light and larger liberty. Every race, every class, every organization of men, every individual member of God's great family, must work out its own salvation. But the conviction that there is a salvation to be wrought out must precede endeavor. With this conviction comes discontent, dissatisfaction with the present order and condition of things, — a righteous discontent, if it stimulate to earnest endeavor.

If this widespread discontent work out the great spiritual problem of the age, in reference to women, even through many mistakes, and the bringing to the surface of much weakness and folly, I believe that the result will be to place her erelong upon a higher plane, and bring to her that conscious and inward satisfaction which can only be attained through her own efforts. What help and sympathy she may receive from man is of little comparative moment. It would be a far more dignified and earnest course to defer less to his opinions and prejudices, since it rests not with one part of creation to confer or to withhold rights to another part. Right is of God and from God. In working to carry out a conviction or a principle, we may be compelled to struggle against misconception, ridicule, and contempt from the many; but the object, if important, is one of too great moment to allow of the waste of time and capital in the vain effort to proselyte those who differ in opinion, to convince the doubtful, or ar-

rest the unthinking. It is harder to remove prejudice than to convince reason. An earnest worker in a righteous cause must press on, fearlessly and steadily. There will be always stragglers who come in at the eleventh hour; and it will be found that they were the indolently contented, encrusted with the prejudices and traditions of the past.

Thus thinks and writes now the old woman, almost, but not quite fourscore, after years of earnest looking forward to a point in progress not yet attained, but which she believed attainable.

At fourteen, what was she, apparently, but a thoughtless, frivolous girl? And yet even then there was an undertone of sadness running through the music of her childish anticipations, intimations of a life that craved celestial nourishment; and as she grew older, and plunged with a keener zest into the world which widened before her, the hungering cry still went up to the Infinite, "Give, give." One after another of her longings were answered, but the answer disappointed her. Moments came to her, as they come to all at rare intervals, when her heart seemed full of a present happiness, but it was an illusion. The glory passed by, and the emptiness remained. Love, romance, poetry, each and all in their turn combined to paint the world with the hues of heaven; but they passed, like the splendor of a summer day, and were succeeded by the dim twilight of shadowy apprehensions, and an aching sense of the mystery of existence.

Sorrow burst upon her like an unexpected storm, whose gathering in the distance she had not perceived, and could not have foreseen; and all the faith, all the trust of the past suddenly vanished. What had it

been, but the spontaneous swelling of the emotions heavenward, while the waters upon which her bark of life was floating wore the golden reflex of the unclouded sun? Where and what was it amidst the blackness of the tempest and the roaring of the waves?

Comfort came with time and the inevitable but gracious law of healing, which even Christian souls accept as in the order of events, not always seeing in the gracious laws of Providence the expression of a Father's tenderness.

New hopes opened upon her life, not gorgeous, like those of the spring morning, but rather like the tender and subdued beauty of an October day, an Indian summer haze, through which the faded blossoms and brown leaves were veiled in softness.

Then came the customary cares, the anxieties, the realities of human life; not exceptional, for to all, with a capacity to feel and to suffer, are cares and anxieties allotted. Through all these, although choked by tribulations and persecutions, her life seemed unfruitful, although its possibilities were not dead. And bringing her to this point, after having, with the garrulity of years, wandered away into a digression where my younger readers may not care to follow, I shall return to relate an incident of that last winter which preceded her return with her husband to Eastfield. But as this requires a special chapter, I shall only add to this a few words which seem necessary in order to define the position of the parties.

It was, after many protracted talks and much deliberation on the part of my husband and myself, decided that it was best to remain where we were during the winter. Philip must try and disentangle his interests

from those of his quondam partner, who, by the way, had absconded. "Failed and gone," — that was the current explanation at the time. But ever and anon a rumor would be set afloat, started by some one who had heard stories of past disgraceful acts; and after a few weeks, so thoroughly was the belief in his dishonesty and perfidy established in the community that it would not have been safe for him to return.

"Who could have thought it?" exclaimed Mrs. Pettigrew. "He seemed such a nice man, and was such a perfect gentleman in his manners! Poor Mrs. Millet!" But poor Mrs. Millet had passed beyond the reach of human sympathy, beyond the need of it. Had *poor Mrs. Millet* been conscious of her rights, would she have died the victim of such a man? If instead of the letter that killeth, she had been taught by the "spirit that giveth life," could she not have found the strength to live? Yet it is men like Mr. Millet who scoff at the right of woman to protect herself. I am aware that I am trenching on dangerous ground. How are we to distinguish between "the letter that killeth and the spirit that giveth life?" How even to comprehend the letter, when learned and astute theologians have never been able to place even verbal interpretations beyond question or dispute? And that seems to me the very ground of the difficulty. It is not by the learned theologians, certainly not through the teachings of theology, that the spirit of Christ is apprehended. I do not wish to detract from the importance of intellectual labor and research; but after all has been gone through, after the head is crammed full of the lore of past ages, after years of controversial and dogmatic training, do we not often see that the great thinkers and profound logicians, as

they draw nearer the boundaries of human life, become more and more like little children in faith and love; more tender in judgment, more forgiving, more humble, more loving; exemplifying the great truth, that "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness?"

Still, this does not answer the question, which I know, alas! but too well; nor do I propose to answer it for another. It is a question for each individual soul to consider, earnestly, conscientiously, prayerfully. On every side we are shut in by human limitations, even to the endurance of wrong, of tyranny, of base subjection to grossness and sensuality. Who is to affix boundaries to the possibilities of human suffering and human patience? Is a man less a murderer who kills by slow poison, instead of the assassin's knife? And is the instinct of self-preservation justifiable in one case and not in the other?

CHAPTER XXXV.

I WAS sitting on Christmas Eve by the light of a glowing, cheerful fire, with Philip. We had filled the children's stockings; for, poor as we were, we still clung to the pleasant custom of celebrating anniversaries, and surely we could not omit the one which ushered in the promise of peace and good-will to men.

We mutually agreed that whatever apprehensions and anxieties might intrude upon our daily life, we would not permit them to darken the light of our home, or the lives of our children. When Christmas and New Year came round, we each and all had our savings bank to draw upon, and our individual contributions were poured into the joint stock of pleasure, both in giving and receiving. Saving in itself we did not believe to be a virtue, any more than self-denial, without an object. Saving and self-denial, that we might be able to bestow and confer, — this was the end which sanctified the means. When anybody boasts to me of the accumulations of years, from an innate love of accumulation, I cannot help saying to myself, if not aloud, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." Sometimes I have said it aloud, and have been met by the assertion that it was not for self, but for those who were to come after; and then again I say to myself, It may be well,

and it may be ill for those who are to come after. If in the mean time their souls have not been starved, and their hearts drained of all capacity for enjoyment, it may be well ; but even then not always. Let us early teach our children that there is a pleasure in giving, a pleasure worth toiling for, worth self-sacrifice and self-denial ; and that generosity of soul is not measured by the intrinsic value of the gift, but by the spirit which accompanies it.

But I am digressing again, and have wandered far away from our cheerful fire-light into regions of speculation and opinion, where I am liable at any moment to be met and perhaps confuted by those who see things in a different light, and who, having a greater skill in argumentation, might overthrow me. To all of whom I can only say, "My theories, so far as I have been able to carry them into effect in my own family, have worked well."

There is a point where generosity of act must yield to the limitations of an absolute destitution of means. But it is a point to which few great souls are driven, for "the liberal hand maketh rich," though the results are not always material.

It was late, but we were not inclined to sleep, and there was an appearance of life and excitement out of doors, which, added to our own cheerfulness, made the world for the time being seem a very pleasant place to be living in.

Philip and myself were aroused at the same moment by a light tap outside the door. We listened, and it was repeated. Our one domestic had retired, and Philip went to the door. I heard my name spoken ; and, thinking I recognized a familiar voice, I followed my husband to the door, where Katharine stood be-

fore me. She was paler than when she left me, but wore the same lovely light in her beautiful eyes.

"How glad I am to see you again !" I exclaimed. "You find us at home, and you must feel that you are at home with us. Come in ; we shall not let you go from us to-night."

"I must go from you, my dear Mrs. Yorke," she said hurriedly, "and I came to ask you if you would come with me, both you and your husband ? I am in great trouble."

I had often spoken to Philip of Katharine, and also written to him of her while he was absent. Therefore he felt that she was no stranger. I would not delay her to make inquiries, and prepared to follow her at once. It was but a short distance. She entered a small house in a neighboring street, and conducting us into a little room, barren of furniture, she turned to me, saying, "My husband is with me here. He is very ill ; and if Mr. Yorke is willing to go to him, I think it may be in his power to help us."

"Go at once, Philip," I said, "and I will wait here for you."

Philip followed her immediately, leaving me alone. Directly he returned and beckoned me to the door. He was so agitated as to be unable to speak for a moment. "For Heaven's sake who is it ?" I exclaimed, "what is the matter ?"

"It is my brother Frank, Maggie," he said. "He is in yonder room, dying. Come with me."

I followed him silently into the darkened room. The dying man was propped up with pillows. Wasted and haggard as he had become through sickness and misery, I could trace, in the wreck of his once noble features, a resemblance to my husband. Although

many years his junior, anguish, shame, and physical suffering had done the work of years.

"Can she forgive me?" he asked.

"She can, she does," replied my husband. "Come here, Maggie. You can tell my brother that our hearts are not barred against him and his."

"Indeed I can," I said firmly. At the same time, drawing close to the dying man, I put my hand on his forehead and smoothed away the thin locks that had gathered moisture from the cold damps of death. "Brother Frank," I said, stooping down so that he could hear me, "we have long since forgiven you, and we both thank God that we can assure you of it, and promise you that your wife and boy shall always find a place in our hearts and in our home."

"I do not deserve it," he said, pressing my hand, "but she does. She is an angel." He beckoned Philip towards him.

"Has she told you," he asked, "that I have tried to expiate my fault? God's hand is upon me. O Philip, she will tell you all when I am dead." Exhausted by the effort and the excitement of our presence, he fell back, and a frightful pallor spread over his face. We stood watching with the feeling that he might pass away at any moment. Suddenly he roused again, and called Katharine. She came to him, and, moistening his lips with wine, she tried to induce him to swallow enough to revive him. Alas! he could not swallow. The struggle was fearful, but for a little time he seemed to wrestle with death. "I cannot die yet," he gasped. "O Philip! My dear, dear brother, pray for me, that I may live long enough to say what is on my heart. I would tell you all, but I have not time. She will tell you who—how I was drawn on step by step—she will"—

"Do not speak of it, brother," said Philip. "Reserve your strength. Have you any request to make? Is there anything I can promise, anything I can do to comfort your departing soul?"

"You can, Philip. O brother, the brand of infamy is on my brow. I do not complain, I deserve it; and now, while I lie here grappling with death, it is not to place a moment's space between me and my Judge on my own account, but that I may ask you, by the love you once bore me, by the forgiveness you have granted, that you will not let my boy curse his father's memory."

"Never, so help me God, Frank."

"He cannot grow up in ignorance of my crime and his own disgrace. Do not leave it to a harsh world, to my enemies, to tell him, but, O my brother! when you feel the time has come that he must know all, tell him his father's heart was not all bad; tell him that I loved him; that when I held him, a prattling child, upon my knee, and pressed on his young cheek a father's kiss, I thanked God, and meant to be worthy of so great a blessing. Tell him how I was tempted and fell. Warn him by my example, but do not, O do not let him curse me. I have been hunted to death. I have been driven into exile,—goaded by remorse; but I have not dared to complain. It was justice, and mercy too. Now I am going to my God and my Judge,—going to my Father. Yes, guilty as I am, I feel that He has forgiven me, as I have forgiven those who trespassed against me. O! if it could be possible! if I could look on the face of my poor boy once before I go hence! But it can't be; I know it can't be. Good-night, Philip, Margaret, Katharine, all who are near me. I hear your sobs. I cannot

— I cannot see you. Don't cry. I am glad to go. Good-night, and good-by."

We were indeed sobbing around the bed of the dying man. Philip held his hand, and from time to time, as his feelings could find utterance, he whispered words of comfort and cheer; but by and by, in the hush of midnight, while we all stood gazing, that mysterious change never to be mistaken passed over the noble features, and slowly and gently the look of youth returned, and all trace of the soul's sorrow and the body's anguish had passed away.

We remained with Katharine for a time. We told her that Frank should be buried from our house, that henceforth our home should be her home. She shook her head sadly as she replied, "My duties call me away from here."

"I thank you," she said, grasping Philip's hand, "that my poor Frank at your hands can receive Christian burial. I did not dare to ask it." She had lodgings at the house of a poor woman with whom he had formerly found a home. Philip asked to see her, and said his brother's remains would be removed to his own house for interment.

After having made every arrangement possible at the time, we took our leave, and thus ended our Christmas Eve.

Yet, in his sadness, gratitude was the prevailing emotion of my husband's heart, — gratitude that God had spared his brother to speak his last requests, to unburden his soul to the ear of affection, to hear the accents of forgiveness and love this side the grave. Long we sat by our own fireside that Christmas night; and although I knew his heart bled at the sundering of the earthly tie, I was glad to know also that his soul

was lifted up with thankfulness even amidst his sorrows.

Poor Frank was buried from our house. My husband made no attempt to conceal the fact that it was his brother's funeral, — the brother who had fled from justice, who had sinned against the law, but escaped the penalty; who had repented, and who, he believed, was forgiven and accepted by his Heavenly Father.

He wished no other service than the Lord's Prayer repeated at his grave. Who that lives, and believes in God and in Christ, could refuse to utter that prayer even over the grave of the greatest criminal on earth? "*Our Father*" — not mine or thine alone, but ours, fellow sinners, fellow sufferers, — "*Our Father who art in heaven.*" "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,*" not that we may glory in our own strength, not that we may trust in our own righteousness, and look down in contempt, in self-righteous horror upon our fallen brothers, but that we may be "*the children of our Father who is in heaven, who causeth his sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good, and sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust.*"

Frank died on the eve of Christmas, and was buried on New Year's Day. In answer to the inquiries of the children, we simply said it was their father's brother, who had been far away over the sea. It was their first impression of death and burial. They did not go with us to the grave; for my husband had what would then have been considered peculiar ideas on the subject of death, and was especially solicitous to avoid in their education everything calculated to create terror and superstitious dread of physical dissolution.

Again, after the funeral, I recurred to the subject of Katharine remaining with us, praying her for my sake

to do so, and also to watch over and educate her boy; but again she refused. "I have undertaken to support myself in New York," she said, "by keeping a small store. I shall feel more independent to continue the occupation, while at the same time, by doing this, I am carrying out my husband's wishes. Aleck is better off with you at present, and happier than I could make him; but I shall insist upon adding my mite to defray the expense of his education." She then put in my hand a sealed package, requesting me not to open it until after her departure. The day after Frank was buried, she left us on her lonely journey to her desolate home.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was several days after Katharine's departure before I felt disposed to open the package she had left in my hands. I dimly suspected what the contents might be, nor was I mistaken. She had written a brief narration of the circumstances of her marriage to Frank, — their prodigality, her own love of display, her extravagance, her worldliness. She had not been willing to marry upon the moderate income he at first offered her. By successful gambling he suddenly became possessed of a fortune; and, on the strength of his present and prospective gains, she consented to become his wife. She was an orphan, and, after the death of her parents, had been taken into the family of an aunt, whose career of extravagance terminated in sin and shame. It was in that school that her young mind received its earliest lessons in worldliness and vanity. Penniless herself, she had been educated to believe that wealth was a necessity. The example and the teachings presented to her were all calculated to foster her vanity, and weaken her principle. She loved Frank; and if she had dared to obey the dictates of her heart, she would have married him earlier; but being instructed by her aunt, and warned that if she did marry a poor man, she need look for no aid or support from her, she had not courage to run the risk.

Before her refusal of Frank, she had no reason to suppose he had ever visited the gaming-table. He had assured her solemnly he had not done so; but, after repeated successes, the thirst for that intoxicating excitement overcame every consideration of prudence and principle. Then followed reverses, alternation, desperate stakes, overwhelming losses, despair, and finally crime. Foremost among those who tempted him on to ruin, was one who has been often mentioned in my story, Mr. Millet, known in New Orleans by another name, — the prince of gamblers himself; a man of dissolute life, but fascinating manners, specious and plausible, who could be all things to all men, not in order to save, but with the intent to ruin. To repair his losses, and in the expectation of being able to cancel, before its discovery, the sum he had obtained by forging his brother's name, he had drawn sums to an incredible amount; and, suspicion being aroused, an investigation was held; the crime was discovered, but the criminal had escaped.

The wretched young man was for some time a prisoner in Mr. Millet's house, and, through his instrumentality, was at length able to escape in disguise, and quit the country.

In a foreign land, a stranger and penniless, he wandered on foot, not daring to remain long enough in any place to find an occupation by which he might earn his bread, and assisted, through the kindness of a tried friend to whom his wife had been induced by her desire to help him to intrust her bitter secret, by small sums of money, the proceeds of her earnings, by which he was enabled to live.

"It was in the hope of gaining tidings of him that she went into the service of Mrs. Millet. He had not

known her in her day of prosperity, therefore she did not fear discovery. She had disposed of every ornament of value, for money, which, through this friend before alluded to, had been sent to her husband under a feigned name. When she heard the name of Yorke in the conversation she had repeated to me, she made every effort to obtain a position in our family, that she might gain access to her child. She knew that Philip was the name of her husband's only surviving brother, and she knew also that through her own suggestions the boy had been sent to him.

That part of her history comprising the few months she was in our family, is already known. It may be remembered that she made a stipulation to be allowed a half day during the week to herself. In that time she completed two pictures which she had begun under a teacher, some years before, and they were placed on exhibition, in New York, and received favorable notice. They were afterwards sold, and with the proceeds she purchased stock for a small fancy store, which was at the same time her place of business and her home. Knowing that her husband was on his return, broken in health and incapable of earning his support, she provided this asylum for him on his arrival. When the last hope of his recovery was given up, he had but one wish, and that was to behold his brother once more, and to hear from his own lips the assurance of forgiveness. The remainder of the story has been told. Enclosed in a separate envelope directed to me, was a sum of money, small, when measured by the accumulations of successful toil, but large enough to surprise both Philip and myself. What must have been the patient industry and self-denial that enabled her to lay up so large a proportion of her income! She was

still cultivating what talent she possessed for painting, and found in it a resource and a remuneration. She insisted upon her right to labor for her own, and we knew that she spoke the words of truth and soberness.

She was gone. I felt keenly this second separation. It would have been pleasant to have her with us, but alas! we had as yet no abiding-place on earth, — no place that we could call home, no “city of habitation.” The failure of “Millet & Co.” had left us very much in the situation of the possessor of one talent, who had gained nothing by trading, after the sentence had been pronounced, which always staggered my comprehension: “From him who hath not shall be taken even that he hath.” We certainly had nothing more to lose, “Owl’s Nest” still lay a dead weight on our hands. I received a quarterly remittance from the sum bequeathed to me by my father. Philip found employment temporarily, which, although but scantily remunerative, served to stave off the wolf from the door, and keep the domestic machinery in motion. “What would some of our old acquaintance say, to look in upon us here?” he asked, as, after the children had gone to bed, we drew our two chairs close to the decaying fire, — “Mrs. Sinclair’s elegant and stylish neighbors in B—— Street, for example. What do you imagine your quondam admirer, Sheridan, would think of our present mode of life, and our surroundings generally?”

“It is of no manner of consequence to either of us what they would say or think,” I replied. “I would not at this moment change places with any of them.”

“Nevertheless, you are better suited to the place in society they hold than to this ungenial sphere,” he said sadly. “Why is it, Maggie, that love makes us

men so selfish? I was capable of heroic resolve, but not of persistent self-denial. Well, it’s too late now for regrets or self-reproach. So long as you don’t upbraid me by word or look, I ought not to complain.”

“Do you suppose, Philip,” I asked, “that those elegant and stylish people you speak of are any happier than we are?”

“I think I should be happier with their means and appliances,” he replied, “but only because I could make them instrumental in procuring you the luxuries, the elegances, which you ought to possess.”

“I do not know why you say I ought to possess these things, Philip. I don’t pretend to any unusual piety or spiritual illumination; but it does seem to me that if there is a Providence in the affairs of men, if we believe that the circumstances of our lot are not accidental, we ought to feel that our condition in life is the one best adapted to our spiritual growth, even though in many respects it may be very unlike what we should choose, or what our tastes and desires might aspire to. When I look around on this comfortable home, and feel the genial warmth of our own fireside, and see you hale and hearty beside me, and think of those two dear children, sweetly sleeping up-stairs, after a day of healthy and active enjoyment, and then let my memory go back to the time, not very far distant, when we were all so wretched at Owl’s Nest, — for there is no disguising the fact, we were in a miserable plight there, — I do not feel that I have any right to complain. If my past sufferings have not taught me to appreciate my present blessings, I deserve severer discipline.”

“You are a wise preacher; but, Maggie, I could be more grateful for the present, if I had any reasonable

hope of success in the future. It is a melancholy fact that a man, who after long and toilsome endeavor has succeeded in placing himself above pecuniary anxiety, or, in other words, a man who at middle life has made a fortune, and then by accident, or, if you object to the word accident, we will say in the order of Providence, loses everything, seldom regains pecuniary independence. The avenues open to young men are closed to him; if they were not, the activity, the energy, the hope, with which he began his career is gone, and he is out of place among the crowd of aspirants for fame and fortune. I try sometimes to think that mine may be an exceptional case; but the melancholy fact stares me in the face, that the experience of many whose misfortunes I have often compassionated, is repeated in my own. I cannot, with any shadow of reasonableness, expect or even hope to acquire another fortune through my own efforts. The most that I dare even to hope for is a competency."

"And, except in my unreasonable moments, I feel that I can be satisfied with that. If I am not, I ought to be able to increase our store by my own exertions."

"It is the duty of a man to provide for the wants of his family; and, when I say wants, I mean something more and deeper than mere physical necessities. He is bound to provide for and to satisfy their wants of mind and soul, to educate them in everything that will give breadth and strength to their intellect, to develop their powers, and cultivate their talents. This is the obligation which rests upon a father. It is what he owes to his children."

"Was your father able to do all that for you?" I asked.

"He was not. Unfortunately, my father, having

had small opportunity himself, and a very limited education, did not look upon this matter in the light I have presented. You know, of course, that I was compelled to work my own way in the world."

"And do you really believe it was on the whole a misfortune that you were thrown on your own resources?"

"You are a close questioner; but, if I speak the truth with regard to myself, it may not have been a misfortune. Nevertheless, a little assistance in some of the sharp exigencies of life would not have come amiss. But, Maggie, I am only one of many that begin life under the hard conditions of poverty. I had a strong and vigorous temperament of mind and body. I was inured to hardship from my boyhood. I was not over sensitive; and there was not in my case that wear and tear of soul, which grows out of the conflict between the inward want and the outward deficiency, which those whose early training has been less severe so often suffer. We note those whose labors and efforts have been crowned with success. They are prominent in the high places of the earth; but we think very little, know very little, and, I fear, care but little, about those who succumb under repeated failures, and, in the race and scramble for what we call success, are crowded out or crushed down."

"That is true," I replied, "and I am sorely puzzled when I try to interpret the ways of Providence. Success, or what we call success, seems so strangely dealt out, and what we call failure so often seems undeserved. I am often obliged to take refuge in what you will probably call a blind faith in Providence, and to believe that the real success and failure of human beings generally will be decided when the race is

finished. But we might talk forever, and it would not make the road before us one whit clearer, or in any respect alter the way already trod. We are just where we are, and just what we are,—two respectable middle-aged persons, heads of a family, with good health and a slender purse between us. I recollect reading in some book this assertion: ‘The elements of success are born with some people, and they cannot help getting on.’ What these elements are, I really do not know, or whether they were born with me or not. I don’t know whether to have been born with them is to continue to have them forever, or if they can be lost. In short, I know very little about them; but I intend to make a close and thorough examination of my mental structure, in order to ascertain whether any of these elements can be found in me. If I find any, I shall make them available, you may be sure. I have been thinking very seriously for a long time on certain matters, and have been trying to solve certain problems with regard to woman’s capacity and her obligations; and I shall not be contented until I have solved at least some of them, not only for my own satisfaction, but for the benefit of those who may come after me. I foresee that the time must come when thoughtful women will be impelled both to ask and to answer many searching questions with reference to their own obligations and capacities. I foresee also that she will be obliged to pursue her inquiries and carry out her projects under persecution, misunderstanding, ridicule, and contempt from the majority of mankind, and a total want of sympathy from her own sex. Some women are weak, and some who might be otherwise, love to be thought weak. The luxury of being protected, and petted, and dressed up like a doll, is the

highest aspiration of which they are capable. But that is the fault of the men, who profess to admire what is womanly, and dread or pretend to dread nothing so much as an encounter with a woman of sense. Now, I admit there is a natural desire in the female heart to look up, to be taken care of, to reverence as her superior in some respects the man she calls her husband. But you know as well as I do that she cannot compel herself to feel this reverence. You know as well as I do that whatever may have been the divine intention when man was created, all men are not worthy of such reverence.”

“Don’t you recall what I told you years ago on that subject,” asked my husband, “when I believed that with your romantic notions of man’s supremacy, you were setting him on a pedestal he would certainly fall from most ignominiously?”

“I remember every word of our conversation,” I replied.

“And you have proved the truth of it in your observation and experience,” he added.

“Yes, I have,” I replied. “I don’t mean to degrade human nature ‘to point a moral,’ or glorify it ‘to adorn a tale.’ I may have had, at the time of the notable talk you allude to, rather an exaggerated opinion of man’s superiority; but some examples which have fallen under my notice since that time have modified my views. Now, don’t take any of my words home to yourself. You still remain where I placed you. I see your incredulous look, but I always tell the truth.”

“Perhaps you did not put me on a pinnacle,” he said.

“I certainly did not. Your determination to represent yourself in an unfavorable light was not without its influence. I could not believe you were so black

as you sometimes painted yourself, nor so superhuman as some other people painted you. So I struck, as far as I was able, the golden mean."

"I like your frankness. I remember I told you how much I admired commonplace people. You were indignant with me, but after all you have come round to my way of thinking. Heroes and heroines have had their day. They must be surveyed from a distance. They won't prove agreeable inmates of the family."

"That is the way I look at them, from a distance," I said. He was looking steadily and gloomily in the coals, and I as steadily, but not so gloomily, at him.

"But perhaps you do not understand me. When our loved are absent, we dwell on all that is best, highest, and noblest in their characters, and we forget the natural and inevitable imperfections which sometimes annoy us in every-day contact. When our loved ones die, all that was unworthy and imperfect, all that produced antagonism in us, is buried with them in the grave. We look at them from a distance; and who shall say that we do not behold them as they are? Where our love places them, there our love will surely meet and recognize them some day. Perhaps I speak from appearances, after all, when I say we look at them from a distance. I think I do, for something within me says that souls are only brought near each other when this deep love, divested of earthly anxieties, its temporal conditions, recognizes its own."

"I think you have been dipping into the philosophy of Swedenborg," said my husband.

"I have been dipping into no philosophy, either of Swedenborg or any other man. I have no taste for such writings. My father used to pore over those

heavy volumes for hours together. Often and often I have known him to call my mother into the office, that he might read some 'memorable relation' to her. She used to listen, I suppose; but I doubt even if she heard as much as I did, or with half the interest excited in my mind, by accounts of familiar talks with the departed. On the contrary, I think my poor mother's brain was completely muddled, and that she had an idea it was not exactly in accordance with Scripture, or with her strict orthodox training, to listen to such things."

"But you say you listened. What was the effect upon your mind?"

"Yes, I listened. Unfortunately, it was a habit of mine to listen, and to prick up my ears at every word I overheard that savored of the supernatural. I sometimes learned more than was intended for me,—very much more than I could digest. The consequence was a mental dyspepsia, of which I am not yet wholly cured."

"I don't know of a better cure for that," said my husband, "than can be found in these same books you speak of. One assertion the old seer makes, which, if it be true, we had better act upon at this moment. He says we are under the special protection of angelic spirits while we are asleep; and as during the day the diabolic very often get the ascendancy, the longer our spirits are under the benign influences of the celestials, the better."

"That is an argument for not getting up early in the morning."

"Why not for retiring early to rest?" he asked.

"Why not for lengthening the hours devoted to sleep at both ends?" I added; "but I should like to

ask your wise oracle, if we are under the special protection of the celestials while we sleep, how does it happen that we are so tormented by frightful dreams, as is the case so often?"

"To answer that would take us into another field of speculation," replied Philip.

"Then you admit that what Swedenborg has left us, are merely speculations. I thought they were assertions, to which, if you believe at all, you must give an unqualified assent. I confess, that has always prejudiced me against them."

"And so it would me, if I read in that way. It is folly to say we believe what we do not; or because a part seems reasonable, it is folly to swallow the whole. I never have read and never can read Swedenborg in that way. I can never render blind credence to any human medium. What convinces my reason, and satisfies my heart, I accept. What does violence to both, I must reject. If I say I believe all that Swedenborg asserts, I falsify myself. I may accept by and by, what now does not strike me as credible. If I do, I am not ashamed to confess it. Nevertheless, as far as any human medium professes to interpret the eternal truths of God, it behooves us to accept cautiously, to bring them to the tribunal of our own intellectual and spiritual consciousness. This seems to me in accordance with the Spirit of Him who gave me the faculties I possess. To Him alone I am accountable. It is written, 'Call no man your master upon earth, for one is your Master, even Christ.' I would rather believe an error conscientiously than accept a dogma on authority. I believe there will be no marked spiritual advancement, until what goes by the name of religion becomes a personal matter between

man and his Maker; and the life of a true woman, like Katharine, like Aunt Content, and many others I can mention, proves to me the living fact of Christianity more incontrovertibly than all the books of theology that were ever written.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Swedenborg was a great, a wise, and a good man. The fact of his illumination rests wholly on his own *ipse dixit*. He simply affirms that he was in the spirit, and saw and heard thus and so; that his spiritual sight was open. Now, I believe that such an opening of the spiritual sight is possible. He has proved it to my mind philosophically, and my understanding is satisfied. He saw marvelous things. So did John, so did Ezekiel, so did Peter. If we believe these men, why not believe Swedenborg? The prophets and apostles were men, and fallible men too. Swedenborg's philosophy explains the Scriptural statements of John, Peter, and the visions of the old prophets. We need a key to the understanding of these visions, and he furnishes it. I, for one, am much obliged to him; but I should never think of despising others because they could not see as I do, and there comes in the terrible injury to Christianity which grows out of the intolerance of sect. You must subscribe to the whole or nothing. Thus people make liars of their consciences. I have never subscribed to a creed, never yet saw one devised by man that I could wholly subscribe to. On some points my mind is not made up, perhaps never will be while I see through a glass darkly; and I never will, so help me God, profess to believe what I don't believe, even at the risk of being called, as I am very often called, an Infidel.

"The beliefs of the Christian world are, and always

will be various. The duty of the Christian individually is so plain, that 'the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.' It may be all summed up in a few words: 'What does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' or thus: 'True religion and undefiled before God is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world.' Now if a man seriously resolves, and resolutely tries to do this, he will have less leisure and inclination for controversy and dogma than he has now."

"A good sermon, and well pronounced!" I exclaimed, "and I never once felt like going to sleep; but now, if you please, I am quite ready to place myself under the guardianship of the angels."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON looking over my journal, in order if possible to glean from its pages sufficient material to carry on a connected story, I am mortified to be obliged to confess, that so many and so wide are the gaps therein, and so desultory the contents, that it is impossible to make it available. Consequently, I am compelled to draw upon my memory for facts and incidents to carry out my intention.

"Length of days should speak, and the multitude of years should teach wisdom." Undoubtedly they should; but unfortunately, neither "length of days," nor "multitude of years" accomplish all that may with propriety be expected of them.

I used to fancy, long before I had attained middle life, that I had done up a vast amount of thinking, in consequence of which, I laid claim to more wisdom than belonged to the majority of my sex. I learned, after a time, that it is not by thinking about the great problems of human life and destiny, so much as by living and doing, that we become wise.

God has decreed that we should "*work* out our own salvation," not *think* it out, or *reason* about it, and, as if purposely to take the wind out of the sails of our self-conceit, He sends the storm and the tempest, thereby compelling us to draw them in before they hurry us on to the rocks and shoals, where we shall

inevitably be wrecked, unless we put forth all our energy, and, with what resources we can command, work for our very lives against the current.

And in these sudden exigencies, often the very first thing to be done is to throw overboard the greater part of our cargo, to keep our ship from sinking. How terrible to be thus apparently at the mercy of the winds and waves! Helpless as children we cry out, "Lord, save, or we perish." If there were not One who sees us toiling in rowing, what could keep us from despair? But there is One whom even the winds and sea obey. Day after day, in the sunshine, on the smooth sea, we glide along, trusting in ourselves, in our wisdom, in our foresight, in our intelligence; but by and by a great pall of darkness falls upon us, the shadow of some mighty sorrow; our ship is in the midst of the sea. Where are all our thoughts about God, — our speculations on great moral problems, our schemes of salvation, our creeds, and our dogmas? Of how little importance then seems to us the disputes, the differing conclusions, of learned theologians *about* Christ! The time seems worse than wasted that we have given to this aimless searching into mysteries. To believe this or that about Him, is not what we need; but to believe Him, to find the way to Him, to trust Him, that we may have "rest unto our souls."

This, however, is not the strain in which I proposed to write at this time. I confess it is one which I am too prone to fall into, which may be set down as a failing, or at least a peculiarity, of old age. I need the wholesome hint which an occasional yawn from my young readers would give, or a kindly admonition from some one who knows that if I preach too much and too long, I shall have no readers at all.

I think I may as well own frankly that the portion of my story yet to be told will be of a serious character; and thoughtless, excitement-loving readers will lay it down of course.

I am about to make a long step forward, over an interval of ten years, and to introduce myself to notice as a matron "hard on to forty," as the country people say. My husband, to make use of an equally expressive phrase, had "turned of fifty." There is just enough of ambiguity in these provincial phrases to allay whatever sensitiveness one may feel on the subject of growing old, and yet sufficient definiteness to satisfy idle curiosity. Neither Philip nor myself could at this period lay any claim to being considered young; and both of us, whether we were pleased or displeased, were compelled to admit the hard fact that we were growing old. Our oldest daughter was in her seventeenth year; our foster-son wanted but a few months of coming of age; and added to our lives were three separate blessings, all given to us within the space of ten years, for which we thanked God in our hearts, — Kitty, our second daughter, Rebecca, our third, and Theodore, our baby.

Of course it will be understood that the school plan had been carried into operation. Indeed, it seemed the only feasible employment open to my husband; and it had this advantage over any other, that he loved it. In a pecuniary point of view, it was not a great success, which may be accounted for by the fact that the elements of that kind of success had died out of his nature, and never existed in mine.

Aleck, although we loved him as dearly as though he belonged to us, like the fond and dutiful son that he was, recognized a higher claim even than our own, to

the noble woman, whose steady and unflinching efforts had been crowned with their fitting reward. Well might he be proud of her, who through her sharp and prolonged trials, had never lost courage, — never swerved in her wife-like devotion or her maternal duty.

My mother and Aunt Rebecca still lived on together in the old house, not far from my own. George was the proud and happy father of a host of boys and girls; and Stella had grown to be a fair and captivating girl, the belle of Eastfield.

The Thirfield family still remained in the same place, although one could hardly trace in its modern dress and appointments the antiquated and dilapidated mansion of fifteen years ago.

And while I am on this theme, I must not forget the most important of all the changes which had taken place in Eastfield during my long absence, — important in many of its bearings in the community at large; and that was the laying of a railway through the very heart of the town, and the building of a station, with all the accompaniments of warehouses, hotels, and livery stables, on the very site of the old Parsons mansion.

Yet, in spite of change and progress, Eastfield was still "the loveliest village of the plain." Its beautiful river still wound in graceful curves through the wide green meadows. Its green hills rose like walls of verdure bounding the western horizon, and over the craggy summits of the distant mountains, the morning sun rose as gloriously as in the days of my childhood.

There was still enough of the ancient leaven of Puritanism to make war with the innovations of more liberal interpretations of old dogmas; and although what

had been in my day the new society, was on my return a regularly organized body of worshippers; even that fold was not broad enough to take in all who styled themselves Christians. A Methodist and a Baptist denomination were added to the list of churches, nor was there a lack of worshippers in any. Eastfield had become a growing place; and when once a place begins to grow, who can say when or where it will stop?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was Aleck's last term in college. He had divided his vacation between his mother and ourselves. He was a noble boy (to us he seemed but a boy, albeit he had the stature of a man). I have said but little of our children, partly, because if I began to talk of them there is no calculating how much time and space they would monopolize in my story. Continually to drag our children before our friends is a refinement of egotism only tolerated by those whose weakness in the same direction makes them lenient. It is such a happiness to talk of *our own*; but even the most motherly of us finds it a weariness to listen. I trust I may be forgiven for saying that a nobler young man than Aleck never gladdened a parent's heart, or a fairer maid than my Alice never graced a home. I know it was not maternal blindness. Too many reports of what others said and thought reached my ears, to permit me to question for a moment the truth of what I have stated. But, supposing they had been less fair, less noble and gifted, would they have been less dear to their mother's heart?

We only begin to comprehend our capacity for happiness and suffering when in our children's lives are repeated the experiences of our own. And yet they know not, nor can they know, nor could we have known, until the fountain of parental love was un-

sealed in our own breast, the breadth and depth and fullness of that sympathy which does not feel and suffer for, but with our children.

There is something sad, even in its unselfish devotion, in a mother's love. I remember how often I used to say, when my first-born was yet a playful, thoughtless child, "How sweet will be our relation to each other when she shall have grown into companionship with me!" How could I believe, ah! how could I desire her to comprehend the unutterable yearnings which are forever looking beyond, to a closer and closer communion? for, after all, it is not till she, in her experience, is brought into communion with the motherhood in humanity, that she is able to fathom its depths. We must not quarrel with the eternal laws. To understand and to fulfill them will bring us closer to the Infinite Love, the father and mother of us all.

My husband's delight in the writings of Swedenborg induced me to read them; and fain would I give my unqualified assent to many of the doctrines he sets forth. Fain would I believe much that he has written which makes that mysterious world beyond the grave a real world, and annihilates the awful thought of distance and separation, which makes death a terror to so many. To some of his statements my feelings and my judgment yield assent; but when he affirms that maternal love is extinguished there, and places it among our human instincts, my heart refuses to follow him, and asserts its own intuitions above his masculine intelligence. Instinctive I know, in its earthly conditions, parental love must necessarily be in part, but within is a spiritual and celestial principle which allies it to the Infinite. No love can be so unselfish, so pure, so self-forgetting. If a higher manifestation of

God's love for us had been possible, why were the teachings and sufferings of Christ needed, to make us comprehend the Fatherhood of God?

The only union of soul which Swedenborg declares eternal is what he calls the spiritual union of man and woman. To this he gives the highest rank in the scale of human relations. But does this relation help us to understand the heart of God in its infinite tenderness, forever yearning, forever giving, forever drawing his children into closer and closer relationship with Himself?

As I could not in the commencement of my reading, and cannot now, after more thoughtful perusal, confess an unqualified assent to all Swedenborg's assertions, it may not be audacious in me to declare it as my opinion, that never having had children, he could not be supposed to know what parental affection is.

I am not so self-opinionated or self-satisfied as to think that my independent judgment, so plainly expressed, will have any influence either in settling or unsettling the convictions of other minds, or, in fact, that it will have any effect whatever upon anybody. I felt like expressing my opinions, and therefore I did it. I uttered frankly my individual convictions; and I have no doubt that there are mothers far and wide, who, if they were to know my views on the subject, and were equally frank in the expression of their own, would say, "I, from my own consciousness, pronounce them true."

And now that the egotistical impulse seems to have taken strong hold upon me, it is only by a resolution not to write another word that I shall be able to restrain the desire to go on as I have begun; and I do not wish to make such a resolution.

I want to have my say out upon the subject of independent thinking; or, as its opponents call it, free-thinking. Not without much suffering, many doubts, apprehensions, and misgivings, did I attain to that state of mind in which I *dared* to think for myself, much less give utterance to my convictions. To find "peace in believing," my soul yearned and strove devoutly. Having in some unaccountable manner escaped the trammels of sect in my youth, I had none of the prejudices of education and tradition to throw off. I had been religiously, but not theologically trained. I did not feel, with Solomon, that I had "more understanding than all my teachers." On the contrary I could not even profess to have understanding sufficient to decide whether they were right or wrong. Much that I heard from the pulpit I could not believe; but I had too keen an enjoyment of the pleasures of youth, too large a field of imagination and fancy to wander over, too great a love of day-dreaming and castle-building, to wish to trouble myself about the doctrines of election, total depravity, and justification by faith; and I had too little reverence for the propounders of these doctrines, to be greatly influenced by them, having been brought into so close a propinquity with some shining examples, as to have little respect for the practical working of their peculiar leaven. I hated those who dared to call my father an infidel.

Had my temperament been less healthful and cheerful, the consequences of the state of doubt and disbelief in which many years of my life were passed, might have proved disastrous. There were examples around me which I can even now recall as painful and pitiful commentaries on the kind of preaching I was subjected to in my early days. Could the religion of Christ

have produced the results which in some instances followed in the wake of such preaching? It cannot be believed for a moment that He to whose loving sympathy and compassion the man whose name was Legion clung with trembling gratitude, beseeching that he might be with Him always, that He, the Immanuel, should approach some tender, timid, distrustful child of earth—in prayerful effort to find, to love, and obey Him—with judgments and threatenings, to terrify, to discourage, and quench at last the light of reason in blank despair! Yet, though I grieve to say it, such examples were not wanting in those seasons of excitement so wide-spread at that time. Verily I believe that like Saul, when he persecuted the Christians, these pastors and teachers believed they were doing God service; but I rejoice, even at this late day, that I could not believe them. Nor at this time have I the least desire to judge or condemn them. In all times and in all nations has it been shown that the pastors and the teachers of God's flock were but fallible men; therefore does it not become every mind that can think, and every soul that must "work out its own salvation," to feel an individual responsibility in the matter? We do not want to be told what we must believe, but what we must do, to inherit eternal life,—what we must become to realize the kingdom of Heaven in our own souls. How many troubled hearts and doubting minds run from one fold to another! how many earnest seekers after truth tax a mind already sick and incapable of seeing truth in its fair proportions, growing farther and farther away from comfort and trust and hope, and amid the babel of human authorities and opinions not able to hear the only living words that the soul needs: "Come unto me, all ye that

labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" What can all the eloquence and erudition of human authority add to this?

It is not rest we seek in the morning of life, with the freshness of the perfumed air and the joyous singing of the birds around us, nor yet in the noon, in the deep hush and unclouded brightness of a day without clouds. It is happiness we crave,—hope which stimulates to activity and the reward of successful achievement. But when the sun declines, and the shadows grow longer; when the hopes that were unfilled lie scattered along the way we have trodden; when cares thicken, and the strength to cope with them grows less; when the goal seems afar off, and the limbs are too feeble to reach it,—then, if we have not before brought the great mystery of life home to our own consciousness, if we have not before stood in spiritual isolation, reaching up to the Father, hungering after the only "living bread," we shall know the meaning of the want and the weakness and the helplessness to which that precious invitation is addressed, and gladly exchange our dreams of happiness for that "peace which passeth understanding."

We need not, indeed we cannot anticipate that time. How useless is the self-inflicted torture by which we try to force upon the soul the knowledge which can only come by experience! How cruel the attempt to force it prematurely on others! As though we could lay up stores of wisdom and strength for the great exigencies of life in any other way than a constant, a wise use of what we gain from minute to minute! As if human calculations could supersede God's intentions! As if God's message to the soul needed human expounders! Wherein does it differ from other truth,

if it is not a mirror wherein we can see our inner selves,—a well from which we can draw living water?

When I proceed with my story, dating ten years from the time of my sojourn at Eastfield, the explanation of these sober thoughts, which would not be denied utterance, will be apparent. Not that those ten years were a blank. There are no blank pages in our book of life. And we shall find, no doubt, that there are none in our book of remembrance, when their earthly record is closed. But I prefer to dismiss that decade with only this remark, in passing: though important to me, they could have little interest to any one else; and with this end my chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

I repeat once more the sentence at the beginning of the foregoing chapter: "It was Aleck's last term in college." After a visit to his mother in New York, he had come back to say good-by to us before his return to Cambridge. He had left us in all the exultant health and hope of a vigorous mind and body.

When he came back, we perceived a something,—we could not call it sadness, but, like the shadow of a cloud over a summer landscape, an undefinable something seemed to have passed over the summer of his soul; and both Philip and myself felt that some trouble which we knew not of, had disturbed the current of his life.

We did not ask one another what it was, nor did we ask him. We felt in our hearts that the time had come when, if he had not already made inquiries, he would ask about his father. It was an hour we had dreaded, often wondering why, but always thankful that it had kept away so long. But now it had come, and with it the certainty that on us devolved the sad duty of answering any question he might put to us.

Long and sorrowfully Philip and I talked with each other that last night but one of Aleck's stay, trying to anticipate his inquiries, so that we might frame our replies in such words as would give the least pain, and yet be true.

In every light in which we could view the crisis which we felt had come, we saw no alleviation but to tell the bitter truth. We knew his sensitiveness, his high notions of honor, his unswerving integrity, and his deeply rooted pride of character. We knew also his self-sacrificing tenderness and devotion to those he loved, — his romantic idolatry of his mother, his long contemplated resolve, by his own effort to provide a home for her, in which the refinement and culture which he had learned to value as it deserved, should find its appropriate sphere.

What had occurred in that last visit we could not know, but that something had passed between them, bearing upon this painful subject, was evident; for he did not return to us the light-hearted being he had been heretofore.

All that last day before his departure it seemed as though a spell of silence had fallen upon us. After tea, Aleck asked his uncle to take a walk with him. It was late when they returned. Alice had retired; and I, although I had been sitting up watching for them, made my escape when I saw them drawing near the house.

I heard Philip's "Good-night, God bless you my boy," and I heard Aleck go up-stairs and shut the door of his chamber. A few moments after, Philip locked the street door and came to our room. He was pale, and looked distressed. "I have told him everything," he said, "and now we must do all in our power to prevent him from morbidly dwelling upon ills that cannot be remedied. Therefore, Maggie, I do not wish you to go to him, in his present excited state, with those demonstrations of womanly affection and sympathy which are more grateful than healthful to the soul at such a crisis."

"But, Philip, would you not have me assure him that I feel for and with him?" I asked.

"He knows that already," replied my husband. "We do not need a verbal assurance of the sympathy of those whom we love and trust. We must help Aleck to rise above this trial to his pride and his affection. We must not allow ourselves to be crushed by sorrow or shame, even though it be the penalty of our own misdoings. While there is life to suffer remorse, there is life to repent of our misdoings; and although an honorable name is an inheritance we naturally desire, it does not affect our absolute and eternal relations. I have tried to convince Aleck that in judging of his father's character he must put aside as far as possible the verdict of the world. In this trial the sympathy of the world can neither afford him help nor comfort. His father sinned against the laws, and escaped their penalty. But what heavier punishment could the law have inflicted upon him than in those years of exile he endured from the reproaches of his own heart, from the thought of the misery he had brought upon others?"

"I talked to him of the noble and generous impulses of his father's nature, — and who knew and loved them better than I? I felt that I ought to impress upon the boy, through whom I seem to see his father, living and appealing to my heart for love and forgiveness, the danger of trusting to generous impulses in the tremendous issues of life. But I was not afraid to speak to him of those virtues and sweet affections which his short career of sin could not have totally obliterated, nor to assure him, that so far as his father's condition in the spiritual world is concerned, I need no other assurance that it is well with him than

my own heart gives, founded on what I believe to be the justice of God's dealings with us. I feel comforted every day I live with the conviction that he is forgiven, that he is happy; for, Maggie, I do not count God's justice to be what man has defined it, but what Christ embodied in his life on earth. Man's justice is often injustice, and is limited by the narrow range of his spiritual vision; but God is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities.' In all I said to Aleck, I tried to be charitable, and yet not to lessen his abhorrence of sin by a mere sentimental justification of the wrong-doer; but when all is said that can be said in denunciation of sin, there was never yet an example of wickedness, in which a just judgment could be rendered, without taking into account the strength of the temptation and the weakness of the will. No one but the infinite God can do that.

"What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."

"And how did the poor boy bear it?" I asked.

"Of course," my husband replied, "he was very much overcome by it, but he bore it like a man; and now we can do nothing more. I gave him his father's dying message." Here Philip's voice betrayed the agitation of his soul. "He did not speak, but wrung my hand. 'Your mother must find happiness in life through you,' I said. 'Remember, in all your struggles, your successes, your failures, your sorrows, *we* are with you; God is with you.' And now, Maggie, it is not necessary that we should allude to this painful subject again, either to him or between ourselves. No good can result from talking it over. Of course Aleck knows that I shall tell you of our interview. Of course his mother knows it; for she desired him to

ask me, thinking I could tell him better than she. When we meet to-morrow to bid him good-by, let our voice, our manner, inspire courage and cheerfulness. He must bear his load like the rest of us. I would gladly have postponed the painful duty; but now that it is over, there is a satisfaction in knowing it is not to be gone over again."

After my husband was asleep, which was long past midnight, I rose softly and stole across the entry to the door of Aleck's room. He was up, for I heard him move his writing-table, and I saw the glimmering of his lamp through the key-hole. I thought I heard the rattling of paper, and the sound of a pen in writing. I know that I heard a long, deep groan. Could I permit him to go from us without the assurance of my love, my confidence, and my trust in him? Philip was wise, but it was the wisdom of a man; perhaps wanting in that element of tenderness which belongs to woman. I felt an irresistible longing to go to my poor boy, to throw my arms about him, and say—what? "I compassionate you! I feel for you!" But he knew all that. "No," I said to myself, "there are crises in life when, like our Master, we must 'tread the wine-press alone.' This is one, and Aleck, my poor, dear boy, will never doubt my love or my sympathy." I turned away, and in the silence of that night my prayer went up to God to bless our stricken one; to give him the patience to bear his burden, and the courage to overcome every enemy to his peace; and for his mother's sake, for our sake, for the sake of all who must live and suffer, to come forth conqueror in the end.

We met around the breakfast table. The shadow still rested on that proud young brow; and the clear,

guileless eye, that never shrank from our earnest look, was downcast and troubled. I could scarcely restrain myself from weeping, but my husband's example assisted me. Directly after we had finished our meal, Philip proposed that they should walk together to the station without delay, and that Parker, the hired man, should follow with the trunks. This did not allow much time for leave-taking. Aleck kissed Alice and the children, shook hands with the servants, and, putting his arm around me, drew me with him to the door.

"We have barely time to get to the station," said my husband. "God bless you, my own dear boy," I said, and he was gone.

"What is the matter with Aleck this morning?" asked Alice. "I never saw him look so sober. I guess Lottie Green must have refused him."

"What reason have you for thinking he gave her the opportunity?" I asked.

"All Eastfield knows he is in love with her, and has been ever so long, but her parents won't let her encourage him. They pretend they have heard something to his disadvantage, though they won't tell what it is. As if Aleck ever did or thought anything wrong in his life! I am almost sure he offered himself to her, or, at any rate, made a declaration of his love, before he went to New York. He looked sober before he went, and a thousand times more so when he came back. If I were Lottie, I wouldn't give him up for anybody. If I loved any man, no power on earth could compel me to renounce him."

"My child, my darling, don't talk so extravagantly. You would not be true to yourself, certainly not to those whose only wish is to secure your happi-

ness, if you did not allow their judgment to influence you in such an important step."

"Forgive me, mother dear," she replied. "I hope it will never be necessary, — or, rather, I hope, if I should be in love, you would approve my choice. Don't let us talk about it. Time enough to provide against trouble when it arrives, father says. Nobody has asked me yet, but — poor Aleck! how dreadfully he looked! I heard him walking about his room nearly all night, and Katy said his bed hadn't been slept in. As if there could anything be brought against him, poor fellow!"

"I am quite sure that nothing can be brought against his character," I said. "His record is as spotless as that of any young man I ever knew."

"And even if he had faults, — if he had great faults, — that ought not to influence Lottie against him," continued Alice. "I wouldn't give up a man because he had faults. Who hasn't faults?"

"It would depend very much upon what his faults were," I said. "I should not blame any mother for using her utmost influence to prevent her daughter's acceptance of a young man like George Thirkield."

I did not observe at the time, but I have thought of it many times since, that instead of making any comment after this remark, Alice turned abruptly away, and I did not meet her again till dinner time.

I owe to my readers an explanation. Having presented George Thirkield in an unfavorable light, as a young man whom any mother might dread as an associate for her daughter, I feel called upon to give my reasons. This I am willing to do, indeed, I must do so, since I have bound myself to tell the truth. I must open the heart-wounds which time has never healed,

and unlock the fountains of a sorrow to which death and the grave are comparatively light afflictions. But before I turn over those pages written with my heart's blood, I must go back, and take up the broken thread dropped so long ago, and bring up the story of the Thirkields to the time of my conversation with Alice just narrated.

CHAPTER XL.

It will be remembered that when Laura Thirkield left Mrs. Sinclair, she had accepted a position as governess in the family of a wealthy Southern gentleman, a personal friend of Philip's, named Rogers. It may also be remembered that in a conversation with me, at the time when we were both inmates of Mr. Sinclair's family, she declared unequivocally her intention to become rich, that she might lift her family from the condition of poverty into which pecuniary reverses had plunged them, relieve her sister of a load of care she was ill fitted to bear, educate her younger brother and sister, and make the declining years of her father comfortable, as far as outward circumstances could accomplish this object. Laura Thirkield was a girl of strong though not masculine character; and the ungenial influences which surrounded her early life in Eastfield so worked upon a naturally obstinate and rebellious disposition, as to crush out apparently the imaginative faculty which belongs to the feminine nature in its early development, and bring forward prematurely a resolution and steadfastness of purpose which few women ever attain. But it is not among women alone that vacillation of purpose is apparent. In order to carry out a fixed purpose in life, those elements of success are needed which I have before alluded to as

essential to "getting on" in the world; and, if my observation is correct, those elements are by no means promiscuously or lavishly bestowed, and seldom, if ever, attained by wishing or willing.

Evidently it is not the intention of the Creator that everybody should get on and up in the world; and if those for whom nature and circumstances combine to further their aims and purposes would only be more modest—arrogate less to themselves,—they would not look down upon the unsuccessful competitors in the race with that sort of contempt which means, if it does not say, "It is all your own fault,—the fault of your indolence, your extravagance," or, to sum up the whole catalogue of shortcomings in one word, "It is the fault of your universal shiftlessness, that you do not stand this moment in as high a position as we do."

My dear, successful competitor, if every one who runs should win, where would you be? This long lane of earthly life may have no turning which will conduct all to wealth or fame or distinction here; but those who under repeated disappointments and failures still run or even hobble along with patience,—don't you suppose they will come to a fortunate turn somewhere in the eternal ages? We are told of a time to arrive when "the valleys shall be exalted, and the mountains and hills shall be brought low." This prediction has been subjected to many interpretations, but not to so many that another is impossible. I find it very applicable, in a figurative sense, to an idea of my own, which is, that the valleys and mountains of human attainment will present a very different aspect when viewed spiritually, from that which appears now, and forms the basis of our merely human judgment; and that, in actual progress, many who

through their mortal lives walk through the valleys and under the shadow of the mountains, by some spiritual law not yet understood may sometime find themselves on heights, from which the altitude of their worldly, fortunate contemporaries will have sunk to the level of the valley.

If it should be so, will they be filled with pride and assumption, or will they say from the heart, "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to thy name be the glory"?

I would not have it understood that in following my friend Laura's fortunes and successes I have been led to these conclusions. The unselfish aim, the persevering industry, the undeviating purpose of attainment, were traits in her character which inspired my unqualified admiration. I would have imitated it at any period of my life, if I could have had the shadow of a prospect of success. When one has attained sufficient self-knowledge to form a just appreciation of one's capabilities, it is one important step gained. What if from ignorance of my own powers, I had kept myself and my friends in a continual state of discomfort, by repeated efforts to get up, which must have resulted in repeated fallings backward, till, between ambitious attempts and ignominious failures, body and soul would have been worn threadbare? How many such examples, both in men and women, do we see around us! Is it anybody's fault? Not always, but sometimes it is. It is the fault sometimes of those teachers who, beginning in our earliest years to hold up for our imitation "illustrious examples," incite to a blind emulation, a bootless effort to be somebody else, instead of making the most and the best of one's self, and, failing in this, to be set down as a nobody.

It is for this reason I abominate the almost universal practice of cramming the growing mind with biographies of great men and women, saints and heroes, who, if they really did attain the eminence assigned them by partial historians, attained it by maintaining their own individuality, not by copying any one else. What we call mediocrity is not always what we conceive it to be, namely, a sort of intellectual imbecility; but, in whatever form of words we may define it, the fact itself is that the class of human beings who are set down as *mediocre* would be very much more limited, if all the efforts of education and society brought to bear upon them were not calculated to put them and keep them just where they are.

If any ill-natured person pronounces what is written above a case of special pleading, arising from an envious discontent, I must emphatically deny the charge. In the first place, who among our *mediocre* friends and acquaintances would be likely to admit that such was his intellectual status? Certainly I have not so humble an estimate of myself, and I am very sure that few of the number of those whom I might consign to the ranks of mediocrity are any more humble than I; therefore, if any one should propose to call the roll, I am afraid there would be few if any to say aye, in their own estimate of eligibility to the position.

But as to Laura Thirkield, she never was and never could have been called mediocre, even by her enemies. She had talent, education, beauty, strength. She was bound to be something, and to do something out of the ordinary limits prescribed to woman. At this day and in this generation, she would probably be a pioneer in the woman's rights movement; and were she even now living, and in possession of her faculties, she would

undoubtedly be found an ally worth having in the inevitable progress of independent thinking. At the time, when, in all the courage and hopefulness of youth, she struck out a path for herself in the world, it was not to prove what women could do for the world, if they chose, but what one woman could do for those she loved, if not bound by conventional shackles. Certain restrictions of propriety and custom had to be overstepped, and she fretted and chafed until she gained courage to do it; and when once she felt her freedom, her course was steadily onward to the accomplishment of her ends.

This end was to attain pecuniary independence by her own exertions. Like all who have an end in life, and a determination to pursue it, she was reticent of the steps by which she purposed to reach that end. She was conscious of power, and in what direction it lay; but she did not go about from one to another of her confidential female friends and say what she was going to do, or get drawn into any argument with regard to the ways and means; neither did she scorn the "base degrees" by which she knew she must begin her ascent.

When Mrs. Sinclair offered her the position of nursery governess, she saw in it one step, — a short one to be sure, and apparently unimportant, but a step, and the only one possible at the time. She took it, and accepted the humble position, as a beginning. She was not contented — of course not. It was not in her nature, or in the nature of things, that she should be; and by and by a broader view opened to her. She welcomed it, not only as a pecuniary advantage, but as throwing her into new relations with a new order of society, in a part of the world that was new to her. For those who are resolved to carve their own

way to fame and fortune, it is often a great advantage to go beyond the reach of early associations, — away from the influences of home, — sweet and hallowed though they are; for, we all know of a truth that a prophet "hath no honor in his own country, and among his own kindred." The affectionate solicitude, the timidity, the tender guardianship of those who love us best, begets in us restraint, concealment, and dissatisfaction. What could poor Laura have accomplished at Eastfield, of all the large designs she proposed to carry out? There were other good, intelligent, self-sacrificing daughters there, who felt the necessity of leaving the parent nest, and lifting the burden of their support from off the hands of fathers and mothers, whose slender means could not avail to satisfy the increasing demands of their sons and daughters. "The field is the world" to man, but to woman what is it? Domestic life, is the stereotype reply, — husband and children. If she do her duty there, what need of any larger field?

No one pretends to doubt the truth of this assertion; but where are the husbands, and from whence the children? The discussion of this question seems utterly useless. There never was a time in the history of civilization, when the proportion of women was not larger than that of men. Certainly, I do not remember the time in New England when it was not so. And again I ask, where are the husbands to come from?

I do not think in Laura Thirkield's plan of life the possibility of a husband and children was admitted. Not because she was unwomanly and unloving, not that she was deficient in all good and feminine instincts; but with them she had a large share of com-

mon sense, and she knew the chances of a husband, even if it had been the sole object of her life to get one, were only one in a thousand. Therefore marriage did not enter into her calculations.

What then was her career? She went into this wealthy family as a governess. She was received and treated as an equal. She enjoyed precisely those advantages which called forth her peculiar talent, her genius I may say; for it was genius that determined her final choice of a profession, and made her preëminently successful in it. She became an actress, a successful one among so many whose aspirations end in disappointment.

To this, she owed her fortune; for this, she gave up all minor pursuits, all the promptings of womanly instinct, which pointed to the present, personal enjoyment of domestic life. Was she less a true woman at heart, for this self-renunciation?

Hers was an example (and this labor-field of life offers but few) of worldly success which exceeded expectation; and the memorials of her love and her labors were written in the hearts of those for whom that love projected, and that labor achieved.

Perhaps she overestimated the advantages of pecuniary independence; perhaps she exaggerated the evils of poverty. I do not feel called upon to decide these questions. Her satisfaction in the attainment of wealth, and her happiness in the appropriation of it, was not without alloy. May not the same be said of every human enterprise, however successful? Is the delight of being able to bestow, less on account of the so frequent misuse and abuse of the good bestowed? We do not judge thus of the Giver of all good, who showers the profusion of his bounty, not only on the

righteous and the grateful, but on the unthankful and the evil.

There were many righteous people in Eastfield who shook their heads solemnly when some new scandal reached their ears concerning that incorrigible scapegrace, George Thirkield, to whom his sister's bounty had proved a weapon of self-destruction! Ill-gotten gains! it was said. And what judgment would they pronounce upon the rich Deacon Potter, who, all his natural life, screwed down to the verge of destitution a weakly wife and a growing family of sons and daughters, that he might fill his coffers, and leave to his heirs a fortune which would make the good people of Eastfield stare, but which those who ought to have been benefited by it were not permitted to use when they most needed it, and, when it did fall to their lot, they only knew how to abuse and squander.

When the great book of accounts is made up on the day of general reckoning, I think Laura Thirkield's record of debt and credit will stand as fair as that of Deacon Potter's, — certainly if the motives which are the spring of endeavor are to form the basis of that final judgment.

George Thirkield was a young man of persuasive manners and extraordinary personal beauty and fascination, yet utterly without principle, and therefore very naturally dreaded by every mother who valued the well-being of her children. The prevailing fault of his character was a total indifference to truth, — apparently a lack of perception of what truth meant; yet, such was the persuasiveness of his eloquence, that while he was speaking, it was almost impossible to doubt him. Nor was this his only fault. Stories of his dissolute habits were too well authenticated to ad-

mit of any doubt, and the grief, shame, and humiliation he caused his family were indorsement sufficient to prove the truth of all and more even than rumor laid at his door.

Our long habits of intimacy with the family very naturally threw the younger members together, although I had openly and emphatically avowed my determination to exclude George from any closer association with us than what my love for his sisters, and my respect and sympathy for his aged father, required. How could it have occurred to me that my own child, innocent and pure, the very soul of truth herself, could be for a moment deceived in or by him? — could for a moment believe the words of one whom every honest mind doubted, every true heart condemned? How many things come back to me now, and fill me with wonder at my blindness! Surely my "eyes were holden, that I could not see!" Surely some evil spell must have been laid upon me; for now I recall that gradual withdrawal of my darling's confidence, which, although it pained me at the time, I religiously tried to convince myself was the inevitable result of that conscious individuality which comes with years. She was a child no longer; I must not expect to be admitted into that hidden life which constituted her distinct personality. Fond, doting mothers, you can understand the bitter, bitter pang of finding yourself for the first time shut out from the hearts of your children! You live but for and in them. They cannot understand this. The current of their lives runs not back to mingle with yours, but forward to the ocean of their own hopes, to the anticipation of that joy which you have felt in them, to the certainty of that sorrow, call it selfish if you will, — what sorrow

is not selfish? — which is no less keenly felt, because its pangs must be suppressed. I mean the sorrow which anticipates the desolation of a home bereft of children.

Sometimes, when my heart was over full, I used to unburden my troubled thoughts to Philip, and tell him that Alice was not so bright and joyous as she had been, that she loved to go off alone, that she cared less for her brother and sisters, less even I feared for us. Not that her manner was less affectionate; but she had been wont to tell me every thought and feeling of her heart, and seemed incapable of enjoying anything fully without my sympathy.

He listened, and tried to comfort me with the assurance that such was the common lot; it was hard, but many things in life were hard, and there was a "*needs be*" to all suffering, or it would not be permitted. I tried to find strength, if not solace from his words. I cannot say I listened and believed; but I religiously and prayerfully tried to accept the suffering and disappointment which I supposed must needs be in the nature of things.

I do not mean to convey the idea that I was unhappy. Far from it. Had I not objects of love which called out the strength and tenderness of my nature? Ah! who can estimate the capacity for affection which lies in one human heart? Who has ever exhausted it? Who does not know that even in the fullest measure of giving, there is yet room for more? But who is satisfied always? What is the mystery of those moments of loneliness which come to us in the depths of our souls, even when life and love ought to satisfy us! What is this prophecy, this shadowy intimation of sorrow that flits across the brightest noon

of our happiness? Why, when we ought to rejoice, when all within and all without calls upon us to rejoice, — why do the sights and sounds of gladness and beauty fall on our souls like music on deaf ears, and the gorgeous glory of the sunshine on eyes that are blind?

Do the guardian angels who are about us, who stand forever before the Father, and through his wisdom discern a gracious purpose in the storm which is about to burst upon us, do they — remembering their human weakness, feel for us, in our short-sightedness and utter ignorance of the future, a sad and pitying tenderness, which stands between our soul and its happiness, like a tearful mist, between the earth and the sunshine?

I will not curse him, that treacherous man, though he stole into our peaceful sheep-fold and bore away my innocent lamb. For twenty years I have not ceased to pray, "Lord, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." There must come an answer of peace some day. When I again behold her, my angel amidst the shining ones in heaven; when I can see her, radiant with celestial joy, and lose forever the haunting memory of her faded earthly loveliness, her wasted form, my fair flower rifled of its bloom and fragrance; when I can forget her as she lay upon my breast, her first and last resting place, so young and yet so broken in heart, — then I may find that what my lips have uttered so often has not been in vain; then I shall feel that what we have asked "*for Christ's sake*" has not been in vain.

I will not curse him. Even in my agony there was one cause for thankfulness. Tear-blinded and heart-broken, she groped her way back to us. But I am anticipating.

All the while I have been writing the story of my

life, I have had this sad chapter before me. Many times while it was in progress, and as it drew nearer and nearer, my heart misgave me, and I said, "It shall end here." I thought, "How can I live over again that day of suspense, that long night of anguish, those months and years of deep, unutterable sadness; those sudden and overwhelming shocks of doubt and distrust of God's goodness; that shuddering dread lest all I had been taught to believe, all my very heart and life cried out to believe, was but a delusion,—that there was no God, no hereafter, no comfort, no city of refuge but the grave!"

I need not live it over. The day which shone upon her empty room passed, yet we lived, hoped, watched for her to its close. At dusk there came a letter which told us all. She had deserted us and fled with him, of her own free choice. She believed in him and in his love.

The children were sleeping in their beds. The hush of a summer night lay upon the earth. All day long we, Philip and I, had wandered from room to room, unconscious even of each other, hidden even from each other's eyes by the awful presence of an undefined yet fearful dread.

After Philip had read the letter, he handed it to me. His face was ghastly pale, but I, how could I speak words of comfort? I do not remember that I read the letter; my brain caught at the dreadful story it revealed. I stood transfixed, without power to speak or move. I felt Philip's arm around me. I moved mechanically where he led, and we were standing together in the darkness in our child's room.

"Maggie," he said. His very voice was changed. "Maggie," he repeated, "I must speak, or my heart

will break. O my darling, if we cannot find one ray of hope in all this darkness, what will become of us?" I could only answer with a groan.

"Maggie, do hear me speak. I can be calm. I don't know what brought to my remembrance something I heard or read long ago. I want to tell it to you. It was about a poor widow who had one only son."

"O Philip, I know what you are going to tell me. but he died,—died. Our lamb isn't dead: would to God she were!"

"No, Maggie," he said, drawing me to him; "it is not the sad Bible story I was going to tell, but another, a story of our own time. This widow had but one son, and she loved him better than her own life. Like the prodigal, he wandered into a far country, and there wasted, not *his* substance, for he had nothing of his own, but *her* substance, the hard earnings of her daily and nightly toil, wasted the heart's blood of his mother, in riotous self-indulgence. Year after year she watched, and hoped, and prayed, for his return, and every night for forty years before going to rest she left the door ajar, for she said, 'When he comes back he must not find his home closed against him.'

"Whether he came or not, the story did not say. Maggie, light and beauty have left us, but all is not gone. Thank God we are not desolate, like that poor widow; but, like her, we will keep the door of our house and our hearts forever unbarred, for our lost one will come home. Our poor, deluded child will come, and find forgiveness and peace here."

He was right. She did come back to us, but it was to hear our assurances of love and forgiveness, and die in our arms. O stricken fathers and mothers, who

have gone with your darling to the gate of mortal death, and seen it close after them, shutting from your earthly vision the light and the glory beyond, — shutting from your human hearts the answer to your cry of agony, I need not tell you of our anguish through those days of watching, — those sickening alternations of hope and fear! Her poor, wasted frame, — why should I bring it before me again? The bitterness of her self-upbraidings, her pleadings for forgiveness, her outpourings of affection, her humble acquiescence in God's will! We knew she did not wish to live, save that she might comfort us. Her hands could feel a father's clasp, her eye could read a mother's undying love, even to the last, and to the last our hearts were grateful that God had spared her to come home.

We did not know, we never after sought to know more than that she was beguiled by one who knew how to put on the garments of an angel of light — that she was deceived and betrayed — that she was or thought she was his wife — that he forsook her — that she came to herself, and, trusting in a love that could not fail, in our forgiveness and in His who forgave so much to her who loved so much, and who would not despise her broken heart, came to her home to die.

Human comforters were not wanting. Friends and neighbors were kind to us in our affliction. We were grateful; but we felt, as all feel under the pressure of a heavy sorrow, that the light of our life was quenched forever. Nor were wanting, as an aggravation of our wretchedness, the suggestions of self-reproach for neglect of duty, for parental, overweening indulgence, for mistakes, sins of omission and commission. How often in the contemplation of the afflictions of others, even by those who feel true sympathy, this question is

asked: "Lord, who did sin, this man, or his parents," that this calamity should have fallen upon him? but, thank God, the stricken heart can drink in the answer of the Comforter: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." And to our sorrowing hearts, vainly striving to interpret the ways of Providence, what ministry of human wisdom could avail? "The cup which our Father had given us, must we not drink it?" Our sick souls were ready enough to acknowledge the short-sightedness, the imperfection, the weakness, even of our best endeavors, and humble enough to accept as chastisement the terrible blow which had fallen upon us, and could say in our anguish, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Although Philip, after we had laid our darling in the grave, determined to resume the labor of teaching which he had been compelled to lay aside for a time, and had delegated to an able assistant, it was but too painfully evident that the enjoyment of labor was gone. It was fortunate for him that the necessity for it remained, and could not be put by. It was fortunate also for me that three surviving children made constant demands on my time and attention. To have no pressing duty compelling our efforts, and withdrawing us, even if it be by compulsion, from the contemplation of ourselves, in these fearful emergencies of mortal life, would be an unspeakable calamity. It is true, our labor is mechanical, our duties are but empty routine, and all the while we drag ourselves through our daily tasks, the life of our life is far away, our hearts ache, our brain is giddy with thinking, and we stagger blindly through a mist. But notwithstanding all this, work is the medicine of the sick soul. Not

through days of contemplation do we learn to comprehend the divine purposes of sorrow; they are wrought out in the daily efforts of our lives to do with our might what our hands and heart find to do.

It is an old saying, that troubles never come singly. Upon what foundation this assertion rests, and has become a recognized fact, I do not know, but observation and experience go to prove that it has a foundation in truth. In our experience it was soon verified. Only one short month after the burial of our child, we received from a friend of Aleck's the intelligence that his health was seriously, and, as he believed, fatally impaired, and that without his knowledge he had taken upon himself the duty, which he considered imperative, of communicating to his family the apprehension he felt for the condition of one who was so dear to him.

"He will not admit," so the letter ran, "that he is ill, and declares that a short journey at the end of the term will set him up again. His friends are not so sanguine; and if, without exciting his apprehensions, some member of his family could visit him here, it would be a satisfaction to themselves, and to those to whom he is endeared by so many noble and manly qualities, that his loss would be one of personal sorrow and deprivation."

Katharine was with us when this letter arrived. She had come to us in our sorrow, from the conviction that no one knew better than she how to understand, if not to minister to our broken hearts. Her first impulse of course was to go to Aleck directly; but on second thought, as her unexpected presence might excite his apprehensions, we decided that Philip had better undertake the journey, ostensibly to trans-

act some business in Boston, which really required his attention, and in that way ascertain for himself Aleck's true condition. In order not to take him by surprise, we dispatched a letter, advising him of the proposed journey and visit. The letters we had received from him in our affliction had been filled with affectionate expressions of sympathy. Our loss was his also; for had Alice been his own sister, he could not have been more fond of her.

Of course no time was lost in deliberation. Philip followed his letter immediately; and the first tidings received from him confirmed our fears, although he said that "with youth and a naturally vigorous constitution in his favor, he thought we ought not to despair of his restoration to health."

We could not admit into our already darkened souls the fear that another blow was impending; and in order to keep at bay the gloomy forebodings which seemed to fill the very air with dreary spectres, we tried to suggest hopes to each other which our own hearts did not feel, and to lay plans which, even while we told them to each other, sounded in our own ears like solemn mockery.

"He shall go a voyage," — Katharine would say. "We will spend the winter together in Florida, or, perhaps, sail round the world, as Frank's friend did, as a last resort after having been given up by his physicians; and, after two years' absence, he returned perfectly cured. What is to hinder our trying everything? Thank God! I have the means, even if it costs all my savings; how could they be better appropriated? If he lives, shall I not be rich? and if, after all is done, he should die, of what use would money be to me?"

"We must not look on the dark side," I said,

while all the time I was conscious of an utter hopelessness, which seemed the very presentiment of evil; and then I repeated the words which she knew as well as I: "Take no anxious thought for the morrow."

"Yes, I know them by heart," she replied. "I say them over and over; and yet how can we help taking anxious thought? it is not in human nature, under such circumstances as ours. I know perfectly well we are no better fitted for the duty to be done, or the suffering to be borne, by dwelling upon it in anticipation; and yet our thoughts seem riveted upon the terrible possibilities of suffering, as though we were spell-bound. But I will not talk so. I want to ask you a question, which I know you will answer truly, if at all."

"About Aleck?"

"Yes, about him, my dear boy, — our dear boy, I ought to say. I know his Uncle Philip has talked with him about his father. It was at my suggestion that Aleck went to him; for although it must appear to you as weakness, — one would suppose a mother could talk with her child better than any one else could, — yet I shrank from it. Besides, it was Frank's dying request that when the time should arrive, and Aleck should ask, that Philip should be the one to communicate all it was necessary for him to know, without concealing or excusing any part, however painful or humiliating. It is not on that subject I wish to talk with you. In after years, if God spares him to me, we shall grow nearer to each other; now, the relation between us is one of comparative restraint, and on my part is a diffidence, a dread of seeming to pry into his confidence. These feelings will wear off when we are more together, if God permits me that great blessing, in answer to my prayers. It is on a subject of which you probably

know more than myself that I am moved to speak now. I allude to an attachment which I am quite sure is not simply a boyish preference, so far as his happiness is concerned. The young girl belongs in your neighborhood. Her name I think I have heard since I have been with you. If I remember aright, it is Green."

"Yes, I have heard it," I replied, and at that moment flashed across me the time when it was mentioned, and the occasion which called it up.

"I have reason," she continued, "for believing that Aleck is or was very much in love with the young person, but I think without any hope of return. I have often reproached myself for not having encouraged the confidence which, now as I look back, I am certain he really wished to bestow upon me. I knew that something troubled his mind, that a motive stronger than mere curiosity impelled him to inquire into the circumstances of his early life, and induced him to ask me certain questions. I was sure that he either suspected, or had been told, that there was a mystery, a painful mystery, connected with his history; and I had not the courage to ask him a direct question, although I can see plainly now that he gave me every opportunity. Can you throw any light upon the matter?"

"None in the world, Katharine," I replied. "I know absolutely nothing, beyond what you have discovered already. Aleck has always been a favorite with young people, and with old too. He has always been fond of the society of ladies, and quite general, as I supposed, in his attentions. I have heard Alice joke him about a dozen different girls; but I never, with the exception of one day, — the day of his departure, — heard her allude to any special love affair. On that

day, after he left us, she did ask me why he looked so unhappy, and added that she thought Lottie Green had refused him. This is all I know."

"She gave no reason, then, for her probable refusal?"

"Now you remind me of it, Katharine," I said, "she did mention what she had heard as a possible reason. She said the old people knew something against him, and had forbidden Lottie to receive his attentions."

"They could have known nothing against him personally," said Katharine.

"Of course not," I replied. "His character is above suspicion."

"Then it must have been the story of his father's crime and its consequences, which Mr. Green had learned."

"It must be so, Katharine. Though we have felt, Philip and myself, that the past was buried and forgotten, and forgiven by all those whom we called our friends, it is true as my husband often says, one cannot outlive reproach. What an unjust, what a cruel world!"

"To call it cruel, to know that it is so, does not mend the matter," said Katharine, "does not help us, does not help him, my poor, dear boy. There is the sad fact; we can do nothing. Mr. Green forbids his daughter's acceptance of the love of a noble, generous heart, because of his father's wrong-doing before he was born. It is a hard law, Maggie, but nevertheless a law—not of divine appointment—I never can believe that; and yet if permissive, it must be wise, it must be beneficent. 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children to the third and fourth generation.' Is it, can it be an arbitrary infliction of

divine anger? Is it a punishment of the innocent for the guilty, or does it grow out of the nature of human instincts, desires, and passions? But what boots it to ask? When I reflect that if Aleck lives, this law will follow him; that in all he undertakes, all he achieves of worldly success, there will be this drawback to his enjoyment; when I think that now, just at his entrance to manhood, it confronts him with that dreadful 'No' to his hopes, to his ambition, to his love,—I can almost be reconciled to the thought of losing him. It cannot follow him beyond this world. We have the divine assurance of that, and all that we covet to make this world a heaven, if we are true and faithful, will make our heaven there."

"But it strikes me, Katharine," I said, "that you look on the matter almost morbidly. Aleck's character must stand on its own intrinsic merits. No truly noble and generous soul would reject him for the fault of his ancestors."

"'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Thus saith the word," replied Katharine bitterly.

"But it does not say they deserve to be set on edge, only that they are. We can endure to suffer undeserved blame, and be happy in spite of it. We can even live down actual wrong committed; we can be happy in the approval of God and a clear conscience. Are you not happy, not as the world counts happiness, but in your own heart, Katharine, in your noble endeavors, in your uncomplaining spirit, in your sweet love and trust; are you not happy?"

"I have sometimes thought so," she replied sadly, "but you must remember, dear sister, my life, since the time you first knew me, has never been without an

object which called me out of myself. First it was for Frank I lived and toiled, and after he died it was for our boy."

"And will be yet, Katharine. You will live and labor together; and he will have the holiest of all objects, one which he counts as dear as his own life, — the care and duty a son owes to his mother. Do you think one disappointment of the affections, even if it is true that he has met with such an experience, is going to drag a noble, healthful soul like his into the dust? You do him the greatest injustice."

"You are right," she replied, turning away, "and I have been wrong; — wrong if he should live, wrong if he dies. I do not often question the ways of Providence. You have given me back my trust."

But I must draw this chapter of my story to a close. Philip returned, bringing Aleck with him. One look at his face was enough to confirm all our fears. He lived through the winter, and midway into the spring, bringing down to our souls "celestial benedictions." He lived in two worlds, and the angel of God ascended and descended, bearing to us sweet certainties of spiritual life, and carrying from us to those who had gone before the tender recollections, the undying love, the voiceless yearnings, which his soul could interpret to them so well.

His words, his looks, his assurances of inward peace, made him our comforter, gave us the strength to meet and bear the inevitable loss to us, which was his gain. All the reserve of his nature seemed to melt away in the presence of an infinite love shining into his soul. To his opening vision, the spiritual was the real world, and he spoke of it as such. Looking through his spirit, we could almost hear the music, and behold the beauty,

of paradise. His exaltation was not the ecstasy of delirium. It appeared to us that he was permitted from time to time to dwell among the angels; to talk with them face to face, and, returning to earth, to bring back to us a portion of their peace and love ineffable.

Does any one doubt that the approach of death may be stripped of all terror and gloom? that we can follow the vanishing footsteps of our beloved upward, borne by the triumphant faith imparted by them to our souls, above selfish sorrow, above the sense of loss, and soothed into quiet submission by the help which cometh down from above through the medium of human ministration? I can only say, "It is possible." I can give my experience, and the experience of those who went with our loved one on his journey to the gate of the celestial city, as a proof that what I testify are the words of truth and soberness.

Happy are those to whom is granted this joyful entrance into life! In Aleck's presence we could not think of death or the grave. There was no moment of that glorious transition when our souls were overshadowed with gloom. It was life — unbroken, uninterrupted life — that we beheld, and not material decay and dissolution. He seemed to us as a messenger of God, sent to teach us, not that we were mortal bodies, but immortal souls, — spirits clothed in earthly garments here, walking our appointed ways, fitted to our earthly conditions; and when these conditions were fulfilled, we should gravitate to our eternal place, where we could feel at home: free, living, loving children of God, entering into the joy prepared for us "from the foundation of the world."

Nor was our departing one so prostrated by disease or physical weakness as to be unable to live with us in

pleasant family relations to the last. He had his own favorite seat by the sunny window of the family sitting-room, at the table, in the school-room, and, through the winter, by the cheerful evening fireside. His own room opened into that of his mother; and when the warm spring days came, he walked, leaning on Philip's arm, through the garden paths, and sat under the shadow of the budding elms. We did not see that he failed day by day; but one morning he did not wish to rise, and his mother left him sleeping. When she returned with his breakfast, she observed an increased pallor on his face. She spoke to him, and he answered cheerily, lovingly as usual; but when he tried to rise, he found his strength was unequal to the exertion, and his head fell back on the pillow.

"The time has come, mother," he said.

"O, don't say so, Aleck!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, mother, it has come. Call my uncle and aunt. I want to speak to them while I can."

We answered to the call, and stood by his bedside.

"I want to say 'good-by,'" he said, taking Philip's hand, "and to tell you all that this is the happiest moment of my life — of my happy, happy life. If I didn't love life so well, I could not say this. If I feared death, I couldn't say it. I do love life, and I feel I am only just beginning to live. I believe that I shall carry with me all that could make me happy here, and leave behind all that might make me unhappy if I stayed here. When I first felt sure that I must die, it was hard; I had formed so many plans of happiness and usefulness, and the future world seemed so vague, so unreal. But that is all over now. Tell Aunt Rebecca I thank her for reading me those passages from grandfather's book. I am going where I shall see him,

and where I can thank him for myself. I am going to my earthly father. I know and feel it is so. Dear Aunt Maggie, in a little while I shall meet Alice, my dear sister and companion. Perhaps hers will be the first familiar face I meet; but, if not at first, I know that I shall surely see her, and I will give her your love, and tell her — may I tell her, Aunt Maggie? dear uncle, can I tell her truly that you have ceased to mourn for her? that you are happy? that you know she is not dead, but really, consciously living and happy? May I tell her so?"

"You may, my boy," said Philip, "and we will strive and have it so."

"I think," continued Aleck, "that God sometimes permits those whom we call dead, but who are not dead, only not here with us bodily, — I think our good Father sometimes permits those who love us to come to us, but that it can only be when we have a place prepared for them in our own hearts. Only thus can the Christ come to us. They can feel pity, sympathy, love for us; but only in our joy and trust and faith in God can they come into conscious communion with us, so that we really feel their presence. I will tell her that though your hearts are very sorrowful now, that they are not hopeless or faithless. We will talk together of you; and some time, perhaps when you are not thinking of us, — some time when your souls are peaceful, happy, full of love to our Father and sweet trust in Him, — you will know that we are with you. Do you think you can believe it?"

"I know we can, my dear boy," said Philip, "and perhaps you will strive for and with us; for here, you know, we only see through a glass darkly."

"I will, uncle," he said; but we perceived his ut-

terance became more and more feeble. After a few moments, in which he seemed to have been sleeping, he roused himself and called, "Mother." She bent over him, and he said, "I wanted to live, that I might work for you, — that you might know how much I loved you. The love doesn't die, — the motives we can carry with us, and perhaps do more for those we love than we could here. If it is so, mother, you will be comforted through me for all the bitter sorrow and the hard struggles of your life. Aunt Maggie, I want to speak one word to you. It is a little secret, mother," he said, smiling; "she may tell you when I am gone." I bent over him that I might hear his words more distinctly. "Aunt Maggie, perhaps you know — perhaps Alice told you that I loved Lottie Green. I have loved her from a mere boy, and I love her now. She knows it, and she loves me; but her father is proud — he could not — he never would have been willing to give his daughter to me, because of the blot on our name. He was the first one who ever spoke to me of my ancestry. Of my own will I relinquished all claim to Lottie. Do not blame her, Aunt Maggie. She has a good, true heart. I spoke bitterly when I parted from her, but I want you to tell her I have regretted it ever since. I hoped she would have come to see me sometimes — but perhaps it's all right. Give her my good-by." Again he closed his eyes, and in the hush which brooded over us, we watched to see him breathe his last. From time to time he spoke in broken sentences. His mind seemed to be recalling what Aunt Rebecca had read to him the day before.

"Yes, he knew — my grandfather knew the time would come when the questions which perplexed him would trouble other minds. What light — what truth

his answers have shed upon — mother — did you say you saw it — that true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He then asked his uncle to read to him from the twenty-first chapter of Revelation.

"And I heard a voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people."

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

"And the gates of the city shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there."

Still Philip read, selecting one after another of those prophetic utterances, which, even though comprehended but in part, so clearly point to a day when the nations of the earth shall walk in the light of the New Jerusalem, which needeth not sun or moon, for the "glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Softly Katharine touched his arm, and he looked up.

"He does not hear you," she said. "He is gone."

Yes, it was true. His earthly garments were there, but he was gone.

Tenderly, lovingly, we laid his form to rest beside that of our darling Alice; and as we turned away from the two new-made graves, Philip said, "they are not there, they have risen."

"Yes," added Katharine, "but we — we must still live on. You have other objects; I am indeed alone."

The exaltation had passed; human sorrow asserted its sway. Our home seemed desolate indeed. The peace he had brought down to us seemed to have left us with him.

CHAPTER XLI.

DAYS and weeks passed, and outwardly the business and pleasure of life flowed on in their accustomed channels. The sunshine was as bright, the earth as fair, as when the eyes of our lost children reflected back their beauty. In the field and the garden the flowers bloomed; in the branches of the trees the robin sang; the summer had lost none of its garlands. Youths and maidens strolled along the pleasant paths and under the embowering trees, when the long shadows lay athwart the ground as the sun declined, and the murmur of happy voices, the ripple of joyous laughter, mingled with the music of wind and wave as day melted into twilight, and twilight into dusk, and the voices of our loved ones were no longer missed. Only to our ears was the music incomplete; only to our eyes was the sunshine dim, the twilight sad. Thus did it seem to us, as though we alone walked in the shadow. Is not this the cry of every bereaved heart? "No sorrow is like to my sorrow!"

But by and by, we know not how, steal over us sweet, chastened recollections, alternating with our sense of loss and loneliness. The duties which we had performed mechanically, without heart or hope, begin once more to interest us; the pursuits of life take on a cheerful coloring, the reflection of a healthy soul. "Sorrow has left us, but left us not the beings we were before."

Ever and anon the dark waves roll back and threaten to engulf us again, — terror seizes upon us; but the storm passes; and the skies brighten, and with this ebb and flow we attain at last the calm confidence that cannot be shaken.

"When dismal, chilling clouds of doubt shut down,
Brooding, like night, through many weary miles,
Then love, which many waters cannot drown,
Looks up; through rifts of blue the sunshine smiles."

One night, after a long quiet talk with Philip and Katharine on topics suggested by the reading of my father's book, I retired, leaving my husband still poring over its pages.

"Your company is very pleasant," I said as I withdrew; "but I am weary, and, although it is still early, I think I will put myself under the guardianship of the angels;" and bidding them good-night, I went to my room.

I was not superstitious, although from my earliest childhood I had a vague belief in the supernatural, at that age coupled with a fear and dread of ghosts; but afterwards, when I had acquired a more rational knowledge of spiritual laws, it was an admission of the possibility of some tangible manifestation of spiritual influences, acting directly upon our own spirits, in certain conditions of mind or body. All the while I was preparing for bed, my mind was dwelling upon the pleasant things we had been reading, and I wondered whether they were indeed truths of spiritual life or delusions of the imagination. Pondering upon the subject in a pleasant frame of mind, I fell asleep.

I do not remember my dreams, or whether I dreamed at all; but as I awoke to consciousness in the morning, I said aloud these words of the Saviour:

"It is expedient for you that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you ; but if I depart, I will send him to you."

Now, if this chapter of my story should prove to be a sermon, the verse I have quoted will be the text, and my discourse upon it will be short ; for I shall try to tell in a simple, straightforward manner the thoughts which passed through my mind on that morning. I know that the readers of novels generally are displeased with too much preaching. I remember when I used to skip the sober parts of a story, in order to follow out the romance. But I know also that however much romance attaches to our ideas of human life and experience when we first set out in the journey, we come to the end of that path very soon. Not too soon, however ; for, in my judgment, reality is much better.

Yes, I know I shall preach, for I cannot get the recollection of that morning, and that verse, and what I thought about it, out of my mind.

How strange his words must have sounded to them, those sorrowing disciples, who had left all and followed Him, not without the expectation of some good that was to come to them, because there was the promise in his own words, that they should receive "a thousand fold more in this world, and in the world to come, life everlasting ;" and how was all this to come about after He left them ? They were ignorant, for He had chosen them from among the common classes, — the unintellectual and uneducated, — chosen them, that He might communicate to them eternal truths ; and now He was going to leave them, even before they had begun to comprehend the half He had told them. Indeed, He declared that He had many things to say which they

were not able to bear, and now, instead of continuing his teachings, that by and by they might be able to receive more, He was going to break off at once, leaving the promised truths untold. He had given them intimations of higher laws, of a purer gospel. He had shaken their faith in old traditions and time-honored authorities, uprooted their old prejudices and associations, but had not made clear to them, in its height or depth, the religion which it was his mission to plant, and theirs to carry forward ; and so far from having gained higher knowledge, the little they had learned only seemed to have bewildered and unsettled their minds. Any one might have said then, and might say now, that it seemed absolutely expedient, nay, necessary to them and to the world, that He should have stayed, that the greatest calamity which could happen to them and to future generations was to leave them thus and there.

Was it to punish them for having learned so little from his teachings and his example that He said it was expedient for them that He should go ? To be sure, they failed to understand Him and only half believed, as we all know who have read the history as it stands. In the very presence of his humility and patience and tenderness, they disputed with each other as to who should be greatest ; and even after they had learned from his lips to say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," they seem to have had so little comprehension of its meaning that on an occasion when their feelings of indignation were aroused, they asked the Master if they should not call down fire from heaven to destroy their enemies.

"If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you." And why did they need another Comforter ? Why need any Comforter at all, if He would remain

with them? It is as though the dearest friend we have on earth should strike a blow at our heart for the sake of binding up and healing the wound. What they might have said to Him do we not also say, when our hearts are filled with satisfaction, and our lives are rich in blessings: What need have we of a Comforter? And yet it is expedient for us, as it was for them, that our best and dearest should go away, to enable us to measure the value of the blessing by the void and the want in our souls when it is withdrawn. It is not as a punishment that our hearts are so lacerated; it is that we may learn our need of a Comforter. "Every good and perfect gift cometh down from above," even the greatest of all gifts, who is to us "the Way, the Truth, and the Life;" and yet in the experience of all who live long enough is learned this great lesson. It is expedient that they be taken, — even expedient that the light of our faith and trust in God should sometimes seem to leave us, that we may know the awful desolation of a heart where the Comforter cannot come.

I promised my sermon should be short, and therefore I will end it with these two questions. Is it not one of the divine uses of affliction that we should feel a void which only this Comforter can fill? If angels can draw nearer to our souls when our wills oppose no barriers to their approach, as is the case so often in our waking hours, is it not rational to believe that our departed ones often lift from our stricken hearts the burden of sorrow, and come to us as comforters?

CHAPTER XLII.

My journal has long been laid aside, and my memory refuses the task of gathering up many fragments of the past, which are lying loosely scattered among its pages, because to do so would swell the number of characters and incidents to such dimensions that it would require more time and talent than I can command to collect them in one volume. Therefore I have purposely left out many pages of experience, and many people and kindred as worthy of notice as those whom I have pressed into the service.

In staid old Eastfield still remain the descendants of many of the old families, many of the collateral branches of my own family, my brother George and his descendants; among them Stella, who belongs to that sisterhood whose members are steadily on the increase in our New England towns.

As for myself, I must now be classed among the oldest inhabitants, for my youngest grandchild has passed her teens, and my two married daughters are comely matrons, heads of families, and I have lived to rejoice in the birth of my son's sons.

The friends of my youth, the Sinclairs, full of years, were gathered to their fathers, and their children's children are scattered far and wide, the length and breath of the land. Katharine still lives, though in our old age we seldom meet. She never resumed her

business in New York, having made up her mind to devote the remaining years of her life to some form of charity in that great city, in which the field is so wide, and the laborers comparatively so few. After the death of Aleck, she sold out her stock of fancy goods, and, at our earnest request remained with us a year. Before the expiration of that time, through the death of her aunt in New Orleans, she came into possession of a handsome property, and thus had ample means to carry on the benevolent projects in which she is still interested.

My mother and my Aunt Rebecca passed away before they had reached my present age, in full possession of their faculties, and nothing loth to answer the call, "Come up higher."

Laura Thirkield, after a brilliant and successful career as an actress, came back to her old home, where she with her younger sister — a maiden lady now past fifty — still abide. George Thirkield never returned to Eastfield after Alice's death. His family for a time received occasional letters from him, but all communication ceased after the lapse of a few years, and he has long been given up as dead.

And now to return to our own nearest of kin: Theodore, our youngest son, whose daughter Maggie was bequeathed to me so many years ago by her lovely young mother, who, after a brief but happy married life, faded like a flower over which the wind passes, and it is gone, — Theodore is the only one whose home is with us.

When he first came to man's estate, we formed great plans for him, hoping that he would be an active, go-ahead, prosperous man.

Notwithstanding our own experience of the unsub-

stantial nature of human possessions, we had not outgrown certain worldly ideas with regard to the advantages and conveniences of wealth; and we hoped that Theodore would develop some of those elements of success which were lacking in the other branches of our family. I say we, and I mean Philip as well as myself.

All parents, I think, will bear me out in the assertion that our desire for the prosperity of our children is often stronger than it had ever been for our own, and for this reason among others, that we have educated in them a necessity which did not exist in our case.

For what end in reality are our labors and sacrifices, if not to place them above the necessities imposed upon us? We know of course that labor and self-denial is the universal law; we do not question the justice of it; but we educate them for a higher plane and a broader field than was open to our ambition, and we would save them, if possible, from the discouragements which blocked up our path to success. We do not like to think that the hard experience, the bitter disappointments, we have passed through, may be their lot also. At all events, we are resolved that the drawbacks of ignorance, lack of opportunity and sympathy, which we found it so hard to overcome — in fact, which we never did fully overcome — shall not exist as hindrances in their path, if we can prevent it.

In all this is a leaven of worldliness; and it goes to prove that very few of us, young or old, live above the world while we are in it. Nor do I think that we are required so to live. He whose words we receive as the highest truth, explicitly declares to his disciples that his teachings were not given to take

them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil. The world is our field of labor while we remain here; and to labor in it to any good purpose, our heart must be *in* our work, not *above* it, that by the right use and application of all our faculties, we may help elevate and refine our fellow-creatures. The more heartily we do this, the greater will be our reward in time, and I believe in eternity also.

But while we were thinking and planning in one direction for our son, he was dreaming and hoping in another and an opposite one; and it came to pass that after he had gone through college, and it became necessary that he should decide upon his future profession or course or life, he told us that his highest ambition was to be an artist, that he did not care to be rich, that he despised business and had no talent for it, and that if he ever achieved success at all, it would be in the direction to which his talent and inclination pointed.

It was a downfall to our hopes, but Philip had always adhered to the resolution not to oppose his children in their choice of a profession; and so it was granted to Theodore to carry out his own wishes with what means we could afford to help him on.

What he might have attained under more favorable circumstances we cannot tell; but while he was scarcely able to support himself, he fell in love with and married a young girl, who, like so many daughters of New England, was thrown upon her own exertions for support, and whose fragile constitution early tasked and overstrained, was unequal to the demands of maternity, the wearisome drudgery of domestic toil, with poor servants or none, and the manifold anxieties which grow out of small means; and she drooped and died,

leaving a sorrow-stricken husband and one child, now grown to womanhood, to whom these pages are dedicated.

And now I trust I may be pardoned a little egotism before taking leave of my readers; for as I sit at my table, with this pile of manuscript scattered around, wishing I had the courage, and the time, and the eyesight, to look over and revise and make it worthier to see the light, I catch a glimpse of a "frosty pow," which the golden glow of a cheerful fire has tinged with yellow, just like the flaxen curls of the children who played and sang, and rejoiced around us so many years ago.

It is an old man whom I see, and his shoulders are bent, — any one can see that, for his back is turned toward me. With spectacles on nose, he is reading, while I am busy with my pen. I know what book he holds in his hand, and why he has taken it down from the shelves at this present time. It is my father's book of which I have spoken so often, and which the old man before mentioned says I am bound, out of respect to its author, to notice more at length in these pages. More than a half-century ago that book was intrusted to Aunt Rebecca in an unfinished state, to be by her prepared for publication. It consisted of essays on various subjects, some of them so new and so startling at the time they were written, that my aunt very wisely delayed carrying out the wishes of the author until, as she said, the times were ripe for the ideas the book contained.

What would in his day have startled and shocked the religious world at Eastfield, at this date has ceased to create surprise or even to provoke controversy. My father was a student of Swedenborg, nor did he

neglect to refer all who might hereafter accept as truth the opinions he had expressed on various subject to their true source. He did not pretend to accept the great seer as an infallible authority on all subjects, but reserved to himself the right of private judgment, doubt, and denial; consequently, had he lived in the present day of organizations, he might not have been willing to enroll himself under any sectarian banner.

The philosophy of spiritual manifestations, the origin and explanation of the universal belief in supernatural agencies, were unfolded to his satisfaction in the writings of Swedenborg; and the "obstinate questionings" which forever have arisen, and will continue to arise in reference to our relations with the eternal world and the beings who inhabit it—questionings which grow out of the nearer and nearer approach of that world which is the substance, to ours which is the shadow—found conclusive answers in his unfolding of spiritual laws.

An application of those laws to the questions which agitate society at this day forms the material of many essays in the volume; and, in my judgment, they seem to throw a clearer "light on the hidden way" of our earthly life than any which has ever dawned upon it.

How much has been brought from darkness to light by the discoveries of natural science in our material world, and made to subserve the material advancement of the nations of the earth, which He who was the truth and the way, even in his omniscience and omnipotence, could not have revealed, because the world was not ready for such knowledge! Yet, what thoughtful mind condemns the knowledge and research of those who seek to understand and disclose natural

laws? Why, then, should one be looked upon as demented or deluded, or a dreamer, whose faculties are turned inward to the study of spiritual laws? Doesn't it flow in the universal order, first that which is natural, afterwards that which is spiritual?

There can be no clashing of spiritual truth with scientific discoveries, any more than of the soul of man acting in harmony with his material organization.

And now, as I cannot pretend to transfer to my pages the written words of my father which have so strengthened and delighted me, which have cleared away the shadows from the land whither I am going, and where so many of my loved ones have already gone, I wish to touch upon a few points in his life which I have only come thoroughly to understand from his writings.

The spirit is the real man, and the spirit it is which bears witness to our spirits of an inward experience which the outward life does not always manifest.

I have given, in the first chapters of my book, the mere hints and suggestions of an early mistake, a misunderstanding, a game apparently of cross purposes, by which, as it seems to me, and probably seemed to many lookers-on, the happiness which a congenial marriage would have secured to two young people was defeated, without actual blame attached to either side.

That my father and my Aunt Rebecca loved each other, is a fact perfectly clear to my mind. And that they were in a special manner fitted to make each other happy, is equally clear to me. That my father's marriage was a mistake, and that neither my mother nor himself ever experienced the happiness that both were capable of enjoying, is as evident to my mind as

is the fact that very few of the marriages which are contracted in this day and generation are a type of what the relation is intended to be.

In all my father's deepest aspirations, in his inner life, my mother could have had no real sympathy. Her nature was incapable of it. His mind was to her as a sealed book. Not that he was so great, so lifted above her comprehension by intellectual superiority, but the current of their thoughts did not run together, and except by the force of custom, authority, and duty, would have necessarily flowed in contrary directions, farther and farther apart. But the bonds of habit, of authority, of religious obligation, of public opinion, compelled an external conformity, and they were faithful to conscience and mutual duty. In such a union there cannot be perfect happiness, free development, inward satisfaction, although each may be good and true. Of course the one whose capacity of happiness is deepest, must suffer most; but each, by fidelity to duty, can find alleviation for selfish and morbid disappointment, and materials for present and tangible satisfaction.

From what I am able to recall of my aunt's visits to our home when I was a mere child, I am convinced that it was a wise, an absolute necessity which induced the separation. In whom originated the strength to take the first decisive step I do not know. I am trenching, perhaps, on forbidden ground; but since I have entered upon it, I am not inclined to turn back.

From what I have learned of men and women in a long life, I am forced to utter my conviction that to my aunt, to the so-called *weaker vessel*, is due the wisdom of seeing the danger, and the prudence of avoiding it; nor for a moment would she compromise her

allegiance to the right, by yielding to a temptation so beguiling, so apparently innocent, as the daily interchange of thought and feeling, by which souls are drawn into a snare in which it may not be possible after a time to say, "Thus far and no farther."

I am borne out in the assertion that the merit of taking the first step originated in her, from what I know of men in general,—of their weakness, their willful blindness, their disregard of consequences in such cases.

For many years she was a stranger in our home, but came to us at length in our sorrow, when, after his checkered experience, my father's earthly life was drawing to its close. Happy must they have been at that last meeting, that they could look into each other's souls without self-reproach, and with unshaken confidence in the truth, the beneficence, the all-comprehending wisdom which will surely throw more light upon our pathway at last, and show us the why and wherefore in answer to our prayers.

Just at that point I was interrupted, and shall not resume the subject, but simply add the following as a finale to my story.

"Maggie," said a voice which issued from the figure with the "frosty pow" before mentioned, "are you ever going to stop writing? If your readers get as tired of reading your book as I am of seeing you write it, I pity them. What are you preaching about now?"

"How do you know I am preaching?" I asked.

"Because you wouldn't sit there so long, if you were not in the midst of one of your sermons. Not that I object to them on the whole, only I long ago

made up my mind that over-much preaching was time and labor thrown away. Confess now you were preaching."

"No, I was not, truly I was not."

"Then what were you writing about?"

"About Aunt Rebecca and father."

"And what about them?"

"That they were just suited to each other, and ought to have been married."

"Well, in my opinion you know very little about the matter; and, if you are so hard pushed to make out your book as to be obliged to draw upon your imagination to write out an essay on spiritual affinities, I suggest that you break off at once. You may be mistaken. Now suppose your worthy and gifted father had married your aunt instead of her sister, where would you be, and where should I be? I suppose you will be finding out next, that we also made a mistake in marrying each other. Perhaps we did, but after jogging along very contentedly" —

"Say happily, Philip," I said, putting aside my papers, and joining him beside the fire. "Why not say happily? I am sure we have been more than contented in our lot."

"Then," he said lifting his shaggy, gray eyebrows, and fixing his clear, deep-set eyes on mine, "then you sincerely believe our marriage was not a mistake?"

"From the first moment I saw you, Philip, when I met you on my way to school, your eyes looked into my soul just as they do now. If I had thought anything then beyond the trivialities of girl-life, I know it would have been that we were destined for each other."

"That our match was made in heaven, you mean?"

"I mean just that."

"Well, now, listen to me, and don't interrupt me while I upset all your theories, and prove you wholly in the wrong. Either our marriage has been a great mistake, either you are wofully self-deceived about it, or about your father's. For if your father had not married your mother, I should never have married you, which I admit would have been a great mistake. But my having married you, and the fact, if it is a fact as you say, that the match was made in heaven, and that up to this moment we can bear living testimony to its divine origin, is a proof incontrovertible that your father was only carrying out the ends of Providence when he married your mother. Now, suppose we let the matter rest just there, and admit two things: first, that there is a Providence in the affairs of men and nations, and, second, that whatever has taken place has been necessary in some way to carry on the designs of that Providence, — not to thwart them. Granted that many marriages are disappointments, that some are intolerable in their sufferings; granted that the aspect of the world and of society to our circumscribed vision may seem like confusion worse confounded; granted that deep questions must arise, which cannot be hushed to silence, and must and will be answered, and that in the convulsions which shake old habits of thought and time-honored customs, we may often feel terrified as to results, and think that righteousness will go under, and wickedness cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, — what better can we do than hold on to the declaration: 'The Lord reigneth — let the earth rejoice;' because so surely as He does reign in omniscience and omnipotence, all things will work together for good in the end."

"Then you think I had better snap the thread of my story now," I said.

"I certainly do, Maggie," he said, "for if you want young men and women to read it, there's too much sober reality in it now to suit their taste. We must not forget that we are far down the vale of years, and that 'the shadows lengthen as the day declines.' Not that we feel old, or look old to each other, — and see what I have just been reading on this very subject: —

"'There is no old age to the spirit. Those who are in heaven, are continually advancing to the spring of life, and the more thousands of years they live, to a spring so much the more delightful and happy;' and see here what it says about the aged of your sex, who have lived good earthly lives in happy marriage relations: 'They come into a beauty which exceeds every idea of beauty ever perceivable by the sight,' and now read this about celestial marriage, he said, putting the open page into my hand.

"If one can only believe it," I exclaimed; "but why did our Lord say there was neither marrying or giving in marriage there?"

"And what beside did He say?"

"That we were as the angels of God in heaven."

"And how is that? How are the angels of God in heaven?"

"That He does not explain; He leaves us to imagine. And, how widely our conceptions of angelic life differ. I cannot carry my story beyond the boundaries of mortal life. It will not be long before we enter within the gates, which are not shut, except to the unbelieving.

"Here in this pile of manuscript is my autobiography,

and if I feel like writing another book, I may give free rein to my love of preaching."

"You will not feel like it," Philip said. "You will look back, and see how little good you ever derived from it; and when the grandchildren and great-grandchildren make these lonely rooms resound again with music and gladness, we shall not feel like forestalling the discipline of Providence or forcing prematurely on their young minds the reflection which only years and experience could have brought to us. When you see two married partners who seem to have made a great mistake, you will not fall into a greater, by trying to reconcile their differences even in your own mind. If they have courage and faith to help them through, they will doubtless each find a crown of glory awaiting them at the end of their journey, and will fully understand what seems to be past finding out here, what it is to be like the angels; but if, in another case, the trial of uncongenial tempers passes the limits of endurance, you will not feel called upon to be a judge or executioner; you will remember that our Lord not only said that till heaven and earth should pass away, not one jot or tittle of the law should fail, but with a knowledge of human infirmity far beyond what we feel for each other, He did not condemn in many instances where human judgments are most severe."

I looked in his face while he was talking. I never should have thought of calling him old. I would not have one wrinkle less, for every one has some history of its own which I know how to read.

"I am not quite sure, Philip," I said, "that I relish the idea of returning again to the spring of life, as Swedenborg says we do when we throw off these time-

worn garments of mortality. I would rather keep you just as you are."

"Wrinkles and rheumatism, failing sight, ears dull of hearing, — would you like to see me drag myself about the celestial gardens with the help of this old cane?"

"But I am afraid you would not seem like my dear, old Philip."

"That, I fancy, is just what I should seem to you, — not perhaps your *old* Philip, but your Philip of old; while in that 'angel of inconceivable beauty,' I know I should not be mistaken, so long as she permitted me to call her mine."

"I think we should be accused of talking heresy, if some of the good people of Eastfield were to overhear us."

"And that you had misnamed your book, which ought to have been entitled 'From Fourscore to Fourteen.'"

THE END.