THE

KNOW NOTHING. (?)

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CHAPTER I.

A SUMMER'S day, hot, sultry, and disagreeable, was about drawing to a close. The sun was not quite gone; but the huge hills that begirt the village and valley of QUIZVILLE were already affording their accustomed evening shade. The heat of this long, never-to-be-forgotten day had been well nigh insufferable. Even the sturdy farmer had been compelled to relinquish his midday toil; and the storekeepers had done little else than toss their yardsticks from hand to hand. Conversation centred upon nothing more, nothing less; and, now that the shadows of evening were beginning to fall, the pleasant piazzas and pretty yards and walks were beginning to be peopled with anxious seekers for the cooling breeze.

It was at this hour that the village loiterers were beginning to assemble about the front door of the principal hotel. This very inviting spot had been looked upon from time immemorial as a piece of public property belonging to the town. Any land-

lord who would have made the attempt to correct this opinion would have forthwith lost patronage and caste. It made no difference that not one of the many who thus made themselves at home had never paid for a single meal: such sometimes seemed to think they had a preëmption right, and made themselves the more at ease. So was it on this memorable evening. One by one the new comers brought from within chair after chair, upon which they spread themselves to the best advantage, thinking little, and perhaps caring less, from whence the worthy host should procure seats for his guests; and when the chairs were all occupied the steps were taken possession of, and then the hitchrail, until every available spot was seized.

Chat was becoming quite lively. Severally the little groups of grave and gay were becoming located according to affinities; and the passer by might very honestly have concluded that a "good time" was being enacted around the tavern door.

Among the groups most merry there was one individual who had secured a seat upon the hitchrail, and who was considered one of the eccentricities of the village. In point of character, influence, or station, he was really nothing worth; yet, as a feature of just such circles as that by which he was now surrounded, he was all-important. Education was a thing with which he had never been oppressed; yet his wit was native, — as it ever must be, — shining forth from his other *peculiar* gifts like a lonely flower in the desert waste. "Worthy Ike" was the cognomen by which he was known, and

known, too, by every inhabitant of the place, young and old. It was, however, generally the case that one of his names was dropped, according to the circumstances under which he was addressed.

"Well," said Ike, as the last cadences of an uproarious laugh were dying away, "it's no use of any of you pulling out your gold watches to look at the time; for I know this much, that it will not be long before we will see the old stage climbing over the top of the hill; and, what's more, somehow or other I am in a sort of anxiety to see it."

"And why so, Worthy?" asked the landlord, who had edged in, and was standing among the circle. Had he expressed himself, he, too, might have divulged a desire much akin to that of Ike's.

"Aha!" was the reply; "you're there, are you? No doubt the coming of the old coach interests *you* very particularly."

"Quite likely," answered the landlord, quietly, and not failing at the same time to notice upon the countenances of the company the hopeful desire to witness a tilt between himself and Ike. "Nobody doubts, of course, that *I* should be interested in the arrival of the coach."

"That is," interposed Ike, "if it has something in it."

"Well, yes," continued the landlord, still noticing the deepening smiles of all around; "but tell us, Ike, why is it that *you* are especially desirous for its coming?"

"I can't tell you that," answered Worthy; "but there is with me a sort of *un*resistible feeling that

it is either going to bring in a full load, or, if small, a very choice one."

"Perhaps the president, Ike," said one of the crowd.

"No, sir — *no, sir!*" replied he, energetically; "no president comes here. Votes are too scarce; the game wouldn't pay for the powder. When the president travels, he travels to make it count; and in these days it don't pay for office seekers and popularity hunters to go any where but among the crowd. No; I don't expect any president here; but it strikes me that we are to have an arrival to-night that will give us something to relieve the terrible dulness of these roasting days. But listen; didn't I tell you we should have it soon?"

And, as he spoke, the stage horn's blast was echoing from hillside to hillside, waking the drowsiest head in the village, and giving to all a something to look for during the hour to come. And doubtless the pleasure and excitement of these semi-weekly arrivals were purer than that of the more go-ahead places, whose very cottages are darkened by a locomotive's smoke. Happier far are they — although the mass may very differently think — whose homes are yet where the whistle of the iron horse has not entirely supplanted the good old stage horns of the times gone by.

It was astonishing to see the rapidity with which the windows and gateways along the street on which the coach was to come became filled with eager faces. Little children clapped their hands with real joy, and danced as merrily as if it were an

era in their lives. More and more distinct became the notes of the horn, although the coach itself was not yet in sight. It was not very long, however, until a cloud of dust began to show itself above the summit of the eastern hill, so great and dense as to make it entirely impossible to see what was coming with it. A few minutes more, and the wind bore the dust away, revealing the looked-for coach, just commencing the descent of the hill. The jaded horses, braced by the sound of the horn, the cracking of the driver's whip, and their near approach to their rest, started down at such a pace as to make the wheels of the old coach rattle cheerily upon the stony road. In due time the driver drew in his reins before the tavern door, and, with an absolutely pompous air, merely raised himself upon his footboard, without deigning a descent therefrom. Meantime the hotel porters were busy unstrapping the baggage, assisting the passengers from their dusty seats, and listening to the hundred and one questions which were poured upon the driver by the loungers round.

If ever there travelled a lot of poor, dusty, weary, and woebegone-looking set of passengers in one of Uncle Sam's carriages, these were certainly the ones. One by one, as they stepped forth, they gave themselves a shake that caused dust enough to fly to almost envelop them from sight. Then came the stretching of limbs, the lazy congratulations among themselves, and, alas! some of the hard words that ofttimes will come from such a crowd, as for a moment they recall the toils and troubles

of the tedious day. Who is there that cannot as faithfully picture the scene as if it were even now before his eyes? How many there are of us who, in times gone by, have formed parts and parcels of just such loads! and with what pleasant sensations we can look back to the arrival at the country inn, where, from the tin basin, or perhaps from the mouth of the pump, we have cleansed our greasy visages, straightened our locks with the general comb, and sat ourselves down with eager longings for the hearty country supper — the hot rolls, the fresh, sweet milk, the tender venison, and the coffee of all coffees! Ah, these are visions of the past.

With the exception of one, the passengers had all alighted. This was a gentleman whose motions were made very leisurely. While all the rest had arisen pellmell at the instant of halting, as if impatient to be released from their confinement, he had very composedly kept his place until all were out. Then he rose, and, as he stepped forth, still holding by the handle of the coach door, he took a hasty but complete survey of the crowd about him. Nor did the crowd survey *him* less. There was that about him which attracted every eye. He was but in the blush of manhood, tall, finely formed, handsome to a fault, dignified, and dressed with special taste. As his full dark eye looked about him, there came a hush upon the crowd, that was full of eager curiosity and interrogation. This, however, gave him but little concern, although it did not escape him that he was an object of more attention than those who had stepped from the

coach before him. Noticing with a glance that his baggage was right, and without imitating the shaking and dusting process of his fellow-passengers, — who, in this respect, had evidenced but little regard about filling other folks, so that they relieved themselves, — he proceeded to the counter, and quietly waited his time to register his name.

Meanwhile our acquaintance, Worthy Ike, had scanned the face of every passenger, and taken all the items which he thought might prove serviceable for an hour's gossip. From the first moment that he set his eyes on the handsome stranger, he became perfectly satisfied that his prophecy was to be realized in full; and this thought produced a very evident and satisfactory change in his countenance. To be looked upon as "knowing a thing or two" was Ike's highest ambition. It would have been a source of real annoyance to him if this evening's arrival had "amounted to nothing." Consequently it may not be regarded as a very great breach of the truth to say that, for the time being, an inch or two was added to his height. To and fro he strode the room, stopping now and then in close proximity to the stranger, and making the line of his promenade just such as enabled him to keep the object of his attention full within his eye. Occasionally he would turn a glance upon somebody about him, that wanted not the least explanation. It was full of self-satisfaction, and a desire to impress upon the minds of those who had listened to his predictions before the door that what he had said was not mere idle talk. Now and then his eye would catch that of the stranger, and he could scarce refrain from

throwing himself before him with some pertinent remark, that might result in his learning who he was, whence he came, and whither bound.

It might have been noticed too, by any close observer, that the stranger, although with that greater dexterity which education and association with the world never fail to impart, was just as intently watching the countenance and movements of Worthy Ike. Immediately after registering his name, such was the crowd and bustle about the corner that he quietly withdrew to a window, on the sill of which he leaned until the crowd should lessen. He very soon noticed the movements of Worthy; but the curiosity manifested upon the countenance of the latter was to the stranger no matter for surprise. Had Ike known all that was passing within the mind of the other, and the recognition been mutual, the old tavern walls would have rung with a shout that would have made the very village ring.

Worthy's curiosity at last rose to fever heat. Making a determined motion, he stood before the stranger.

"May I ask, sir, if you have ever visited this place before?" said he. "It runs in my head that you have a familiar face, but it seems impossible for me to fix you."

Now, as a general thing, it was not Ike's custom to get "skeered," as he termed it, no matter what the occasion might be. But on the present there was a peculiar sort of misgiving within him that rather tended to give his knees the attractive and repulsive action. And the feeling was not lessened in any degree as he looked upon the stranger's stern

and unflinching gaze. It was not, we may suppose, that he feared the possibility of any personal rencounter; but the conviction quickly fastened itself upon him that he had intruded without a sufficient excuse, and might consequently receive such answers as would throw the laugh just where he didn't want it to come.

"I beg pardon," said he, when he saw that there was no disposition on the part of the stranger to reply, at the same time motioning to withdraw. "I suppose I must be mistaken."

"Who are you?" said the stranger.

The tone, rather than the manner, of this question considerably allayed poor Worthy's fears.

"My name, sir," replied he quickly, and with a rising hope that matters would come to a conciliation, "is Bledsoe — Isaac Bledsoe; or, as I am oftener styled, Worthy Ike, at your service."

"Ah, indeed!" answered the stranger, dropping his head slightly; and then, as in a musing way, "Ike; Worthy Ike. Well, Mr. Worthy Ike, your card is on your tongue; mine you will find on yonder register. If the name LAMONT will in any degree gratify your curiosity, you will find it there."

Ike commenced a very penetrating scratch of his head, but it amounted to nothing. He had never known or heard of any such name or man, and he reluctantly gave it up.

"If you have not yet located me," said the stranger, advancing to the landlord, "I wish you to give me a pleasant single room; it may be that I will remain with you several days."

"We are pretty full," replied the landlord, in a hesitating way. "It matters not," said the stranger, almost imperiously; "it matters not. I want a single room, and a pleasant one; and more than this, I want it *quick*. Can I have it?"

This was the sort of logic that the worthy host fully understood.

"I will do my best, sir," he answered. "Please excuse me for a moment."

And it was not much more than a "moment" before he returned.

"Here, John," called he to the porter; "this gentleman's baggage. Will you please to walk up, sir?"

To all of which *Ike* had been very respectfully attentive.

"It is the best we can do to-night, sir," said the landlord, as he opened the door of a very snug little white-curtained room. "If possible, we will change you for the better to-morrow."

"I thank you," said the stranger, with a pleasant smile that showed a set of incomparable teeth; "this will suit me well; and to tell the truth, I should not wonder if a good housewife or a pretty daughter presided here."

The landlord's bow of acknowledgment told plainly enough that the courteous stranger had not guessed far astray.

So soon as the door was fairly closed, Lamont threw himself across the bed. Forgetful entirely of the snowy covering and his dusty self, his bosom heaved with powerful emotion. In the past hour, it

seemed to him that he had lived a lifetime. And it was an indescribable relief that he was now alone; that he could know that no earthly eye was looking upon him to witness emotions which might not be construed aright, and with which, just then, he wanted not the sympathy of any one.

This, however, in its degree, soon passed away. He arose and went to the window. A sweet breeze met him there, and cooled his heated temples. It was not yet so dark but that he could look over a good part of the village, and take in the pretty prospect of hill and valley, cottage and spire, without aught to obstruct his view.

"How little changed!" said he, with a thoughtful tone. "And so many years, too, have passed! Here and there my eye rests upon dwelling-places that I never saw before. Ah, now I see objects more clearly, and it is plain enough that the pretty place has enlarged and improved more than I thought. But there goes the supper bell, and I had forgotten that I was at once hungry, dusty, and tired." Stepping into the hall, he gave himself a general shake, returned and cleansed his hands and face, and went down to tea.

Seated at the table, his eye ran along the company, if so be that it might fall upon a face which it had ever seen before. There was nothing to reward his search; even had there been among the mass of the boarders any such, he would not have seen them, for they had taken the regular tea and left before him.

An hour more, and, tired and weary, he had given himself to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

QUIZVILLE is a village so pretty that the most romantic dreamer would doubtless feel that his aspirations were realized in looking upon it. Descriptions of such places are ofttimes prosy; yet it is necessary that they be given, in order that the reader may feel himself somewhat intimate with points and locations that have a natural connection with what he is reading about. It is, however, very easy for him to pass any and all such chapters so soon as he finds them void of the interest which he seeks.

This romantic spot — the theatre of the events which we here relate — was settled many years ago. The camp fires of the revolution had burned upon its hills. In its valley the Indian and the white man had stood face to face in deadly strife. The blood of little children, tomahawked by savage hands, had flowed upon its soil. And even now within some of its rural cottages may be found those who can take you back to those early scenes of savage conflict, and narrate to you events which their own eyes witnessed, and in which their own hands took part. With a melancholy pride they will walk with you to some green spot, every inch of which has connected with it some incident of

revolutionary times; and then, with an eloquence which the subject never fails to inspire, they will rehearse tales alternately of tragedy and victory, each of which in its turn will awaken within you feelings of indignant horror or patriotic commendation.

The traveller, in approaching the village, does not have it long in view. Like some sequestered spot of fairy renown, it lies surrounded on almost every side by a range of high and verdant hills, at the very base of which is the level area on which it sits. A view of the village from the top of any of these hills is picturesque in the extreme. On the southern side is the clear and quiet little Lake Petumpse. This lake, small and unimportant as it is in a geographic sense, is nevertheless the village idol. Upon any pleasant evening one may see its glassy surface dotted with many a tiny sail, where fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, lovers, and friends meet together in happy union. And when stern Winter comes, locking the lake in his icy arms, the numberless sleighing parties that skim along it, and the merry ringing of sleigh bells, give intimation pretty strong that the general happiness is at its height.

The population of the village is somewhere about two thousand, and is composed of as intelligent and worthy a class of people as are in a hundred. Some of the more enterprising part of the people, blessed with an abundance of means, and having travelled sufficiently to keep up with the spirit of wholesome advance in the world, have erected ele-

gant mansions, which greatly adorn the place, and very quickly acquaint the stranger with the fact that Quizville is not entirely behind the times.

There is one feature in the social characteristics of Quizville which may in a great degree account for some of the prominent items of interest of this story. Nothing can transpire which every body must not know; not that we would be understood as saying that there is any legal enactment to this effect. By no means. But it is a conventional rule that nothing must transpire and remain a secret. The gay metropolitan, revelling in a thousand scenes of giddy excitement, becomes, after a time, surfeited with news, unless, perchance, they come to him under the caption, "awful," "startling intelligence," "tremendous excitement," "unparalleled rascality," &c.; but the humbler villager is *taken* with "the day of small things." Such is the case in Quizville; and the least event is at once started, magnified, and kept moving from corner to corner, until it is common property, worn so threadbare that nothing is left upon which to hang a tale. But woe be to the poor unfortunate circumstance that starts its race with any thing like a shadow of mystery hanging about it! Like the traveller beset by highwaymen, it is arrested, strangled, beaten, and bruised, until compelled to disgorge. Nobody allows it a moment's peace. If there is in the length and breadth of our land one in whose lap the good things of this life are so profusely poured that ennui is swallowing him up, let him go to Quizville *incog.*, remain there a month with one eye

resting on its "*otium cum dignitate*," while the other is taking notes, and, our word for it, he will wish before he leaves that he had his sides insured.

At the close of our last chapter we left our newly-arrived stranger asleep. Intense fatigue had effectually done the work for *him*, notwithstanding the noisy talk and laughter that was going on about the tavern door. Some of his fellow-passengers, less weary, were sitting with the sociable crowd. The whole of them, however, had not excited a tithe of the interest stirred by the one who had retired, and who was in fact, during much of the evening, the object of continued talk. Curiosity was getting up pretty fast; conjecture assumed a hundred forms. And as among these passengers there did not appear to be the strongly repellent appearance exhibited by the other, some of the loungers, and Worthy Ike most prominent among them, thought that here was a source from which information might be gained.

"If I am not mistaken," said Ike, approaching one of them in a very bland but respectful manner, "you were one of the passengers arrived this evening."

"Yes, sir," replied the passenger, leisurely raising his feet upon the hitchrail, and assuming a sociable air. For a half hour past he had been an amused listener to some of Worthy's quaint conversation, and, for want of something better to enable him to pass away the otherwise lonely evening, was very willing to make the acquaintance, for the time, of almost any one with Ike's entertaining fund of talk.

"Pretty hot day for travelling," said Ike, taking courage.

"Rather too warm for comfort; between the heat and the dust, we have had a very uncomfortable day."

"How far have you come?"

"Do you mean *to-day?*" asked the traveller.

"Yes, sir."

"From Swanwick, sir; not a very short ride for such weather as this."

"It is not, indeed," answered Ike; "sixty miles is about as much as a man could conveniently stand, in my opinion. However, where one has agreeable travelling companions, the ordinary inconveniences are not felt so much." Worthy was very anxious to come to the point.

"Aha! there you are right, my friend. But it is not always the case that we fall in with just such company as suits our taste; and then the annoyances are only increased."

"And how has it been with you to-day?" continued Worthy. "I was sitting here when the coach came in, and, from the little which I saw of your fellow-passengers, I should judge that you were a very sociable company, and had helped each other to pass away the time to the best advantage."

"Well, I can't say but you have formed a very correct opinion, my friend," answered the other. "Amongst our company, however, we had a gentleman who, although very far from being in any degree disagreeable, was so taciturn and wrapped up entirely with his own thoughts that our good

companionship was in a great degree embarrassed."

"Which one do you allude to?" asked Worthy, looking slyly around upon the others who were scattered here and there among the crowd.

"I believe he has retired," replied the gentleman. "I have not seen him since we sat together at tea."

By this time quite a group was attracted by the conversation going on between this gentleman and Ike; and the former, without suspecting the cause, noticed one after another leaving their seats and locating around him, until he found himself in the very centre of an increasing and attentive crowd. These movements were exceedingly gratifying to Ike. He felt very certain that he was on the right track for making the discovery he wished; and, in the event of his doing so, nothing could please him more than that as many as possible should witness his ingenious management of the case. His self-important air visibly increased. Flattered by the sociable and gentlemanly manners of the other, he caught the spirit, and endeavored as far as possible to play the gentleman himself. Good manners are contagious. The veriest clown never fails to detect the presence of a genuine gentleman. It is a fact which we may never fail to witness in intercourse with the world, that the rude man instantly feels the influence of the presence of gentility, and at once endeavors, if thrown with it, to converse and act to the best advantage.

"You made no acquaintance with him, then," asked Ike.

"But very little," was the reply.

"Not even learn his name?"

"I have only found it out since we came here by the register. However, in this respect I cannot say that he is matter for remark: there were two others of the passengers concerning whom I learned but little more. But, my good friend," continued he, "I think I noticed before tea considerable anxiety manifested by yourself respecting this gentleman. Have you any reasons for supposing there is any thing connected with him that is matter of special interest?"

"I cannot say, sir, why it is," replied Worthy, with a sort of abstracted air, "but there is something about him that is odd, entirely different from men in general, and which makes me more curious to know something about him than of one man in twenty. His face I must have seen before — must have seen it so often that it is one with which I have been acquainted; or else I have seen him in some sort of circumstances where he played a particular part, and made an impression upon me so strong I can never forget. Hang my picter, if I don't *know him!*" continued he, bringing his clinched fist down energetically upon his knee; "but how, when, or where, is the rub. When it comes to that point, I am out; and although I have scratched my old head almost sore for the last hour, with thinking, and remembering, and wondering, I am just as far off as ever. I haven't gone to the register less than six times, and looked at his name over and over again. There it stands 'LAMONT,' without any thing else, before or behind."

"And does not say whence he is, nor whither bound," interposed the gentleman, who had been listening to Ike with all his might.

"Not a word about it. That, too, is a thing which puzzles me. I ask myself, I wonder if he is ashamed of where he come from, as well as where he is going. Then I have every time come out here and set down, and tried to get to talking with somebody about something else; but it's no use. The first thing I know his face comes just as plain before me as yours is now, and for the life of me I can't tell what to make of it. One thing is certain: I heard him tell the old landlord that he would probably stay here several days; and if I don't find him out, my name's not Ike."

"I wish you great success," said his listener, much amused at the uncommon interest which Ike manifested in the stranger, "and I am only sorry that I cannot give you more information concerning him than I have. It may be that he is one of the celebrated order that is now making so much noise throughout the country, and has come among you to make efforts to swell the lists."

"What order do you mean, sir?" asked Ike, brightening up with the prospect of learning something new.

"Can it be that you have not yet heard of the springing up of a society called the *Know Nothings?*"

"The *what*, sir?" cried Ike, the crowd at the same time almost increasing to suffocation.

"People call them the *Know Nothings*," replied

the gentleman, noticing the rising interest which his item of news was creating.

"The *Know Nothings*, eh?" reiterated Ike. "The d——! Ah, I beg your pardon. I was just going to speak of a personage who perhaps has nothing to do in the case."

"Whether he has or not," was the reply, "he is a personage the less talked about, and more avoided, the better for us all."

"I believe with you, sir," answered Ike, a little mortified that he had made any thing like an advance to vulgarity in his conversation with one who he was pretty well assured relished nothing of the kind; "but who and what is this society of which you speak?"

"That is more than I can tell you. There is a great deal of noise made about them, and some of our recent elections in various places are said to have been entirely carried by this ticket. Whether there is in reality such an organization, nobody seems certainly to know. Nor does any body know, if there is, that this is its proper name. There are places now where you hear little else talked about but the Know Nothings. The name is on every body's lips, and fifty times in a day you may be accosted with the question, Are you a member? or do you know any body who is?"

"And do they let any body join who wants to?" asked Ike.

"You have forgotten, my friend," replied the gentleman, "that I told you a moment ago I did not know that there is any society of this name to

join. In due time you may learn more about the whole affair from somebody who has taken more interest in it, and can tell you more, than I."

"You cannot tell me then, of course, what it is they intend to do, or what they have as the end of their work?"

"Not a word. As I have told you, before I left home our city was in a ferment about the matter, rendered more so, perhaps, from the very fact that, although every body talked, nobody knew what it was. Like others, I joked with my friends upon the subject, and laughed at the many whom I saw appearing to move heaven and earth with the hope that they might solve the puzzle."

Ike drew a long breath. Like the eager schoolboy, who, seeing some marvellous sight, about which he wants to ask a hundred questions, but does not know where to begin, so was Worthy. His lips were parted, his finger and thumb fumbled his buttons, and he looked into the face of the stranger with an abstracted stare, that plainly showed the high pitch of excitement into which he was wrought. In truth, he had got rather more out of the gentleman than he had expected, but with this qualification — mystery had been piled upon mystery in all the intelligence he had gained, to a degree which only carried him farther and farther from his point. He determined now to make a summing up of the whole, and to see what the relation might be of *this* to *that*, hoping that one might throw some light upon the other.

"Well sir," said he, resuming the conversation,

"what is your opinion about this fellow-passenger of yours? Do you think it likely that *he* is one of this strange society?"

"I have no opinion about it," answered the gentleman, smiling at the earnestness depicted on Ike's face: "when I made the suggestion, it was not with any particular seriousness that I did so. Even if he were, so far as any information I have yet obtained upon the subject goes, it would be no ground for objection to him. He is evidently *a gentleman* in appearance and manners, which a less acute eye than mine can very easily observe."

Ike mused again; he scratched his head; drew lines on the sidewalk with the toe of his boot; looked from one face to another. Then a new question would linger on his lips, dying before born; and finally he "darned his picter if he didn't find out a *Know Something* who could tell him both about the *Know Nothings* and the stranger."

Nor was the crowd less eager than he, although their curiosity was rather more centred on the one object — the new society — than his. Consoling themselves with the thought that not very many days could possibly pass without their receiving more definite information about a society which appeared to be making so much stir in other places, they one by one began to rise and stretch themselves preparatory to their homeward walk. In little clubs they started off in different directions, full of what they had heard, and talking about it all the way. Arrived at home, they told their wives; their wives told the next-door neighbors, even waking up

some who had already gone to bed; and so it rapidly spread.

Meantime Ike had taken another look at the name on the register. "*Lamot — Lamont*," said he; "'twont do; 'twont do; can't make it out. Never mind; we will see to-morrow." He bade the sociable stranger good night, wished him a pleasanter ride next time, and started on his homeward way.

CHAPTER III.

THE sun of a new morn rose with just as melting a visage as on the day before. The worthy dwellers in our little village looked forth from their various abodes with a vain hope to see gathering clouds. Then came the feeling of general disappointment, followed by stoic resolves to endure what they could not remedy, and make the best of what they had. With a great many there was the happy consolation that the events of the evening before had given them something richer for speculation and talk than they had had for many a day gone by. The men tied themselves up in little knots upon some friendly counter or beneath some inviting shade. The gentler sex were issuing forth at an early hour, the younger ones especially feeling that there was something going on in which *they* were specially interested. Within the abodes of that portion who savored more of the aristocratic and recluse the recent intelligence was already finding its way, and was beginning to be discussed with all the interest which it seemed to demand. So far as the stranger was concerned, the information was of that character which made this latter class decide that, if he was to be the guest and property of any body in the town, he would of course belong to them. Very

lively chatted the damsels with conjecturing talk, whispering to each other little confidential thoughts, and laying very innocent little plans, into the secrets of which they admitted nobody but a privileged few. Ah, pretty Quizville, human nature was none the less human nature within thy hills than any where else.

Long and tedious were the hours of that eventful day. About the tavern the crowd of comers and goers was unusually large. It may seem almost impossible for any one, living in some large commercial mart, or even in some place of small note, where strangers are arriving in throngs almost every hour by rail car or steamer, to understand how it could be that the mere arrival of one individual could create any where an excitement so intense. Such persons would very easily learn how such things can be, were they for a time to make their abode in a place where communication and travel are limited. The stranger, too, of our story was a man of more distinguished air than ordinary, and his manners, as we have seen, so peculiar that he would not have failed to excite attention even in a place of more publicity than this.

It was very naturally expected, by all who were from hour to hour congregating about the door of the hotel, that, by remaining in the vicinity, they would, some time through the day, have their curiosity gratified by a sight of the stranger. At every footfall upon the hall stairway, the eyes of scores were turned to the spot. Of the remaining portion of the passengers who came with him, all were stroll-

ing through the town, attending to the little matters of business which they had to accomplish, or were in some way visible to any who were disposed to favor them with a look. But where was *the* stranger? A few had seen him at the breakfast table, from which he immediately returned to his room, where he kept himself close, as if he had neither curiosity to gratify nor business to accomplish.

And where, too, was Worthy Ike?

Among the very first who, neglecting all other matters, had made their way to the tavern, he was one. On the way thither he had picked up, by a sort of natural attraction, here one, and there another, until he had secured quite a varied and imposing train. As he passed along, all his native genius was called forth to entertain and excite his motley followers with regard to the matter in hand. Had shillings been very plentifully stowed away within his pockets, he would doubtless have parted with the requisite number for the tavern breakfast, in order that he might have himself in early contiguity with the object of his thoughts. But, alas for such a desirable consummation, these little bright open sesames were nestling in but questionable profusion within his ample pockets. It was a sad reflection, and none the less so from the consideration that something more tangible than wishes and words was necessary to remedy the defect.

He determined, however, still to persist in the next best thing. It required no shilling to hang about the door, and there he intended to wait until hunger and thirst should call him away. A matter

of great consolation to him was the knowledge that there were many others just as anxious as, but no better off than, himself; and while they waited and lounged, they might, instead of thinking of the melting weather, have a right good time.

Pending all these out-door manifestations, Lamont kept his room. What special business he had that so closely engaged his attention, was best known to himself. When the dinner hour came he made his appearance, elegantly, but tastefully, dressed. To one less self-possessed than he, the many sidelong glances which were cast upon him would have been embarrassing to no small degree. Among the lady guests he made a great sensation. The reserve, however, which he had manifested the day before was considerably thrown off, and he conversed sociably and pleasantly with those who sat near him. Yet his dignity, far from an ungracious stiffness, was not compromised a particle; so that the good opinions which he gained were but blended with respect. With an easy style, he ingratiated himself with the good will of those who were part and parcel of the town, by his complimentary allusions to it, commending the location, praising its generally neat appearance, pretty dwellings, &c., with an earnestness not too profuse, yet showing that he said no more than he felt.

Dinner passed, and with one or two of those who had sat beside him he took a seat upon the piazza, where for an hour or more he engaged in pleasant conversation, much of which turned upon the vil-

lage and vicinity — the history of the former, its people, circumstances, and all those little incidental topics which would naturally be suggested to an interested mind. Then with a perfect grace he excused himself to the little party, and sought his room.

As the evening drew along he sent for the landlord.

"I wish a carriage, sir," said he to this worthy personage, "for a little drive. Can you give me something open, light, and airy? I want to enjoy the evening, and see every thing that is to be seen about your pretty village."

Now, so far as this little matter was concerned, he was just exactly in the right place. Quizville could boast as many fine turnouts, pretty drives, and fast horses as any other place of its "advantages" in the country. Its young folks understood this matter to perfection, and Lamont was destined on this very evening to meet fair faces enough to turn a heart less vulnerable than his.

"You shall have one, sir, in quick time," replied the very accommodating landlord, bright prospects of good-sized bills looming up before his vision, "in a very short time, sir, very short;" and he darted down the hall and stairs with the speed of a starting locomotive.

This was to be a drive in which Lamont had especial ends to accomplish. He dressed himself with even more than his wonted good taste, and he consequently lacked considerable of being ready when his carriage was announced.

"Which way shall I drive you, sir," asked the obsequious coachman, as he clasped the door.

"Any where — every where," was the reply, "specially nowhere but just wherever there is fresh air to be had, pretty spots to be seen, and not too much company to cover us with their dust."

Lamont was not a little surprised at the gay turnout in which he found himself so comfortably seated. It was more than he expected; more than, in so modest a place, he had any reason to hope for. And as he rolled away, followed by the eyes of a gaping crowd, he was compelled to yield to the very delightful conviction, that here, at least, he was indeed a "lion." With the exception of here and there a little too much dust, he had every thing to hope for in the way of a delightful drive. Over the easy roads, beneath towering shade trees, beside the glassy Petumpse, over hill and dale, away he went in the full enjoyment of the evening scene, and fully elate with the joy of a youthful heart.

On the suburbs of the village, among many others, was one of those handsome mansions which never fail to attract the passer by. It was not that it was of the modern style of flimsy architecture that the building had about it any thing to admire. On the contrary, it had the appearance of being antiquated — one of those rich old mansions of the olden time that many of us picture to ourselves as worthy relics of the past — just such a place, perhaps, as that where in childhood we gambolled away the happy hours, and to which we ofttimes now recur with feelings of sadness, as we think of "the old

folks at home." It was of heavy, solid structure, as if designed to withstand the ravages of time. There it stood amid leafy old oaks, fragrant shrubbery, and clinging vines. Through its verdant clothing you might here and there peep into its sociable piazzas and roomy halls. Its ample grounds were handsomely laid out, and evidently tended with great care. In a word, the *tout ensemble* of the whole was the very perfection of an establishment of which kings might have been proud, and so romantic that fairies might have made it an abiding-place.

Lamont could not conceal from his driver the intense interest with which he regarded this elegant place.

"Drive slowly here," said he, "and tell me to whom belongs this venerable mansion." And as he gave the order he straightened himself in his seat with an excited mien, and clutched the carriage side almost wildly.

His driver, having been nearly all his lifetime a dweller in Quizville, was entirely competent to give the name of every body, every house, every family, and all the items of interest that had ever transpired in connection with them.

"This, sir," said he, "is the residence of General Buford, one of the old inhabitants here, a man beloved and respected by all the people. There, sir, you may see the old gentleman now, walking in that little lump of a grove: he has a couple of ladies with him. Ah, sir, what is the matter? Are you unwell? Nothing serious, I hope," continued he, showing some alarm.

Lamont made an effort to smile; his face was blanched, his forehead rested on one of his hands, and his whole deportment betrayed deep emotion.

"It is nothing," he replied; "merely the recurrence of a little attack similar to which I am often subject, and will soon pass away." Then, with a manner the intent of which was to induce the driver to believe that what Lamont saw and heard had no connection with his sudden indisposition, he gayly added, —

"You may go on with what you were telling me."

"They have got so far down the walk now," continued the driver, "that I reckon you can scarce see them with any distinctness."

"Not very plain; but they are now taking an angular walk, which, by your driving on at the same rate you are now going, will bring us immediately before them. You may do so. I have heard of General Buford, and, as we may now have an opportunity of doing so, would like to see him more nearly. But who, can you tell me, are those ladies with him?"

"His daughters, I think, sir, although I can hardly see them plain enough to tell."

"Daughters!" exclaimed Lamont; "he must be a happy old gentleman to have such as those appeared to be. But do they compose the whole of his family?"

"Bless you! no, sir," quickly replied the driver; "he has some seven or eight children, one or two of

them quite young, but he has been unfortunate enough to lose two or three."

"And how many of those remaining are sons?"

"But one, I think, sir; and there he is," answered the driver.

"Where? where?" asked Lamont, quickly.

"You may see him just entered the garden gate, and walking towards his father and sisters. Ah, sir, they are a lovely family, and many is the poor fellow of us that has received favors both from the old general and his goodhearted son, just at the time when they were favors indeed."

Lamont endeavored to hum a little snatch of a song, and pretended to be occupied with observing the mansion.

A moment or two more, and the carriage had neared the spot where it would almost confront the little party in the garden. General Buford and his family had heard of the arrival of Lamont in the village, but had not thought so much of the matter as had many others. But when his quick eye saw the coming carriage, and that it was occupied by a gentleman whom he had never before seen, he concluded that he it was of whom he had heard. The carriage passed very near to the group, there being between it and them but a light, open, low fence. With that generous courtesy that looks with a kindly recognition upon a stranger, the general gently saluted and wished him a pleasant evening. Lamont acknowledged the courtesy by raising most gracefully his hat from his brow and smiling with his incomparable air.

"Papa, *papa*," cried the general's daughters, simultaneously, when the carriage was passed, "that is he — that is he!"

"Well, well," replied the old gentleman, amazed at the earnest manner of his daughters, "suppose it is. Are you both going at once to lose your hearts in consequence?"

His daughters hung their heads with a little bit of shame at their father's teasing question.

"Edward," said the general, turning to his son, "have you seen this stranger before."

"I saw him but for a moment an hour ago, as he stepped into his carriage," replied the young man.

"Have you learned that there is any one in town to whom he is recommended?"

"I have not, sir: there is but one item of information that I or any body else can possibly obtain respecting him."

"And this is what?" asked the general.

"His name."

"And it is ——"

"Lamont."

"It is a new name to me. Well, perhaps it is unnecessary to know more," continued the old gentleman; "although I would wager my sword that he is a gentleman, and worthy of our acquaintance."

The young ladies exchanged significant glances.

"It would be a wager, sir, in my opinion," replied Edward, "which you would undoubtedly win; and I have thought, if he remain here, I will seek his

acquaintance, and show him that we can act upon the principle of treating every man as a gentleman until we know him to be the reverse."

"I commend your purpose, my son," said the general. "He seems somewhat older than yourself; yet you may find him a most agreeable and profitable companion. Until, however, you can learn definitely concerning him, you need not introduce him to the family."

The young ladies exchanged significant pouts.

"Has General Buford no wife?" asked Lamont of his driver, so soon as the carriage was out of hearing.

"Ah, sir, indeed he has," replied the driver; "and a lady she is, too, with more friends than any body else in town. But the poor old lady has had a serious time of it lately."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Lamont; "in what respect?"

"A fall which she received from her carriage, while the horses were running away, came very near making short work with her. She has been confined to her bed much of the time since, but is now so much recovered as to take easy rides. Ah, sir, the good lady would have been no little missed if she had left us."

Dusk was rapidly approaching; and the driver, informing Lamont that there were yet quite a number of pretty places which they had not seen, said he would be very happy at any other time, or as often as the gentleman would wish, to drive him around,

and tell him all that was of interest connected with the village. Whereupon Lamont informed him he might return to the hotel. The drive had by no means been misimproved. The talkative driver was greatly pleased to give the first airing to one who was so much an object of notice, and he did his part faithfully in imparting a fund of information as he went along. There was a very pretty little quarter of a mile yet between them and the hotel, running through the most thickly-settled part of the village; and the driver knew that there would be many an anxious eye directed within the carriage as it passed along. It was no difference to the good-humored fellow that *he* was not the principal object of notice within it: he was perfectly satisfied that he was driver for the one who was. Opening the carriage a little more, under pretence of making it more pleasant, he put his horses on their best manners, and drove along with a very self-satisfied and important air.

He was not at all mistaken. Pretty faces, bright eyes, and fairy forms filled many a vine-embowered doorway; and rapid remarks passed from many a cherry lip to that of some waist-encircled companion, showing very clearly that the interest was on the increase.

Mr. Driver cracked his horses along at a merry rate, and in a very few moments drove up to the tavern door in a manner that was as much as giving notice to every body to clear the way. More gratifying than all was the fact that, when they

stopped, something quietly slipped from Lamont's hand to his, shining and bright, and of more extensive dimensions than were the average number of its kindred that found a lodgment in his waistcoat pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

On the afternoon following the records of our last chapter, a young man was standing on the shore of Lake Petumpse. His age was perhaps twenty-one or two, his form graceful and sinewy, and his whole appearance attractive. He had been standing for some minutes with the unloosed rope of the boat in his hand, his right foot resting upon the prow; and he seemed as though waiting for some one to accompany him for a sail. His naturally mild blue eye, now restive with a little impatience, was turning hither and thither, as if to catch the earliest sight of the person for whom he waited.

"It is very strange," said he, in a soliloquizing tone, "that Perkins does not come. He has never disappointed me before, and we are fast losing our prettiest hour for sailing. Every body is on the lake; the breeze is fresh; and I shall certainly be tempted to leave him unless he makes his appearance soon."

"Ha, ha, Ned!" cried the well-known voice of his friend, who had stolen upon him unawares around a little bluff piece of ground; "you are all in waiting for me, are you? A little impatient, too, I have no doubt, that I am not here as punctual as usual."

"You are right, Perkins," replied the young man. "Had it been almost any one else but your very prompt self, I should not have wondered at the delay. But tell me," continued he, taking the arm of his friend and gently urging him towards the boat, "what has kept you?"

"First let me thank you, dear Ned, for your complimentary allusion to my punctual habits. I am certain I could not more faithfully reciprocate it towards any other than yourself. With regard to my detention, however, I might say that thereby hangs a tale."

"Ah, indeed! Then suppose you be seated and give it to me while we sail."

"Good for you, Ned. You certainly deserve credit for your *rhymatic* turn. I wouldn't wonder if somebody detects you making poetry next, at which time such matter-of-fact fellows as myself will of course be excluded, as being too little of the sentimental for your company."

"But I am impatient for your excuse," exclaimed the other; "and we are wasting our evening in starting."

"I am sorry, then, that we must waste a little more of it, if I fulfil a promise which I have just made. But don't look so amazed; I have no very startling information to impart."

Young Buford — for it was he — was all attention.

"You will remember that we parted yesterday evening with the intention of early calling upon

and making the acquaintance of the stranger Lamont."

"Well," cried Buford, eagerly.

"Well," responded Perkins, "I have just come from doing this very thing alone; not because I did not intend to wait for you to accompany me in a formal call, but simply because we fell in with each other at the hotel, passed the ordinary compliments, and made such mutual advances as almost fixed us friends forthwith."

"He is not, then, so haughty as we thought?"

"I may answer yes and no. His manners, to one whose acquaintance he did not wish, I should think were very much so; but, where he has any disposition to a friendship, he is affable and frank as you could wish."

"You flatter yourself, then," said Edward, with a smile, "that your very handsome self will be one of the favored few?"

"Don't get jealous, Ned," replied Perkins; "for you will soon have an opportunity for forming the same opinion of yourself."

"Ah; why so?"

"Because he is to join us here in a moment more for a sail."

"You don't say so! But if he is, what sort of courtesy do you term it that left him to come alone?"

"A very questionable kind, truly," said Perkins, "were it not for the fact that he could not accompany me at once; and I feared, unless I came in advance, you would conclude I was not to join you, and leave us behind."

"That exonerates you; but will he certainly come?"

"Look for yourself," replied Perkins; and, as he spoke, the two young gentlemen turned towards the path by which Lamont would have to get to them, and saw him even then rather hastily advancing, as though he feared being a cause of detention. Short as the time had been, he had already changed the dress in which Perkins had left him, and had on a simple undress suit, appropriate for a water excursion. Nevertheless, even at the distance at which the two young men saw him, they could not but remark his gentlemanly bearing and graceful motion. It was impossible for them to resist the feeling of admiration and respect with which he involuntarily inspired them.

"I can almost say that I *love* that man," said young Buford, "although I have never spoken a word to him. Why is it that about some persons there is that native-born attractiveness which draws us to them even at first sight — and this, too, sometimes, when one of equal advantages of education and its incidental benefits exercises not a tithe of the power over us?"

"One of Nature's own freaks," replied Perkins, "to keep us from admiring all alike. But come; let us meet him."

Buford stooped for a moment to secure the rope which he had continued to hold, and quickly joined his friend, who had already advanced towards Lamont. He could not help hesitating for a moment to admire the two gentlemen as they met. To his

view, they were each the perfection of manly beauty and grace. And, in fact, a looker on upon the whole trio would have pronounced them three as handsome young men as one would meet in searching among any crowd.

"Mr. Lamont, let me introduce my friend, Mr. Buford," said Perkins, taking a hand of each within each of his own; "with myself, he will be happy to have your acquaintance during your sojourn here."

"And I shall be even more so in having his," replied Lamont, bending upon Edward, and giving him a look almost of tenderness. "Indeed, gentlemen, I cannot feel myself under too great obligation for the courtesy you exhibit in proffering your friendship to a stranger, concerning whom you know nothing."

Edward's warm heart opened more and more, until he could have almost thrown his arms around the fascinating man.

"While we have thought, sir, that we would be but paying a courtesy towards one whom we have reasons to believe a gentleman," answered he, his hand resting in the fervent pressure of Lamont's, "we have at the same time thought we would be conferring a pleasure upon ourselves. We can only hope that this feeling will be mutual; and so far as my friend Mr. Perkins and myself are concerned, we will not fear in the least that we shall regret the informal acquaintance we have made."

Lamont's slight bow made acknowledgment of his complimentary reception; and by this time they had reached the boat.

The lake was now quite thick with boats, into the midst of which Buford's was shortly sailing. Parties of old folks and young were enjoying the evening thus, with the great mass of whom Perkins and Buford were intimate, and with whom they exchanged frequent recognitions.

"I do not see what there is wanting to complete the happiness of any of you living in this pretty village," said Lamont. "It seems to me you have every thing that heart can wish."

"True," replied Perkins, "it does appear so; yet there is no place and no situation that has not its points of objection. Ofttimes, no doubt, these evils are imaginary, and yet, perhaps, greater from the fact that they are imaginary."

"Even so," answered Lamont.

"May I ask," interposed Edward, "if Mr. Lamont has ever lived in a country place?"

At this question the young men noticed that a shade passed over his expressive countenance; but he answered, without hesitation, —

"When a boy, my home was amid just such hills as these which now surround us. The scenes of village life are as familiar to me as if I had been mingled with them all my life. And although I have spent my later years among the most splendid pageants of the world, one single memory of those boyhood associations has awakened tender feelings and homely longings that had been long time forgotten. I believe that any man has been greatly favored whose early days were passed among the more virtuous, thoughtless, showy associations of

country life; indeed, I would not hesitate to add, whose *whole life* were so spent. His heart must ever be more tender, and his conscience more sensitive, although his person may have been clad in a linsey suit."

Buford, more than his friend Perkins, was a young man of what we may call a pure heart. His parents had ever been careful to plant the seeds of virtue well within him, and had taught him to revere and love the person of good principles wherever found. The sentiments uttered by Lamont only served to captivate and draw him to him more. Perkins, too, was a young man of sterling principle, but his education had not been cast in the same mould with that of his gentler friend. The gayeties and formality of *bon ton* life had a special charm for his ambition; and he consequently mingled more with the world, and made his visits more frequently to cities where he might enjoy in greater degree the life of his choice. Nevertheless, he was as yet to any considerable extent unharmed. He was pleased, though not as Buford, with the sentiments of Lamont, but the style and manner charmed him more. Nevertheless, he was in a small degree disappointed in Lamont, having looked upon him as a man of the world, perfect in its accomplishments, and indulging all its high notions of honor, refinement, and style. He had indeed regarded him as one from whom he might learn lessons of life that would be improving to him, and aid him in the prosecution of his ambitious schemes. But if it were true that Lamont was one who had never par-

ticipated in, or, having participated to repletion, was disgusted with, the ways of the world, Perkins felt that he had not gained the kind of friend for which he had hoped.

"Do you think," said he to Lamont, "that you could again make yourself content to live in such a place as this, after spending so much of your life amid such livelier scenes? Could you find enjoyment in any spot so dull?"

"Dull, Perkins!" exclaimed Edward, looking into the fine face of his friend with astonishment.

"*Dull!*" echoed Lamont. "You surely do not consider Quizville a *dull* place, do you, Mr. Perkins?"

"At times almost insufferably so," replied Perkins, although a little abashed that both the gentlemen were raising their voices against him.

"And so, my dear sir, would you find at times the most stirring place in the world," said Lamont, warmly. "To one who has been unaccustomed to the excitements of a large city, there may be much to entertain and divert for a time. But it is astonishing how soon you may become so habituated to these things that they scarce call forth a passing remark. And when this ensues, you must have troops of friends to keep your spirits up, so wrought up is your taste for excesses. Then comes the terrible reaction when the *season is out*, at which time you may talk of *dulness* to some purpose, unless it be that with the fickle crowd you wander from one watering-place to another. This, sir, is what *I* call dulness of the very worst kind — the dulness of a

restless mind, that has nothing substantial to give coloring to its pursuits, and nothing to inspire it with healthy hopes. But see, my dear sir, the contrast to all this among the mass of the inhabitants of every well-appointed village like this. The very country air which you breathe gives a tone to your character, and a zest to all in which you engage. Your society is in the main permanent; and instead of the perpetual engrossment of all your thoughts in the eager pursuit of new and *late* acquaintance, you have learned your neighbors, and have them not to study. Your mind may be devoted to its own improvement, instead of being startled by the ever-recurring intrusion of fancy fashions. Your friends — ay, your *friends* — are those of a lifetime, almost as much so as if your mothers had been one and your childhood had been spent about the same fireside. Look around you now. On every hand I see you greeted by pleasant and hearty smiles. I need nothing more than what I now see to convince me that both of you are surrounded by many who regard you with the kindliest friendship, and to whom you are ever welcome. Indeed you may congratulate yourself, Mr. Perkins, that you have your life where, almost as with your own brothers and sisters, you enjoy year after year the healthful summers, with their many incidental pleasures like that we now enjoy, your ripe autumns, your sociable winters, and your budding springs. In a proper view, it seems to me you need never be afflicted with dulness here."

"Possibly Mr. Lamont may, in some degree,

change his opinion whenever he shall make up his mind to fix himself here, or in any similar place," answered Perkins.

"I cannot see why," remarked Edward, smiling, and even affectionately placing his arm within that of his friend; "and, to tell you the truth, — hoping you will not become jealous when I do, — I think Mr. Lamont's views are perfectly correct, and have no need of even the slightest change."

"Ah, Ned," returned Perkins, gently, "I can easily forgive *you* for deserting me; you are a mother's boy, and have hardly wandered away from her side enough to know that there is any other world but Quizville."

"For which he may thank God with the fullest heart," exclaimed Lamont. "Permit me, however, Mr. Perkins, to say, that if, after a fair trial of the life which I have been so highly extolling, I shall in any respect change my opinions, I will be candid enough to let you know."

"Ah!" replied Perkins, his handsome face lighting with animation; "may we then understand you as intimating that you intend to settle yourself in a country home?"

"I think it quite likely that I shall," answered Lamont, promptly.

"Permit me, then, to toast you with the happy realization of all your fondest hopes. But may I ask a question more?"

"Certainly; a dozen, if you wish."

"Thank you," replied Perkins, with a rapidly rising interest; "have you yet decided upon your locality?"

"I cannot say that I have; perhaps *here*, for aught I know," answered Lamont. "Thus far I know nothing as to where my home will be."

"Ha! ha!" cried Perkins, laughing; "perhaps we may set you down as belonging to the *Know Nothing* order, of which we are beginning to hear."

Lamont merely smiled in reply.

"I am quite sure," said he, after a moment's hesitation, "from what I have seen of this place, and what I presume to be its hospitable people, that it has about it all that is necessary to gratify my ambitions of life. The mind's quiet is to me something more to be coveted than to shine in heartless crowds. Before, however, I can make a decision as to where I shall be fixed, there are matters in my hands to accomplish which none other may perform."

The young gentlemen cast upon him an inquiring look, but said nothing.

In continued pleasant converse the new-made friends passed their evening away so rapidly as to be scarce conscious of the near approach of night. The little crowd of boats that had been gayly sporting on the lake were beginning to seek the shore. One after another they might be seen yielding up their joyful charges, all of which, according to their different locations, were filing off to right hand and left, their happy voices and hearty "good nights" ringing along the water almost from shore to shore.

With a mutual regret the young gentlemen prepared to quit the lake. During the short time

which they had been together, Perkins and Buford found themselves irresistibly drawn to Lamont. And, so far as they could judge, he had formed an equal attachment for them. It was harder, however, for them to determine the full extent of his feelings. The reserve and dignity of his manners formed a veil through which they could not see as satisfactorily as they wished. Buford's undisguised heart was somewhat troubled at this; but he made all the allowance which his susceptible nature permitted for the momentary acquaintance and the caution which he supposed Lamont had acquired from association with the world.

At the door of the hotel they separated, but not until they had exchanged professions of friendship and promises to meet again.

CHAPTER V.

"WILL my good sister give me her company this evening?" asked Edward Buford of one of the young ladies whom Lamont had seen a couple of days before with their father; and, even as he asked the question, his arm encircled her waist, while upon her cheek he imprinted an affectionate kiss.

"Certainly, dear Ned," replied the fair girl, locking her hands within his, "especially when you look so communicative as you do just now."

They stepped forth into the garden together, the very picture of that fond attachment and confidence which it is to be feared exists too little nowadays between brother and sister. Too much is it the case that the former looks upon the society of "fast friends" and fast horses as far superior to that of a gentle sister; while she, deserted by the brothers upon whom she has the strongest claims for love and attention, must accept the attendance of strange young men, oftentimes of very questionable character, or make herself a recluse at home. But it is a feature of the times; and whatever "the world" indorses is right, *of course!*

"I have made an acquaintance this afternoon," said he, as they seated themselves in a little rustic seat.

"And I can easily tell you whom," answered Emily.

"You were not on the lake?" replied he, with some surprise.

"No, I was not; indeed it is not at all necessary that I should have been to enable me to say at once who is the acquaintance of which you speak."

"Ah," replied he, "you ladies have that native discernment, in almost all cases, which makes you unravel secrets and come to conclusions with much more quickness than can we of the duller sex. I suppose, then, it is hardly necessary to say that I speak of Lamont."

Emily merely smiled in reply.

"And it is concerning him that I wished to have a little talk with my sister. You will remember, an evening or two ago, when in conversation with our father, I said that I had intended seeking Lamont with the twofold purpose of showing him courtesy, and, if possible, learning who and what he is; and I have to confess that mere curiosity mingled largely in my plans; for there seemed so much about him, both to myself and others, that was peculiar at once in appearance and manners, that I could scarce restrain myself from making friendly advances when first I saw him. This afternoon I have been with him. Our friend Perkins very unexpectedly met him at the hotel, and from mere commonplace advances they formed an acquaintance which resulted in myself enjoying the same privilege. During the afternoon's sail which we have had together, my curiosity has not been

satisfied as I had wished; yet my regard for the man has almost ripened into love."

"Ah, indeed," said Emily, playfully; "what a fortunate thing that this was our brother Ned, instead of his poor sister, whose heart might even now be forever gone!"

"There are very many true words spoken in jest," replied Edward, almost seriously.

"Well, Edward, you must forgive me if I have seemed a little to sport with your very susceptible nature," said Emily, forcing her hand lovingly through his luxuriant locks.

"I can forgive *you* any thing," he replied; "but I never was more serious in my life than in the expression of strong attachment which I have formed for Lamont. Perhaps you will understand me better when you may have been an hour with him."

"Possibly so; but you have forgotten the instructions which your father gave you concerning Mr. Lamont's introduction to the family."

"You are much mistaken," he replied; "my father's wishes never make so slight an impression upon me. But I know that, if this man is to remain here, it will not be a very long time before he will be on intimate terms with us all."

"*Intimate* terms!" exclaimed Emily; "you speak very confidently."

"But with none the less truth," continued he. "Notwithstanding the fact that Lamont has not as yet given to either Perkins or myself any definite information as to himself, yet it is a fact not to be

denied that he is a man of such character as will justify us in receiving him to our friendship."

"Remember, Edward," replied his sister, "that *appearances* are oftentimes very deceitful."

"I am aware of the fact," said he, quickly; "yet it is not genuine charity for us to condemn indiscriminately, because there are exceptionable cases."

"Very true," answered Emily, half musing. And it was also true that her young heart, though in words opposing, was secretly entertaining the same interest which Edward manifested in the stranger. Her woman's intuition caused her to know, even when her brother asked her to walk with him in the garden, that he wished to speak to her of Lamont. She knew well that Edward's curiosity had been greatly excited towards the stranger, for he had spoken of him almost every hour through the day, and she very quickly guessed that her brother had, in a measure at least, gratified his curiosity, and wished to inform her of the result. Perhaps, if the truth had been known, her thoughts had been running in the same direction for a day or two; and it was a very pleasant thought that she might now get some information on the subject.

"Is it not a little singular," asked she, "that Mr. Lamont so closely keeps back every thing connected with himself? Your frank offer of friendship surely demanded a different course."

"My dear sister forgets," replied Edward, "that it was not *he* who sought *our* acquaintance, but *we* who sought *his*. We consequently had no claim upon him in this respect."

"But suppose that Mr. Perkins and yourself were about to introduce him to your sisters."

"Well, suppose we were. If we extend the invitation, does he not stand on the same independent ground?"

"I do not know but you are right, Edward," answered Emily; "but I am much inclined to believe that, as matters now are, your father will not withdraw the injunction he has laid upon you. However, as you seem so greatly interested in the gentleman, it is to be hoped he will in proper time let you know more about his who and what."

"I can hardly suppose, from some remarks which he made," said Edward, "that, for the present, we are to learn much more about him."

"Then, Edward," interposed Emily, with considerable energy, "you must not think of bringing him to our family. Even were our father willing, *I* should not be. So far as friendships are concerned we have all that we can attend to, and I have neither time nor regards to hazard upon characters that may be possessed of only gentility's disguise. If Mr. Lamont wishes to visit your father's house, and is a gentleman, he knows the proper means for the accomplishment of his wishes; and if he wants *not* our acquaintance, Edward, you well know that your sisters, at least, want not *his*."

Edward assumed a thoughtful air. He very well knew that his sister was right, and he felt proud that he had a sister whose self-respect was not to be compromised for the gratification of any mere idle curiosity, not even were her heart prompting to such

an action. Yet he was fascinated with Lamont — admired the virtuous sentiments he expressed — sympathized with his apparent isolation and abstraction — almost felt like worshipping his noble form and handsome face — in a word, had permitted himself to be bound to him by the strong tie of a generous heart and a confiding nature. But could he retain companionship with Lamont, and, knowing him to be a stranger among strangers, never ask him to his home — never intimate that he had sisters, to whose society he would introduce him — never express the wish to bring him within his own large circle of friends? It could not be. The tie must be more closely formed, or entirely dissolved.

Emily noticed the thoughtful expression of her brother's face, and needed not to be told what was passing within his mind; and she felt for him, too, with all the affectionate consideration of a sympathizing sister's nature.

"What are your reasons, Edward," asked she, "for saying that you think it doubtful as to your obtaining, at present, any further light as to the character and history of Mr. Lamont?"

"I do not know," he replied, "that I have any strong reasons for thinking so. Nevertheless it appears to me that, were he intending to give us any such information, some little reference would have been made to it during the hour that we were together. Neither Perkins nor myself hesitated in speaking of ourselves, and part of our conversation was of a nature to draw him out on this point, if he had any disposition to speak. There was, however, the intimation given us by himself that he has determined on trying a country or village location, coupled with one that even *this* place might prove as congenial to his tastes as any that he has thus far seen."

"And does he talk as though he would probably remain here now for any length of time?" asked Emily.

"He is just about as indefinite on this point as every other; but I am inclined to think that he will not leave very soon. Indeed, I have learned that, when he spoke to the landlord of the hotel about his room, he remarked that he would probably be here for some time."

"Does he not appear to have any business — any plans of which he speaks?"

"He has made but a single remark on the subject. He says he has some matters to attend to, before he can make any positive disposition of himself, which nobody else can possibly do," answered Edward.

A loud call, "Emily — Emily — sister Emily — where are you?" just here interrupted this conversation; and in a moment more their little sister came bounding into the arbor, almost out of breath.

"O sister! sister!" cried she, so much excited as scarcely to be able to articulate, "that man — that man! He was just now here, and he talked so funny, all by himself, and nobody talking a word to him at all!"

"Why, what can you mean?" said Emily, stopping the child's further talk and pressing her hair

back from her eyes. "Sit up in my lap, darling Alie, and tell us of what man you are talking."

"O, the one that passed by here in the carriage all by himself, and that you all talk about so much."

Edward and Emily looked at each other inquiringly, but said nothing.

"And he talked all the time as he went along," continued the child; "and I heard all he said."

"He was merely passing by the front yard fence, then?" said Emily. "Is it so?"

"Yes, yes; that's where I saw him. You know when you and brother came into the garden, pa, and ma, and sister Cornelia sat down on the piazza, and I walked in the little walk by the gate. Presently I saw him coming; and he walked so slow, and kept looking towards the house all the time. When he came close to where I stood, I heard him talking all by himself."

"And did you understand any thing that he said, dear Alie?" asked Edward, quickly.

"First I heard him say, 'Just the same;' and then he stopped and looked harder at the house than ever; and then he said, 'How strange it will appear!' and then he said, 'I must do it now — I cannot wait any longer;' and then he put his hand to his head and said, 'I *must wait* a little longer; it will be but sweeter then.' O sister, it seemed so strange when I looked at him, for he is so handsome! and the bright moon helped me to see his face so plain, and he looked so sad! But I was not afraid at all, for I knew he could not see me; and

when he had passed out of sight I went and told them on the piazza, and then ran as hard as I could to tell you and brother."

If young Buford had wondered before, how much more did he wonder now!

"Why cannot I at once learn more of this strange man?" cried he, starting up and walking quickly to and fro. "I am certain there is something mysterious connected with him; but whether for good or evil, is the question. What can he mean by his manner before our house this evening? You may take my word for it, Emily, there is something yet for us to learn of Lamont that will make us to open our eyes with wonder."

"Be calm, dear Edward," replied Emily. "I fear you will permit this man to enlist your feelings to a degree that may involve you in trouble. Suppose there is something mysterious, as you say, connected with him; why should you seek to unravel what in the first place may be none of your concern, and in the next may do you harm?"

"I cannot believe wrong concerning him," answered Edward, warmly. "In his very face are the strongly-drawn marks of intelligence, goodness, and integrity, else am I deceived beyond all other men."

"For the sake of your own generous disposition, my brother, I sincerely wish your opinion may be well founded. In the mean time, as I have to confess to a growing interest in the matter, I hope you will not fail to let me know all that you may ascertain, especially if it be for good. Again let me

caution you, however," continued she, rising and placing her arm within his, while her remaining hand clung to the little Alice, — "let me caution you that you be prudent, and not fully commit yourself to him until you are satisfied that he is a companion such as you ought to have. If you ascertain that he is a man whom you would not like to introduce, you should forthwith discard him yourself."

"So I certainly shall. But come; let us go to the house, and see if they also are not discussing him as well as we."

Not a word more was spoken by either until they reached the steps of the piazza. Even little Alie was quiet, for what she had seen and heard, both from the stranger's own lips and the conversation between her brother and sister, set her childish thoughts to work. All the marvellous stories of strange men and their stranger actions seemed, to her fertile imagination, destined to be fully realized in this man. Perhaps he wanted to steal her away, or had some other bad purpose in view of which she could not fully conjecture. Place the matter in its best light, and she thought nothing good was brewing; and as the winding walk brought them near to the spot from which she had seen "the man," she clung to her sister with an unmistakable dread.

Edward and Emily were not deceived in supposing that the topic of conversation in the piazza was the same as theirs. General Buford asked his son question after question of much the same nature as those which had been proposed by Emily,

the answers to which only resulted in his repeating the injunction which he gave when they were talking of Lamont before. He did not, however, dissuade his son from prosecuting the acquaintance, but urged him to the same care of his actions that Emily had already done.

The old lady, Mrs. Buford, had hitherto said very little on the subject, and it had appeared strange to her that the family were so much engrossed with it. But it could not be that she would remain silent a great deal longer, when she heard so much. She now asked of Edward a great many little things concerning the stranger of which the other members of the family had not thought, and it was a fact that the old lady made some suggestions which set the whole of them to some pretty serious thinking.

Cornelia was for having Lamont invited to the house without further hesitation. "Because we may invite him," said she, "is it any reason that we should be implicated in any thing that might come to hand unfavorable in his character or history? More than this, I would like to know how long Edward will be able to withhold this invitation, if he is to associate with him every day."

"Sister Neely has already given her heart away," replied Edward, laughing, "and thinks there is now no danger in *her* case at least."

For which jocose remark Sister Neely gave his ears a pretty extensive boxing, causing a general laughter; after which the whole party bade each other good night, and sought their rooms.

CHAPTER VI.

Again do we find ourselves at the tavern door, mixed up with very much such a crowd as the one convened at the commencement of our story, and at just about the same time of day. Indeed there was never any evening known to pass away in which more or less of the same parties were not found at this great point of attraction — the scene, doubtless, but the duplicate of thousands of others all over the land where all the "choice spirits" congregate to hear and be heard, to tell entertaining anecdotes, laugh at "good things," and oftentimes to be merry for the ninety-ninth time over the same old story, for want of something new. It is the great village scapepipe, where all the accumulations of wit, jocularity, and news have vent, and by which the boiler of sociability is prevented from explosion.

Lamont had just stepped from the door, made his way through the crowd, and walked off in company with Edward Buford. Worthy Ike was, of course, "on hand." The poor fellow's brain had been sadly puzzled for the last few days, and it was with no small degree of mortification that he found himself making no actual advance in respect to this last great object of his hopes. Ever and anon his genius had devised some new plan, by means of which he felt

very certain he would "ferret the thing out." But alas for human plans! His were destined to meet the same fate with those of many other of the poor sons of Adam. Disappointment is written many times upon those very projects concerning which we entertain the most sanguine expectations of success.

"I say, Ike," cried out a lusty-sized character, whose visage was here and there marked by some very questionable sorts of elevations and depressions, — "I say, *Ike*."

"Well, *what* do you say?" returned our more respectable Worthy.

"Why, what do you make of that man, any how? Fact, he sorter looks to me like one of these fellows there's so much talk about round here for a day or two past; these ere — what d'ye call 'em? — Know Nothings — Know Nothings — that's it. Somehow or other, I reckon he's sorter beat you *this* time: don't believe you can make head nor tail out of him. Come, come, Ike, brush up your wits, old fellow — hunt him out, and let's know all about him."

At almost any other time, neither Ike nor any body else would have thought the old man's talk worthy of attention; but it just now happened that he touched the right point, and opened a door of conversation in which the whole company were well pleased to enter.

"If there *is* any such thing as a Know *Nothing* society," replied Ike, half scornfully, "I should think *you* would do for one of the best members, old fellow: to tell the truth, I doubt very much whether

you could stand up right now and tell us whether you are on your head or your heels."

"There cannot be very much doubt, friend Ike," said a young man of the company, interrupting some senseless reply which arose to the lips of the man, "that there is now existing an order by this name. See! here is a paper which I have just received from Philadelphia, where an exciting election has been lately held. If you all say so, I will read you some of the remarks of the editor with regard to this very so called Know Nothing party."

"Good — good — let's hear it — read on," cried one and all. "Just the thing we want."

"Very well; here it is," said he; "listen: —

"'THE KNOW NOTHING TICKET. — The Know Nothing party has completely carried the election. What this party is, and who are its members, is a matter we cannot answer: all we can say is, that it is universally considered that the nominees of this society, or order, whatever it is styled, have entirely carried the day. Prior to the election, considerable talk was going the round on political 'Change about this organization; and it was confidentially asserted that its would be the successful ticket.

"'Our readers will of course be anxious to know all about this party, its principles, and objects. We regret that we cannot enlighten them any further than that it is said to be rapidly gaining ground so much so, that not many months more will probably pass before, in every city, town, and village, it

will have a lodgment not to be rooted out. Even perhaps at the moment that some of our country readers may be perusing this article, the Know Nothing society will have planted its standard near to their own firesides, and their next-door neighbors may have united themselves to the person or persons properly authorized to make auxiliary organizations. So soon as this is done, we presume that every man of proper standing and patriotic principles will have the opportunity of getting more information than we can give him, and, if so disposed, unite himself to the party.

"'Many of our readers heretofore have been disposed to ridicule the matter, and we do not know but we have to some extent been guilty of the same thing; but all such persons, we doubt not, are, with ourselves, beginning to have their eyes more widely open as to the reality and popularity of the movement, and are viewing it in a vastly more serious light.

"'One point there is about it that has caused *us, individually*, no little trouble. At every tea table, wives, mothers, sweethearts, sisters, and daughters are discussing the subject with considerable interest. They have somehow obtained the information that the whole affair is a mammoth club concern, having more secrets and wonderful things incidental to it than all the orders of Masons and Odd Fellows through the country; and the result is, that we poor fellows are already nearly pinched blue to "tell" if we are "one of 'em," and what are all the secrets. We have never seen a man yet who tells us he is a

member; yet, like invisible spirits, they hover around us, about us, and on every hand.'"

This was the first definite intelligence which most of the listeners had received on the subject. In fact it had been but a day or two since the first whisperings of the matter had been heard in town. The effect of the information may in part be imagined. For a moment or two nobody seemed disposed to say a word, but all stood in that position of open-mouthed astonishment which would make a picture for an artist. As if by magic, the universal thought turned upon Lamont, and a looker on might have noticed their eyes involuntarily turning up the road whither he had gone.

"Then it is possible," said a very respectable man of the village, breaking the silence, "that we even now have this thing in operation amongst us; and, for aught we all know, some of us sitting around here may already be enrolled, but will not make it known."

Every man's eye immediately turned to his neighbor, as though, if this were so, they would look it out of him at once.

"I don't see that any body *flinches*," said the same speaker, laughing, "unless it is Worthy Ike. Does it not seem to any of you that he looks as if he knew something that he wants very much to tell, but dare not do it?"

No doubt Ike wished the charge were true; but he was forced to plead "Not guilty."

"It may be so," replied he; "but if it is, it is more than I know of just now."

'O, yes," cried half a dozen, none of whom, however, indulged the slightest suspicion adverse to what he said,—"O, yes; didn't this paper just now tell us that they all say the same thing? Come, come, old Worthy, own up, now, tell us all about it, and we'll all join you right off."

"My opinion is," replied he, very gravely, "that the two gentlemen who went up street from here together a little while ago could tell us something about it if they would. You may depend upon it that that man Lamont is here with some project on his hands that he intends to work out without any noise."

"Ned Buford a Know Nothing!" cried two or three of the younger gentlemen. "Ha! ha! that will do right well. Ah, no, Worthy; you're the man, and you must let us know it forthwith."

"Well, we'll see about it some of these days," replied he, half disposed to encourage the assertion; "and if the right time comes, I'll tell you all you want to know; but if you'll all take my advice, you'll keep your eyes on that stranger. You know that old Ike *knows* a thing or two——"

"Just what we were saying," cried they, interrupting him almost uproariously; "that's just what we were saying; we don't doubt at all that you know *more* than a thing or two. All that we are *now* objecting to is, that you won't let *us* know also."

"As I was saying," continued he, without appearing to notice the interruption, "you all know that I *do* know a thing or two, and you'll all see that this

man is the one who has this Know Nothing business in his hands. And you may set me down just exactly for one of the sort of Know Nothings that don't know nothing at all, if it don't turn out just as I tell you now."

"Seriously speaking," said the gentleman who had read the article from the newspaper, "we have good reason to believe that Worthy Ike's suggestion is worthy to be considered. I know nothing ——"

Every body laughed, and the speaker himself joined it when he thought of what he was saying, but quickly continued: —

"Yes, I must say I *know nothing* of this Mr. Lamont, having not yet been so fortunate as our young friends Perkins and Buford, who seem to have almost made his intimate acquaintance; but I should not at all wonder if he is the man. There is something about him which perhaps none of you have noticed as closely as myself. I'll guaranty that he can already tell to a nicety the character of every man in this place who has been two minutes under his eye. I have seen him reading faces, as plain as ever one of you has seen another reading a book; and it has struck me when I have seen him so engaged, and since I have heard of these Know Nothings, that he is in the connection, and is laying his own plans in his own way. However, there is nothing easier than for us all to be mistaken; and if we have any determined prejudices against the society before we know what it is, we had better not fix it in our minds that this Mr. Lamont is the man, and thus form improper prejudices against *him*."

"I do not know," replied a gentleman very near to the other, "that any of us *can* form unfavorable opinions of this society with any consistency. We have no reason for supposing that there is any thing connected with it that is separate from good morals or inimical to true patriotic feeling. I have heard it spoken of as having nothing of the special political platform of either of the great opposing parties, but joined in heartily by good men of both sides, who have looked upon it as embracing deeper interests than those which have kept them separated thus far — men, too, it is said, of all ranks, and of the highest intellectual standing, whose views are worthy of consideration."

"Ah, indeed!" cried somebody; "how do you know that? Are *you* one of them?"

"Well, according to what we hear as to the very secret character of the thing," replied the gentleman, "my *denial* of any such connection would amount to nothing. But with reference to the character of many of those who are in the league, I suppose it would very soon become matter of general information, even when *names* would never be mentioned. I can conceive of a great many ways whereby this general intelligence may be spread by a man sworn to secrecy, from whom you might immediately ask twenty questions, and be none the wiser for all the answers you might receive. For instance, you might ask him first if he is a member of the Know Nothing society; and this not being in fact the *name* of the party, he can tell you, 'No.' It may be an organization that knows *every thing*,

having unbounded sources of information under its control, and his affirmative reply to the answer you propose would be an absolute untruth. Again: if this society has powerful interests in hand, and is thoroughly and judiciously organized, it may have its runners and intentional falsifiers, who, with much pretended hesitation, are quietly circulating its pretended principles among the uninitiated, representing it as at work in opposition to some specified religion or religions, when the fact may be that it has no designs upon any sect or creed. Or, possibly, we might hear it blazed abroad that the Know Nothing party — a mere sham name to blind outsiders — is to wage war upon all foreigners, hurl them from any and all of the unparalleled privileges which they enjoy, when the order does not contemplate any such object. Again: we might have it told us that the whole affair was a grand secret scheme of abolitionism, having immediate connection with the wonderful under-ground railroad; or, the very reverse of this, that it was a terrible slavery plot, the victims of which are to be abolitionists and runaway negroes; all of which may be just as near to the truth as we are to the moon. How easily, too, might it be reported that it is the genuine secret conclave of filibusters and annexationists, who are laying their schemes deep and wide for some sudden and overwhelming descent upon foreign territory, which it would be very profitable for them individually, and us as a nation, to acquire! There would be no impropriety at all in any of such persons circulating the information as to the general high standing and

influence of those who are members; and the next most likely thing would be, that they would start all sorts of counter reports as to the plans and objects of the society, for the very purpose of deceiving those who are not of them, and to divert attention from the special purpose they design to carry out."

"You are of opinion, then," said another speaker, "that it will be useless for any of us to make effort to find out any more than we already know?"

"I am, decidedly," replied he. "If *I* were called upon to assist in the framing of a plan for the accomplishment of any purpose, the means and objects to be kept secret, I would certainly have all the arrangements of such a nature that the whole that any body could report would be mere surmise. Contemplating, as in the case of the society in question, an endless amount of inquiry, I would have all the range of supposable interrogation before me, and, with reference to it, would frame answers and evasions that would at once be consistent with truth, and prevent any man from having to acknowledge that he had any connection with it. These answers should be such, that, the more of them the interrogator would receive, the more would he be in the dark, and infinitely farther from having any definite knowledge than when he began. And yet he might *suppose* that he had handsomely worried all the necessary information out of his friend, or from some unsophisticated person, and go away chuckling over the wonderful dexterity of his manœuvres, while at the same moment *he* was the party *sold*. You may depend upon it, gentlemen, that if this Know Noth-

ing society is one having important interests involved, with men connected with it of intelligence and worth, it just as surely had able heads at its inception, and has been started under auspices too potent to be laughed at or successfully resisted."

"But don't you suppose," asked somebody, "that it may be expected there will be traitors in the camp, who join either as spies, or, having honestly united, yield to some pique or prejudice, and make an *exposé* of the whole affair, thus letting it be known, notwithstanding the precautions you have suggested?"

"Great exigencies," answered the gentleman, "demand great actions. And so would it have to be in the formation of such a society as this. We will suppose that those of us sitting here have for months or years past witnessed the growth of some evil in our midst, moral or political, and we unite ourselves together for its suppression. There might be circumstances attending such a course which might, if the matter were made public, make a personal hazard for us, each and all. Enmity and bitter feeling might be arrayed against us to such an extent that our property, our homes, and our persons would be put in danger. Foreseeing such results, it would be incumbent on us to guard well the entrance to our society. Candidates would have to be known, their views and feelings carefully sounded, and time given them, before we would admit them to our ultimate plans. The route to this point we would have circuitous, hedged by vigilant sentinels ever on the alert, though to the candidate unknown;

and at the entrance and along the way we would have feeble lights, pointing only to preliminary principles and plans; so that he who retreated, even from the door of the ultimate chamber, would do so under apprehensions not calculated to excite the ill will of any, and far remote from what we did not want to be known. But with reference to the contingency of exposure, we would have ourselves enclosed in a wall of obligations the most solemn, and with every consideration of honor, good name, and bright prospects committed in the pledge. Every man then would be so situated that the violation of his sacred pledge would involve him in ruin more dire than were pestilence, fire, and famine to come upon him. Look at the result to him; he exposes those who have put their dearest interests in his hands. Will not *they* cast him off, branded as a truthless wretch whom none can ever trust again? Would they not look upon him with a scorn and contempt too withering for the soul of *a man* to endure? Look, too, at those who, proscribed from membership, or not wishing it from motives of their own, — with a willing ear they might perhaps listen to what the unprincipled wretch was divulging; but, so soon as their curiosity was gratified, and they concluded they had strained all out of him that it was possible for him to impart, they would turn upon him with loathing, and spurn him forever from them as the basest of the base. A brand would be upon him too terrible to efface; and, though he might for the balance of his days bend with a hearty penitence before his Maker or receive absolution

from a score of popes, from the confidence of his fellow-men he would be forever excluded a place.

"There would be a way, however, whereby we might even guard *this* unhappy exposure, at least so far as its extent was concerned. We might only admit to the inner chamber of our most secret plans men of the most unblemished character, their reputation unstained by any glaring fault, and the associations of their lives having been of such a nature as to make their views unmistakably known. Others, to whom the least doubt might appertain, we would admit only to such degrees of information as might secure their vote, while our purposes and plans, in detail, would be to them unknown."

And thus, in grave discussion of something about which they all knew nothing, did our tavern-door circle continue until the evening was fully spent; then, with the unanimous conclusion that they would know more after a while, they departed to their several homes.

CHAPTER VII.

In the mean time the young gentlemen who, at the commencement of our last chapter, left the hotel in company, were enjoying a very pleasant walk. They were fast becoming inseparable friends, and seemed knit together by a genuine love. And it was not very often that they spent an hour together without having Perkins with them. The latter, however, did not indulge the almost devoted feeling for Lamont that filled the bosom of Edward. He respected and admired him greatly; but he was not a man of that cast of mind which would permit him to hold another in the same affectionate bond with which young Buford encircled those whom he once concluded worthy of his regard.

They had walked beyond the more densely settled portion of the village, and were seated on a pretty little spur of the hills on the eastern side of the valley, where they could overlook all the vicinity, inclusive of the star-reflecting and peaceful lake.

"Edward," said Lamont, "several days have now past since I came here; and, had it not been for yourself and one or two others, it might have been that I should have been without friends to assist me in passing my time pleasantly away."

"I hardly agree with you," replied the young

man. "Indeed, I am quite sure that, had neither Perkins nor myself sought your acquaintance, Quizville is not so entirely destitute of kindly and hospitable feeling as to have permitted yourself or any other man with the marks of a gentleman about him to remain long unnoticed."

"Far be it from me, generous Buford, to pass so very poor a compliment upon the place," answered Lamont, "if we had reference to a gentleman coming among you with the recommendations which you have a right to demand. But, when one comes as *I* came, it is a different thing. I do not doubt at all that I or any other ordinarily genteel man might go almost any where and very soon draw about him a circle of *bar-room* friends, or fall in with others who, strangers like himself, would be drawn towards him by a common feeling of sympathy. This, however, is the kind of friendship which I am but little disposed to accept. Perhaps in this respect I am particular to a degree which savors not of courtesy and sociability; but others exercise their tastes, and I do the same."

"Which makes me esteem you more highly, perhaps, than I otherwise would," exclaimed Edward, warmly.

"Thank you. Instead of the not very desirable friendships of a promiscuous acquaintance, you, standing here in the best circle of the place, and with hosts of friends to come to your every call, have stepped forward and favored me with a courtesy which, under the circumstances, I had no right to expect."

"And have had a friendship in return that has made *me* infinitely the gainer."

"Do not be too complimentary, my dear friend; you do not know me yet, and cannot say that you have not been throwing away your generous heart on one entirely unworthy of the trust."

Buford's head dropped thoughtfully on his breast.

"I have often wondered," continued Lamont, "what are your thoughts and your friend Perkins's concerning me. You have each many times given me intimations that you would like to know who I am, where from, and what my object in remaining here so long. Will you believe me if I tell you that to all these questions I could give you satisfactory replies?"

"I will," cried Edward, his countenance quickly brightening, as he grasped Lamont's hand, — "I will, indeed; and it has been to me matter of regret that you did not do so at the first."

"Are you so much interested in me?"

"Can you doubt it, Mr. Lamont?" asked Edward, reproachfully.

"I cannot, certainly, he replied; "yet you will think it strange when I tell you that, for the present, I cannot give you any further enlightenment concerning myself than you already possess."

A shade passed over Edward's countenance at once.

"There are circumstances," continued Lamont, "which will compel me to remain unknown, as I have been, for a short time at least; after which *you*, my kind young friend, shall be made acquainted

with such matters connected with my history and plans as will enable you to decide whether I shall be longer honored with your friendship. It is not for me to say what your decision will be; but in the mean time I will hope that the kind feeling hitherto existing between us, as also that which I hope there is between your friend Mr. Perkins and myself, will not be disturbed."

"I fully reciprocate your wishes in this respect," Edward replied; "yet I cannot but regret that I am still to remain in ignorance of that which I so much desire to know. I freely confess — what I doubt not your own discernment has made plain enough to you — that you have inspired me with a respect and admiration that I cannot have for every one. When first I saw you I was interested; when I became acquainted with you I was greatly pleased; and as our acquaintance has advanced, I have every day felt myself charmed and profited by the society of a man whose manners, conversation, and sentiments have been those of the gentleman, the man of principle, and of cultivated mind."

"Do you not consider yourself an adept in flattery?" said Lamont, putting his arm around the confiding youth and drawing him to him with the tenderness of a lover; "and have you forgotten that it is often the case that we are most in danger when on enchanted ground?"

Had it been any one else who had so profusely complimented Lamont, his noble nature would have caused him to be offended with the person bestowing it; but he was willing in the present case to

make much allowance for the ardent and impulsive nature of young Buford. More than this, there were other reasons of his own which made him willing to encourage the most affectionate intercourse between Edward and himself — reasons which will be self-explanatory when we have made further progress in our story.

"It is too true, as you say," replied Edward; "but I trust it will not prove so now. But, with reference to my being profuse in my expression of pure regard, I hope Mr. Lamont will take no offence from my enthusiastic speech. Indeed, I fully believe you will properly understand and appreciate me."

"I do indeed," answered Lamont; "but if I were permitted to give you a very little counsel, prompted by the best motives, I would beg you ever to remember that, to a truly sensitive mind, it is ever unpleasant to listen to lavish praise."

"You are right, sir," said Edward, feeling much dissatisfied with himself for having spoken so fully as he had, "and I fear you are more offended with me than you are disposed to admit."

"I assure you I am not; indeed I feel myself too much under obligation to you to permit any such unimportant matter to give me offence. But enough of this. I have wanted just such a retired opportunity as we now have to converse with you on matters of more moment to you and me."

Edward looked into his face with an expression of surprise. "Matters of moment *to me*," exclaimed he, "in connection with *yourself!*"

"Even so," answered Lamont, calmly. "But tell me; you have said that I have your entire confidence. Is it so?"

"You have."

"And I may impart to you in confidence a matter in connection with my visit here, and one, I repeat, in which I, at least, am indissolubly involved?"

"So far as it may be of an honorable nature, you may," replied Buford.

"Ah, you do not trust me, then, implicitly," exclaimed Lamont.

"Have I not said to the contrary?"

"You have; and yet you have qualified the assent you gave to my request. Think you I wish to couple you with myself in any dishonorable transaction, or impart to you any information that a virtuous mind ought not to receive?"

"May there not be circumstances," said Edward, "in which opinions may widely differ as to the character of the action? May not two representatives of opposing powers, for instance, entertain national ideas the very reverse of each other, and yet the one feel that he might in all honor seek to proselyte the other?"

"I grant you that," replied Lamont; "but I am on no such errand. The matter which I have to communicate to you is more local, and is one, in my judgment, perfectly compatible with every principle of honor, virtue, and right. However," continued he, making a motion to rise, "Mr. Buford perhaps wishes to withdraw his asserted confidence, and I had better retire."

"Stay!" cried Edward, earnestly. "You do me wrong in speaking thus. Was it possible for me to decide upon being your confidant until you had pledged me as to the unquestionable propriety and morality of that in which I must necessarily take a part? Had I done so, would you not have esteemed me less? Would you not have looked upon me as rather too eager to become acquainted with what to you it might not be safe for me to know?"

"I admit the correctness of what you say," returned Lamont, composing himself again in his seat, "and respect your prudence. Yet I am on a mission which also demands penetration and caution, and must not be too hastily committed to other hands. I cannot, however, confide this matter to you without the most solemn pledge of secrecy and effective coöperation. Do you consent to listen on these terms?"

"I do."

Lamont rose and uncovered his head. Edward mechanically followed his example.

"You will give me your hand," said Lamont, extending his.

Edward did so, but at the same time there was an undefinable sensation of dread that filled his bosom. It was night—the time when any such transaction as the one in which these young men were about to engage is naturally shrouded in a graver and more solemn aspect than at any other time. All of the strange surmisings that had continually been filling the mind of Edward in respect to Lamont, and the many conjectures expressed by

others, came full upon him in a moment of time. And to what, with this mysterious stranger, might he not be committing himself? "I am not yet to know who he is," thought he, "yet I am about to be made acquainted with what I am not to communicate to my dearest friends." There Lamont stood before him, the very personification of a noble-looking man, with a countenance and an eye that bespoke no connection with trifling affairs. And that speaking, searching dark eye was bent upon Edward's, as though it would penetrate the very recesses of the young man's thoughts. It is not to be wondered at that strange emotions should cause his bosom to heave; and indeed it required no little nerve to look composedly on the now stern man who stood looking so fixedly upon him.

"You here pledge me your word of honor," said Lamont, gravely, "that, in any matters which I may now or hereafter communicate to you, you will remain faithful to me and the cause which I represent. You promise, as an honorable man, that you will not divulge to any person or persons neither the whole nor any part of the affairs of this cause until you have personal permission from myself or those properly authorized to give it; and you furthermore promise that you will earnestly and diligently coöperate with me in all I have to perform, it being understood that these labors are loyal to our country, sound morality, and the interests of our fellow-men. All this you faithfully promise, as a man of honor, without mental reservation of any kind whatever."

"I promise," said Edward, firmly.

Lamont again seated himself, and Edward placed himself beside him.

"And now, my dear Buford," said the former, "we are united by a strong bond of friendship, and by me, perhaps more than yourself, is the full force of this tie appreciated. It is *I* upon whom the confidence has been bestowed, and it is I alone that as yet understand the nature of our near relation. If there is in your mind a lingering feeling of doubt, let it be at once dispelled. Thus far you have known me as a stranger; henceforth let us know each other only as friends. I am sorry to say that, so far as the immediate and full acquaintance with my mission and its objects are concerned, you will be disappointed. Yet I trust you will exercise patience, and an implicit confidence that at the proper time—not long hence—you shall know all. For the present, it must suffice for you to learn that I am deputed to this place from an order of great numbers and influence, the objects of which order are the entire overthrow of certain evils, and the establishment of better things in their place. The *name* of this order I cannot tell you now; *but hear me.* I have information to impart that *will startle you*, information that will cause your bosom to thrill with emotions that you have never experienced before. Ah, do not start and look incredulous. It will be even as I tell you.

"But now let me say something concerning myself."

"Thank you," exclaimed Edward; "on this point

I am all impatience. With regard to the other matter, I am content to wait your time; but with reference to yourself, it seems to me that I feel myself so increasingly bound up in you that I cannot wait. And you must not, in consequence, suppose that I doubt you, but because *I fully confide in you*, and will do so until your own actions shall forbid it."

"And were I to trample upon your generous confidence, I should despise myself," returned Lamont. "I am happy to say to you—although you can have nothing but my word for it—that I am, in birth, education, circumstances, both social and pecuniary, all that would recommend me to any society to which I may wish to be presented."

"So I have fully believed," said Buford, interrupting him; "and so far as I am individually concerned, I would, ere now, have taken pleasure in introducing you. But ——"

"Pardon my interruption," continued Lamont. "I fully understand you. You have sisters."

"You are right."

"And you have parents, who guard the admissions to their acquaintance. Better far would it be were there more families in which this same vigilance were maintained. Do not suppose that I have felt unkindly to you on this account. Indeed I have respected you more; and should the time come that I may be received to your father's family, I shall only think that I am admitted to a society consistent with my tastes. For the past four or five years I have made myself a citizen of the world, ever on the wing, and seeking for knowledge and information that I could not obtain by remaining at home. With unlimited means at my disposal, I have sought every clime, and might, perhaps, write a book of incidents connected with my lately checkered life that would be in no small degree entertaining, and perhaps profitable, to any who might be disposed to read it. For three years I have been in Europe, and have even wandered as far as among the antiquities and curiosities of the Holy Land; and now that I am returned to my native country, fully prepared and determined to fix myself in some permanent habitation, it is no small trial to me that I have been put on this mission, which for a time prevents me from enjoying myself amid the endearments of the old home fireside, to which I have been a stranger so long."

"Have you parents?" asked Edward.

"I have," replied he, struggling in vain to hide his rising emotion.

"Sisters and brothers?"

"Ay, such as any man may love and prize."

"Then I congratulate you," cried Buford, with an earnest sympathy; "and I congratulate *them* on having such a son and brother."

Lamont rose from his seat and paced the turf, evidently under deep excitement. Edward feared to intrude further questions upon him, not knowing but he had already probed farther than was agreeable to his friend.

"Suppose we walk," said Lamont; and in a moment more, joined arm in arm, they were on their return.

"Is it your intention," asked Edward, "to admit our friend Perkins to this private order?"

"I was just about to speak to you on that very point," answered Lamont. "What think you? Will he be willing to accede to the terms?"

"I am sure that he will, and do not doubt that he will do so with less hesitation than myself. His eager nature will induce him to make compact with you, if for nothing more than to learn what you have to reveal."

"But is there no danger that he may not esteem the matter too lightly for my purpose?"

"Possibly he might, so far as any advantage to yourself or your cause is concerned; but, with respect to his fully maintaining his pledge, he would almost challenge you for expressing a doubt."

"Very well; are you willing to broach the subject to him?"

"Why, the fact is," replied Edward, smiling, "I have so little to broach that I hardly know that I can do it to advantage."

"You have all that is necessary for an introduction, and I will commit it to you to perform. But be careful; advance cautiously, lest he be not so ready as you suppose. When next we meet I shall hope for a favorable report. But here is your door, and I will not subject you to the courtesy of accompanying me farther. Good night."

They shook hands cordially and parted.

CHAPTER VIII.

In the cool of the following afternoon Lamont started from his hotel to enjoy a walk alone. Onward he went, without seeming to know where, or without having any definite route in his mind. Before going a great distance he came upon a prettily-shaded road, striking off almost parallel with that on which he first entered the village in the old coach. It was a road upon which he had not yet been, walking or riding, and opened to him as especially inviting for a quiet stroll. He took it, passed through the archway of venerable trees, and soon found himself ascending the hill. The latter, at this point, was neither very high nor steep; consequently he soon reached the top and descended the other side. At the foot of the hill, on the side where he now was, ran a creek — quiet, narrow, and deep, circling around the hills, and losing itself in the lake. Across it was a bridge sufficiently wide for two vehicles to pass comfortably, but without railing on either side, and moss covered, as if having been built for a long time. Lamont crossed it. Here he found himself at the foot of a hill more formidable than that which he had passed. The road to the summit was for some distance straight and smooth, albeit too narrow and with too

many deep cuts along its sides to make it either a very safe or pretty drive. Advancing, he ascended perhaps a hundred yards, when he found himself on a sort of bench formation in the hillside, from whence the road continued in a zigzag course — uneven, narrow, and even less inviting as a mere drive than it was on the lower part of the hill. The whole road, however, was in steady use; and even as Lamont walked he was passed to and fro by farmers' teams and others, that were conveying produce and merchandise to and from the village. The vicinity of this level spot affording many inviting little resting places, he seated himself on a fallen tree, in a refreshing shade, drew a book from his pocket, and began to read. Becoming absorbed with what he was perusing, he forgot the fleeting moments, and was not a little surprised when he found that the shadows of evening had fallen so thickly that with all his diligence the twilight would be upon him ere he could reach his hotel. He quickly rose, pocketed his book, and began his return. In the descent of the hill, although charmed with his otherwise delightful walk, he could not help forming in his mind the unfavorable contrast which this road made to all the others in the vicinity of the village. There were some points where the event of an unmanageable horse might make very serious work. He drew a freer breath when he remembered that he had here seen no riding parties, making it evident that restive horses and pleasure seekers generally made their sporting ground elsewhere. He reached the foot of the descent, and

was just about stepping on the bridge, when he heard the rapid motion of some light vehicle far up the hill. The blood forsook his cheeks as the thought of a possible runaway team came quick to his mind, and he turned to listen with the most eager interest. Terrible as the thought was, it was even true, as he had feared. What should he do? With the quick perception of a sagacious mind, he decided. He could accomplish nothing by running back and attempting to stop the horse or horses on the hill. Even should he succeed in this, it could not be otherwise than very hazardous to whoever might be riding, as well as to himself; for the sudden arrest would be certain to injure some one. He feared that in the decision which he was compelled to make there would be no call for his services so far as making an effort to stop the horses was concerned; the great probability was, that horses, vehicle, and occupants would be dashed to pieces long before they reached the spot where he was. Should it be, however, by any favorable circumstance, that they came safely to the bridge, they would then be in a peril even greater than that which they escaped — even the danger of being cast from the bridge into the deep water below. Lamont's decision was, to wait their coming, and, by the greatest effort of which he might be master, to stop the runaway before it should gain the bridge. This was the wiser conclusion; for, should the vehicle be upset, broken in pieces, or in any way harmed while yet on the hillside, he could quickly reach it, and render all the assistance which the case might demand.

Lamont had not more than made his decision when he was yet more startled by the most agonizing screams, and from female voices. Gloomy as the woods were becoming from the increasing darkness, the echoes of these cries of terror made the manly heart of the listener to throb with a fearful dread.

"Ladies in such terrible peril as this!" cried he, his whole frame quivering with manly sympathy. "God have mercy on them! for there can be little hope elsewhere. And O, if——"

The sentence died on his lips, and in a moment more the frightened horses came dashing into view at frightful speed. With a feeling of horror he saw at a glance who were in the carriage, it being open. They were a young lady and a little girl. Quickly recognizing the horses, he at once knew that *the sisters of his friend Perkins* were they whom there was a possibility that he might save from a terrible death! Every muscle of his fine frame grew rigid; a calm determination settled upon his face; and he looked resolute as some iron-shielded warrior denying the passage of a foe.

By one of those singular interventions of a kind Providence in which we oftentimes see an overhanging and almost certain calamity turned away from its deed, the horses reached the foot of the hill—themselves, carriage, and ladies unharmed! Like some light plaything, the vehicle had bounded from side to side of the road, here striking something that threw it nearly at right angles with the horses, and there being well nigh upset. Yet, strange to say, it

came safely down. There was now a short piece of rising ground before the bridge would be attained, in passing over which the speed of the horses was considerably checked. The young lady saw Lamont, and imploringly cried for help; the little girl was clinging to the carriage side, a picture of the wildest terror, and aghast at the prospect of being drawn upon and then hurled from the bridge. Lamont clinched his teeth with a double desperation; he waved his hand to the poor sufferers, as a pledge of his assistance; and, with a well-poised bound, like the spring of a tiger, he darted at the horses' heads. His aim was unfailing; his iron grasp, aided by their powerful curbs, brought the horses round, from which they fell upon their haunches; the carriage turned upon its side, and the young ladies were thrown upon the ground, the limbs of the child being caught beneath the wheel.

It was all the work of an instant, and it remained now to see what were the injuries received.

"Ah, sir! my sister! my sister!" cried the young lady, while the screams of the dear child were renewed with new force. The horses were fearfully restive, and it required all Lamont's power to prevent them from plunging off again with the carriage, the wheel of which might dreadfully mangle the child. With an astonishing heroism, Miss Perkins, after in vain trying to raise the wheel from her sister, went to the horses' bits!

"I can hold them, sir," said she, with a quick and determined manner. "O, add to your great kindness that of relieving that dear child! Will you,

sir? *Quick! quick!*" continued she, seeing Lamont's hesitation at leaving her where both herself and sister might receive greater damage.

"I fear to do so, for the sake of both of you," said he.

"The horses know me," she replied, agitated at a moment's delay; "and you have now so quieted them that I can easily retain them."

"May the Lord preserve you and her if they bound!" returned he, yielding to her urgency, and seeing that it was a necessary though dangerous course. She seized the lines of each of the horses short by the bits, and planted herself before them with a determination that even *they* were capable of understanding. In a moment more Lamont had removed the carriage from the child, and had her in his arms, making the most delicate and soothing inquiries as to the nature of her hurts. By this time the driver came up, righted the carriage, and took the horses from Miss Perkins, who sank exhausted and fainting at the feet of Lamont.

Nervous with affright, the child continued to cling to her preserver, as though she did not yet feel that the danger was past. So soon as the driver secured his horses and saw the condition of the young lady, he hastily brought a tin cup from the carriage box, filled it with water from the creek, and sprinkled it darlingly upon her face. She soon revived, looked wildly around, and seemed for a moment unable to comprehend her situation. Quickly, however, her eye fell upon her sister, whom Lamont, having seated himself, was still holding in his arms. With a

bound, and for the moment entirely unheeding any thing else, she fell upon her knees beside her.

"O Netty! Netty!" cried she, in an agony, "dearest Netty, are you safe — are *you* safe?" Then, turning her eyes to Lamont's, "O sir, I cannot thank you as I would for your great kindness. We will remember you ever with the warmest gratitude, and ——"

She hesitated, but soon began again, her thoughts turning with a devoted solicitude to the precious sufferer beside whom she knelt.

"Has she received much injury, do you think, sir?" asked she, her eye eagerly drinking the expression of his, as though she would therefrom anticipate his reply. "O Netty, darling Netty, look at your sister. Tell us, sweet one, are you much hurt?"

"I do not think there is much reason to fear for her," said Lamont; then, looking tenderly upon the child, "Will you try and walk a little, Netty, so that we may see if your limbs have been injured?"

With the moan of a suffering child, the little creature made the attempt to comply with his request. Her complaint was only of a soreness of the limbs; and it was evident that her injuries were but such as simple applications would remove.

"Thanks to our Father in heaven!" exclaimed Miss Perkins; "and O, sir, how much we owe to you!"

By this time the driver had brought another cup of water, of which the sisters drank, and were refreshed. The result was, that the bruises of neither were very severe.

It was not until now that Lamont began to discover that he had sustained himself injuries which, from the increasing pain, he feared might turn out more serious than all the balance of the affair. He was thankful, however, that he had been just in time to effect the preservation of the sisters, even had he been hurt tenfold more than he was. The excitement of the affair, in intense interest as to the result, had until now kept him from turning his thoughts upon himself. His right arm became almost powerless, and his side felt sore and swollen as from a prodigious blow. He had entirely forgotten that, at the moment he seized the horses, the carriage pole dealt him a thrust that did not fall very much short of breaking some of his ribs.

Miss Perkins quickly detected the painful expression of his face, and saw the movements which he was making with his arm, as if he would hide from her the fact that he had any solicitude for himself.

"You are the one, sir," cried she, her eyes swimming in tears, "upon whom, I fear, the worst consequences of this disaster have fallen. You have been suffering, perhaps terribly, all the time, and have kept it from us."

"It would be idle," said he, "for me to say that I have entirely escaped. My arm and side, it is true, feel as if I had been struck severely on the one and sprained the other. But I think I may confidently say that I shall soon recover from the whole. But it is growing late. Are you willing to risk your horses again? Your driver says that the carriage has not been so much injured but that you can ride safely in it."

"O, certainly," she replied, and with less timidity as to the horses than Lamont had expected; "if the carriage is serviceable, we will of course resume our seats. I am aware to whom we are so greatly indebted, and will of course expect that Mr. Lamont will accompany us home." And she stepped towards the carriage as confidently as though the idea of his declining did not come into her mind. He assisted the young ladies to their seats, and, ungallant as he felt the action, began to close the door with an appearance of bidding them good evening.

"I must insist," said she, "that you take a seat with us. Present circumstances fully justify me in putting all ceremony aside while I urge the privilege of presenting the gentleman who has so gallantly succored us to my parents."

This was the very thing that Lamont wished to avoid — at least for the present; but courtesy demanded that he should now see that the sisters reached their home safely. It was nearly dark; the distance to his lodgings was considerable; his bruises were becoming increasingly painful; and last, though not least, the anxious pleadings of the beautiful girl before him were not to be resisted. He took the seat. The fact was, that, as to the necessity of their being where they could receive the proper attention, the whole three were more in need than they had as yet supposed.

"The recognition made is a mutual one," said Lamont, as soon as they were fairly started. "I am aware that it is Miss Perkins whom I have the pleas-

ure of attending. But may I ask by what means she learned who I was?"

"By no very difficult operation," replied the young lady. "A stranger in Quizville is soon known, at least by name, to every body, far and wide. More than this, my brother has spoken of you in the family, until we have all almost felt that we were acquainted with you. He has purposed inviting you home; but his intention is now entirely forestalled, as we shall henceforth look upon you, not merely as an acquaintance, *but a friend*, towards whom we must ever entertain the warmest feelings of gratitude and thanks."

"It will indeed give me great pleasure," said Lamont, "to be so favored; yet it will cause me some unpleasantness, lest the time come when you may feel that you must retain me on your list of friends simply because you may feel yourselves under an obligation to me. However, I shall hope for better results."

Charlotte Perkins had heard much more of Lamont than she chose just now to let him know. The very handsome man before her, in whose every word and gesture there were the unmistakable marks of the genuine gentleman, had been talked of in her presence, and she had joined in the conversation until his name was becoming to her familiar as that of some established friend. Then, too, there was the mystery in which his stay, not less than his advent in the village, had been continually enveloped. This was in itself sufficient to make him an object of increasing interest to her.

Yet was there another cause. During the very short time that he had been with her, she had several times noticed his full, dark eyes turned upon her with an expression that seemed to have a connection with something in the past. Ah, it was not wonderful that an interest should be excited in his behalf in the feelings of even a less susceptible young lady than Charlotte Perkins. Lamont sat before her in the easy, graceful position of his nature; his form tall, erect, and modelled to perfection; his finely-chiselled face beaming with intelligence, dignity, and conscious virtue; his eye full, searching, and anon melancholy; his dress rich, tasteful, and becoming. To the profuse expression of gratitude for and laudation of the brave action just performed, which Miss Perkins poured upon him, he returned no sickly disclaimer of merit, but received all with the calm dignity so foreign to the vain pretender, who would seek to have a small courtesy magnified so as to make it in the end a matter of extensive profit. It is no wonder, then, that what was formerly mere curiosity quickly gave place to admiration for one in whom, to Miss Perkins's woman's eye, so many graces of mind and person were so harmoniously blended.

And little Netty, too, was fast losing *her* heart. When Lamont had seated himself in the carriage, Netty was already lying with her head pressed to her sister's bosom, uttering little childish sobs of pain. Lamont asked her if she would not sit with him. "Your sister," said he, "may be suffering from bruises, and it may not be well that she have

even the weight of *your* dear little head upon her. You had better sit with me, and I will hold you very gently, so that you may ride comfortably, and without suffering from the motion of the carriage."

Netty, struck with the suggestion of her burdening her sister, who was a sufferer with herself, raised her tear-bedimmed eyes to Charlotte's.

"I think you had better ride as you are," said Miss Perkins, answering both at once. "When Mr. Lamont spoke of your being too much of a load for me, he forgot to tell you that he himself is perhaps the most injured of us all."

"I think I will have to exercise a little authority in this case," answered Lamont, with a smile that asked forgiveness if he was too bold. "Miss Netty has already been in my arms, and is indeed such a pleasant burden that I desire to renew the pleasurable task." And he took her with all tenderness upon his knee, placed her head upon his bosom, and with the gentlest and most soothing manner strove to relieve her pain and check her tears. Lying against his heart, each of its strong vibrations seemed to quicken her love for him; and as she listened to his conversation, his full yet gentle voice gradually gained melody to her ear, until at length her sobs were hushed. There is that about childhood which is keenly conscious of the presence of those whom it may respect. There are manners which it recognizes and actions which it observes, no matter whether in stranger or parent, that quickly excite feelings of like or dislike. It is not to be deceived. He who thinks to play falsely with a

child, must learn to guard every movement, every word, every expression of face and eye, else the little keen observer will, sooner or later, discover the fraud, and give very decided evidence of the fact.

In good time they reached the family mansion, at the gate of which well nigh the whole household were standing, strangely wondering at the delay. The first to spring to the carriage door to meet them was Jasper. His astonishment at seeing Lamont therein, with Netty in his arms, was beyond all bounds. Instinctively he cast his eye around the carriage, over which splinters and dirt were sufficiently scattered to convince him that all was not right. Perkins loved his sisters most sincerely. Charlotte he looked upon — and very justly — as one possessed of such graces of mind, heart, and person, that she was fit to be a queen. And Netty, — she was a little idol, at whose shrine he worshipped all the day: she was the dear creature who clung daily to his neck, kissed his fine forehead, and caressed his waving hair.

"What has happened?" cried he, wildly, the blood forsaking his cheek, and leaving him almost ghastly with apprehension. "*And you here, Mr. Lamont! What is it?*" And question after question rolled forth from him so rapidly that there did not seem to be a prospect of his getting a very early answer to any of them; nor did it look as though he expected any, for his whole soul seemed absorbed in Netty, conjecturing as he did, from seeing her in Lamont's arms, that, whatever the disaster had been, its consequences had centred upon her.

He snatched her from Lamont's arms almost rudely; and as he stepped backward with her from the carriage, a general burst of grief and weeping arose from the parents and other members of the family, including servants, all of whom had been for the last half hour assembled about the gate, anxiously awaiting the young ladies' return.

Colonel Perkins instantly stepped forward to assist Charlotte, and met Lamont just as he alighted. The two gentlemen bowed politely, and Charlotte spoke.

"The gentleman is Mr. Lamont, father," said she; "at the imminent peril of his life, he has saved Netty's life and mine. None of us, unless it be Mr. Lamont, are much hurt; but I fully believe, had it not been for his timely aid, we would not have been here as well as we are."

The old gentleman grasped Lamont's hand with an ardor that told his unbounded thanks: his eyes swam in tears, and he became too full to speak. Jasper, too, having had Netty forced from him by her almost frantic mother, and ascertaining very soon that matters were not half equal to his fears, hearing what Charlotte had said, threw his arms about Lamont's neck with a gratitude too fervent for words. In fact, so ardent was the embrace that the full shining of the hall lamplight on Lamont's face revealed the distortions of his face, telling plainly enough that he was in pain.

"You are hurt!" cried Jasper, for the moment forgetting all else.

Lamont turned to hand Charlotte from the carriage; but her father had anticipated the action while Jasper had been encircling his friend in his arms.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Charlotte, trying to make them believe that she was entirely unharmed; "what a loving brother you are! You are hugging Netty and Mr. Lamont like a wild fellow; while I, poor creature! am left without sympathy if half killed, or congratulation if safe!"

Thrice happy girl! She well knew that a dozen hearts, from that of her venerated father to the smallest servant, were beating with an eager joy that *she* was returned safely to them. And Jasper, brought to himself by her playful reproach, pressed her to his heart, and with an unspeakable delight impressed a brother's kiss upon her pretty, pouting lips. He turned again, however, quickly to Lamont.

"Come," said he, "we are wasting time here. I shall be in a furor of excitement until I know the full extent you are injured and have seen you under proper attention." And he commenced drawing Lamont towards the house.

"Gently, Perkins!" whispered the latter, not wishing that the others should hear him. "I am indeed very sore, but you must not let them know it. Come with me to my room."

"Indeed I will not," answered Perkins, quickly, and really hurt that Lamont should propose it. "You shall go to *my* room, and shall be nursed by *my* hands, when gentler ones are not near."

To resist was useless. Lamont was at once encircled by the entire family, excepting the old lady,

who, accompanied by a servant, had flown to the house with Netty, and was forced as by a solid phalanx to the house. A very short time more and he was upon Perkins's bed, his arm and side bare, and his bruises fully exposed to view. In the mean time, and while such remedies as were thought proper were applied by one and another to the sufferers, the physician was sent for, who arrived in haste. Then came the quick examinations, soon made; next the immediate application of such remedies as even a child would know were only adapted to unimportant cases; and every body drew a long, happy breath that the total amount of damages was not very great after all. Lamont's injuries were in fact the most serious; his arm was swollen, stiff, and very painful, and not much less so was his side; but a few days' care would probably restore him; and he congratulated himself that he had done so good an action, even had it been at greater cost. Perkins was unceasing in his attentions; the parents were continually loading him with kindness and thanks; Charlotte daily sent him some little delicacy prepared by her own hands; and Netty — dear Netty! — hesitated not, when accompanied by her mother, to bend over his pillow and press loving kisses to his cheeks.

CHAPTER IX.

On the following day the news of the previous evening's disaster spread rapidly through the village. With every repetition the affair was embellished and magnified, until all sorts of terrible reports were in circulation. The family at the Perkins mansion had scarce finished breakfast before some friend came in, almost breathless, to learn the true state of the matter. Then came another and another, each new comer bearing more and more strongly upon his or her countenance indications that they had heard the most startling intelligence of broken heads, mangled limbs, or death in horrible form; and until the hour of noon, at which time the true condition of things had become pretty generally known, the door bell was going continually, and nearly every member of the family had as much as they could do to answer the thousand and one questions that were asked by the eager crowd. And there were very few exceptions among the visitors of those who did not come with a heartfelt interest and with ready hands to do any thing in their power, if their services were needed. There were not two families in Quizville more beloved and respected than those of General Buford and Colonel Perkins. Each of these gentlemen had done their country essential service in days gone by;

and there were many even in the village who could remember trying scenes through which they had passed, led on, patronized, and defended by these venerable sires. And the day had never yet been, although prosperity and honors had been showered upon them, that these families had arrogated to themselves the supremacy of the village, or spurned the poor and needy from their doors. When the young ladies walked abroad together, — and they were sisters in heart, — every face greeted them with a smile, and many a blessing was bestowed upon them.

There was, therefore, one universal feeling of sorrow when the report spread, as it did in some instances, that Charlotte Perkins was killed, or very dangerously hurt. Every countenance was shaded with sadness. Judge, then, the joyful surprise to those who entered the house when they were smilingly received by the dear girl in person, and saw no evidence of any serious accident having occurred to her save a coquettish little bandage diagonally encircling her face! Little Netty, too, was hugged, and kissed, and passed from hand to hand, the few bruises about her eye and face gaining for her heaps of sympathy, accompanied with hearty congratulations that she had fared no worse.

Among the earliest visitors were Emily and Cornelia Buford, with their brother. The moment the news came to them, the whole three left every thing, and, without hardly waiting for bonnets or hat, they hurried over. Fearful apprehensions were pictured on their faces; so much so, that, when Charlotte met them, she could not forbear bursting into a laugh.

Instantly apologizing for so doing, she told them the whole story; at the conclusion of which Edward bolted up to Perkins's room with just as little ceremony as he would have gone to his own.

"My dear Lamont," cried he, scarcely noticing Jasper, who sat upon the foot of the bed, "I am rejoiced to find that matters are no worse with you than they are. We were told that Miss Perkins was terribly injured, and that you were lying so mangled that you could not possibly live!"

Lamont and Perkins laughed outright.

"But to tell you the truth," continued Buford, "I am confounded glad that the thing has happened!"

"The mischief you are!" said Lamont, quickly turning upon him a look of surprise. "Confounded glad of it, eh? Please to tell us why, will you?"

"Because you will not hereafter be merely Jasper's friend and mine in the street and at your room, but our friend *at home*, united to us by strong ties that nothing can sever. Is not this reason sufficient?"

"Yes," replied Lamont, "provided that something does not very soon occur to make you as much *regret* the friendship as you are now pleased to say you prize it."

"What circumstance *can* occur, Mr. Lamont," exclaimed Perkins, "that would endanger this friendship? Surely we may safely hope that you are a gentleman in whom we may confide, and at any rate no fugitive from justice, of whose acquaintance we might be made ashamed."

"I am sufficiently satisfied on this point," said Edward.

"Are you indeed?" asked Lamont. "From whence did you get your information?"

"It matters not," replied the young man. "I am content for the present with what I know."

"Very well," returned the other; "we will see how future circumstances will affect your present opinions."

"Any how, then," said Edward, "we will obey the old precept, 'Sufficient for the *morrow* is the evil thereof.' *Now* is our time: future days we will leave to take care of themselves. In the mean time, we will hold ourselves subject to your order; and I can only say, that I envy Jasper the place of having you for a companion in his father's house. I shall be greatly pleased when you shall be sufficiently recovered for him to bring you to us, that you may divide your time, while here, between his father's house and mine."

"I hope your very generous nature may never receive a check," answered Lamont, gravely: "it is indeed refreshing, after one has been tossed here and there on the waves of capricious friendship, and been chilled by the formalities and selfish actions of outside life, to drop in upon some quiet place, where may be seen in genuine existence the hearty hospitalities which we all so greatly covet, but so rarely find. Our friend Perkins looks at me incredulously, I know, and his nature will not permit him to rest until he has fully experienced the truth of what I say. Then, perhaps, you will one day see him re-

turning to these Quizville hills and to this pretty village, his heart callous by association with sordid influences, and wondering why it is that he so ardently longs to feel, to see, and to be as in the days gone by."

Perkins felt much disposed to resent this as an overdrawn picture. Strange to say, he was the only one of his father's family who longed so ardently to be "one of the world." It was only the wishes of his parents — who, however, did not oppose him very urgently when he expressed desires to go — that kept him where he was. Yet his father's admirable training, combined with the love which his excellent mother's deportment had ever inspired within him, kept him firmly in the path of propriety, the cultivation of mind and heart, and the uncompromising deportment of a gentleman.

"There is an old saying, my dear Lamont," said he, "that there are some persons who will not learn unless they have experience for a teacher; and I suppose I am of that class. While I am free to confess my unbounded confidence in your opinions, it at the same time may be true that your judgment of specific things may be influenced by peculiar circumstances in which you may have been placed, or by your natural tastes. To speak truly, I think you judge the world too harshly: I cannot believe that man must necessarily become bad in proportion as he mingles with his fellows. Why should he? Are not his faculties of activity and enterprise called into more lively action? Does he not throw off the stiffness of his manners and character, as well as

the rust of his energies? Has he not continually before him higher motives to ambition, with more flattering prospects of exalted success? It is fully established, that the more a man has to do, the more he can do; and admitting this, it seems to me an unreasonable assertion, that, because he may be so located that all his energies of planning, pushing, and acquiring are called into increasing exercise, his moral and social powers must at the same time necessarily and proportionably decline."

"Nor need they," exclaimed Lamont; "I am only urging the fact that *they do!*"

"Ah, indeed; that is it, is it?" returned Perkins. "Your remark is quite encouraging; and if ever I launch my bark fairly upon the ocean of worldly commingling, I shall hope to prove an honorable exception, returning to my port without having shivered a mast, rent a sail, or lost a rudder."

"I cordially wish that such may be the result, dear Perkins," replied Lamont, "and would congratulate you thereon. But if you do not find that broken pledges, misplaced confidences, a hardening familiarity with scenes of disappointment and grief, and an increasing disrelish for high social and intellectual pursuits — the invariable attendants upon the thing ycleped life — are the items with which you have to do, I will then allow you to question the strength of my opinions. I hope, however, that our companionship, even though it may be but temporary, will not make you look upon me as one too monastic for your tastes, and too sober to respond to your bounding aspirations."

"The very reverse is the fact," answered Perkins, "as I think my whole deportment to you will fully prove. The only apprehension that I have is, that you will make a preacher out of Ned. I think he would be an apt subject for some theological seminary canvasser."

And in pleasant social converse did these three young friends pass nearly the whole of the morning away. Edward, especially, could not conceal the joy which he felt in having Lamont as a closer companion. The barrier that had existed between them was circumstantially thrown down; and, come weal, come woe, he should hail the day with delight when he should present the accomplished stranger to his parents and sisters, and see him seated with them in friendly converse around their domestic board. Such was his heart; such was the generous nature for which Lamont had expressed the desire that it might never meet a check.

When the evening came, Perkins and Buford strolled out together. The former had been with Lamont during the entire day, and felt the need of a little fresh air. Edward would have remained for company while Perkins went out; but Lamont urged to be left alone rather than deprive the two friends of each other's society. He knew, too, that the new relation which he sustained to them, and the circumstances which formed it, would naturally be a matter about which they would be anxious to confer together. He had another reason why he wished them to be with each other, undisturbed, of which the reader is aware. Circumstances, too,

were exciting within him an almost uncontrollable impatience for expediting the matter which he had in hand. And O, with what peculiar sensations did he look forward to the time when the veil was to be removed, and these two friends were to look in upon a vision that was to startle them beyond any thing of which they conceived!

"Well, Ned," said Jasper, after they had got to a point beyond which they would not be stopped every few steps by friends who wished to ask questions, — "well, Ned, we are in for him now, sink or swim. If results will only be according to our hopes, we have gained a friend of whom we may be proud. But if some unlucky day reveals the fact that we have been leaning on a rotten staff, we can congratulate ourselves that it was one beautifully and elaborately finished, and was an ornament while it lasted. The plague take me if I care a pinch of snuff for any body who, under the circumstances, might think they had a merry joke upon us! We must act concerning him on the principle of a short life and merry one — that is, crack him up high to any body that comes to us for information; and then, if he does fall, he will be quick killed and soon forgotten."

"The brave fellow who saved your sisters' lives!" remarked Edward, with some astonishment at his friend's rattling style.

"O, ay, that's fact, my matter-of-fact Ned; you are determined never to let me say any thing that is not as longfaced as your arm. I am indeed under lasting obligations to Lamont, and shall consequently hope, for my own sake as well as his, that he may come out right side up. But when is this confounded mystery about him going to be explained to us? If he is what he ought to be, what motive can he have for enveloping himself in such a cloud? He knows that we are all curiosity; he knows as well as you and I do that every man, woman, and child in Quizville is looking at him wonderingly. If it were not that he is so much *the man*, instead of *the trifler*, I should be half disposed to say that he is some matrimonial speculator, coming in such a way as to produce excitement and get himself into some well-feathered nest. But this is not Lamont. He has never intimated to us in the least that he would like to make the acquaintance of any of our lady friends, and, in fact, only speaks of the sex in a very dignified and respectful way, without manifesting any special personal interest in them. But look you, Ned, and remember what I tell you. The *dénouement* of this affair will show you that Lamont is in some way compromitted with some grave and extensive mission, — of rascality perhaps, — or has in hand some very pretty joke, the conception of an ingenious head."

"Jasper," said Edward, laconically, "do you like Lamont?"

"I do indeed," replied he, looking at his friend as though he thought this a verv unnecessary question.

"Much?" asked Edward.

"Yes, much; but why?"

"You are very sure of it, are you?"

"Why do you doubt it?"

"I *will not doubt it*," answered Edward, "if you will only think well what you say, and then tell me that you do like him. I have a reason for wishing to know."

There was something about the gentle, thoughtful manner of the young man that Perkins could not understand. With fixed eyes they gazed upon each other in perfect quiet for a moment or two, as though the one would read the other's thoughts. Perkins had suspected before now that Lamont was encircling Edward with his fascinating coil; and during the forenoon, while they were together, he either saw, or thought he did, looks and motions between the two that were designed only for themselves. This was like the dawn; the questions and manners of Edward seemed now like the coming sun, that was to bring objects more distinctly to view.

"A reason, have you?" said Jasper. "May I know it?"

"You may when you have decided to answer my question."

"And I suppose you would like me to give you an affirmative reply?"

"If it be a true one."

"Very well, Ned — I *do* like Lamont; nay, more — it seems to me that, were I not to keep my feelings in check from motives of prudence, I should love and respect him most sincerely. Will this suffice?"

"'Tis all I can ask; and, standing to each other as you now do, it is well that it is so. Let me tell you, Jasper, he is worthy of your regard."

"You know him, then!" exclaimed he, grasping Edward's hand, and looking at him most intently.

"I do — and yet I do not," answered Edward, without in the least relaxing his gravity.

"Ned, you'll be the death of me yet," cried Perkins, holding his sides, and roaring with laughter. 'I say, Ned," continued he, when he had got through with his merriment, and was looking into the face of the latter with an irresistibly ludicrous expression, — I say, Ned, is your life insured?"

"No," replied Buford, with a smile that he could not keep back.

"Well, it had better be. Remember, old Loomis advertises small premiums, prompt payments, and all this; and now's your time. Better do it, Ned."

"Perhaps I may, and have the proceeds in reserve for you and my disconsolate widow. But I want to talk to you about Lamont."

"Good! I am all ears."

"For which I am very sorry," said Buford, gravely; "bad sign."

Perkins "took," and made a motion as though he would annihilate him. "I shall have to be more guarded in my language," said he, "when I am talking in the presence of such inimitable wit. But come; I am getting anxious to hear what you have to say."

"Very well. I said a moment ago that Lamont is a gentleman worthy of your regard; and I say this simply on information that comes from himself. When you have heard what I have to tell you, you can form your own opinion. But I can go no far-

ther until you give me the same pledge which I gave him — that what I say to you will be strictly confidential."

"You gave such a pledge, did you?"

"I did."

"Very well: I do not fear to commit myself to any thing in which *you* may already be involved."

"You pledge me, then?"

"I do; on my sacred honor."

"Sufficient. Our friend Lamont has confided to me the fact that he is on a mission, the particulars of which I am yet to know. I gathered enough, however, to understand that it was the formation of some society, or order, the objects of which are good."

"Ah! this *Know Nothing* business, I presume?"

"I cannot say. He has told me that he is the bearer of some information which — to use his own words — *will startle us!* and all that we have got to do is, to be patient until the proper time comes for us to know more."

"The story opens very pretty," remarked Perkins, with a rather incredulous air; "and to tell you the truth, Ned, I am getting considerably interested. Indeed, I don't know but I like it better than if he had told us all at once."

"It will, at any rate, give us something more spicy to talk about than we have had for some time," replied Edward; "but I fear that my patience is not so enduring as yours."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jasper, almost running away from his friend in his delight. "Rich! rich! How

we'll plague the girls! eh? Just think of it! Both enter at same time; faces long; look very knowing; look at each other ominously; draw long breaths; shake our heads; girls wonder; look at us with their mouths open; ask questions; we say nothing, but look mysterious; excitement gets high; get hosts of kisses by way of inducement to divulge; no go; tell the girls they'd never survive it; leave them in astonishment; get up stairs; good time then by ourselves — ha, ha! — rich *tableau*, eh, Ned? What do you say?"

"Your high-strung imagination gets it up almost to perfection, I must confess, Jasper; but you have to remember that you have pledged me not to make any suggestive insinuations to any body relative to Lamont, or at least to there being any thing about him with which you are acquainted, but may not speak."

"Seems to me this is a codicil of your own attaching, is it not?"

"By no means; I think it was clearly implied in the pledge you gave me."

"Very well," answered Perkins; "be it as you say: but really it seems to me as though we were throwing away an excellent bit of fun. I would not give a sou to tell a secret, but it does me an amazing amount of good just to let some very inquisitive folks know that I have one."

"Hence your would-be equivocatory promise," remarked Buford.

"Exactly. But have you nothing, in reality, to tell? Are we the first to whom Lamont has broached this matter here?"

"Yes; I think I may say that we are, with perfect confidence."

"And how soon does he design making such advances as will set his proposed organization to work?"

"I presume he will set about it more vigorously when he comes out again. The main obstacle, that of getting one or two enlisted on whom he could depend, being now accomplished, he will, no doubt, soon have a formal conference with us, and set the thing in motion at once."

"And will, of course, depend almost entirely upon us as to the proper persons to be admitted to co-operation with us," remarked Perkins. "Very well; the brave soldier likes the front of the battle, and I would infinitely prefer being where we are than to bring up the rear. We have this advantage: as we are the first to know, we can very easily withdraw, if we see any exceptionable points, before any one else will know that we have been connected with it. I like it better all the time. But you have not yet told me what Lamont said to you concerning himself, which warranted you in saying that he was entirely worthy of our regard."

"That is a fact. He spoke to me of his parentage, family relations, and, in general terms, as to his pursuits, in which, for the past few years, travelling has been the principal feature. He spoke tenderly of his home, but did not say where it was; spoke of his unpleasant situation, in that, having returned to his native country after an absence of four or five years, he finds himself put immediately on this

mission, which prevents him for a time from enjoying the companionship of the dear ones from whom he has been so long away."

"From the manner, then, in which he spoke of his associations," said Perkins, "you judge him to be such a companion as we would willingly accept?"

"I do. Indeed, he told me unequivocally that I would have nothing to apprehend on this point," replied Edward.

"But after all," remarked the other, "we have nothing for it but his word."

"In which I have implicit confidence," rejoined Buford, quickly. "And yet there was something which he persisted in saying that would, as often as uttered, throw a damper on each new rising hope. He seemed intent upon impressing me with the hope of our perpetual friendship only under the qualification, provided what I yet have to learn — probably relative to his mission — does not materially affect my views. However, as you have already said, we are in for it, and I am bound to see him through at any reasonable sacrifice of time and trouble. You remember the old adage, 'Make a spoon,' &c."

"And I am with you, Ned: a strong eye will beard a lion. But we had better return to our patient: I shall watch over him with a twofold interest now. Do you know that it was with the utmost difficulty that we could prevail upon him to be nursed in my room, notwithstanding we are so greatly obligated to him? I was half provoked at his dignified independence."

"Simply because you entirely misconstrued his motives," answered Edward, kindly. "It was not the kind of dignified independence, I am certain, to which you allude, that prompted him to decline your courtesy."

"What was it, pray?"

"The mere instinct of a truly sensitive mind, that did not wish you to take him to a home, prompted, for aught he knew, by nothing but a feeling of obligation."

"Ah, poor fellow!" replied Perkins; "he must learn to discard that notion of his, which believes that the world has lost its heart, and that every kind action is only apparent, and performed from merely selfish considerations."

Twilight came upon the young gentlemen as they drew near to the Perkins mansion. Buford was secretly rejoicing that he had accomplished so much with his friend during their pleasant walk. Perkins was no little excited at the intelligence he had received; and it was not very hard for the young ladies on the piazza to see that something was on the countenances of the young men indicating some secret on hand.

Approaching the piazza, they lingered but a moment or two with the young ladies — then excused themselves, that they might go up and see to their friend.

"Will you stay there all night, Ned?" cried his sister after him, teasingly, as he ran along the hall.

"No, Emily," replied he, laughing at her roguish air; "wait for me but a few moments, and I will accompany you home."

"Poor Ned!" said Emily to the little company: "were I somebody whom I know, I would get very jealous of Mr. Lamont. The poor boy's heart is gone entirely — yielded up without a struggle."

The young gentlemen found Lamont awake; he had, however, been enjoying a refreshing little sleep; his bruises were less painful, his limbs more pliant, and he expected soon to be well.

"I have envied you your pleasant walk," said he, "and would have enjoyed being with you."

"It is, perhaps, just as well," said Edward, "that you were not along."

"Ah, why?"

"Because Jasper and I have been doing some special talking."

Perkins looked at Lamont with a knowing smile.

"Well?" said the latter, looking at Edward, inquiringly.

"He is all right," said Edward.

"Enough," answered Lamont, taking a hand of each cordially; "when we know each other better, I hope we shall love each other more."

And they parted for the night.

CHAPTER X.

Two evenings more, and we are brought to a very interesting part of our story. We will not stay to speak of the beautiful evening, for it had all of the glowing sunset, soft, fading shadows, gentle breezes, and fragrant odors from hillside and garden that we are accustomed to see in the many descriptions of a closing summer's day.

On the piazza of the old Perkins mansion — the almost duplicate of the Buford — sat a young lady reading aloud to an elder one, who sat fanning herself, and gently rocking in a stately chair. The age of the young lady was about twenty-two. In size she was above the middle stature. Her beautiful face, animated with her subject, was expressive of deep feeling, intelligence, and firmness. It had in it, too, that gentle, amiable look which could not but attract any one on first sight. She was dressed with peculiar care, and yet there was no show of gaudy taste in any article she wore. Her deep-blue eye of love was radiant with expression, and her delicate cheek was tinted with the hue of health. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that the beautiful girl was Charlotte Perkins, and the other lady her mother.

Charlotte's reading was arrested by hearing her

brother coming down the stairs, accompanied by Lamont. Her heart beat quickly, and she well knew that the tinge on her cheek was deepening fast. It would be the first time she had seen Lamont since he had been a guest at her father's house. She felt herself interested in him for special reasons. He was a handsome man, just such a one as she would want to win her heart. The mystery in which he was suspended aroused all her curiosity, and kept the question perpetually recurring to her mind, "Who is he? What is he?" And then, had he not probably saved her life? Nay, more; in doing so, had he not risked his own? Never could a woman's heart forget the latter consideration. That a noble stranger, the very *beau ideal* of her most ardent hopes, should have done so, was in no degree calculated to lessen the supposition that she would view him with special regard. And now she was to meet him, and be with him, talk with him, and have more opportunity for judging if he were all she thought him.

"I have brought our invalid down to breathe some of this sweet evening air with you," said Jasper to the ladies, as Lamont and himself stepped from the hall door to the piazza.

The ladies rose and received Lamont with much cordiality; and when Charlotte felt her own soft hand pressed within his, there was a thrill went through her. In a moment more she had given him a pleasant seat, where he could have the full benefit of the breeze and look over the garden. If ever a poor girl's heart was in danger, Charlotte's was certainly

so now. Lamont's confinement, during which he had eaten but little, had already given him the appearance of an invalid. His noble forehead was almost too white to be natural, rendered more so by the dark locks of fine hair which the breeze was throwing to and fro upon it. His arm was still too much swollen and too painful for him to draw on his coat, and he was enveloped in a most magnificent wrapper which he had purchased somewhere in foreign lands. A beautifully wrought pair of slippers incased his feet, and a very light tie encircled his neck. There was, perhaps, but one item about him which did not exactly suit Charlotte's taste; he wore, not only whiskers, but mustaches. She did not, however, take so much exception to these *on him;* for they became him well, and gave a *recherché* finish to the contour of his face, instead of the coarse and vulgar appearance which they ofttimes give to other men.

"We were in hopes," said Charlotte to him, "that you would have been well enough to have taken a drive with us this evening; but we are glad at any rate that you have a prospect of a speedy recovery."

"Mr. Lamont will probably have a poor opinion of our drives about here," remarked Mrs. Perkins, "and may perhaps not wish to give them a trial."

"Indeed it is not so," replied he; "I have enjoyed several very pleasant ones, and hope yet to enjoy more. You are greatly favored in this respect, having so many beautiful roads open to you in every direction."

"Is this your first visit here?" asked Mrs. Perkins.

"I was here some years ago," replied he, "and have never forgotten the pretty place since. There was an instance during my journeys abroad when this village was brought strongly to my mind. It was in Switzerland. After a hard day's ride we brought up to a pretty town, the whole location of which, with the surrounding incidents of hill and valley, was the almost duplicate of Quizville. The greatest difference was in the buildings—their style of construction being almost entirely adapted to the tastes and means of a simple peasantry; otherwise it was Quizville over again. And I suppose I never shall forget the home associations which were revived during my stay in the place. It seemed as though my heart experienced an almost insurmountable longing for my native land, and yearned in a moment to be there."

"Was your early home in the country?" asked Charlotte.

"Yes; and I am happy to say that my love for it has never abated. If my apparent complicated destiny will permit, I hope the evening of my life will be spent amid rural scenes."

"You strike the right chord for these ladies, now," remarked Jasper, with a smile. "My good mother here, especially, thinks that man should seek no other home than among green fields and singing birds."

"And hopes that her son will some day give practical evidence that he entertains the same opinion," replied the old lady, most kindly.

"It may be," said Charlotte, who was anxious to

know why it was that a gentleman so evidently calculated to shine among the gay assemblages and stirring scenes of city life should have this taste for a country home, "that Mr. Lamont has never permitted himself to remain long enough in the busy world to become attracted with it."

"On the contrary," answered he, quickly, "it is just because *I have* spent much of my latter life just there. I can say that I have done so, too, under the most favorable circumstances, both here and in foreign cities. It has been my privilege, if you will excuse this reference to myself, to have had all the advantages of time, means, and acquaintance that one need have to form correct opinions of the world in detail. So far as I might be engaged where I could have the active employment incident to commercial enterprises, I would like life in the busy mart; but when I look at the rapid dissipation of true moral and social feeling that every where hangs as an inseparable *attaché* to this life, I am repulsed from participation in it, and long to be where such weights will not be dragging me down."

"Mere philosophic gammon," said Jasper, laughing. "I intend to keep an eye on our friend Mr. Lamont, and see where he plants his stakes. He *may* make a planter of leisure, but I doubt it."

"You are very complimentary, brother," replied Charlotte. "Please inform us what right *you* have to gainsay Mr. Lamont's opinions?"

"None, none," answered he, giving his shoulders a very ludicrous shrug; "merely one of my notions."

"Your brother and I have already had one or two

discussions on this point," remarked Lamont, "and I begin to think that he has already set me down as a singular human phenomenon, in which all the *good feelings* of life are died out. He cannot understand why it is that *I* should have such tastes as I profess; and yet he might start from this door, and find that at least half of all the persons he would meet in the next hour would think just as I do. The trouble with him is that *I*—*I*— should be longing for a home where I might avoid contact with those very features in life which *he* so ardently longs to be connected with."

"True," replied Jasper.

"And why true?" asked Charlotte.

"Perhaps I had better not say just now."

"You certainly *ought* to say," said his sister.

"Very well, then. To speak truly, I think our friend Lamont adapted to more worthy pursuits."

"Than which?"

"Well, agriculture, you would perhaps style it; but, in more matter-of-fact phraseology, raising corn, hogs, and potatoes. All very pretty things to read about in an elegant parlor a hundred miles away from the scene of action, but lessening in beauty as it draws near."

"But every body who has a country home," replied Lamont, "must not necessarily toil in the field."

"So I well know; yet he must have more or less to do in the matter, all of which occupation is in my view better given to men who have not the genius for more exalted pursuits."

"More *exalted* pursuits!" reiterated Charlotte.

"Yes," replied he. "I fully appreciate the exception you would take to my wording. I know that poets and romantic dreamers are accustomed to write about Nature's beauties as seen only in the country, and of man as only filling his proper vocation when he is surrounded by waving crops and growing herds. But, as I have often said, it is all moonshine. I believe that every man of proper cultivation, native genius, and refined manners, may in busier scenes accomplish nobler ends and be of more essential service to his fellows."

"Fie, Jasper!" replied his sister; "you will change these opinions before your head is gray."

"A long while before," added Lamont. "At which time I think we will see him better satisfied with himself, and a happier man than the veriest stickler for city upper tendom."

Their conversation was interrupted for a moment by the coming of happy little Netty and her father. With a bound of joy the dear child sprang towards Lamont, and gave him what she did not often give to strangers — a kiss; and then she ran on with her childish prattle, full of delight that he was getting well, and promising him prettier and safer rides than the one which she and sister had lately taken on the old bridge road. The colonel, too, gave him a hearty reception, although he had already seen him two or three times through the day, and each of the days that he had been with them.

And thus was Lamont among friends — friends whose hospitable hearts were opened to him on the

score of obligation, but were now finding him a gentleman of whose companionship they believed they might be proud. Even the old gentleman, who held strict notions with regard to whom and what he admitted to his acquaintance, and especially to his family circle, gave up all his scruples, and cordially invited Lamont, while he remained in Quizville, to make the mansion his home. The colonel was passionately devoted to his children; and that Lamont had so gallantly rescued them in an hour of imminent peril, was of itself sufficient to gain the affectionate father's lasting regard.

Whatever were the special designs that Lamont had to accomplish during his sojourn in Quizville, it is certain that this family friendship was giving him a fair starting point. No matter what might be the feeling of curiosity respecting him, and no matter what the suspicions that had been entertained, every body would be compelled to confess that he was now in a situation where he might defy them all. It was possibly the fact that he had done so all the time, and would not have done so less had he not gained this advantageous ground. The curiosity mongers had given him credit, any how, for about all the independence, *sang froid*, and important pompousness that they thought was one man's share.

Of course they knew all about it.

CHAPTER XI.

"No!"

"Fact: no mistake about it."

"And the old colonel has given him a *carte blanche* invitation?"

"Nothing less."

"Well, it does grow interesting, that's a fact. Luck makes a man's fortune sometimes, and he meets a favorable breeze just where he was expecting a squall. It's all the result of that runaway scrape, I suppose?"

"Of course; and the fellow's in clover now. I'm plagued sorry that more of us couldn't get *our* fingers on to some runaway horse, or some other windfall."

"Well, there's no telling, Weston. You know the old saying, 'Fool for luck.'"

"Which I presume induces *you* to entertain some very sanguine hopes."

"Not exactly on this ground; yet, according to the adage, 'Birds of a feather,' if one of us have any expectations from this cause, the balance may very reasonably hope."

"True; for shadows do not more faithfully stick to their originals than do we to each other. But, returning to the question, what may we conjecture as the result of this new feature in Lamont's affairs?

There's one thing he'll find himself mistaken in if he makes a commencement at it."

"Ah! to what do you allude?"

"Baiting his hook for Miss Perkins."

"Yes, you are right there. Her heart is too firmly mortgaged for any new comer to get hold of. Probably this is one reason why the old colonel had so little hesitation in making Lamont so much at home. I'm not so ill looking, nor yet so outrageously unattractive, as I might be; but I readily confess, I wouldn't like very much to have him for a competitor in any *affaire de cœur* of mine."

"Nor I; yet I am inclined to think there is one in the present case who would not have any such fears. More than this, Miss Perkins is not the one to be caught by every new plume. She has certainly had offers enough since her engagement to Henry to have turned the head of any ordinary young lady."

"Well, we'll see what we will see. But have you learned any thing fresh about this new society? Every body has his tongue going about little else but the Know Nothing question; and I verily believe that, unless Mr. Lamont or somebody else gives the thing a start amongst us pretty soon, the world will be startled by the announcement that a branch is in operation in Quizville, of spontaneous growth. I'm in for the Know Nothings myself. They are taking the country fast; that's palpable. But you may hang me if the way they do it isn't the rub. Somebody is whispering around that Per-

kins and Buford are into the secret. If so, we may hope to have it as soon as is proper."

"You don't say so! I had not heard this, although I am aware that they have been quite intimate with Lamont almost from his arrival. Where did you get your information?"

"From Sandford, who was talking with them this morning, and who seems to be certain that we will all have an opportunity, before very long, of learning some things we do not know now."

"Well, in such an event I think we can say we have just passed *from* the Know *Nothing* order to the Know *Something* order. I would like to be informed what it is that we know *now?*"

"Don't you think you used the wrong pronoun there, Ashton?" asked a young man, dryly.

"Which?"

"When you said *we*."

"Birds of a feather, you know somebody said just now."

"True; but it may sometimes be the case that some birds are *not so much* of a feather as their companions."

"I think we'll have to send *you* to the cooper's. A cask with such expansive wit should certainly be well hooped. But to the old point. If it be true that Jasper and Buford are having any thing to do with this thing; we can certainly hazard nothing in following where they lead. What do you all say?"

"We're in, certain," cried half a dozen.

"Then the sooner they propose the better; and

if they don't let some of us into it pretty soon, I intend to pump both of them on the first occasion. However, we may be wasting lots of gas here in conjectures and hopes which may all be vain."

"Alas! 'tis even so," said one, with a twang.

"So far as Mr. Lamont's general conversation, about his hotel, is concerned, we have but little on which to hang a hope," continued the other. "In fact, the thing has several times been tried in his company, to see if any thing could be elicited from him. Now and then he will smile at some comical remark, or answer some question in a general way; but so far as getting any reply indicating any knowledge or connection with the Know Nothings, or any expression of interest or concern on his countenance, is concerned, nothing satisfactory has been gained. If he *is* in the game, he plays well."

"Just in such a way as a man of his cast *would* play, take my word for that, Master Frederic. If Lamont *is* on any such errand, it is no fool's, and he understands his game; and so far, too, as his being jilted by Miss Perkins goes, you need not alarm yourself on that score either. He's not the fish to bite at old bait."

"As if Miss Perkins was old bait!" was the half-scornful reply.

"Bait, any how, that has caught all that she wanted," said the other, confidently.

"Then *she* is not the one, certainly, to throw it out again."

"It might, however, be unconsciously left in the way; but with such wary sharks as Lamont it

would fail to draw. He knows what he's about I'll pledge you that."

The foregoing conversation, with more of the same character, passed between a company of young men in the room of one of their number. The most of them, like Perkins and Buford, had spent their lives in Quizville. One or two belonged to the worthy professions of M. D.'s and Esq.'s; and yet one or two were of the yardstick and counter. They were all of the brotherhood of "good fellows;" and some of them had very strong partialities for having frequent recurrences of "a good time," rather than for spending their time good.

Nevertheless they were nice young men, more, perhaps, of the Perkins than of the Buford school; and, so far as such an occurrence like the talked-of new organization was concerned, they, like the former, were decidedly "in;" for they doubted not there would be something in connection with it that would certainly be food for their mirth-loving and inquisitive tastes.

They were some of the young men of Quizville.

CHAPTER XII.

It was not long before Lamont was well as usual. The family were no little surprised to hear that he intended returning to his hotel; and so was almost every body else. He had gone with Buford, and been introduced to the young man's parents and sisters, from whom he had received a hearty invitation to divide his time between their mansion and the Perkins. He thanked both families sincerely for their kindness, but begged them to excuse him from accepting their invitation. He had business in hand which made it more desirable that he should be at the hotel; and again, he did not feel — so he said — that under the circumstances he had any right to accept the offers. He hoped they would not feel unkindly towards him for declining, as he would avail himself of their generosity by being a frequent visitor to both. So the general feeling as to Lamont's being well nested, some of which we saw in our last chapter, was an entire misconception. He had no such notion. In fact, for reasons of his own, he really did not wish to be where, during more or less of every day, he would be in such close and continued contact with any of the members of either house.

The result of this step was a decided feeling in

his favor. Even the families themselves whose hospitality he had thus declined respected him more, now that they saw evidently his purpose not to place himself under obligations to any body. It was natural, too, that they should. The world generally respects that man most who asks no favors, helps himself, and goes ahead.

Lamont had already commissioned Perkins and Buford to commence making efforts with such men in the village as would be likely to be in favor of an organization the principles of which were "good will to all — opposition to some current evils — the promotion of good morals — and the country's true interests forever." Rather vague, it would seem, for any body to get a special idea from, yet sufficiently plain for the most ignorant to understand. One thing was certain, said the mass — it says nothing about losing our heads or our dollars; and any thing that don't take from must certainly add to us.

It was not very strange that just about this time an opposing party should spring up. These took a different view of the whole matter altogether. It was some device of the devil, said they — one of those villanous plots for sowing enmity among neighbors — a machine for creating civil discord, waging war upon special institutions, the end of which was to be a hubbub in general and bloodshed in particular. It was eminently desirable, in their opinion, that whoever was setting the thing in motion — a secret, by the way, any further than as mere surmise had it — should have an exalted ride out of town on the soft side of a rail. This would be

nipping the evil in the bud. But when somebody suggested that this eminently desirable proposition should be carried into effect, there arose two very serious objections. First, who could solemnly assert that he knew who the proper party was upon whom this distinguished honor should be conferred? Second, it was very doubtful, even could this information be unmistakably arrived at, that any body could be found who dared to try it. These were very grave considerations — considerations, too, which made some to scratch their heads, some to wonder if no other better idea could be suggested, and others to say some very bad words.

An idea *did* come to some of them at last. They would "join the —— society," (the adjective applied not being in the dictionary, we have chosen to omit it,) "and then they could take it by the inside, as in the case of a coat, and turn it wrong side out."

This was a capital thought, if it could only be put in practice. But, unfortunately, they had yet to learn that "joining" is a business which very frequently takes *two* to accomplish. Perhaps some of them could testify to this from their own experience in certain other matters; but in the present reference "ignorance was bliss," and they smacked their lips with great gusto at the happy prospect.

Meanwhile, under the judicious efforts of Perkins and Buford, converts were beginning to accumulate; a small stream at first, but soon gaining the dimensions of a river. Good names and true were enrolled in due form, subscribing themselves to the "what was to come" with all manner of varied

feeling. Wonder, distrust, fear, all had their place; but, nevertheless, numbers were found willing to flock to the standard. For the time being, Lamont was not in the service; it was thought better that his worthy aids should do all this part of the work, making it appear as much as possible that they were the prominent parties in the scheme. The work was all done in due form, every candidate being required to give all the solemn pledges that Jasper and Edward had given themselves. To the former it was matter for some rare sport. Not having before him the same solemn appreciation of it that was entertained by Edward, he did not hesitate to make the pledge or pledges such as in his opinion were adapted to individual cases. The essential part, however, was invariably retained. Yet, when he got hold of some unsophisticated or some waggish friend, it was all that Edward could do to maintain his gravity at the entirely original phraseology which Perkins would press into his service. An instance as specially suited to his purpose was his initiation of no less a personage than our friend Worthy Ike.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Jasper of him, after he had been cautiously sounded.

"Don't know," said Ike, scratching his head and thinking gravely.

"Nobody can know for you, Worthy. It's to be Ike himself in this case, and nobody else."

"That's the d——, that is to say, that's the trouble on't," answered he. "You won't tell me nothing about it till I swar pint blank, eh?"

"Not a word."

"I rather guess it's something about this 'ere Lamont and them Know Nothings."

"You can guess what you please."

"And you, I suppose, won't tell *only* what you please?"

"Just so."

"Well, here goes: hang me if I care, as long as you and Mr. Buford are in the same scrape. I'll swar."

"Take off your hat," said Perkins, solemnly. They were in a quiet little rear room, purposely darkened, and fully invested with all the insignia calculated to give dignity and force to all the proceedings that were enacted within it.

Off went Ike's hat, while his knees commenced a vigorous emulation of Christie's "bones."

"Your right hand in mine."

It was there put, quivering equal to the maiden's when first put into that of her lover.

"Your left in Buford's."

This one ditto.

"Now listen well," said Perkins. "You, Isaac Bledsoe, hereby positively promise that from this time henceforth, without hesitation, reservation, or equivocation, you will be one of 'em."

"Of who?" cried Ike, interrupting him.

"No matter: this you must faithfully promise now, trusting to us to let you know more by and by. Do you so promise?"

"I swars it," replied he, spasmodically.

"And to be faithful and true?"

"I will that, as long as *you* don't back out."

"And to lend a willing hand"—(drops of genuine perspiration here became visible on his huge brow)—"to lend a willing hand in all matters appertaining to the mysteries of this grand order?"

"Mysteries!" this revived him considerably: he was great on mysteries—*he* was!

"I promise that, certain!" he exclaimed.

"And you furthermore promise that you will not reveal to any living person," (didn't relish this part at all,) "or persons, the fact that you are aware that any thing of secret character is now going on here?"

"I do."

"And that you will punctually appear" (here Perkins's voice was lowered to a whisper, at which Ike gave signs of evaporation) "on next Monday night, at nine o'clock, quietly and alone, at the upper court room, rear entrance, without giving intimation to any person, or persons, that you know that aught is to be transacted there that night?"

"I promise you," said Worthy, in the suppressed tone of Perkins.

"Then," said Jasper, with all the dignity he could assume, "I pronounce you, Isaac Bledsoe, one of 'em; and remember, the breaking of your pledge in any particular will be quickly known, and from that fatal moment it will be all up with Worthy Ike."

Isaac thought it was nearly so now. But when the door was opened, and the cheerful light greeted his eyes, and the cooling breezes fanned his temples, his fears vanished, and he rather congratulated himself that he was in a fair way for knowing a thing or

two more. His self-importance increased so rapidly that he determined to step down to a certain "store" in a corner of the hotel and invest a sixpence! As to the nature of the investment, it is perhaps unnecessary for us to speak.

CHAPTER XIII.

MONDAY night came.

The "upper court room" had been quietly secured, through the influence of a friend, to the proposed order, and its windows so shaded that outsiders would not see that any thing was going on in the room. Proper arrangements had been made to prevent more than one or two going thither together, and every thing so far appeared to be working well.

It is perhaps proper to state that Perkins and Buford had been just as successful in their efforts as they could have wished. Some thirty or forty were already committed in the out-door pledge; and there was no doubt but that a hundred more might have been just as easily obtained. But the young men had received their instructions from Lamont to proceed with extreme caution; and they had done so, notwithstanding the apparent unconcern exhibited in some of Perkins's movements. Possibly the reader is ready to ask, If it is true that they were so very careful, how was it that they were willing to admit such a member as Worthy Ike?—one certainly who could add very little in the way of dignity or influence to the movement. This is true enough. But it must be remembered that there must be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in

almost every enterprise, and in this as much as any other. Ike, though odd, was trusty. And even had he not been, he belonged to that class of superstitious ones whose questionable features of character may be very easily kept in place by the application of such binding obligations and sidelong threats as were carefully administered to him. Indeed, Ike was just the fellow to serve good purposes in more ways than one.

The room was in dimensions some sixty by fifty feet—a quaint old place, that had been the scene of the administration of "justice" from the dawn of the olden time. A judge's box, so elevated that the occupant's head was not specially remote from the ceiling, stood at the western end. In the wall behind it were two six by one windows, *some* of the glass of which was wanting. We may perhaps be excused for stating that the balance of the windows was defective in a similar way. Some forty benches were arranged about the room in charming disorder. Quite a number of them were evidently in the decline of life: of the remnant it might truthfully be said that they had attained their culmination. Time had laid his fingers, too, upon the walls, the plastering of which had here and there quitted its hold and sought the floor.

Thus the "upper court room."

On the inside of the door of this antiquated place stood an individual, whose ear ever and anon, in answer to certain (to him intelligible) signs made on the outer side, was applied to a small hole made for the purpose. These unknown signs to others being

satisfactory to him, the door was opened, and the applicant cautiously admitted. Being admitted, and before properly aware what course to pursue, he found himself between two friends, one of whom significantly placed his fingers on his lips; the other led the new comer to his appointed seat. Quiet was wonderfully preserved, which, with the dim lights, gave to the proceedings, especially in this mystified phase, a peculiarly strange and effective appearance.

Thus they continued to enter, one at a time, each one being assigned his place next his predecessor, and all the admitted having their eyes constantly turned to the door with eager curiosity to know who would enter next. The number was at last reported complete; that is, all the persons, as their names had been handed to the doorkeeper, were in punctual attendance.

The door was closed, fastened; fresh lights were added; and the almost breathless expectants were anxiously wishing "the curtain to rise."

Their anxieties were at last satisfied to some degree when they saw Lamont, whose position in the dark room had been such that he had not been noticed, come and take a stand in front of the judge's bench. With grave faces, Perkins and Buford sustained him on either side.

Perkins spoke: —

"Friends and Brothers: In compliance with the pledge given by each and all of you to our brother Buford and myself, you are here this evening. We are gratified that, without an exception, you have been willing to place the required confidence in us as to the objects of the worthy order we are here this evening to form. We can only repeat to you that these objects are such as are perfectly consistent with true principle, sound morality, and genuine patriotic feeling. Of the details we are ourselves ignorant, but our faith stands unshaken in our leader that he will in due time confirm our hopes.

"Before we take further steps, you will rise without confusion, and, with your right hands uplifted, give me the following pledge."

They did so rise and so raise their right hands.

"You each and all hereby pledge us, that, in all the proceedings of this and all subsequent meetings of this organization, you will maintain perfect order, harmony, and peace among yourselves.

"And you furthermore pledge us, that if, during this or any other of our preliminary meetings, there occurs any thing that shall induce you to ask for dismission from any further connection with us, you will never reveal to any person or persons aught that you may know of the formation or proceedings of this order. Do you, as men of honor, and on the penalty of forever forfeiting the good will and esteem of this whole order, together with its parent and confederate organizations, so promise?"

"We do," was the response as of one voice.

"You may be seated."

Which was quietly done.

"Permit me now the pleasure," continued Perkins, "of introducing to you my friend Mr. La-

MONT. He it is to whom we will be indebted for the introduction among us of this order; and I confidently recommend him to you as one in whom you may confide."

Mr. Lamont advanced a step, and bowed with his own inimitable manner. There is every thing in the appearance of *a leader*. Above all considerations of form and person, he must have an eye bold, penetrating, and fearless. His *look* — the single momentary glance of his eye — may decide a battle, may sway the destiny of a nation, may incite to nobler deeds than could any motive that might be urged.

And on this little band the eagle eye of Lamont quickly made its mark. He stood before them in an attitude bold, commanding, and thoughtful. Dressed with his usual care, though habited in a somewhat foreign style, there was all about him to excite attention. Most of those present had never exchanged a word with him; consequently the new relation of friendship and brotherhood into which they were about to be placed with him made the occasion to them at once novel and interesting. And it is not too much to say that within each and every bosom the feeling of deeptoned respect and affectionate regard that had stolen upon Perkins and Buford, so unconsciously to them, began to have a sure resting-place. There are men who amuse us; there are those who cannot excite a particle of respect within us; there are those whom we *do* respect; and there are those whom, ere we are aware of it, *we love*.

Such was Lamont. He spoke thus: —

"FRIENDS AND BROTHERS: You are here this evening to enlist in a cause the special plans, objects, and interests of which are to you unknown. You are referred to me as the one who has introduced the matter among you, and the one, consequently, to whom you are to look for all the information you are to receive. Let us, then, to our work.

"To do good, whether the object on which conferred is an individual, a community, or one's country, is to have stock that will be returned with interest a hundred fold. And it is the duty of every good citizen to look abroad, either in the community where he is, or over the country of which he is an interested part, to see where evils exist; seeing them, it is his unquestionable duty to set himself, with whatever ability and influence he may possess, to their correction. It would be an error, were you or I to know of any danger to which our common country is exposed, — internal, or from without, — not to sound the alarm; it would be an error were we not to appeal to those in office, that the danger might be provided against, and, if possible, averted. This character of obligation is not less forcible with reference to minor matters; for example, our duty to the community, the city, the village in which we live. We are all but parts of a great whole. Your interests are blended with mine, mine with yours. Were we actuated by no higher motive, self-interest demands that we seek to promote the welfare of our neighbor; that we be to him indeed *a neighbor*, a protector, and a friend. And it is not a new

thing that men have banded themselves together, with purposes of humanity, good fellowship, and love. And they have done right—right, notwithstanding the beneficent acts contemplated in their brotherhood might by some of them never be needed. In truth these latter are they to whom the greater benefits accrue — even the ability, the disposition, and the opportunity to do good to those who are in need.

"It may be true, however, that an organization may be formed having in view the accomplishment of some grand ulterior object — an object, it may be, in the distant future; an end which they are well aware is only to be attained by long, patient, and persevering application. Yet, like a bright star continually before them, it unceasingly attracts, impels, and guides them onward. They look at it as the tempest-tossed mariner looks with eager watchings for the joy-giving light that tells him he is near to the haven of his hopes. They look for it, perhaps, as only to descend in blessings upon children or children's children. Let it be gained when it may, it is to be a rich legacy to those who succeed them, and who may shed tears of grateful thanksgiving as they look back to the toils and sacrifices which were endured that this good gift might be placed in their hands. And yet this order, with its far-reaching plans, may have smaller machinery at work; wheels working within wheels; little good deeds to be continually accomplished; social feeling to be maintained; distinctive interests to be promoted; in a word, something, for the time being,

that has its accomplishment, its ends, its joys, its blessings, its social attractions, to draw, unite, bind, and open its never-exhausted treasures of good things *now!*

"My brothers, I am here among you with good intent. My purpose is something of that which I have just now sketched. I came as a stranger, but I confidently believe that I am now among friends. You have me presented to you by those whom you know, have known long, and in whom you implicitly confide. You have, consequently, sufficient guaranty that your confidence is not to be misplaced. But, notwithstanding the trust which you are supposed to place in me, my obligations and instructions are such that time — not long, however — must elapse before you will be fully initiated into the plans, operations, and mysteries of our order. The best vessel that ever withstood ocean storms was tested well before treasures of wealth and life were committed to her on the mighty deep. The most thoroughly executed and beautifully finished engine placed in the hold of stanchest steamer must have its merits tried. So with any social machinery of character such as this in hand; it must be kept together by many appliances, each and all of which need adaptation to their several places, by care, gentle working, and skilful tests, else in some fatal hour the whole fabric, fair in design, apparently beautiful and perfect in construction, fails in some hidden part, and becomes a wreck.

"There are, however, initiatory exercises to be

this evening performed, which will interest you, I do not doubt, and to which we will now proceed.

"For our preliminary meetings, there will be but three offices occupied — viz., a president, vice president, and secretary. The first of these I must necessarily assume, but will of course do so only as a temporary thing. The other two offices will be filled by brothers chosen by yourselves. I repeat, however, that these officers will, like myself, hold these places for the time being, or rather until you shall be fully organized and understandingly in operation. And, as every step is taken in form and under pledge, before we proceed to this election you will please draw around me in a semicircle, that you may give your assent to certain constitutional questions."

They did so, *excepting one.* Lamont quietly called attention to this man. Perkins and Buford both went to him.

"What now, Hinson?" asked the former.

Now, Hinson was a regular genius of the school blue — a man of family, means, and oddities — a good man, but a queer one. The young gentlemen had, in fact, hesitated about making propositions to him, knowing that he was occasionally in the habit of "putting his foot down" with the solemn declaration that he would never take it up. At such times he would give his long chin a shake, and his loose teeth a rattle, that was well known to be a stopper to any further argumentation. He was an older man than they had sought elsewhere —

say fifty; indeed their efforts were mostly confined to young men; but it happened that they came in contact with him at a time and under circumstances which induced them to waive all other considerations, and make the trial. They found him with a more willing ear than they had supposed, and had left him under the impression that he would come out all right in the end.

True to his word, he came. But, unfortunately, when he drew near to the old "upper court room," from whose windows no cheerful light was emitted, and into which, passing through the dark alley and up the dark stairway, one after another, figures of human form he could now and then see entering, there came upon him an involuntary feeling of dread. Then, when he had safely emerged from the dark alley, and his foot was placed upon the bottom of the dark stairway, matters began to appear to him in a very serious aspect. He was greatly tempted to drive away his fears by whistling; but just in time came the thought that he was pledged to do all his music of this nature in some other place. About this juncture it is very possible, nay, we may say probable, that, had there been any quiet spot of egress save a return through the dark alley, Mr. Hinson would no doubt have availed himself of the happy opening. To return as he came would not do; for he might fall in with some one just coming in — which event he deprecated in an eminent degree. His decision, however, was now almost immediately made, for he heard easy footsteps in the alley. Consequently, before

he was well aware how the hazardous feat had been performed, he found himself at the head of the stairs. He had not ascended them frequently of late, as he constantly maintained a dogged determination to keep himself as much as possible away from courts, lawyers, and the devil, and with gentle and cautious manner made his proper application for admission to the window-darkened and mysterious "upper room."

Once seated, and his eyes wandered from corner to corner, side to side, ceiling to floor, with a wild, inquisitive look. It appeared to him as if he had gotten in without knowing where he was. Visions of the dark alley and the dark stairway floated before him; but nothing was distinct. Once or twice was he quietly addressed by some friend sitting on right hand or left; but he hardly knew what was said to him, and his answers were hasty and vague. There was one strong, prevailing desire with him; and this was, *to get out.* Could he but accomplish this happy event, he felt quite sure that he would use all the expedition which a proper regard for his age and dignity would permit in gaining the dear spot in which his domestic imagination just now saw an affectionate wife and seven small responsibilities modestly getting themselves to their nests.

Mr. Hinson's uneasiness evidently increased; and when it came to the time that his own eyes beheld the door actually fastened and the key in the sentinel's pocket, he was well nigh departing this present life — at least for the time being. He was partly reassured, however, when the room was made more

light and he saw his worthy young friends Perkins and Buford taking an active part. But this was an evanescent ray. Old-time stories of "riding the goat," "climbing the pole," "crawling through the chalk barrel," &c., came vigorously to his mind; and, as he reflected, he came to the positive determination that he would do neither of these things. They were performances which, however much they might interest such young gentlemen as Mr. Jasper Perkins, were entirely beneath the dignity of Mr. Martin Hinson; and he ratified his determination by clinching very tightly the expressive hand that lay buried in his pantaloons pocket. And we cannot blame him; for it is unquestionably every man's duty to maintain his dignity and self-respect!

This decision of Mr. Hinson's experienced no change — not even after listening to the very proper addresses which were made by Perkins and Lamont to the incipient brotherhood. We are consequently not to be very much surprised that, as the brothers were called to the stand to make their intentions known, Mr. Hinson most contumaciously kept his seat. It is just here that we see him approached by the two young gentlemen, and have the question addressed him by Mr. Perkins: —

"What now, Hinson?"

"Don't know," replied he, shaking his head and looking anxiously to the door.

"Do you fear to join us?"

"Don't know," (very restless.)

"Well, sir, who is to know if you do not?" asked Lamont, straightening himself very much, and look-

ing from Mr. Hinson to the window near by, and from the window to Mr. Hinson, as though he were thinking what unbounded pleasure it would give him to afford this gentleman an exit therefrom.

"Believe I'd rather be excused from joining, Mr. Perkins."

"You would, eh? Well, sir," regaining his composure, while his eye twinkled from some sudden thought, "we will be extremely sorry to part with your pleasant society, anticipating so much as we have from the counsel of older and wiser heads."

"Very sorry — very sorry," murmured Mr. Hinson, oppressed with the weight of the compliment implied in the latter adjective; "but, Mr. Perkins ——"

"O, we will certainly, though reluctantly, comply with your wishes. Excuse me for a moment while I consult our worthy president as to the course to be pursued in cases such as this."

Perkins consulted Lamont quietly for a short time. The latter spoke: —

"Friends and Brothers: This is but one of many similar cases, and there are constitutional directions as to the mode of procedure with them, to be in some respects varied as to the character, age, position, &c., of the party who declines. You will please retain your places while we proceed to the gentleman's honorable dismissal."

Then, addressing Mr. Hinson, —

"The gentleman will be obliged for a moment or two to occupy a position in this circle."

Mr. Hinson did so in a manner very undignified and little becoming his age.

"You will raise your right hand."

It went up nervously, and not very high.

"The brother Perkins will give a word to your private ear."

Which communication, being made, caused Mr. Hinson to stand in his boots with a very deprecatory air.

Mr. Lamont proceeded: —

"We have admitted you in good faith to this our council chamber, and do not doubt that in like good faith you have met us. But, to insure this, you must give us your most solemn pledge that you will not, under any circumstances nor to any human being, reveal even the little that you know concerning this order — will not say to any person or persons that you know it exists — will not say that you have ever had confidential propositions made to you by any member connected with it at any time. And remember," — here Lamont's voice sank to a very low tone, and his eye became deeply penetrating, — "you cannot make any such revelations without the fact being known. Then will there be visited upon you the perpetual indignation and scorn of this order, extending, too, to all who, in other places, of our fraternity, will learn of the same. You will remember, sir, that this pledge rests upon you as privately given to the two worthy brothers who first approached you; but it must be repeated here. Do you give us this pledge?"

"I will — I will!" cried Mr. Hinson, upon whose brow great drops of perspiration were gathering fast.

"Then," said Lamont, extending his hand, "do we herewith give you the right hand in honorable dismissal. The sentinel will conduct you to the door."

Mr. Hinson grasped the extended hand quickly; bowed, as expressive of his thanks; and looked eagerly for the sentinel. He was conducted to the door, escorted down the dark stairway and through the dark alley; which being safely accomplished, the exact amount of time that he devoted to the purpose of getting from the vicinity of the "upper court room," and within the near vicinity of his affectionate wife and seven sleeping responsibilities, is hardly worth recording.

Lamont resumed: —

"It is made my duty, brothers, to ask you the following questions, preparatory to your future full membership in our order. You will raise your right hands."

All raised promptly.

"Do you come to us with free will and good intent?"

"We do," answered all.

"Is it your wish to become fully acquainted with the purposes of this order?"

"It is."

"Do you promise the most rigid secrecy in reference to every thing connected with this order?"

"We do."

"Are you willing, each and all, to take upon you offices of kindness, benevolence, and good deeds?"

"We are."

"And do you promise to stand by this order in all its circumstances, either of applause or condemnation — being friends to each other, and seeking, by all good means and true, to promote the individual and collective interests of those who are thus bound with you?"

"We do."

"Then, by virtue of the authority vested in me, do I pronounce you worthy candidates for admission to the rights, privileges, benefits, and mysteries of our order. You may be seated; after which we will proceed to the election of a vice president, secretary, and doorkeeper — these offices to be held for a single month. In passing to your seats, you may commence from the extremity of your circle on my left hand, and give your signatures for application in the book which our brother Buford has for that purpose."

They did so, each in turn, until all were seated. Nominations were then called for by Lamont; the result of which was, the election of Perkins for vice president, Buford for secretary, and our friend Worthy Ike for doorkeeper. The three were immediately installed into their temporary offices in due form, which form was nothing more than a solemn pledge of fidelity to the duties appertaining to each of their posts. Worthy Ike appreciated the compliment very highly. It was the first time in his life that he had ever been elected to an "office;" and he secretly congratulated himself that the day was now dawning when his merits were to be rewarded. He cast his eyes with due complaisance

and dignity to the theatre of his future operations, — the door, — and longed for the moment of his *début* in "public life."

The election and installation properly accomplished, Lamont asked the attention of the order to what he now had to say.

"You are now," said he, "brothers, duly pledged to membership in this order. Permit me to repeat that you have committed yourselves to an organization the operations and objects of which are laudable and good, as I doubt not you will all acknowledge when you have obtained further light. At our meeting two weeks from to-night — there will, however, in the mean time, be three meetings for the reception of new members, to be introduced and elected by yourselves — you will have communications made to you that will give you extensive insight into our plans and objects. At that meeting it is necessary that every member be present, as it will be the last opportunity for any one whose feelings may incline him to withdraw to do so. The meeting which will be held here *three* weeks from to-night is the one at which you will receive final instructions and communications; and, *hear me, brothers,*" his voice sinking almost to a whisper, "you will then learn that which *is to open every eye with wild surprise!*

"There are but two things with which I have to acquaint you to-night. First, the means by which you may ascertain if any one in whose company you may be, whether here or elsewhere, is a member of the order. It is, by placing the thumb of

your left hand between your fore and middle finger, the third also being bent. The hand is then to be carried carelessly to the face, as mine is now; and then, as if rubbing the cheek or beard, you draw the little finger, extended, two or three times across the cheek, from the corner of the mouth outward. Care must be taken that the action be free from all appearance of design; and it is better that your eye be not too intently fixed upon that of the person you address. If he be not a brother, he will of course make nothing of your query. But if he be, he will reply to you, and will immediately close the thumb and forefinger of his left hand and place them to his left side, as if to put them in his vest pocket. As, however, it may be that these signs may have been obtained by some person who is not a member, you are to test his brotherhood further before making any confidential advances. You say to him, 'What news do you carry?' and if he is not a brother, he will of course give you one of the hackneyed, commonplace answers to your no less commonplace question. If he *is* a brother, he will answer you interrogatively, —

"'Your news first.'

"You then ask, —

"'What like you to hear?'

"He replies, —

"'Nothing but *that*.'

"'Ah, well,' you answer.

"'Proceed,' is his reply; upon which you are permitted to acknowledge him as a brother; being cau-

tious, however, if your conversation is of any thing connected with the order, that you are so situated that what you say will not be overheard. At the close of our meeting we will practise the *dumb query*, as it is called, among ourselves.

"The only other instruction which you are to receive to-night has reference to your entrance to meetings of the order. This instruction, you will remember, only remains in force during the current month. Having approached the door, you rap thereon gently with one knuckle, thus: tap, tap — tap, tap — tap, tap — making six distinct knocks, with a short interval between each alternate rap. The doorkeeper applies his ear, (Worthy Ike was listening with an air of much importance,) and through the wicket softly says, —

"'Well?' as in interrogation.

"You reply with your lips close to the wicket, and in a whisper, 'I greet you.' Upon which he admits you to the council. Having entered, you advance to the president's desk and salute him by bowing, the forefinger of your right hand being placed upon your lips. The vice president you will see seated at his desk, which is always placed in the centre of the side of the room, at the president's right hand. Having saluted the president according to this instruction, you turn to the vice president and salute him by placing the point of your right forefinger upon your eyes, your lips, and your heart. Whereupon you may be seated. If during the progress of any meeting you wish to retire, you can do so by quietly

rising in your place and putting the back of your right hand to your forehead. You will then retire with as little confusion as may be possible.

"This is all with which you will be made acquainted this evening. Our adjournment will now take place in the simple form of our order; after which adjournment, we can have an hour of friendly intercourse. It is my wish to become intimately acquainted with you all. We are brothers in a good cause; my heart will ever beat with a warm, fraternal feeling for you, each and all; and I confidently hope that the results which our future operations will disclose will cause us to look back with delight to the hour when we thus banded ourselves together.

"Our form of adjournment is thus: The announcement is made by the vice president, who enjoins attention upon all. The president then rises, with his right hand raised, and the brothers do the same. He says, —

"'I pledge myself to be dutiful and true to this order, in all its interests, secrets, and operations;' which is at once to be repeated by you all."

The newly-elected vice president made the announcement in proper form, under Lamont's directions. The latter rose and raised his right hand.

Which the members also did.

He repeated the pledge.

Which was duly responded to by the members; and the meeting was adjourned.

The hour was now beginning to be rather later than some of the more sedate part of the members

were in the habit of being out; yet there was not a single one who seemed anxious to leave. On the contrary, all appeared greatly pleased with what they had seen and heard, and were well satisfied that they had connected themselves with an organization that had good in it either for themselves or somebody else. Lamont mingled with them on terms of cordial affability, yet without exhibiting a single thing in word or action calculated in any degree to lessen the esteem which had been raised for him in the minds of the whole company. He was looked upon as the trusting soldier looks upon his leader — the imbodiment of all those qualities which make the man worthy of his station.

Never did the young and old men of Quizville spend an evening together before this under such pleasant social circumstances; and they were compelled to admit that, even were there no other advantages to accrue save the creation and perpetuity of this new fraternal compact, they would be much the gainers. Good feeling was universal; and it is a fact, or at least is so reported, that some of the "small hours" actually came in sight before the last of the new alliance had quietly emerged from the outer end of the "little dark alley."

CHAPTER XIV.

A HAPPY company were standing on the shore of Lake Petumpse. A strong breeze was setting from them, and the gentlemen were hastily unlocking their boats, stepping their masts, and shipping their rudders, preparatory to seating their fair companions. Some six boatloads made the party, all of whom were in the bright heyday of life. Most prominent among the individuals were the young friends to whom the reader has already been introduced. Lamont was standing among the ladies, his company for the sail to be Miss Emily Buford and the loving little Netty. Indeed the latter was his company all the time that she could get near him. Jasper had already told her that he was getting jealous of Mr. Lamont; but one of her sweet kisses and full-hearted embracings she thought abundantly sufficient to quell her brother's asserted jealousy: the which having ascertained, he repeated the declaration oftener, that the kissings and huggings might come in due proportion.

Buford was kind enough to put Mr. Lamont's boat in sailing trim, — the latter was his guest for the day, — and having done so, he volunteered some little counsel as to sailing the little clipper to the best advantage. Lamont pretended to be listening

very intently to Edward's instructions; but there was a something about the corners of his mouth and the twinkle of his eye that was almost as much as to say he had seen a sail boat before. He made but little reply, however, but stepped in with his company. Netty watched him closely, being seated on the after "thwart," and immediately opposite to Emily, both with their side faces to Lamont. The boats had all received their loads, and were heading round, filling sails, and getting under way. By some means, the coil of the heel rope of Lamont's sail was a little entangled, the rope itself having some three or four turns around the belaying pin, and the sail was kept hanging fore and aft the boat. The consequence was, that the stiff breeze was laying the boat deeply on her side, and dragging her out in an almost dipping condition. Emily felt a little uneasy, but quickly seated herself on the upper side, at Lamont's request. Perkins and Buford, each in separate boats, saw their friend's condition, and let their sails go, that they might return. The cause of the trouble was seen by them in an instant.

"Cut the rope!" shouted Edward through his hands, his boat having already sped some distance in advance. But Lamont did not cut it, for he just now got it all clear; and with the quick request to the young ladies to take the other side of the boat as the sail filled, he was quickly dashing across the water, the sharp prow of his pretty boat throwing the water off in white foam on either side.

"Making up for lost time, eh?" cried Edward, as Lamont sped by him.

Netty clapped her little hands in great glee. Emily did not exactly understand what Lamont was at. Somehow or other, it did not seem to her that his rope was so badly "foul" in the first place; so little so, that she once or twice thought, when she saw him working with it, that he might have "shaken it out" in half the time. And now that they were fully under way, and were dashing off at a terrible rate, she sat, her eyes following his, and looking as though there was something about him which she *ought* to understand, but could not.

"You are not, in my opinion," said she at last, "what my sailor brother Ned calls a green hand; are you, Mr. Lamont?"

He merely smiled in reply, for he had just turned from looking back at Perkins. The latter was evidently trying to pass him.

"A trifle farther on that side, if you please, Miss Buford," said he.

"Aha!" replied she, laughing; "I am fully satisfied now, and see what you and Jasper are about. You will have to keep a steady hand, and woo old Neptune hard, if you want to make any thing out of our friend there." And she sat for some moments measuring the distance between the two boats, as also between all the balance, for they were all getting in hot pursuit.

"Jasper gains upon us," said she, after watching closely: "but look at Master Ned, will you? It looks very much as though he and Carrie Litton would be leading the whole of us before very long. They are certainly passing Jasper."

"I rather fear," answered he, with a plaguing air, "that there are some secret little wishes, even in *our* boat, that may help our good Jasper to gain our race." He had not time, however, to notice the effect of his remark, for Edward was rapidly coming up on the other side. Little Netty didn't like it. She watched Lamont's movements closely, and observed that the latter, on seeing Edward's boat gaining so fast, gave a hasty look to every part of his own boat, got from his pennant the exact point of the wind, looked inquiringly at the tension of his mast, traced the line of the now nearly-buried gunwale, and then looked out over the little fleet again. By this time a perfect troop of little boats were converging to the chase, old folks and young, all becoming greatly excited and interested in the scene. From some cause Edward dropped back until he was nearly abreast of Perkins; and then came another tiny boat gallantly up, in which were Miss Charlotte Perkins and young Wallace Moultrie. Jasper's company was Cornelia Buford; and the gallant young fellow was using all his nautical genius to put his sail alongside of Lamont's. For a little while victory seemed likely to perch on Moultrie's mast: he knew his pretty craft from stem to stern; her model, best tacks, handling, and most advantageous trim, to a charm; and he was giving her the full advantage of his knowledge; for she was bending to it until she seemed just ready to go under. It was getting to be quite a pretty race, and much the more animating from being entirely unexpected. Neither of the young gentlemen, and

especially none of the young ladies, had thought of any thing more than one of those little social sails so frequently enjoyed, and where one is continually passing another, and in a few moments passed again, according as conversation may be agreeable and sailing unheeded. But when they saw Lamont leaving them behind, and going off as on a tilt, they one after another thought it would be a very pretty little piece of fun to show him that it took something else besides a clean breeze to put his little bark on her best time. It looked very much as though he was bent on indorsing the opinion.

"Netty," said Lamont, "can you hold on secure enough to step over that seat?"

"Yes, sir," answered she, promptly, and looking up into his face with an expression that plainly signified her readiness to do so as soon as he should say the word.

"Wait a moment," said he, reading her willingness and looking towards Moultrie. The latter was almost on Lamont's after larboard quarter.

"You may do so now, if you please, dear Netty; but be careful." Emily assisted her.

"Shall I sit here?" she asked.

"For a little while." She saw him vary his tiller slightly and draw upon his heel rope. The new trim evidently helped him. His little boat coquettishly slipped away from her companions, slowly, but sufficient to be plainly perceived before the next two minutes had passed. Buford acted on the hint that Lamont had given him, and made some efforts to alter his own trim; and to some purpose, for it

was not long before he was once more on the gain. He came up rapidly, too, soon bringing himself so nearly alongside of Lamont that they could converse together without shouting. Three minutes more, and they were prow to prow.

"A little more that way, Netty," said Lamont; "I must study our little craft some closer. If she has any faster heels, we must see them." He was fully convinced that he had a disadvantageous load, and the point with him was to dispose of it in the best manner. With the three in the entire after part, the boat dragged too much water astern. To sit distributed from stem to stern would put them too much on a dead keel. Hence the necessity for the most judicious trim which the circumstances would afford. With each change that Netty had made at his suggestion, Lamont quickly saw that his little craft was coming to her points. He braced her a trifle more, and she shot ahead, gaining more and more at every change which his genius suggested as worthy of trial.

The boats were all approaching "the Chain." This was a chain of rocks, of very uneven elevation, and extending entirely across the lake. At no time was any portion of them visible above the water; and there was but one road, and this a winding one, through them where even small boats could pass.

"Don't you think we had better return, Mr. Lamont?" asked Emily. "We may get ourselves into trouble by going any farther."

"We will certainly return, if Miss Buford wishes," replied he; "but it is yet early."

"It is not on this account that I made the suggestion, but because I thought we might get mixed up in some of the rocks ahead of us, and have trouble."

"Can we not pass safely if you give me some directions? You ought to be a perfect pilot any where in this vicinity, by this time."

"But I am not," she replied, becoming rather uneasy as they advanced.

Lamont smiled — the same smile that she often saw, and which she never could understand. It was ever full of meaning — but meant what? A query it was to Emily, but only increasing Netty's confidence in him, for she sat as composedly as though she was sailing through the crooked passway with her brother Jasper.

Emily now called Lamont's attention to the fact that they were hailing him from two or three of the boats. Jasper and Buford were waving their handkerchiefs to him to stop.

"I say again, that I will return if you wish it," said he to her; "if you wish it. But you will afford me a pleasure if you will trust to me for our passing through safely."

"How can I?" asked she. "Nothing but danger can attend any one who attempts to go through here without knowing the way."

"And suppose I tell you that *I do know the way?* Can you trust me then?"

She looked at him with blank astonishment; and it is perhaps not too much to say that she felt as though she could very easily trust him any where. His question, however, startled her.

"*You* know the way!" exclaimed she. "By what means did you learn it?"

He smiled again — *that* smile! It was perfectly incomprehensible; but no one could have convinced her that there was not something special in it. It *meant something*. But *what?*

"I cannot tell you now," answered he, "but we will pass safely; and I would like to show those frightened fellows that we can. Look at their frantic actions!" He laughed outright, and Emily was obliged to join him.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Emily," said Netty; "I'm not."

She didn't look as though she was either.

In the other boats they were making all sorts of rapid gesticulations to induce Lamont to return; but to no purpose. He sat as calmly looking over the lake as if there was nothing but smooth water ahead. Emily's courage strengthened; so increased Netty's delight.

"Why doesn't Emily tell him where he is going?" cried Edward, frantically waving his hand to and fro.

"They will be broken to pieces, certain!" responded Jasper.

"Come back!" shrieked Edward, to the very utmost of his voice.

Jasper settled upon the seat with something like a feeling of despair. Every one of the pursuing party felt that it was a hopeless case; and they sailed along as rapidly as possible, to render the assistance which they were sure would be needed. On sped Lamont, his little craft dancing lightly in the breeze,

and gaining steadily on her pursuers at every bound. She came to the rocks — Perkins clutched his tiller in almost breathless suspense — she varies — "Heaven protect them!" cried they in the rear — again she comes nearly about — Lamont smiles — his friends are in a frenzy — she comes to the dangerous place, and must shift her course quickly, or she will gain sideway and strike — she does it all very prettily — goes through as handsomely as she ever did in the world — steadies herself — lays her gunwale in the water, and speeds away like the uncaged bird. A few moments more and she comes about — puts herself on her other bout — returns as safely through the passage as she went — comes up to her companions, who were lying-to, in waiting — gives them a laughing greeting by the lips of those she bears — shakes out her sail, and beats them home!

Lamont fastened his boat, assisted his young ladies ashore, and sat down with them on the grassy bank, awaiting the coming of their slower friends.

"You may expect to see Jasper and Edward fully fixed to scold you for your temerity," said Emily.

"So I suppose," replied he; "although I presume they will be much more disposed to wonder when they learn that I am as fully posted in yonder chain as they."

"*I* am not done wondering at it," said Emily; "and where you got your information I would like very much to know."

"Do you think, then, that Quizville is such an unattractive place that strangers never take sufficient

interest in it to become acquainted with its pretty drives and prettier lake?"

"Indeed I do not. Yet I hardly think there could have been any stranger here during the last ten years, long enough to learn the passage of that chain, without some of our present party knowing something about him. New faces are not very common with us, and we do not soon forget them."

"I am most happy to hear you say so," remarked he, pleasantly, and with an expression that plainly told Emily that he hoped it would be so with reference to himself.

Emily understood the little pleasantry, and turned to the boats, which were drawing near to the shore. She was impatient to hear what her brother and Jasper would say to Lamont.

"A badly-beaten lot you are," said she to them, laughing, as they stepped ashore. They, however, remained very grave, and appeared more disposed to scold her than Lamont.

"Emily," said her brother, "did you not tell Mr. Lamont of the chain?"

"Certainly I did," replied she, gayly; "but it was entirely unnecessary."

"Entirely unnecessary!" exclaimed Jasper, who had been looking from Emily to Lamont with silent surprise. "What do you mean, Emily?"

"Simply that it was useless to tell him what he already knew!"

"*Already knew!*" cried half a dozen at once, staring at Lamont with a new-awakened curiosity.

"Yes," replied Emily.

"Yes," repeated Netty; "he knows it just as well as *you* do, Mr. Jasper."

It was absolutely amusing to look from one of their faces to another. Lamont stood looking at them with a complacency that was almost provoking. Emily and Netty laughed long and loud.

"You all look incredulous," said Lamont, after surveying them a while. "Is it so strange a thing that I should be acquainted with yonder chain and the passage through it?"

"You have never intimated that you were," said Jasper.

"Which argues nothing," replied Lamont. "I did not tell my good friend Edward either, who kindly gave me some advice for sailing just before we started, that it was no new thing for me to manage a sail and a rudder. Yet you are all, perhaps, prepared to admit that I can, to some extent, do both."

"Have you been through that chain before, Mr. Lamont?" asked Edward.

"I have."

"May I ask when?"

"I cannot tell you just now, but some years ago."

"Often?" asked Jasper, eagerly.

"Often," answered Lamont, smiling, and putting his arm coaxingly within Jasper's. The latter drew a long breath.

"You are a riddle to us all," said he, "have been from the beginning, and I suppose will be, world without end — a riddle which I would I could solve."

"The solution you shall have," replied Lamont, kindly; "don't doubt it."

"Why not now?"

"*Now* is not the time," was the reply; "but it is not a long time hence."

"Glad of it," said Edward; and the little party started homeward. By degrees they seemed to forget the matter which had checked their gayety and excited their surprise, and relapsed into accustomed good spirits. Emily pretended to be in a great glee that Lamont had won the race; but the latter had some doubts about her sincerity. That Netty was delighted there was certainly no doubt; for she took especial pains to give vent to a special degree of childish boasting. In starting from the lake, the party had become entirely changed in its relations, so that Miss Perkins was with Lamont, and Emily with Jasper. The truth was, that Charlotte had enjoyed Lamont's victory vastly more than Emily did; but when she saw him so madly dashing forward towards the chain, all the horrors of her late catastrophe came fresh to mind. It seemed to her that he and Netty were only preserved from one great peril to be quickly plunged into another. She spoke to him of her fears, expressing her anxiety, however, as being chiefly concentrated upon Netty. It was true, nevertheless, that much of it was experienced for Lamont. Did she love him? Perhaps not. But they were together, either alone or in little companies at home or elsewhere, more or less every day. The circumstance which made them friends had also given her much to be grateful to

him for. Standing, as she considered it, in the character of her preserver, it was very natural that she should give him a more unreserved friendship than she would otherwise have done. And yet on his part there had been no effort to take advantage of his favorable position. With little Netty he was on almost equal terms with her brother; but towards Charlotte and other members of the family he manifested no disposition to be on any thing more than that of respectful friendship. He neither sought nor made advances that would put him on any other ground.

Charlotte Perkins was a young lady of more than ordinary intellectual taste and culture. He who would have and preserve her friendship could possess it only by the display of those qualities which come from an intelligent mind and a virtuous heart. Waspy-sized flirts, with more beard than brains, made very poor advancement in her estimation. Her own self-respect was too great to permit her to tolerate their society. In Lamont she met the combinations of a well-endowed intellect, a cultivated and refined taste, and a pure principle. Converse with him as she would, there were with him the never-failing resources of his well-informed mind, his poetic and classic style, and his clear comprehension of every thing about which he conversed. And the enjoyment which they increasingly found in each other's society was mutual; for Lamont was never in her company that he did not find himself entertained and improved. Such, too, was the fact in relation to the Misses Buford; but circum-

stances called their attention so much to other objects of personal interest that Lamont and they were not as were he and Charlotte. They esteemed him, however, not slightly, but highly, and ever welcomed him with heartfelt cordiality. This, indeed, was the case in all the families he visited, the list of which was steadily increasing.

"Dear Netty!" said Lamont to Charlotte, as they walked along. "I suppose the sympathy was all for her when we were running into what you all thought was peril. Ah, it must be sweet to have warm hearts to love us and to rejoice with us in prosperity, or sympathize with us if in danger or distress."

"Heaven pity those who have not!" replied she, with much feeling.

"Well may you say so," returned he; "it is a sad condition for any one."

"You speak as though from your own experience," said Charlotte; "but it certainly cannot be so."

"Cannot! Why?"

"Have *you* no friends?"

"Friendship, in name, is a sound which of late years has often fallen on my ear," replied he; "but, so far as any experience of its reality is concerned, I can say that during these years I have had but very little of it."

There was *one heart* that was full of sympathy for him now, at any rate; and if little Netty's could have been clearly looked into, the number would most likely have been *two*. Many a poor fellow there is who has as many less by just the same number!

"You have Netty, at least," answered Charlotte, seizing the only available point that she could command for raising his apparently depressed spirits; "and the friendship of her warm heart is a treasure."

"Sweet child!" exclaimed Lamont, interrupting her; "it is indeed as you say."

"You can depend upon it," continued Charlotte, "that it is more than any one dare do to say aught against you in her hearing."

At this moment the joyous little creature came bounding towards them, was caught in Lamont's arms, and there remained during the short time they were reaching home. The little party separated at the gate of the Perkins place; and Lamont, yielding to Jasper's urging, went in with Charlotte and Netty. After tea, and a very happily spent evening, he left them, with one of Netty's sweet kisses lingering on his lips.

CHAPTER XV.

RAT, tat, tat.

It was a knock at Lamont's door, as he sat within his room the next afternoon. Perkins and Buford were both with him; as they were, in fact, a large part of the time.

"Who now?" said Lamont. "Come in."

The door, which was partly open, was pushed entirely so at his invitation, and two rather coarse-looking men entered without any ceremony.

"We wish Mr. Lamont, or him as goes by that name," said the foremost one.

"I am the man," said Lamont; "what is your wish."

"Ah, you are he, are you?" replied the same one. "I could have made you out very easily, at any rate, from these two gentlemen. The description of you is complete. Please excuse me," tapping him on the shoulder; "*but you are my prisoner.*"

Perkins and Buford sprang to their feet, but Lamont remained sitting. In fact, so calm and unmoved did he appear that one might have thought him guilty at once, and consequently by no means surprised.

"Be perfectly quiet, gentlemen," continued the officer; "I have a warrant here for this gentleman,

of which you may all have the benefit;" and they got it in due form. The description of the man wanted was Lamont's to perfection; and he was now under arrest on a charge of one of those wholesale frauds upon some corporation that are so frequently startling the whole community.

"We will be obliged to have your company, sir," continued the officer, folding up his warrant, and returning it to his pocket.

Lamont was so entirely dumfounded, or at least appeared to be, that until now he had not uttered a word.

"Where is it you wish me to go?" asked he.

"To the city, sir."

"Well, sir," said Lamont, "all I can do is to inform you that you have the wrong man."

"We hear this so often," answered the officer, "that it amounts to nothing. The law must have its course: we have traced you from one place to another, and find you so fully answering the description of the man we are looking for that I consider it fully my duty to arrest you."

There was such an insolent air about the fellow that Perkins sprang towards him as though he would put him head foremost down the stairs. Lamont laid his hand upon his friend barely in time to prevent him from making matters worse for them both.

"Be careful, Jasper!" said he. "Remember that any forcible resistance here can only make the difficulty greater. You will involve yourself in an entirely unnecessary trouble."

"You are right," replied the young man; "but I cannot help feeling that I would like to punish his insolence as it deserves."

The officer paid no attention to Jasper's remark. The fact is, notwithstanding the protection which his office afforded him, he did not relish the idea of a difficulty with the indignant young man before him. In Lamont's mild manner he thought he saw a disposition to accompany him without much parley, and he had his eye largely on the reward in reserve for the capture of the guilty party.

"You wish to start immediately, I suppose," said Lamont. "Is it so?"

"By to-night's stage," was the reply.

"It is a strange proceeding," remarked Lamont, turning to his young friends; "but I suppose there is no other way but to submit."

Edward had said nothing. Had there been an arrival from the spirit land, he would not have been more startled than he was. Lamont arrested as a villain and a thief! The man whom he almost worshipped — with whom was spent more than half of his time — in whose deportment there was every thing of the gentleman — in whose conversation there was every thing to approve, nothing to condemn, — *he* to be arrested thus! And yet why might not the charge be true? Was not Lamont with them as a stranger, unrecommended and unknown? Had he with him a single testimonial to prove himself any thing other than that for which he was under arrest? Nothing, nothing but his word; and yet Edward believed him innocent. He could

not believe that the hightoned soul of Lamont could be shadowed by such a crime.

With the tears almost starting from his eyes, he caught Lamont's hand.

"Tell us," exclaimed he, "about this! Your word will be sufficient. Is this charge true?"

"I do not see, my dear Edward," answered Lamont, "that my word should be sufficient. Every thing seems as much against me as in my favor."

"But we do not believe you guilty, any more than we are ourselves," interposed Perkins, quickly.

"We *never will believe it* till our own eyes and ears have seen and heard the charge substantiated."

"I thank you both for your good opinion of me, from the fullest heart," replied Lamont, "and only hope that our friendship will be perpetual. I am happy to say that this charge has not the slightest foundation in truth, as will be readily ascertained when the parties in the prosecution will have seen me."

Edward's gushing heart could contain itself no more. He threw himself upon Lamont's neck, and the tears coursed themselves down his cheeks.

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried he; "and we are your friends now more than ever."

"Friends who will see you through every inch of the matter," added Jasper, "even from this room to the place where you must be taken."

"So certain as you go, we go too," said Edward.

"This, my friends, I can hardly permit. The kindness which you have to this time favored me with has been bestowed without claim, and I can-

not think of your persisting to remain with me in circumstances which might prove mortifying to you. Leave me and this matter to ourselves, and trust that all will be right."

"I attend you, certain," said Perkins. His determined manner was not to be mistaken.

"And I just as certain," added Edward.

"You may both regret it," said Lamont.

"So we may," returned Jasper; "but we are yours for better or worse. When it is clearly substantiated that you are unworthy of our regard, there will be ample time for us to act differently."

The officer was becoming impatient. It wanted less than an hour of stage time, by which conveyance they were to proceed. He was disposed to object to the young gentlemen accompanying their friend, not knowing but it was merely on their part a plan for assisting in his prisoner's escape. But they settled this matter so summarily that his objections were completely silenced. He had, too, some notions of his own, whereby he thought he could put matters on so secure a footing that Lamont's friends would be able to accomplish nothing in the way of getting him free.

It was arranged that Jasper and Edward were to go along with the party; and they hurried home to procure some little changes for the time they would be away. Lamont asked the officer to step from the room, that he might be left alone for a few moments.

"Excuse me, sir, but I can't do it." Lamont's face flushed with an indignation he could hardly suppress.

"I don't doubt, sir," continued the man, "that you think it hard to be under such close guarding; but my duty must be faithfully performed. For all I know, you may want me out of the room, that you may destroy some of the very strongest evidence against you. There is a window, too, from which escape would be easy. These are two very important reasons why I should keep you in my sight."

Lamont said not a word, but, without any effort at concealment, hastily put together some few articles of dress, put other scattered things in his trunks, and called for the landlord.

"I am compelled to leave you for a short time," said he to this latter personage, "and quite unexpectedly, too. You may give me my bill; and as I do not expect to be gone long, I would like my baggage to remain in your house."

The officer gave a knowing look to his companion, which clearly said that Lamont's "short time gone" might probably prove much longer than he chose to admit.

"All right, sir," replied the landlord, entirely unsuspecting the cause of his guest's departure. "Sorry indeed to lose you; hope you will be with us again very soon; have your bill in a minute." And he darted out, wondering more and more as to Lamont.

Perkins and Buford had determined, if possible, to keep the thing secret from their friends at home. But it was so seldom that they went away, and at such short notice too, that they found secrecy out of the question.

At the Perkins's, little Netty was among the first to suspect that something was wrong.

"O, we are going off on a little pleasure excursion," said Jasper to her eager inquiries.

"Who with?" asked she.

"Ah, that's what you would like to know," he answered, laughing; "were I to tell you, you would know just exactly as much as I do."

"You won't tell Netty, then?" returned she, pouting, and the tears coming to her eyes.

He caught her in his arms.

"Yes, my sweet one, I will tell you. We are going with your kind friend Mr. Lamont. Would you like to go with us?"

"Yes! yes!" cried she, clapping her hands with delight. "Will you take me, brother?"

"I don't think we can this time. We have to ride all night in the old coach, and the whole of our journey will be rapid and hard. And we will be so busy, too, that we would not be able to take care of you when in the city. Next time we will try and take you."

Charlotte had pretended to be very busy in putting her brother's little changes nicely away in his valise while he and Netty were talking. Having fixed things to suit her, locked the valise, and put the key in his hands, she asked him more plainly as to his excursion than she had yet done.

"There is something in your manner, Jasper, that tells me you are going off on some uncommon errand. Why will you not tell us more definitely about it than you do? You cannot surely suppose

that our mother, especially, will be happy while you may be away on some expedition, with the objects of which you will not make her acquainted. Indeed, brother, you are not doing right."

"So I think myself," he replied; "and although the cause of my going away so abruptly will not be very agreeable information for you, you shall know it. Our friend Lamont is a prisoner, and to-night the officers are to take him away on a most villanous charge."

Netty fairly shrieked in her agony. Charlotte stood like a statue gazing at her brother, as though the power of speech had entirely left her.

"Lamont a prisoner, Jasper!" exclaimed she at length. "What is his crime?"

"Charged with some heavy fraudulent transaction."

"Can it be that he is guilty?"

"About as much as I am," replied Jasper.

"And what says he?"

"He declares his innocence in a manner that has entirely satisfied Edward and myself that what he says is true; and we are determined to stand by him until we have seen the result."

"Thanks to you, dear Jasper, for that. We owe Mr. Lamont much; and if you can in any way befriend him, do it by all means. Situated as he here is, without any who have known him and can testify to his (in my opinion) unimpeachable character, I can easily conceive that it must be a hard trial for him. You may assure him of our hearty sympathy, and tell him that we earnestly hope he may quickly be released."

"And tell him that Netty sends him a kiss," added the little sobbing listener.

Which reminded Jasper that he had better lay in a store of the same article from Netty and Charlotte too, not only for Lamont, but himself; and he very unceremoniously took two or three from each.

"Dear Mr. Lamont!" cried Netty, as Jasper gave his valise to his servant. "Tell him, brother, that little Netty loves him very much, and will pray for him every night." There was somebody else who could very truthfully have sent him the same message.

Matters were much the same at the Buford's. With all the tact that Edward could muster, it was impossible for him to keep his secret long. And when he did divulge it, he was well nigh deluged with questions from the entire family, which were gathered around him. And when at last his preparations were made and he bade them good by, they stood looking after him, their countenances betraying a degree of wonder and astonishment to which they had been strangers for many a day.

And after tea, when the two families were gathered together on the Perkins piazza, nothing else but this matter was the subject of conversation from the moment they met till they parted. All sorts of strange things were surmised. Every feature in their acquaintance with Lamont, favorable and unfavorable; (and they were unanimous in asserting that there was precious little of the latter;) his mysterious coming and remaining amongst them; his reserved manner, especially so on the introduction of certain subjects; and even his affair during the

sail of the previous evening, — all of these, and a dozen other points, were taken up and discussed. And after all their talking, and surmising, and wondering, they were compelled to come to the conclusion that they were just about as near getting light on the subject when they began as when they ended. One thing was true, whether strangely so or not — Lamont had gained such an influence over the whole of them, and had come to be looked upon as such a model of excellence and propriety, that, although the blackest charges in creation might *be made* against him, until they were substantiated, and clearly, they would certainly never be believed.

Night was just drawing its shadow over the village, when the old coach was driven away with its load. For some time but little was said. Lamont had been greatly comforted by the kind messages which were sent him from those who remained his friends even in his trouble. Rousing himself from his quiet, he commenced a cheerful conversation, which so beguiled the hours that he and his friends were quite surprised when the driver drew up at the end of twelve miles to change his horses and coach. While the change was being made, the party seated themselves on the porch of the old farm house, where they also added something to the hasty supper which they made before leaving the hotel.

Just before setting out again, Lamont and his friends were startled by seeing the marshal open a small carpet bag and draw therefrom a pair of handcuffs. In an instant it seemed to Lamont that his soul swelled with the spirit of a Fury. Springing to

his feet before the marshal, he cast upon him a look so determined and full of indignation that the fellow quailed beneath it.

"Why have you opened those things here?" cried Lamont.

"The night is dark, and my duty compels me to use them," replied the marshal.

"On *me*, sir?"

"Just so, sir; can't help it."

Lamont looked at him for a moment, so boiling with indignant rage that he seemed only deciding in his mind as to the most effectual way of pouring out his wrath upon him. Jasper, too, and Edward, stood almost grinding their teeth, but in word or deed appearing entirely to await Lamont's procedure.

"Hear me, sir," cried Lamont — and his friends themselves almost stood aghast at his commanding and scornful appearance; "you are an officer of the law, and I am a respecter of the law. I am your prisoner on a charge of which I call high Heaven to witness I am innocent in every particular. This, however, you are not likely to believe; nor do I care whether you do or not. I have accompanied you unresistingly, and in no degree have I given you reason to suppose that you would have the least trouble in bringing me where you would. Now, sir, listen! I repeat that I am a respecter of the law; but I do most solemnly declare before these witnesses, right or wrong, that at the moment you *touch* my person with that badge of degradation, at that moment *you die!*"

Now, the worthy officer had been educated in the English language from his youth, and had as clear an understanding of the text as one man in a thousand. His prisoner was talking it to him in its unadulterated purity, and it fell upon him with such a convincing force that he quickly came to the conclusion that he had to do one of two things — viz., either return his highly ornamented "bracelets" to the place whence they came, or make his arrangements for a speedy exit from this terraqueous abode. Neither of these afforded a very pretty prospect either to his official dignity or his greedy purse. To do the former, would look like a compromise of that bravery and determination which he felt an officer of the law ought at all times to possess; and the accomplishment of the latter would materially lessen his prospects for the "five hundred dollars' reward."

He stood looking at Lamont for some moments, as though he were revolving the delicate question in his mind in all its bearings. He would very cheerfully have given *any body* an order for a new hat, at least, if the offending handcuffs had been permitted to remain where they were; but all his wishes were in vain; they had either to be put *in* their former hiding-place, or *on* Lamont!

"Make your choice," said Lamont, with even an increasing firmness, and advancing a step towards him, "*and make it quick!* I want those things out of my sight, now and forever."

"I think we shall have to put them on," said the

man, making a fresh show of courage, and motioning to his aid to draw near.

"Very well," replied Lamont; "*you will not put them on*, I pledge you that. But here are my hands; let me see you *dare* to attempt it!" Jasper and Edward were beside him in a twinkling, but they said nothing.

"Gentlemen," said the marshal, hesitating, "you are only getting yourselves into trouble. This resistance of the law will make a hard reckoning for you."

"That is our affair, or mine at least," said Lamont, not willing to admit any complicity on the part of his friends; "*you* are to act for yourself. I have said all that I deem necessary. Without any regard to law or duty, you are now on the ground of personal interest. A guilty man and a villain would perhaps be too much the coward to defy your proceeding as I do; but as I deny being either, the law nor all its minions can prevent me from resisting, to my death, the base degradation you would put upon me."

"May I depend upon you, then," asked the other, glad of any excuse to take what was evidently the *safer* side, "that you will give me no trouble on the way?"

"I promise you this very cheerfully; nay, were you to go on without me, the result would be the same. You doubt it, perhaps; but, before two suns more are set, you will learn how little cause there is for your doubts. The law is only a terror to the guilty."

The "bracelets" were returned to their place, the stage horn blew, and in a short time more the travellers were making their way over the dark and lonely road.

They reached the city on the next day in sufficient time for the ordinary investigation for commitment. As the hour drew near, Lamont's friends could hardly conceal their anxiety. They were soon to have the question settled, whether he was yet to be their friend, or one who was to be spurned forever from them. Lamont was apparently calm; yet there was a trouble within him that he permitted none to detect. He was more than ever amongst strangers; or, if he were in the very midst of friends, he chose not to make it known until there should be greater need.

The investigation came on; the prisoner was brought in; but the witnesses who personally knew the guilty party had not yet arrived. Quiet pervaded the room, although all sorts of whisperings were going from mouth to mouth. At last the witnesses came, looked with eager haste for the prisoner, and at once arrested the whole proceedings by declaring that Lamont WAS NOT THE MAN!

There was a general hubbub. The magistrate congratulated the prisoner, and told him he was discharged. Some laughed, some swore; and so much ridicule was poured upon the very efficient officer who made the arrest that it got in part to his ears, and he took occasion to leave. The revenge which he had secretly determined to have upon Lamont and his friends for threatening him at the old farm

house he quietly concluded to bury, as he did not care to have it known that he had been "backed out" in the discharge of his duty.

Probably there were never two more joyful hearts than Jasper's and Edward's when their friend's innocence was declared. They almost took him from the court room in their arms; and, before either of the three was well aware of it, they were in the returning coach, their hearts beating with inexpressible delight as they thought of their happy reception at home.

Again the old coach was coming over the hill; again the notes of the old horn were reverberating from rock to rock. The handsome stranger was again within it. It stopped at the door of the Perkins mansion, where sat the beloved members of two households. The coach door opens; Jasper, Edward, and *Lamont* all step forth, their countenances telling all that their delighted friends cared most to know. Kissings, huggings, and tears rapidly followed each other, amidst all of which little Netty pushed her way until she found herself contentedly nestled on Lamont's bosom, while her young heart was overflowing with joy.

It was a happy meeting that. Questions innumerable were put and answered; and the whole party put their heads upon their pillows that night with grateful thanksgivings in their hearts that the result of this unpleasant matter was the realization of their most fervent hopes.

CHAPTER XVI.

Poor fellows!

What a sad disappointment it was to them when they learned that *he* had returned with no stamp of guilt upon him! for they had industriously circulated the report, embellished to suit their fancy, that he was a fugitive from justice. "Great pity it is," whined they, "that a parcel more of just such couldn't be put where they ought to be. *They* are the fellows who are originating all such villanous plans as Know Nothingism and its alliances — rascally inventions to rob good citizens of their rights, take away their privileges, and muzzle their mouths. A fine eye, too, have they to their own advantage — collecting initiation fees, which in the aggregate are not to be sneezed at, and living meanwhile on the fat of the land. Ay, they've got *him*, any how; and it's to be hoped he will be made a proper example of; so that, if he is one of these Know Nothing scamps, the world may know the character of the agents."

And they forgot their callings for one day, that they might stride from corner to corner, and from one loafer's rendezvous to another, stirring up disaffectants, and seeking to swell the list of those who

were wanting some huge topic for slander and willing to take the first thing that came to hand.

The idea that "this grand rascal in gentleman's disguise" would return to Quizville in less than forty-eight hours did not enter into their calculations. It was enough for them to know that he was taken away *a prisoner!* This fully settled the point with them that he was guilty; and whatever thoughts they had of his whereabouts two days hence were associated with high stone walls, iron-barred windows, and a felon's dress — unpleasant associations, 'twas true; yet restraints and punishments only were they for those who, like him in question, were stirring up trouble between man and man.

There are events that transpire in this world that occasion an expression of surprise upon the countenance, which to a beholder is ludicrous in the extreme.

This was just the comical appearance of a number of faces on the day succeeding Lamont's return. Could it be true that he *had* returned? They determined to know for themselves. They found it no less true than strange. And, as some of them knew that Worthy Ike was a sort of a second-hand favorite with Perkins and Buford, — by what sort of a tie they couldn't determine, — they concluded that the true state of the case might be learned from him. Now, Worthy was the very respectable proprietor — notwithstanding his name of Worthy Ike — of the flourishing carriage and wagon factory of

the village of Quizville. As we have before mentioned, he was a queer specimen of the *genus homo;* but, with all his defects, — among which were his love for gossip and news, with an occasional propensity for devoting a sixpence to the purchase of the peculiar merchandise kept at the "store" near the tavern, — he attended generally to his own business — this carriage and wagon business. During the two days past Ike had been considerally chapfallen. Even the thoughts of his recent elevation to office did not comfort him; for was not this highly honorable office under Lamont? True, this relation of his to this individual was known only to those who were with him in the same confederacy; but he did not relish the idea that *even these* should ever after have the opportunity of giving him a wink of contempt for the first office to which he had been elected. Hence Ike's trouble. Pertinaciously had he applied himself to the wagon and carriage business for two days gone by; and during the second evening it was remarked at the tavern door that Ike must be exceedingly busy, that the light of his countenance was not with them as was his wont.

But the shadow was not destined to remain long upon him. The news of Lamont's return, together with all its favorable circumstances, reached his ears almost as soon as it did any of his neighbors'. It was such good intelligence that Ike came to the conclusion that the carriage and wagon-making interests would have to suffer for a part of the day at least, while he should enjoy the luxury of setting

some of the turbulent spirits to rights who for a day or two past had been so diligently circulating all sorts of reports relative to Lamont's arrest. He was in a great good humor as he sallied forth, and had not proceeded very far before he fell in with some of the aforesaid individuals, who declared he was just the man they wanted to see.

"I am, eh?" exclaimed he, straightening himself up with an air of great security. "Well, what would you see me about?"

"Have you heard the news, Ike?"

"What news?"

"Pshaw, now, Ike; you look altogether too innocent. Don't say you haven't heard."

"Can't say whether I have or not," he replied, "until you let me know what you allude to. Perhaps then I can tell you more about it."

"Ah, yes, Worthy; this we don't doubt in the least; and this is just the reason why we have been looking you up. We knew you could tell us all about it. It's reported that he has got back."

"Reported that *he* has got back, eh? Well, *he* is a person whose acquaintance I haven't made yet. Perhaps I might be better enlightened if you would just say who Mr. '*He*' is."

"Well, we mean this Lamont, that every body has been making such a fuss about for the few weeks past. The fact is, we haven't had the pleasure of seeing your very worthy self for a day or two past, and don't know that you were aware that he was arrested and carried off the other night for some grand robbery."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Worthy, with a feint of great astonishment.

"Why, didn't you know it?" cried two or three, looking into his face with that peculiar gaze which we often see in one who thinks he is giving a piece of news first hand to his neighbor.

"O, yes," said Ike, with a broad grin, "I know all about that; and I know, too, all about his return. He is back again, safe and sound."

"And turned out to be an honest man, after all," said one, with a look of disappointment.

"Just so," returned Ike. "You surely didn't think he was any thing else, did you?"

"Well, you know, Ike, it's hard knowing who's honest and who ain't. This fellow ——"

"Say *this gentleman*," interposed Ike, his dignity quite offended.

"Ah, you take up for him, do you? Well, this gentleman, then, has come here from the devil knows where ——"

"I don't think he does," interposed Ike again. "I have very little idea that Mr. Lamont subjects his movements to the direction of any such personage. Keeps better company always."

"Well, have it your own way, Worthy; but, making the best of it, nobody about here knows where he came from, who he is, nor where he is bound. How are we to know that he is an honest man? Well, among the first things he goes at is to start some villanous Know Nothing society, or something of the kind, that no honest man would have any thing to do with."

"Ah, indeed!" said Ike, considerably stirred up. "How do you know that?"

"How do we know it? Why, every body knows it: yes, old fellow, *you* know it."

"I don't!" said he, in the shortest sort of a style; "but I'll tell you what *I do know*."

"Well?"

"I know *that you lie*, every mother's son of you! I know this!"

They looked at Ike, and Ike looked at them — looked at them one at a time — looked at them all at once. *They* looked savage; and truth compels us to say, that the expression of *his* countenance was but little more amiable than *theirs*. Nevertheless, they all looked at each other, nothing daunted, for some time.

"You *know* this, do you, Ike?" said one at last.

"I do."

"Well," replied the other, bursting into a laugh at Worthy's peculiarly warlike appearance, "if you *know* it to be so, it must be that you are right; and we'll drop this point at once."

"And may take back what you said," added Ike.

"O, yes, old fellow, take any thing back that you say we ought to. But suppose you tell us something of this affair, as we are quite certain you know all about it. He's not guilty of it after all, eh?"

"So it appears. Perkins and Ned Buford were with him all the time."

"And they say he's all right?"

"All right."

"Had nothing to do with the stealing at all?"

"Nothing."

"Well, it's strange, any how, that the marshals should come up to this out-of-the-way place, following him all the way, finding him of just such a description as they were looking for, take him down to the city, and then find out they had the wrong pig by the ear! Strange, isn't it, Worthy?"

"Very."

"Very," repeated they.

"He'll go ahead with new glory now, won't he?" asked Ike, as though it was about his time to do some of the questioning.

"Ah, you're the one to know that."

"Why should I be?"

"Well, they've set you down as a Know Nothing, chalked your coat, spotted you; and you've got to face the music now, certain."

"They say I'm a Know Nothing, do they?"

"Yes, *sir*."

"And that Mr. Lamont is?"

"Yes, *sir* — nothing else."

"And how did *they* get so wise?"

"O, you know, Worthy, it's hard to keep such things secret; will get out in spite of you."

Ike's gravity relaxed.

"*Boys*," said he, "let me tell you something."

"Out with it, old fellow! We want you to tell us something; just what we're after."

"Well, you say that *they* are calling Mr. Lamont a Know Nothing, and *me* a Know Nothing; and I don't know who else they may be talking of in the

same way. Now, if you want *my* opinion, I can tell you what I think of this Mr. *They* you are talking about so much."

"Let's have it, Worthy."

"Well, I think that this Mr. *They* is a confounded jackass — having all the faculties possessed by that distinguished animal for making a noise, but without half his ordinary sense!"

Now this, to say the least, was by no means complimentary to any and all of the unfortunate individuals who were included in this comprehensive pronoun. The fact was not to be disguised that Mr. Worthy Ike was well aware that he was even addressing more or less of these unfortunate individuals at the present time; consequently it was in every essential a personal implication. Again was it the case that *they* looked daggerously at Ike, and that Ike reciprocated the affectionate gaze in full. Thus passed several moments — which moments were occupied diligently by the party in the plural in deliberating whether they could consistently pass over this second thrust. For *any* contingency Ike seemed fully prepared, yet kept himself entirely as though 'twere he that was occupying the defensive ground.

"You profess yourself fully able to stand by all you say, do you, Ike?" asked one at last who was more calm than the others.

"I do that."

"Well, suppose that I, considering myself as part and parcel of the animal you have mentioned, should resolve myself into one of his pedal extremities, and pitch into you in a style fully characteristic? What then?"

"What then?"

"Ay."

"Why, in such an event, I would advise you to bargain for all the force properly belonging to those remaining extremities, — whatever you called them, — throw it all together into one grand push, and do your *pitching in* with a will."

"You would?"

"I would."

"Why?"

"Because I think it would be one of the last opportunities you would have for so signalizing yourself that would come for many a day. Remember, if you please, that, while you would be *pitching in*, it is not likely that I should be merely *looking on*."

"Which makes you think that I had better defer any such performance until some more favorable opportunity?"

"Exactly."

"Well, perhaps you are right. But what do you say to a walk down to the *store?*" By this time all hands were in a good humor again — ready, on Ike's acceptance of this latter proposition, to escort him thither.

"No particular objections," replied he, "to take a little stroll that way; perhaps we'll hear some more *news*." The pronunciation of this last word caused a merry twinkle to come to his eye as he looked round upon his company.

On they went — Ike's good humor increasing

theirs more and more. In fact there was not one of them who did not feel rather sheepish for having taken the conspicuous part which *they* had in denouncing Lamont. As they had some little reason for suspecting Ike to have made league with him in his secret business, of whatever nature they knew not, so they concluded that Ike was a very proper person for conciliating matters for them; so that, if there was in the connection any good thing yet to come, they might have part in it.

It happened that Lamont was sitting in his room as they came along towards the store, and saw them. The result was, that, almost at the very moment that Ike was laying in his "groceries," he felt somebody touch him gently on the shoulder. He turned, and saw one of the boy waiters belonging to the hotel.

"Gentleman wants to see you up there," said the boy, pointing towards the upper part of the building.

"Wants to see me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Number twenty-seven. I'll show you up, sir."

As soon as Ike could get away he followed the boy, who took him straight to number twenty-seven.

"Come in," said the occupant, at the knock.

And Ike found himself alone with Lamont.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Worthy Ike," said the latter, extending his hand. "Take a seat."

"And I can assure you I am no less glad to see you, sir. Have felt pretty bad on your account for a day or two past."

"I am obliged to you for your sympathy, my good friend. I was in a rather unpleasant situation for a day or two; but you remember the old saying, 'All's well that ends well.'"

"That I do, sir, and am glad that it comes true in your case."

"Thank you. But I have sent for you on a little matter of business. You understand, I suppose?"

"Yes sir."

"Please to close the door. We must not run the risk of being heard. You are well acquainted in this town, I believe — know every body, not only by name and face, but by character?"

"Pretty much true, I believe, sir?"

He was considerably elated at the extent of his knowledge.

"You of course remember every one of those who have united with us?"

"As well as I know myself."

"Do you think that any of them have become disaffected by this unpleasant arrest, and made our secret known in any respect?"

Ike thought them all over.

"No, sir; I'll pledge my head that every one of them has remained true. Indeed, I know that some have made it their business to enjoin carefulness on the others, lest matters should be divulged before your return."

"So far very good," said Lamont. "I was a little fearful that it might be otherwise so soon as my arrest was known. Perkins and Buford have done their work well. It is nevertheless true that

there are those in town who have a general idea that something of the kind is going on, and who are saying that they intend practising some *ruse* by which they may gain admittance. Have you heard any thing of this?"

"O, yes, I have heard such a thing talked of in a general way; but it will amount to nothing."

"Not if we are careful. But this we must be, being cautious as to whom we approach, and not encouraging any to come to us who are not just the kind of men we want. You must all remember this."

"That we will; and as for the idea that any of them may have that they are going to come it over us by any trickery, why, we'd like to see them at it. By the way, wouldn't it be a good idea for somebody, say like myself, who is in every crowd and hearing every thing that is going on, to throw some of these fellows off the track?"

"In what way?"

"Well, for instance: some time when I might be in a crowd, where they think they know a plagued sight more than they do, to tell them how they may get in; or tell them some wild-goose story about these Know Nothing operations, which will rather make them want to keep away; frighten them, perhaps, by some old tale like the goat, or the slick pole, so that they would be like old Hinson, preferring not to *jine*."

"Very ingenious," replied Lamont, laughing at the *rare* ingenuity (?): "but please tell me on what authority you would speak of *ours* as a Know Nothing order. Has any body yet said that it was?"

"Why, yes; they say so."

"*They* say so! Who?"

Ike opened his eyes in amaze. The "they" was coming back to him.

"Well, it is so called by every body on the street; and, to tell you the truth, I have looked at it in the same way myself. Didn't think of any thing else."

Lamont laughed, and Ike looked bothered.

"So you see," said Lamont, "that it is one of the easiest things in the world to be mistaken."

Ike was more and more amazed.

"I see that I surprise you."

"To tell the truth, I must say you do."

"Well, you may restrain your wonder for a moment or two until you have heard more. I have not yet said that ours *is not* a Know Nothing order: I have not yet said that *it is*. But because there is so much said nowadays about the Know Nothings, every body seems privileged to conclude that any thing in the way of a society that is started must be nothing more nor less than a branch in this bugbear connection; and not only so, but this same every body takes the liberty of conjuring up and circulating all sorts of notions as to the objects of the thing. Let me tell you, my good friend, Worthy Ike, that these people are the Know Nothings themselves. They are the ones who know nothing about that of which they talk. But supposing that ours *is* an order of this kind; what then? It would not be the *first* Know Nothing organization that has been in existence; that is, so far as any secret society, working in the same way, might be so called. You may

take it for granted that there are more Know Nothing societies than one in the land, and have been for a longer time than is generally supposed. But what do we know about them? Simply that they pursue the even tenor of their way, and all the time *doing their work!* Now, so far as *our* organization is concerned, you will in due time learn what it is, and what it is not. But so far as your making any admissions when with those who may be conversing with you is concerned, you are not to say that you are in connection with any order. And as for frightening any away from uniting with us, you need not do this. Our object is, not to drive away any who may be proper persons to admit, but to receive all such into good fellowship with us. However, up to our meeting of two weeks from next Monday night no persons will be approached on this subject by any body other than Mr. Perkins and Mr. Buford. They have proper instructions as to the character of persons whom they are to approach."

"I wish that the time was already here when we are to be let into full daylight," said Ike, with an impatient gesture.

"Ah, you are getting uneasy."

"Rather; it's sorter natural, you know."

"Yes, it is even so; but it can't be helped just now. I doubt not, however, that you will feel abundantly satisfied, and have all your fears allayed, when the *full daylight* does come."

"Glad to hear it," replied Ike: "but I'll tell you what, if it was my good old wife that had to do the waiting, you may hang me if she didn't hurry up

the daylight, if she had to put a crowbar under the sun."

"You don't think, then, that it would be advisable to have a sisterhood in our order, do you?" asked Lamont, with a comical look.

"Not unless you'd swear them pretty tall to keep their tongues inside of their faces."

"Ah, Mr. Worthy Ike, I thought you were much more gallant. We will defer the matter to our next meeting; and by that time you may change your opinion."

"So I may," answered he, rising; "no telling. But you will please excuse me, sir. I am engaged in the carriage and wagon factory business, and must leave you for the present."

And Ike retired.

CHAPTER XVII.

"MONDAY night two weeks" came.

But before we proceed to give any account of the incidents of this evening's meeting, it is well to say something of the state of feeling of all who were interested in it. At the incipient meetings which were held between this and the first, several new names had been added. One that was appointed had been postponed on account of Lamont's absence. But when it was known that he had returned, and that there had been no proper ground for his arrest, the feeling in his favor increased more than ever; and there was visible impatience for the next meeting to come, in order that this feeling might formally be made known to him. In fact, his arrest proved a most advantageous movement for his cause; for, in sympathizing with him therefor, all were willing for the time to show a more implicit faith in himself and the movement he was making. He had no reason to regret the circumstance, unpleasant though it was for the time being. Every door was opened to him; warm hearts took him to their embrace; friends — so far as he chose to encourage them — flocked round him on every hand; and even rosy-cheeked little companions of the lov

ing Netty vied with her in the interest with which they received him.

And now came the meeting. Quietly and orderly the brothers drew near. Our friend Worthy Ike found himself fully in the midst of the honorable duties of his post; and when the announcement was made that all whose names were recorded were present, — and it was so almost without an exception, — Lamont took the president's chair. Had the meeting been one of the kind where applauding would have been in order, there is no doubt but that he would have received a greeting that would have made the walls of the old "upper court room" ring. It was easy, however, for him to see that great satisfaction pervaded the bosoms of all, and it gave him a new heart for his work. Order being observed, he addressed them thus: —

"MY BROTHERS: I am happy to meet you again. For reasons of my own, I was not with you during the two meetings of last week. It was not necessary that I should be here until this evening, as the worthy brothers whom you elected to office were by me made fully competent for all the duties which would devolve upon them at those meetings.

"Permit me to express my thanks that, notwithstanding the unpleasant circumstance that transpired some days ago, I am permitted to see you thus assembled, your confidence in myself and the order which I am founding with you apparently entirely unshaken. Indeed, I may hope it is not only unshaken, but increased. No man could expect more confidence and kindness than I have received.

Again I thank you for it; and, at the meeting when I shall make my final disclosures to you, I think you will, in the midst of your wonder, rejoice that you have thus stood by me. But we will now proceed to our opening exercises. The constitution of our order requires that, at the opening of every meeting, a form almost similar to that at the close shall be observed. You will please rise and repeat after me, placing the point of your right forefinger to your hearts."

Which was done.

"'I hereby pledge myself a true friend to this order, in all its interests, plans, and operations, binding myself to observe all its forms, keep all its secrets, take part in all its deeds, love its brotherhood, subject myself to the will of the majority, and seek in every prescribed way to increase its numbers and influence and to carry out its designs. So testify I before all these witnesses; and so do I agree to forfeit the good will of every brother of the order upon violation of this covenant in part or whole.'

"And now, brothers, from our worthy vice president you will receive the instructions which you must have preparatory to the degree which will this evening be conferred upon you."

Lamont took his seat, and Perkins advanced to the stand. It was a happy event for Lamont and his mission that Jasper and Edward were taking such prominent parts; it was well that such as they had been enlisted in the work of soliciting memberships. The estimation in which they were held

was a mighty lever in Lamont's hands, wherewith he raised a good superstructure on a better foundation, and gained for his order an impulse that it would have required a very formidable agent to oppose.

Perkins stepped forward with all the appearance of a man who considered himself engaged in an earnest work. "The brothers," said he, "will please draw around the desk in a circular form, and so spread themselves out that every one can at once see and be seen."

With as little confusion as possible, they did as they were instructed; which done, and quiet restored, Jasper addressed them thus:—

"My Brothers: We are glad that your interest in the establishment of this order is manifestly on the increase. We are glad that, during the probationary term now expired, you have not, so far as we now know, had any reason to believe that you have connected yourselves with a bad cause, and wish to be relieved from the obligations thereof. But if, contrary to our belief, there are any who would like to have their relation dissolved, they will now make it known, and they will receive an honorable dismissal."

Not one manifested any such disposition.

"It is but as we thought," continued he, after looking carefully around at them all; "and I look forward with the most pleasing anticipations as to the future good feeling and happiness that is to be experienced by us all from this new alliance. The most of us have known each other from childhood; and it is but natural that this bond of union to

which we are pledged should revive within us those warm emotions towards each other which for some time past have lapsed into mere formal recognition and distant friendship. Too often is it the case as we advance in manhood's years that business cares and the diversity of responsibilities, that take one here and another there, draw early friends apart, and make every thing to centre in self and the immediate interests connected therewith. Such being the case, we forget to love our neighbor as we should; forget the claims of common humanity; forget, or at least do not take the interest which we should in the advancement of public interests and national affairs. We think of self, we struggle for self, we make every enterprise for the general good succumb to self, and we are selfish altogether. And is not this even true with many of those who are bound together under the Christian name? With the most profound respect for that sacred institution, and with the most undoubting confidence that its teachings and injunctions are for the good of all who embrace them, yet I cannot but see that among its professors, while there may be nothing in their actions that is overtly wrong, there is a very distant living from the practical part — that part which bids them exercise charity, love, forbearance, and which enjoins upon them to visit the poor, the widow, and the fatherless. Derelict, however, as its professors are, I would that more of us were connected with it, and that all of us were acting according to it.

"But in the formation of an order such as ours, we come together under circumstances that are calculated to develop all our better feelings; pledges that will dissipate our selfishness; obligations that will make us continually stand by and love each other; and objects in view that will ever keep our sympathies in full flow and our social delights in ever-fresh existence. We cannot pledge ourselves here and rest upon our pledges; we cannot belong here and be idle. But we will ever have work to do, and must ever show willing hearts and ready hands to do it.

"Let us now proceed to those matters which are especially to engage our attention this evening. You are now to be made more fully acquainted with the designs of this order, although the communications of most interest are not to be made until the meeting of which announcement has been made. I have to say with reference to those communications, that, like yourselves, I am as yet entirely ignorant of them; and they will not be committed to a single ear until that evening, when our worthy president will impart them to all of us at one hearing. He has instructed me to say that at that time he wishes every member to be at his post. The meeting-place, however, will be changed in the mean time, lest our movements should in any way have become known, and impertinent persons should be preparing themselves to give us annoyance. Of the new place of meeting, information will be given to each of you in proper time.

"The first matter in hand is the name of our order. You hear much talk of a Know Nothing order; but so far as any information can be obtained,

no such order exists. It is a mere name gotten up by outsiders, who are in reality the Know Nothings of things which they say are done within some fanatical order; or, if such so called fanatical order does exist, it is a name which it has ingeniously sent abroad to blind those who are without. It makes but little difference which is correct. The name of *this* order will be given to each of you *in a whisper;* and every member is to bear in mind that this name is never to be spoken outside our council, and even then only in the quiet way in which it will now be given to you. Our worthy secretary and myself will begin at each end of the circle and give you the name."

And in each ear was whispered the name, which all most eagerly bent forward to hear,—

"THE SONS OF BENEVOLENCE, PATRIOTISM, AND GOOD DEEDS."

"You will see, brothers," continued Lamont, after resuming his stand, "that the very name of this order implies all that benevolent purpose and patriotic principle of which I spoke a moment ago. Receive it as your watchword; inscribe it on the banner of your hearts; and ever hold yourselves ready to go forward where its enforcements may lead.

"We come now to the designs and duties of our order. We are engaging in a cause on whose banner '*Good Deeds*' is inscribed. This has more especial reference to the kind and friendly offices that will be incumbent on every member to his brother. It is made our duty first to obtain here

the acquaintance of every one, and especially if he be in any degree a stranger; our duty to know every brother, and to throw down every wall of contention that may have been built between us; to bury past differences; to forget old hostilities; and to begin anew. It is made our duty to know if any brother is in distress, either from any mental cause or from business reverses. And in such event we are, by kind and brotherly advances, to cheer his spirits, pour in upon them the oil of a sympathizing tenderness, to be followed, not with words, *but with actions* that will make him feel we are his friends, and are willing to sacrifice time, money, and personal comfort to place him on a happy and prosperous footing again. The sick chamber, too, is the place where we must ever stand prepared to go, and go with the cheerfulness of heart and face that is oftentimes more valuable than the physician's prescription. It may be that a sick brother has a family dependent on his daily exertions. With the thought before him of dying, and leaving them to be buffeted by every rude wind, his anxieties are increased, and his disease is made worse as a natural result.

"To him we are to give our hearty assurances that, if he is taken from them, they will be watched over with kindness and provided for with certainty. We are to tell him that his wife shall have mothers and sisters who will give her a place in their hearts; we are to assure him that his little ones shall be educated, and shall be placed in situations where they will be prepared to gain for themselves an honorable livelihood, and positions that will entitle them to

respect. There are the same duties incumbent upon us towards every brother who may not have a family or relatives whose attentions he might expect. Beside his bed we are to watch with brotherly care, seeking to cheer his spirits and check his disease. Thus will we be complying, not only with one of the positive obligations of our order, but with one from a higher source. Great is the pity that the whole race of man is not bound together under positive personal pledge to do such laudable work as this. Then might it be said that he had taken a great step towards being like what he must be, if ever he attains to that place where all is an eternal brotherhood of love.

"The next feature in our social compact you may, at its first suggestion, think of as being unnecessarily incorporated in our chapter of instructions. But as it has reference to a great evil, which many a time ruins the character and blasts the hopes of innocent persons, we must certainly look at it as a properly designed and happy instruction. I will give it to you as it is presented in our chapter.

"*Slander*, being an evil of so great magnitude that it is impossible to calculate the unfortunate results that have followed in its train, is positively forbidden to be indulged in by any member of this order. And this prohibition extends to the evil in every conceivable shape. Not merely is any member not allowed to circulate reports that would in any degree detract from the good name and fair standing of a brother, but he is not allowed to *give ear* to such reports; he is compelled to turn away from any

one whom he may see engaged in circulating them; he is not to permit them to be listened to nor circulated by his family, nor any part thereof. And this course is to be persisted in, unless it be fully and unquestionably established that any and all such reports are true. Even then is it recommended that he try and throw the mantle of charity over the deed or deeds, and encourage others to do the same, if so be he may reclaim the fallen and assist the weak.

"It is to be hoped, my brothers, that, no matter in how great degree these injunctions might be applicable to other localities, they are entirely needless here. Yet they are wholesome considerations, to which we all doubtless unhesitatingly pledge ourselves. We perhaps are apt to think of the thing of slander as meaning only the circulation of gross transactions which are entirely false and set on foot with malicious design. But this is far remote from the kind of slander contemplated in our chapter of instructions. The allusion here is to the slightest innuendo, the circulating of the most trifling thing, which would in even a small degree affect the respectful feeling which might be entertained in any community towards a brother. Thousands of persons there are whose chief business in life seems to be to pry into the affairs of others, that they may quietly make them public. Great pretensions they make to a sound morality — nay, to the Christian character; yet will they persist in going from house to house, and from one person to another, their tongues laden with a cruel defamation, which in its insidi-

ous character is more ruinous than the open thrust. It is this sort of slander, indeed, which our chapter contemplates, more than the open, bold charges which the party assailed may hear of and have an opportunity to defend himself against. I am thankful that this is one of the obligations imposed upon us. We cannot but feel that, were it in full force in every village, city, and clime, mankind would be rid of one of its deadliest foes, and would be advanced another step in the scale of the purity from which it has fallen. Society would be on a new basis, and we might not continually be living in apprehension that our nearest neighbor was our surest foe.

"We come next to a matter which has reference to the business relations which we are to sustain, not merely among ourselves as a fraternity, but towards all with whom we may have to do. I have to confess that there are features in our instructions which, when I first looked at them, I was disposed to think had in view the accomplishment of more than we could hope to perform. But the more I have read them and thought of them, the more am I disposed to give them my hearty approval and pledge. I will read to you: —

"'Uprightness in all business transactions is sufficiently proved to be one of the greatest elements of success, as well as one of the firmest bonds of good feeling between the dealer and the patron. Therefore is it made incumbent on every member of this order that he deal full measure, just weight, genuine articles, and a price, once fixed, to be unchangeably maintained. It is enjoined, too, upon

every brother that in all his transactions he give preference — unless in so doing he is assured it will be disadvantageous to him — to those of the order; also that he recommend them to patronage in all cases where he may believe he can consistently so do. And it is furthermore made obligatory upon every member of this order that his debts be promptly adjusted according to promise or contract, especially where the other party is a brother here, or a person whose circumstances make it necessary that his dues should be promptly in his hands.'

"This, brothers, you may possibly think transcending all the prudential injunctions which any order would be disposed to consider within its range. But why should it be so regarded? It is only opening a door of happiness to each and all of us; only the placing of all our business relations on more certain ground; while to the poor mechanic, the toiling seamstress, and all who are in continual need that the pittance they have earned should be in their hands for disposal, it is a Heaven-sent blessing, that we may all consider ourselves favored in being made the instruments of conveying. I would consider it an insult to any of you to ask you if you would have this instruction stricken from the chapter, even were it in your power; for it is one which cannot fail to meet with a full response from every upright heart.

"For the promotion of good morals and the respectability of our order, drunkenness is forbidden. The instruction with reference to this vice does not take cognizance of the temperate use of spirituous

liquors. It does not pretend to affiliation with what are called temperance movements, nor does it pretend to prescribe any action to its members with reference thereto. But drinking to intoxication is the point where it lays hold of the offending party, as liable to the discipline of the order.

"We come now to an item in our chapter which is of great importance, and which may look forward to great and good results. We are enrolled as the sons of patriotism, lovers of our country in all her relations — social, civil, political, and religious. And it is made our local duty to see that in all offices of honor and trust we seek to place men of pure principle, clear understanding, and sterling worth. There are two extremes of error that are adopted by men, against both of which we are cautioned here. First, that blind devotion to a party which makes every other consideration to fall before it. It is enough for all such persons that their party has made a nomination. They join the hurrah, and would put the nominee in office by acclamation. To them his moral qualities are nothing. To them it matters not that he is ignorant, wanting in intelligence and judgment, wanting in all the requisites which would make him dignify the office, and which would insure them that he would only give assent to righteous enactments. All these are nothing; their party commands, and they obey.

"The other of these extremes is the man who does not give questions of municipal, state, and national interest any attention. Immersed in the things of self, he forgets that there are high claims upon him

to use all his influence that good men may be placed in office, and that healthful laws should be enacted. Perhaps of the two this is the greater evil. No man can consider himself as one who should be excused from taking part in such vitally important matters. When he does not act, the rabble will; and we are not to forget that, 'when the wicked reign, the people mourn.' We are to come into this order, my brothers, pledging ourselves that we will not be guilty of either of these extremes. We are to begin from this good hour to see to it that capable men are those whom we will select to rule over us; men whose influence will be thrown in the scale of morality and virtue; men of enterprise; men who will promote intellectual interests; men who will frown upon immorality in every shape, and who will legislate with a view to our sectional and national advancement, so that we may be as a bright light to every nation on the globe.

"Remember, therefore, my brothers, that in this matter we now stand on new ground. There is no injunction upon you that you shall forsake the political party of your choice, unless it be that it has nominated such men as are contemplated in this proscription. In such event your pledge cannot be violated. You act upon high moral principle, with a view to the accomplishment of high moral results; and the mere principles of demagogism are to be entirely waived. It does not look consistent that the devout man should bend his knee in supplication to the Giver of all good that his country may be prosperous and happy, and then give his influence

to the support of pompous egotists and politicians who are essentially corrupt.

"The last in our chapter of instructions for this evening is this: Charity and good will to our fellow-man must be the principle that shall guide us in all our conversations and transactions, not only among ourselves, but with all men every where. We are to consider ourselves a vigilance committee for the public good; and to each of us is assigned the local duty of seeing that in this community harmony, law, and order ever prevail. Riots we must quell; iniquity must be punished alike in high places and low; the rich must have no favors that shall not be extended to the poor; the oppressed we must befriend; and whenever duty calls, we must ever hold ourselves ready to obey.

"And now, my brothers," said Lamont, stepping into the place which Jasper resigned, "you are instructed in greater degree into the designs and secrets of our order. It becomes you to consider these obligations faithfully and well; and if there is any hesitation on the part of you, we counsel you to wait longer before you give your renewed pledge to what you have heard. Unless there be some objection made, I will proceed to administer it to you."

A firm purpose to abide was plainly manifest on the countenance of every member.

"You pledge yourselves, then," continued Lamont, "that you heartily embrace each and all of the instructions that have been read in your hearing. And you furthermore pledge yourselves that you

will individually and collectively practise and see to the proper carrying out of all of these instructions; that you will abide by them in all your intercourse, your dealings, your influence, and your actions. And in failing to do so, you consent to forfeit forever your good name with every brother of this order. Do you so pledge yourselves?"

"We do," replied all.

"Then, in virtue of the authority vested in me, do I pronounce you, each and all, members in proper standing of this order, in this its second degree. Your certificates you will now receive from our worthy secretary, on payment of the requisite fee."

While the brothers were settling their fees and receiving their certificates, Lamont and Perkins passed round amongst them, introducing and being introduced, until the former had shaken hands with every member. And it seemed as though the order was even now beginning its work. Men of recluse habits became agreeable and sociable. Tongues which were usually silent, except on questions of loss and gain, were suddenly loosed, and showed that they were willing to give expression to the better emotions of the heart within — emotions that had long been repressed, long been hidden beneath the rubbish of corroding care and selfish aims. Men of haughty demeanor became affable to all. The rich and the poor shook hands. The old were gay, and the young were happy. All feuds seemed to have taken wings; and those who had permitted some trifle to estrange them long from each other grasped hands, buried the knife, and were friends again.

Every heart was happy, every tongue was vocal; and it is not too much to say, that they all expected the morning to dawn more placidly, and its sun to shine more cheerfully, than ever before. Whether it was a Know *Nothing* or a Know *Something* order, was just then a question of small import. One thing was certain — it was one which had in it elements for making all who were connected with it good men, better citizens, and truehearted friends.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Worthy Ike had a wife; and, in his eye at least, she was a perfect jewel of a wife. But it was an unfortunate feature in her character that she was strongly tinctured with Old Fogyism. Her very worthy husband was at times greatly troubled on this account, as he was more of the "Young America" school. Now and then she would pitch into him in a manner that would have done credit to the venerable Mrs. Caudle when he would try to get around her with some of his new-fangled notions. And they dealt out short talk to each other at times to an extent that looked very much like an interruption of conjugal bliss. Nevertheless, Ike looked upon her as the very essence of all matrimonial good.

Mrs. Isaac Bledsoe had not failed to notice that there had been a few evenings lately on which her respected husband had sought his home at hours altogether too late to comport with her views of a married man's duty. And as the last evening's meeting had not helped matters much as a question of time, she came to the conclusion that it was an occasion for her to give the matter an investigation. During the first of these evenings she had retired to her rest, leaving the house open for his entry; and

although on each occasion sleep had overpowered her faculties, she was nevertheless aware that he came in later than his wonted time. On this evening, without saying a word to him as to where he was going and what time he would return, she determined to wait his coming. Slowly the hours dragged on, and were counted by her from one to another with no little impatience. The lights in the neighbors' houses were disappearing; door after door was locked; and respectable people were all closing up for the night. And even then there was no little time elapsed before she caught the sound of his approaching footsteps.

It was with no little trepidation of heart that Mr. Worthy Ike drew near his home; and as his conscience rather rose upon him with its upbraidings, he excused himself with the recollection that these calls would not be so frequent upon him when the order should be fully under way, and that there was no probability that the meetings would generally be held so late. A light was shining through the crevices of the blinds; and he knew it was coming from a part of the room so near the vicinity of the clock that the hour would be plainly visible to his anxious wife. It was a great damper to the evening's enjoyment, and an extensive drawback on the dignity with which he felt his office had invested him. But there was no resource other than for him to enter, and trust to the circumstances of the occasion to deliver him from the outburst of wrath which he doubted not would come upon his devoted head.

The worthy madam was fully, intelligently awake when her worthy husband came in.

"Ah, you've come, have you!" was the greeting which he received, accompanied with a not very amiable expression on her domestic face.

"Yes, my dear; I'm here, all right."

"All right, eh? I'd like to know what you please to mean by *all right*."

"Why, I'm not drunk, am I?"

She eyed him very intently, and watched all his movements, as though she did not exactly know whether to say that he was, or was not.

"I don't know that I am fully prepared to answer your question," replied she.

"Madam!"

"Didn't you hear me?"

"I heard you, madam — yes; but it seems to me that you meant to imply something which I think you do not really believe."

"Ah, it does, eh?"

"When I say that I am here all right, I mean that I am here in the full possession of my reason; and as to any insinuation that I am not, I can only say that I am sober as yourself."

"Ah, indeed!" replied she, tossing her airy head.

"I mean to say that I am here under as favorable circumstances as any honest man in this town."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Madam!"

"Mr. Bledsoe!"

"Something has occurred, I fear, to put you in an ill humor to-night."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, madam, *indeed!*"

"Well, sir, if something has occurred *to justify* my being in what you are pleased to call an *ill humor*, what then?"

"Why, in that case, I suppose you would *be justified* in being in an ill humor — that's all."

"It is!"

"I think so, madam."

"And how am I to defend myself from the return of occurrences which may put me into this ill humor?"

"It depends entirely upon what they are."

"Well, suppose I say that the present occasion of my unpleasant feelings — for I am obliged to confess that I am not in a very amiable mood — lies entirely with your very affectionate self?"

"Madam!" exclaimed Mr. Worthy Ike, with a look that told of utter astonishment.

"Yes, sir; it is just as I say. I have put up with your midnight revels long enough; and I want to know what it is that has lately been making you keep such late hours."

"You do?"

"Yes, sir; I do."

"Can't a man have the privilege of spending an evening now and then with a few friends without being called to account for it?"

"My opinion is that he ought not to spend his evenings or any portion of his time any where that he would *not be willing* to give an account of."

"Always?" asked Ike.

"Yes, sir, always."

"But suppose he doesn't choose to do any such thing. What then?"

"Well sir, whenever it comes to the point that a man is in the habit of going where he is ashamed to be let known, and staying, too, until such hours as every honest man should be at home, he is doing just exactly what he has no business to do. Now, sir," continued she, with increasing energy, "you needn't think you are going to hide from me where you spend your time so much, for I know more about it than you think. It's nothing more nor less than this outlandish Know Nothing society, that is leading all the men away from their duties and turning their heads. You needn't think we women don't know all about it. No, sir, you needn't; for we *do know* all about it. We have ways of finding out things that you men don't know any thing of. You may have your Know Nothing societies as much as you please; but we understand well enough about your rowdy affairs. No doubt you think it very pretty to have a place where you can get together and have your good times, your good wine and brandy, your good cigars and tobacco, your good songs and your good jokes. *We* don't know any thing about it, eh? May be we don't — we persecuted wives, forsaken, left to spend cheerless evenings alone, scolded if we indulge in a little bit of gossip; while you, lords of creation, can club together and talk scandal by the hour! Now, sir, there's got to be a stop put to it. You may do it first as well as last, or I'll see if *we* can't have a society that will be a match for yours — a society,

sir, that will make you cook your own dinners, make your own shirts, and take care of yourselves in general! We'll see what you'll do then!" And the eloquent Mrs. Worthy Ike stopped for a reënforcement of breath. Her eyes and head, however, kept up their tune; for she shook the one threateningly, and looked daggers from the others.

Pending her very effective harangue, our friend Worthy had very much the appearance of having the worst of the battle. He sat staring at her with wondering eyes and open mouth. When she first spoke of *knowing* about his movements he was filled with no little surprise. How could it be? thought he. He was well aware that she was more than a match for himself in the way of scraping up news and ferreting out any thing that was enveloped in a mist; but when it came to knowing about his late proceedings, he was entirely in the dark. When, however, she came to speak of her knowledge in detail, he was considerably relieved; for he saw that she was only drawing upon her imagination for facts.

"The information you have obtained," replied he, mildly, "bears rather heavy upon me, I must confess; and I am at a loss to know where you got it."

"It doesn't make any difference where I got it," replied she, judging from his remark and manner that she was even nearer the truth than she had supposed, and in consequence she gathered new strength from the idea; "so that I *have* got it, is all that is necessary."

"You have it from good authority, I suppose?"

"Of course I have."

"But you choose not to let it be known?"

"Indeed I don't. You thought that I was going to submit to such treatment, I suppose, uncomplainingly, and that I wouldn't try to find out all about your very pretty rowdyisms. Ha! ha! How very much you find yourself mistaken!"

"We are very often liable to be mistaken," answered Ike, with a look that was as much as to say that this might even be *her* condition in the present instance. She chose not, however, to interpret it thus, but proceeded with the more agreeable idea that it all lay with him.

"And I hope, sir," said she, "that you have now learned a lesson that will make you conduct yourself with more propriety in the future."

"I have certainly learned *a* lesson," replied he, with a very unmoved countenance.

"Well, sir, I am very happy to have taught it to you."

"But it does not seem to me," continued he, without apparently noticing her remark, "that it is one calculated to inspire me with a very exalted opinion of human nature in general."

"Ah, it don't, eh?"

"No, madam, it don't."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Because it teaches me that human nature is very much given to deception."

"Sir!" cried she, in amazement, as the thought burst upon her that in some way his allusions were intended for herself.

"Very much given to deception," repeated he.

"What do you mean, sir?" cried she, with a considerable show of bristling up.

"You told me a little while ago that you *knew* of my movements during these few evenings in question."

"Yes, sir."

"And said that you had information that I was engaged in the manner which you specified."

"Yes, sir."

"That is," continued he, "engaged in a general species of rowdyism — such as drinking, smoking, singing club songs, and having such like good times."

"Yes, sir."

"Is it not your duty to tell me who it was that gave you this information?"

"Don't talk to me, sir, about *duty*."

"Very well, then — your *pleasure*."

"No, sir."

"Then all I have to say is, that your informer or informers, he, she, it, or they, are very much like their father the devil."

About this time Mr. Worthy Ike was getting pretty extensively wrathy himself, and he stood before his affectionate spouse having very clearly depicted on his countenance the expression of a determined and injured man. And his wife was herself growing very red in the face — which she never failed to be whenever her temper was getting up to the boiling point. When her husband came out so plainspoken, she looked very much as though

she would like to make a late supper out of him, were it not that by so doing she would make herself a widow.

"In what way, sir," cried she, springing up, "do you mean to say that my informers have any resemblance to the horrible personage of whom you speak?"

"*They are liars*, madam!" replied he, coolly.

"Pretty language," returned she, sinking into a chair, considerably subdued, — "pretty language in the presence of your wife!"

"I like to use pretty language in every body's presence," he answered, calmly; "but there are times when certain terms will only convey what I wish."

"And you choose to insult *me* with them?"

"No, madam, I do not choose to do any such thing. So far as I can now remember, I never have had any such disposition, and it is not likely that I wish to acquire it now."

She knew that what he said was true. Mr. Worthy Ike had ever been a very kind husband; and although, as we have intimated before, they had their "family jars," yet the storm was always followed by brighter sunshine, and she looked upon Ike as he did upon her — a model in the matrimonial way. And, as he now came out with such a bold denial of all that she had asserted, she was compelled to remember that it was merely her own imagination that had arrayed before her the many sins with which she charged him. Thinking herself at the time on the right track, she thought the

proper course to be pursued was to show a bold front, and bring him to confession from the belief that she knew all. But the result was just what it is when argument is based on untenable ground. So soon as Ike saw the true state of the case — that she was trying to come over him by pretending to know what she did not — his courage came to his aid, and he determined to hide his wrong, if there was any, by bringing hers plainly to view. Ike knew her "like a book."

"I could have informed you better," said he, noticing the change in her, "than any of these miserable fabricators have done. It is an unfortunate fact that many of your sex think that, because a man may in any way be connected with an institution that does not choose to make all its matters public, he is one of an association that has nothing but evil designs to accomplish. They think it a mere pretext for getting together and indulging in all sorts of wickedness which they are ashamed to let people know any thing about. Now, while I do not pretend to have any thing to do with any associations or societies, yet I think I may very safely say that there are some whose objects are good; for they practise a spirit of benevolence and good actions that some who profess more do much less of."

When Ike told her that he could have given her information that would be so entirely different from that which she professed to possess, hope rose within her that he would indeed do so. And inasmuch as he spoke so kindly, she concluded that a similar

kind manner on her part would draw from him the much-coveted information. Allowing herself time for cooling down in a dignified way, she began at length to address him in an almost tender style.

"I begin almost to be sorry," said she, "that I have listened to any thing that any body has had to say about this matter. But, to tell the truth, I cannot help feeling very anxious to know what it is that should keep my husband away from his home until such late hours."

"And it would be his duty to tell you, if he was in the habit of doing so every night. But when his absences of this kind are not very freqnent, and he comes home to you all right, without any appearance that he has been engaged in rowdyism of any sort, you ought to have sufficient confidence in him to believe that he is at least engaged with some matter for good of which he is not ashamed."

"But is it not natural that I should want to know of every thing that interests you so much?"

"Certainly it is; and I do not say but that some time you may know to some extent. I can say, with a clear conscience, that I am very far from being ashamed of the company I have been in to-night."

"You promise me, then, that at some time you will tell me all about it?"

"Can't say that I will."

"Well, you will give me some idea of it, at any rate?" persisted she, coaxingly.

"Very likely I will."

"Soon?"

"Possibly I may."

"But why can't you do so *now*, if you can at any other time? I shall be cracking my brain surmising all sorts of things."

"To speak the truth, I can't say that I have any thing very particular that I *can* tell just now," replied he. "When there is something that I can tell you, I will then take it into consideration. But, until that time comes, let me advise you to place a little more confidence in your husband, or at least until you see him guilty of something which makes him unworthy of it. There is nothing in the world that is easier than for gossiping people to tell all sorts of ridiculous stories of things concerning which they are really ignorant."

"But now," interposed she, coaxingly, "there is just one thing that I want you to tell me to-night."

"Well?"

"Just one thing."

"Well?"

"Will you do it?"

"Can't promise; depends entirely upon what it is."

"Well, I just want to know if it's the Know Nothing meeting where you go?"

Ike laughed. "Do you know any thing about any Know Nothings here?" asked he.

"Well, no," replied she, hesitatingly; "I can't say that I do in particular."

"Just my case exactly," answered he.

His wife looked surprised. That there was such a society in town, was a matter of no doubt in her

mind. Every body said there was, although nobody *knew it;* and she had, of course, settled the point in her own belief that her husband was one of them, and could tell her all about it if he would. His declaration, that she knew precisely as much about any such society as he did, was something for which she was entirely unprepared.

"Well," said she, "if you don't know, of course you can't tell. But I think, somehow or other, that you have been somewhere to-night where you have been having something to do with the Know Nothings, or somebody just like them."

This was an assertion so comprehensive that she thought Mr. Worthy Ike would be compelled to admit some part of the charge.

"Perhaps I have," replied he, "and perhaps I haven't. I can only say just now, that the wagon and carriage factory business has kept me so closely engaged to-day that I have an almost intolerable appetite for going to bed."

"I think you should have added, as a part of that which has increased this particular appetite, your Know Nothing operations to-night."

"Ha! ha!" replied he. "Perhaps you'll know more about it some of these days."

"That's a dear good husband!" answered she, delighted with the prospect.

And Mr. and Mrs. Worthy Ike retired for the balance of the — *morning*.

CHAPTER XIX.

Charlotte Perkins sat in her own inviting south room, looking out upon the beautiful garden, and inhaling the fragrant odors that came therefrom. It was a breezy morning of early autumn: the sultry summer had just departed. She had been reading; but the book was now closed, and rested in her lap, her finger marking the place where she had stopped. Her countenance betokened deep thought, with the addition of a tint of sadness; and as she thus sat, the perfect representation of a grave and contemplative mood, no artist could have designed a more beautiful picture. It would have been evident to any beholder that there was a sorrow at her heart. But what could it be? Almost every luxury that life affords was in her grasp. She had loving and numerous friends; she had health and beauty; and yet she was sad. Ah, this little moment of her life was nothing more than comes within the experience of us all, sooner or later. It is possible for us to be in the unlimited possession of every earthly good, and the world may look upon and envy our apparently happy lot; yet there may be deep sores rankling within which none may know. Indeed, it ofttimes appears that they upon whom Fortune seems to have lavished her gifts most

profusely — those gifts, at least, which men and women are prone to consider the most desirable — are the poor sufferers who have some deepseated trouble that neither wealth nor friendship can remove. You, reader, are perhaps the identical person who can, from your own experience, testify most fully to what we say. You can, perhaps, tell the poor man or woman who looks at your apparent happiness with a sigh of longing, that, were theirs and yours put in the scale together, you might be the one to be the less envied of the two.

Charlotte was indeed in trouble — a trouble not just begun, and not just yet to end. She was awakened to the fact that her heart was making negotiations in interests where it had no right; and — let those say to the contrary who choose — hers was one of those kinds of troubles that weigh most heavily on the mind and unfit it for proper attention to the duties of life. We may lose property, and with cheerful face and undaunted resolution put ourselves to the replacing of what we have lost; but when a young heart, vigorous in all its warm and strong pulsations, meets an object on which its devotion imperceptibly but surely concentrates, serious thoughts and wakeful nights come then, if they never came before. The very music of the breeze as it rustles by, laden though it may be with fragrant and refreshing odors, has a melancholy sound. The stars seem to look upon us less brightly; and the hand of truest friendship, as it clasps our own, fails to kindle the cordial gushings that are ever ready to start. It is so. Folks may laugh if they

want to, and folks may go to the dogs if they want to, for all we care; but what we say here will be none the less true.

As we have progressed in our story, we have not thought it necessary to detail many of the little incidents connected with Miss Perkins's associations with Mr. Lamont. Into the houses of the Perkinses and Bufords Lamont was coming and going almost as familiarly as if he were a brother; and if he did not make himself more at home than he did, it was merely because he did not choose to do so; for he had all the encouragement that a true politeness and a generous hospitality could give him. With the genuine delicacy, however, of a refined mind, he had at no time permitted himself to make advances of familiarity, that so often, in the end, come with unfavorable reaction upon him who allows himself in them.

With the young ladies of these families and their brothers Lamont read, rode, conversed, laughed, sailed, and sung. They liked him — all liked him. They had no assemblings of which he was not a part; they had no pastimes which he did not enjoy; and his gentlemanly manners and pleasant face, his richly-stored mind and intelligent conversation, his endless narration of scenes and incidents that had passed under his observation during his travels, his dry humor and his warm heart, made him ever the life and soul of every thing in which he engaged. With the parents he was even more welcome. They admired the man, so dignified, so respectful, and so devoid of a trifling and giddy demeanor. In company with him, they always felt themselves in contact with a mind that was cultivated, comprehensive, and active. In all the historic events in which the venerable patriots had taken part, and which they loved to rehearse, they found him ever ready and intelligently to converse. In matters of government polity he manifested decided interest, and talked thereon with all the earnestness and understanding of a statesman. Is it matter of wonder that Lamont was respected, beloved, by young and old? Are the representations which we have given of his character unnatural? By no means. He was just what every one may be — nay, *is* — who uses the same diligence, has had and improved the same opportunities of observation, and has made it a business to cultivate the graces of mind and heart. Such persons are beloved. They have all the elements of character that win love; and when won, so permanent are their principles, so progressive are their graces, they do not fail to retain it. Such was Lamont; such were the feelings entertained towards him. He was among them as a stranger; yet they gave him the unreserved affection of friends.

It was not likely that a character such as Miss Perkins's would fail to be attracted by and have a growing appreciation of such a one as Lamont's. As we have remarked in a former chapter, the affair that originated her acquaintance with him was one which naturally inspired her gratitude and ardent friendship. She was under obligations to bestow upon him more than ordinary attention; and as, day after day, she sat under the tones of

his musical voice, as it fell upon her ear in conversation, reading, or song, so did her regard and admiration increase, until in his presence she found herself increasingly engaged with thoughts having no immediate connection with what he either read, or talked about, or sung. These were thoughts which had grown within her bosom to a degree that to her was startling when she became fully conscious of their meaning. "Was she giving him her heart?" This was the question that awakened emotions which were causing her an absolute anguish of mind that she had never known before. Love him! Why should she? And yet why should she not? Ah, in earlier days, when in the heyday of schoolgirl existence, she had given her young affections to a gayhearted youth, whom every body loved, who had been an idol in every circle, one around whom girls and boys had ever flocked in village sports, in May-day pleasures, or in wildwood shoutings. With him she had often roamed over their native hills; with hand joined in hand they had hunted the wild flowers in the valleys, or strolled along the mossy banks of the pretty Petumpse. Years had passed since then, and he had gone to the college far away; and from thence he had passed into the world, engaged in its busy scenes, and regularly sent tidings of his plans and prospects, and the joy in store when his ambitious projects had met complete success.

His letters — some of them, too, of recent date — were in her hand. Success was perching on his standard; and his tender expressions of affectionate

regard abated not the least in their degree. How often, and even touchingly, did he dwell upon the early scenes of which we have spoken! How often did it appear that his bounding heart had given impetus to his pen as he traced words of love and hope! Fortune — in mere dollars and cents — was, to every necessary extent, his before he left But he had higher aims. The treasures of a self-earned reputation, the diversified teachings and information to be acquired only by personal contact with the world, — these were considerations that had impelled him onward and upward until he should attain the goal of his hopes. With a determination that had made him sacrifice other things, he had kept himself from the temptations to ease which home and loving hearts would have offered, and kept pushing on, a voluntary exile from the dear scenes amid which his boyhood had been passed. And while years had fled he had grown a man, and she who had pledged him her young heart was now a woman. But there had been times while these years were passing that she had asked herself, Would their feelings be the same towards each other when they should meet again? Had they loved each other from principles that would abide the test of maturer years? Would not the very associations — so widely different — by which they had been surrounded create such a disparity of tastes as would irreconcilably keep them apart? These were sage considerations; and Charlotte Perkins's mind was just of that cast to give them the thought and investigation which they demanded. It was the very thing that she

was doing when we saw her, with closed book and meditative mien, at the commencement of this chapter.

It was a fact that she could not disguise from herself that she was interested in Lamont. But what could she do? It was not possible that she could receive him with less cordiality than she had hitherto done; and yet this continued intercourse with him would only be plunging her deeper and deeper into the vortex from which it was necessary that she should free herself at once. One thought there was that gave her much satisfaction. It was, that, in all her deportment with him, she could not call to mind that she had, in word or action, given him to understand her feelings. Possibly she was mistaken in this idea; but even if it were true that she was, it was a matter of congratulation that she was in generous hands. In her decision there was no alternative but to be with him as she had been; excepting, however, that she should, at all times, guard her wandering heart — a dangerous experiment, but one which she was compelled to adopt. To be with him almost daily whose every word and action had in them all that was congenial to her tastes, to see his arms wound about the loving little Netty, and to have the multiplied attentions so winning and gentle as his, — these were the trials through which she would be compelled to pass. Her position loomed up before her with all the importance that a strong mind and a virtuous heart would naturally make it assume. The more she thought and planned the more did her anxieties approach an agony of

spirit; until, bereft of all confidence in self, she fell upon her knees and poured out the ardent petition that she might be guided in the pathway of right, so conducting herself in all the matter that she might not bring reproach and trouble upon herself and others. It was a goodly prayer, and came from a guileless heart.

Thus she sat and pondered through much of the entire morning, until she was roused by the ringing of the door bell, and the announcement from her servant that Mr. Lamont was below. Pleased as she had ever been at his coming, it was now but an accession to her embarrassment and sorrow. Her heart palpitated quickly, and she was certain he would notice her depressed and anxious look. But she mustered her courage, went down, and met him with as much of her usual manner as she could assume. If it could be possible, there was in him this morning, as he rose to meet her, more of gentleness and kind feeling than he had ever exhibited before. The same pleasant expression of face that he ever wore but blended with it a thoughtfulness that Charlotte was quick to notice.

"It may be," said he, after they had been in conversation on unimportant matters for some time, "that I shall have engagements which will draw me away from the pleasant friendships which I have made here."

Charlotte started. Ah, why? Was it because she wanted him to go, and was rejoiced that she would be then free from the danger that was threatening her? Or was it that her affections had become

so bound up with him that the very thought of his leaving was full of pain? In truth, she could not tell which; for she was fully conscious that there was a mixture of both. It was the first intimation she had received that he had any thought of leaving soon. True, she knew not what his engagements were, nor yet what it was even that had kept him with them so long as he had been. Yet, in all her thoughts of him, she had, without any special reason therefor, regarded him as a fixture in the village, one who was centring his interests there, and purposed making the place his home. Going! It seemed as though the word was enveloped in some mist, through which she could not look. Her depression vanished in an instant, and intense excitement for a moment ensued.

"I had not heard that you had any thought of leaving us soon," said she, quickly.

"Nor do I know certainly that I shall," replied he. "My going or staying will be dependent on circumstances that have me at their command."

"Were Netty here," said she, as if to divert him to thoughts of his little favorite being the one whose heart would be the saddest at the intelligence, "I do not know what she would say; for I fear Jasper thinks himself entirely ousted from the place in her heart that he has so long enjoyed. I should certainly anticipate a scene."

"Dear child," answered he, sadly, "it is a refreshing thought, to one who stands in a solitary position, that there is one young heart that beats warmly for him. It has been no small part of the cup of my

happiness during my stay here that she and others of her young companions have ever received me with open arms."

"Are you, then, in reality, in the solitary position of which you speak?" asked she. "I know that you have told us in an indirect way that you are almost alone; but somehow it has never appeared to me as though you could be entirely so."

"And you have consequently never given me any sympathy," answered he, smiling, and evading her question.

"I do not think you can have much to complain of in this particular since you have been here," replied she. "Nobody, certainly, who could have seen the friendships you have formed and the warm hearts that have continually been gathered around you, would have supposed you much of an object for sympathy."

"This I concede," returned he, fixing his eyes intently on hers; "but it was not with reference to the kind feeling entertained for me *in general* that I spoke."

"Of what, then?" asked she, as if not understanding to what else he could allude.

"Of yours personally," answered he, promptly.

This was rather more than she could profess herself unable to comprehend. But as it became apparent to her that their friendly relations were approaching a crisis, she nerved herself for what it seemed impossible to avoid. To reply to him gayly, as if his questions were merely in pastime, was the thought upon which she acted.

"I am certain my sympathies have been as sincere for you as have those of any one else; and as I am under some special obligations to you, it may be they have been more."

"And yet my departure would occasion a scene only with Netty?" interposed he.

"I have not said that we would not *all* experience deep regret at parting with you."

"Ah, you are *in general* again," said he, with a smile. "Why will you not individualize, when you know that I am only asking at that point?"

"Of course *I* am one of the *all*."

"And *you*, then, would experience such a regret?"

"Certainly," replied she, with a little of impatience.

"You do not like my interrogations?" asked he, noticing her uneasiness. "But I flatter myself that I have a place in your regard which will not let you accuse me of mere trifling. And if I have such a place, I think you will agree with me that I have not taken improper advantage of the kindness which yourself, your parents, and your brother have favored me with to gain it. Am I not right?"

"I think we would all acquit you of having done so," answered she.

"And what think you will be the result of the friendships which have been formed between you all and myself? Will I go away, and in a short time be forgotten, or only occasionally thought of for a moment? If so, it will only be an additional link to the many unpleasant reminiscences of my life."

Charlotte's heart was too tender not to be moved

by such suggestions as these. In one sense she thought it would be a blessing to her if she could forget him; but the idea that he towards whom her bosom was so full of thanks for the past, and pity for his isolation, should have to go forth upon the world again, and be forgotten and friendless, was one which would at once have started her tears had she not struggled violently to prevent them.

"Mr. Lamont," said she, pensively, "I cannot say what the results are to be from your coming amongst us; but I think I can certainly say that you will not only never be forgotten, but will ever be remembered with a grateful friendship, and be welcomed on your return with sincere delight."

"But if I go," returned he, "it will be on a contingency that will forever preclude my return."

"What contingency can be so absolute?" asked she, with painful apprehensions as to his reply.

"That Charlotte Perkins, whom I have learned to admire, and love fully, devotedly, should reject me from the place I would wish in her gentle and loving heart."

It was an announcement to the poor girl which caused her hitherto restrained tears to gush forth as a flood. What could she reply to it? There was but one which she could make; and this would be the contingency of which he had spoken. How could she give him this? how send him forth excluded from the hope that he should ever again mingle with the happy scenes and the kind hearts which he was so rapidly learning to love? The hand which he had taken still lay gently pressed

in his; and although she wanted to withdraw it, — nay, knew she ought to withdraw it, — there was a something that prevented her doing so, which she had not the power to resist. And he had addressed her, too, as "Charlotte," without the prefix that his own self-respect, with that for her, had ever made him use. It was the advance on his part of the familiarity of affection, and even fell musically on her ear.

"Charlotte," said he, while her tears continued to prevent her utterance, "there is something here which I cannot understand. If I have done wrong in addressing you as I have, you will surely pardon me. It is an advance on my part which, unknown to you as I am, I should probably not have made. And yet I have done so, knowing that *I can* so make myself known to yourself and your friends that you will be sufficiently satisfied with reference to me. But perhaps," continued he, at the same time relinquishing her hand, "even on the most favorable presentation of myself, you do not look upon me as one worthy of your love. Is it so?"

"No! no!" cried she through her tears. "I have had no such thoughts."

"And yet there is no hope for me!"

"O Mr. Lamont, spare me! spare me!" cried the distressed girl. "Do not torture me thus."

He appeared perplexed, but upon a moment's thought replied to her quickly.

"I see! I see!" exclaimed he. "I have a place in your gratitude, but can have no more; and it is merely that your generous nature dreads to pain one by such a rejection towards whom you think yourself

under a measure of obligation. Tell me; am I not right?"

"O no! O no!" she replied, while her tears flowed afresh. "It is not so — indeed it is not. You have certainly no better, no truer, friend here than I."

"I thank you sincerely that it is so; but friendship is a term, dear Charlotte, that, coming from you, is too cold, too far removed, to satisfy the ardent love with which you have inspired me. You will believe me, I am confident, when I tell you that in all my eventful life I have never given nor offered my heart to other than yourself. You are my first choice; and being as I am in the full vigor of mature manhood, with its steady resolves, firm purposes, and clear understanding of its wants, if this attachment prove unfortunate, it will be to me the blasting of every bright and pleasant prospect in my life."

The poor girl almost groaned in her anguish.

"You may think," continued he, "that my addressing you thus is premature — that our acquaintance has been comparatively short, and consequently only partial. But you know as well as I how many are the circumstances in which we learn more in a month than we would ordinarily in a year. This is just such a case; and I can assure you that it is not a mere impulse that moves me thus. The question is one which I have canvassed thoroughly, comparing our tastes, habits, and principles; and I have had the vanity to believe that we have a harmony of feeling that would ever make us happy together."

Charlotte raised her eyes to his, overflowing as they were, but having in them the expression of some new resolve.

"Mr. Lamont," said she, "I believe you to be a friend to whose honor I can confidently trust that which makes the offer with which you have honored me almost unsupportable to me. Am I right in my belief?"

"Whatever you may be disposed to confide to me," replied he, "will be forever sacred."

"I thank you, and do not doubt it in the least. Mr. Lamont, *I am engaged.*"

He sprang to his feet, sighed deeply, and paced the floor.

"Engaged!" cried he at last, with visible anguish. "O, can this be true? Why should this be my unhappy lot?" Charlotte was almost heart broken to see him thus.

"May I ask you one question?" said he, seating himself beside her.

"Certainly; I am willing to answer any thing that may in the least degree lessen the unpleasant nature of this interview."

"You tell me that you are engaged?"

She merely bowed her head in reply.

"Is yours an engagement of the heart, or only one of those romantic attachments ofttimes formed in early youth and without proper basis?"

"Mine is an engagement, I freely confess, that was made some years ago. He to whom I am pledged has been long away; and what may be our feelings towards each other when we meet again I am unable to say. We were children together; grew up together; and it is no more than I ought to tell you, that I have ever loved him with the almost

idolatrous worship of a young, fervent, and trusting heart — a love which I believe he fully returned."

Could it be true that a tear was standing on Lamont's manly cheek? It was even so, before he was aware of it, but was quickly dashed away.

"It is some relief to me to know," said he, "that this is the ground on which you reject me. It may be, too, that my vanity will superadd the additional palliative, that, had you not been thus fettered, my suit would have met with better success."

"Mr. Lamont," said Charlotte, with a composure that she had not exhibited before, "it cannot be otherwise than a painful task, to any lady with proper feelings, to reject the offer which involves the dearest interests of life. But when she is compelled to do so with one whom she has highly esteemed as a friend, and for whom she has the greatest respect, it is increasingly hard and unpleasant. Freely do I confess the latter to be the position in which I now am placed. I am not ashamed to say that there is every thing in you which I admire; but when the heart has already found its resting-place, there must be something of a serious nature to put it to flight."

"You are certain, then," interposed he, "that yours has found this resting-place?"

"Quite so, unless it be that intervening years and maturer tastes should present obstacles which may entirely change my feelings."

"He has been long away, then?"

"Years."

"And do you know that he will return?"

"I have every reason to believe it."

"But should he not?"

It was a question for which she was not prepared. Her eyes were cast upon the floor, her bosom heaved with deep emotion, and she seemed rapidly revolving in her mind the results which would enure on this contingency.

"But should he not?" repeated Lamont, gently, taking the hand which, as before, some magic influence seemed to prevent her withholding.

"O, do not ask me that!" cried she with fresh tears. "*He will return;* and we will then know if we love each other as in days gone by."

"May the blessings of Heaven rest upon you both, dear Charlotte," said he, rising. "I would prefer death than to be the instrument of improperly separating you; but you must excuse me when I say, that, without the slightest attempt to interfere, I cannot be satisfied until I have known the result of your meeting. Worlds would I give to possess the rich treasure which belongs to him; yet I would not have it unless it came to me unencumbered in any extent."

"Ah, Mr. Lamont," returned Charlotte, "I beg of you to think no more of me in this connection. There are warm and generous hearts that can love you with all the fond endearment you could ask."

"But yours is not among them."

"Mine is among those which will ever be proud to have you on its list of friends; not the friends of a day, but of those for whom we cherish an ardent and lifelong regard."

"We will still be friends, then?"

"It would really make me unhappy to think we would not," was her reply.

For some moments not a word was spoken by either. They seemed occupied with thoughts for which they had no utterance. A little time longer, and Netty's sweet voice, as it came from the garden, reminded them that they would soon be interrupted. Charlotte hastened to compose herself and dissipate all her evidences of weeping as quickly as she could.

"Before that dear child comes to us," said Lamont, "let me say a word. Circumstances will detain me here at least three weeks longer; and I cannot, of course, think of having our intimacy cut short in that time. Nothing would be quicker noticed, and nothing would occasion more exaggerated talk. I will endeavor to intrude myself upon you as little as I can; but, in order to preserve appearances, we must necessarily be much together. Will you consent to have it so, and to favor me with no abatement of the intimate friendly relations we have hitherto sustained?"

"Cheerfully," replied the noble-hearted girl, who would have sacrificed any thing in reason rather than to have thrown upon him the public odium of a rejection. "We will be as we have been, and I will ever think of you as my brother's dearest friend. Consider yourself ever at home with us; and believe me when I fully reciprocate your kind wishes for me in praying Heaven to bless you wherever and with whomsoever your lot may be cast."

"With a full heart I thank you," answered he. "But be careful; here is Netty."

And he had scarcely finished speaking when, with beaming countenance and glowing cheek, she bounded into the room. Ah, how diversely ran the tides of joy and sorrow in the sisters' hearts! Happy childhood, with all its glee, its rapid discarding of sorrow,—here it was in the presence of riper years —years which were already bringing their quota of sorrow and disappointment to those whom they had borne along and placed amid the stern realities of life. Are we children? We would be men and women. Are we men and women? We would be children again, our hearts free from care, our cheeks radiant with joy, and our pathway fragrant with the perfumes of innocent mirth. Such are life's restless wants.

A half hour more, and Lamont sat thoughtfully within his room; and Charlotte, having retired to hers and locked herself therein, gave vent to the bitter gushings of her overflowing heart.

CHAPTER XX.

LAMONT kept his room through the day; but what were his thoughts and feelings is not for us to say. Evening came and found him seated with a pleasant little company of friends at General Buford's. He had not been there long when, just as the day was losing itself in the twilight, a little boy and girl, the former some ten years of age, and the latter about five, gently opened the gate and walked towards the piazza where the company was sitting. All conversation ceased as the children approached. Who they could be was a question which at once arose within every bosom, although no tongue gave the question utterance. It was plain enough to be seen that they were brother and sister; and the very tender care which the boy seemed to have for the little one that clung to him made both at once objects of interest. The little fellow's respectful manner, as he took off his hat and bowed, gained favor for him in the cause he had come to present.

"Is either of you gentlemen Mr. Edward Buford?" asked he, modestly.

"I am he, my fine little fellow," said Buford, advancing kindly, and taking a hand of each of the children within his own. "On what errand do you come?"

"My father is sick, sir, and sent me to see if you would come and see him."

"Are you certain that he wants to see *me?*" asked Buford with some surprise, not knowing the children, and of course not able to think who their father could be.

"O, yes, sir; *I know* he does."

"Who is your father, my child?"

"His name is Fletcher Norton, sir; and he has been very sick for two or three days."

"And this is your little sister, I suppose," said Edward, lifting the girl in his arms and kissing her; at the same time he gave Lamont a significant look, which meant that he now fully understood the case.

"Yes, sir."

"And what is your name?"

"Henry, sir — Henry Norton."

There were some serious thoughts among the most of the company when the boy told his name — thoughts which the reader will not fail to have suggested to him after he progresses farther with us.

"And what is *your* name, my little pretty one?"

"I name Taty," replied she, with sweet childhood's own simplicity, at the same time laying her curly head confidingly upon Edward's shoulder.

"She means to say Katy, sir," said the boy, speaking for her; "sister's name is Katy."

It would hardly be supposed that the coming of these children thus, and asking particularly for Edward, when neither himself nor those who sat around him knew who they were, would not be matter of considerable surprise.

"Do you know this man Norton, my son?" asked Edward's mother.

"I only know that he is a new comer here, and lives in the little stone cottage by the Pinkton Hill," replied he.

"But is it not strange that he should send so particularly for *you?*"

"Perhaps it is. It may be, however, that somebody has told him that I am one of the good Samaritans of the village, and, in consequence, one of the most likely persons to show him the attentions he may need in his sickness."

"The Lord grant that any such information may prove well founded!" replied the kindhearted old lady, with a look of incredulity; "but it certainly does look strange."

"Your father is very sick, is he?" asked Edward, changing the character of the conversation, and calling for his hat.

"Yes, sir; and he said he knew you would come to see him, and would bring somebody with you. And when mother was crying he told her she must not cry, because he knew that you would be kind to her."

"Well, I declare!" cried Mrs. Buford, the others uniting in her surprise. She put on her glasses, told the boy to come nearer to her, and looked at him very intently. The idea of Edward's being sent for by an entire stranger, the request so specially naming him, rather puzzled her. She had not the least objection — nay, was delighted at the thought — that her son should be sent for, and should go and

render all the assistance he could; but what she was trying to get at was, why it should so be. Such a message from some friend of his she could have understood at once. She surveyed the little fellow from head to foot. He was clean, modest, pretty, and his name *was Henry* — all of which would have been recommendations to any body, but especially so to her.

"Did your papa say that he knew Mr. Buford would bring somebody with him, my child?" asked she.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did he mention any names that you remember?"

The boy thought for a moment.

"I heard him speak of one or two."

"Can you name them?"

"One was Mr. Mont, or some name that sounded something like it."

"Well; any other?"

"Yes, ma'am; Mr. Perkins."

"Any more?"

"I can't think of any more."

"There's something about it that I cannot understand," remarked General Buford, who thus far had remained quiet.

"Don't understand it all," added the old lady; and the half dozen young ladies who sat by looked as though they thought the same thing.

"I suppose it would have sounded more natural to you if I had been sent for to gallant a bevy of pretty girls," said Edward, laughing. "But come, my little Master Henry; I will go with you."

"And, with your permission, I will accompany you," said Lamont, rising.

"As you please; the sick man, it appears, has named you, and no doubt would be glad to see you, and Jasper too, were he here to go with us." And they started away together, Mrs. Buford bidding Edward remember that he might send to her for any little delicacy or comfort which the sick man might need.

A few minutes' walk brought them to Pinkton Hill, and they entered the pretty cottage just as the shades of night were falling upon it. They were met at the door by Mrs. Norton, who poured forth the warmest thanks that they had come thus promptly to see her sick husband. Her eyes were yet red with weeping; but, putting on all the cheerfulness she could command, she led them to the room where the sick man lay. With a look of joy he extended his hand, the warm pressure of which betokened the thanksgivings of his grateful heart.

"I told Mary that you would come to me," said he; "although she could not think there was any reason that I had for specifying yourselves. We are strangers to almost every body here; and she thought I was presuming a great deal to send for those whose circumstances in life, being so very different from ours, did not, in the general way of things, give us any claims upon you."

"We come most cheerfully to you, my good friend," said Edward, with a quivering lip; "and your wife may no longer fear that she, and you, and your little ones are away from friends. Any ser-

vice we can render you will afford us infinite pleasure."

The poor wife sobbed aloud and pressed the little Katy closer to her heart.

"O sirs," cried she, "you cannot know how much we thank you for your kindness! It is so hard, so hard, to leave father, mother, and home, and find one's self in poverty and sickness among strangers! God grant that neither of you may ever know how hard it is! When Fletcher told me to send for you this morning I was afraid to do so, and put it off until it seemed he was getting no better and I would be needing help. And when I told Henry to go, only a child, too, as he is, this dear little one cried so to go with him that I could not find in my heart to prevent her. When their dear faces and voices were out of my sight and hearing, and I was here all alone with Fletcher, it seemed as though my heart would break." And the new-gushing tears and the sighs from her sad heart prevented her saying more.

Lamont gently took the little Katy, who was crying because she saw her mother do so, and folded her in his arms. It was a small thing; but it was done so kindly that it was like a balm to the weeping mother. It seemed to her like a pledge that she had fallen into kind and sympathizing hands; and none but the lonely and friendless can properly appreciate a kind look or word. Were their value more known, they would doubtless be more frequently bestowed.

"Mary," said the sick man, "go, my dear, to

another room while I talk with these kind friends a little while. You may return soon."

"O my husband — my dear husband!" cried she, "why may I not stay with you?"

He gave a look towards the children, which she understood at once; and, taking them with her, she went to the next room.

"Sit down, my kind friends," said he to Lamont and Edward when the door was closed, "and I will tell you all about my case. Thanks to God for this humane society which you have just started; for I verily believe that without it I would have died and left my poor wife and children friendless."

And while he spoke, his voice low and his sentences broken, the big tears were rolling down his cheeks. Lamont, too, was visibly affected at the thought of his own instrumentality in the matter, while his heart was rejoiced that fruit was already apparent.

"We are poor," continued the sick man, "and I may say in want. Some two years ago, while working at my trade in the city, it was my misfortune to get a fall that gave me a serious internal injury. For some months I was confined to my room and bed, during which time the little funds we had been saving by economy rapidly wasted away. A kind Providence seemed at last to favor my recovery, and I found myself sufficiently well to engage in the lighter branches of my calling. But I was disappointed in the hope that I would some day be fully restored. Every few weeks I would be obliged to abandon my work and take to my bed. My phy-

sician at last advised me to try a removal to the country, where I could enjoy more healthful air and live at less expense. Upon inquiry, I learned that this village was one where I might hope for all the benefits that a healthy region could afford, and at the same time one where I could have as much work as I would be able to do. You of course know that we have not been here very long; and, until the present attack of my old complaint, I have been apparently gaining fast. Flattered by this improvement, I have unwisely taxed myself beyond proper bounds, the result of which, I fear, will be my death."

"Does your physician say so?" asked Lamont.

"He does not give me any reason to hope that it will be otherwise."

"Who is your physician?" asked Edward.

"Dr. Ellis."

"You could not be in better hands; and we will hope the result will prove better than your fears. But why did you not send for us before?"

"It was only this morning," replied he, "that I became fearful concerning my case; and I wanted Mary to send then, but she was afraid to do so. It is of her and my poor little ones that I want to talk with you. If I die, they will need assistance and a little sympathy from some kind hearts."

"Let me see," said Edward, lowering his voice; "if I rightly remember, you united with us at our first meeting; did you not?"

"I did; and although I was not present last night to make further progress in membership, yet

I had learned enough to believe that our order comes to the relief of just such cases as mine."

"And you are perfectly right, Mr. Norton," said Lamont; "yours is one of the precise cases contemplated in our plan. It is, indeed, a fortunate thing for you that you are one of us; for you may compose yourself on the pledge that Mr. Buford and myself will do for you with the affection of brothers, and that, if you are taken away, your little family shall not merely be provided with what will make them comfortable, but we will see that they are visited by friends who will mete out to them no stinted measure of sympathy and kindness."

"Thank God! thank God!" cried the poor man, clasping his hands above his head and bursting into tears. "O, how this relieves my drooping heart and fills it with joy! *I know* you will do what you have promised me; I know you will; and I can die content. May the Lord ever bless you both, in giving to you friends who will always make life's pathway delightful to you." He ceased, and for a little time even the two strong young men who bent over him united their tears with his. It is not too much to say, that, while the poor husband and father was thanking God for these friends, they also were thankful that the opportunity was afforded them of practising one of the noblest virtues that can adorn the human heart. It was a noble sight to see them thus turned aside from the gay enjoyments and associations which their circumstances afforded, and, with words of consolation and kindness, seeking to buoy up a fainting spirit, in giving the promise

that they would provide for the fatherless and the widow.

"Did I understand you, Mr. Norton," asked Edward, "that you are even now in want?" It appeared singular to the young man that this should be the case; for, since he had entered the cottage, he had not failed to notice the neat and comfortable appearance of every thing within it. Tables, chairs, bedstead, and covering, — all bore the impress of a diligent hand; and the sick chamber itself was one of the last places in which a stranger would have formed the idea that he was in the abode of want.

"I am sorry to say that in some respects we are," answered Mr. Norton. "So far as house, and furniture, and clothing are concerned, we are well enough to do; but when we came here our money was about all gone, and it has taken all that I have made since then to meet our expenses, in connection with what we have sent back to pay some obligations in the city. And we cannot now spare the smallest amount for any thing more than the most ordinary food, which, in my present condition, I cannot relish at all. O my kind friends, so far as regards myself I do not care, and I would much rather die in my suffering than to be throwing myself upon the charity of others; but it is for my poor Mary and my little ones that I have wept almost tears of blood."

"What nice little thing is there," asked Edward, "that you think you could relish now?"

"O, I can't say, Mr. Buford; the doctor says I can eat any thing that is not very hearty and exciting; and I was about to send for some simple thing like an orange; or for a chicken, of which Mary might make me a little broth. But then it came to my mind how low our purse was, and I told my wife not to do it; and it was only when I told her positively and decidedly that I would not touch any thing of the kind, if she bought it, that I kept her from thus spending about the last dollar we have in the world."

Poor Edward! This was one of his early experiences in the witness of suffering poverty. He had not passed his life where some wretched beggar had beset him at every corner, nor had his own eyes ever seen much of the scenes of destitution and misery that are to be found in crowded cities; and his young heart melted with a tender sympathy, that thought not to content itself with the bestowal of a few kind words and fewer shillings. He was fully enlisted in the poor man's cause, and was rapidly turning in his mind the most expeditious and judicious course for Lamont and himself to pursue.

Lamont did not appear to take so active a part in the matter; although in reality, without seeming to intend it, he gave shape and character to all that Edward was devising.

"I will leave you for a little while," said Edward, taking the sick man's hand. "In the mean time, my friend Mr. Lamont will remain with you."

"You are going, I fear," replied Mr. Norton, "to put yourself to some trouble for me that is not necessary to-night. And indeed, as I have already said, it was not with the intention that you should

make any effort for me personally that I sent for you."

"Never mind about that. You must consider yourself, your wife, and your little ones as in our hands now; and we are going to prescribe, and provide too, for them and you. When we think you are giving us too much trouble, we will let you know." Mr. Norton could only press the kind hand that held his own, and Edward soon quietly withdrew.

Arrived at home, he found that additions had been made to the party which he had left there, in the persons of Charlotte and Jasper Perkins. The latter, when he came and learned where Edward was, would have followed him immediately but that there was a possibility that he would soon return. Edward's story was soon told; and when he spoke of leaving Lamont in kind attentions to the sick man, every tongue was loud with its commendations of Lamont's goodness of heart. How ardently Charlotte longed to be beside him, to witness and participate in his ministrations of benevolence! High as he had stood in her regard, it seemed to her now that there was a halo about his character that raised him far above any affinity with herself. Perhaps, too, there were others who had the same thoughts; but if there were, they were only thoughts that moved to action; for every hand was soon occupied in efforts to do something for the sick man and his needy family without delay. Submitting themselves to the direction of Mrs. Buford, whose experience would be likely to suggest the

most advisable things, the young people went to work; and, with the aid of the servants, it was not a long while before a couple of baskets were brought forth, laden with tea, coffee, sugar, oranges, cake, tamarinds, wine, nice light rolls, and butter to match, together with an ample tureen of smoking chicken broth, the savor of which would have been delicious to the most fastidious palate. Here was abundance to satisfy the little nibblings of the sick man's appetite, and to give his wife and children such a supper as they had not had for many days. Nor did the kind friends choose to content themselves with this; for each and all of the young ladies volunteered their services to go forthwith and do all they could, if it was nothing more than to whisper a word of sympathy to the weeping wife. Edward, however, thought it would be just as well for them to wait until the morrow, leaving Mrs. Norton to a night's repose while he and Lamont watched beside her husband. Night though it was, and getting late, too, Edward was bent upon Mr. Norton's having the nice broth which the kind Mrs. Buford had personally superintended the preparation of, even if he took only a spoonful; consequently the heavily-laden servants were hurried along at a merry jog. Jasper would most cheerfully have gone along; but it was necessary that he should remain and accompany some of the young ladies home.

It is a source of no small enjoyment to witness the results of our benefactions — to hear the expression of grateful thanks, to see the moistened eye, and feel the hearty pressure of the hand. Such was

the pleasure in store for Edward, who, without regard to any other considerations, insisted that the sick man, wife, children, and all, should partake at once of some of the good things thus provided. It was indeed enough to fully repay the young man for his trouble to see the children enjoy a supper that was sweeter to their eager appetites than all the suppers they had ever eaten before. But the poor mother was so full of thanksgiving for the little delicacies, some of which she knew her husband so much wanted, and which would, no doubt, refresh and strengthen him, that she had no appetite for food. Pleased, too, she was when Edward told her of the kind sympathies for her by those he had left at home, and that she would be surrounded by female friends on the morrow.

"You must leave your husband with us for the night, Mrs. Norton," said Lamont, whose conversation and attention had been so soothing while Buford had been away, "and seek a night's rest for yourself. So far as I can see, his wants will only be such as we can easily attend to; and you may be satisfied that we will wait upon him with all the attention and kindness in our power."

"Yes, my dear Mary," added the sick man; "go as Mr. Lamont requests you; and thank the Lord, too, that you can leave me in such good charge."

For a moment she hesitated, as though there was something she wished to say, but did not like to do so. Lamont quickly noticed her hesitation, and surmised the cause.

"If any thing should occur," said he, "which

would make it advisable or necessary to call you, we will certainly do so. But you need not have any such apprehension. Mr. Norton, we trust, will rest well."

Tenderly she bent over her husband and affectionately kissed his cheek, leaving also a tear thereon. Then, with a good night to the young gentlemen, having in it all of a thankful though sorrowing heart, she sought another room, folded her little ones to her heart, commended them and their father, and the kind friends with him, and herself, to God, and closed her eyes to sleep.

Through the remaining hours of that night Lamont and Edward were faithful to their trust. Every thing that could possibly tend to soothe and relieve the sufferer was done by them for him. More than once were his pillows shaken, his sheets respread, cooling draughts given him, and cheering and consolatory words spoken, that greatly raised his drooping spirits.

And thus the night passed away; and the morning dawned, bringing again the loving wife to the poor man's bedside, with the words of anxious inquiry that so often come from almost broken hearts. Then, with the promise of a quick return, Lamont and Edward took leave, that they might obtain rest for themselves.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE forenoon had about half passed away, when there was a knock at the little cottage door. Going thereto, Mrs. Norton saw two young ladies, whose benevolent faces beamed upon her as a light from heaven.

"Is this Mrs. Norton?" asked one of them.

"It is," was the reply, as the door opened wider. "Will you please to walk in?"

"We are sisters of Mr. Buford, who was with your husband last night," said the elder one when they were seated, "and have come to offer any assistance you may be pleased to accept from us."

"God bless Mr. Buford, and yourselves too, for his and your kindness to us. I cannot understand why it is that so many friends have sprung up around us within so short a time. Since your brother and Mr. Lamont left this morning, not less already than five or six gentlemen have been here offering their sympathies and their services; and there is one even now with my husband."

"May we ask who he is?"

"He introduced himself as Mr. Perkins — a gentleman who, I believe, has as kind a heart as he has a benevolent and handsome face."

Had Mrs. Norton taken notice, she would have

observed the glow which suffused the cheeks of the young lady who asked the question.

"He is one of our intimate friends," said Cornelia, noticing her sister's slight embarrassment, "and you have only judged him correctly. If there is any one in the world whose presence and manners would tend to cheer your husband in his sick hours, Mr. Perkins is certainly that one. We congratulate you and your husband that you have found so good a friend."

"And I think I have not ceased to be thankful for such friends from the first moment that your brother and Mr. Lamont came to us. What we would have done without such timely friendship is more than I can tell."

"If there is no objection, Mrs. Norton," said Emily, "we would like to see your husband."

"Thank you, Miss Buford. If you will excuse me a moment, I will see if he is prepared to receive you."

And it was but a very short time that she kept them waiting.

"You may walk in, ladies, if you please," said she; "my husband will be pleased to see you."

And there in that sick chamber stood three young people, raised in the lap of luxury, possessed of every comfort and joy that life can offer, but now ready, with heart, hand, and purse, to minister comfort and assistance to the downhearted and needy. It was an errand of mercy in which angels might have been engaged; but one, alas! on which *men* too seldom delight to go. O, how sweet, how

refreshing, is the presence of friendship when sickness has shut us in from the world! and how often would it be the case that the medicine of the physician would more speedily and effectively accomplish its work were there those by the bedside who were offering words of hope and consolation! Mere medicine is ofttimes powerless when the heart is sad and lonely.

Words cannot express the joy which swelled the bosom of Mr. Norton when the young ladies stood beside him and took his hands in theirs. It seemed like the consummation of the fondest hopes he could have entertained. It seemed as though even angels had come down from their high abode to cheer his pathway through the dark valley and shadow of death. It seemed as though they were come to dissipate his fears as to the welfare of the loved ones he was soon to leave behind.

"We will be as sisters to your little ones," said Cornelia, when he had spoken of the anxieties for them which had oppressed him. "You may rest assured they shall be well provided for, at least so long as Mrs. Norton remains here."

Dr. Ellis now came in, with whom the sick man conversed calmly and freely concerning his case. Since the doctor had left him, a marked change for the worse had taken place. Mr. Norton was evidently sinking fast, of which he was himself fully conscious. The manly little Henry had been standing at the foot of the bed, but very soon understood the true state of the case, and took little Katy away with him into the garden. Seating her beneath the

shade of one of the great old trees, and himself beside her, he put his arms fondly around her, and the scalding tears began to roll over his ruddy cheeks.

"Dear Katy," said he, "do you know that we are going to lose poor papa?"

The dear little creature did not properly understand her brother's meaning, and looked into his face with an expression that betokened her incomprehension.

"Papa going away, Henny?" asked she.

"Papa is going to die, Katy, and we will never see him any more!"

"Is mamma going to die too, Henny?"

"Not now, I hope, dear sister. If she should, I do not know what would become of Katy and Henry."

"Will papa go away far when he dies?"

"So far that he can never come back!"

"Where will he go?"

"To heaven, I hope, darling Katy!"

"Is that where God is?"

"Yes."

"And the angels?"

"Yes."

"And Franky, too?"

"Yes, sweet one!"

"And will papa see God, and the angels, and Franky?"

"Yes; he will see them all, and live with them forever and ever."

"Is that heaven, Henny, up yonder, where the

stars shine, and where the moon was so pretty last night?"

"Heaven is very high, above the moon, and the stars, and the sun too, sister, and it is a place that shines brighter than them all, and where every body is good, and where those who are bad here, and do not love God, never can go."

"Will papa get sick there?"

"Never; he will be always well, and his cheeks will be fresh and young looking, just like yours are now."

Sweet Katy! What new thoughts arose within her little bosom! She sat with her velvety hands clasped in Henry's, and her eyes alternately turning from his to the far-off heaven where her papa was going, as though she would have a clear understanding of it and all its beauties. Henry did not choose to disturb her thoughts, and sat watching the bright eyes that were radiant with curiosity and wonder. Poor boy! He could not help thinking that it was a good thing for Katy that she did not probably understand the loss she was about to sustain; and for a moment he even wished that he knew as little as she. But it was not long that he entertained the wish; for it came to his mind that his mother would need some one older than Katy to sympathize with her and do for her when his father would be taken away; and with a noble resolve he determined to show her how kind, and helpful, and manly he could be. Well did he know that it would be in his power to do much towards mitigating the sorrows of his mother's lonely situation; and as this new-

born resolve gained lodgment with him, it seemed as though his own grief had abated, or was giving place to the sterling purpose he had formed. Suddenly he looked upon himself as being of some account; and he was proud at the thought.

"Henny," said his sister, after she had given a full consideration to all that her brother had said to her, "when will you, and mamma, and Taty die like papa?"

"Nobody knows that but God, dear sister."

"Can't you ask God to tell you?"

"God does not talk to people now."

"Can he see us?"

"Yes; all the time."

"In the dark too?"

"Yes."

"Then I think he might talk to us some, and tell us when we are going to die, and all about the pretty heaven where he lives; don't you, Henny?"

"God knows best what to do, Katy; and if it was right for him to tell us when we will die, I know he would do it."

"Can people die whenever they want to?"

"People sometimes kill themselves."

"Do they go to heaven then?"

"Never: all such people are bad, and God never lets them come where he is. We must all be good, and wait patiently until God chooses to let us die; and then we will go to heaven, where he is, and live with papa and Franky again."

"I don't believe I want papa to die, Henny," said

the child, thoughtfully. "Can't mamma get the doctor to make him well again?"

"That is what the doctor cannot do, Katy, no matter how much mamma, and you, and I might want papa to stay with us."

"Then I wish God would make us all die now, Henny, so we might go with papa to heaven."

Her brother folded his arms more closely about her, kissed away the tear that was resting on her cheek, and tried all he could to cheer her with the hope that they would meet their father again in the better world; after which they returned to the house.

In the mean time, one after another of those with whom Mrs. Norton had no acquaintance came to the cottage, waiting to know if there was any thing they could do, and making kind inquiries concerning her husband. It was all a mystery to her; for during the short time that she had been in the village she had made but few acquaintances, and these among the humbler portion of the people. But she now found herself surrounded by friends from the families of the gay and affluent, almost all of whom had brought something which they thought might be of service. And when noon came, here were Lamont and Buford again — the ones who had bestowed the first of all these kind attentions, and who, in truth, had touched the secret springs which had set all the other wheels to work. Over and above all the others were they welcomed again, and especially by the sick man,

who stretched forth his feeble hands and clasped theirs as though he would never let them go.

When the doctor came in the evening he gave very little encouragement to hope that Mr. Norton would live through the night. By the bedside stood the minister of Christ, assisting the dying man in preparations to meet his God; and the serene countenance showed clearly that faith and love were in their full exercise, that past errors were repented of and forgiven, and that already the poor sufferer was near his heavenly home.

"I die content," said he, "and even happy. The anxieties for my family which have weighed so heavily upon me are removed. My bereaved ones will be provided for. God has been kinder to me than I deserve; and I can only reiterate my thanks to those of you who have been his instruments in bestowing upon me so many favors."

The chamber of death is a solemn place. Man may revel in all the excitements and pleasures of life, and his heart may be gay and thoughtless as to his eternal interests; but when he finds himself where a soul is passing away he becomes serious and reflecting, whether he would or not. And perhaps it would be better for us if we more frequently went to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. If the soul is immortal, and its happiness or misery is dependent on the actions performed and the principles maintained in the present life, wisdom dictates that we give its interests more attention than to the getting of worldly gain.

The minister asked the company to kneel with

him in prayer; and when they had done so he poured forth hearty petitions that the dying man might die with a clear and intelligent faith in Christ — that faith which opens heaven to the soul; he prayed that the blessings of that covenant-keeping God, who has said that he will provide for the widow and orphan, might be copiously bestowed upon those now bowed before him, who would soon be such; he prayed that this might be an occasion which would be beneficial to all present, teaching them to "be also ready;" and he prayed that at the last great day it might be seen that all were of that number "whose robes were washed white," and who would enter within the gates of the heavenly city. They rose, and such of them as were compelled to leave did so, having bade the dying man a final farewell, and offered all the consolation in their power to the weeping wife and children.

Edward and Lamont were the first to come with friendly words and actions to this sick chamber, and so were they the last to leave it. And their friend Jasper was also there; and so was Charlotte, on whose gentle bosom reposed the head of the poor wife, where she wept at once tears of joy and broken-hearted sorrow. And how tender, too, were the attentions bestowed on the little Henry and Katy by Emily, Cornelia, and others! Indeed the children were of that lovely character which would have made friends for them even had they not been in their present unhappy position. It drew tears from every eye to hear Katy's appeals to the doctor and the bystanders to "make her papa well," and,

when she was lifted up that she might kiss him, to see her little hand placed lovingly on his cheek and brow, while with piteous accent she exclaimed, "Poor papa sick! Poor papa going away to heaven, to leave Taty, and Henny, and mamma!"

Some of the ladies would have taken the children home with them for the night; but Mrs. Norton preferred having them with her, notwithstanding that Katy's innocent exclamations now and then would almost sever her very heartstrings. This was, however, fully balanced by the consolatory and encouraging words and manners of the noble little Henry.

"Don't cry, dear mamma!" said he, with his arms about her neck; "don't cry! God will let *me* live a long while, I hope; and I will be a good boy, and will do all I can to make you very happy. And sister, too, will love you more than ever; and we will all try and meet papa in heaven."

The evening and the night wore on, and the last struggle came; and in the arms of Lamont, and on the heart which had originated the benevolent order the workings of which were already apparent, Mr. Norton breathed his last — gave up his life with thanksgivings and blessings on his tongue for those who were doing so much for him and his. And the same hands that had been opened to do him good closed his eyes in their final sleep and prepared his body for the grave. And while they were doing thus, gentler hearts and hands were consoling the widow and seeking to wipe her tears away; sweet voices, too, that fell upon her ear, in her desolation,

as though they were from the blissful choir on high, and had been sent to whisper to her words of peace and hope.

The morning dawned in full autumnal beauty, and the birds sang, and all was joyous without, as though in the pretty Pinkton Hill cottage Death had not been doing his insatiate work. Yet throughout the village it was soon known that a soul had departed, that a wife had been made a widow, that little children had been made orphans; and it was known, too, that although a stranger, and in poverty, yet the sick man had been tended as by brothers at the hands of the highborn, the rich, and the gay. Some understood it not — *some did.*

Nor was all done yet. Edward, Perkins, and others bore the body to its resting-place; while on Lamont's arm leaned the widow, and held by his hand was the sobbing little Katy. Between Charlotte and Emily walked Henry; and in the train followed a numerous concourse, some of whom were prompted to this exhibition of sympathy and respect from the fact that such prominent personages in the village were so deeply enlisted in the matter. And when the body was laid in the grave, and the earth was thrown thereon, many were the tears that were mingled therewith, and many were the hearts that poured forth their sympathies for the desolate and bereaved.

But now came to Mrs. Norton the sad return to the cottage. The excitement incident to attendance upon her husband naturally gave occupation to her mind, and prevented her full realization of the lone

liness of her situation. She was now to see the vacant chair, and room, and bed on which he had lain and died; and this is a time when such losses begin to be felt in all their force. But there were those who anticipated the melancholy that would throw its pall upon her, and they humanely determined to remain with her until the first bursts of her grief had subsided. Charlotte and Emily offered, at least, to spend the night with her; and it was with joy that she accepted the offer. Her first choice was that she would prefer being alone, that she might abandon herself to tears; but she thought better of this afterwards.

"It is an offer," said she, "so full of generous feeling that I cannot decline it; and I will endeavor to use it, as it is designed, to assist me in recovering my spirits and energies, and bowing myself in humble submission to the will of Him who gives and who takes away."

How tenderly, and fondly, and delicately did the young ladies strive to cheer and comfort her! They who had never before spent a night under such a humble roof did so now as angels of mercy, and fully realized in their own feelings that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

It was the beneficence of the heart, compared with which that of the purse is nothing.

CHAPTER XXII.

The evening anxiously looked for has come. Within the village of Quizville there had been a number who had been turning much of their thoughts to the events that were to transpire on this evening. Lamont had told them that this was the time when they were to receive such information as would make them open their eyes with wonder. And they believed him, notwithstanding he had been arrested and carried away as a criminal; believed him, notwithstanding he had given them nothing definite upon which to rely. They were just as much in the dark concerning him personally as they had ever been. So, too, were his intimate friends, Perkins and Buford.

Among that portion of the villagers who knew nothing certain as to the order which had already been organized, Lamont was still looked upon as the Know Nothing. As he passed along the streets his ear would often catch the whisper, "There goes the Know Nothing!" In little chitchats he had often been sounded by old and young, men and women; but he continued still to be enveloped in the same impenetrable veil; yet there was nothing occurred to lessen the feelings of respect and admiration with which he had inspired all. He was the same

dignified, gentlemanly, intelligent man that he appeared to be at the first; took no liberties *with* any body, allowed none *from* any body; visited extensively, rode, sailed, and lived as one in the full possession of abundance of means and leisure. He was an enigma that every body was trying to solve; he was a man among men, a pattern of gallantry among ladies, and a child among children.

It will be remembered that the members of the order were informed that the place of meeting would be changed, and that each of them would be notified in proper time where the present meeting would be held. The hall now engaged was one that had been used as a concert and ball room, or, in fact, for any kindred purpose. It was in the third story of a fine block of buildings, the ground floor of which was occupied as stores. So far as privacy was concerned, this place was, perhaps, not so retired as the court room; but there were motives of their own which the leading parties had for the removal. The entrance to this hall was from the front, between the stores; and on this evening, with the exception of the door being open, — which, by the way, was the case nearly all the time, — there was no evidence that any thing was going on in the hall. The blinds of the windows were closed front and rear, so that no telltale light should induce the passer by to ask what was going on.

The hall was well prepared for the purpose for which it was now to be used, having some alterations made that would make it in proper condition for permanent service. At the head of the stairs

was a small room that was just what was needed for the primary entrance, in the door of which, as well as in that opening into the main room, wickets were made.

And here was the place where the anxious members were to convene, to be fully initiated into all the rights and privacies of their order; this was the place where all conjectures were to be silenced, and where they were to have revelation made to them by one and concerning one who had in some sense made more excitement in the village of Quizville than any one man had ever made there before.

Lamont was not among the first to arrive; but when he did come, it was remarked that he was evidently much excited; and yet there was a lingering smile upon his countenance that spoke of pleasant emotions within. He did not stop to hold any conversation with the members, but passed directly to his desk, saying a few words to Perkins and Buford and some two or three others who drew around him. Twice he called to the doorkeeper to know if the brothers were all present, manifesting a disposition to delay the opening while any were yet to come. At last the very worthy sentinel made announcement that, with the exception of two or three, every member had entered.

"The brothers will come to order," said Lamont, without further delay.

This they were not long in doing.

"We will make our usual pledge; after which the brothers will salute the president and vice president in the manner prescribed."

All of which was done.

"Any brother or brothers now present, who were not here at the meeting at which our constitution was signed, will now step forward and give their signatures."

Which was done by quite a number.

"The names of those who are now united with us will be read by the secretary."

And Edward rose to perform this duty; but it was not with a steady voice that he did so. Probably among all the membership there was not one present who had looked forward to this evening's disclosures with the intensity of interest that he had experienced. From the moment that he first found himself in the society of Lamont down to the time when at night and alone they sat together on the hillside, and on through all the friendly associations which had increasingly bound them together, all, every thing, seemed now to appear before him enveloped in mystery as they had been; and now the covering was to be removed. Lamont's words came forcibly to his mind — "You shall *then* judge whether I am worthy of your regard;" and he could not conceal the strong excitement under which he labored.

The names were read.

"And now, my brothers," said Lamont, rising, "you are entitled to full and proper membership; and, before you leave this hall this evening, you are to learn what is to cause strong pulsations within more hearts than yours in this village.

"It is with a melancholy pleasure that I refer you

to the events of the past few days, as evidence of the fact that the designs of our order are for good. You have seen the wants of the needy supplied, the dying made to utter benedictions upon you, the widow's heart and the orphan's to rejoice. Many of you have personally been engaged in these labors of love; and all of you, I doubt not, were just as ready and as willing to have done the same. You may well suppose that my own heart rejoices at the thought that you have permitted me to come among you, received me with kindness, and allowed me to organize you as you now are, and that we have so soon witnessed the first fruits of our labors.

"And you are ever to look upon your order, the whole of whose works are for the promotion of good. You have already learned that it contemplates morality of principle and action in all who are connected with it; and you are instructed that it looks to reformation in high places; that it has a plan of action that has reference to the suppression of vice and the elevation of virtue.

"My brothers, you may be somewhat surprised when I tell you that I am interested in the prosperity of this village and the happiness of its inhabitants; and am especially so in the prosperity of our order, because I know that when its interests are advanced, so also will be those of the place. Organizations are every where made for the accomplishment of special objects. Why not here?

"I am aware that I am looked upon by very many as being in connection with that order whose

out-door name is Know Nothing. Perhaps I am; but when you will have learned more of the order to which *you belong*, then you may judge for yourselves. So far as I can say any thing of this Know Nothing order, it makes professions of love of country, and the correction of evils which are rapidly working mischief, the extent of which is not so trifling that it may be overlooked. Nobody pretends to ascribe to it any other motives; and surely, with such representations of them, every good man should raise hand and voice in applauding the scheme. Thousands there are who will always oppose every thing: they are born with a spirit of opposition within them. There are others too, who, thinking that some scheme of national advancement may abridge some of their personal and selfish plans, are wild in their cries of denunciation; while at the same time they would see our blessed institutions committed to the charge of some despot, whose iron hand would mould them to his own purposes, or would crush them beneath a sanctimonious heel.

"It is for every man who loves his country, and would not see her degraded to the dust, to put forth effort to preserve her institutions and liberties. Vigilance alone can do the work; for there are opposing agencies engaged whose vigilance is sleepless — agencies which look upon our stars and stripes as the watchword that is rallying the lovers of republicanism and liberty to the onslaught upon despotism and tyranny.

"We are to remember that every man is to be

diligent in his place; that none are expected to survey the whole field and think upon the whole work as that which they are to perform, but that every one is looked to for the accomplishment of local labor. And *here* is our sphere — here, where we are to work, having the assurance that other locations have also their organizations faithfully engaged. Would you know our numbers? *We are legion!* Would you know our character? We have in connection with us the learned, the good, the influential. Would you know our spirit? It was bequeathed to us by the patriots who gave all, even life, that we might have the liberties we now enjoy. We defy any and all aggression; we proclaim love, peace, and good fellowship with all; and we only keep ourselves pledged together, fully disciplined, and with the will *and the power* to sweep away, as would a fierce tornado, any agency that may dare arise to do violence to our rights.

"We believe that one of the most deadly enemies at work against us is the immorality of the age. How sadly are we losing ground in this respect! How many there are amongst us who despise the Sabbath, and insult, by their gross and public trampling upon it, the feelings of those who would keep it sacred! And it is oftentimes the case that our lawmakers are those who participate in this wickedness. Can we expect that the favor of Heaven will rest upon us if we permit these things to be? Never! Our ruin will come. So certain as we do not become a more virtuous people, so certain will we see 'Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin' written

against us. And it is while associations are springing up all over the land that ours has come into existence, having a pure patriotism inscribed upon its banner, and throwing itself into the contest between virtue and vice.

"Our order, then, is patriotic — a patriotism taking higher ground than that which generally goes by the name. It is a patriotism which begins to build only upon a foundation that is sure — one which does not seek to deaden the tree by trimming the branches. We base our patriotism upon principles of morality, if not religion; and in so doing we confidently look forward to nobler results than are to be hoped for from the mere political principles that have heretofore composed the platforms of contending factions. It is a noble, a glorious work; it is one in which we may all heartily and conscientiously engage, and one against which no weapon that is formed can possibly hope to prosper.

"You are pledged to see that even in this village good men are placed in office, and by no means to give your vote to any one whom you may think not disposed to use his influence for the suppression of vice in every form. The political considerations which have heretofore governed you are to be sacrificed, if they are not represented in the persons of men of virtue and genuine good deeds. If the tree be good, the fruit will be also good; and we may rest secure when men of integrity are placed over us. True, it may be that they may not in the minor matters do that which may suit our views; but in the greater they will pursue such a course as will

be promotive of our more essential interests. With such an administration, national and local, we may confidently look forward to the decrease of crime, the depopulation of our jails and penitentiaries, the diminution of the almost incredible expenses to which we are subjected for the support of paupers and criminals and courts of justice, and the universal right to worship God as we please, without any to disturb or make us afraid. Talk not now of our glorious religious privileges. Are we in the *full enjoyment* of these privileges, when bands of infidel foreigners and shameless *freethinkers* are permitted to march the streets, with bands of music and flying colors, by the very doors where quiet citizens are met to worship God? It is a slander upon the name of *liberty;* and such an illustration of it cannot but arise as a stench in the nostrils of every good man, as it undoubtedly does in His who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with allowance.

"In what better service could we be engaged? And how much we have to encourage us, when we remember that such vast numbers of the great and good — seeing the evils with which we are threatened — have banded themselves together, and are one with us in this cause!

"We are aware that there are those who are opposed to secret orders; and it is true that any such organizations may be productive of evil when bad men are connected with them and are at the helm. But such is not the case with this order. Look around upon our membership here. Does it not consist of the best men of the place? And as

you see the character of its membership here, so may you rest assured is it every where else. The secret pledges which we make have the effect to bind us together, and to preserve our order from becoming common. The deeds of benevolence we are bound to perform among ourselves serve but as incidental to our ulterior aim. They make us love each other, make us feel that we have interests within ourselves, and serve to perpetuate our bond of union.

"My brothers, there are many little things connected with the duties imposed upon us by our order which are unimportant just now to know; and I now proceed to make a communication to you, which gives a phase to our affairs not anticipated, I am certain, by any member in this room; and it is one which will require from you an additional pledge — a pledge, too, which, I fear, some of you will find exceedingly difficult to keep."

Never, perhaps, was there assembled a more completely hushed and interested audience than that which now sat before Lamont. Every eye was turned upon him with the most eager attention, and every member was leaning forward with an intense anxiety, which it was impossible for them to conceal. Jasper and Edward would have made a strong picture for an artist. The latter, especially, seemed as though the moments were dragging along too tardily for him. His heart throbbed violently, and his right hand clutched his desk with a grasp almost of desperation. And Worthy Ike, too, — he was there, and was by no means the least interested

member in the room. The good old fellow had dreamed of this hour for many nights gone by, and would very cheerfully have put his shoulder to the chariot of old Time and hurried him up to a livelier gait, if such a thing had been in his power. Consequently he was rejoiced that there were no more nights nor days to intervene before his ardent longings were to meet their realization.

"You will rise, my brothers," continued Lamont, "and form a semicircle about the desk with as little confusion as you can possibly make."

And they did so.

"Three days hence you will be at liberty to make public what I am now about to communicate to you — although not as having any connection with our order; and I require of you, each and all, the positive promise, that, until that time shall have elapsed, you will not utter a word of the matter unless with my consent. Do you so promise me?"

"We do," was the quiet but unanimous response.

"This communication I am to make to you, personally, in a whisper; and you are furthermore to promise me that you will make no exhibition of surprise or alarm, no matter how great your astonishment may be. Will you give and keep this promise?"

"We will."

Lamont stepped from his desk under much agitation.

"In order," said he, "that I may not appear partial, I will reveal this matter to these friends, Perkins and Buford, with whom I have associated

most, and to whom my first advances were made, only when I have done so to every other brother. Be patient, brothers, and I will be as expeditious as possible."

Poor Edward! It was a trial to him to wait even this little time, much more of a trial than it was to Perkins, who was endeavoring to keep as cool and patient as the circumstances would admit.

Lamont advanced to the right and began his work — placing his lips close to the ear of the nearest brother, and saying a few words which were entirely inaudible to any other ear. *The man started*, and gazed into the face before him, as though revelations had been made to him from the land of spirits; and it is very probable that he would have violated the pledge to preserve quiet had not Lamont placed his finger on his lips.

The amazement exhibited on the face of this man created intense excitement throughout the hall, although not a word was spoken. Quietly and rapidly Lamont passed from one to another, frequently finding it necessary to suppress some rising burst of astonishment; and it was really a curiosity to see the expressive looks that were exchanged amongst those who had already received the communication. They gazed upon each other incredulously, looked at Lamont, then at their nearest neighbors, shook their heads, and seemed altogether unable to believe what their own ears had heard.

In due time the communication had been made to all excepting Jasper and Edward. When the former received it he clasped Lamont's arm, and

stared him in the eyes with a look of startling amazement. Lamont returned his gaze without the relaxation of a muscle, and started towards Edward; but Jasper still retained the convulsive grasp of his arm, as though he would not let him go.

"Be careful, my brother!" said Lamont. "It would not look well for the whole membership to abide by its promise, and *you* disregard it."

Jasper released him, dropped into his chair, buried his face within his hands, and looked the very picture of unbelief.

And now Lamont stood before Edward, whose whole frame was quivering with suspense and excitement. He received the communication, and was just bounding forward with a wild cry, when Lamont covered his lips with his hand. Edward measurably composed himself, and stood looking upon Lamont, as though entirely undecided what to do.

"Must I also caution you as I have just done our brother?" asked Lamont. "All my reasons for this whole matter you shall all know in proper time; but I must ask *now* that we preserve quiet."

It was astonishing to see the influence which Lamont possessed over the whole order. Edward, 'tis true, rather violated his pledge; for he, like Jasper, sank into his chair, leaned forward upon his desk, and gave way to a burst of tears. But allowances were made for him by the whole order, in consideration of the intimate friendship which had existed between him and Lamont. On the part, however, of the members in general, every pledge which they had given was faithfully kept.

"And now, my brothers," said Lamont, resuming his desk, "it is for you to say whether the friendly relation between you and myself is to be sustained. I can easily imagine the whirlpool of contending emotions with which every bosom is stirred; yet what I have communicated to you is none the less true, as you will all know more satisfactorily before many days have passed. Henceforth we must be brothers, who will love each other with all the strength that our order contemplates, and assiduously labor for the accomplishment of the blessed purposes it has in view. When this month shall have closed I will resign this chair, voluntarily assumed, and leave it for you to place any one from your number in it whom you may think worthy of the honor."

"Never! never!" cried they as with one voice, but without being boisterous; "we will never place any one in it but yourself."

"Then you confide in me?"

"Perfectly, completely," was the response.

"Then," said the handsome man, whose whole countenance lighted with a smile of joy, "come forward, and let me take you each by the hand, and in the happiness of our new bond of union we will quietly talk our matters over."

O, how the warm hearts gathered round him! and how many were the manly cheeks that were bedewed with tears while ardent hands clasped his with the pressure of exuberant joy!

Thus passed an hour away — passed, too, so rapidly that all were astonished that it was already

gone — an hour, too, in which scores of questions were asked and answered, and in which Lamont had to go through an ordeal that he had not anticipated.

"My brothers," said he, "at length the time has now come when we must adjourn; although, in truth, I could enjoy myself greatly in remaining here with you until the morning's dawn. Three nights hence I wish you all to meet me here, and on the day following you may consider yourselves as liberated from the obligation which I have placed upon you to keep this matter quiet; and you need not fear that I am going to forestall you in making the announcement public, any further than with those who are immediately interested.

"I am most happy that I have come thus among you and given you the initiation into the work of our excellent order. Perhaps, had I come otherwise, I might not have been so successful; but I cannot but trust that you have all entered upon your duties with ardent spirits, and are now more than ever determined to labor vigorously and unitedly in the cause. Remember and love the work. It is manly, noble, Christian, and patriotic; and it may be the privilege of all of us, many a time, to see the tear of sorrow wiped from the mourner's cheek through our instrumentality; the dwelling-place of poverty and suffering made vocal with thanksgiving; this pretty village delivered from some of the evils which curse it; and even our country, from the combined efforts of our whole order, preserved from sinking lower — if not made to rise higher — in the scale of moral and political degradation."

The closing pledge was recited, and the order adjourned.

* * * * * *

"Not to-night, Edward — not to-night," said Lamont, as he, Perkins, and Buford stood, hand clasped in hand, after the adjournment; "be patient until to-morrow. I will call upon you in the morning, which will be as soon as I can consent; but until then, you and Jasper must not utter a word, and I do not wish either of you to say any thing until I am present."

"If it *must* be so," replied Jasper, while he and Edward still held Lamont, "there is no use for further pleading. God grant it may all be for good."

And the friends parted for the night, their bosoms stirred with emotions which it would be impossible for us here to describe.

CHAPTER XXIII.

But, before the morning dawned, there were some strange scenes enacted in some of the Quizville dwellings. A look into that of our good friend Mr. Worthy Ike may, perhaps, exhibit to us a fair representation of what transpired in fifty others. Let us, therefore, follow him home.

Having entered, he betook himself very thoughtfully to a seat. For some minutes he said nothing, during which time Mrs. Worthy Ike was giving his abstracted manner a very thorough investigation.

"I say, old lady," said he, springing up, "I've got it at last!"

"Got what?" asked she, with no little surprise.

"Ah, excuse me!" returned he, with some confusion of manner, "I forgot that you didn't know any thing about it — forgot that altogether."

"Don't know any thing about what, my dear?" said she, very tenderly coaxing.

"O, nothing much: tell you, may be, some of these times; but I be hanged," continued he, as if to himself, "if it ain't a funny turn up after all!"

"*Dear* Isaac," replied Mrs. Worthy, "am I not your own dear wife?"

"Well, I believe so, old lady; that is, to the best of my knowledge."

"Then oughtn't you to confide to me all your secrets — all of 'em?"

"Well, now, as to that I can't say; and by the way, what makes you think I've got any?"

"I'm sure you talk and act as though you have."

"I do, eh?"

"Yes, you do."

"Well, the fact is, old lady, *I have* learned something to-night that is very wonderful."

"Ah, now I thought so! Come, you are acting just like your own good self now — you are indeed!" said she, lovingly taking a seat very near to him. "What is it you have learned, Isaac?"

Worthy shook his head.

"O, don't say you can't tell me!" cried she; "you must tell me all about it *now*. Indeed I am dying to know it."

"Well, if I really thought you was *dying* about it, *that* would alter the case; but it's no use talking. Be patient, and in three or four days you shall know what I have heard to-night."

"In three or four days, you say?"

"Yes, about that time."

"Can't you say one day?"

"Out of the question."

"Say *two*, then."

"No; *three* is the shortest possible time."

"Well, it don't make much difference any how, I guess," said she, carelessly; "it's only something about that Know Nothing business; and that's not much."

"No, not much," replied Worthy, glad of any

excuse to get rid of her importunity; "so I believe I'll go to bed, as I'm getting pretty sleepy."

"O, yes!" cried she, losing somewhat her gentle manner, and coming out on a new key; "you wasn't sleepy an hour ago, I'll be bound."

"Well, no; I can't say that I was; but you know it grows on a body all of a sudden sometimes."

"Yes, it's very apt to when a man happens to sit down alongside of his wife."

"Never mind, old lady," replied Ike; "I've got something rich to tell you — something that will make you open your old eyes with wonder."

"Did it make *you* open *your* old eyes?"

"It did that."

"Well, they don't look very wide open just now, any way."

"Then I guess I had better bid you good night;" and without further ceremony, Mr. Worthy Ike betook himself to his bed, and thence to the land of dreams. His loving spouse followed his example, so far as the first-mentioned part of the business was concerned; but the latter was not so easily accomplished. She tossed from side to side, wondered, conjectured, and then tossed again. One hour passed — *two* hours passed — nay *three* hours passed; and she was still awake. By this time Mr. Worthy was deeply ensconsed in the embraces of old Somnus, of which his rich, sonorous breathings were bearing abundant witness.

His wife at last gave him a gentle push; but it had no other effect than to stop his music for a moment. She pushed a little stronger: he changed

his position. Again she pushed, accompanying it with calling his name.

"Isaac! Isaac!" said she, gently.

She received a grunt for an answer.

"Isaac!" said she, louder, and giving him a rather extensive *smite* in the side.

"Well! well!" cried he, quickly, and starting up.

"I want you to tell me something."

"What about?"

"About that matter we were talking of. Is it any thing of that Mr. Lamont, that every body is so crazy about?"

"I wouldn't wonder if it is," answered he, not exactly thanking her for having disturbed him, and yet considerably amused at her curiosity.

"I wish you would tell me now. I haven't slept a single, solitary wink."

Ike laughed outright. "Can't do it, can't do it," said he; "bound not to do it."

"You didn't *swear* you wouldn't, did you?"

"Yes; couldn't help it."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the good woman, considerably horrified; "how wicked you are getting!"

She left him to his slumbers, which were quickly resumed; busied herself for a half hour more in all sorts of queer surmisings; and at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE morning was about half gone when Lamont, in accordance with his promise of the previous evening, presented himself at the Buford mansion. Edward had been awaiting him for some time, and was fast becoming impatient and nervous. It was consequently a great relief to the young man when Lamont came.

"An age has almost gone over me since we parted last evening," said Edward, affectionately placing his arm within that of his friend; "and the night was one of the longest of my life. I did not sleep a moment. But come; let us go in and have it done. What the result will be I cannot foresee," (and a shadow came over his countenance as he spoke,) "but we will hope for the best."

"We have no reason, that I know of," replied Lamont, "to anticipate any other than a happy result. Why should it not be so?"

Edward shook his head, and, when Lamont was seated, threw himself into his arms, and wept such a torrent of tears as men do not often weep.

"We *will* hope for the best," said he, through his tears; "yet there are times when an excess of joy is as fatal as one of grief; and to tell the truth, this single thought has driven sleep from my eyes

throughout the night. And now that the moment has come when I must make the announcement, it seems as though my courage fails."

Lamont laughed at Edward's fears, and bade him take courage, doubting not that all would be well. "I will engage," said he, "to clear all the difficulties from the way; but I am convinced it will be better that you precede me. I think, too, you had better not delay any longer, for I am fast becoming impatient myself."

"And richly deserve to suffer a year of suspense and penance," returned Edward, smiling. "But my father is in the library; and I will go to him at once."

General Buford was seated in his great arm chair, reading, when his son entered. Turning to see who came in, he was struck with the young man's appearance; for Edward's countenance strongly betrayed the intense excitement of his mind.

"Are you unwell, Edward?" asked the general, extending his hand.

"Well enough in body, father, but not exactly so in mind."

"Ah!" exclaimed the general, who loved his son most fondly, and could not bear the thought that any thing should distress him; "ah! what can have occurred to disturb you?"

Edward took the chair which his father drew near to his own and sat down, covering his face with his hands.

"Speak to me, my son! What is it?"

"I have news to communicate to you which

ordinarily would cause your heart to bound with joy; but, under the circumstances, I do not know how yourself and my mother and sisters will receive it."

"News in which we are all personally interested?"

"Deeply."

"Of what nature?"

"It has reference to Mr. Lamont."

"Mr. Lamont!" cried the general, rising hastily, and pacing the floor. "From the first, Edward, I cautioned you to beware of that man; and from the time that necessity seemed to force him upon us, from our connection with Colonel Perkins's family, I have continually feared that his fascinating manners would draw you so closely to him, that, if he were disposed, he could do you much harm."

"But your fears, my dear father, were needless."

"*Needless!*" exclaimed the general, stopping suddenly before Edward, and looking him full in the face; "why, then, my son, does any information that you may have to impart concerning him cause you the deep feeling under which you are evidently now laboring? You surprise me."

"And must surprise you more."

"Edward!" cried the general. "What can you mean?"

"Father," replied the son, calmly, "you are aware that, since Mr. Lamont has been here, I have been with him almost continually, night and day."

"Well."

"And you will believe me when I tell you that I have found him to be every thing that man can be — noble, honorable, generous, and upright."

"Certainly. Whatever you say of him I am prepared to believe, so far as good qualities go; for the character you give him fully coincides with the opinion that I have all along entertained."

"It is a good opinion, I can assure you, which was never more worthily bestowed. But before I tell you what I am about to. I wish my father to grant me a favor."

"Name it, my son."

"It may be that your first impulse will be to cast Mr. Lamont from you, as having acted in a manner which you may consider trifling. But you may depend upon it that he has good reasons for having acted as he has since he has been with us; and the favor I ask is, that you will not yield to any hasty impulse that might be adverse to him, but will receive him with your characteristic generosity. May I ask my father to promise me this?"

"For your sake, Edward, I will receive him as you wish."

"It is not for *my sake* that I ask it, but *his;* for, father, *Mr. Lamont is my brother Henry!*"

General Buford sank into his chair as if life had departed; but in a moment he sprang to his feet with the look and gesture of a madman.

"Edward! Edward!" cried he, "you know this is not true! O my boy! my boy! why should you, how can you, tell me a falsehood such as this?"

"*Sir!*" exclaimed Edward, springing up, while the blood that he received from this same high-toned father mantled his indignant cheek.

"I command you, sir, to retract this wilful fabri-

cation!" cried the old gentleman, in a rage. "Lamont *is not* your brother!"

"I repeat it, sir, *he is!*" returned Edward; "he is my brother, and your son!"

"*Then do I renounce him!*" was the almost furious exclamation; "*I renounce him!*"

Rapidly the silver-haired father walked to and fro the room. He thrust his hands through his locks, and seemed like one demented. Edward permitted him to do so for a few moments, but at length drew near, took his father's hands within his own, and looked pleadingly into his face, but did not say a word. It was more than the fond father's heart could resist; it seemed to remind him of the promise he had made but a few moments before; and, with a perfectly subdued manner, he permitted Edward to lead him to his chair.

"My dear father," said Edward, gently, "Henry is indeed with us again, and it is he who has so often broken bread with us as a stranger. Would you cast your firstborn from your heart?"

"No, no, no, my dear boy, I would not, I could not do so. Forgive me, Edward, that I have treated you so unkindly. You have ever been to me all that a good and dutiful son could be, and it grieves me that I should have spoken so harshly to you. But why has Henry acted thus? Why has he adopted such a strange method for returning to his home? Can it be that he loves us, and would so long willingly be a stranger even within the very home where loving hearts have so long mourned his absence?"

"Doubtless he has reasons for so doing which he can explain to your satisfaction more fully than can I. But would you see him?"

"Would I? Yes, yes; where is he?" asked the old gentleman, quickly, and looking towards the door, where he seemed to think Henry might even then be waiting an invitation to enter.

"I left him in the drawing room. Shall I bring him to you?"

"No, no; I cannot wait longer. Let us go to him."

A moment more, and the old gentleman, supported by Edward, stood within the drawing-room door. There sat the Lamont of the past few weeks, in conversation with Emily and Cornelia, who had entered without being aware of his presence, and who were in complete ignorance of what was so soon to fall upon their ears.

Lamont rose and advanced as the general and Edward entered; and in the next moment the venerable father clung weeping upon the bosom of his long-lost son.

"My boy! my boy! my boy!" was all the overjoyed old general could utter.

The young ladies were speechless with amazement.

"What means this, Edward?" cried Emily, so soon as she could use her tongue.

"Your brother Henry my sisters — your brother Henry," was all that Edward could say.

"Our brother Henry Mr. Lamont!" screamed the young ladies as with one voice, and not com-

prehending what the strange scene meant. "Where is he? Do you know him?"

"I do indeed know him, my sweet sisters, *and am he*," replied Henry, releasing himself from his father and extending his arms towards the young ladies. "Will your loving hearts receive the brother that has practised this *ruse* upon you?"

With a wild scream, that startled the whole household, the poor girls fell upon his neck; the father and Edward encircled the whole three with the warm embraces of overflowing hearts; and for a little time there was nought but sobs and tears of joy and thanksgiving. It was a moment of bliss.

The little Alice soon came bounding into the room. When Henry went away, she was so young that she did not have a very distinct recollection of him. She knew well enough, however, that she had a brother Henry; for, although absent, and part of the time far distant on foreign soil, his name was ever on the tongues of those he had left behind. There was not a day passed that Henry was not talked of; and she had many a time seen her dear mother with clasped hands and closed eyes, when she knew well enough that prayers were going up to the mercy seat that blessings might descend on the absent son.

The child had heard the screaming of her sisters, and was attracted thereby to where they were. But when she entered, and saw her father, and brother, and sisters encircling in their arms and calling by the name of Henry him whom she had known as

Mr. Lamont, her astonishment was beyond all bounds. Henry was the first to notice her.

"Will not my sweet little sister come and speak to her brother Henry?" said he, extending his hand towards her.

"You are not my brother Henry," replied she, drawing back.

"Indeed he is, darling Alie," said Emily, who was almost suffocated with joy. "Mr. Lamont *is* our brother Henry, and you must come to him."

It needed no further indorsement of the fact to convince her; indeed she was very willing that it should be the truth, for she had already learned to love him very much; and she sprang to his arms and clasped hers around him with the full outgoings of her sisterly love. It was indeed an exciting scene; but it appeared as though the venerable father's heart would explode with his unbounded happiness.

The loving little Alie did not long remain in Henry's arms; for, while her sisters were loading him with eager questions, she slid from his bosom and started out the door and through the hall.

"Quick! bring her back!" cried the general, in an instant surmising her purpose; "she will break your mother's heart!"

But they were all too late; the child was already beyond their reach, flying up the stairs, disregarding entirely the calls of Edward and her sisters, and was almost in an instant in her mother's room.

"Mother! mother!" screamed she; "brother Henry — brother Henry has come, and is down stairs with them all!"

It was almost as the old general said it would be. This sudden and unlooked-for intelligence was too much for Mrs. Buford. She attempted to spring from her chair, but fell fainting on the floor. But aid was near at hand; for Cornelia and Emily had followed the child, and burst into their mother's chamber just in time to see her fall. The usual simple restoratives, however, were not long in bringing her to consciousness.

"What is this, my children, that this child has told me?" asked she, unable to realize the truth.

"Joyful news! joyful news, dearest mother!" replied Emily, whose arms were around her mother. "Henry is indeed here, and we have something very interesting indeed to tell you about him." This she said almost in a laugh, that her manner might tend to prevent her mother from indulging in any unfavorable apprehensions.

"Then let me know it quickly, my dear children," returned she, hastily looking from one to another.

"Well, mother, you know Mr. Lamont?"

"Yes, yes; what of him?"

"*He is our brother Henry!*"

"Merciful Father!" cried the old lady, with hands clasped and eyes uplifted; "now do I thank thee that thou hast thus watched over him. But," continued she, addressing her daughters, "are you not mistaken?"

"No, my own dear mother, they are not mistaken," answered Henry himself, bounding into the room, followed by his father and Edward. O, what were the emotions of the devoted mother's heart, as

she threw herself upon his neck and clasped him to the bosom on which he had lain in his childhood's years!

There are scenes that transpire in this world which no pen can properly portray; there are emotions which are stirred of which any attempted description would be folly. And the present was exactly one of the kind. So we will leave it for the reader's own imagination to think of as best it may, and to give to it all the *empressement* which it chooses.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Buford was the first to arouse herself from the flood of joyful emotions that seemed for the time to have paralyzed every tongue — father's, mother's, sisters', brothers', *and servants'*.

"O my dear Henry, my dear, *dear* boy, why have you treated us thus? How could it be that you could sit so often with us, within your own home, and hear your own name mentioned so often, and with so much of the anxious solicitude that you have often heard us express in your behalf?"

"*Mother*," said Henry, attempting a reply which the pronouncing of that hallowed word, that had been so long silent upon his lips, entirely cut short for a few moments, "mother, let us all be seated, and enjoy an hour — I in telling, and you in listening to, my story."

And all hands, servants included, sat down to listen. Alice insisted on sitting on his knee, with an arm encircling his neck; and Mrs. Buford sat close by, with her hand clasping his. It is not to be disputed that her maternal bosom swelled with

pride as she looked upon the erect and noble form and into the surpassingly handsome face of *Lamont*, and knew him to be her own son. The general, too, and his daughters, and Edward were transported with delight that they had such a son and such a brother; and they all sat gazing upon him with a satisfaction they could not conceal. Among the most marvellous parts of the whole matter to them was, that any one could possibly have changed so much as he had. They did not seem to remember that he had left them when scarcely out of his teens — an unbearded boy, simple hearted, and very far from being the tall, finely-formed, graceful, and handsome man that now sat before them. His air and dress were foreign; and last, though not least, we might mention the fact that there was very little of his face that they could see, so covered was it with beard and mustache.

"My tale," began he, "can be told in few words. It was but a few days before I started here from the city that I returned from my sojourn abroad; and, as my glass easily acquainted me with the fact that even my dearest friends would not be able to recognize me, it came to my mind that I might practise upon you some pretty little *ruse* like that which I have. It need not any longer be a secret to any of you that I have been here as the representative of a benevolent brotherhood, or secret society, if you may choose so to call it, having vested in me full powers to organize a branch of the order in this village. It was by mere accident that I learned, while in the city, of the existence of this order, and that it

was sending forth its representatives to every town, village, and city in the country. Through the instrumentality of a friend I secured a connection with it, and also the commission which I hold to make an auxiliary organization in this place. I purposely refrained from advising you of my return to my native land, lest the knowledge of it might render me liable to discovery, when, as I knew would be the case, any of you and myself would be thrown together.

"There was another motive, too, which I had for coming and remaining so long among you as a stranger. It was that I might in this capacity make the acquaintance of Charlotte, and be enabled the better to ascertain if there still existed between us the same congeniality of taste and sentiment which so strongly united us in our earlier years."

"Dear Charlotte!" interposed Emily, clasping her hands; "what joy there is in reserve for her!"

"How do you know this?" asked Henry. "You cannot say but that she is so fascinated with Mr. *Lamont* that Henry Buford will be forgotten."

"Ah, now you are flattering yourself, I should think, that Mr. Lamont has been making a decided impression," returned Emily, gayly. "But suppose that this were the case, would not the result be the same, inasmuch as Mr. Lamont and Henry Buford are one?"

"Not exactly; this Master Henry Buford would not relish the fact that another had come and so far won the heart of Charlotte that old memories should

be forgotten. But I am most happy to inform you that he is not particularly alarmed on that score."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed both his sisters. "Pray what gives you so much confidence?"

"It is based entirely on what has come to Mr. Lamont's own eyes and ears."

"You may depend upon it, sir," said Cornelia, "that *Mr. Lamont* occupies no very low position in the regard of Charlotte."

"So he may in her respect and admiration; but I am greatly deceived if Henry Buford does not occupy much the higher place in her affections. Tell me, do you not think it so?"

"You had better get your information elsewhere. Doubtless Charlotte is abundantly able to speak for herself. But I can assure you, sir," said Emily, "that if I were in her place, and were disposed to receive you to favor at all, you should have to undergo a very rigorous penance for the past few weeks transactions."

"Ha! ha!" replied Henry; "I think I will advise Jasper to put you to trial." The tinge upon Emily's cheek very perceptibly deepened; and she was glad to use her slight confusion as an excuse for slipping out of the room, that she might run away unexpected and accomplish a little project that was making her heart to dance a lively beat.

CHAPTER XXV.

Hastily throwing on her bonnet and shawl, Emily slipped down stairs, through the hall, out of the gate, and was "over the hills and far away" before any of the family knew that she was gone. Nor was it very long ere she reached Colonel Perkins's, dashed up stairs, found Charlotte in her room, and threw herself into her arms, almost out of breath.

"Mercy on us, Emily!" exclaimed Charlotte, in affright. "What can be the matter with you?"

"O Charlotte! Charlotte! *Henry! Henry! Lamont!*" rapidly answered Emily, but too much out of breath to say more.

The manner in which Emily made this communication — "Henry! Lamont!" — startled Charlotte exceedingly. The reader is aware of the reasons which would naturally be suggested to her mind for the hasty supposition that Henry had arrived, and that something of a serious nature had transpired between him and Lamont.

"What of Henry and Mr. Lamont, Emily?" asked she, in great alarm.

"Henry has come!" replied Emily, hardly knowing what she said.

"Heaven be praised!" shrieked Charlotte, while the big tears of joy started over her cheeks. "But

what of him and Mr. Lamont? Dearest Emily, do not keep me longer in this suspense."

Emily burst into an almost hysterical laugh, and clasped her arms more tightly about Charlotte's neck.

"Nothing, nothing," at last replied Emily; "nothing of *them*. There is no *them* about it; for Lamont is none other than our own dear, long-absent Henry! He has been playing this trick upon us all this time."

Charlotte did not hear the latter part of what Emily said. The fact that Lamont and Henry were identical was completely overpowering; and she swooned in the fond arms that embraced her. Many years had the truehearted girl cherished the undying love with which Henry had inspired her, and many were the hearts that had been laid during the time at her feet. She had even rejected Henry *for Henry!* And now that she was again to be pressed to that bosom on which her girlish head had oft-times laid, and that bosom, too, none other than that of the noble, handsome, and gifted Lamont, whom she so sincerely respected and admired, — all this caused her cup of happiness to overflow, and she could not find words to relieve her swelling heart.

But while she reclined thus in Emily's arms, — who, by the way, had rung for assistance, — and was recovering her consciousness, Cornelia, Edward, and *Henry* rang, and were quickly seated in the parlor. Cornelia was asked above by the servant, and found Charlotte as we have described. The young ladies embraced each other as sisters.

"O Cornelia," said Charlotte, "can it be that this is true? To think of Mr. Lamont being none other than our Henry! I hardly know how to meet him."

"You need not stop to think how you shall meet him; for he is down stairs at this moment, waiting to see you." The sisters would hardly permit the agitated girl to arrange her hair and dress, but hurried her off in what, under other circumstances, might have been considered a rather unceremonious manner. And it was well that they assisted her; for she did not seem to have sufficient strength to go down and endure the meeting.

After entering, she stood hesitating within the door, her bosom violently heaving, and her whole manner indicating intense excitement and emotion. Henry at once rose to meet her; and she stood gazing upon him with a most penetrating look.

"O, how can it be that you are Henry," said she; "Henry, the fairfaced youth who left us? It does not seem to me that I can believe it."

"Dear Charlotte," replied he, taking the hand that had so often lain in his, and had even done so lately, "do you remember the Henry who five years ago stood with you at yonder gate and beneath the shining moon, and to whom at that time you pledged your heart forever, as you were bidding him farewell?"

With a wild scream she sprang to his extended arms, and was pressed in a long, loving embrace to that heart which ever had been, and would be, hers.

"O Henry, Henry," cried she, through her scalding tears, "can it be that you are my own dear Henry — my own loved Henry? My joy is too great — my heart too happy." And she sank sobbing on his bosom.

"God be thanked, my beloved one," answered he, "that my return to you makes your happiness so complete. I am indeed repaid for all the privations I have endured during our separation."

Just here Edward took his sisters to lead them away. "Come, come, girls," said he, "this is no place for us. They will not want to see any body else but each other for the next two hours."

And his sisters thought so themselves. So, giving Charlotte and Henry kisses enough to have sufficed for any half dozen ordinary occasions, they closed the door upon the happy couple and took their leave.

It was a fortunate thing for Charlotte and Henry that every body belonging to the family — servants excepted — were out. Accordingly, we may behold them on a luxurious sofa, their arms intwined about each other, and altogether in about as comfortable circumstances as I trust *you*, my reader, either have been, or will be, at some period of your sojourn "here below." Dry old patterns of humanity, doubtless there are, who might not think that in so doing we were making any great wish in their behalf; but all such have a thing or two to learn. We pity them!

When Charlotte found herself alone with Henry, the pent-up emotions which had been naturally kept

so, even by the presence of those so intimately connected with him and her, burst forth unrestrained.

O, how long and tenderly did she gaze into those speaking eyes, which were those of the Henry to whom she had been so long and devotedly attached!

"How many have been the times," said she, "when I have been in your company as Mr. Lamont, I have looked into your eyes, and upon your brow, and almost called you Henry! Often too, have we all spoken of this resemblance; and you may know now why the company of Mr. Lamont was ever so acceptable to me."

"You are very certain that *this* was the reason, are you?" asked Henry, rather provokingly.

"Can you doubt it?"

"Of course not, if you say *you* are certain; but I do not know yet what the result would have been had plain Henry Buford returned to you instead of the rather dashy Lamont."

"Have you any recollections of any proposals that were made by this dashing Lamont? and do you remember any thing about a very devoted heart that he professed himself ready to lay at the feet of the plain Charlotte Perkins?" asked she, archly, and twining one of his ebon locks within her fingers.

"Well, yes; I have some recollections of this kind; yet I do not know that he was very decidedly repulsed. Do *you?*"

"He certainly had the sympathy of a heart that did not wish rudely to crush his hopes."

"And perhaps rather wished it was not so fettered

as to be prevented from establishing those hopes. Eh! What says Charlotte to this?"

The fond girl was not much in the mood for Henry's playful inquisitions just now; her heart was too tender, too full; and she could not refrain a burst of tears.

"O Henry! dearest Henry!" cried she, "do not talk thus to me now; for it seems to me that during this happy hour I do not wish to hear or know any thing else than that we love each other with an abiding devotion even surpassing that of our former joyous years. In the Mr. Lamont with whom I have associated so much during these few weeks past I have seen every thing to admire; but in finding that he is none other than Henry, having become the mature man, adorned with the grace and finish of the gentleman who has been with the world, gaining lessons from its teachings, and treasuring up all its stores of information and culture, I am not less delighted than surprised. Yet is there an additional motive to my gratification. It is at your hands, dearest Henry, and not at a stranger's, that I owe my life, perhaps, and that of Netty's. You cannot conceive of the unbounded happiness which this recollection will give me while life shall last."

The recurrence to this event brought strongly to Henry's mind the moments of agony through which he passed at the time. His cheek blanched at the remembrance of the imminent danger in which she was placed whom he most loved on earth, and his heart swelled with thanksgiving to God that circumstances so strange had placed him where, by an almost superhuman exertion, he had accomplished so much.

Before the happy couple were aware of it, an hour had passed away; then two hours had passed away, and Netty was coming home from school. In passing along the hall, she turned and saw Charlotte and Henry in the parlor.

"Come in, Netty," said the latter.

She did so with a bound, and gave him the kiss which he never failed to receive when they met.

"Netty," said he, "will you grant me a favor?"

"O, certainly I will, if I can."

"You can very easily."

"Well, I'll try."

"I want your sister Charlotte."

"What for?" cried she, greatly surprised.

"I will leave you to guess."

"Not to be your wife, do you?" asked she, looking inquiringly from him to Charlotte, whose cheeks, by the way, discovered to the knowing little Netty that something strange was going on.

"Well, why not?"

"Because — because ——" She looked at her sister, as if afraid to proceed.

"Speak it out," urged Henry.

But she still continued to look at her sister as though she could not "speak it out" without Charlotte's permission.

"Why do you look so at me, Netty?"

"Does Mr. Lamont want you to be his wife?"

"You must draw your own inferences."

"Well, I'm sorry." And she dropped her head very despondingly.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Henry. "Why, I thought you esteemed me more than this."

"Well, I do love you very much; but then sister Charlotte can't be your wife, because she is already engaged to Henry Buford."

Henry smiled, and so did Charlotte; but Netty could not understand why they did so.

"Netty," said Charlotte, "do you know Mr. Lamont?"

"Do I know Mr. Lamont, sister! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Do you know Mr. Lamont?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, you know somebody, then, with whom I am not acquainted."

The child was amazed beyond measure.

"Sister Charlotte, *do* tell me what you mean," said she.

"Well, I have recently been made acquainted with the fact that there is no such person as Mr. Lamont."

"Then who is this, sister? Have we not always called this gentleman Mr. Lamont?"

"We have indeed; but we have been calling him by a name which is not his own."

"I would like to know, then, what his name is."

"It is Henry Buford."

"*Your* Henry Buford, is he, sister Charlotte?" asked the child, whose surprise was beyond comparison. Charlotte did not exactly reply to the

question as Netty had framed it; but Henry saved her the trouble.

"Yes, Netty," answered he; "that very same Henry Buford. What do you think about it?"

"Why, I think that you and sister are just trying to play a trick upon me, and I don't intend to believe that you are telling me the truth."

"And is it my dear little sister Netty," asked Charlotte, "who will not believe what her sister says?"

"Yes, sister, I will believe all you say; but then it seems so strange that Mr. Lamont should turn out to be Henry that I could not think it was true. I am not sorry now, Mr. Lamont, — I mean Mr. Buford, — that you want sister Charlotte to be your wife; indeed I am glad, for I love you very much; and I know that sister ——"

Charlotte blushed, and stopped Netty's further confessions for them both by laying her hand upon her mouth.

"And so you are Henry Buford?" said Netty, sliding from his knee, then stepping off at a little distance and surveying him intently.

"Yes."

"Well, I can't remember much how you looked when you went away; but I should think, if sister and all of them didn't know you all this time, that you must have changed very much."

"Very likely I have," laughingly replied he, at the same time complacently stroking the luxuriant beard and mustache against which Netty had so often filed her injunctions.

"I think sister will make you cut off those horrid things, any how, and then you will look a little more natural and nice; don't you think he would, sister Charlotte?"

"Perhaps he would; but we will see about this after a while."

The child left them, clapping her hands and singing in great glee, her happy voice ringing through the halls, and gradually being lost as she flew from attic to kitchen to communicate the wonderful news. To most of the servants Henry had been known from childhood, and they dropped every thing and came rushing in with very little ceremony to see for themselves. Soon, too, Colonel Perkins and the old lady came in; and we will leave it to the reader to imagine the wonder and rejoicings with which the old mansion echoed and reëchoed from side to side.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Mr. Worthy Ike came home to his much-respected spouse that evening considerably earlier than usual. His eye danced with a merry twinkle when he entered the house, and his wife was quick to observe it. With the children he was very playful; and it was evident that he had something in the way of a "choice cut" of humor in his cranium.

"Ha! ha! ha! old lady," said he; "didn't you wake me up last night about something? It seems to me that I recollect something about it."

"Well, yes, Isaac, I did; to tell the truth, I think it was very cruel of you to get my curiosity up, and then disappoint me as you did."

"It *was* cruel, that's a fact," replied he, very tenderly; "but what was it you wanted to know?"

"I only wanted you to tell me if this secret of yours didn't have something to do with this Mr. Lamont."

"Was that all?"

"Yes."

"Well, if I give you the information, you won't let it out, will you?"

"Of course I won't; am I not one of the best wives in the world to keep secrets?"

"Certain, certain; indeed, I may say that you are

one of the very best wives in this or any other world. But before I tell you about it, there is another thing. If I let you know whether this secret has any thing to do with Mr. Lamont, you will be satisfied, and will not ask any more questions, will you?"

"O, no."

"Well, it *has* something to do with him."

"No!"

"Fact; something very important too."

Now, it was just about this moment that *Mrs.* Worthy Ike thought that *Mr.* Worthy Ike was more unkind than ever, in that he had extorted from her the promise that she would not seek to know more; and she commenced fussing from the closet to the supper table, and from the supper table to the closet, in a very singular manner. Mistaking the sugar bowl for the castor, (her husband was great on spiced suppers,) she put the latter in the tea tray, and the former in the centre of the table. The sugar spoon was stuck in the salt cellar, and the cream jug was placed in a distant corner of the board. Ike sat very composedly watching her movements, understanding the whole cause of her strange proceedings, and enjoying it greatly.

"I say, old lady," said he, with mock gravity, "have you been taking new lessons in table setting?"

The question brought her to her senses, and she showered down a pretty extensive amount of tongue thunder upon him for being the cause of it all.

"Isaac," said she, "do tell me what it is about him — that's a good husband."

Ike laughed.

"Come, now," urged she.

Ike laughed louder.

"Do, do," persisted she, and getting very impatient.

"I don't believe you will give me any peace until I have told you all about it."

"Indeed I won't," replied she, taking courage.

"Well, I don't like to tease you so much; so, if you'll promise me you won't tell any body at all, I'll let you into the secret."

The clouds vanished from her face in an instant, giving place to sunshine and smiles.

"Of course I won't," said she, repeating her former promise.

"Well, Mr. Lamont is Mr. Henry Buford!"

"Not Charlotte Perkins's Henry Buford!" cried she, letting fall a plate of buttered toast "wrong side up."

"The very same."

"Why, Isaac! Are you crazy?"

"Not to the best of my knowledge."

"You certainly are."

"I certainly ain't, madam."

The good lady went to gathering up her toast, which by this time had left its seal upon the carpet.

"What do you think of it?" asked Ike.

"It's really very funny. How long have you known it?"

"Since last night."

"And why couldn't you have told me then?"

"Because I promised not to tell any thing about it to any body for three days."

"Then you have broken your promise."

"No, I haven't; for Mr. Buford's folks let it out themselves; and it is getting over town so fast that Mr. Henry himself gave permission this afternoon to tell it as much as we pleased."

"Well, I declare! I wonder what will come next to make a body open their eyes. What in the world did he come here and stay so long for, making every body believe he was Mr. Lamont?"

"I guess there are some folks that may be thankful that he came as he did and has done the good that he has."

"What good has he done?"

"Perhaps the widow Norton could tell you better than any body else."

"You don't pretend to say that it was he who got her so many friends and provided so well for her?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why, I heard it was Edward Buford."

"Edward Buford acted most kindly and nobly with her and to her husband while he was sick; but it was because this Mr. Lamont put him in the way for doing it all."

"How could he? I didn't know that the widow sent for Mr. Lamont at all."

"Perhaps she didn't; but I am at liberty to tell you this much: This Mr. Lamont, as we have called him, has already started a society here that makes it its business to see that all of its members

who may be sick or in want are taken care of kindly and their families provided for."

"No!"

"Fact; and this is the reason why Mr. and Mrs. Norton found all of a sudden so many friends."

"Do *you* belong to that society, Isaac?"

"I can't tell you whether I do or not."

"Which means that I may believe you do. Is it one of these societies with secrets?"

"Yes."

"What sort of secrets?"

"Such as you will never know; but one thing you may be satisfied of — there is no member of it who will ever want for friends either for himself or his family."

"Is it the Know Nothing society, Isaac?"

"Yes, so far as *you* are concerned, it is."

"Well, I don't know but it's a pretty good thing after all; but I expect they must do some very wicked and horrible things, or else they wouldn't be so ashamed to tell."

After tea, Mrs. Worthy Ike just slipped into her neighbor's to get her assistance in keeping what her husband had communicated to her. But she found that her neighbor knew just exactly as much as she; and they both talked themselves tired about Lamont and the Know Nothing society, and especially about the "awful secrets" which all *the men* were so wickedly keeping from their wives.

"The men" certainly do some very wicked things!

CHAPTER XXVII.

The reader will not be much surprised to be told that the recent disclosures created no little stir in the village of Quizville. Twenty-four hours did not pass before every body, of all classes and characters, had learned the news. General Buford's house was beset by throngs, all eager to look a little more closely at Henry than they had done since his return. True, they had often looked at him with wondering eyes as "Mr. Lamont;" but now they wanted to see him again, that they might learn how it could be possible that they could have been so long deceived; and before the second night came, the poor fellow's arms were nearly shaken off. As we have already intimated, Henry had been a great favorite in the village, and many were the tears that were shed when he went away. How many were the heartfelt congratulations which the family received that he was in the paternal nest once more! For several days and nights nothing else was talked of; and Henry was flooded with invitations to one cricle after another, until it seemed to him he would never get through.

But, amid all the round of gayety with which he was encircled, let us look at him in circumstances of another nature.

It is a pleasant evening; and accompanied with no one but the two children, Netty and Alice, he is enjoying a delightful walk towards the pretty Pinkton Hill cottage.

"And will you both continue to love little Henry and Katy?" asked he of the children.

"Indeed we will, Mr. Buford," answered Netty; "they are such good children that we could not help loving them. And then to think that they have lost their papa, and their mamma is so poor! We ought to do all we can to make them happy."

"Brother Henry," interposed Alice, "can it be that Mrs. Norton is so very poor?"

"She certainly is; why do you ask?"

"Because the children came to school to-day; you know they stopped before their papa was taken sick; and I thought, if Mrs. Norton was so poor, how could it be that she has money enough to send them? Mr. Morris, too, put Henry in one of the highest and most expensive classes. Little Katy, of course, can only stay in her A B C's."

"The money, I suppose, is provided in some proper way, my dear Alie," replied Henry. "Mrs. Norton told me yesterday that she already had more sewing than she could do."

"Why, where in the world could she get so much, Mr. Buford?" asked Netty, with surprise. "I know that sister Charlotte has given her some; but I did not know that any body else had."

"Yes," said Alice; "but Miss Charlotte, and Emily, and Cornelia have been talking to somebody else about giving her work, I think. At least I

heard them saying something about doing so the next day after Mr. Norton died; and I know that sisters, and mother too, all gave her some themselves."

"Well, it is very strange," said Netty; "for there are Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Sefton, who have never been able to get near as much as they could do; and if it hadn't been that Mr. Morris took Charley Sefton for half price, I am afraid the poor boy would have had to go without any more education than his mother could give him at home."

The next moment they were within the gate, and Katy came running out, and was kissed and rekissed by Netty and Alice, and finally found a lodgment in Henry's arms. Mrs. Norton met them at the door, her eyes swimming in tears, but her countenance wreathed with a smile. She had a note in her hand, open, and on which a tear had fallen — a tear prompted by a grateful heart.

"O Mr. Buford," said she, receiving him and the children with an earnest welcome, "read this. How shall I ever be able to repay the repeated acts of kindness which have been bestowed upon me and mine during the few days past?"

Henry took the note and read:—

"MRS. NORTON.

"Dear Madam: Will you please accept the accompanying articles, believing them to come from one who sympathizes most heartily with you in your affliction, and who thanks God that he has the ability

and the disposition to be kind to the widow and the orphan? A FRIEND."

"Just look here!" said she, opening a large closet, when Henry had read the note. He did so, and saw coffee, sugar, tea, candles, and some few little delicacies that would be most palatable to an unsurfeited taste.

Henry could not restrain his tears.

"O Mr. Buford," cried she, "you are all too kind!"

"But you need not attribute this to me at all," returned he, seeing that she had fixed upon himself as the donor.

"Ah, who, then, can I thank?"

Henry pointed upward.

"I know that," replied she; "but I would also thank the instrument. The great Giver of all good, I do not fail, I trust, to be grateful to at all times. Indeed, I wish I knew who sent me these!"

"Have you no idea who it is?"

"None."

"Who brought them?"

"The singular-looking carman who wears the beard just like your own."

"Why did you not ask him?"

"I did, and pressed him to tell me; but I could get nothing out of him, as he said he promised positively not to tell any one. And this, you know, is only one of many similar favors that have already been bestowed upon us. O, how much I have to be thankful for!"

"I learn that you reëntered your son at Mr. Morris's school to-day, and that he was placed in one of the highest grade classes."

"Yes," answered she, the tears all the while rolling over her cheeks. "This is another favor from some unknown hand. Let me show you the very kind note which came to me with reference to it." When she had produced the note, Henry opened and read: —

"My dear Mrs. Norton.

In conversation with you within two or three days past, I was grieved to learn that you had been compelled to withdraw your son Henry from his school for want of means to pay for his tuition. It will give me great pleasure if you will accept the enclosed ten dollars, and with it place him again at school. The amount will be sufficient for the present quarter; after which I may trouble you again. With sincere regard, yours, Friendship."

Had Henry looked up at once after examining this note, it is very probable that his countenance would have betrayed the fact that he knew somewhat of the writer. The writing was in a lady's hand, and it was evident that the author had endeavored to disguise it as much as possible; but Henry saw sufficient in it to enable him to trace it to Charlotte Perkins.

"You are certainly not wanting for kind friends, Mrs. Norton," said he, with a smile.

"Wanting!" cried she, with surprise. "I have

so many more than I deserve that I do not know what to make of it. But that which comforts and cheers me most is, that I have not only received these many supplies for our necessities, but have been visited and sympathized with and invited to the houses of the very best people in the village O, this is the sort of kindness that has reached my heart; and I would have preferred it, even had I been compelled to make my meals of bread and water. Not a day has passed since my dear husband's death that I have not had more or less of the company of such kind ladies as your sisters and Miss Perkins; and if it were possible for them to know a tenth part of the joy and encouragement that such kind conversation and company as theirs never fail to give to the comfortless and needy, they would pray that they might always have doors opened to them to go forth on such errands of love and mercy. And these dear children, too," continued she, turning to Netty and Alice, — "they have been like living sunbeams in our little cottage. Indeed, Mr. Buford, had you seen Katy last night, as she bent at my knee and clasped her infant hands, and asked me, 'Mamma, may I say prayers to God to bless Netty and Alie?' you would have thanked the Lord that you, and others kind like yourself, had set this train of good deeds at work."

The widow, "sorrowing, yet rejoicing," ceased; and we may well suppose that within Henry's bosom there did arise those very emotions of thankfulness of which Mrs. Norton had spoken. There can be no satisfaction so great as that of doing

good. It is a satisfaction which the selfish worldling seldom experiences. Such a person is never happy; he never can be. He may suppose he is happy while whirling in the giddy maze of fashion and excitement; but he is much mistaken. The great Architect of our moral fabric has not constituted us with any such capacity; and man, poor worm! can only attempt to controvert his Creator's designs in vain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AUTUMN rolled along, and "the sear and yellow leaf" began to appear. The cool evenings were inducing their natural results — closed doors and cheerful fires. Quizville, externally, was losing much of its beauty: its hills and trees were becoming barren, and the chilly winds were beginning to moan through the naked branches. But, in doors, happy hours were just commencing: friends were assembling together in cosy rooms; lovers were drawing closer together around inviting fires; and little children were sporting about shining hearths.

A pretty morning has dawned upon the village. The sun is shining bright and clear, rapidly dissipating the frost that has clad hillside, steeple, and house top in white. The air is sharp and healthful, and every body steps along with the vivacity of youth.

Listen! Is that the church bell that is departing from its accustomed solemn toll, and is now ringing forth a merry peal? Indeed it is. But what is the matter? Around the church door a crowd is already gathering, early as is the hour, and all are pressing in. Let us join the crowd and see what is the cause of this unusual scene.

But yonder come carriages — one, two, half a

dozen. They stop at the church door, and are emptied of joyful maidens robed in white and gallant youths in holiday attire. Most prominent among the dozen pairs are Henry Buford, on whose arm hangs the queenly Charlotte Perkins; then Edward Buford and Carrie Litton; then Jasper Perkins and Emily Buford; then Wallace Moultrie and Cornelia Buford; and four prettier, handsomer couple perhaps never entered a church door. It was indeed a sight to be remembered. As this whole party entered, the bell pealed forth more cheerily than ever, and the modest little organ greeted them with a "voluntary" of different cast from that which it was wont to discourse. Then the young people arranged themselves before the altar; and the bright sun of that autumn morning shed its light as witness to the weddings of eight happy and devoted hearts. And then come congratulations, and kissings, and tears, and shaking of hands; and the little organ strikes forth boldly once more, and the bell wakes echoes among the hills, and the crowd that could not gain admittance sends forth long and loud shoutings of excited joy that fairly make the churchyard to shake.

But Henry and Charlotte were the most "observed of all observers;" the former the perfect pattern of a man and a gentleman, his handsome form passed through the crowd with the stateliness of a prince. Even the "hateful mustache" was admired, and commented upon as exceedingly becoming the man; and that exquisite taste in dress which he had ever manifested since his return was now more

conspicuous than ever, making him altogether one to be looked upon and never forgotten. He was proud, too, of the beautiful girl who clung blushingly to him, and who had just placed her dearest interests for life in his hands. Numberless were the blessings that were showered upon them, and never did two young hearts set forth on the voyage of life under auspices more bright. So, indeed, may we say of Jasper and Emily, Edward and Carrie, Moultrie and Cornelia; for the pathway that stretched far along in advance of them seemed bordered with flowers and sunshine, love, friendship, and hope. The interesting ceremonies of that hour were destined for years to come to remain fresh within the recollections of all who witnessed them, and to be the theme of conversation for many days to come.

Two hours more, and the whole party, arrayed in travelling attire, were seated within their carriages, preparatory to a joyous wedding tour.

"God bless you, my beloved ones!" said General Buford, as a tear started upon his cheek; "may your lives ever be as bright as the lovely morning which now sheds its light upon your nuptials."

"Amen!" added Colonel Perkins; and the mothers, too full of emotions for words, wept tears of thanksgiving and joy.

* * * * *

A little more, and our story is done.

Some three weeks after the events which we have just related took place, "the order" met one evening in its hall. Henry Buford occupied the presi-

dent's chair; and it was with a feeling of secret pride and self-satisfaction that he looked over the membership, and remarked the character and general standing of those who had united. It was impossible but that, with so much good material, great good would be the result; and he looked forward to important transactions that were to exert a wonderful influence on the affairs of the village.

"Brothers," said he, after the meeting was organized, "I told you some three weeks ago that I would resign this chair to your hands, that you might elect to it such a man as would discharge the duties to the best advantage."

"None can fill the place better than Henry Buford," said a voice.

"I differ with you, my brethren," replied Henry. "Ours is an order that has important objects to accomplish, and we will need one to preside over us who is a man of experience, dignity, and influence. I am decidedly of the opinion that a much older man than myself should be elected to the office."

"Henry Buford! Henry Buford!" cried half a dozen.

Our worthy secretary will pass round slips of paper to you, and you will please prepare your tickets for the offices of president, vice president, recording and corresponding secretaries, treasurer, usher, and two sentinels, which offices are to be held for the term of six months."

Jasper Perkins positively declined being a candidate for the office of vice president; not at all from any lack of interest in the matter, but because he

was well convinced as to the choice which would be made for the offices of president and secretary, and the additional election of himself would look too much as though the order was a family concern.

Henry would have been chosen by acclamation to the office which he had temporarily held; but such a vote was unconstitutional; and in due time the balloting exhibited the choice of himself, Mr. Barclay, Edward, and others not necessary to our purpose here to name, excepting that of our good friend Mr. Worthy Ike to the office of sentinel-in-chief.

"And now, brothers," said Henry, — and as he spoke every whisper was hushed, — "you have made choice of your officers; and I suppose it is my duty to yield my opinion to yours, so far as my desk is concerned. Is the choice, as here presented, that to which you give your hearty consent?"

"It is."

"And do you pledge yourselves to stand by, and encourage, and assist those whom you have chosen in the performance of all the duties of their office?"

"We do."

"And do you promise a faithful attention to all those duties which are incumbent upon you each and all as members of this order?"

"We do."

"Then, brothers, I commend you to your work. Be thankful that you have given yourselves to it, and ever regard those interests which it is engaged to promote as those with which you, your homes, your wives, your little ones, nay, your country, all

are intimately connected. Whatever may be the influences that any of us may hereafter see at work which in our opinions are calculated to accomplish injury to us as individuals, to our village, to society, or to our country, social, moral, or political, we are to report the same to our order, and like men must we put ourselves to the destruction of all agencies of the kind. Ever remember the watchword under which we are enlisted — 'The Sons of Good Deeds;' be always true; and blessings great and unnumbered shall descend and rest upon you and all that you hold dear."

Quietly went the members forth that night, feeling strong under their compact of love, and with hearts beating full of zeal for their work. Days and weeks passed by, and citizens were beginning to notice the universal good feeling that prevailed in the village. The rigor of winter seemed to many a poor family to have only been a thing of the imagination; the hands which they had feared would lie idle had plenty to do; and tables that had been but scantily spread were laden with the good things of the earth; hearts that had been lonely and sad found happiness and friends. An unseen agency was at work, noiselessly going from house to house, and leaving its sweet and healthful perfumes to refresh and gladden every home. Parties that had been estranged and unfriendly, ere they were aware found themselves drawn together again; and offices of kindness were performed by many to the identical individuals in whose downfall they would have taken most delight. Haunts of dissipation were discouraged, frowned upon, and gradually gave up the ghost. Men of worth and genuine enterprise were put in office, under whose administration sprung up a state of things to which the village, and even the county, had ever been strangers.

The Lamont of our story and his beautiful bride, and Jasper and Edward with theirs, were active in matters of private and public good. It was indeed a sight upon which angels might have looked with pleasure, to have seen these young hearts and hands ministering to the wants of the poor and needy, putting bread in the mouths of widows and orphans, and binding up and healing with the oil of kindness hearts that were crushed and bleeding. It would have done any feeling soul good to have seen them, for instance, in such an abode as Mrs. Norton's. Without such kindness, cheerless would have been her home and hard her lot. But now ladies were continually making application for her services, so much so that she was compelled to get others to assist her, thus more and more increasing the radius of happy results that were as fruits to the heavenly work that Henry Buford — even as an unknown stranger — had begun. Her son made rapid progress in his studies; by means of the little favoritisms that were bestowed upon him at the hands of the rich and influential, added to his own lovely disposition, he rapidly and surely secured many friends; and his ever-ready smile was like a sunbeam from the holy abode of the blessed, shedding beams of heavenly light and consolation upon his mother's widowed heart. Katy — dear Katy — sported about

cheerful old firesides, ever welcome, always wanted, and became the idolized companion of the gentle Alice and the loving Netty. Henry, Jasper, and Edward were but her elder brothers; and with her curly head pillowed on either bosom, her heart exulted with a joy akin to that of the blessed ones on high.

Rumors of the felicitous changes which were taking place in Quizville and vicinity quietly but rapidly spread abroad. Inhabitants from villages on whose social altars the fires of love and friendship and generous hospitality had of late burned but dim became witnesses of these events, which were rapidly raising our pretty village in the scale of good morals. One after another of these visitors, through the friends which they had in Quizville, gained membership in the order, examined carefully its principles and purposes, and were delighted with what they saw and heard; and in passing through the village, in company with those who had gained them the admission, they saw here and there palpable fruits of the work that was going on. It was to them the inspiration of hope that within their own precincts similar good deeds might be done and similar results accomplished. Here they beheld men of all political views permitting these views to be sacrificed on the altar of sound morals and Christian deeds. Here they learned, too, that this order was but an auxiliary in connection with a gigantic organization that had already spread its wings over the whole country — wings that were abundantly ample to shelter her and all her sacred

interests from the aggressions of any and all potentates and influences, secret or public, at home or abroad, that might seek to invade her precious rights or lay her sacred honor in the dust.

The "Quizville order" was but a part; and it performed a part — a noble part; for it quietly but steadily acted in accordance with its duties. The widow and orphan it provided for and cheered, the sick it ministered to, the needy it assisted, the stranger it befriended, the evil minded it discountenanced, the profligate and immoral it sought to check and restore, its own interests and its country's it watched over with an ever-jealous eye; and all around where Quizville was known did the pretty village send forth influences happy and elevating, likening herself to "a city set on a hill," and casting abroad a bright and glorious light, the lustre of which would never grow dim.

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Very respectfully, A. GUYOT.

I cheerfully add my testimony to the high value of the work of the lamented Dubois, from which the map of M. E. Sandoz is compiled. (Signed) L. S. AGASSIZ.

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