

J. Y. Wood

TOILING AND HOPING:

THE

Story of a Little Hunchback.

BY

LC
JENNY MARSH. °

Take home this lesson—it is such
As turns life's darkness into light;
Oh! we can never love too much,
If we only love aright!—M. S.

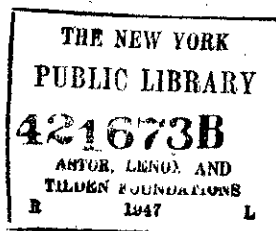
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J. Y. Glover

TO YOU,

My Dear Mother,

WHOSE LOVE HAS CHEERED ME IN THIS MY ENDEAVOR

TO DO GOOD, I DEDICATE MY

FIRST BOOK.

JENNY.

TOILING AND HOPING:

The Story of a Little Hunchback.

CHAPTER I.

We laugh and we cry, we sing and we sigh,
And life will have wintry weather!
So we'll hope and love on, since you, love, and I
Are husband and wife together.

GERALD MASSEY.

THIRTY years ago this autumn night, I came as the bride of Ralph McAlpine, to his home at Daisy Lawn. I was his second wife, and the step-mother of his only child, Angebell, whom I had never seen, yet often heard described by her father, as a pretty little girl, of four years, loving him dearly, and possessing a warm and generous heart. Since the death of her mother—and the little one was scarce a twelvemonth old when that took place—she had sometimes been in the care of her Aunt Fanny, a wealthy widow, residing in New York, the only sister of the former Mrs. McAlpine. This lady had one little daughter, Florence, who shared the affection of her only parent with the motherless Angebell, and it often appeared that the latter secured the greater supply.

When "Birdie," for that was the pet name of the little one, was not in the care of her aunt, who granted her every indulgence and would not permit her will to be crossed in any way, she was the sole charge of Aunt Betsey, the good natured and faithful housekeeper at Daisy Lawn. The title of aunt had been self-chosen by this honored and beloved domestic, and so pertinacious had been her claim to it, that all of the household, from the oldest to the little toddling Birdie, had learned to know her by no other name. Aunt Betsey's simple and honest heart could never see a fault in her little charge, but had allowed her somewhat refractory disposition to go unrestrained. The father saw the injury his child had received, from lack of discipline and a wise controlling influence, and had entrusted to me—to one so weak, so inexperienced—her guardianship and formation of character. Seeing the fearful responsibility devolving upon me, the duties that it would be mine to perform, the trials that would surely come, and the burdens that would struggle to overwhelm me, I knew that I should prove all insufficient for my task, if I leaned not upon the arm of the Almighty, and made Him my chief guardian and guide.

I was an orphan, and though placed above want and surrounded by friends, yet, until the kind and generous heart of Ralph McAlpine had offered me its shelter, I felt a lone one in the world. I was then twenty-four years of age, unschooled by trials or restraint. I had never mingled in fashionable gaieties; indeed, I had ever shrank from them, loving well the cloister-like retirement of the rural villa of my bachelor Uncle Hugh, who had been, since the death of my parents, my faithful protector and guardian. I loved his old-fashioned house, hidden by the elms and locusts, his cozy parlor and well filled library, both graced with the most antique of furniture, far better than the splendid saloons of my relatives in Philadelphia. Uncle Hugh was old-fashioned, and so was I, and, therefore, we lived in the happiest retire-

ment, and loved each other dearly. Ralph McAlpine was a cherished friend of his. They had been college chums, and though Uncle Hugh was much the senior of the two, and often made rather unjust exactions of his friends, yet nothing had ever occurred to shatter their friendship. "Take her, Ralph, take her," said he, on the morning of our departure for Daisy Lawn, twinkling his roguish eyes and shaking his head, with an air of indifference. "I have been half tempted to pick a quarrel with you for some time, and feel very much like it this morning, but I restrain myself under consideration of the littleness of the trifle."

I did want to weep when I bid Uncle Hugh good-bye, I felt such a heavy grief upon my heart; but I could not find a chance for tears, he piled his laugh-provoking jokes so unmercifully upon us.

"Here we are, at Daisy Lawn," said my husband, as the carriage turned upon a smoothly graded avenue, thickly shaded by shrubbery and trees. We had been riding all day, and the intelligence was welcome indeed.

It was early in the evening, and a clear moonlight. We were driving through grounds laid out with taste and care. I saw the cheerful gleaming of lights through the trees, and, as we drove on, the hum of voices greeted our ears.

"They are expecting us," said Mr. McAlpine, cheerfully; and when a turn in the avenue brought the house distinctly in sight, he continued, "Yes, and they are all out upon the porch to give us a welcome. There is Aunt Fanny and Florence, Aunt Betsey and my darling Birdie, crowing with all her might; *she* will give me a greeting I assure you."

I sat back in the carriage tear-blinded, while a deep yearning arose from my inmost soul. Shrinking, I scarcely knew from what, and overwhelmed by a sadness that had no definite cause, I was unconscious that the carriage had stopped.

"Dear Clara," whispered my husband, pressing me to his

heart and kissing me fervently, "here is your home, and may it ever be a happy one."

"Papa! papa!" was shouted loud and strong, as soon as we alighted from the carriage. A portly, good-natured looking woman, dressed in a neat brown gingham, with a snowy white apron and muslin cap, came quickly down the steps of the porch, bearing in her arms the laughing, shouting child.

Mr. McAlpine grasped her burden, and after kissing it fondly, introduced me to the woman, who stood gazing upon the scene with the most unmingled delight, and before I had time to extend my hand, Aunt Betsey had grasped it firmly and had given it a hearty shake, with a sincere welcome and congratulation.

We advanced toward the porch, Birdie crowing, her father laughing and tossing her in his arms. As we ascended the steps, an elderly lady stepped forward with a slow and dignified tread, cautiously gathering up the folds of her expensive silk with one hand, while the other flourished an immense feather fan. I knew it to be no other than Aunt Fanny, from her correspondence to the graphic descriptions I had previously received.

She returned the introductory salutation by a slight bowing of the head, and a momentary dropping of her skirt to clasp the tip of my fingers, and then bringing forward a pale, delicate child, who had modestly screened herself behind her mother, she introduced her as "Miss Florence Lawrence, a niece of the former Mrs. McAlpine."

The child looked up into my face timidly, while her soft blue eyes spake so kindly, that she won my affections completely, and kissing her fondly, I inwardly wondered if she was not "the angel of the house."

Aunt Fanny led us into the parlor, with many an inquiry as to our journey and the fatigue incurred, and then bidding Aunt Betsey to conduct me to my apartments, and to render whatever assistance I might need, she repaired to the dining

room to see that our supper was in readiness. Our long ride had prepared us with a keen appreciation of the plentiful and delicious refreshments that were soon to be spread before us. The glimpse I had of Mr. McAlpine, as I passed the library door, assured me that Birdie was in the highest state of bliss, and Florence as happy as her quiet nature would allow.

Betsey ushered me into a large square room, furnished with an elegant simplicity. The bed was hung with snowy white, and the walls adorned with paintings appropriate for a sleeping apartment. There was a well filled book-case, a chintz covered lounge, provoking indolence, and a toilet-stand, bearing a vase of beautiful and fragrant flowers. Everything offered an air of quiet, ungilded comfort. A large bay window opened upon a balcony, and as I glanced through the vines that thickly shaded it, I saw sleeping in the silvery moonlight a beautiful landscape, through which flowed the rippling Weimar. This is a tributary stream of considerable size, one of the chief attractions of Daisy Lawn, and long before I had beheld its loveliness, I had become well acquainted with its quiet beauty, through the graphic descriptions of Mr. McAlpine.

"What a delightful room!" I exclaimed, with supreme satisfaction. "Is it mine?"

"Yes," answered Betsey, gratified with my delight; "and may never a bit of sorrow follow you in here."

"Were these flowers gathered for me?" I asked, bending over the rare tribute, and inhaling their sweet fragrance.

"Who else would they be gathered for?" she replied, with a beaming smile, as she carefully assisted me to remove my bonnet and shawl.

"And who was so kind as to pick them for me?" I continued to interrogate, although quite suspicious as to who was the tasteful giver.

"Nobody but Aunt Betsey," answered she, with a hearty

laugh, "that always did take a pride in seeing things look cheerful-like."

How little things will overcome a flood of sorrow. The sweet eyes of Florence, her timid embrace, and the honest words and smiles of Aunt Betsey, had lifted the gathering load from my heart; and when Mr. McAlpine came to conduct me to the supper table, I returned his smile of love with one of unalloyed happiness. Aunt Fanny had puzzled me a little, but she was a strange eccentricity. Tea passed off pleasantly, though Aunt Fanny did not once lose her gravity or formal dignity. Birdie had persisted in sitting on her father's lap, and had been assisted to that station by her Aunt Fanny; but when being prohibited from sailing bread boats in his tea-cup, she had demonstrated her displeasure by screams of rage, which Aunt Betsey, by some unknown power, had succeeded in hushing behind the nursery-door.

On returning to the parlor, the first thing that I observed was the portrait of a young and beautiful woman, arrayed in a festal garb. The haughty brow, softly shaded by braids of dark brown hair, from which gleamed many a costly gem, the Grecian nose, the well arched eye-brow, the delicate mouth, and the coquettish curl of the lips, forcibly reminded me of the little and beautiful Birdie.

"That is the picture of Adel, my lamented sister," said Aunt Fanny, coming to my side. "We consider it a perfect picture."

"She was very beautiful," replied I.

"You are not the Columbus of that," answered she, turning her keen blue eyes full upon me, and taking a careful survey of my diminutive person. "She was admitted to be the most beautiful woman of the circle in which she moved."

Mr. McAlpine stood silent beside us, with his eyes fastened on the handsome face before us; and the momentary glance that I cast upon him, revealed him as suffering deep emotion.

"Angebelle is very much like her mother in mind, in spirit, and in appearance," continued Aunt Fanny. "I only wish my Florence had half of her animation and energy. Florence does not seem like one of our family, she is so timid and dependent."

"I am very much pleased with my little Florence," I ventured to remark, as I drew the child from the chair behind me, and, stooping to kiss her, discovered tears in her eyes. "Come out on the balcony with me," I whispered, leading her toward the open window.

I seated myself, and took the child on my lap. She wound her soft arms about my neck, and looking up into my face, enquired: "Have you come here to live? to be Birdie's mother?"

"Yes," I said, delighted with the simplicity of the sweet child.

She paused a moment, moved her lips as if to speak, then dropped her eyes, and was silent.

"What is it, Florence?" I asked. "Are you afraid to speak to me?"

"Oh, no," she replied confidently; "but I would like to know, if you are her mother, if you are not then my auntie?"

"Of course I am; you must call me Aunt Clara, and come here often to see me."

The eyes of the child sparkled. "I am so glad," said she; "for I love you very much."

At that moment Mr. McAlpine stepped out upon the balcony, and Aunt Fanny was heard calling Florence.

"Good night, auntie," she said, and glided away. We sat there for some time, engaged in conversation. The house, the place, the new circumstances, and strange associations about me, my thoughts of the past, and glowing hopes of the illuminated future, led me to silent communion with myself. My husband but seldom interrupted my blissful

reverie, and then it was by a kindly sentiment, that revealed his thoughts to be of a like nature to mine. I was very happy, and the voice of my heart was tuned to thanksgiving, and yet it would have been far easier to weep than to smile. Something occurring to break the intensity of my thoughts, my attention was diverted by the sound of Aunt Fanny's voice in the parlor. The window was open, and I was seated near it.

"Florence," said she, with melancholy intonation, "look upon that picture of your dear Aunt Adel, and impress its beauty fully upon your mind, for I fear that you will never behold that portrait again. It will be removed, and the face of the strange lady you have seen to-night will hang there in its stead. But I hope you will not, like many others, drive away the memory of one so dear, and bestow your love upon a stranger."

This came bitterly to me, and quickly aroused my naturally passionate, and then unguarded, heart. The hot blood tingled in my cheeks, but I pressed my lips tightly together, to stifle what I might not speak. I turned toward Mr. McAlpine, who sat farther removed from the window than I, but his serene countenance, and calm, abstract mood, convinced me that he had heard nothing of what had fallen so painfully upon my ear. My first impulse was to impart it to him, and this I doubtless would have done had not something in the garden arrested his attention, and called him from my side. The conversation in the parlor had ceased, and the sound of Aunt Betsey's voice in the hall, and the pattering of lighter footsteps than hers, told me that little Florence, who had stolen the love of my heart so completely, was going to her bed. "May God bless her," rose in an earnest, but silent supplication, from my inmost soul; and the shadow of that prayer was a sacred calm falling back gently upon me, rebuking the impatience and turbidness of my spirit, and bidding me pause awhile, and consider where I

was treading. "What!" whispered an inward vigil, "shall the first trial—one so small, so trivial as this—overthrow you?"

Mr. McAlpine soon returned to the balcony, and I was thankful that I exhibited nought of my late discomfiture. I had resolved to keep that wound a secret, knowing that its revelation would renew and increase my pain, beside imparting an infection to others.

That night when I knelt with my husband, for the first time, beneath the roof that afterwards sheltered me so many years, I had need to implore the giver of all good gifts to strengthen my weakness, and to grant me grace for my insufficiency. I had expected trials, bitter ones, and hard to bear, and had vainly thought myself girded for the struggle, but, oh! how weak had a trifle found me!

And so we arm ourselves for great adversities, ever guarding with strength and watchfulness the terrible rather than the insignificant; yet who does not know, that with weak human kind the latter is ever more victorious. The great perplexities and severe trials I had anticipated, had hidden the petty crosses that would surely show themselves.

As circumstances would compel the departure of Mrs. Lawrence and her daughter the next day, early in the morning the house was astir with the gathering up, and packing of the necessaries for their journey, which was to be by the stage coach most of the way. With the first peep of morning, through the leafy curtain of the bay window, I heard the heavy tread of Aunt Betsey through the house, and the sound of her voice giving orders for the proper arrangement of things in general. I could distinguish the slow and dignified step of Mrs. Lawrence, but waited long, and in vain, to catch an echo from the voice of the sunny-eyed Florence.

'Tis many a long year ago, yet I can not now forget the blissful sensations I experienced that morning while making my breakfast toilet. Everything seemed fraught with happi-

ness. I never heard canaries sing so sweetly as did those little warblers suspended in the porch; bees never hummed so softly as those that lit among the blossoms of the creeping vines; sunshine never seemed so heaven-bright, or trees like those that Eden knew. All inspired me with hope, and blessed peace; and even a remembrance of the unhappy event of the past evening, that came and faded like a shadow, could not break the sweet harmony in which my spirit reveled. My hopes were reanimated, and touched with a brighter glow; my faith basked in a broad sunshine, and looked up to a cloudless sky, while love garnered up her blessings, and found nought to break her peace.

Are you all thinking of the "morning glories," the delicate flowers that are so beautiful while the shadows lean far to the west? that smile on the morning sun, and nod so bewitchingly to the humming birds and bees, because of their mute happiness? "They wither," you say, "ere the stroke of twelve: they are nothing but morning glories!"

"We have an hour yet before breakfast," said Mr. McAlpine to me; "and Daisy Lawn, if first surveyed on such a beautiful morning, cannot well fail to make a favorable impression. How would you like a stroll around the grounds at so early an hour?"

I was delighted by the suggestion, and we stepped from the balcony upon the smoothly graveled walk. The imperfect view I had of Daisy Lawn the evening before, of the gothic cottage, with its balcony so sweetly shaded by vines and trees, its wide spreading sward blooming with flowers, and dotted with rustic bowers, small statues, and sparkling fountains, had prepared me somewhat for the pleasure of a more complete survey.

There was nothing grand or imposing about the place, leading the beholder to imagine it the home of luxury and fashionable pleasure, but everything offered an air of happy and quiet repose. The house was not large, nor built in an

extravagant and costly style, but simple and elegant. A capacious parlor and library were situated in the front, which faced the south, and their large windows were shaded by a hospitable porch that extended across the whole front of the building. At the eastern angle, and adjoining the library, was the wing which contained the delightful apartment which had been allotted to me. This was nearly hidden from the avenue by the dense foliage around and overhanging it; yet, when we were far from the house, and uncaged birds were warbling us a wild welcome at every turn of our walk, I thought that I could plainly distinguish above them all, the chirping and song of the little canaries that had bidden me so sweet a good morning.

We were walking leisurely along in a path near the roadside, when we heard the slow tramp of horses' feet, and soon two riders approached; one a tall, grave looking man, who sat erect, with his arms folded across his breast, and the reins hanging loose on the neck of his horse. His singular and abstract mood attracted my attention, and I naturally inferred from his plain suit of black, and white neckcloth, that he was a clergyman. His countenance was pale and thin, and until he was aroused by the salutation of my husband, it wore an expression of deep and settled melancholy. His companion, if we might apply that term, was a rosy cheeked and roguish eyed lad, who managed his gray pony with considerable skill and not a little boyish pride.

"Good morning, Dr. Grey," said my husband, as we advanced through a wicket gate to the road side. He stopped his horse, and in a gentle and dignified tone, requested the young and impatient rider to do the same.

"Come, turn back to Daisy Lawn and breakfast with us," said Mr. McAlpine, after introducing me to his highly esteemed friend and pastor of the village church; and to his son, who bowed very gallantly for one so young; "you will give us great pleasure by so doing."

"I am inclined to do so," returned Dr. Grey, while a pleasant smile illumined his sad and thoughtful face; and turning to Charlie, who was giving his pony some very quaint advice, he added, "and will you return directly home, and tell Mrs. Brown she need not expect me there to breakfast, or accompany me to Daisy Lawn?"

Charlie hesitated a moment, then looking up with his eyes full of fun, asked of Mr. McAlpine:

"Is Florence there yet?"

"Yes, and she leaves to-day for New York."

"Well, then," said he, and his pony wheeled about, "I guess I'll go to Daisy Lawn."

We all joined in a hearty laugh, in which his father shared. This, however, did not disconcert Master Charlie in the least, but telling us that he was in something of a hurry, he whipped up his pony and soon disappeared between the gates that led up the avenue, while Dr. Grey rode slowly by our side.

"I have called on Susan this morning," said the pastor, "and found her in much sorrow and affliction. Her husband died last night."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mr. McAlpine with great surprise: "what was the matter with him? He was in good health when I left home."

"His death was sudden and unexpected, yet brought on by his intemperance and dissipation. He was off on another spree last Sunday, and coming home he fell from the bridge, and was picked up next morning by Mr. Graham, who was on his way to market. He was perfectly insensible when Mr. Graham found him: he had fallen upon the stones near the bank, bruising his head and back severely, and had suffered greatly from loss of blood. He remained insensible until his death."

"I regret most sincerely the dreadful death of such a miserable man," remarked Mr. McAlpine, "and yet his life

has ever been more of a curse than a blessing to his family and the community."

"Susan tells me," continued Dr. Grey, "that notwithstanding his vicious habits, he always managed to give a support, even if it was a poor one, to his family. She is now left in a helpless and sad condition, and looks forward to a life of penury and want."

"She shall never suffer from poverty," replied Mr. McAlpine with much earnestness, "as long as it is in my power to assist her. I will visit her to-day, and attend to her wants;" and then turning to me, who had inquired who the unfortunate woman was, he told me that Susan Blake was formerly a servant in his household, and a faithful attendant upon his former wife. She had been married about two years to one totally unworthy of her deep and true affection. She had one child, a noble little fellow, a year old. Several months before, she had been prostrated for a tedious length of time with a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism; and from a deep interest and anxiety for her child and the affairs of their long neglected household, she had been very imprudent, by leaving her bed and venturing out of doors before she was able to do so, and had thus, by the alarming cold she caught, which speedily settled in her limbs, made a cripple of herself for life. She could move about a little with the aid of crutches, but was indeed very helpless; and in this sad condition had she been left the penniless widow of a drunken husband, and the mother of a child.

"Let me go with you to visit her," I asked, for the painful recital had awakened my sympathy for the poor woman, and a hope also that I might in some way lessen the weight of her heavy burden.

"Certainly, if you desire it," replied my husband. "Susan has a noble heart that has been sorely tried with much sorrow and severe suffering."

"Mrs. Brown will go there either to-day or to-morrow,"

said Dr. Grey. "I do not think Susan will be compelled to go to the Alms House, although she is fully confirmed in that belief."

Dr. Grey was a widower, and the Mrs. Brown of whom he spake, was the house-keeper at the parsonage. She and her husband were much respected by the pastor, and were the only servants he found it necessary to employ. Mr. Brown always went by the name of John; indeed, he would hardly have recognised any other title.

"Susan shall never go to the Alms House as long as I have a home to offer her," said Mr. McAlpine. "I should consider it the basest ingratitude on my part to allow her to suffer in any way, when it was in my power to alleviate her wants. And I am very sure that Mrs. McAlpine will join in my interest for the unfortunate woman when she has become better acquainted with her worth and misfortunes."

When we reached the house, we found Mrs. Lawrence and the children assembled in the parlor, and I was not a little surprised to find that it was no other than Charlie Grey seated at the piano. The music I had heard when approaching the house, led me to suppose the performer to be a person of cultivation and years of study. So enrapt was he with the melody that glided smoothly from the touch of his little fingers, that he did not observe our entrance, though Florence did, and moved timidly away from where she had been standing and seated herself modestly upon the sofa.

We exchanged a mute good morning with smiles and slight gestures, rather than to forfeit the completion of the piece, which was executed admirably, in the brilliant and off-hand style that one might expect from so dashing a performer.

"There!" said he, whirling around and tossing aside his curls. He had expected to meet the smile of Florence, and not the gaze of a room full of listening spectators. The surprise and our hearty appreciation of his sudden embarrassment, caused his cheeks to assume a deeper hue, while he

fumbled over a piece of music as if searching for something.

"If I play the 'Rogue's March,' I suppose you'll vacate," said he mischievously; then getting rather disconcerted by the praise we bestowed upon him, and the jokes relating to his hasty ride up the avenue, he slyly beckoned Florence from the room, and off they bounded into the garden. Mrs. Lawrence, as soon as she discovered their exit, arose from her chair nervously, and stepping out upon the balcony, called to her daughter, who was running races with Charlie, while Birdie stood laughing and cheering them on.

"Do not be so rude," said she; "I am surprised to see you so wild." Then perceiving that the child was bare-headed, and that her neck and arms were uncovered, she bade her wait upon the porch until she should return with a bonnet and shawl.

"Don't you wait," importuned Charlie, as soon as Aunt Fanny was out of sight and hearing; "you won't look half so pretty in a big bonnet that comes clear over your eyes, and hides your curls, and in a dreadful shawl covering up your arms and shoulders. I wouldn't wait, if I was in your place;" and he tried to pull her down the steps. "Let's run away before she gets back; she's an old granny to bundle you up so."

"No, no," answered Florence, looking grave, and endeavoring to withdraw her hands.

"Well, let her put them on you then," and Charlie laughed with an expressive chuckle; "and we'll go down into the garden and take them off again. Ain't I glad that I haven't a mother to bundle me up like that," he whispered, as Aunt Fanny appeared with the bonnet and shawl.

Florence was packed up from the warm sunshine, and a restraint placed upon "the spirit in her feet," by the commands of her mother, and the heaviness of her shawl. Charlie looked scornful and very indignant, and walked by her side with the air of a major. I expected Birdie would be subjected

to a like trial, for there she stood shaking her uncovered curls in the bright sunshine, and clapping her hands gleefully.

"Angebell is in your care now," said she, turning toward me, with calmness and dignity; "are you not fearful that she will take cold?"

"Not in the least," I replied; "it is quite warm, and she is prudently clad. Children are quite as liable to suffer from a deprivation of air and sun-light as from exposure. Birdie appears to be very healthy."

"She is," was the grave rejoinder; "and you must pardon any seeming improper interest I may take in her welfare. I am anxious that her health may be preserved. Her resemblance to my dear sister Adel, makes her very precious to me. Have you ever had the charge of young children?"

I replied in the negative: that I was the youngest of my mother's family, and since her death I had resided with a bachelor uncle.

"Then you have no experience in the important duties that now devolve upon you?"

"I have none, yet I hope by constant faithfulness and unceasing diligence to prove myself competent to the task."

"I admire your manifest zeal," she replied, advancing a step nearer to my person; "but you know that we are all liable to think ourselves more trust-worthy than we really are."

I hesitated a moment, fearing I did not fully understand her. She seemed to comprehend my silence, and continued:

"I would not give offence, and yet I would speak frankly and without fear. You must pardon what appears unkind." Then lowering her voice, she continued: "I feel that I should be doing great injustice to my dear sister Adel, if I did not offer to relieve you of the charge of Angebell, and adopt her as my own daughter."

I crimsoned and felt somewhat excited.

"Have you spoken with Mr. McAlpine on this subject?" I inquired.

"No," she replied, appearing disconcerted by my warmth; "I deemed it highly necessary to first gain your consent."

"And that I shall ever be unwilling to grant," I answered quickly.

I knew that I did not fully understand Mrs. Lawrence, and though somewhat surprised and wounded by her suggestion, I resolved to speak with as much discretion and kindness as possible, and said:

"When I married Mr. McAlpine, it was not without a knowledge and a due consideration of the responsibilities I was to bear. I am aware of my inexperience, yet, am also conscious of my earnest endeavor to fulfil my duty to the utmost degree. I should consider myself deficient in regard to his dearest interests, if I suffered any neglect of his child, or cast her upon other hands, before I had attempted anything in her behalf."

She looked at me earnestly for a few moments, and then interrogated in a low tone:

"Have I offended you?"

I was fearful that I had spoken too warmly, and felt rebuked by her interrogation.

"Have I spoken too warmly?" said I.

"I fear you was unguarded, and forgot my assurance that I meant not to offend," she answered.

At that moment we were summoned to the breakfast table, and our conversation interrupted, leaving me in a sad perplexity as to how I was to take Aunt Fanny. She was to me a riddle I could not read nor understand.

Dr. Grey and Charlie remained about an hour after breakfast, and then departed, leaving a pleasing impression on my mind. Aunt Fanny and Florence left about noon, the latter kissing me fondly when bidding me farewell, with many a

promise of writing me a letter as soon as she got home. Aunt Fanny took my hand and said something about my precious responsibilities; but, alas! for the thickness of her travelling veil that prevented me from understanding her. After the "last kiss" had been given to Birdie more than a dozen of times, the impatient driver cracked his whip, and the stage coach rumbled away from Daisy Lawn.

CHAPTER II.

Her soul like the transparent air
That robes the hills above,
Though not of earth, encircles there
All things with arms of love.
And following her beloved Lord,
In decent poverty,
She makes her life one sweet record
And deed of charity.

LONGFELLOW.

It was about the middle of the afternoon that we arrived at the dilapidated cottage of Susan Blake. It was not far from Daisy Lawn, and I had enjoyed the walk over the rough yet romantic road.

The house stood in the midst of the woods, and half way up a steep hill. Every thing about the premises wore a thriftless and negligent appearance, yet close by the door the ground had been spaded, and a few flowers cultivated. Sweet peas and flowering beans were trained over the window and door, and their cheering and fragrant beauty relieved much of the barrenness of the place.

"I am sure that Susan planted those," said my husband, whose attention was also attracted by the flowers, "and the whole place would present a much better appearance, if she was able to get about. But her misfortune confines her closely to the house most of the time, and I presume she planted those some day when she has had her chair drawn out into the sunshine."

Upon entering the cottage we found ourselves in a small

scantily furnished apartment, scrupulously neat and in perfect order. The same humble taste for the beautiful that had planted the sweet peas and flowering beans around the door revealed itself within the abode of suffering and want. Pictures were hung around the room—cheap ones, to be sure, and coarsely framed—yet such as a woman of pure taste would select for ornaments to an humble home. There were no battle pieces habituating the eye to scenes of lust and murder, but lovely landscapes and childish figures. We may read a character with a great deal of certainty if shown the pictures that are selected for constant companions. Many a mind has received its pure or immoral bias from the painting hung upon the homestead walls.

On the window sill, with a broken sugar bowl for its pot, a tea rose was flourishing, while several geraniums, some in tea cups and others in tin basins, were arranged by its side. Near the window, upon a lounge, with the sunshine falling upon her thin pale face, a woman lay with her hands folded and her eyes closed as if in slumber. On seeing her, and fearing to disturb her rest, we told the little girl who had received us and offered us chairs, that she need not awaken Susan, that we would call at another time. "Oh no," said she, looking earnestly into the face of my husband, "do sit down; Susan is not asleep, she is only thinking. She has spoken of you several times to-day."

Susan was aroused by the conversation, and opening her large blue eyes, a sweet smile spread itself over her face. Slightly rising from her pillow, and extending her hand toward us, she said in a low, feeble voice:

"I am so glad that you have come. I was fearful you had not got home, though Jeanie told me that she thought she saw your carriage turn into the avenue last night."

Susan smiled again when introduced to me, though her tears came when she congratulated me in her simple way, and wished me a life-time of unalloyed happiness.

"Not a whole life-time of nought but happiness," I replied, "for the heart grows hard if tears do not fall sometimes to soften it."

"And it breaks," she said, with a quivering lip, "if they fall too long and often upon it."

"Yet God can heal the wound and sustain our weakness, and send his sunshine to make us glad again."

"And that sunshine may fall upon a desert spot, where the flowers will not bud, nor the waters flow."

"But God can make an oasis on the desert spot where the palm and the cypress shall cluster, and the fountain gush forth to make glad the hearts of the weary and worn."

"Yes, God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever," said Susan; and the sweet calm of Christian resignation settled upon her broad, expansive forehead. "It were unjust for me to murmur beneath the crushing weight of my afflictions. There are better things in store for those that love Him."

The holy trust of that poor woman, bowed down by so many adversities, was a lesson for the despairing heart that scarcely knows what sorrow is, that, frowning, shrinks from the April showers, rebels when one daisy in a meadowful withers and dies, and is overwhelmed with terror, and utters wild curses, when the whirlwind rages, or a blight creeps through the harvest. 'Tis a sweet consolation, the most precious of all that is ours—"God is good, His mercy endureth for ever." If we believe not, nor trust that promise so sweet, how much misery may be our portion.

"Where is Willie?" inquired Mr. McAlpine, glancing around the cottage.

"I have sent him over to Mr. Graham's," she replied. "They have been very kind to me, indeed. Jeanie has promised to remain with me until after the funeral. I was afraid if Willie staid here he might get a sight of the corpse of his father, and I fear it would make an impression on his mind that he would never forget, and I have no desire that he

should have the least remembrance of his father. It were better that he should not."

"It is a sad remembrance to deny a child," returned Mr. McAlpine; "yet in this case you have acted wisely and considerately. The recollection would only serve to pain his after years."

The remembrance of a father excluded from a child as a poison, as a stain! It is a sad thing to think of, calling for the tears of the angels. But the memory of the dead should be fruitful of sweet and holy thoughts; of blessed aspirations and heavenly rebukes for our errors and worldliness. The memory of a good and affectionate father, faithful to the charge God granted, is the richest inheritance ever transmitted to a son. It is a crown of honor; a sword bringing nought but victory. But, alas, for the thoughts that will burn at the recollection of a parent steeped in intoxication, or uttering brutal oaths, although he may have been long since gathered to the dead. It is a chain and a curse, binding and destroying. Was it not well then to hold such thoughts, if possible, from creeping with a slimy trail across the childish heart of poor Willie Blake? It was; and many a haunted heart is wishing even now that their memory might prove treacherous, and barter thence a loathsome and perhaps, for often it is so, cherished image.

Susan returned Mr. McAlpine's proffers of assistance with sincere and tearful gratitude. The house in which she then lived belonged to him. This he promised to repair, to fence the garden, and to present the place in its improved condition to her as a testimonial of his remembrance of her faithfulness and tender devotion to his former wife. She should do all of our plain sewing, and he would interest himself in her behalf among the other villagers, whom he was confident would gladly assist her. Aunt Betsey had a little niece about nine years of age, who was orphaned and destitute of a home.

She should come and live with her, to attend to her wants and to look after little Willie.

While Mr. McAlpine had gone to see the corpse that was laid out in an adjoining room, I praised Susan for the taste she had displayed in the selection of pictures and her cultivation of flowers.

"I love my plants," said she, "though they are few and simple. They speak many a gentle word, and bring many a consoling thought, as I lie here so sad and lonely. I am not a scholar, nor have I read very much, yet I always love to remember and repeat this pretty verse:

"God might have made the earth bring forth
Enough for great and small;
The oak tree and the cedar tree,
But not a flower at all."

I left the cottage in a sad and thoughtful frame of mind. Susan's holy trust and sweet simplicity of hope, amid such bitter trials, had shed a light upon my own heart, and revealed many a weakness where I had gloried in strength.

"She shall be my example," I said; "but in striving to attain her virtues, I fear I have placed my mark too high."

My husband replied in the words of George Herbert:

"Sink not in spirits; who aimeth at the sky
Shoots higher far, than he who means a tree,"

CHAPTER III.

Forgive and forget!—why the world would be lonely,
 The garden a wilderness left to deform,
 If the flowers but remembered the chilling winds only,
 And the fields gave no verdure for fear of the storm.

CHARLES SWAIN.

WEEKS and months passed away quickly and pleasantly at Daisy Lawn, and when the anniversary of our bridal came around, memory garnered up a sweet and sunny year. Care had sometimes frowned, but love had smiled the shadows away.

Birdie was indeed a refractory child, yet tenderly affectionate. A supreme selfishness manifested itself in her childish nature, predominating over every better trait, and threatened to prove a sad stain upon the character of the one we loved so dearly. This unfortunate blemish had been cultivated in a great degree by the indulgence of Aunt Fanny, and the simple and sincere devotion of Betsey; and when she was placed in my care, with the heart-felt desire of her kind father that she should be well disciplined and prudently restrained, I daily felt an urgent and increasing demand upon my patience and perseverance.

I resolved never to punish the child if kind words and simple reasoning would produce a cheerful and ready submission to my will; but, alas, for moral suasion in the case of poor Birdie.

The child had a quick and passionate temper, and when disappointed or opposed in attaining an object—no matter

how trivial it might be—she would manifest her sore displeasure by kicks and blows, or the dashing down of any thing she chanced to hold. Her father had the superintendence of these dangerous accomplishments, and having tried for some time to restrain her by severe rebukes and denying of privileges, he gave up the method as useless, and laid a willow twig above the nursery door. Mademoiselle was made to fully comprehend its power and meaning, and for what offences it would be called upon for assistance. He also charged me to be strict in regard to its application.

One day, during a brief absence of Mr. McAlpine, I entered the dining room and found Birdie helping herself to a basket of fruit that stood upon the sideboard. She had partaken quite freely of it at dinner time, even transgressing the dietetic rules laid down by her father, on account of her late illness. Fearing a disturbance, and wishing to prevent it if possible, I said, turning toward the garden:

“Come, Birdie, let’s go and find the rabbits. Put down the pears, and Betsey will keep them until your father comes home.”

She had not then tasted of the fruit, and I hoped, by mentioning her father, to remind her of his express command, and also to win her away by the thought of her pet rabbits.

“No,” said she, with considerable decision, that bespoke the coming storm, “Pa don’t want pears.”

“But you must not eat any,” continued I, with more firmness, and approaching the sideboard; “do you remember what your father told you about eating fruit? Would you be naughty to your good father?”

Seeing that she took no heed of what I said, and was about to feast herself forthwith, I extended my arm to take the fruit from her.

“Get away! get away!” screamed she, putting her hands behind her, and stamping her feet with furious rage.

"Angebell," said I sternly, "hush instantly, or I shall punish you."

My threat only increased her rage, and she screamed the more furiously. Decided upon my duty, and remembering the repeated request of Mr. McAlpine, I stepped to the nursery and took down the willow twig. It was its first descent, and I was not a little apprehensive of the disturbance it might cause.

When I left the room she ceased screaming, thinking, no doubt, that I was defeated, and commenced regaling herself on the contents of the fruit basket, but when I returned and she saw the ominous twig in my hand, the true state of affairs flashed across her mind; and all the fire and fury of her ungoverned spirit arose in rebellion.

"Get away! get away!" remonstrated she at the top of her lungs; but seeing that I was not at all intimidated by her furious yells and gesticulations, she raised her arm and threw a pear with all the strength of her excitement. It struck the large glass pitcher standing on the table, which was thrown upon the floor and dashed to atoms.

"Angebell," said I, laying a firm grasp upon the child, who was silent for a single moment at the mischief she had done, "you have been a very naughty girl. You have disobeyed me and I must punish you for your disobedience."

I struck her once, not harshly, for I had resolved not to be severe, unless circumstances sternly demanded it, but the blow awakened a more intense anger than she had yet displayed, and "Aunt Betsey! Aunt Betsey!" was mingled with her terrible vociferations.

Aunt Betsey came rushing in from the kitchen, with her sleeves rolled up, and dough dripping from her hands.

"What is the matter with my darling?" inquired she with much emotion, catching up the child, who ran to her arms screaming with all her might. Beholding me with a whip in my hand, she comprehended the whole matter; and unable

to restrain her high displeasure for the affliction of her pet, she broke out in a loud tone of excitement, interspersing her almost incoherent words with kisses upon the sobbing child.

"It's a shame to you, no matter how fine a lady you may be, to abuse so sweet and motherless a child! She never had need of the rod before, and I'll warrant she had none for it now. A better child I never saw, and it's only a *step-mother* that could take to abusing it so dreadful-like."

I interrupted her with a command to put the child down and return to the kitchen.

"No, never will I put down the child," returned she with emphasis, "until you promise you'll not give her another blow."

I was greatly surprised at such conduct from Betsey, and unable to endure her continued interference, I grew indignant at the boldness of her remarks, and the abuse she heaped upon me; and the stubbornness of her purpose only incensed me the more. Had I been conscious of sufficient physical force, I doubt not that my feelings would have led me to take Angebell from her arms and drive the faithful old servant from beneath the roof. But I was a little puny creature, looking twice as feeble as I really was, when placed by the side of the strong and robust Aunt Betsey. Remembering, too, the dignity that I should maintain in so trying a situation, I endeavored to conceal my anger, but my voice trembled, and my whole frame shook violently.

"Betsey, I again command you to obey my orders. If you think it best to follow your own course, do so, but prepare to leave Daisy Lawn as soon as Mr. McAlpine returns."

"What is all this?" inquired a voice behind me, which I was rejoiced to recognise as my husband's, who had entered unobserved, and had been a listener to my last remark.

"What have you commanded Betsey to do?"

"To put down Angebell, and return to the kitchen," I replied.

Betsey placed the sobbing and pouting child upon the floor.

"Mr. McAlpine," began she, in vindication of her cause, "I could not help ——"

"Not a word from you at present," interrupted he; "obey Mrs. McAlpine," and he waved his hand for her to retire.

She burst into tears, and muttering something about a "poor motherless child," and "cruel step-mothers," went back to the kitchen to finish her soliloquy.

"What is the matter, Clara?" gently asked my husband, drawing me to a seat, and calling Birdie to his side; "what was the cause of this unusual disturbance?"

The calmness that had sustained me when dealing with the passionate Angebell, and the indignant pride I had possessed enabling me to submit to the insults of Betsey, forsook me, and overcome by the tide that swept so wildly across my heart, I bowed my head upon the shoulder of my husband, and burst into ungovernable weeping. He tried to soothe me, but in vain; nor could I stop the torrent of my tears. I hardly knew their cause; it seemed a demand of my whole being; but when I think of it now, an extract from my favorite poem, Festus, comes forward in explanation:

"For a fearful time
We can keep down the floodgates of the heart;
But we must draw them sometime, or it will burst
Like sand the brave embankment of the breast,
And drain itself to dry death. When pride thaws—
Look for floods!"

After calming myself, and feeling not a little mortified by my passionate outbreak, I gave an account of the whole transaction. Mr. McAlpine heard me to the end, without a single interruption, although his countenance expressed much interest and sadness.

"Birdie," said he to the child, who had as usual quickly recovered from her passion, and was laughing and chattering with the canaries, "pick up that whip and bring it to your

mother," and he pointed to the willow twig lying on the floor.

This threw a sudden dampness upon her gaiety, and caused the corners of her rosy mouth to droop sadly, while an ominous frown gathered upon her forehead, but her father's stern and collected manner, and the decision with which he spoke, overawed her rebellious nature somewhat, and instead of her usual scream of defiance, she stood still and pouted a silent refusal.

He did not address her the second time, but arose to go towards her; she seeming to apprehend the result, moved slowly in the direction of the whip.

"Be quick," said her father, annoyed by her snail-like movements.

She reached it at last; every inch of procedure having added more threatening darkness to her face. She planted both of her feet firmly upon it.

"I told you to pick it up," continued her father, laying his hand upon her shoulder, "and I firmly intend that you shall obey me."

"I won't! I won't!" broke forth with furious cries, as she attempted to extricate herself from her father's hand, but failing in this, and expecting no sympathy from me, she remembered her former deliverer, and lustily called for Aunt Betsey. But Betsey did not answer the summons, for her own great afflictions had rendered her deaf to the cries of the child.

"We must enforce obedience from her now, if we ever expect any," said Mr. McAlpine, turning to me. "She must regard us with reverence, or we must regard her with fear."

He brought another twig from the garden, and showing it to Angebell, who looked somewhat intimidated, he again told her if she did not pick up the willow twig and bear it to me, she should receive a severe punishment, and that he should not yield until she had fully obeyed him. He paused for her obedience; but without moving a muscle, she stood there, the impersonification of a stubborn will.

"Birdie," importuned I, hoping to move the better nature of the child, "don't you love your father well enough to mind him in so small a thing?"

She made no reply, but stood there sobbing, with her eyes fastened sullenly upon the floor.

"Then I must punish you," said Mr. McAlpine; and thereupon dealt her several stinging blows with the pliant twig, which called forth the usual accompaniment of her voice and stamping feet.

"Hush!" said he, "hush!" and the child, who was beginning to be convinced that she was in the hands of one who was her superior in physical strength at least, allowed a slight diminution of the unmelodious uproar.

"Now, Birdie," enquired he, in a conciliating voice, "will you do as I bid you?"

She made no reply, but cast her eyes down upon the troublesome twig, and even bowed slightly forward, but the thought of such a submission seemed too bitter for her refractory heart, and she was commencing to reassume her invincible demeanor, when the uprising arm of her father occasioned a wavering in her purpose. She looked up half beseechingly, and down to the whip most bitterly; but her will was not yet broken.

"My daughter," enquired he, with evident emotion, "are you going to obey me? If not, I must punish you again."

Her crying commenced, but in a much milder octave than any she had lately given us, nor did she make a reply; and it was plain to be seen that her father's request was unheeded. A more severe punishment was given, and suspended at the first faint and humble plea for lenity.

"I will be good! I will be good!" she cried; and quickly stooping down, she grasped the twig in her hands, and ran and laid it on my lap.

I was deeply affected by her submission, and would have

folded the sobbing little one in my arms, but the father observing my intention motioned for me to desist.

"Now, Birdie," said he, drawing the child to his side, and smoothing her curls, "will you disobey me again?"

"No, no," sobbed the child.

"And are you sorry for having been so naughty?"

No reply, and the question was broached in another form.

"Are you sorry for having made your father feel very bad, because you were so very naughty?"

A slight pause, and then a feeble "yes."

"But," continued he, "do you remember how you disobeyed your mother this afternoon—how very naughty you were to her?"

An unpleasant remembrance, not easily acknowledged, but finally confessed.

"And did she not tell you that she should punish you for your disobedience?"

No answer, but a fresh outburst of weeping.

"Well, Birdie," said Mr. McAlpine, gently pushing the child toward me, "your mother must keep her word."

Gladly would I have been released from that painful duty, yet I knew that the welfare of the child, and our future happiness, was at stake. I felt more like clasping the little one to my heart, and kissing away her bitterness, than to inflict chastisement.

"Birdie," said I, taking the chubby dimpled hand in mine, "I feel very much grieved at the thought that I must punish you, but you have been a naughty girl, and have disobeyed me. If we did not love you, we should not try so hard to make you a good child."

I struck her lightly a few times; then taking her on my lap, I wiped away the tears that were falling like April showers.

"Will you try to be a good girl hereafter?" I asked.

"Yes, mamma, I will," was her reply; and she pressed her wet cheek closely to my bosom.

During the long years that followed that day, amid the varied words of joy and sorrow, bitterness and peace, that the voice of Birdie brought, none ever gave so sweet a bliss, or stirred so deeply the fountains of my inmost soul, as those few, but precious ones, each teeming with a heavenly hope to her father and me.

Not ten minutes after, we heard her laughing and shouting with Charlie Grey, who had taken her on the back of his pony, and was cantering up and down the avenue.

"Here is your mail," said Mr. McAlpine, taking a couple of letters from his pocket, and handing them to me; "and while you are reading them, I will go and have a talk with Betsey. We can soon convince her of her unwise conduct, and you may expect a hearty and sincere confession. We cannot think of her leaving Daisy Lawn: that would be a dreadful catastrophe," and, with a cheerful smile, he left the room.

Immediately after the return of Mrs. Lawrence to New York, I was not a little surprised to receive a letter from her. I had expected one from Florence, and it came with her mother's: a small sheet, containing a childish account of their journey, and great joy on arriving at home again. Aunt Fanny had been a more punctual correspondent than her gentle daughter, and her original and frank letters had often given me great pleasure, and sometimes puzzlement. I recognized Aunt Fanny's chirography on the outside of one letter, and the almost unintelligible scratch-work of dear Uncle Hugh on the other. I threw open the bay window, and drawing up the old easy chair, prepared myself for a rich treat in the most comfortable style.

I laughed heartily over Uncle Hugh and his unequalled jokes. He declared himself spun up in cobwebs, and if he could ever disentangle himself, he was going to mount old

Ginger—a favorite horse of his—and go forth with all the valor and fortitude of Don Quixote; not to find a wife—heaven preserve him from that calamity—but somebody, no matter who, if she only belonged to womankind, that would come and take care of his "Old Haystack," as he always called his quaint fashioned home. He affirmed that the carpets had faded away beneath a cloud of dust; and if the rats and mice had not perforated his walls like a net work, there would be no admission of light into his apartments, as the windows had long since assumed the appearance and utility of slate. These, and a thousand-fold disasters, had led him to implore me by letter, to come and share for a season the comforts and beauties of his "Haystack."

There was a P. S. from my dear Florence in the long letter written by her mother, and I was led to believe from several expressions that seemed to fall unintentionally from her mother's pen, that she was in delicate health, and even fears entertained as to her final recovery. But Birdie was, as usual, the burden subject of the epistle. "Is she well? Is she improving in education, manners, and appearance? Does she exhibit any taste for music? Her mother was a remarkable musician." Such, and other interrogations and remarks, constantly revealed how closely the writer was bound to the little Birdie.

I was fast learning to understand Aunt Fanny, and she was constantly stealing into my heart. I found her a strange and eccentric woman, yet possessing generous and true womanly qualities. Holding fast to her old and precious treasures, she but seldom cast them aside unless some grievous tarnish destroyed their worth; nor was she willing to add to her store until she had fully proved the excellency of the new-found gem. She had idolized her sister Adel, and it had been bitterness enough for her to behold another reinstated in the affections of Ralph McAlpine.

Aunt Fanny had her imperfections—great ones, such as

you and I possess—and I plead innocent of all charge to impugn the character of the lady when I tell you that she wore that well known weakness—family pride—and was fond of dress and society. Her splendid saloons were not the resort of the young butterflies of gaiety—Aunt Fanny was altogether too substantial, too open-hearted, to find congeniality with them—but she was a generous patron of the literati, and made social gatherings for them at her house, and prided herself upon being president of three “Female Charitable Societies,” besides a forward manager of nearly every benevolent association of any importance in the city.

I sat silently meditating upon the contents of my letters, of the illness of sweet Florence, and imagined misfortunes of Uncle Hugh, when the door opened, and Aunt Betsey entered, with her face hid in her apron. She stood silent as if waiting for me to address her.

“Do you wish to speak to me about the affair of this afternoon?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered, sobbing more deeply; “it was wrong in me, but I could not think so then, and I tell you, Mrs. McAlpine, it was all for the love of that dear child that I tended so long, and was as a mother to.”

I knew Betsey’s simple and honest heart, and the affection which had led her to act so imprudently, too well to meet her with reserve and indifference. I forgave her freely, and offered many a sincere regret that so unpleasant an occurrence had taken place, expressing a heartfelt trust that it would never be repeated.

“That it never shall,” chimed in Betsey; “but I can not bear a blow to fall upon the child.”

I spoke to her of Birdie’s passionate and refractory disposition, and of the evil we should suffer to come upon her if we threw no restraint about her. I succeeded in partially convincing her of the justness and truth of my argument, to which she acceded by saying,

“You are right, you are right, I suppose; yet it seems so great a pity to give a blow to the child. I spoke hotly in my rage, and said many a thing that I feel much sorrow for.”

“It is forgiven, Betsey, and I hope will soon be forgotten, and that nothing may again occur to mar the good peace existing between us.”

And my wish was fulfilled. Aunt Betsey was my faithful friend and support during many a long dark hour that crept across my path; and pain, and care, and adversity, never broke the bond that bound us to each other. Every day unfolded a new virtue in her great kind heart, and my love for her increased with my years, and received its deepest wound when she died. “God bless her,” old and young would say when she passed by with her smile and goodly cheer, and never was a prayer answered more richly than that, and none were more deserving choice blessings than was Aunt Betsey.

CHAPTER IV.

A solemn thing it is to me
 To look upon a babe that sleeps—
 Wearing in its spirit-deeps
 The unrevealed mystery
 Of its Adam's taint and woe,
 Which when they revealed be,
 Will not let it slumber so.

Mrs. E. B. BROWNING.

"To be sure!" said Aunt Betsey, in her softest tone, as she gently came to my bedside, holding in her arms a roll of white flannel—delicate embroidery!—and, as I discovered when she had unfolded the little blanket, a wee bit of a baby, with a little red face, and tiny hands clumped up into fists; "to be sure," she repeated, with a little more earnestness—looking at the same time with a vast deal of adoration upon her burden—"it is a rare beauty. It opened its eyes a minute ago, and looked right up into my face so knowing-like, and for all the world its eyes are just like its father's! Now if that isn't the cunningest little nose, to say nothing at all about its mouth—which is the very picture of your own—I wouldn't say so." Thereupon she kissed the little one again and again, and then laid it upon my pillow.

"My own child,—my own daughter," thought I, as I laid my hand upon her little breast, and felt the faint beating of that infant heart. "Mine to give back to the Maker of all things, pure as a tarnished gem, or one worthy of his crown. Mine to love, to guard, to guide,—to yearn, to weep, to hope for. Mine for a little while, and God's for ever."

I can not repeat the mighty thoughts that rushed like an avalanche upon me, when I looked upon that little helpless one, given to my lifetime care; but every mother's heart has known their power, in a greater or less degree, unless vice and shame have stifled the angel-nature down. 'Tis a fearful weight, yet like the pressure of the great Almighty's hand, whose sweet burden bringeth joy and peace.

Then I looked at the wry face of the little one, and notwithstanding the preliminary remarks of Aunt Betsey, I was unable to distinguish any wonderful traits of extraordinary beauty. Even after considering that I was its mother, it looked to me just like all other babies of its youth and experience, and I even ventured to remark to Aunt Betsey, that if my child was then placed in a row with twelve others of its age, I was very doubtful whether she, or anybody else, could rightly distinguish the daughter of Ralph McAlpine.

"Oh, you know better than that," replied Betsey, starting up with considerable surprise. "I'll wager that there would not be one among them with so sweet a face. Why we all thought that Birdie was remarkable, but really she was nothing to this one."

If Aunt Betsey had one fault among a host of virtues, it was that of flattery; yet, bless her dear kind soul, she bestowed her abundance of praise, not from a selfish or sinister motive, but with the sincere design of making somebody's heart "a little happy-like," as she would say. Although I did not give full credit to all the beauty she professed to see, yet I did not contradict her;—what mother could?

"Has Birdie seen the baby?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "and she jumped right up and down at first for joy, because her father told her it was her little sister that had come to love her, and to live with her always; but pretty soon she asked, with a face all sorry-like, if it was to be *his* baby, and he laughed, and asked her if she had objections to that, and she pouted out her lips and said she had,

for she would not have any body for baby but herself. So he talked to her funny-like; but she *would* cry in spite of all he said. But she's got over it by this time, and torments the life out of me, teasing to take her little sister out in the garden, and she even asked to let Charlie Grey give her a ride on his pony; but I mustn't talk to you any more now," and she bent down to take up the baby.

I was willing, perfectly so, that she should stop talking, but the baby she should not have: that was my property, *my own*, and I felt powerfully conscious of an undisputed right to retain it as long as I pleased; so Aunt Betsey, bidding me to be very quiet, and try to get a little nap, left the room.

To take "a little nap" was just the very last thing that I thought of doing, and I could but smile at the absurdity of the thing. What! I go to sleep, with my own baby lying for the first time upon my arm? No, I had quite too much to think about then.

Never did a more rosy future glide before the visionary eye of any one. I did try to picture clouds, dark with threatening storms and fearful peril, but ere I was aware, golden tints were shining where darkness should frown. I saw my daughter, the little helpless one that nestled so closely to my heart, as a maiden, bestowing upon me the richest boon of affection and trust. She was graceful in form and manner, and her face exceedingly fair;—indeed I do not know but Aunt Betsey had made a powerful impression on my mind; for I could not dream of *my daughter* being else than beautiful. I would study the little wry face and build my dreams upon it. I was sure the nose was a Grecian—Mr. McAlpine had a Grecian nose, and if this one proved a type it would of course be faultless. The squinting eyes had opened once long enough for me to become satisfied of their hue. Blue as they could be! And who ever denied that blue eyes were beautiful, even if it laid a compliment at my

feet. Then the chin looked very roguish, and the forehead meek and fair.

Now I will confess, that after this due deliberation, I came to the mother-like conclusion, that my baby was really a beauty—just as Aunt Betsey had told me—and then it bade fair, remarkably fair, to be a very smart child: mother-pride must not be set down on the score of foolish vanity.

Then I began to wonder by what name my daughter should be called. The old saying, that "there is nothing in a name," must sound preposterous, indeed, to parents who have puzzled their brains by recalling the remembrance of every fascinating novel; making regiment-rolls of the family pedigree; tossing up the alphabet, and so on, and so forth, for the production of a simple cognomen that shall answer their exacting demand on beauty and propriety. I resolved that it should not be—Mary, Sarah, Ann, or Jane;—but what then?

"I have sad news for you," said my husband, coming into the room, and seating himself by my bedside; "can you guess what it is?"

I thought but a moment, and a dread apprehension seized my mind: "Is it of Florence?"

We had not heard from New York in some time, and the last letter we received, informed us of her dangerous illness. She was suffering from a disease of the heart, and was then liable to be removed at any moment.

"Yes," was the sad reply; "Florence is dead!"

"Poor, dear Florence!" said I, and turned to bury my face in my pillow; but there lay my baby with her eyes wide open, and gazing at the ceiling with a wondering stare.

I kissed her passionately, and my hot tears fell upon her face.

"We will call our little daughter Florence," I said, "in memory of the dear one gone."

"Yes, my little Florence," whispered Mr. McAlpine, as he

took her in his arms, "and may your life be as sweet and pure as that of the one departed."

"Oh, for the life of you," interrupted Aunt Betsey, who at this moment entered the room, with my tea and toast, and had heard our final remarks, "never name the child after a body dead. I'd not be so bold as to express my opinion, but I do it for the welfare of the child. Misfortune will surely come to it if you name it after the dead."

My husband smiled, and so did I, at the sincerity of her plea. Mr. McAlpine expressed his total disregard of such superstitious notions; and gave her a kind rebuke for the entertainment of the same. But she heeded him not, but firmly continued to mutter:—

"'Tis a sad thing, a very sad thing, and looks unwisely-like, to provoke misfortune on so sweet a child."

"Florence is a beautiful name," said I, unheeding the lamentations of Aunt Betsey, whose face was wearing a most doleful aspect.

"Yes," was my husband's reply; "and the sacred memory which we shall ever hold of that pure young spirit, if imparted to our daughter, will be a sweet and powerful influence."

And then with the memory of the sainted dead bound close to our hearts, and a seeming of her calm spiritual eyes looking down upon our tearful act, we kissed the unsullied brow of our tender child, and whispered the name of "Florence."

I must not dwell long upon her childhood, nor upon those first years—those happy years spent at Daisy Lawn—but must hasten to tell you of the painful misfortunes—not a fulfilment of Aunt Betsey's prophecy: God forbid such a supposition on my part—that came to her childish years, casting the dark shadows upon her whole life. In all my fears of what the uncertain future might bring to blight the prosperity of my child, I never contemplated a lot so dark—

a path so thorny—no, nor even heart so strong as God in his hidden providence willed to her.

Until Florence attained her fourth year, she enjoyed almost perfect health. Looking back as I now do, across the lapse of twenty-six years, with a mind dispossessed of a too partial judgment, I can but call the rosy cheeked face of my daughter very beautiful. Her body was plump and well formed, and she bounded over the lawns with the airy-like grace that every healthy and happy child does possess. She differed widely from Angebell, both in mind and personal appearance. Birdie was more brilliant and attractive to the eye of a stranger, and her wit was more sparkling than that of the retiring and thoughtful Florence. Birdie, though four years her senior, was the younger, and her life seemed by far the more natural of the two.

"That child is too old-fashioned like," Aunt Betsey would say, looking sharply at the sweet face of Florence, who would sit still and watch the sports of Charlie Grey and her merry sister, laughing sometimes at what was really very funny, and even clapping her hands. She was not demure or void of all childish instincts, but those which she did possess, were in wide contrast with those of most children of her age. She loved to be out of doors, and at play in the broad sunshine, but never wanted companions, unless they were Pruno, the good-natured dog, and old Tabby, the Maltese cat, or some of the many dumb pets of the household. If Charlie Grey and Birdie came to visit her at her little play-house in the angle of the fence—paying their best compliments to her neatness and taste as a housekeeper, and to the good behavior of Tabby and Pruno—she would feel highly honored, and entertain them as well as she could, giving them the last bit of her seed cake and loaf sugar, unless she became convinced that they intended to spend the day, and in that case she generally stole back to the house, and played with her wax doll in the nursery.

Dear Florence! It often seems as though two daughters have been mine; one the beautiful child, rosy cheeked, fair in face and form, and bidding to fulfil the lovely dreams I had spent upon her; and another, the unfortunate, yet unmurmuring daughter, amiable and gentle, possessing a mind that ever seemed yearning for, and grasping at, things beyond its ken, and who never called me "mother" without awakening a sympathy and a prayer in my inmost soul. But I never had but one—my dear, unfortunate Florence.

When nearly five years of age, she was seized with a scrofulous disease of unmitigated virulence, which confined her, an intense but patient sufferer, to her bed for two years. During this time I was necessarily confined closely to her, and found it impossible to bestow the needed care and attention on Angebell; so we consented to the urgent importunities of Aunt Fanny, who was very lonely since the death of her daughter, and sent Birdie to New York, where she was placed in a seminary of high repute. She boarded with her aunt, who gave us many assurances of the faithful care she would exercise in her behalf. This step was taken with great reluctance both by Mr. McAlpine and myself, it having been one of our most cherished plans to educate our children at home, we acting the responsible part of their instructors. But the illness of Florence, and the immense care and anxiety that it imposed—although alleviated in a measure by the kindness of Aunt Betsey and Susan, and by the unmurmuring patience of the little sufferer—forbade the fulfilment of our desires.

Oh, that long weary two years of suffering and care! Now hoping, now despairing, now imploring earnestly for the precious life of my darling; and then, again, asking God to take her hence, and let death break the agony of her torture. But the Almighty kept his own counsels, and the sweet breath of healing stole softly to that feverish couch, cooling the parched lips, and removing the seal of pain from that

pure young brow. Florence was spared to me, but God forgive the rebellion that tore my heart, threatening to uproot each precious hope and desire, and to hurl me as a reprobate from the pleasant paths of holiness, when I first beheld my child, after her returning strength had permitted her to leave her bed.

"She will be a dwarf," the physician had told me, "and very much deformed. Her deformity will probably increase with her years."

I had thought myself willing, even rejoiced, to bear any disappointment and burden, if the life of my darling child might but be spared. She was too dear to number among the dead, too pure for worms to feast upon; and then she was my only one: would not God spare her to me?

Mercifully he did; and oh, the sin of that one moment of rebellion! But had I not dreamed of a daughter fair and beautiful—graceful, and by every one beloved? Yes, and the gross selfishness of my earthly nature was loth to yield so sweet a hope.

I had been walking alone in the garden gathering flowers for the convalescent, and had found the sweet pale rose-buds, which she loved so well, and the fragrant violets. I had been to Susan's cottage, and enriched myself with some of her sweet flowering peas. I had arranged them as tastefully as I could, and was slowly returning, half lost in blissful revery of the recovery of Florence and Birdie's return, when I was interrupted by the heavy footsteps of Aunt Betsey, who was hastening down the avenue to meet me.

Florence had been helped into an easy chair the week before, and had been wheeled out on the balcony several times, but she had not attempted to walk without the firm support of Mr. McAlpine or Aunt Betsey. I had never seen her in a standing posture; indeed, I had secretly avoided it.

Aunt Betsey's face was radiant with good news. "Oh!" said she, throwing up her hands and gesticulating with con-

siderable vehemence, "Florence is standing all by herself! She walked from her chair all alone, and is now on the porch waiting for you. But, alas!" she added, in a lower and sadder tone, "alas, for the poor child."

Without answering a word, I started quickly forward, my heart beating wildly, and the tears fast falling from my eyes. Yes, so it was: there upon the porch with the bright beautiful sunshine falling full upon her—the beautiful bird-songs warbling in her ears, the beautiful flowers nodding from the lawn, and the beautiful elms reaching out as if to protect her—stood my daughter, my darling Florence, a clumsy, deformed child!

Had I seen the sweet content, the quiet joy that played across those pale emaciated features, I dare to hope I should not have murmured and rebelled against my heavy trial. But I turned my face away, and would gladly have withdrawn where I might calm myself, before meeting the expectant child; but a feeble voice calling "Mother, mother," was the sternest rebuke my God could have given me.

She had reached out her arms to embrace me. They were very thin, and one had been contracted by her terrible disease. "Oh, mother!" cried she, as I clasped her to my heart, praying inwardly, God knows how fervently, for forgiveness, "are you not glad that I came out here all alone, with nobody to help me? I do believe that I shall get well again."

I gave her the flowers, which afforded her exquisite delight. But her exercise was proving of too long duration, and this Aunt Betsey quickly discovered, and took her up in her arms to carry her back to the nursery.

"Take me into the parlor," importuned Florence, looking up wishfully into Aunt Betsey's face; "please do."

"Of course you shall go into the parlor," was the good-natured reply; "'tis many a long day since you cantered over the rosy-red carpet. You shall see the little marble

angels, and all the pretty things, and your mother shall play on the piano for you."

We went into the parlor, and I threw open the blinds, letting in a rich flood of sunshine; then turning to Florence, who was thoughtfully looking towards the mirror, I asked her if I should play one of her little tunes.

"Not now, mamma dear," she answered; "I'm too tired to stay long enough for that; but will you not please put me down before the mirror? They say I'm a deformed child;—I never saw one, and I want to know what they look like."

"Oh, no," said Aunt Betsey, wiping away her tears, "you don't want to look in the glass; let's go back to the nursery," and she turned toward the door.

"No, no," urged the child, with a melting tenderness; and looking up into my face, and discovering the anguish I could not conceal, she silently appealed to Aunt Betsey, but found her also in tears.

"You don't want me to look in the glass," said she; "you think it will make me feel sorry. But I don't believe it will; so do, Aunt Betsey, put me down."

Betsey looked around for my consent, which was granted, and Florence was placed before the mirror, which gave her a full-sized portrait. She gazed thoughtfully and sadly for a moment at the image there reflected.

"I never saw any one so crooked before. I don't look at all as I used to look—do I, mother?"

I could make no reply; my heart was bursting within me. I turned my face away, unable to witness so trying a scene.

"Don't cry so, dear mamma, don't cry," and my child clung fast to the skirt of my dress; and, taking my hand, she held it close to her cheek. "God did it, father says. The little angels have no such humps on their backs, and if I ever go to heaven where the angels are, mine will all be gone."

Keenly her words rebuked me, yet poured a fresh torrent

of grief upon my heart. Aunt Betsey's sobs increased, and only the little one was calm.

I kissed her long and fervently, but could not speak. Aunt Betsey took her up lovingly in her arms and carried her back to the nursery, leaving me to supplicate grace from the Dispenser of all things.

We were now expecting the return of Angebell, accompanied by her Aunt Fanny, who would stay with us during the remainder of the summer. A year had passed since Birdie left us, and we were not a little anxious to become acquainted with the changes, if any there were, in her mind, appearance, and disposition. We were convinced that she had made considerable improvement in scholarship, as her letters exhibited a decided advancement in that direction; but the culture of her heart we considered of more vital importance. This would reveal itself in its true light when she was restored to the home circle.

Aunt Fanny had never seen Florence McAlpine since her illness, although her letters had expressed a deep sympathy for the suffering child. She had been highly pleased with the name we had bestowed upon our offspring, and though she tendered her much affection, and often made her presents of costly value, yet it was plain to be seen that Birdie was the pet idol of her heart. "She is so like my dear Adel," was the ready excuse for every endearment and indulgence; and Birdie returned this love, and was ever partial to its advice and commands, unless—Miss Angebell McAlpine thought it proper to enforce her own will. "But I will be firmly strict with her," Aunt Fanny had written, when pleading for the guardianship of Birdie, and we were very desirous to ascertain, by the disposition and culture of the child, if she had really had the heart to keep her resolution in that particular.

You are all aware of the undisputed fact that children, particularly boarding-school misses, when sojourning between the ages of ten and fourteen, are remarkably self-conscious of

their superior knowledge and infallible judgment. It seems to be a law universal in nature, for the exceptions are so "few and far between." We did not expect then that Miss Angebell McAlpine, late from Madam Gearau's, of New York, would deviate far from the general rule, and therefore anticipated in the fair young girl a deal of self-importance and affectation.

About an hour before the time when we expected them to arrive, I was in the nursery combing the hair of Florence, who was chattering away in a manner unusually lively for her, about the return of her sister Birdie, and her remembrance of the eccentric Aunt Fanny.

"Yes," said she, sparkling her blue eyes as she spoke, and clapping her hands at the joyousness of the thought, "Birdie and I will have our little 'rose chamber' again, and I shall not have to sleep in the nursery any more by Aunt Betsey, who snores so loud I can hardly get to sleep."

The "rose chamber" was a room on the south side of the house, and derived its name from the climbing roses which had been trained over the windows. It was one of the most delightful apartments of Daisy Lawn, and, until the illness of Florence, had been occupied by the two girls, who ever expressed a vast deal of pride and preference for their pleasant quarters. It had been furnished with a regard to their tastes and convenience, and the toys and cherished gifts of both figured largely among its ornaments. Florence, who had acquired a strong aversion to the little crib in the nursery, had often expressed an ardent desire to sleep again in the "rose chamber," but we had thought it best, until Birdie's return, to keep her under the nightly care of the faithful Aunt Betsey.

This room was not, as one might rightly suppose, situated in the second story of the house, but adjoining the dining-room, and quite removed from my apartment. Had Florence been obliged to ascend a flight of stairs to reach it, her

hope would have been vain indeed, for it was but with great difficulty that she made an ascent of any kind.

"Yes," I replied, to her joyous anticipations, "Betsey arranged the room for you this morning, and I saw her carry in two large bouquets not long since."

"That will make Birdie glad, I am sure;" then starting as if a happy thought flashed upon her, she added, "and instead of handing her the present I have for her, I'll put it under her pillow, and then I shall see how funny she acts when she finds it."

"You had better tell Aunt Betsey to put it there now; they will be here soon."

The gift spoken of, was a night-dress and cap, delicately embroidered by Susan, in accordance with the taste and direction of Florence, who intended it as a present to her sister on her return home. She called to Betsey, who immediately answered the summons, and was as highly pleased as any of us with the idea of a pleasant surprise to Birdie. She rolled them up neatly and carried them into the rose chamber, talking to herself meanwhile—

"'Tis good to see the children so sisterly-like; but well may we all love Birdie, the gay, innocent child."

We heard a rumbling of wheels, and, looking from the window, saw Aunt Fanny's carriage, containing herself and Angebell, coming up the avenue. Florence waited in her easy chair, while I hastened to the porch to welcome them. Mr. McAlpine and Aunt Betsey were there before me.

Birdie, hardly waiting for the stopping of the carriage, bounded to her father's arms, crying and laughing, and covered his face with kisses. Aunt Fanny, though evincing much joy on meeting with us again, did not lose her dignified composure, but gave orders to Tom, the coachman, before directing her attention to us.

"Oh mother," said Birdie, giving me an affectionate embrace, "how glad I am to get home again." Then looking

around the porch and slyly through the parlor window, she asked:

"Is Charlie Grey here?"

By the way, I must tell you, Charlie and Angebell had maintained a regular correspondence during their separation. Aunt Fanny had consented to this, on condition that she should read all the letters that passed between them. That was quite annoying to the young parties, no doubt; but submitted to, rather than a long silence.

"No," I replied, laughing at her blushes; "but you are an hour before your time, you know."

"He was here this morning," interrupted Aunt Betsey, who had burst into tears as soon as she had clasped her "darling Birdie" in her arms, and had stood weeping ever since. "He was very anxious to know just the time you would be here. I told him about four o'clock, and he promised to be on hand about that time. He looked very happy-like when he cantered away on his pony. He is a jaunty lad, that Charlie Grey."

During this conversation Aunt Fanny had solemnly made her way into the parlor, where she stood with folded hands, and a sad, thoughtful countenance, gazing earnestly at the portrait of her "dear Adel." Birdie followed her, but instead of paying the same mute reverence to the beautiful painting, she cast her bright eyes about the apartment, exclaiming, "Oh, how natural every thing looks!" then hastened to the nursery, from whence a sweet feeble voice was calling, "Birdie! Birdie! come in here Birdie!"

I followed Angebell, desirous to witness the meeting of the sisters, and observe the effect which the deformity of Florence would produce on her sister. Florence had left her chair and advanced a little distance to meet her, and when Angebell entered, the child stood in the centre of the room, her pale face radiant with joy, and her thin arms extended for an embrace.

Birdie started back when her eye fell upon her, and a visible shudder thrilled her whole frame. She clasped her hands over her face, and turning away sank overcome upon the lounge. Florence comprehended at once the cause of her violent emotion, and the joyous brightness of her eyes was dimmed by fast coming tears. She walked up to Birdie and laying her hand upon her arm, said, in a soft tone mingled with deep sadness:

"Don't cry about it, dear Birdie; I am so glad you have come home again. I am so glad to see you, sister, and I want to kiss you, because I am so happy—even if I am crying."

Birdie bent forward and kissed the upturned face of the child—not once only, but again and again—saying, "poor child! poor child!" with each pressure of her lips. Then winding her arms about her and drawing her close to her side she said—

"I do pity you, sister, very much. It must be terrible to have such a form."

"But you will love me just as much, won't you Birdie?"

"Yes, and more; but you were so beautiful before, and I was so proud of my pretty sister. Tell me, mother, will she always look like that?"

"She will always be deformed," I said; and then anxious to change the subject, fearful it might prove a painful one to Florence, I enquired for Aunt Fanny.

"Here I am," replied the lady herself, who had just left the portrait in the parlor. Her eyes and cheeks were wet.

I did not expect that she would kiss Florence; that was an indulgence she seldom allowed to her own daughter; indeed Birdie was the only person upon whom she made that demonstration of affection. But the sight of Florence must have touched her heart with a deep compassion, for after seating herself and smoothing her skirt, she took the child on her lap, kissed her and folded her close to her heart. Neither of them spake a word.

Charlie Grey made his appearance at the expected time, and all of Angebell's former mirth and gaiety exhibited itself, and when tea time came they were no where to be found, and the only information we could gain was from Aunt Betsey, who said she saw them a short time ago, and they were both of them riding on Charlie's pony "so crazy-like."

"So then I am to sleep alone, am I?" said Birdie, when bed time drew near. "It will seem like old times to get into the 'rose chamber' again."

"Why no," interposed Florence, "I am going to sleep with you."

Angebell was disconcerted and looked anxiously at her aunt, and then enquiringly at me. I comprehended her discomposure and asked if she had any objection to Florence's wishes?

"I don't know," was the faltering reply, "but would it not be better for her to be near Aunt Betsey?"

"I think it would be better for both the children," interrupted Aunt Fanny. "Florence will be safer in Betsey's care."

Florence had dropped her head and was looking sadly disappointed.

"Her health does not require the nightly care of any one," said Mr. McAlpine. "Betsey informs me that she sleeps soundly and sweetly. She will of course room with Angebell, who must be very attentive to her wants, and remember at all times her almost helpless condition."

There were tears in the eyes of Florence, when I kissed her good night; the dread of so sad a disappointment as that of a restoration to the "rose chamber" had brought them there, and the anticipation of having to sleep in the nursery again with the snoring Aunt Betsey.

The shouts of laughter which we heard soon after they had retired, told us that Birdie had really been happily surprised

by the presents found under her pillow, and that the tears had disappeared from the eyes of Florence.

Before many days after Birdie's return to Daisy Lawn, we were obliged to conclude, from her proud exacting manner and grasping selfishness, that Aunt Fanny had broken her resolution in a slight degree at least. She gave no heed to her father's desires or mine whenever they conflicted with her wishes, and she often allowed herself to wound the unfortunate Florence by some bitter taunt awakened by an uncontrolled temper. When her anger had subsided, she would profess a sorrow for her unkindness and ask for forgiveness, but not in a humble and sincere tone that won our confidence. During the stay of Aunt Fanny, we found it almost impossible to enforce in a full measure the rigid discipline which we thought necessary, because she was ever ready to excuse and defend the wayward child;—yet we allowed no misdemeanor to pass without punishment or rebuke.

Angebell was proud not only of her personal appearance, but of her father's wealth and standing in society. Her pride manifested itself in a foolish manner, and was the source of much mortification to Mr. McAlpine. It also compelled her to inflict many a grievous wound upon Florence: wounds that her heart bore through a lifetime.

A lady and her son, residing in New York, were spending a few days with us. The boy was about Birdie's age: a dashing, unprincipled lad, with a cruel heart, and untutored mind. He, however, won a vast deal of attention from the coquettish Angebell, much to the indignation of Charlie Grey, who absented himself from Daisy Lawn until a beseeching little note bade him to return.

It was the day of the arrival of Mrs. Wilbur, and Dickie, her son. Birdie and her guest had been strolling through the garden, and passing my vine-covered balcony they spied Florence, who was sitting on the porch fondling Pruno.

"What chunky is that?" enquired Master Dickie, pointing to the steps. "There's a beauty, and no mistake. I'll fall in love with that belle, just for the romance of the thing."

Angebell laughed at his coarse wit, and swinging her hat, which she held in her hand, answered carelessly,

"Oh, that's only Florence."

"Aha! Well, I must confess, that your sister is the flower of Daisy Lawn."

"She is only my half sister," was the quick reply; and scorn curled her ruby lip as she cast a contemptuous glance toward the child, who, having heard the conversation, arose from her seat, and with eyes brimful of tears, and her breast heaving as if it would burst, came softly into my room, and hiding her face in my lap, gave way to her wild emotion.

"Oh, mother! mother!" she sobbed, "why does Birdie hate me so?"

Oh, how weak and insufficient was I then, with my own soul bereft of all holy peace, to impart sweet comfort to my dear wounded child. I could only hold her to my heart, and press her wet cheek to mine, and let my hot tears fall upon it. I felt that the poisoned dart had struck too deep for any but an angel's hand to draw hence.

Yet, did not her journey lie through a cold and unfeeling world? Were there many hearts that would shelter and compassionate her misfortune as tenderly as should those of her home? Would every eye that fell upon her sad deformity call down a tear, and say "I pity you?" Would love come to her unasked, kind words unearned, bright smiles unbeckoned, and friends unsought for, as they did to the beautiful and brilliant Birdie? No, mother! no. And yours is the bitter task to teach that hoping, yet sorrowing young heart, that her path will ever lead through a wilderness, where the thorns shall tear her feet, and the brambles her hands, when she would clear the way before her. And yours, weak mother—whose eye is ever prone to fall earthward instead of

heavenward—the holy mission to tell your afflicted one of him, the best beloved of the Father, who, when on earth, “was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, who had no form nor comeliness, and whom it pleased the Lord to bruise.” She will hear and believe you, and garner the sweet consolation to her soul, and it shall be her balm and support when darker days close around her.

If it is a sweet and easy task for a happy mother to take her beautiful and intelligent child upon her knee, and gaze upon its noble brow, while she dreams of the happiness that awaits it, the hopes it will fulfil, the honor it will wear, and the blessings that will ever attend its pathway, what must that parent experience who clasps a darling child, a deformed dwarf, to the bosom, conscious that its path leads on through darkness and sorrow, and that its mother alone may ever know how to sympathise with it? I can tell you, it is a bitterness; yet oh how trifling if God be remembered through it all.

My words, so weak compared with what my soul felt incompetent to utter, fell soothingly upon the wounded heart of Florence, and she ceased her weeping. She appeared to comprehend what awaited her, yet, when I told her of the gentleness and patience that would earn love for her, and the holy trusting faith that would win smiles more precious than any the world could give, she smiled sweetly, and said: “I will try to be good, mamma, and if nobody but you can love poor Florence, God and the sweet angels will.”

CHAPTER V.

But ah! to look upon the dead,
And know they ne'er can wake again;
To lose the one we love the best;
Oh! God! it sears the breast and brain!

'Tis then the human heart will groan,
And pine beneath the stroke of fate;
'Twill break to find itself alone,
A thing all sad and desolate!

ELIZA COOK.

WE had waited tea more than an hour for the arrival of Mr. McAlpine. He had been absent from home several months, now dating his brief and hasty letters at New York, then again at Albany, while the last one received was mailed at Boston. Daisy Lawn was not far from a pleasant little village in the south-eastern part of the Empire State, but I shall not tell you its exact locality, nor the true name of the lovely little stream—wide and deep enough for our fairy skiffs—that murmured through the meadows of my dear home. I have called it the Weimar, and I can now see its bright waters through the thick boughs of elms and maples that overhang its verdant banks. Many changes have come to Daisy Lawn since the evening, when, as the bride of Ralph McAlpine, I rode so sadly up the broad avenue. The cottage is old-fashioned and weather-beaten; some of the lofty old trees have been cut down, and younger ones fill their places. The little village is a flourishing town, and instead of one white steeple pointing faith-like upwards, I behold the spires

of costly churches, the domes of State buildings, and the belfreys of the common schools. Instead of the rumbling wheels of the heavy stage coach, and the welcome twang of its horn, I see the "iron horse" darting across the meadows, while the shrill scream of the whistle reminds me of the march of progress and the rapid flight of time.

Twenty years ago, only twenty, travelling was attended with far less pleasure and convenience than now ; indeed, it required considerable courage and fortitude to set out upon a long journey. Oh, how rough the roads were !—how uncomfortable those churn-like stage coaches, and how widely separated the miserably furnished inns ! And yet we love to remember those days, and to tell them over to our children, or grandchildren, who are now borne with such speed and comfort, from one land to another.

Mr. McAlpine's journey had been a long and tedious one, and he had suffered greatly from fatigue and want of rest. It was in the fall of the year, and the rains had rendered the roads almost impassable, and travellers were often exposed for nights in succession to the cold and storm. I felt a deep anxiety on my husband's account, as his health had been quite infirm through the summer, although he hoped and trusted that his journey would prove beneficial.

We expected him the day before, as that was the time specified in his last letter to me. But we waited and waited, until the tea-cakes were spoiled, and our own spirits exhausted, and then, sad with disappointment, we repeated, one after the other, "I really don't believe he is coming."

I could not slumber that night, from anxious excitement. Did I close my eyes, and endeavor to calm my fears to rest, the slightest rustle of the willow boughs, or the sound of wheels on a distant road, would start me from my pillow, and hasten me to the window to gaze anxiously out into the dense darkness, only to increase my disappointment and fearful apprehensions.

"He will surely come to-day," I said, when I met the family at the breakfast table ; thus striving to save them from my painful solicitude. "John tells me that the road is quite passable between here and the village."

"Then what prevented his coming last night ?" asked Birdie : "he never disappointed us before."

"That is no sure evidence that he never will," I replied, as cheerfully as possible. "Urgent business may have detained him a day."

"Or he may be sick," said Florence. "Perhaps he has had another fit of apoplexy !" and laying down her fork, she scanned my countenance closely.

That terrible possibility had suggested itself with fearful power during the long and wakeful hours of the night, yet I had hoped it would not occur to any other member of the family. Mr. McAlpine had had one severe attack of that dangerous disease, and was liable to encounter another, but the scrupulous care that he had constantly exerted for the preservation of his health alleviated my fears in some measure.

Could I have obtained an instant control of my feelings, it would have been my endeavor to crush that frightful supposition ; but Aunt Fanny, who had been meditating very gravely for some time, remarked :

"Indeed, that has been my conjecture. I dreamed it last night."

"You shall not talk so !" exclaimed Birdie, interrupting her ; and dropping her cup, she burst into a passionate flood of tears. "You know it is not so ; and it is very wicked for you to suppose any thing of the kind. Such an idea would drive us all crazy." Then addressing herself more particularly to Aunt Fanny, who, unheeding her passionate vehemence, was prefacing her past dream, she continued more loudly :

"It will be a shame if you repeat such nonsense to mother and Florence. I will not listen to you another moment,"

and she left the table, her beautiful face flushed by her excitement.

"I hope my dream will be true," said Florence—leaning her head on one side, as she always did when she had something pleasant to impart, and smiling at Birdie, who had paused to hear what her sister would say—"for I dreamt that he came home in the daytime just as we sat down to dinner. He kissed mamma again and again, then Birdie, and pulled her curls and laughed at her about Charlie Grey. Then I dreamt that he sat down in the easy chair and took me on his knee, holding me tight in his arms, just as he always does, and he kissed me right here on my forehead"—she pointed to the spot—"and I thought, when he did so, he whispered, 'My poor little Florence—*my clipped-winged birdie*,' and he was crying all the time—"

Her voice faltered as she drew near the conclusion of her happy vision. Then turning to me as if expecting her bright dream must give me pleasure, she inquired:

"And don't you believe my dream will come to pass?" then, without waiting for an answer, added, "I know it will. I am very sure of it."

Aunt Fanny, heeding Birdie's command, remained silent regarding her dream. I did not justify the disrespect of Angebell, but rebuked her for the same. Her course, however, was upheld by Aunt Fanny, who declared that she had spoken unwisely, and that she admired "the noble tenderness"—to use her own phrase—"of the child. That was very much as my dear Adel would have done," said she. "She would never allow an uncertain grief to be thrust upon her. She would hope to the last."

"I wish dinner-time would come!" Florence said many times during that long forenoon; "and then perhaps my dream will prove true."

Noon came and passed, and Florence wept because no father came to clasp her to his heart, and call her by the

name he gave her in her dream—the name she cherished ever after, "My poor Florence—my clipped-winged birdie."

And evening came on so slow and drearily, so dark and stormy. A cheerful fire was blazing in the grate—a warm and bounteous supper awaiting the expected one. Aunt Fanny sat with her gaze fixed on the beautiful portrait, although her occasional remarks betrayed her share in the general solicitude. Birdie was impatient and restless; now throwing herself upon the piano-stool and dashing off a lively air, regardless of time or harmony, and then starting up suddenly at the distant sound of wheels and bounding out into the porch, even venturing with her thin-slipped feet quite a distance down the avenue, to get the first kiss from her "dear father"—"the dearest father in all the world," as Florence called him.

I had seated myself in the easy-chair and close to the window. Florence was on my lap, and when the tears I could no longer suppress fell upon her face, a little hand would reach up and gently brush my eyes, and if an uncontrolled sigh would escape my heart she nestled the closer in my arms.

"Oh mother!" she whispered, as it grew late, "if he should never, *never* come back again, how much we will have to ask God for, won't we?"

"And how much we may ask of him now!" I replied, and her large blue eyes were fastened upon mine with an expression so deep and earnest that I closed my eyelids for a moment lest she should read the terrible anxiety I was trying to conceal. That piercing glance troubled me, for it conveyed a fear kindred to my own.

"What is it, my darling?" I asked, lifting her head from my shoulder, and smoothing the brow that had darkened with its thought.

"I hardly know, mother," she replied, sitting upright before me; "I feel so very sorry to-night, I hardly know for

what. I never felt so unhappy before. There seems a *great dark* before me when I think of dear father's coming home again."

Dear one! that "great dark" was already fast about your mother's heart, yet she had courage to whisper of hope to you. But her words gave you no peace; they were soul-empty and imparting no balm.

Aunt Betsey came in, looked anxiously from one face to the other; said "O dear!" several times; piled wood on the grate, and went to the window and looked out; then, glancing at the clock and seeing the lateness of the hour, began to drop the curtains.

"Loop them up again, Aunt Betsey," I interposed; "the bright windows will make the house look more cheerful and welcoming to him."

"O, he will not be here to-night," she answered, with a deep-drawn sigh. "It looks very strange and dreadful-like to me that he should stay so behind his time. O dear! O dear!"

Aunt Fanny was sound asleep in her chair. Birdie lay upon the sofa, her bright eyes restlessly wandering about the room, while her every movement was characteristic of her impatience. Florence and I still sat in the easy-chair, both awake, and our eyes searching the darkness. I had tried to pray, but could not lift my spirit from its gloom. My hope was sick and faint, and what is prayer bereft of that?

We heard the sound of wheels, and in an instant every inmate of the room was aroused, and their faces pressed breathlessly to the windows. Yes, we heard the creaking gate of the avenue swing open, and the tread of horses slowly approaching the house. Birdie gave one wild shriek of joy and bounded out the door. Florence clapped her hands—Aunt Fanny readjusted her cap—Aunt Betsey burst into tears—and I, hardly knowing what I did, rushed with them all to the porch.

"Father! father!" Birdie was shouting; forcibly reminding me of the sweet joyous voice that greeted my coming to Daisy Lawn.

"Father! father!" chimed in Florence, and the loud blasts of the wind and the dismal screeching of the boughs did not diminish their shouts of joy.

The night was so dark we could not distinguish the form of the vehicle until it drew close to the house and passed before the windows where a flood of light fell upon it. I was surprised to discover it was an uncovered carriage, unlike what I should expect my husband to choose for so tedious a journey, but, from the imperfect view which I obtained, I discovered that it was a high box wagon. Two men were seated near the front, but so completely were their faces hidden by the collars of their dripping overcoats that I was unable to decide if either was Mr. McAlpine, yet I had no doubt but one of them was my husband; still, I wondered at his not returning the joyous welcome of the children.

The horses stopped and the two men alighted, and Birdie, supposing the taller of the two to be her father, bounded from the steps and would have thrown herself into his arms had not the sound of his voice undeceived her. She started back with affright, while a death-like silence hovered over our little group.

"I would speak with Mrs. McAlpine," said he, in a respectful tone, and bowing to us all.

I stepped forward and introduced myself. So powerful was the dreadful apprehension that settled with an incubus weight upon my heart that it robbed me of my strength; but straining every power to obtain a momentary support, I listened to what he had to impart. O God! even the remembrance of that bitterness!

"My duty is indeed sad to perform," said he, with a faltering voice, "yet I hope God will give you grace to bear your affliction. Mr. McAlpine would have been at home last

night, but he was attacked with apoplexy at the hotel, at Norwich, and before proper medical assistance could be obtained, he died. We have brought his body home."

With those words, "*he died*," seared upon my heart, and the low piteous moan of Florence, and the fearful shrieks of Birdie ringing through my brain, I lost all consciousness, and like a wounded bird sank down with the arrow in my breast.

CHAPTER VI.

I find she loves him much, because she hides it.
Love teaches cunning even to innocence ;
And when he gets possession, his first work
Is to dig deep within the heart and there
Lie hid, and like a miser in the dark,
To feast alone.

DRYDEN.

THE mind must undergo a fearful struggle in casting aside a sorrow keenly united with every tie of life. It must leave the sacred shrine of the heart unvisited for a while, lest the sight of its cherished relics—its mouldering hopes and joys and its dear sad memories—should overcome the resolution to shake off the heavy robes of despair and go forth again, though wounded, yet fearless, to struggle with the world.

We may weep bitterly for a dear one gone ; we may bend over the precious form, and while kissing the cold lips which never before met ours without fervently returning the pressure, call on God, the God of the living and of the dead, to chill our hearts that know no joy in throbbing when cold is the one they beat for ; to shut our eyes, that they may never weep again, and lay us close by the side of the one we love. We may so weep and supplicate in the dark and bitter day of our affliction, when the deep wound is fresh and bleeding ; but when they have borne away the idol, and we know that his footstep will never come back, for we see the grass springing above his grave, we must learn a peaceful resignation, a holy trusting content, and looking toward heaven with smiles more sacred if they break like sunshine

through our tears, let the warmth of God's gladness and hope return to cheer the wilting verdure of our hearts.

We may cherish the holy memory of the dead, and guard their relics with the most faithful love; but we must not drape our spirit's chamber with mourning, shutting out the glad sunlight and fragrance of flowers. The blue sky must smile upon the bier and fresh rosy garlands twine about it. Then shall it be an altar for hope as well as for sad remembrance, and love shall not always weep when gazing upon it, but she shall smile, and clasping Faith with a sisterly embrace, whisper softly and serenely, "I wait but a little while: my Father doeth well."

Such were my reflections as I sat alone in the library one morning, about a month after the death of my husband. I saw the sinfulness of yielding longer to the prostration of grief, and the necessity of arising cheerfully and hopefully to the performance of my multiplied duties. My affliction was indeed a bitter one; but were there not manifold blessings remaining for me?

Upon an examination of Mr. McAlpine's affairs, we found them unembarrassed, and in a condition that afforded me but little care or anxiety. He had made his will but a few months before he died, and Daisy Lawn was in my undisputed possession, with its surrounding farm of a few hundred acres. This, with a moderate amount of invested capital, would afford me an income sufficient for the comfortable, but not extravagant support of my bereaved family. I resolved to curtail unnecessary expenses, and therefore dismissed the house servants, with the exception of Aunt Betsey, and Maggie, the kitchen girl, who had lived in the family for many years. Willie Blake, who was then an amiable, active, and good-natured boy, ten years of age, should do the chores about the place. Mr. Graham, a worthy man, and a good farmer, whom I have before mentioned, that had long been an honest and faithful tenant of Mr. McAlpine's, received the

sole superintendence of the farm, and I had the most implicit confidence in his skill and judgment.

By the will of Mr. McAlpine, Susan had been made possessor of the cottage on the hill, and its small garden. She obtained a comfortable sustenance for herself and industrious son by needle-work, which she did with much neatness and taste. Among the families in the neighborhood, a wardrobe was rarely considered complete unless it contained one cap at least, ornamented with the delicate embroidery of Susan's hand. She was an universal favorite with all, and so was Willie, who earned many a pretty sum by his well deserved faithfulness and trust.

Aunt Fanny had proved a valuable friend in the sore trials through which I had passed. Although truly sympathizing with me in my sorrow, and bearing a heavy portion of grief, yet her cool deliberation and frigid calmness did not forsake her. She quietly relieved me of a burden of care, by superintending the business matters that accompany so sad an event; looking after the affairs of the household, and the comfort of poor Florence, who had wilted like a crushed lily since the death of her father. Birdie's grief had been fearfully wild and passionate during the terrible night that brought the sad intelligence to Daisy Lawn. She was like one insane, wringing her hands and filling the house with her piercing shrieks and bitter lamentations. And on the morning of the funeral, when we bowed for the last time above our cherished dead, her young heart seemed overwhelmed by its avalanche of woe. She entered the apartment leaning upon the arm of Aunt Fanny. Her face was deathly white, her thin lips firmly compressed, and her dark eyes sunken and bloodshot. Her step, however, was so firm, and her countenance so calm, that I thought she had mastered her feelings, and would, in that last and trying hour, control them. But no sooner had her eyes fallen upon the marble brow of the dead, than she

sprang wildly forward, and uttering a loud shriek of the deepest woe and despair, fell senseless to the floor.

Florence had shown no violent demonstrations of grief. At the funeral she was very calm, scarcely shedding a tear. The morning before the burial she went to her father's bier, and laying her little hand upon his forehead, quickly withdrew it, and trembling from the shock its iciness had given her, she grasped the hand of Aunt Betsey, who was standing by, and told her that her dear father was very cold.

"O yes, my darling," replied the kind nurse; "your blessed father is dead. Dead folks are always just so cold."

"But father has gone to God," and the little mourner looked smilingly through her tears, as she drew near the bier again, and pressed her rosy lips to those of the beloved dead; then laying her cheek against his, and twining her arms about his neck, she whispered, "the sunshine of heaven will make him warm again; but I do wish that God had taken us all, for we don't want to stay here now that dear father is gone."

"Poor darling," sobbed Aunt Betsey, catching up the little one and clasping her tightly in her arms, "you talk so angel-like, that you will go to your father some day;" and then pausing a moment, added, in a solemn whisper, "and before long I am afraid."

The quick ear of the child caught her words, and her pale sad face lighted up with the happy thought.

"Do you really think that I shall go to heaven before long?"

"O, I am feeling so sad that I don't know what I say," said Aunt Betsey, grieved at the earnest inquiry; "no, no, darling, you must not think of dying this many a year. What would your poor mother do without her dear Florence?"

"But, Betsey"—and the big drops fell fast upon the cheek of the thoughtful child—"what if mother should go to heaven and leave me sick and alone behind? Do you think the dear God would do such a thing as to call her away from me?"

"There would be friends enough to care for you, if he did," was the reply; "there is your Aunt Fanny who has plenty of money, and a grand house in New York; and old as I am getting to be, I would work my finger nails off before you should want for any thing, my precious child."

"I would not like to live with Aunt Fanny in New York."

"Why?" asked Betsey.

Florence hesitated a moment and looked sadly down upon the still face of the corpse; then throwing her arms around the neck of the faithful nurse and hiding her face in her bosom, began to sob bitterly.

"O, because," she whispered, "gay and handsome people stay at Aunt Fanny's most of the time, and Birdie, who is so beautiful, would like to be loved and praised, and I should wish her to be, for I do love Birdie; but you know, Aunt Betsey, that I am a little homely dwarf, and that those happy folks who have no humps on their backs, nor dreadful aches in their limbs, would laugh at me and talk to Birdie just as Dickey Wilbur did; and then when the tears *would* come, mamma would not be there to tell me about Jesus and the angels."

Aunt Betsey was called from the apartment, and she left the child with the dead.

While the deep and silent grief of Florence continued to cling about her, and to shadow every well-spring of her existence, Birdie had become quiet, and exhibited many signs of her former mirth and gaiety. She had taken several rides with Charlie Grey, and even began to rebuke the pining Florence for her continued sorrow and sad depression of spirits.

All these things were passing through my mind as I sat alone in the library, haunted with so many precious and cherished memories of the past, when I was aroused from my meditations by Aunt Fanny.

"Shall I disturb you by a short interview?" she enquired.

I replied negatively; and that I was indeed anxious to confide in her, as well as to consult her good judgment concerning affairs of some importance.

She drew her chair close to mine, and assuming an erect posture, after the usual smoothing of her skirt, she folded her hands and expressed a willingness to hear all I had to say.

"You must stop this continual weeping," said she; "you can accomplish nothing while you are so overwhelmed by sorrow, and so deeply wounded by your bereavement. You must remember that important duties and the welfare of your children call for action, not despair."

I acknowledged the perfect agreement of our thoughts on that subject, and my renewed determination to perfect, as well as I could, the many duties devolving upon me.

"I feel very thankful," I said, "that my many cares are of so light and unvexatious a nature. Had I been left in poverty, or with an encumbered estate that I must needs struggle to retain, there might have been some excuse for murmuring; but my only anxiety is with regard to my children."

"In what particular?" she asked: "this is a subject about which I feel deeply interested also."

"Concerning their education, both moral and mental," I answered. "My income will allow no extravagant outlay — indeed I do not desire it. I do not aspire to seeing my daughters made gilded and frivolous ladies of fashion, sole ornaments for the parlor and stars for the festive hall. I could not desire it for Florence were it possible for her to attain it; nor am I ambitious to give Angebell the plumes she may so easily wear: I only desire that they may worthily fill the stations of true and noble women. My anxious fears arise from my increasing ill health, which threatens to forbid my constant guardianship of my children; yet if Angebell was as amiable and as easily influenced as I wish she was, my fears would be lessened."

"I understand you perfectly," replied Aunt Fanny, "and think I may well predict for you more care and anxiety than you anticipate if you retain the sole charge of Angebell. I know her faults as well as any one can. She is not the worst child in the world, yet too much of a care for one in your poor health. Florence alone is a vast responsibility. You are not congenial with the ardent temperament of Angebell: she would be to you a source of constant annoyance and trial. Surrender the child into my hands until she has completed her scholarship. I will send her where we shall both feel satisfied with the influence and discipline she receives. My house shall be her home during the vacations; I will bear all her expenses, and you shall be relieved of the vast care and responsibility that otherwise must rest upon you."

Long and earnestly we conversed on a subject of such vital importance to me. I saw considerable truth in the calm reasoning of Aunt Fanny, and was deeply influenced by her truthful arguments. I had been much out of health during the past year, and was then a weak invalid unable to walk farther than the avenue gates even when enjoying "my well days," as Florence called those bright ones of the summer time, when I would venture out a little way from the house. The only reason of my hesitating to accept Aunt Fanny's generous offer was the deep and abiding sense of my duty to labor earnestly for the promotion of the future welfare of my husband's child. Was she not dear, very dear to him, and did not his whole soul go forth in earnest prayer for the happy destiny of his darling Birdie, until his loving heart ceased to beat? Had he not committed her to my care trusting that I would be a mother to the wayward one? Should I shrink when his kind voice could no longer cheer and sustain me, and leave my duty unperformed?

But was I in a condition to labor for the child's best interests? Would my failing health admit of the constant care and exertion she would certainly demand? She was then

thirteen years of age, and of an unamiable and refractory nature. Would my crippled influence be sufficient to mould anew her character? Then there was Florence, my gentle but unfortunate one. Who but a mother would care for her, and who knew so well where the thorns in her pathway grew? I felt my inability to bear unassisted the guardianship of both. One must from necessity be committed to the educational care of strangers; and could I send my "clipped winged birdie" to moan and flutter far away from the sheltering nest?

After much painful deliberation, and a long consultation with the kind Dr. Grey, who highly favored Aunt Fanny's plan, although Charlie pronounced a veto against it, Angebell was delivered to the guardianship of Aunt Fanny. They soon departed for New York, where Birdie remained a few weeks, and then entered as a pupil the flourishing Hillsdale Seminary in New Jersey.

Daisy Lawn was very lonely after their departure. Its quietude was seldom interrupted, except by the visits of some of the neighboring families, by Dr. Grey, or his volatile son, Charlie, who was very apt to dash up the avenue on his gray pony about the time that letters might be expected from Hillsdale. Alas for the bliss of the young lovers! The circumspect Principal of the Seminary would not allow them to correspond only through letters written to, and by myself; and if a letter did chance to come, as it did once or twice, with only a short P. S., or a brief message to Charlie, how his roguish eye would sadden, and the laughing corners of his mouth drop into an expression of unutterable disappointment.

Charlie Grey was then seventeen years of age, and of a warm and generous nature, a cultivated and well stored mind, a clear and discerning judgment, all of which noble and manly attributes were often baffled and led far astray by a thoughtless recklessness which characterized his every

action. He was the creature of impulse, ever moving with the spur of the moment. Possessing a bountiful and fun-loving heart, as willing to take a joke as to give one, he was the universal favorite of his many companions. Educated by his father, who was a superior scholar both in ancient and modern literature, and polished by all the accomplishments which fitted him for the most refined class of society, Charlie did not disown the rougher sons of the farmers and mechanics of his native town, but gave them all the hearty shake of his hand, and his faithful friendship.

But music was the idol passion of Charlie's soul. He could perform admirably upon several instruments, but his favorites were the piano and guitar. His voice was one of excelling sweetness and tenderness, and its expression, whether merry or sad, seldom failed to win the heart of the listener.

I fear there is but one descriptive term that will aid me now in bringing forward Charlie Grey in his true character. I must steal the phrase from the idioms of to-day, for it was unknown when it would have befitted my hero. Remember all the noble qualities of the generous-hearted youth, and then add, "but he was very *fast*," and you will understand the character of Charlie Grey.

The great deficiency in his character was a want of principle, and a deep sense of the moral justice due to himself. Dr. Grey was truly afflicted by the waywardness of his son, and used all the means in his power to restrain his youthful dissipation, but his exertions appeared useless, for notwithstanding his serious threats, and his affectionate counsel, Charlie would have a spree now and then—not very often, to be sure, but often enough to awaken the fearful solicitude of his kind and watchful parent.

I must pass briefly over the five years succeeding the death of Mr. McAlpine, and Angebell's departure from home. Daisy Lawn was a scene of the most undisturbed repose

during that period. But few incidents occurred to arouse it from its sweet quietude: among the most important of these were, the visit of Uncle Hugh, and the occasional ones of Angebell and Aunt Fanny. Uncle Hugh remained with me two months, and, as might be expected, our guest transformed Daisy Lawn into a scene of constant merriment. Even the pale thoughtful face of Florence caught his comical look, and startled us with several original jokes. Aunt Betsey was never tired of waiting upon him, nor of indulging him in his home luxury of taking his breakfast in his room, and of smoking in the library.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed, sinking into a chair, the day after his departure, and folding her hands in listless despair, "this house is so lonesome-like; I wish we had some one here to break the calm of it."

"I thought you was very fond of quietude," said I.

"I am—but not of such a hum-drum kind. I wouldn't want the house full of gay folks, but just one or two with a light heart to keep our spirits up."

"I think I know what Aunt Betsey wants," chimed in Florence, who sat bolstered up in her easy-chair with her embroidery frame before her. She had ceased her occupation, and was looking steadily into the face of the complainant.

"What is it?" I asked, while Aunt Betsey gazed abstractedly out of the window.

"Uncle Hugh," was the laconic reply.

I laughed heartily, but Aunt Betsey appeared somewhat disconcerted. She fanned herself with her apron, and after twisting uneasily on her chair and saying, "Well, but," and "no, I mean," several times over, she remembered that she had biscuit in the oven that Maggie never would think of, and she started off with unusual rapidity.

The keen perception of Florence had detected something undreamed of by myself, although, when the suggestion was made, I was ready enough to suspect Aunt Betsey of enter-

taining flattering ideas regarding my eccentric Uncle Hugh. Both parties were what many would call "queer" and "old-fashioned," and I was inclined to think there was a considerable amount of similarity and congeniality existing between them, but then to suppose for one moment that Uncle Hugh would forswear his blissful state of bachelorhood for the more perturbed one of matrimony, would be the height of folly and absurdity.

Would you see my Florence at the age of fifteen: the sweet May-time of maidenhood? You start back, half in pity and half in wonderment, as your eye falls upon the dwarfed and deformed figure seated in a low easy-chair with a book resting on her lap. Her head is large in proportion to her stunted body, her neck slightly distorted, and bears a dreadful scar, while the marked deformity of her back and shoulders cannot escape your observation. You look into her pale, thoughtful face, into the depths of her sad blue eyes, and upon her broad and projecting forehead, and say, "She is not a girl of fifteen, but a woman of riper years." If you overcome her timid and gentle reserve, her conversation will lead you to farther doubts regarding her age. She will speak clearly, and with a deep understanding, intermingled with so much confiding tenderness that she soon reveals the avenues of her heart, and as you gaze upon the thought-radiant brow, so meekly shaded by folds of soft brown hair, or see those liquid eyes illumine at the expression of a soul-cherished idea, you may forget, perchance, the ugliness of the setting, and think only of the radiant, priceless gem.

I clung to the responsible task of educating my child as long as my health would permit, often incurring an increase of bodily suffering for the sake of her mental culture, but my physician having at length forbade my bearing longer such a burden of care, I was compelled to employ a teacher in my place. Florence was then much in advance of most children of her age, as she possessed a natural strength and clearness

of intellect happily accompanied by an extraordinarily retentive memory and love of study. Her preferences were decided, and her aversions hard to be overcome. History, metaphysics, poetry, and the drama, were her delight, but mathematics, in whatever shape presented, were looked upon with distaste and horror. She read almost constantly, and retained a vivid recollection of what she perused. The old Greek historians were her especial favorites, while anything containing *real* poetry was a sure source of exquisite happiness.

Dr. Grey, who had ever taken an unusual interest in Florence, was very anxious to receive her as his pupil; she should come to the parsonage every afternoon and spend several hours, and he would do all in his power to accomplish the noble end that sickness deprived me of attaining. I rejoiced in his generous offer, and so did Florence, and accepted it with sincere gratitude. His terms were moderate, and she was his only pupil.

For about four years she devoted herself to her studies and to the kind and careful guardianship of Dr. Grey, and made a rapid proficiency. She then discontinued them for a time, as Angebell had completed her scholarship and was soon expected home. Nearly two years had elapsed since Florence had seen her sister, and so joyous was her anticipation of their final reunion that she sought to unburthen her mind of even the slightest care that might shadow their happiness. For many months preceding the arrival the chorus of her every thought had been, "when Birdie is home."

As must necessarily be expected, Florence had been thrown much into the society of Charlie Grey during her tuition at the parsonage. He had sometimes, when his father was absent, or otherwise engaged, heard her recitations, and when this happened she was sure to return home later than usual.

"You need not come for Miss Florence to-night," he would often say to Willie Blake, who generally drove her over to

the parsonage. "I am coming that way and will bring her myself."

And then he was sure to stop and finally spend the evening with us. There would be something he was so anxious to read in our company; a story to relate, or perchance a new musical composition of his own which he was desirous of submitting to our criticism; or perhaps some cherished plan which he could not put in operation until it had been spread out in glowing colors before Florence, and she had pronounced her judgment concerning it; in short, he was with us nearly every evening.

During the year previous to Angebell's expected return, the little postscripts had been few and far between, and those were deprived of the ardent sincerity which once characterized them.

This was the fault of Birdie. Charlie had remained faithful to his childish preference, until repeated neglect dampened his ardor. He seldom spoke of his fickle love, but whenever her name was mentioned it was in vain for him to endeavor to conceal his interest.

I had looked upon the intimacy existing between Charlie and Florence as a confidential friendship, equally so considered by both. Charlie possessed a mind of refinement and cultivation, and it was natural for him to seek the companionship of one with tastes and feelings congenial with his own. The precocity of Florence had overthrown the wide difference in their ages, and she swayed him with a powerful influence; indeed she appeared to be the older of the two.

I had thought myself well acquainted with every treasured secret of my daughter, and the sweet confidence she had always given me, made me loth to believe that her heart had yet an inner chamber, the most sacred of all, from which I was excluded. But there are some things so closely knitted with the tender fibres of our souls that to bring them forth to the sight of the one we love the best, must break the

binding tendrils and cause us an agony intense ; and so we clasp them closer and closer, and hope for none to see them but our Maker.

Angebell had sent us a miniature likeness of herself, which reached Daisy Lawn a few weeks previous to her arrival. It was an excellent picture, although it plainly revealed the changes time had made, and led me to fear, by the half scornful smile of her beautiful face, the extravagant elegance of her dress, and the fashionable affectation that clearly betrayed itself, that she would be but illy satisfied with the calm repose of Daisy Lawn. It was very strange that I forgot to show it to Charlie, who came in the evening after its reception ; and although it did occur to the mind of Florence, she neglected doing so, thinking I had some reasonable excuse for withholding it.

The miniature had been laid upon the cabinet. I sat knitting in a retired corner of the apartment, my busy thoughts precluding me from any interest in the passing conversation. Florence sat in her low chair, her head leaning on her hand, listening to Charlie, who sat upon an ottoman beside her. The topic they were discussing occasioned him to step to the cabinet for a book of prints, and it was there the miniature chanced to be.

"What is this?" asked he, holding it up in his hand ; "shall I presume to open it?"

"Certainly," I replied, with an apology for my forgetfulness.

He started, and turned pale when he beheld the well-known features ; but conscious of the emotion he betrayed, he changed his position, so that we could not see his face, and stood for some time silently gazing upon the beautiful type.

Casting a careless glance toward Florence, I was startled by her unusual appearance. Her head was thrown back, her countenance white as marble, and expressive of intense agony, while her eyes were piercingly fixed upon Charlie Grey.

Then tightly closing her eyes, her lips moved slowly, and her face gradually assumed its former serenity. It was the struggle and victory of a moment, the witnessing of which cast a fearful light upon my hitherto blinded vision.

"It is an excellent likeness, and a beautiful picture," said Charlie, with affected carelessness, replacing the miniature and returning with the book of prints to the side of Florence.

During the remainder of the evening she was borne down by a depression of spirits which she vainly endeavored to conceal. Charlie did not stay as late as usual, but after singing a very romantic song of farewell, took his departure. I observed that he did not whistle when he walked down the avenue, as he usually did, and that old Pruno, who lay upon the porch, was denied his friendly caress. Florence retired immediately to her chamber with the burning secret she thought all her own.

"Oh ! must a sorrow like this come upon her?" I murmured, as I lay upon my restless pillow. "Must her deep unchanging love fasten upon one who will not return her devotion ? It is already so, and the frost is falling which will make her tender heart a wintry waste. My poor Florence ! My unfortunate one ! must the richness and verdure of your inward life be stunted and deformed ?"

I heard a slight movement in her chamber ; its window could be seen from my balcony, so arising and throwing a shawl around me, I stepped out upon the leafy enclosure. It was a warm and balmy night in June, and the moon shone clear and bright. The window of the "rose chamber" was thrown open, and beneath the soft shadow of the hanging roses, which clung about it like gentle guardians, I beheld Florence sitting engaged in writing. One hand supported her head, while the other moved slowly across the paper. Often she paused, and closing her eyes, remained for some time calm and motionless, while the snowy paleness of her face,

and the sad expression that rested upon it, gave her a strange and unearthly appearance.

"I will not rob her thus," I said, turning from the balcony, and going to my bed; "I am gaining her secret without her confidence. I will patiently wait my time, for I know my child too well to suppose that she will conceal so bitter a grief from her mother's sympathy." Then, with a heartfelt prayer to the God of the fatherless and the widow, I laid down upon my pillow, but only to drench it with my tears.

CHAPTER VII.

O! why should woman love;
Wasting her dearest feelings, till health, hope,
Happiness, are but the things of which henceforth
She'll only know the name? Her heart is scar'd:
A sweet light has been thrown upon its life,
To make its darkness the more terrible.

L. E. LONDON.

THE next morning Florence appeared unusually depressed, and I discovered an effort on her part to conceal her feelings from me. She seemed conscious of my newly awakened solicitude, and secretly endeavored to arrest it. She sat with me most of the forenoon, silently engaged with her sewing, and several times when my gaze was fastened intently upon her, as it would be involuntarily, she betrayed an immediate consciousness of my observation, and lifted her sad eyes to mine, with an expression of such mournful tenderness and confiding affection, that I felt rebuked for attempting to enter, unguided by herself, the sacred chambers of her pure young heart.

But I missed her from the house soon after dinner, and as the afternoon wore away, and her little red cushioned chair remained unoccupied, and the embroidery, vowed to be finished by the setting of that day's sun, was lying untouched beside it, I concluded that something of importance must have engaged her time and attention.

"Where is Florence?" I asked of Maggie, who had just come in from the garden.

"Out under the elms, with her big black book," replied the girl.

"Is there any one with her?"

"Nobody but old Pruno, who is fast asleep, and taking as much comfort as she is."

The "big black book," as Maggie and Aunt Betsey always called the favorite and inseparable companion of Florence, was a large and choice selection from the German poets. She translated with ease, and had applied herself with much labor and diligence to acquire that valuable portion of her scholarship; but Uncle Hugh always accused her of reading by pure witchcraft, whenever he found her with that volume in her hands.

I was lonely and depressed, and grieved for the confidence of my child, so I put on my bonnet and started for the elms.

This favorite retreat of Florence was indeed as lovely and secluded a spot as any ardent admirer of nature could desire. Near to the softly murmuring Weimar, and serenely shaded from the few cottages that peeped here and there out from the distant orchards, by the beautiful elms—the graceful sentinels of the place—the thick clumps of elder bushes, and the willows bathing their long tresses in the kissing waters, it had ever been chosen by us as a spot sacred to our retirement, and hallowed by some of the dearest associations of our lives. It was but a short distance from Daisy Lawn, and Florence could reach it without assistance or weariness. Willie Blake, whose tasteful ingenuity had contrived many an appropriate ornament for our garden and sylvan nooks, had constructed there a rustic seat and table for our pleasure and convenience.

Maggie had told me right; for as soon as I parted aside the luxuriant shrubbery, I beheld my daughter bending over "the big black book," and old Pruno, with the most contented air in the world, lying close by her side. So enrapt

was she in her perusal that she was not aware of my approach until my voice had broken the silence.

"So you have concluded to break your vow, have you?" said I, startling her somewhat, and sitting down beside her.

"What vow?" she asked, folding her hands upon the book and looking abstractedly into my face.

"The one you made so solemnly this morning, and that was to be performed, notwithstanding the prognostications of Aunt Betsey, and my own avowed misgivings."

"I have forgotten it," she replied, smiling in her sincerity.

"A vow so quickly forgotten must have been hollow enough."

She thought a moment and then laughingly exclaimed, "Oh yes, the embroidery!" and observing the shadows which stretched nearly across the river, she added: "Well, it must be broken, for it is now too late to redeem it. I did not think I had been here so long: that sweet poem has perjured me completely," and she fell to dreaming again.

"What is the poem?" I asked, looking down upon the open page, but the German stared blankly in my face, and Florence smiling as she always did when I peered so earnestly within her "big black book," replied:

"I wish you could understand the original. It will be cold and dead in translation I fear, but I will render it as well as I can."

Knowing as I did the state of her mind, I was led to anticipate the nature of the poem which had interested her so deeply. Nor was I disappointed. Teeming with poetic fervor, and revealing an acquaintance with the inner depths and tender fibres of the human heart, it rehearsed the innocent and blissful love of two souls whom adversity could not separate, but only bind in a dearer union; and the affection ever clinging and hoping—that sacred attribute making us like unto the angels about our Father—was vividly por-

trayed, and the keen anguish which must ensue when this life fountain is poisoned or embittered.

During the reading of the poem, her voice had sometimes trembled, and she had been obliged to brush away the tears that obscured the page. When she had finished it, the timid glance she gave me betrayed her fears that she had by her weakness revealed her secret, but discovering nought to justify her misgivings, her large eyes grew lustrous, and a glow, unnatural for one so pale, burned upon her cheeks.

"It is beautiful to love!" she rapturously exclaimed; "to love as the angels do, merely for the sweet sake of loving; to let the soul expand, unfettered by selfishness, ambition or grief; to bind the human heart to a thing human, yet nearest to God of all his marvellous works; to cling to it though its coldness chill you, and to adore it though it grant no blessing. That is like 'our Father,' whose love knoweth no discouragement, and no end."

She paused for my answer, but I gave none, and she continued, her face growing more radiant as she spake:

"There is bliss in loving one who gives us true devotion in return—one who may fold us to the breast and say, with fervid sincerity, I alone am thine, and thou alone art mine. They tell me that those are the sweetest words fond hearts can breathe to one another; that heaven is all around when such are whispered. I know it must be true, although my own experience never has, and never may testify to it; and I can but think the love that falls in purity upon its object, and clings to it though it be cold and lifeless as marble to its passion, has so much angel-hood in its fidelity, and such a heaven-reaching hope, that it is indeed a love the soul may be proud to cherish."

"She is revealing her heart to me unawares," thought I, and then remarked:

"But if a gentle trusting heart is once shattered and broken by a misplaced affection; if every window of hope

is so clouded that the sun can but dimly break through; if faith falls in the dust and stifles her prayers with wailing, will you call the love that clings about the ruin beautiful to witness?"

"Yes, oh yes," she replied, with a sad intonation, and shaking her head slowly. "Love is always beautiful: it is God. The apple boughs are sometimes so heavily laden that they break and fall, yet we despise not the fruit nor reproach the bough, but say it was not strong enough to bear so much! And when a love is so firm that pride may not combat it, nor any of the grosser attributes of the heart overpower it; when the heavenly so triumphs over the earthly that it sinks and acknowledges love its master and can not rebel, is it not then beautiful?"

"A heart that loves merely for the sake of being loved in return is earthly, is selfish. That love which springs spontaneously from the soul pure and without a price, because it is priceless, for ever loving its idol because it has *once* loved it, is heavenly, is Christ-like, yes, very Christ-like, for did he not love, and does he not still love those by whom he was despised and rejected?"

I was really grieved that our conference was then interrupted. Dash, Charlie Grey's favorite dog, at that moment came bounding through the bushes and frisked before us, heralding the approach of his master.

"Hurrah! wood nymphs!" exclaimed Charlie, showing his good-natured face: "Have I rights admitting me to your bower?"

"Very fairy-like nymphs, indeed," responded Florence, ironically: "a gray-haired invalid woman, and a hunch-backed girl. Really, Professor Grey, your compliments are to be appreciated!"

Charlie laughed, and begged us not to exorcise him completely until he had presented that which he fervently hoped would reinstate him in our favor. He then drew a letter

from his pocket, which he handed to me, saying that Willie Blake had taken it from the office an hour before and entrusted him to deliver it to me.

It was from Angebell, as I expected, and after hastily glancing over its contents, I read it aloud. It was as follows:

"Well, my dear mother, you may tell good Aunt Betsey to reserve a plentiful shower of tears against the 22nd inst., for on that day I flatter myself the pleasure of seeing Daisy Lawn. Aunt Fanny cannot accompany me, as it is impossible for her to leave home at that time, but I have invited Miss Anna Clayton, my confidential chum at school, to spend the vacation with me. She is a charming girl, just that style of amiability and gentleness which I am sure you and Florence will fall in love with, and Aunt Betsey delight to make comfortable. Let particular preparations be made for my friend, for she is of a wealthy and aristocratic family residing in Philadelphia, and is accustomed to every luxury that wealth can afford. See that the piano is in good tune; and if it were a thing possible I would entreat you to remove that terribly old-fashioned clock in the dining room, and replace it by one of more modern style. But I am in great haste this morning and will not particularize. I have implicit trust in your taste and forethought.

"I am really glad that I am coming home, I am so tired of these hot dusty streets and long piles of brick. Anna and I are anticipating all the *rural* felicities ever allotted to mortals; new milk when we want it, and plenty of Aunt Betsey's sweet home-made bread. Enclosed you will find a receipt for making a very rich and elegant cake which I wish to have for supper the evening of our arrival; also one for a dessert which we must have for dinner the day after.

"How is Florence? Such beautiful letters as she does write me! I always read them to all my friends, and Aunt Fanny makes a point of showing them to Dr. Clyde, an old bachelor

friend of hers; he is a man of talent, and very deeply interested in my unfortunate sister, and says he thinks her remarkably gifted. I wish Florence would braid her hair in the style of the fashion-plate which she will find in the magazine I last sent her. She looks like a little Methodist with it drawn back behind her ears, as she used to wear it. Can't you overcome her conservatism in that respect?

"And where is Charlie Grey, my old beau, my devoted lover? If he is in the land of the living try to have him on hand against our arrival, for I am half crazy to see what he looks like now since he has got to be a man. He must be over twenty by this time, and quite a musician, if his love of music was less fickle than that for a wild Birdie that once flew around Daisy Lawn.

"Now remember, on the afternoon of the 22nd, Anna and I will be with you. Aunt Fanny, who is unfortunately waiting for me to take a ride with her, sends much love to you all. Why should I write more, when I shall see you in so short a time?

"Ever your

BIRDIE."

There was a long stillness after I had finished reading the letter. Charlie stood absently gazing upon the ground, while the half-averted face of Florence revealed her painful emotion. Her breast heaved tumultuously, and tears were stealing from beneath her drooping eyelids, when the deep silence aroused her, and fearing the confession her weeping might make, she turned her face entirely away. There was a visible nerving of her strength, and when she again looked upon me, it was with her usual sweet, placid smile.

"Well, Charlie," said I, awakening him from his reverie, "will you grant Birdie's most urgent request?"

"Most certainly," replied he, laughing, as he whipped off the leaves from the maples with his walking-stick; "how could I refuse one so flattering?" Then turning to Florence,

who was winding a willow twig around her summer hat merely because she had nothing else to do, and was desirous of something to divert the painful tenor of her thoughts, he added, laying his hand upon her head:

"And what says our book-worm to the stringent laws that are to enforce ornamental braids upon her?"

"She declares them to be unconstitutional," replied Florence, with a slight discomposure.

"An alarming symptom of your conservatism," responded Charlie, shaking his head with mock seriousness.

"Yet cannot be helped for all that," and Florence glided from beneath his hand, and after putting on her hat, picked up her book and proposed our return to the house, as it was already past tea-time, and Aunt Betsey was doubtless in a fever of impatience, occasioned by our long absence.

Charlie declined our invitation to return with us, assuring us that a friend at the village was waiting to meet him, so bidding us good-bye, and promising to come to Daisy Lawn the evening after Birdie's return, bringing his guitar, as a matter of course, he left us, and Florence and I walked on in silence toward the house.

On the garden walk we met Aunt Betsey, who had come out in search of us.

"Have you got a letter?" exclaimed she the moment her eyes fell upon us. She had been very confident all day that we should hear from Angebell that night. I held the letter toward her, and she seized it.

"You must not cry now, auntie," interposed Florence; "Birdie wants you to reserve all your tears until she gets home;" but Betsey did not hear her, for, seating herself immediately on the green sward, she wept faster than she read.

"Ah! indeed," said Betsey, when she joined us at the supper table, "I am almost afraid that the same dear Birdie who went away from here long years ago, is not coming back to us again. I am afraid she's got to be fashion-like, and will

find nothing good enough in the house. But if I ever did try to give comfort to that darling child, I'll do it now; she shall have everything nice for her company, and we'll send for the fixings for that cake to-night. Maggie is going to the village."

Florence and I were unusually silent, while Aunt Betsey talked briskly of the preparations she was determined to make on the morrow; the cleaning that Maggie must do, and the baking and setting of things to rights that she must herself superintend. The parlor chamber, although in perfect order, should undergo one of her fearful revolutions. The window-curtains should be washed again, and the dimity bed drapery should be rendered a more immaculate white. Aunt Betsey was never so completely enthroned within her chosen sphere as when, upon a like occasion, she could review all the pressing responsibilities devolving upon her, and declare that she had "everything in the world to do."

"But really you don't think of taking down the old clock, do you?" asked she, directing our attention to the faithful monitor whose old familiar face ever beamed with rich memories to me, while the slow tones of its sonorous and meditative voice never failed to thrill my being with whispers of days agone.

I looked up to our household friend, and Florence did the same. "Take down the old clock?" I ejaculated, and the tears would come to my eyes, at the thought of such a sacrifice. "I would part with any other piece of furniture in the house in preference to that."

"It would seem wicked-like enough," replied she. "I remember the day that Mr. McAlpine brought it home. Let me see," and she rubbed her forehead, as was her custom when recollecting old dates; "it was just twenty years ago last spring; one year before Birdie was born, and one year after they came here to Daisy Lawn. I know that Mrs. McAlpine never did like that picture on the front of it, though. She said it made her think of bar-rooms and packet-boats,

where 'Washington crossing the Delaware' was always the first thing to be seen."

"Oh, I love that old picture," cried Florence, her eyes beaming with admiration at the more patriotic than beautiful illustration. "I always remember, when I look at it, how father used to lift me up on his shoulder and tell me what a great and good man Washington was, and how much his poor brave soldiers endured for the sake of liberty. He told me too that his father was with the gallant General that very night, and I used to think then, that the noble-looking soldier with the gay coat, standing beside Washington, was no other than grandfather himself. I think Birdie must be as proud of the old clock as I am."

"I cannot believe that she would wish to have it removed any more than we do," I remarked, "if she thinks about it for a moment. I wonder if she has forgotten the morning that her father tried to teach her to tell the time of day. It was so hard to convince her that unless the clock was striking it was at any time at all. 'It don't *say* so,' she would interdict, when he told her it was a quarter or half-past the hour."

"We will make the cake and dessert, and put the house in prim order, but then we will have our own way about some things after all," interposed Aunt Betsey, as we arose from the table; and then shaking her head rather demurely, added, "If all of the old-fashioned things are to be disposed of, I suppose I shall be set aside, unless I change my muslin border cap for one of ribbons and laces; but Aunt Betsey, with all her folly, will never do a thing so foolish-like as that; no, not even for little Birdie, the poor dear child."

"Only think how strangely Aunt Betsey and I would look if our stubborn conservatism were overcome," said Florence, smiling at the supposition. "Aunt Betsey adorned with a fancy cap like Aunt Fanny's, and I with my hair elaborately plaited: only think of it!" And she appealed to Aunt

Betsey, who was surveying her snowy head-gear in the glass with evident satisfaction.

"It would never do, never do," was the emphatic reply; "for I tell you what it is, darling, you and I were never made for beauties; never in all the world."

That was a satisfactory conclusion to the whole matter in Aunt Betsey's mind, and was vouched with a sincere solemnity, which was intended to have made a serious impression.

I readily discovered, from the increased depression which Florence betrayed after the reception of Angebell's letter, and the painful emotions she constantly endeavored to conceal whenever it was mentioned, that it had inflicted a wound in her sensitive nature. I sincerely regretted the unguarded manner in which Angebell had spoken of her sister, yet willingly attributed it to thoughtlessness rather than want of feeling.

I wondered Florence did not confide her grief to me, asking my sympathy and consolation, as she had before been accustomed to do whenever a shadow, no matter how trivial, fell upon her.

"She is learning to endure in secret," I thought to myself: "she thinks to make her young heart the stronger, by schooling it to bear its bitter burdens alone; and that the soul fighting its own battles, is more heroic than the one depending upon the kindly aid of others. She would be valiant in her sorrow, and is so confident of her strength, that even her mother is forbidden to enlist in her cause. My poor child is weak—she must lean close upon a protecting heart, and shall I murmur if she chooses God instead of me?"

The next day Florence was alone most of the time. She did not bring her sewing or reading into the library and sit with me, as was her usual custom, but she was wandering through the garden, was secluded in the "rose chamber." About the middle of the afternoon, I espied her sitting upon the porch, listlessly watching Willie Blake, as he trimmed

the plants. I went out to her and proposed taking a ride, and to call at Susan's cottage in the meanwhile.

"Oh do!" importuned Willie, before Florence made a reply; "mother is really down-hearted about something, I hardly know what, and was all day yesterday wishing that she could see you."

"I do want to see Susan and Lucy very much," said Florence.

"Well then, I'll go and bring up the ponies;" and Willie threw down his knife, and was off for the stables in no time.

In a very few moments the carriage was at the door, and Willie, with his good-natured smile, assisting Florence into it. There was no one that could wait upon my helpless child with more tenderness and delicacy than Willie Blake.

We drove directly to Susan's, preferring to make our call first, and take our leisure ride afterward. As we drew near the cottage, we heard the cheerful voice of Lucy Dean carolling, as she went about her work. Lucy was a niece of Aunt Betsey's, and a younger sister of Sarah, whom Susan had adopted immediately after the death of her husband. Sarah had been as a kind and faithful daughter to her humble benefactor, but having married, she had gone to reside in a distant village, and Lucy had taken her place. Susan had learned to love her dearly, and called her her youngest child.

Of a warm and generous nature, and a pure confiding heart, unskilled in "book learning," for which she never cared a trifle, but always smiling and ever happy, she cast a flood of gladness wherever her footsteps went. She was as handsome as rural lassies can be, and who has redder cheeks or brighter eyes than they? She was then about nineteen, and the village gossips said that a love match was brewing betwixt her and Willie Blake. I half suspected the truth of the story, for Willie would blush so deeply whenever he had occasion to speak of her, and I had seen her rosy cheek assume a deeper hue when he approached her side.

Lucy heard the carriage stop, and came bounding out to meet us. She assisted me to alight, and then lifting up Florence as if she had been a wee child, carried her in her arms to the house. Florence remonstrated, and so did I, but all to no purpose; Lucy playfully tossed her in her robust arms, and declared she was light as a feather.

If Susan had been sad, as Willie told us, we found her looking happy enough when we entered the cottage. She sat as usual in her little low easy chair, her crutches laying beside her, and her sewing on her lap.

"I am so glad you have come," said she, reaching out her hand, and clasping mine with an earnest pressure; "I have been lonely to-day, and longing so much to see you. Lucy has sung all the merry songs she ever heard, and has chattered as wildly as she could, but there has been a burden on my heart; I hardly know what it is, only a deep sadness that would not let me smile until now. But I feel much more cheerful since you have come, so you must sit down close beside me, and talk to me all you can, and let me say just what I please or happen to, and perhaps I shall feel relieved of my depression."

Susan had ever made a confidant of me, and it was very evident that something was preying upon her mind, which she desired to impart to me, so after showing her our last letter from Angebell, which she said made her feel half sorry and half glad, Florence went out in the garden with Lucy, and we were left alone.

"I want to speak to you about Willie," said she, leaning forward, and laying her thin hand upon my shoulder, while her large blue eyes beamed with all the interest that can live in a mother's heart. "I am anxious to do something for his welfare; something that will assist him in attaining that situation in life which he has so long been striving for."

"This is a subject of deep interest to me also," I replied; "I am glad of the opportunity to converse freely with you

upon it, and doubt not your desires are the same as my own."

The tears came to her eyes, and her lip quivered as she proceeded:

"I can never express my gratitude toward Mr. McAlpine and you, for the undeserved kindness you have so freely bestowed upon Willie and me; yet, notwithstanding all you have done, and are constantly doing for my son, I am discontented and unwilling that he should remain longer in your employ."

"So am I," I replied, smiling in her tearful face, and her countenance lighted up.

"You are not blind then," she continued, with more vivacity, "to the capabilities that Willie does possess of honoring a profession? It has been his long-cherished dream to study law; and oh how thankfully would I have gratified it, had it been in my power. He told me last night that he had means sufficient to take him to New York and to board him for a short time, in case he should not find immediate employment in some law office. He is hopeful, and quite confident of success, and only awaits my consent to take his departure. I feel unable to decide without your advice in the matter."

I paused to complete a plan which seemed to me a plausible one, and that might realize the bright hopes of Willie and his fond mother.

"Let me first write to my Uncle Hugh," I said; "he has a large circle of friends in New York and Boston, and among them he ranks many who are eminent in the profession that Willie has chosen. His influence may prove of vast importance, and I can not think he will refuse it, after the deep interest he manifested in Willie's welfare, during his visit with us."

"Do you really think he will help him?" she exclaimed, her eyes brightening with her hopes; "how glad Willie will be when I tell him of this to-night. He was so dejected when he talked to me about it, and yet he would not despair.

Besides, you know"—she told it in a whisper—"he is in love with Lucy, and knows very well that he cannot marry her until he has the means of providing for her. I know that she loves him as fondly as he does her, and that she will make him a precious wife."

"Are they really betrothed then?" I enquired.

"Yes, I suppose they are," she answered. "Willie has never told me definitely: there is little need of that, for I am not blind."

I was expressing the joy that this piece of pleasant but anticipated information gave me, when Lucy and Florence entered. We remained a short time after; when promising to drive around again on the morrow, if nothing unseen prevented, we rode away from the cottage with the sweet influence upon our hearts that Susan's presence ever shed.

"Let's drive through the maple woods, and along the river road," suggested Florence, "and then we shall see the sun set behind the hills."

I turned the ponies into the thickly-shaded lane, and the serene retirement of the spot seemed to cast an influence even upon them, for their brisk trot soon subsided into a slow meditative walk. As we rode thus leisurely along, Florence sat silent by my side, and appeared lost in deep thought. Sometimes she would lift her eyes suddenly and look earnestly into my face, as if yearning to reveal her spirit's burden, but without having spoken a word would turn away, and relapse into her apparent sad reverie.

"Florence," said I, after some moments' hesitation as to the course I should pursue, "what is it you are longing so to tell me?"

She looked up with a sweet sad smile, her whole soul beaming in her eyes; yet she did not speak; her lips trembled but gave forth no sound.

"Is it a sorrow or a joy that my darling bears as a secret?"

I asked, drawing her close to my side. "Is it something too sacred for any but God to know?"

"Oh no, oh no, mother," she replied, and her voice faltered as she spake, "but God can read my heart, and know all that I sometimes think will ever remain unspoken. You can only read my face, unable to comprehend why there is sunshine or shadows upon it. I do wish you could look upon my soul, and read as God does, then I should not have to struggle to frame weak words to express vast and unspeakable things."

"My dear child!" was all I could utter: my heart was too full to say more.

"It is a burden," she continued, after a moment's pause, "yet like a steel armor that shall protect and make me strong. It is a hope, and what soul is mighty that has not one to lean upon? Yet it is an earthly hope, but planted I trust in the purest garden spot of my soul, with a fervent prayer that it may climb to heaven."

"You do not answer me," she said, after looking earnestly into my face, and gathering nothing but a burning tear for her cheek; "you can say nothing until I reveal my secret—the hope that I so wildly cherish. If I tell you, my mother, that it is but a yearning and trust to speak these unspoken things which wrestle so fearfully in my heart, thus unlocking other soul-chambers than my own, casting a light upon their mysteries—will you comprehend my meaning?"

"Yes, I think so: you intend devoting your time and energies to authorship. Am I right?"

"Yes," was her only reply, uttered with such a calm and firm intonation that it revealed the depths from which her purpose sprang.

"And I shall hope with you, my daughter, with scarcely a fear of disappointment, for I know your capabilities and the sad experience which will but assist in empowering your efforts."

"And yet, my mother," she replied with a melting tenderness of tone, "how happy must they be whose hearts can rest with love within and around them, undisturbed by the strife of an unsatisfied ambition or a yearning that knows no rest—a tempest that can never hear the command, 'Peace be still.' Oh, it were heaven-like I think!"

"Oh no, not so perfect as that; every path has its thorns."

"I know it," she answered, "but we do not feel their sharpness so much when a kind hand clasps our own, and a dear voice bids us be of good cheer."

"The loved one may leave us; death may call him away when our path is roughest, and the sky more threatening than ever before."

"Oh, yes," she continued with enthusiasm, "but then his face would turn toward us from the golden gates, and its radiance would fall upon our pathway; and we would see the hand reached out waiting to clasp our own again. 'Tis beautiful to know that a kindred spirit will give us heavenly welcome; I sometimes think it would be sweeter than the embrace of the angels."

"But not sweeter than the words of the 'Father' to one who had striven bravely below to accomplish the God-given task—'Well done good and faithful servant.'"

We were proceeding slowly along by the river side, thinking ourselves alone with nature, when we were startled by the "hurrah!" of Charlie Grey, and soon that young gentleman made his appearance at the side of the carriage. He was returning 'cross lots from the village, and on his way to Daisy Lawn.

"Just in time," said he, jumping into the carriage, and taking the reins from my hands, "just in time to secure for yourselves a coachman. Go on talking just as you were when I had the impertinence to interrupt you. Don't mind me, but proceed as if I was out of the question. I am quite sure that Florence was giving a sermon, and one just of the

style I particularly admire: right to the point, but so bewitchingly tender that no one could think of spoiling its effect by putting it in practice. Come, go on with your '*tenthly*'—you had got to that I imagine."

"We had finished our sermon," replied Florence, "and now call upon you for a few concluding remarks."

"I'd rather close by singing," he replied, and thereupon struck up a lively air, at which the ponies pricked up their ears, quickened their pace, and soon brought us to the avenue gate of Daisy Lawn.

CHAPTER VIII.

And if she met him, tho' she smiled no more,
 She look'd a sadness sweeter than her smile,
 As if her heart had deeper thoughts in store,
 She must not own, but cherish'd more the while.

BYRON.

"THERE they come!" burst from the lips of Florence, Aunt Betsey, Maggie, and myself, as we stood waiting upon the porch, and saw a carriage drive into the avenue; and we were soon assured by the sight of a beautiful joyous face that was anxiously looking out, that our expected Birdie had at last got home.

We hastened to the door of the vehicle, Aunt Betsey wringing her hands, and making every demonstration of tearful joy.

Birdie sprang to my embrace, and clasping her arms about my neck, covered my face with tears and kisses.

"Poor darling!" she exclaimed, as she returned the affectionate greeting of Florence. But Aunt Betsey could wait no longer, and before Angebell was hardly prepared for so vigorous an attack, she was locked to the warm heart of the faithful old nurse.

A modest blue-eyed girl had alighted from the carriage, and stood silently participating in the joy of our happy meeting. Without waiting for an introduction, I welcomed her to our rural home, and the bewitching smile that accompanied her grateful reply made its path of sunlight to my breast.

"This is Florence," said Birdie, who, after the delirium of her joy had somewhat subsided, remembered the presence of her friend, and politely introduced her to us all; "she will talk poetry to you, and steal your heart before you know it."

Florence smiled through her blushes, and timidly drew back, but Anna stepped towards her, and bending down, kissed her forehead, saying in a soft tremulous voice, "'Tis given without theft."

"And this is Aunt Betsey," continued the chattering Birdie, released from her clasping arms; "she will give us bread and milk six times a day if we want it, mend all our romping dresses, love us almost to death, spoil us entirely, and, in short, make us perfectly happy."

Anna tried to reply, but the enthusiasm of Angebell overwhelmed her. Pulling her toward the parlor, she continued, "And there is the 'dear Adel' that Aunt Fanny talks about from morning until noon, and from noon until night, and dreams of all the night long, I believe. You remember she commended it to your adoration, so now fall down and worship if you would secure a place of safety in her affections."

Anna smiled faintly at her friend's vivacity, and remarked that she did not wonder that so beautiful a portrait, beside being that of one so very dear, was highly regarded by Mrs. Lawrence.

"That is all well enough in its place," replied Birdie, "but one gets tired of a lamenting eulogy which always gives an expectation of its being continued on the morrow." Then looking about the room, resting her eyes first upon one familiar object, and then upon another, she exclaimed—

"How natural and comfortable it does look here; but dreadfully old-fashioned after all. I suppose Charlie Grey has charmed that old piano completely, so that it will emit nothing but the most bewitching sounds;" and pulling off her gloves, and throwing her hat and scarf upon the sofa, she

seated herself at the instrument, and dashed off a little waltz that her nimble fingers had played long ago.

"I must allow my old piano to give me an early welcome," said she, turning round with a half apology to Anna, who, seated beside me, was giving a pleasant account of their journey; "it speaks as familiarly as any voice about the old homestead."

"Have you forgotten 'Bonny Doon?'" inquired Florence. That was the favorite air of Mr. McAlpine, and Angebell used to play it at his request.

"Yes, I presume so, unless this is it," she replied, and the sad pleasing melody floated through the apartment, burdened with hallowed associations that crept like tearful angels about my heart. I closed my eyes, and memory led me softly back over the lapse of weary years, and I sat as then in that very room, with a manly form beside me, in the old easy chair, and a little pale faced child was nestled in his breast. I met the tender glance of his mild eyes and felt their penetration in my soul. He smiled an unspoken bliss upon me, and my heart beat faster. He moved his lips to speak—but, alas! for dreaming! The music ceased, and I looked toward the piano and the merry little girl had faded with my dream, and I was again a lonely widow.

"There, Florence, did that really please you?" asked Birdie, when she had ended the performance. "I am at a loss to know how you can like such old-fashioned hum-drum airs. Why, I used to play that ten years ago, and should have forgotten it entirely, had not Aunt Fanny, who has rather an antiquated taste, called for it occasionally." Leaving the instrument, she walked restlessly about the room, taking up books and ornaments, and remarking upon them, as strangers or old friends, and finally exclaimed:

"I shall not be satisfied until I have explored every nook and corner of the old house—been in the orchard, meadow,

garden and all. Come, Anna, you must compassionate my case, and take with me an immediate survey."

Anna declared that nothing could please her better, if it was her friend's desire; then addressing Florence, who stood beside her, said, "I fear you will not be able to join us."

"Oh, mercy, no!" exclaimed Angebell, "unless we consent to make dromedaries of ourselves, and carry her a good part of the time. I want to see the rose chamber, the Alladin's palace of my younger days," and taking her friend by the hand, who cast a sympathising glance upon Florence, whose quivering lip and flushed cheek revealed her pain, she led her into the apartment which had been so long occupied by Florence alone, and from whence their conversation was easily heard in the parlor.

"Oh, this is delightful!" exclaimed Anna. "Only look through this window! Such a beautiful landscape! Rather more enchanting than brick walls, I confess."

"Here is the doll's house that Florence and I used to have when we were children," said Birdie, pointing to the relic so carefully preserved. "And, oh! if here ain't 'Dolly Fisher,' in her pink silk, and calico apron, and here's Lady Jane, too, in her immaculate muslin! Lady Jane used to be my protégée, and Dolly was the classical pupil of Florence."

"This must be Florence's room, I judge, from its library," remarked Anna.

"Yes, this is her sanctum sanctorum, I suppose. Don't let your eyes water for any of those books, for they are but Dead Sea apples after all—Latin, German, French, and even Chinese for all I know; and what is in English, I dare say, is either metaphysics, history, or poetry. And let me tell you, to begin with, if you think of entombing yourself in here during your stay with me, I withdraw my companionship at once, and altogether."

"Ah, indeed," was the good-natured reply; "but surely I could never get lonely with your sweet sister Florence."

"Well, really," said Birdie, in a tone of surprise, "have you then taken such a fancy to that poor child? I am glad if you have, for I was very fearful she would be disagreeable to you. She is so painful to look at."

"Oh no, I don't think so," said Anna with emphasis; "she has certainly the most interesting face I ever beheld."

"She was very beautiful when a child; but now she is so dreadfully unfortunate."

"No wonder that you get beautiful letters, if they are written in such delightful quarters," Anna continued, gazing about the room. "Why, I believe I could frighten Madam Gearau with an original composition if I had this for my study."

"Aha!" exclaimed Birdie. "Well, sit down in that inviting chair of Florence's, some day, and perhaps you may rival one of her sweet little poems. She shall read some of them to you while you are here. She has nothing else to think of, you know—no society, no amusements—and so she writes poetry sometimes. Poor child!"

Florence could not but hear their conversation, and though it betrayed a heartlessness in her sister which wounded her afresh, yet she could not help smiling occasionally, particularly at the last remark concerning her.

We were greatly disappointed in the character and appearance of our guest, although agreeably so. We had imagined Anna Clayton to be more like Angebell, and could hardly believe that the gentle young girl, whose soft blue eyes spake such a wealth of true affection, and whose lips parted but for the utterance of kind words, could be the chosen friend and associate of our Birdie; yet so it often is, that natures widely different cling together like the wild grape and towering tree.

Miss Clayton did not even appear to be a votary of fashion, and in that respect she differed widely from Angebell, who, in accordance with my expectations, was dressed in the latest style, and without regard to expense. In choosing a

light and costly silk, a delicate scarf, and a lace hat, for her travelling costume, she had shown less judgment and good taste than Anna, who was more modestly and becomingly attired in a dress of plain merino, and a neat little straw hat with trimmings of blue, that rivalled most bewitchingly the hue of her sparkling eyes.

Florence was delighted with the appearance and character of our guest, and could not refrain from expressing to me her sincere encomiums.

"I am so glad that she can love me as well as Birdie," she said, "for now I shall be much happier than I expected. I was afraid that Birdie's chosen friend would be less kind and gentle than this sweet Anna Clayton. Why, I have learned to love her name already, and have as yet hardly seen her. It must make her happy that strangers can love her so early."

"Where are the creatures?" inquired Aunt Betsey, coming into the parlor, her face bright with an increased stock of good humor. "Tea is all ready now, and it would be a dreadful thing to have the biscuits get cold." Hearing Birdie's clear ringing laugh from the garden, she started from the room, saying, she had brought that poor child to her supper before then, and saw plainly she must do it again.

She returned playfully leading one by each hand, listening to the merry account of the romp they had taken, with the most extreme satisfaction.

"Just look at this!" exclaimed Birdie, holding out a flounce she had torn badly in climbing over a fence. "Wouldn't that be a good text for Aunt Fanny to preach from? But I know that my Aunt Betsey thinks of doing nothing more or less for her unfortunate child than mending it so nicely that the most observing eye could never spy it out!"

"Of course I will mend it," was Betsey's hearty answer, her countenance expressing anything but dissatisfaction at the task imposed upon her never failing good nature. "It

would be cruel like, enough, to scold you for so innocent a thing as that."

"Isn't she good?" said Birdie, turning to Anna; "there are no bounds to her kindness, I assure you, so don't let the fear of having to worry over a torn dress restrain your romping propensities in the least, for Aunt Betsey will befriend you as willingly as she does me, depend on it."

"Well, Anna," resumed Angebell, after we were all seated at the table, "you have yet to behold the greatest attraction of Daisy Lawn."

"Indeed!" was her reply; "what can you have in reserve?"

"Put on your thinking cap, and guess. It is to climax all that has yet delighted you."

"Perhaps it is old Pruno," I suggested.

"Oh, we have seen him," responded Angebell, "and the faithful old fellow was as happy as any of you to see me at home again. I was afraid he would be dead by this time, but really he gave me quite a lively welcome for one of his advanced years."

"May be it is the bower down in the corner of the garden where we used to build our play-house," chimed in Florence. "The china closet stands there yet, with a clam-shell and an old tea-pot on its shelf."

"Oh, we forgot to go there," exclaimed Birdie, "but will right after supper. It is strange I should have forgotten the old play-house. No, you will have to guess again."

"Is it the river bank?" I asked.

"Oh no! no! Why, I am surprised at the dullness of you all."

"What is its nature," inquired Anna; "fish, fowl, beast or human?"

"Were I to define it, it would be the same as telling you what I wish you to be smart enough to guess," replied Angebell.

"You do all seem rather stupid-like, I do declare," said

Aunt Betsey, looking roguishly over the tops of her spectacles, and winking first at one, and then another ; " why I see as plain as day that she means Charlie Grey ! "

Of course we all understood it then, and a merry laugh went round the table in which all joined but Florence. She smiled faintly, but no one observed her but myself.

" Aunt Betsey is right," said Angebell, " and I give her the credit of possessing more sagacity than all the rest of you put together, including our discerning Florence notwithstanding."

" Well, when shall I delight my vision with this wonderful spectacle?" inquired Anna.

" I don't know," replied Birdie. " What is the news from him?" and she looked around the table.

" He was an attentive listener to your last letter," I answered, " and promised to call upon you, bringing his guitar, this evening."

" That is glorious!" shouted Birdie, clapping her hands with childish ecstasy. " I mean to reinstate myself in his favor, if he is anything like what I imagine him to be. Is he handsome, agreeable, and disengaged? Or has he been thrown into the society of my studious sister so long that he can talk of nothing but what is far beyond my earthly ken?"

" I am not positive as to the claims upon his heart," I replied, " but am inclined to believe he is entirely free. He is the same Charlie Grey that he used to be, generous hearted and full of fun; and as to his personal appearance I must leave it to your own decisions."

" Quite favorable indeed," replied Angebell, and then turning to Florence, who had sat silent and thoughtful during the conversation, she inquired:

" And how often has he called upon you, during my absence? Indeed, little one, I thought that pretty name of his blundered a little too often in your letters to me for the proper control of my burning jealousy. Aha! how is it?"

Florence crimsoned deeply under the mirth-sparkling eyes of Birdie, who, notwithstanding the evident embarrassment of the sensitive child, could but illy discern the fearful struggle of her aching heart.

Florence timidly hesitated, with an expression of acute pain on her countenance, and Angebell continued, with mock intensity of grief:

" Come now, little one, reveal the dreadful secret that is to blight every precious hope of my life, and leave me —; I have forgotten the poetical phrase I should use, so I will briefly say *alone*," and she gave pathetic importance to the concluding word.

" Pray don't quote poetry and go distracted yet," importuned Florence, having regained her composure; " you may safely expect the whole attention of Charlie Grey, unless Miss Clayton should rob you of a portion of it."

" No danger of that," replied Angebell, shaking her pretty head menacingly at her friend, who blushed deeply in anticipation of what was to be revealed, " for if she smiles on him more than twice, I shall dash off a letter to a certain somebody in Philadelphia, who I am confident will be most anxious to hear from Daisy Lawn."

" Certainly until Miss McAlpine returns," retorted Anna.

" Were it not for the confidence you have in me, as a true friend, I would tell just now that you are actually engaged to one Walter Lane, of Philadelphia," and Birdie looked very grave.

We could but laugh at the rather severe pleasantry, and Anna, who tried hard to stammer out a rejoinder, received her friend's raillery all in good part, and joined in our general merriment.

" Charlie will not be conventional, I suppose," said Angebell, looking at the faithful old clock she had so severely condemned. " Does he ever call upon Florence before this time?"

"Oh yes," I replied; "he comes at all hours of the day: sometimes takes breakfast with us. He told me that he should call early this evening."

"It is now seven o'clock," she remarked, still attracted by the old-fashioned time-piece. Her lip curled scornfully as she surveyed its antiquated appearance, and finally she broke forth in a tone of considerable impatience:

"I can not see the use in hoarding up such household monstrosities as that old clock! I had hoped to find a new one in its place; and you keep that old-fashioned sofa in the parlor yet;—I should think it would occur to some one about the house that furniture waxes old with the lapse of years."

Nothing was said in reply, not even a vindication from Aunt Betsey, who exhibited evident signs of matronly displeasure. The meal being finished, I arose from the table, thinking that the gentlest mode of calming a gathering storm, and was followed by Florence and Betsey into the parlor, while Angebell and Miss Clayton retired to their room to dress for the evening.

"Mrs. Lawrence has spoiled the dear child," whispered Aunt Betsey, after closing the door carefully, and drawing close to my side; "she has filled her head with every thing but common sense, so that she really thinks she is going to make Daisy Lawn look like the grand houses in New York. We must try to teach her better, and make her more kindly-like, for she is as good a girl as ever lived in this world—that's certain."

"You must not blame Mrs. Lawrence too severely," I answered; "for although I think she has sometimes erred greatly in the management of Angebell, I am confident she has had a deep interest in her welfare. Of what character was Birdie's mother?" I inquired, looking at the beautiful portrait.

This subject had never before been mentioned to my old

and faithful housekeeper, nor had she ever made an attempt to introduce it to me.

Mr. McAlpine, who had ever spoken with sincere regard of his former wife, had occasionally disclosed to me sad imperfections in her character, even those developed in her daughter. I made the inquiry of Betsey, not for the gratification of an idle curiosity, but to ascertain how much, if possible, of Angebell's disposition was naturally implanted.

"Now I'll tell you what it is," said Aunt Betsey, rubbing her spectacles, and replacing them as she always did at the commencement of her private conversations, "she was as strange a woman as I ever saw. She was beautiful as that picture up there, but seldom looked as happy-like, unless the house was full of company, of gay folks from some of the grand cities. She was a terrible scold, and poor Mr. McAlpine caught it pretty often as well as I."

"Was she of a nervous temperament?" I asked.

"No, not by nature, for she was strong and healthy as any one need be, and could dance all night, and ride all over the country with parties of ladies and gentlemen; but she never cared a particle how things went at home, if the parlor was only kept grand-like and the table well furnished. She never was a mother to Birdie: she was given up to me, and I have known a whole week to pass without that poor child's being once in its mother's arms. Mr. McAlpine used to look dreadfully sober-like, and it did my heart good to know he was happy at last, after he found you."

"Is Angebell's character much like that of her mother?" I inquired.

Aunt Betsey hesitated, smoothed her hair, and drew her hand slowly across her face. She could not bear to say aught against her favorite Birdie, and yet I had left a plain question for her to answer.

"Well, I don't know but she is," was the faint reply; "but the dear child is not to be blamed for that, I am sure."

We were interrupted by the pattering of light footsteps in the hall. The door was thrown open and the two young ladies glided in, somewhat transformed by their tasteful toilets. Anna was arrayed in snowy muslin, relieved by simple knots of blue ribbons, and a few jewels, unostentatious, yet precious, and of rare and beautiful designs. I thought her appearance more lovely, and far surpassing the more brilliant Angebell, who wore an elegant and showy silk trimmed with lively ribbons, while sparkling gems flashed from her braided hair, and from her arms and breast. She was proudly beautiful, and moved with so much majestic grace that the coronet of Zenobia would have befitted her brow. I gazed at her a moment, almost lost in wondering admiration; but my eye stole away to the little chair in a secluded corner of the room, where sat a distorted figure, fifteen years old, yet scarcely three feet high, and I met the gentle and sorrowful expression of a soft melting blue eye, and my mother's heart gave forth from its inmost depths a prayer of affectionate yearning, almost happy that my loved one was not so brilliantly beautiful as Angebell.

"Do you think we shall make a decided impression?" asked Angebell, smiling bewitchingly and tossing her head quite coquettishly; "for you must know that I am going to do my best, this evening, to reclaim an old lover who was once as faithful as the sun to his wilful lady-love."

"Whose was the fickle heart?" I questioned. "Which one of you is to ask forgiveness of the other, for inconstancy?"

"Neither, I hope," said she; "for then I should have a most humiliating task to perform: one that I have no idea of undertaking, I assure you."

"Well, darling," interposed Aunt Betsey, who had sat like a statue, gazing upon the sparkling brilliancy of Angebell, "I do hope you will marry Charlie Grey, for he would make you one of the best of husbands, and he likes you well enough, I know."

"Ha! ha!" shouted Birdie, clapping her hands, "that is rich! Aunt Betsey thinks I am in earnest, and that I have really chosen Charlie Grey for my husband proper. Oh no, Auntie," and she leaned over Aunt Betsey's chair, and whispered in her ear, yet loud enough for us all to hear, "there is a certain Frenchman in New York, who is worth his thousands upon thousands, that is striving to win me for his bride."

Aunt Betsey opened her eyes wide with astonishment, and looked inquiringly into the bright ones that only laughed back upon her.

"And are you going to take him?"

"I don't know but I shall, if he waits long enough."

"Waits long enough?" interjected Aunt Betsey; "what are you waiting for?"

"For a better offer, if I can get one," was the laughing and half earnest reply.

"Is there much love associated with the affair?" I ventured to ask.

"A vast deal professed by him," she said, "and a becoming amount of attention from me. Aunt Fanny wishes me to take him for no other reason, that I can see, but that he is rich and dines with her very often."

"Is he much older than yourself?" I inquired.

"Bless your heart! yes," replied she, bursting into ringing peals of merriment: "he is only fifty, gray-headed; wears a moustache, so that all may know he is a foreigner; talks about his titled relatives in France; and entreats me to tell him 'yes, or no.'"

"But then you have in reality no idea of accepting the offer of M. Durand, have you?" inquired Anna with astonishment. "He is a good old man to be sure, and has abundant wealth: certainly you would not marry from pecuniary interest?"

"What matters it?" she replied with an air of unconcern,

patting her tiny foot upon the carpet so nervously that I suspected an uneasy state of mind; "indeed, what matters it, whether I love him to crazy distraction or not, as long as he will make me his pet, and surround me with every luxury I can wish. Heaven deliver me from ever being so bound to any man that his coldness would break my heart, or his death make me an everlasting mourner."

"Then you do not consider love essential to your conjugal happiness? I thought *that* to be the treasure of every true woman's heart," said Anna, modestly, and blushing deeply as she spoke.

"I flatter myself upon being as true a woman as any of you," replied Angebell pettishly, rising as she spoke, and going to the mirror to rearrange the jewels in her hair; "yet I hope never to belong to the love-sick, heart-broken class of community."

"We cannot promise that you will be an exception to that condemned class," retorted Anna pleasantly.

"Righteous judgment perhaps," was Birdie's rejoinder, turning her face from the mirror, and looking half scornfully upon her friend, yet with a smile lingering around her rosy mouth. "You think, I suppose, that because you have made your heart so perfect a slave, that every woman must possess the same tender weakness. No, indeed!" And she turned abruptly to the mirror again, weaving a string of snowy pearls among the glossy braids of her dark hair.

"And what does Florence think of all this?" said Anna, after a brief silence, during which we had all sat gazing at Angebell, as if endeavoring to fathom the true depth of her remarks.

"I think that Birdie hardly knows what she is talking about," answered Florence gravely.

"That is my idea exactly," joined Aunt Betsey; "if she never loved a man, she don't know any thing about it. But let me tell her, that if she ever marries without love,

she will find the need of it soon enough; if Aunt Betsey ever told the truth, she'll find it so."

"Don't alarm yourselves yet, friends," said Angebell gaily, "nor awaken your compassionate sympathies too soon." Then casting a glance upon our several faces, she continued: "Really, my remarks have been wonderfully impressive! There sits mother as grave as a parson, Aunt Betsey looking unusually severe, Anna matching the threads in the carpet, while Florence is, I declare, the very type of unspoken grief. Speak out, my little one, and tell me how I have broken your heart?"

"You have not broken my heart," said Florence seriously; "I am afraid you will break your own."

"That is truly poetical—sublimely, tenderly so!" was the sarcastic return, modified by a garb of playfulness. "Come now, give me a little sermon '*extempore*'—or, as they say in Methodist revivals, 'dear sister, relate your experience!'"

"I will tell you one thing," replied Florence, charming the attention of her sister by her rapt, earnest expression, and the mournfulness of her voice, "an unloved and unloving heart is the saddest thing the earth can hold. Love alone can make us happy here. Without it, beauty, fame, and wealth are worthless—like precious stones to one in a desert starving for bread."

"Well, what is my poor sister going to do for this all-satisfying love? She has never dreamed of bridals, I am sure."

"There is a love sweet and precious, sun-bright and full of hope, that will sustain and comfort the heart that dreams of no earthly bliss."

Birdie made no reply, but, going to the window, betrayed a good deal of impatience at the delay of her expected guest. Suddenly she started up, clapping her hands, while her face grew radiant with joy.

"Here he comes!" she exclaimed; "Charlie Grey, for all the world! I must go and meet him;" and seizing the hand of Anna, they ran laughing out upon the porch. Birdie, casting off all restraint and the discipline of Madam Gearau and Aunt Fanny, bounded down the steps, and met her old friend in the avenue.

"Hurrah! Charlie!" she exclaimed, while her merry laugh rang loud and clear, at the same time clasping his hand within both of hers and shaking it heartily.

"Hurrah! Birdie, hurrah!" and before she was aware, not one, but a dozen kisses, at least, were on her cheek.

"For shame!" she cried, releasing herself, shaking her head menacingly, and attempting to rebuke him by a look of assumed displeasure: "what will my friend Anna think of you now?"

"Anna will not blame me, I am sure," said he, approaching Miss Clayton, who extended her hand and gave him a friendly greeting, calling him by the familiar name of Charlie.

With spirits overflowing with the merriest glee, they entered the parlor; Charlie looking the happiest of them all. He greeted Aunt Betsey and myself with his usual regard; congratulating us upon the increased joy of our household; then espying Florence, who retained her secluded seat, he passed a pleasant word with her, slyly hinting at her perverse formality and conservatism.

Charlie seated himself on the sofa close beside Angebell, and soon the rehearsing of old memories, the recollection of pleasant things almost forgotten, old friends scattered and gone, merry romps and childish feuds, brought us in a close circle around the fireside. All had something to remember, something that would make the old cottage ring with peals of laughter, or bring tears to our eyes. Each one could but appear in their better nature. Birdie's affectation disappeared, and she seemed once more like the warm-hearted but wayward child that used to scamper with Charlie Grey over the

green meadows of Daisy Lawn. Her eyes sparkled as brightly as then, her cheeks grew as rosy, and the thick waves of hair that disengaged themselves from their jeweled band and fell carelessly upon her snowy neck added a fascinating charm to her appearance. I could but gaze at her in mute admiration, unheeding the merry or sad tales she was telling, only thinking how very beautiful she was.

Charlie Grey was lost in a dream of delight. He looked upon her with eyes disclosing all that his heart endured. Seeming well-nigh unconscious of the act, he stole her little hand within his own, and there it quietly rested for more than an hour with many a gentle pressure upon it, I ween.

"Now where is your guitar?" inquired Angebell, after the evening had nearly worn away. "Nothing will seem so much like old times as its melodious tinkling with the accompaniment of your voice."

Charlie arose to bring his instrument, and then, as I glanced over the group, I missed Florence. She had retired unobserved: I could define the cause. Excusing myself upon the lateness of the hour, and wishing them a continuation of their happiness, for which I received a good-night kiss from each, I was about to retire, when Anna said:

"Please carry my kiss to Florence, who has stolen so mouse-like away from us,"

"Sure enough!" said Charlie, looking around the room. "She has given us the slip finely. Tell her I have an account to settle with her on the morrow."

"She is so strange!" said Birdie. "She seems to find no enjoyment in gay society. Nothing but prosy books and old gentlemen and ladies can interest her."

"Take care! take care!" broke in Charlie, patting her lightly on the cheek, "Florence is my confidential crony, and I cannot hear aught against her."

I left at that moment, and did not hear the reply Birdie was about to make; but soon the tinkling of the guitar

greeted my ear, accompanied by the sweet melodious voice of Charlie Grey.

I went directly to the chamber of Florence, and tapping lightly at the door, she bade me to come in. I entered and found her sitting before her writing-desk, with her portfolio on her lap, examining its contents. She smiled on me inquiringly.

"I have just left the parlor," I said, in answer to her smile, and delivered the messages from Anna and Charlie Grey.

"O, did they really miss me?" she asked. "I did not suppose they would, they were all so happy when I came out."

"And were you not happy, my daughter?"

"No, mother, I felt very sad, indeed, and came away for fear they would see me weep."

"What was it that made you so unhappy?"

"Nothing but Florence," she replied, trying to smile as she brushed a tear from her cheek. "She will not do as I wish to have her. She will not perform the task I require of her, and that I know she is able to accomplish."

"Is it a very difficult one, Florence?"

"Yes, mother, more so than any other she has ever felt it her stern duty to execute. She has learned how weak she is."

"And, dear Florence, do you wish to tell me what you are striving to do?"

"O yes, mother, if I only could——" and she bowed her head on my lap, and remained so for sometime, silent and motionless. She was not weeping, for she did not sob, and when she raised her face there were no traces of tears upon it.

"Why should I not speak to you freely?" she said. "You are my mother, and possess the only human heart that will support mine when it is sinking." Then, after pausing a moment, as if to summon more strength for the revelation of her heart's precious secret, she added, "I would learn the lesson of resignation."

"Florence," said I, smoothing the hair that lay so softly

upon her broad white forehead, and almost startled by the sad spiritual gaze that centered upon my face, "forgive me if my knowledge give you sorrow; I would save you the painful rehearsal of your grief; I already know its cause and nature. I have not pryed into the sacred chamber of your soul to rob you, but my love for you, and my ready detection of the slightest shadow that falls across your path, has revealed this, your heavy trial to me. God grant you grace to bear it, my daughter."

"Then you know how I love him?" replied she, clasping my hand firmly, and leaning her head upon my bosom; "then you know all I have to bear, to stifle, and to yearn for, and why I so ardently desire to learn the lesson of resignation?"

"Yes, my daughter."

"And then you will hope and plead for me, aid me when I falter, speak of heaven when I faint, and fold me ever as a little child within your arms?"

"Yes."

"My dear mother!"

Long she nestled in my bosom, her eyes tearless, and a sweet happy smile radiating her countenance, while I bathed her face with burning tears. My heart beat wildly, and my breast heaved tumultuously. Nearly an hour passed ere either of us spoke a word, when Florence said—

"Mother, I believe I have not shown you any of my little rhymes for some time past; I have been afraid to do so, lest they should tell too much."

"Will you let me see the one you wrote the other night after Charlie went away?"

"How did you know that I wrote one then?"

I informed her of my uneasiness and sorrow at that time, and what I beheld from my balcony.

"Oh, mother!" she whispered close to my cheek, "I thought my heart would break that night, and I did so long to talk with you that I was tempted to go to your bedroom,

and lay down by your side, and tell you all of my sorrow, but I could not then."

She opened her portfolio, and after fumbling for a few moments among its papers, brought forth a slip, delicately traced over with pencil marks, from which she read to me.

Would you like to see the poem, dear reader? I have brought an old and faded copy from my escroitoire, where it has lain for many a year, and will copy it for you.

They tell me "God is love,"
That weary souls may lie upon his breast,
And he will shield them from this world's unrest;
That from above
His smiles will beam, more sweet than any here,
And never fall the fainting heart to cheer.
And yet this spirit mine,
Weary and worn, and longing most to die,
Doth from the heaven-throne withdraw its eye,
And fluttering, falling, pine
For human love with earnest faith to wake
Its sleeping music to its angel tone—
For tender words from love-warm lips to break,
Calling me dearest—calling me their own.

Why should this heart awake—
This wounded one, that hath no shelter here,—
To break in yearning for a boon so dear?
It can no answer make,
Save this, O God, and let thy grace be given,
It hath but little now as foretaste to thy heaven!

Peace, wayward heart,
Nor let a murmur from thy depths arise;
It were not well for tears to cloud my eyes:
The Father loveth me!
Is human love as strong?
Endureth it as long?
Or to my weeping can it softly say—
"Come, lean upon my breast,
And I will hide thee while the tempests stay,
And bear thee safely through the valley-way,
And grant thee lasting rest!"

"Mother," said my daughter, as I arose and kissed her good night, "I feel that I have told you but little, very little. Can you read the rest?"

"Yes, my dear child, and may God bless you."

CHAPTER IX.

When clouds are seen, wise men put on their cloaks.

SHAKESPEARE.

"I do think," said Angebell one morning at the breakfast table, several days after her return home, "that a single gallant for two such charming young ladies, is rather pitiable. For my part I am tired of the partnership, and you, Anna, must send for Walter Lane."

Anna turned crimson, and twirled her spoon rather nervously, yet confessed by her happy smile the pleasure that the suggestion gave her; still she hesitated to make a reply, and I interposed in behalf of Angebell's proposal, and tendered a cordial invitation from the whole family to Mr. Lane.

"Yes, ask him up," chimed in Aunt Betsey, "and then you will feel more contented-like."

"You see Aunt Betsey understands it," replied Birdie. "The long face you wore yesterday after getting such a lengthy letter from Philadelphia, led me to suspect that you are growing home-sick."

"Oh no, Birdie," interrupted Anna. "I doubt not that Walter would gladly accept an invitation into the country for a short time, having been closely confined to his office during the year past; and there is no spot he would choose rather to visit than Daisy Lawn."

"We can easily believe that," returned Birdie, "while Miss Anna Clayton is a guest there."

"That I shall not deny," replied she laughing; "and yet

the reputed hospitality of its inmates, and the rural beauty of the place would be essential attractions."

"For which compliment we all return an humble 'thank you,'" said Angebell, "but shall doubt your sincerity unless you give Mr. Lane an opportunity of appreciating us truly. So write a letter of invitation this morning, and Willie shall take it to the office before the mail goes out. Tell him to come instant. Let me add a postscript, and I will vouch for his speedy arrival. If he only knew what a handsome dashing gallant is constantly lingering about here, he would not tarry long, I am certain."

"And what message shall I send from you?" asked Anna, turning to Florence, who had sat silent during the whole conversation. "I doubt his coming without a special invitation from you."

"Oh, I want to see him very much, very much indeed," she replied quickly. "We shall be good friends, I am very sure."

"Of course you will," and she paused to kiss the speaker ere she followed Angebell, who was hastening her into the library that the letter might be immediately written and despatched.

Why I did not hear from Uncle Hugh in answer to what I had written him regarding Willie Blake, was a source of anxiety to me. It was now four weeks since my letter had been despatched, and the reply had been some time due. I had requested him to write soon, on Susan's account as well as on my own, and knowing his strict punctuality, I could but wonder at the seeming neglect of my request. Had he been ill he certainly would have given me that intelligence; for then he always summoned me to his bed side, no matter how slight his indisposition might be. That he was absent I could not believe, for he seldom allowed himself to journey elsewhere than to Daisy Lawn; and if so singular an intention as his moving from the shadow of the old "Haystack"

in any other direction had been entertained, he would have considered it worthy of being heralded to me at least six months in advance of his leaving his garden gate.

"Any thing for me?" I inquired of Willie Blake, who had returned from the office, and sent Anna blushing to her room with a letter, and aroused the wildest merriment of Angebell by the delivery of some advice from Aunt Fanny. I must say that I had but a small spark of hope, and that flickered fast when Willie gravely remarked:

"'Tis an unpleasant thing, Mrs. McAlpine, to say 'no,' every time, but it may perhaps break you of asking me that one question so often."

"I fear, Willie, that nothing will break me of the habit but the hearing of you say 'yes,'" said I, turning slowly toward the house.

"That is what I think; so here is your remedy," and he tossed a letter toward me.

"It is from Uncle Hugh!" I gladly exclaimed, and broke the seal as hurriedly as possible.

"I knew it was from him," said Willie; "what a queer hand he writes!"

"I suppose you are anxious to know its contents?"

"I confess I am."

"Well, wait a moment," and I sat down upon the steps of the porch to give the letter a first perusal.

"Well, I declare, Willie, if you can make any sense out of this scrip, you have keener wits than I," I exclaimed, after I had read the brief and hastily written epistle. "What can Uncle Hugh mean?"

"Let's see it," said he, bounding from the saddle with an animated countenance, and grasping the letter.

He read it slowly through, ejaculated, "Queer, isn't it?" read it through again, and then with a countenance a good deal fallen, he added:

"He means to tell you something, undoubtedly, but what it is, nobody but himself can find out by that letter."

This is Uncle Hugh's mysterious communication :

"OLD HAYSTACK, Oct. —, 18—.

"If my little Clara will be patient, she will find it more comfortable than to be uneasy. As for the lad, the world will not leave him for a little while, at least if he jogs along in a steady course. 'Tis more comfortable to lie upon down than upon corn-husks, and we all have the good right of choosing between the two; but the privilege of lying where we choose, is another thing.

"I have had ample time to reply to your long letter—a real woman's letter—before this, yet, believe me, little Clara, I should not have answered this now, had it not occurred to me that, during my silence, you might bestow more thoughts upon me than I stand in need of. I am sound yet, but rather rusty, and hope you may enjoy the same blessing.

"Write, if you choose to, but I do not promise to answer in some time.

"Yours, with all the love my old heart can muster,

"HUGH STARKWEATHER."

"Well, Willie, take the letter home to your mother, and if it puzzles her as it does us, we must reckon her as blind as ourselves. I am really lost in attempting to understand him. I suspect it to be some of his good-natured eccentricities that we shall soon unravel."

"I hope so," he replied, looking rather despondent; "but he—he,——" and Willie stammered and hesitated, but I readily comprehended his fears.

"You would say," I observed, "that he manifests but little interest in your affairs. I can not blame you for the suspicion, but can not allow you to retain it for one moment, because I know my strange uncle too well, and his great interest

in you, to suppose so much indifference on his part; but, as Charlie would say, 'there is a *kink* in it we don't understand!'"

"Don't you fear he is crazy?" asked Willie, seriously.

"Oh no! I have many other letters from him that would excite such fears, much more than this one. Do not feel disappointed, Willie, but wait patiently until we hear from him again."

"He says he shall not write again very soon."

"Well, never mind what he says. Uncle Hugh is Uncle Hugh, and nobody can tell what he means to do; only, be sure, from the never failing generosity of his heart, that if he can do a good deed, it will be accomplished, although he may have his own way of bringing it about."

Willie looked a little more cheerful, and putting the letter carefully in his pocket, galloped briskly away toward his mother's cottage, while I stood knitting my brow in perplexity of thought.

In a few days Anna received a reply from Walter Lane, thanking us sincerely for our invitation, and promising to leave Philadelphia for Daisy Lawn the following day. The facilities for travelling were then so much improved that his journey would be but a short one. The railway would convey him most of the distance, and within twenty miles of our home. To save him the infliction of a stage coach ride of that duration, and to increase the happiness of the young ladies and his own, Charlie Grey tendered his light carriage and fleet horses, with his own pleasant company withal; and early in the morning of the day Walter Lane was expected, long before the sun peeped over the hills, or saw the happy face of Anna Clayton, the party of three had partaken of a light breakfast, and hurried away, making the gray morning musical with their glee.

They did not return until very late that night, and Aunt Betsey, who arose and welcomed them with the goodly cheer

of her happy face, accompanied with the more to be appreciated coffee and cold chicken, urged Charlie Grey to remain at Daisy Lawn; so, the next morning, at rather a late hour, I met them all around my breakfast table.

They were happy and noisy enough; each one seemed striving to laugh the loudest, and crack the merriest jokes, but no one succeeded better than Charlie Grey. He had, unexpectedly, found in Walter Lane an old friend and playmate of his boyhood, and this discovery, as might be expected, recalled the funniest memories of times ago.

Walter Lane was less boisterous than his volatile friend, Charlie. His temperament was not so ardent, and the merriment which he mingled with the rest, seemed rebuked by the calm dignity and almost cold expression of his dark eyes. Although he joined briskly in the conversation, and made many happy retorts to the keen wit of Angebell, or the more biting sarcasm of Charlie Grey, yet I should have pronounced him cold and destitute of warm and generous impulses had I not secretly marked the heart-springing emotions that would illuminate his face, and give a speaking lustre to his eyes, whenever they lingered upon the gentle girl sitting by his side.

A strong will and unyielding pride revealed itself in every feature, but the sterner attributes were softened by a revelation of true nobility, and a refined intellectual worth. A secure shelter for one so gentle and timid, I thought, as I contrasted Anna with him she loved with all the intensity of her true womanly nature.

Walter Lane directed but little of his conversation to Florence, yet as often as her eyes wandered in another direction, his own would be sure to fasten thoughtfully and sadly upon her. He regarded her with the greatest respect, and with a manifest interest that attached itself to her as if with the intention of solving a mystery.

It was finally decided after a long controversy, in which

Charlie and Angebell valiantly opposed each other, that Walter should make his home at the parsonage, with his old friend, during his vacation from city life, so they took their departure immediately after dinner, promising to return at an early hour in the evening.

"Well, Anna, you made a catch, and no mistake, when Walter Lane came into your net. Handsome, rich, and talented! Why, I am half inclined to fall in love with him myself," and Angebell turned from the porch where she had been standing with her friend, watching the departure of the two young gentlemen.

"I am glad you like him," said Anna, slowly withdrawing her gaze, and following Angebell into the parlor, where Florence, Aunt Betsey, and I were sitting. "I really hope you may have one so kind and true to love with your whole heart."

Discovering us, and knowing that we were listeners to her last remark, she crimsoned with modest embarrassment, and was making her way back to the porch, when I addressed her:

"Anna," said I, taking her hand when she had drawn near enough to my side, "that was a generous and noble wish, I am sure, and one you need not blush to express for your friend."

"Yes, but her wishing don't do any good," anticipated Angebell; "I never expect any one to love me half so well. If they only treat me with respect and attention my expectations will be realized."

"Why do you talk so?" and Florence looked up from her embroidery with an expression of mild rebuke.

"Because I think so," was her instant reply. "Many praise me, and pet me; but nobody pretends to love me."

"Have you forgotten us, Birdie?"

"Oh, the dear child can not be talking in earnest now, I am sure," chimed in the loud voice of Aunt Betsey. "She

knows well enough that Charlie Grey thinks more of her than he does of his eyes; and I am sure he is as fine a lad as Walter Lane."

"Enough said on this subject," said Angebell, abruptly. "It would be a relief to know that these sermons could once be broken off without an expectation of their speedy revival and continuance. I should be pleased to express my sentiments occasionally without so fierce an inquisition," and she walked majestically out of the room, leaving Aunt Betsey gazing after her with eyes wide open with astonishment.

So afflicted was I with one of my severe attacks of nervous headache, that I remained in the parlor but a short time that evening. Anna's delicate loveliness was increased by the exuberance of her gentle spirits, while Angebell, robed in the fairest smiles, appeared more brilliantly beautiful than I had ever seen her before. Florence, who declined the urgent solicitation of Anna to remain in the parlor with them, was all alone with her thoughts and sorrow in her quiet "rose chamber."

The short time that I was with them I thought I discovered a manifest determination on the part of Angebell to secure the sole attention of Walter Lane to herself. She seemed forgetful of the presence of Charlie Grey, who, for awhile, appeared dejected enough, but when I retired he was seated on the sofa by the side of Anna, conversing in a low and gentle tone, while he twined the flowers that he stole from her bouquet—one that Walter had gathered for her—amid the waves of her soft brown hair; and I thought of thorns scarcely hidden by roses.

CHAPTER X.

A merrier man,
Within the limits of becoming mirth,
I never spent an hour's talk withal.

SHAKESPEARE.

EARLY one morning, several days after the arrival of Birdie and her friend, I was awakened from the broken and troubled slumbers, that had but wearied me through a long and tedious night, by the sound of merry voices without. I knew that it was Anna, Birdie, Walter, and Charlie, starting for a horseback ride that had been decided upon the evening before.

Leaving my hot and feverish pillow, and stealing to my easy chair, I leaned my head against the window casement to participate in a weak degree in their enjoyment. They were about to mount, and I was somewhat surprised to see Charlie Grey lead Anna to his favorite pony and assist her into the saddle. The sad expression of her face, meanwhile, did not escape me, although she tried to smile upon Charlie when he handed her her whip, saying something so low that none but her might hear.

When Walter and Birdie dashed gaily by them, the whole air, musical with the clear bewitching laugh of the beautiful girl, a shade of unutterable anguish passed across the countenance of Anna, and she tipped her hat so that its long heavy plume concealed her face, thus hiding her tears, if any she shed, from her companion, who for a moment gazed

silently after the laughing pair, his lip curling tremulously, and the joyous smile dispelled that he had worn an instant before.

"Oh! how strange it is," I thought, as I went back to my pillow with an increase of pain, rather than an alleviation, "that she who has so many and rare flowers springing about her feet, should cultivate but the thorns to chaplet other brows as well as her own."

There was revealed to me a continual and violent struggle in Angebell's ambitious heart. Her invincible and arbitrary pride was continually combating with a generosity of affection which, if unrestrained by, and freed from, the grosser attributes that corrupted its pure nature, would gush forth in blessings upon her life. She loved Charlie Grey, and yet had so open an avowal betrayed itself in her heart she would have crushed it down with contemptuous disdain. To win her hand was not the gaining of her affections; her pride, her never yielding pride, was to be bought, and naught but paltry gold could equal its price. Charlie Grey was the son of a village clergyman. He had not wealth, yet was possessed of sufficient fortune, besides his abilities of increasing it, to offer a home supplied with all the needed comforts and many of the luxuries of life. He was talented, and even attaining a wide spread celebrity for his musical abilities: that was nothing. He had a warm and generous heart that would prove ever faithful in its devotions: that was nothing. He had in his early youth been overcome by temptation—had been beset and gone astray—but had once more arisen in the true nobility of his nature to regain the moral progress he had lost: yet that was nothing. He had not gold, and that was all.

A heart actuated by such principles, and impelled by so gross a motive, would not hesitate, I feared, at the means employed, or the ruin that might ensue, in the accomplishment of its object. Walter Lane was the only son and heir of a wealthy banker of Philadelphia. He was also a lawyer,

and although he had been but a few years in practice, yet his undisputed talents were gaining him a high reputation. If Angebell, by her brilliancy, fascination, and ambitious pride, could win him from the idol whose every hope lived in his love, was there one noble principle implanted in her being—one befitting the soul of a woman—that would arise in rebellion to such an accomplishment?

"But perhaps my fears are vain," was the more consoling thought. "Birdie is mischievous, and often cruelly so, and this all may be intended merely for a flirtation to amuse herself and torment her friend. And yet a motive like that could not originate with one regarding the tender feelings of others as sacredly as her own."

So lost had I been in my meditations, that I heard not the rumbling of wheels up the avenue, or the unloading of trunks upon the porch, and I was considerably surprised when Aunt Betsey came puffing into the room, hardly able to speak from the excess of her excitement, and informed me, with an almost unintelligible jargon, that Uncle Hugh had come.

Forgetting my headache, that had threatened a day of suffering, I hastily dressed myself and hurried to the parlor, from whence I heard the familiar voice of the good man, who already had Florence upon his knee, amusing her with his illimitable jokes.

"Hurrah, jimplicute!" was the greeting he gave me: the same he always had ever since I was a wee lassie. "Kiss me if you must—women always have a necessity in such matters—but don't bite, I say, don't bite!"

I didn't bite him, but he did me, and that was just exactly as I expected.

"The old Haystack got lonesome," said he, "and I felt like a spider wound up in a dusty web. I've come up here to dust off; to stay as long as I want to, and to go home just when I please. I have brought trappings enough to last me

a year, or even more, but just like as not I shall leave you to-morrow."

"Why didn't you let us know you were coming, and we would have met you at the cars?"

"That's not my policy, for then there is no telling whether one is really welcome or not. You can easily smile on a bore when you have had a week or more of practice."

"Now I understand your last letter more perfectly," I said, "and why you told me you should not write again very soon. I was really at a loss what to make of it."

"That's good! that's good!" and Uncle Hugh rubbed his hands and laughed with all his might. "I meant to puzzle you, and make you believe that your wicked old uncle had a grudge laid up against you. And didn't you really think so? Don't fib now, hoping I am going to overlook the past. Say, Florence, what is it about the long face mother has worn lately, and the dreadful things she has said against Uncle Hugh?"

"I really haven't heard her say a word," replied Florence. "She wondered at your sending so blind and unsatisfactory a letter in reply to the one she wrote you. Willie Blake is the only one that carried a long face about it. He was very much disappointed."

"And what makes mother take such an interest in Willie Blake?" and he looked roguishly into her face, and shook his head very knowingly. "Is he to have my little Florence?"

"O no," she replied gravely; "Willie is engaged to Lucy Dean."

"Whew! the pretty lassie I used to see at Susan's? That does my heart good, no mistake, and makes me twice as glad to help him a little. I have good news for the lad when I see him—some that will take off all the pouts my letter hung on his face."

"So then it is in your power to assist him?"

"Yes, a little, a little," he replied, his face brightening,

not from a consciousness of his noble generosity, but from an anticipation of the happiness a young hoping heart was to feel in beholding its brightest hopes realized.

"I always did like that Willie Blake," he continued, "not alone for his respectful kindness and attention to me during my previous visit here, but I could always see something shining right out of his eyes, something so noble and manly that I knew him to be worthy of higher advantages than fall to the lot of a poor errand boy. I thought of him a great deal before I got your letter, and was trying to make up my mind what to do for him. Your letter decided me, and I sat right down and wrote to my old college chum, Hank Leonard, of New York, who is as good a man as the world holds. From what I told him, his interest was awakened very deeply for the boy, so if Willie will pack off for New York city, he will find just the berth he wants in Judge Leonard's office."

"O! Uncle Hugh! how good you are!" exclaimed Florence, throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him until he called loudly for her to desist, saying she had overstepped her bounds altogether. "How happy Susan will be! she will love you for ever, for what you have done."

"Will she love me?" cried he, with much alarm. "Then how much I regret the step I have taken! Alas! for the misery I have brought upon both of us! She will die immediately of a broken heart: women in love always do that."

"O! Uncle Hugh!" said Florence, laughing at his well feigned despair, "if you talk in that way, I shall think you mean to live an old bachelor all your days. That would be dreadful; don't you think so?"

"What would there be dreadful about it? I think I am happier than most of folks, and therefore flatter myself I am on the safe side of the hedge after all."

"You are a happy man, I know," continued Florence, half

smiling, yet convincing us by her earnestness that she really meant what she was saying; "but don't you believe that you would be much happier if there was a cheerful somebody gliding about your old Haystack, keeping the windows and furniture clean; seeing that your curtains were snowy white, gathering bouquets and placing them in your library; sewing on your shirt buttons, and preparing with her own precious hands your dainty meals, that would taste twice as good because she eat beside you?" "Only think of having somebody to love you better than any one else in the wide world, to laugh with you when you are happy, and to console and watch with you when you are sick and weary;—now don't you really believe that such a precious somebody would make your home more cheerful and attractive than it is now?"

"Goodness gracious! what shall I say to the girl? If I am not careful I shall forswear my long cherished bachelor principles, and what an overwhelming downfall that would be! But Florence, can you really tell your old uncle where he can find such a delectable, precious somebody as all that, not that he wishes to win her, but merely to behold the curiosity."

"They are not such a rarity as you suppose," she replied, "and I must consider you very unfortunate indeed, if you have lived in the world as long as you have and never discovered such a one."

"Long years ago," he said, changing from his merry mood to one of deep seriousness, "I found such a jewel, but she was not for my keeping. God took her. I have shrank from marriage since, fearing I should find none like Mary."

"You never mentioned this to me before," I said. "I always wondered why you lived alone."

"I have seen many since I buried her that I thought I could love: women of noble and generous hearts, and yet they were not my Mary."

"Shall we wait longer for the young ladies?" inquired Aunt Betsey, entering the room arrayed in her prettiest gingham gown, her best linen apron, and Sunday cap. "It is late now, and I guess Mr. Starkweather feels a little hungry-like after his long ride."

"Not a bit, Aunt Betsey, not a bit," he replied. "I took a lunch at the hotel; yet if any of your unrivalled toast and coffee are on the programme this morning, I shall surely speak for a ticket."

Aunt Betsey blushed, smoothed her apron, and while busy at arranging the music upon the piano, replied:

"Yes, we have got toast and coffee, and seeing you had come, I had Maggie get some veal cutlets, for I remember how well you used to like them. They look very nice, and I guess they are."

"Leave Aunt Betsey to look after my comfort. She spoiled me when I was here before, by pampering up my appetite at the rate she did. But by the way, what young ladies were you speaking of?"

"Angebell is now home from school, and she has a friend with her, Miss Anna Clayton of Philadelphia."

"Well! I am in a fix now, and what a terrible fix!" he exclaimed, starting from his chair. "One solitary unprotected old bachelor beset by—let's see—one, two, three, four, five—yes, a dozen for all I know—women!—All sorts too, handsome, old, young, and intellectual! Oh dear!"

"Don't despair quite so soon. Charlie Grey, and Walter Lane, the betrothed of Miss Clayton, will lend you their constant assistance in the entertainment of so many."

"Well, that's consoling," he replied, wiping his forehead with his bandanna, and sinking again into his chair. "But really, I did think that things were rushing to a crisis."

"You have never seen Birdie, have you?"

"No," he replied, "and I have a great desire to." Then

addressing Florence, he added: "Which is she most like, Aunt Betsey or you?"

"Oh now don't be thinking that the child is a bit like a homely old woman like me," said Aunt Betsey advancing towards Uncle Hugh with forcible gesticulations; "she is the most beautiful creature you ever saw; there never was a face at Daisy Lawn that could equal hers excepting that of her mother whose picture hangs over the piano."

The glowing eulogy was interrupted by the exclamation, "here they come!" and soon their horses galloped up to the door. Charlie, who rode by the side of Anna, assisted her from the saddle, complimenting her upon her skilful and graceful horsemanship. She did not appear to heed a word he said, but bowing almost coldly in return, she cast a hurried yet piercing glance towards Walter, who was chatting merrily with Angebell, and then walked slowly into the house. She passed the parlour door without looking therein, and proceeded directly towards her chamber. Her face was deathly pale, and she staggered slightly ere she reached the stairs. Hoping that no one but myself observed this, I arose to follow her, but Florence preceded me.

"Was that Miss Angebell?" asked Uncle Hugh.

"No," I replied, hardly aroused from my abstraction.

"I thought not," he said. "Quite another cast of character I should judge."

"Yes."

At that moment Birdie, who had remained upon the porch conversing with Walter in regard to a proposed pleasure trip for the day, came into the room, her eyes beaming and cheeks glowing from the effects of her exhilarating ride. She was surprised at the presence of a stranger, but when an introduction was given, she quickly extended her hand, and expressed the greatest delight in meeting with her Uncle Hugh.

"But come right out to breakfast," importuned Aunt

Betsey, apprehensive for waiting toast and cutlets. "No matter, Birdie, about changing your dress; you are not very dusty."

"I know I am not, for the shower last night laid the dust completely, and I shall be right glad to have my breakfast as soon as possible."

Anna and Florence did not make their appearance in the dining room, although Aunt Betsey went and jingled the little bell as loudly as she could at the bottom of the stairs.

"Anna is taking particular pains with her toilet I judge," said Birdie.

"I am fearful that she is ill," I added. "Aunt Betsey, will you go up and inquire?"

She was rising from the table, when Florence entered, apologising for her absence by saying that Anna was suffering from a severe headache, and wished to be excused that morning.

"I will take her up a nice cup of tea," said Aunt Betsey, making a commotion among the cups and saucers. "Poor child! it is enough to make her downright sick to get up so early and tramp off so far. There's Birdie might ride from here to Michigan and never tire a bit, but Anna is a poor delicate thing."

"She did not complain any while riding," remarked Angebell, calmly sipping her coffee and manifesting but little interest in the condition of her friend. "I thought she was wonderfully still, but I allowed the unceasing chatter of Charlie to account for it. I hope she is not going to be very sick. She has always been subject to spells of severe sick headaches and I trust this is nothing more serious."

"Let me carry it up," said Florence, reaching out her hands to Aunt Betsey for the little service that had been laden for the sick girl in a tempting manner.

Aunt Betsey handed it to her, telling her to be sure to return directly and eat her breakfast. Then opening the hall

door for her, she stood watching her as she slowly ascended the stairs.

"And tell Anna to take a nice nap" she said; "it will do her the most good of any thing. I will be up to see her in a little while."

Angebell had turned the conversation upon another subject and was endeavoring to interest Aunt Betsey as well as Uncle Hugh, when the former started up suddenly and revealed an entire lack of interest, by saying:

"Well, I guess I'll go right off and fix up the drink that mother used to make for brother John when he had the sick headache. It did him a wonderful sight of good, and I can't help feeling uneasy like about the child," and she left for the kitchen with an air of concern. Angebell gazed silently after her, her lip curling and face crimsoned from wounded pride.

"She has a right generous heart," said Uncle Hugh. "It does me good to see her whew around at the rate she does."

"I only wish she had a little more politeness," said Angebell, unable to conceal her feelings.

"Fudge on your politeness! if she hasn't a supply of the genuine article," and Uncle Hugh's knife and fork went down with vehemence; "why, my dear young lady, politeness is nothing more than obedience to the good rule of doing unto others as you would be done by."

I feared a disrespectful retort from Angebell, as her temper was well aroused, and the remark of Uncle Hugh hardly adapted to the maintenance of peace. There was naught but good nature on his part, but he was quite ignorant of Angebell's peculiarities. She made no reply, only tossed her head disdainfully, but Uncle Hugh, who was at that moment contemplating a slice of toast, remained in entire ignorance of her displeasure.

As soon as the meal was finished I started for Anna's chamber. Angebell followed, expressing her grievous fears that unless her friend recovered before noon they should be

obliged to give up their anticipated ride to River Hill, a wild and romantic spot on the banks of the Weimar, about five miles from Daisy Lawn.

"Oh Anna! how unfortunate this is!" she exclaimed as soon as she entered the room and beheld her friend lying upon the bed, her eyes dim and sunken, and her face very pale. Florence was sitting beside her, bathing her throbbing temples in cold water, while Aunt Betsey was closing the blinds and arranging the curtains that the light might not fall too strongly upon the sufferer.

"Not very unfortunate, I hope," she replied, smiling faintly and extending her hand to us both. "It is but one of my dreadful headaches that soon pass away. I am sure it cannot hold out very long in opposition to so much kindness."

"Do you think you will be able to go this afternoon?" asked Birdie.

"Oh no, it would be imprudent for me to venture out so soon, even if I was better."

"Oh dear!" sighed Birdie, "how I wish that I understood the art of magic, and I would soon have you restored."

"You need not give up the ride on my account," said Anna, pressing her hand upon her forehead and closing her eyes with an intensity of pain. "Cannot you enjoy yourselves without me?"

"No, not so well, my darling," and Birdie bent down and kissed her; "and if we do go, we will promise to think of you all the time. But I must change my dress, for this riding habit is hardly convenient. Try and get a nap and may be you will feel well enough after all to go with us," and ere she had closed the door she began to carol a light and merry song.

"We had better leave you alone now, I think," said I, after doing all in my power to alleviate her pain. "A short slumber is the thing needed."

"But let me see Florence a few moments," she said, and

Florence went back to her bedside, and I closed the door, leaving them alone.

"I am going up to see Susan, and won't you go along with me?" said Uncle Hugh, who met me in the hall with his broad straw hat on, and his walking stick in his hand.

"I cannot walk so far, but here comes Mr. Graham, and he will harness the ponies for us."

"Well, I suppose I must accommodate myself to circumstances," and Uncle Hugh took off his hat and seated himself in the easy-chair again, while I went to speak to Mr. Graham.

We drove leisurely along, and had rode some distance before either broke the silence by an attempt at conversation. I was intent upon the scenes that had transpired that morning and the fears they had originated. Uncle Hugh was as meditative as myself, but finally revealed the tenor of his thoughts, by saying:

"That Florence of your's is a queer sprig. She was always widely different from other children, and her deformity but adds a stronger light to her peculiarities. She is older than either of us," and he slowly shook his head. "She puts those eyes of hers so close to my heart that she reads all of my secrets, and I have no power to say whether she shall or not. She has a keen discernment, and a powerful faculty of reading characters. She is seldom, if ever, mistaken in her estimate of any one. I told my friend, Brown, about her when he visited me a short time ago. He is one of the editors of the *Hearthstone Magazine*, and that, you know, has as wide a circulation as any monthly in the country. He read those pieces of hers that you gave me last summer, and thought them beautiful, and worthy of publication. I let him have them, and they will be out before long."

"That will surprise Florence very much. She has never sent any thing for publication, although her friends have desired her to. She thinks her productions too imperfect as yet."

"Fiddlesticks!" ejaculated he. "If I can secure her portfolio I will send it to Baker entire, for I promised him that she should contribute to his magazine."

"I doubt not but she will, and feel truly grateful for your kind assistance. Divesting myself of a mother's partiality, I can but believe she will yet attain a fair reputation as a writer."

"There is nothing to hinder her, nothing in the world. I shouldn't think it much of a misfortune to have her little chunky form if it was steeped off by such a head. I tell you what it is, God treats us all about equal."

We were then at the cottage, and I saw Lucy Dean, who was in the back garden, run briskly into the house as soon as she espied us, to tell Susan, no doubt, to give up desponding, for Uncle Hugh had come, and what could it be for, if not to bring good news for Willie.

CHAPTER XI.

I have not from your eyes that gentleness
And show of love, as I was wont to have.

SHAKESPEARE.

FLORENCE remained with Anna all of the forenoon, and did not leave her chamber until a short time after dinner. Anna was then sleeping, under the influence of a gentle opiate that Aunt Betsey administered; and Florence came down into my room, where I was sitting alone, as Uncle Hugh was in the garden with Birdie and Aunt Betsey.

Florence looked very serious. She drew an ottoman close to my chair, and seating herself upon it, rested her head upon her hand, and sat for some moments lost in thought.

"Mother," said she, in a low tone, looking up searchingly into my face. I raised my eyes from my sewing, and fastened them inquiringly upon her. She paused, saying nothing more.

"What is it, Florence?"

"I am thinking strange things of Birdie."

"Not unkind ones, I hope."

"Not exactly unkind, and yet I feel indignant at what she is doing. I wish that I might talk with her."

"What prevents you?"

"Oh, Anna says I must not, and I have promised to regard her wishes."

"Then your thoughts concern Anna also?"

"Yes; but they are all of pity. Why, mother, have you been blind?"

"No."

"And isn't it cruel? How can Birdie do so? Anna says that she has not had an opportunity of speaking with Walter alone but once or twice since he came here, and then she was interrupted by Angebell. It appears to me that Birdie is determined to prohibit them from each other's society as much as possible."

"Would Anna object to your talking with me about this?"

"No; I told her that I should, and she was perfectly willing. She fears that she is foolish, and betrays a lack of confidence in Walter. It almost breaks her heart to bear the neglect she has from him of late. She does not blame Birdie or him, but I blame both. She is afraid that Walter thinks that she encourages the flattering and almost exclusive attention of Charlie Grey when she does not."

"What would you say to Birdie?"

"I would tell her to remember her womanhood. She forgets it in acting the part she does."

We heard low voices in the hall. It was Charlie and Walter who had come to take the young ladies to River Hill. The carriage was standing in the avenue. Florence hastened to meet them.

"Oh, I am so sorry that Anna is asleep," said she, laying her hand upon Walter's arm, and withdrawing his attention from the lively Birdie. "She said that she must see you if you came. She was so urgent about it, that I will go up stairs and awaken her; she will be so disappointed if I do not."

"No, no; you must not wake her up," interdicted Aunt Betsey. "That would be crazy-like, enough. Mr. Lane must wait until she has had her nap."

"That would be wiser, perhaps," said he. "Has she been very ill?"

"Oh no, not very," replied Angebell; "it is only one of

her dreadful headaches. She was feeling much better before she went to sleep, and wanted me to be sure and tell you to go to River Hill this afternoon. And you must indeed, for the scenery around there is delightful."

"If we are to go," said Charlie Grey, in dolorous tone, "I suppose one of three things is left for my choosing. To go alone, stay at home, or get some pretty girl to ride beside me. I think I prefer the latter, and I know where there is as fair a lassie as one would wish to see."

"Who is she?" inquired Birdie.

"Lucy Dean, of course."

"What! Do you really think of taking Lucy Dean? Rather a crude taste I must say."

"We can ride by ourselves, I suppose," retorted Charlie rather sharply. "There is another carriage in the village."

"Now, Charlie," said Angebell, going up to him, and changing the disdainful curl of her lip to a bewitching smile, "you are offended by my unguarded remark. I should like to have Lucy go. You must forgive me if my thoughtlessness wounded you."

For a moment Charlie appeared to doubt her sincerity, and looked coldly upon her; but the bewitching tenderness of her smile, and the soft beaming of her eyes, overcame him, and he apologised for his ungoverned irritability.

"Keep very still!" whispered Birdie, shaking her finger at them all, "for it would be a sad thing to break Anna's slumber. I appoint Walter to maintain order, while I go to put on my bonnet," and she hastened away with light footsteps.

"What shall I tell Anna for you?" asked Florence of Walter as they were about leaving the house. "I know that she will ask if you have been here the very moment that she wakes up."

He bent down and kissed her, and then whispered, yet loud enough for the rest to hear:

"Give her that for me—she will understand it better than any thing else."

"And you will stop when you return?"

"Oh yes, and she must be well enough to come down into the parlor this evening and sing and play for me."

"Give these to Anna when she awakes," said Charlie, who had come in from the garden bearing a beautiful boquet. "Tell her that there is a story hidden in every flower that she must believe."

Florence saw Walter's ill-concealed discomposure, and the exulting smile of Birdie. She did not wish to be the bearer of the flowers, and she was annoyed by the perplexity of her situation.

"It would perhaps afford you a greater pleasure to present them to her yourself this evening," she replied, bowing slightly and withdrawing her hand from the extended boquet.

"It would afford me more pleasure," said he, "to know that she was reminded of me at the first moment of her waking. So take them and put them in your prettiest vase and set them where the first beam from her blue eyes will fall upon them."

She hesitated a moment and then reluctantly received the flowers.

"But I tell you what it is, Charlie," she exclaimed with a joyful exultation, "I am to give her Walter's kiss the first thing, and I am really doubtful about her bestowing many thoughts upon the giver of this beautiful boquet after that."

"Well, don't argue the case any longer," said Angebell, who had stood impatient during the conversation; "let us be going now. I expect to find upon our return the flowers woven into a garland and bound around the head of my fair friend, who will declare the fragrance to have been a healing balm. I must not tell her of the pretty Lucy Dean that rode with Charlie to River Hill. I must say he went alone, and was very sad and dejected."

Charlie and Birdie hastened merrily to the carriage, while Walter followed listlessly and slowly. He did not look very happy, and Florence, who stood watching him from the porch, felt very sure that he was not.

"Come, Parson Gravity!" exclaimed Birdie at beholding the serious demeanor of her companion; "that long face is surely a consoling foretaste of a pleasant ride. What is the subject of your soliloquy—love, death, or bank stocks?"

"Oh, neither," he replied, suddenly changing his humor, and smiling gaily upon her, as he assisted her into the carriage.

"You must be back by supper time," cried Aunt Betsey to them from the porch. "We are going to have something dreadful good."

"We believe that, if you say it," said Charlie, "and know that it will be well to be on hand in season." Then driving slowly beneath the window where Anna slept, so as to make as little noise as possible, they left the avenue and turned toward the river road.

Aunt Betsey had reached down to Florence from the parlor mantel-piece the prettiest vase of the somewhat tasteful collection. Florence had filled it with water and stood it on a little stand, arranging the flowers in it that Charlie had left. Aunt Betsey, with arms a-kimbo, stood looking on with a face the much happier of the two.

"Charlie Grey is a good lad to remember the poor girl so kindly-like," remarked she. "These are sweet posies," and she snuffed them briskly.

"Yes," answered Florence, with but little thought as to what Aunt Betsey said, or her own reply.

"Walter Lane is a likely youth, but Charlie Grey has a foot a *leettle* way ahead of him. Didn't Birdie say that Walter was engaged to Anna?"

"Yes, she told us so."

"And do you really believe it?"

"Most certainly I do."

Aunt Betsey cogitated in silence. Florence, busy with her own thoughts, did not interrupt her.

"It looks queerish, then," she at last broke out in low confidential tones, drawing nearer to Florence, who, having completed the arrangement of the flowers, stood holding the vase off from her eye, and looking at it with evident satisfaction.

Tinkle, tinkle, went Anna's bell, and Florence, with the vase in her hand, hastened to obey the summons, leaving Aunt Betsey with a bewildering mystery revolving in her mind.

"Has Walter been here yet?" inquired Anna, feebly, arising from her pillow when Florence entered. She saw the bouquet, and her eyes brightened.

Florence sat the vase down and went to the bed, and putting her arms around the sick girl, kissed her, whispering as she did so:

"Yes, Walter has been here, and left this kiss for you, and a wish that you may soon get well. We were all sorry that you were asleep when they were here."

"Why didn't you wake me up?" and through her faint smiles the tears glistened.

"I did want to, and should, but Aunt Betsey would not allow it. He said he would be here this evening."

Anna brushed her tears away, and looked more happy.

"Oh, that's good, for then I shall see him alone, and I know I shall have no cause for weeping to-morrow. But oh, how my head does ache!" and clasping her hands across her forehead, she sank back upon her pillow.

Florence wet a napkin in cold water and laid it on her head, saying:

"I was hopeful that you would feel better after sleeping. Walter said that you must be well enough to come down into the parlor, and sing and play for him, to-night."

"Did he say so?" and a rose blushed upon her snowy

cheek. "But, oh dear! I shall not be able to, for my head does ache so very bad. Give me that kiss that he sent me, once more," and Florence bent over her pillow.

"Oh, Florence, I do love you so," and Anna took the little twisted hand and held it lovingly in her own. "You are beautiful in my eyes: I never see your deformity."

"I am glad that you love me, and I hope that you always may."

"I wish that you might have somebody to love you just as I do Walter. Poor child! your heart never had such a blessing, did it?"

"No, and never hopes to have. And yet I should not say, *never hopes*, for such a sunlight does come over it sometimes; but it dies away."

"I fear I should be miserable in your place. But you always look contented and happy."

"I am, Anna. My cup is bitter, yet God gave it to me. Shall we expect good at the hands of the Lord, and not evil?"

Anna's eyes wandered and fell upon the flowers.

"Was that bouquet sent to me?" she asked.

Florence brought the vase, and set it on the stand by the bedside, telling her whose gift it was, and the message that accompanied it. Anna looked disappointed.

"He was very kind to send me the flowers," she said, turning her eyes in another direction. "But where is Birdie? Does she know that I am awake?"

"I forgot to tell you that they have gone to River Hill. They were much disappointed because you were unable to go with them, and would have given up the ride but on Birdie's account: she could not think of the disappointment. Charlie has taken Lucy Dean, the young girl you saw at Susan's the other day."

Anna was silent and troubled. At last she timidly inquired:

"Did Walter go with Birdie?"

"Yes."

"When will they be home?"

"They said they would be back to supper."

"Florence," said Anna tremulously, and starting with the throbbing pain in her temples, "I cannot go down stairs this evening; I must see Walter, and will you be sure and ask him up here to see me?"

Florence assured her that she would, and began to regulate the room in anticipation of his visit. She arranged the toilet-stand, and sat the vase of flowers there. She put away the riding habit that had lain across the chair ever since the morning, then smoothing the bed and pillows, and gently brushing the hair of the sick girl, and confining it in a clean snowy cap, she drew the large rocking chair beside the bed, saying:

"Walter shall sit here, right beside you, and while you are dreaming around this old chair, I'll go down and engage the services of Aunt Betsey for something nice for your supper."

"Not any thing very nice, for I don't feel as though I could eat a bit."

"But you must, and she will know just exactly what you need and want," and closing the door softly she hobbled slowly down stairs.

Florence was not mistaken; for after Aunt Betsey had bustled around the kitchen awhile she passed through the hall with a tray laden with some of her most palatable niceties. Florence followed close behind her bearing the sugar and cream that could find no place upon the crowded tray.

"Tell Anna that I shall be up to see her after her supper and shall expect to find her looking quite smart," said I, as they passed the parlor door where Uncle Hugh and I were sitting.

"May be I shall come too," added Uncle Hugh.

"That's right," replied Florence, "and unless our skilful physician, Betsey Wilkins, M. D., should think it proper to

forbid it, Anna will be the centre of attraction this evening as usual."

"M. D. or not," responded Aunt Betsey, puffing up the stairs, "I shall have my way about the girl. She is going to be well to-morrow, certain sure."

We waited tea an hour for the return of the party from River Hill. It did not seem an hour to me, for Uncle Hugh had been telling me many incidents in his past life: events that had cast their shadows upon his destiny. It must have been a tedious time for Anna, who had persuaded Aunt Betsey to let her sit up in the rocking chair awhile, by the window that looked off upon the winding road from River Hill.

It was quite late when we sat down to tea, but the party had not yet returned. It was rather a long ride, yet we were certain they had ample time to go there and back if no accident or unnecessary delay had occurred on the way. They might have stopped to take tea with Susan, but we thought that hardly probable. An old friend of Birdie's resided not far from River Hill, and they might have called there, yet this was very doubtful as we had not heard Birdie mention her for many years.

After tea I went immediately to Anna's chamber. Florence met me on the stairs, and thus I knew that Anna was all alone.

She was sitting by the window, her face turned towards it, and in such a position that I saw but her half averted profile. It was twilight and the lamps were not lighted, but the full moon, that shone through a cluster of distant elms, cast a mellow light into the apartment.

I opened and closed the door so noiselessly, and she was so lost in her meditations, that she was unaware of my presence.

"Oh, Walter! such treatment from you!" burst passionately from her lips, as wearied with watching, and overcome with painful forebodings, she turned her face from the window and burying it in her hands, gave way to her irrepressible

grief. She thought she was all alone, and I withdrew, resolving that she should never be pained by the knowledge of the revelation she had made.

I met Florence on the stairs, and hushed her when she was about to speak. She opened her large eyes with wonderment.

"I have been in Anna's chamber," I whispered: "she did not know I was there, and you must keep it from her."

"I understand it. She gave way to her feelings, thinking she was alone. She has suffered much to-day both in mind and body."

"Do you know what detains Birdie and the rest of the party?"

"No, and I do wish they would come. Anna has tired herself out waiting for them. She is anxious to see Walter alone to-night."

"And she shall not be disappointed."

"Come back with me, and talk cheerfully with her awhile. It will make the time seem a little shorter perhaps."

We rapped softly before opening the door. The sweet and tremulous tone that bade us come in, and the red and swollen blue eyes that spake us the kindest welcome, told of a bitter struggle, and when I kissed her hot and throbbing cheek, I heard the beating of her troubled heart.

"Had you not better lie down?" asked Florence.

"No, not yet," and she looked anxiously out of the window.

We sat in silence, but out of doors the air was thrilling with sweet sounds, twilight sounds, the loveliest music of the day. We let them talk for us, and the sad plaintive melody accorded with the unspoken sorrow of our hearts.

A faint rumbling of wheels aroused us. We bent forward without speaking. Soon the zephyrs wafted a clear singing voice that we knew to be Birdie's. They were coming, she singing as they rode.

"That is them!" said Florence, arising from her seat to

open the blinds that Anna might better see the carriage as it came up the avenue.

But Anna checked her movement. "No, Florence," said she; "let them be thus partly closed."

Leaning back in the chair, she folded her eyelids close upon her pale cheeks, while her lips faintly trembled with inaudible whispers. Then shuddering slightly, she drew her shawl closer about her, and leaned forward to the window again.

Birdie ceased singing shortly after they entered the gates; but every nook and dell was resonant with her sweet voice.

The carriage moved slowly, as if the melody had charmed the horses into a dreamy mood.

"No lights but in the kitchen and dining room!" we heard Birdie say, as she came within full sight of the house. "The folks have all gone out to ride, I think."

Charlie Grey was sitting alone upon the front seat, his elbows upon his knees, and his chin resting upon his hands. The reins were lying loose: the horses knew better than he what they were about.

Walter and Birdie were sitting behind him. She had taken off her bonnet, and Walter's hat, adorned with willows and flowers, was set bewitchingly upon one side of her pretty head. His arm was around her, and she was looking up confidentially into his face. The stopping of the carriage aroused Charlie from his reverie.

"Well, here we are!" said he, yawning as he arose from his seat. "'Tis a good thing that these horses have travelled this road before. It is no care of mine their bringing us here."

Birdie replied by a light musical laugh, and Walter added something about the shortness of the ride that was heartily responded to by Charlie Grey.

"Here's your hat, Walter," said Birdie, after alighting, as she lifted it carefully from her head, so as not to disarrange

its burden of wilted flowers, "and in remembrance of me and our pleasant ride, you must never remove these faded blossoms."

"I could hardly be tempted to do that, if I dare flatter myself upon looking as bewitching beneath their shadows as yourself," and he drew her to him and kissed her.

I turned quickly to Anna. She was leaning breathlessly towards the window; her face very white, her eyes wild and tearless, and her lips firmly compressed. Strongly nerved by the intense excitement that gave to her fragile being an appearance of daring power, I trembled at the discovery, as I thought of a stream that rising in foaming might, would overflow its banks, and scatter devastation and ruin. But it was only the fearful spell of a moment. The sweet gentleness that characterized her was yet her most powerful attribute. The rebellious voice of wounded affection could not overcome it. Trembling violently, she sank back in her chair, and the deep shadow that screened her, concealed the expression of her countenance. My hand accidentally came in contact with hers, and I felt it very cold.

"I will go down and invite Walter up to see you," said Florence, arising. There was a huskiness in her tone that revealed her agitation.

"No, Florence; no!" and Anna started suddenly to her feet, and laid her hand upon the shoulder of the little one.

"Why so?" asked Florence, pleadingly. "You have been longing all day to see him."

"I know it!" and pressing her hand upon her forehead, she sank back again into her seat; "but I cannot see him now. I cannot!"

Knowing that she was forgetful of my presence, I reminded her of it by saying:

"It will be better, perhaps, to wait until morning. Your illness to-night would prevent your enjoyment of his society."

She started at the sound of my voice, and looked discon-

certainly at Florence. Kissing her good night, I left them alone.

I did not go into the parlor, from which issued the merriest sounds of glee, but to the quiet library, then moonlighted, and, as ever, memory haunted, and seating myself in my husband's chair, gave way to the melancholy that rushed upon me, the past and the present, and the dim to come, and when Florence entered softly and aroused me by her soft hand upon my forehead, I was weeping bitterly.

"Has Walter gone up stairs?" I inquired.

"No, Anna does not wish to see him to-night: she says she is not calm enough."

"Have you been in the parlor?"

She told me that she had, and Walter, who was sitting by the side of Angebell, smiling at her cheerfulness, had appeared disappointed by Anna's continued illness. Angebell had made a few careless remarks, half earnest, half sportive, but Charlie Grey had evinced more sympathy and regard for the sick girl than them all. He inquired minutely concerning her, gave many a tender message, and hoped that his humble gift had lessened somewhat the painful weariness and monotony of a sick day.

"Do you think that Charlie is in love with Anna?" asked Florence.

"No, it is but a retaliation upon Walter, who, he thinks, has stolen Birdie's attention from him."

"Do you think that Walter loves Birdie?"

"Walter is more a stranger to me and I cannot read him so perfectly. He seems infatuated with her brilliancy and beauty, and she constantly violates her professed friendship to Anna."

There was a long silence between us, broken only by an occasional sound of Birdie's laugh from the parlor. Florence drew closer beside me and laid her head in my lap.

"Mother."

That one word spoken sadly and softly was ever the preface to her confidential conversations with me. After my response there was always a silence ere she continued.

She said, "I am sometimes happy that Birdie does not return the affection of Charlie Grey. Not because I love him: oh no; but she would never make him good and happy, and that is what I so much desire him to be."

"She will never marry him, Florence; at least I think so now. She aspires to wealth and position, and that Charlie has not."

"Walter has."

"And that fact leads us to read things more clearly. Poor Anna! I pity her."

"So do I," responded Florence, "and yet I once wished that Birdie might love and marry any one but Charlie Grey, but I would rather now it were him than Walter."

We heard a slight movement in Anna's chamber, which was directly over us, and Florence fearing she was in need of something, left me alone once more.

"All alone!" I murmured, as the door closed and her footfall died away upon the stairs. Those two sad words thrilled my whole being, and clasping my arms across an aching void, my yearning heart looked down the vista of past years, then fluttering its feeble broken wings, it struggled towards the future.

Oh! the long years of his absence, would they never come to an end? Must I still journey on foot, sore and weary, with but the remembrance of his smile and blessing to give me cheer? Florence was left to love me, and her sweet affection clambered like a fruitful vine about me, yet there were leafless withered boughs it could not cover.

God be kind!

CHAPTER XII.

'Twas bitter then to rend the heart
With the sad word that we must part,
And like some low and mournful spell,
To whisper but one word—farewell!

PARK BENJAMIN.

"CHARLIE and Walter have been here," said Florence, when she entered my room early the next morning.

"This morning! Is there to be another excursion to-day?"

"Walter and Charlie are going up to the mountains hunting and fishing, and do not expect to be back in a week or more. They came to bid the girls good bye."

The young ladies were not awake when Aunt Betsey came blustering into their chamber, telling them that Charlie and Walter were down stairs, and that they must hurry and get up to see them. Birdie sprang from her pillow, and making a hasty toilet, without offering any assistance to her friend, ran merrily down stairs. But poor Anna, whose head was still aching, and who had slept but very little during the past night, felt unable to do so.

Aunt Betsey brushed up the room a little, and drawing the easy chair near the bed, assisted Anna into it. Then she washed her face as she would a wee baby's, smoothed her hair, and claimed her usual tribute of a kiss.

"You will feel lots better in a little while, my darling," said she, when she saw the sick girl almost fainting with her pain. "After you have been up a few minutes, and breathed

the fresh air, and drank the cup of tea I am going to send right up, you'll be as smart as a cricket." Then throwing a shawl around Anna's shoulders, she opened the eastern window, and let in a flood of sunlight.

"You want to see Walter all alone, don't you, my darling?" and Aunt Betsey paused upon the threshold.

"Yes; I would like to," was the low reply.

"Then, indeed you shall; and that will help to drive away this headache I am sure. You are looking sweet this morning, I do declare, so white-lily-like;" and she cast a lingering look of admiration ere she left the room.

Aunt Betsey did not scruple to confine her invitation to Anna's chamber to Walter exclusively. Angebell was absent from the room at the time, and Charlie Grey, half sportively, inserted a plea that he might go up also.

"Now, Charlie Grey!" exclaimed Aunt Betsey, throwing up her hands in astonishment, "I should expect you to be more thinking-like than to ask such a thing! Don't you suppose that if you was engaged to our Birdie, that you would like to see her alone once in a while?"

"Why, yes, if I loved her, and nobody else;" and Charlie presumed to laugh in the sober face of Aunt Betsey.

"Don't talk so foolish-like, Charlie Grey," and Aunt Betsey grew excited. "You are a smart sensible lad when you have a mind to be, and I only wish that you would always behave yourself as well as you can. There has been no need of your taking on as you have for a week or two past; it is something you should be sorry for."

"Now, my dear Aunt Betsey, what are you scolding me about?" said Charlie pleadingly, and looking very pitiful indeed; but if Aunt Betsey had had on her spectacles, as by chance she did not, she would have seen a roguish twinkle in his gray eye all the while. "I am sure I try to be good: these little stumbles are only my daily certificates of humanity."

"Yes, Charlie, you are a good boy, and I love you as I would my own." The voice of Aunt Betsey grew more tender, and her hand rested on his thick curly hair. "I can hardly think that you mean any sorry mischief, but it does look very wicked-like."

"What is my crime? Oh, I forgot, but now I remember: I laughed at your sun-flower bed yesterday, beside spilling some of Elder Berry's wine on your immaculate white apron the other night. But I am really sorry, and do forgive me, and I'll never do so again."

"What is it that calls for so humble a confession?" interrogated Birdie, who entered in time to hear Charlie's petition.

"Oh, he knows," replied Aunt Betsey, wisely shaking her head.

"Where is Walter?" suddenly inquired Birdie, glancing around the room.

"Up stairs of course," replied Aunt Betsey, in no very pleasant tone.

"Ah! is he? Well, then, Charlie, we will go up there."

"They do not want to see you now, I am certain," said the fearless Aunt Betsey. "The prettiest thing for you to do is to stay where you are."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Birdie, with flashing eyes and withering scorn. "Low heads are wearing high plumes! Hereafter, Betsey, when your advice is needed you will be called upon."

Aunt Betsey gave no answer. Her heart sank beneath the bitterness of Birdie's words, and choking with the sorrow they awakened, she hastily left the room.

"Now, Charlie," said Birdie, with regained composure, "I trust you will venture to accept my invitation up stairs."

"Certainly," he replied, following her.

Anna had conversed but little with Walter when Charlie and Birdie entered. She had imparted nothing of a confi-

dential nature, and there was a crushing burden upon her heart. She could have burst into tears when she heard them merrily ascending the stairs, but she bravely concealed her feelings and welcomed them as kindly as she could.

She had divested Walter of every fear regarding her illness, assuring him that she felt much better that morning, and was confident, from past experience, that ere the day should transpire, she would have made rapid recovery. But, alas for her hope, and his ready belief, scarce an hour had passed after his departure before she grew alarmingly worse. Dr. Talman was summoned, and pronounced her threatened with fever, yet he entertained sanguine hopes that by quiet and careful nursing the disease might be warded off.

She was very sick all that day, and Aunt Betsey watched with her through the night. She was delirious at times, and would then have revealed, had we suffered her to, much that was locked up in the most sacred chambers of her heart. She would call for Walter, and mourn at his absence, in language that made us weep. We would have sent for him, but no one knew their exact destination when they started off. They were going hunting and fishing "up the mountains," and there were unnumbered localities that Charlie would be prone to choose.

She sunk into an easy slumber towards morning, and did not awaken until a late hour, and then she felt much soothed and refreshed. Her fever and delirium had subsided, and she manifested a hearty appreciation of Aunt Betsey's toast and tea.

Florence and I were sitting beside her. She was tossing restlessly on her pillow, and we had seen her brush away several big tears, but they came fast and faster, and at last she hid her face and sobbed bitterly.

"I can't help it, indeed I can't!" she replied to our tender inquiries. "I do want to go home. You are kind and good, but I want to see mother!"

"Was you, my dear reader, ever homesick when surrounded by loving friends who did all in their power to make you happy? Was you ever sick in heart and body as Anna was, and far away from the paternal roof? Then you will blame her as little as we did. She was an only child, the pet of a household, and how natural it was that she should, after an absence of a fortnight or more, so want to go home and see her mother.

"I must go to-morrow! indeed I must!" said she decidedly, and smiling through her tears.

"Oh, you will not be well enough!"

"Yes I will; the thought of going puts a new life into me. You have been kind and good, and have made me very happy, but now I want to go home, for I must see mother," and her face was hid in the pillow again.

Willie Blake was to start for New York the next morning, and after due deliberation and a council with the physician, who considered it rather hazardous, it was decided that Anna, if she was a little better, should accompany him to the end of his journey. She had relatives living in New York, and some of them would go on with her to Philadelphia.

I had learned to love Anna dearly, and the thought of her departure gave me sadness. Florence would burst into tears whenever it was mentioned, but Birdie, who professed much sorrow, betrayed a heartlessness after all.

Late in the afternoon Anna persisted in sitting up a while, and her plea was so tenderly earnest, that the objections of Aunt Betsey were finally overcome.

"Now draw that little stand beside me, if you please, and get my portfolio that is in my trunk. I am going to write a letter."

"Oh, you are not well enough for that!" exclaimed Aunt Betsey. "Indeed, if you go on so, you'll not leave Daisy Lawn to-morrow."

"I will only write a letter." Then giving an expressive

glance to Florence: "It is something that must be written."

Florence got the portfolio, and spread the writing materials before her.

"We will leave you alone ten minutes," I said, taking my watch and laying it beside her. "Aunt Betsey, will you allow her that time?"

"Oh yes, if she'll promise to write easy-like, and not work like a hurried parson. 'Tis natural enough for the dear child to want to leave a kindly word for Walter Lane. He'll feel bad enough when he comes back and finds her gone, and he will not stay here long, I reckon."

That made Anna smile, and she was sadly smiling when we left the room.

An hour passed before the letter was finished, and then Aunt Betsey's feverish fears were somewhat allayed, for Anna consented to go back to her pillow and try and "catch a nap."

"I must leave my letter in the care of some of you," said she, "trusting that it will receive an immediate delivery."

Florence put forth her hand to take it, but Birdie grasped it, and reading the simple direction, "*Walter*," exclaimed:

"Oh yes, Anna! I will be a faithful servant to you." Then discovering that it was sealed, she tapped lightly upon the wax, saying:

"That is against Aunt Fanny's strictest rules of decorum. She would declare it to be a lack of confidence."

"Well, it is not," said Anna. "I had no such thought while sealing it. I expected to leave it with Florence."

"And she is the last one with whom to intrust any thing of so much importance. Why, bless your kind heart, it won't be ten minutes after you have gone, before she will be entombed in that catacomb of a library, thinking of any thing but Anna Clayton and her love-letter."

"Well! well! well!" whewed Aunt Betsey, "you don't seem to think that this child must have some sleep. Go down stairs all of you. Your Uncle Hugh will be lonesome

enough, left to himself so much. Come, hurry out!" and we were all ejected from the chamber, without attempting a useless resistance.

Anna was much better the next morning than we had anticipated she would be. She was pale and very weak, but we thought that the ride, and the excitement attending it, would exhilarate her. Willie Blake was a fortunate companion, and we felt confident of her comfort and safety while she was under his protection.

Willie had bidden his mother and Lucy farewell, and his face bore signs of late weeping, when he came smiling among us. They had but few moments for delay, and those were improved by us all. Uncle Hugh felt paid a thousand-fold for the deed of kindness he had done, by beholding the happy face of Willie Blake, who, clad in coarse yet neat apparel, with a little pack upon his arm, and a mother's blessing and the love-vow of Lucy upon his heart, was going forth to battle with the world. We all wished him success, and a hearty God-speed.

"Oh! how I love you all!" said Anna, as she lingered among us upon the porch. "It is hard to leave you, you have been so kind to me."

"Stay then," said Birdie; "we do not want you to go."

"Oh, you are mother's baby! that's it!" and Aunt Betsey gave her a hearty kiss, and a little basket well filled with cakes to eat upon the way.

We kissed her again and again, each one procuring a kiss for Walter, and her eyes moistened at the mention of his name. She had embraced us all, and was about to enter the carriage, when she looked lingeringly back to Florence; she clasped her once more in her arms, and whispered the last good-bye. Then the carriage rolled away, and Florence sat down upon the door-step and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER XIII.

"To die for what we love! O there is power
In the true heart, and pride and joy for *this*;
It is to *live* without the vanished light
That strength is needed."

A WEEK after Anna's departure, Charlie and Walter returned from their excursion to the mountains. On the day previous we had received a letter from Mrs. Clayton assuring us of her daughter's improving health, although she had been very ill for a few days after her return home. She expressed a sincere gratitude for our kindness and attention to Anna, and an earnest wish that the visit should be returned at a not distant period. Anna would write to us as soon as she was able, and was very desirous of receiving a letter from Angelbell or Florence.

Birdie sat down immediately and dashed off a flippant letter to her friend, but Florence delayed writing until Walter's return, thinking it would be soon, and she might then send her letter to Philadelphia in his care. She had no thought of his lingering at the parsonage, but naturally supposed he would take an early departure, and therefore she was greatly surprised when Birdie told her one morning, a day or two after the young gentlemen had got home, that Walter intended to prolong his visit.

He became a constant visitor at our house, while Charlie Grey called but seldom, as Florence secretly avoided him, and Birdie was absorbed with the unceasing attentions of

Walter. But late one afternoon Charlie appeared with a book of poems that Florence and he had formerly read together, and paying no heed to the rather exclusive occupants of the parlor, he went in search of Florence, who was, as Birdie would say, "entombed among her books and parchments."

"Come now, Florence!" said he, startling her by his unexpected presence, "have mercy on your old friend once more, and grant him a little of your attention. I am down with the blues, the real old-fashioned kind, that you understand curing so marvellously."

"And what shall I do for you?" she inquired, closing her book and modestly dropping her eyes, that had been at first timidly uplifted to his face, while a brilliant pink mounted to her forehead.

"Come and read with me as you used to do. I have hardly looked inside of a book since the afternoon we spent with Charles Lamb down in the garden. I am going to be more steady now, and read something every day, and you know I wouldn't care a fig for reading without you. Nobody gives me the comfort you can, even if you do lecture me once in a while," and taking her hand he drew her gently from her chair, saying that the library was vacant and looking particularly inviting.

"Well then we will go there," said she, and had Charlie known all she had told to me, he might have observed the broken undulation of her voice, her slight trembling, and the alternate crimson and paleness of her cheeks.

They sat down in the deeply recessed window, and Charlie put his arm around her just as he had ever been wont to do.

"You are my sister, Florence," he said, kissing her broad forehead, "will you own me as a brother?"

How tenderly he spoke: yet it was a deep wound to her aching heart, that writhed with its intense anguish. She could not speak, but silent and motionless she sat, her gaze

fastened upon the sunset clouds. The vision of faith was piercing beyond, yearning for strength in that time of weakness.

Her outward serenity concealed her inward agitation, and Charlie, thinking her absorbed by the glorious beauty of the dying day, drew her closer to his side and imprinting another kiss upon her forehead, added:

"Will you love me as a brother, Florence? May I call you my sister?"

"Yes, Charlie," and she spoke firmly and distinct; but he made two requests of her, and her reply could only have been to the last.

"Well then," and Charlie laughed, as he always did, no matter how sober he might feel, and playfully patted her upon her burning cheeks, "if you are a sister to me you must expect lots of care, trouble and responsibility. I shall break resolutions by the score, laugh sometimes at your sermons, and do any thing but what you would be pleased to have me. But you must believe that I mean to be good after all."

"Noble motives bring noble deeds. If the heart is right the hand will not work much mischief."

"I know that," said he, "yet our outward temptations may be so much stronger than our purest resolutions that we may be too weak to accomplish our earnest endeavors. Then we want an influence to shield and protect us. I would depend upon you before any one else."

"Not upon me, Charlie, not upon me," and her soul beamed from her eyes as she spoke, and he thrilled beneath them; "my influence is human and unsanctified. A broken reed is a poor support to lean upon. God is the only Shield and Protector."

"I know nothing of Divine influence. If there is such a thing I am too far removed to feel its power. Earth is nearer to me than heaven, and you than God."

"Ah no, Charlie, God is very near to you. We cannot

enter a human heart. To us it is veiled in mysteries, and the glimpses we may catch are like peeps through a key-hole into a large and dark mansion. But He moves through the chambers of our soul, and nothing is hidden from him. We cannot bring a human heart so near to ours."

"You look upon these things very different from what I do, and in a clearer light. Humanity is nearer to me than Divinity; but we will not debate the question, as I am not in the least bit of a mood for an argument;" and opening the book he had brought, he found a page that was folded, and handed it to Florence, saying:

"I want to hear you read that again, and just as you did last spring. It has rung in my ears ever since, and I can distinctly remember your intonation for every word. It will hardly interrupt our conversation as it bears upon the same subject in a degree."

Florence had by that time obtained so perfect a control of her feelings that she read with her usual ease and eloquence, and it was long after sunset, when the twilight was insufficient to light the page, that the reading ceased.

"I wish that my engagement for to-night was annihilated, so that I might stay longer with you. I wanted to have a long talk with you, and yet for the life of me I hardly know now what it would be about. You are the only person in the wide world, Florence, that really understands me."

He had arisen to go, and stood leaning over her chair. She felt his warm breath upon her face, and she wondered if he could hear the wild beating of her heart. Tears were gushing from beneath her drooping lids, but the twilight was so deep that they fell unseen by him.

Charlie lingered, saying nothing, but the tattoo he beat upon her chair was a sure indication of his mind's unrest. Suddenly he turned upon his heel, gave her a hurried good night and was gone, and Florence remained alone in the library until late.

On the morrow she was sad and abstracted. She had related the interview to me, the severe struggle it had cost her, and the peace it had broken. "Yet I do trust in heaven that I shall yet be strong," she added with her simple faith.

The conduct of Walter Lane was a source of grief and wonderment to all of our household, with the exception of Angebell, who seemed happy in his exclusive and flattering attention. I thought him strangely infatuated by brilliancy and beauty, that, perhaps with deceit and cunning, but drew the net closer about him. He carefully avoided conversation with any of us, and although he was daily at the house we saw but very little of him. It was clearly manifest that Angebell desired but little intercourse between us, and if we were brought together by accident she was ever ready, with some apt excuse, to withdraw him from our society.

"I wonder what Anna wrote in the letter she left for Walter?" said Florence to me one evening after receiving a letter from Anna, in which but slight mention was made of Walter, and that but a modest inquiry if he was yet at the parsonage. She had shown the letter to him, and he had merely glanced it over without making a single remark.

"Nothing harsh, I am certain, if I may judge from her feelings that day."

Florence sat thinking. Her troubled countenance and her uneasiness showed the nature of her thoughts.

"I don't know but I am very unjust," she said at last, "but I can't help doubting if Walter ever got that letter."

"We would be unwilling to condemn Angebell without abundant proof."

"I will ask Charlie Grey about it: he will be likely to know. I shall conceal my suspicions. Do you think there will be any harm in my speaking to him about it?"

I could see none. Charlie came to Daisy Lawn that afternoon, and when he went away Florence walked with him to the gate, and made that the opportunity of broaching the subject.

He knew from a casual remark of Walter's that Angebell had handed him a letter from Anna, but what its contents were, or their effect upon him, he could not tell, only he had been led to surmise from his silence in regard to Anna, and his non-correspondence with her, that it was something that had dissolved their engagement. Walter and himself were friends, but not confidants. Charlie was not backward in stating his firm conviction that Walter and Angebell were betrothed.

"O, how shall I write to Anna?" said Florence, with painful perplexity, when she returned to me. "It is hard to tell her the true appearance of things: she has grief enough already. Yet I profess to be her friend, and I must not violate her trust."

"Say but little in regard to Walter, but enough to prevent her from any wrong inferences."

"I will tell her that he contemplates prolonging his stay at the parsonage. I will say nothing about the letter, for I am now sure that he has it."

"Shall you tell her of his intimacy with Angebell?"

She thought a moment.

"No, I hardly think I will; it would almost break her heart. I will do something else first."

"What will you do?"

"I will have a plain talk with Walter. He may think it is none of my business, but I think it is. I will try and find out how he feels towards Anna, and what he intends to do; and if any one can clear the poor girl from unjust blame, I think it is in my power. I will see him to-night."

"He has gone to ride with Angebell, and will not return until late."

"Well, then, to-morrow."

"Another disappointment, I fear. They are going to River Hill with that fishing party."

"Then the first chance I get!" and she set her foot down

decidedly. She was invincible when fully determined, and opposition but served to make her strong.

"Well! well!" said Uncle Hugh, coming in slowly from the garden, and looking very pale. "I'd like to know what has taken hold of this old bachelor! Fever and ague, cholera, scarlet fever, croup, or what? I feel bad enough, of that I am sure," and he threw himself down upon the lounge.

This, of course, made a commotion throughout the house. Aunt Betsey looked woeful enough, and bustled about as if she had a world to make before sundown. Florence insisted on bathing his head in water, while I urged him to allow us, if he thought any thing serious ailed him, to send for the doctor.

"Goodness gracious!" and he jumped up suddenly, and tried to reach his bedroom; but alas, for poor Uncle Hugh: he was too sick and weak, and he staggered so, that he was obliged to let Aunt Betsey help him back to the lounge. He looked rather meek after such a downfall, yet summoned up enough of his good nature to laugh and wish himself in the darkest and dustiest corner of his old Haystack, where he might be sick if he chose, and all alone to himself.

"Now don't take on so," said Aunt Betsey, returning with his dressing-gown and slippers; "'tis a dreadful thing to be sick alone, indeed you must know that it is;" and she deliberately pulled off his boots and put on his slippers, and he bore it all very quietly.

"Now please to get up and take off that coat you are rumpling so dreadfully, and put this on," and she handed him his dressing gown.

He was very sick, yet he would laugh and be contrary, and we had to coax and plead with him for some time before he submitted to our wishes.

"Now you must tell me just how you feel," said Aunt Betsey, sitting down beside him, looking vastly concerned.

Uncle Hugh muttered something about corns and gray hairs, and his conviction that he was not so young as formerly.

"Now do be sober-like," and Aunt Betsey looked stern; yet deep wrinkles would show themselves where dimples had once been. "Speak out; for we want to know what to do for you."

"Have you any catnip?" He really looked serious.

"Yes, a plenty, a nice lot of it," and she partly arose; but Uncle Hugh detained her.

"Any smart weed?"

"Of course; I always keep it on hand."

"Any lobelia?"

"Yes, a little; shall I get you a dose?"

"Wait a minute, Betsey; just wait a minute. Tell me if you have some red peppers?"

"Yes, yes; every thing of the kind," and the good dame grew impatient.

"Now I'll tell you what I want you to do," said Uncle Hugh, with a stifled groan, and pressing his hand upon his head, that ached so dreadfully. "Go and steep all the things together that I have mentioned, in equal amounts, with the exception of the peppers, and let them predominate four to one. Sweeten to your taste, and administer to old Pruno, who is lying out upon the grass, looking as if he would say, 'thank you,' to any body that would give him the death blow."

And so he teased and tormented us, until about eight in the evening, when he grew so much worse that he did request us to send for Dr. Talman, our old family physician, who soon arrived and pronounced it a case of typhoid fever.

For several days he was dangerously ill, and Aunt Betsey did not leave him night nor day. His pillow was restless unless she smoothed it, and his gruel unpalatable excepting she prepared it. But even when his fever was at its height, and great fears were entertained as to his recovery, he was

the same Uncle Hugh, making us laugh in spite of our anxiety.

During this momentous time, Florence did not entirely forget her resolution of conversing with Walter, but she was so engrossed with the invalid that no favorable opportunity presented itself. She marked the increasing intimacy, notwithstanding, and felt deeply pained in beholding it. Angebell confided nothing to us, and returned our interest with silent disdain.

One evening when Uncle Hugh was a convalescent, bolstered up in an easy chair, telling us stories of the days when he was a boy, Mr. Graham returned from the office, and scattered a bundle of letters and papers among us. There was a letter from New York for Angebell, directed in so singular a hand that we all pronounced it to be from M. Durand. Aunt Betsey, eyeing it most suspiciously, carried it to the parlor, where Angebell was entertaining Walter, and returned assuring us that it was from the "old Frenchman," as she called him, and she knew by the way Birdie acted when she received it.

There was a letter for Susan from Willie, directed in my care; one for Florence from Anna, and the tears came to her eyes when she took it, and hastened from the room to give it a perusal. There were several for Uncle Hugh, besides a quantity of newspapers and monthly magazines, and from these he selected one and handed it to me, winking most mischievously as he did so. It was the "Hearthstone Magazine," and sure enough, it contained a little poem, very prettily praised by the editors, and to it was suffixed the simple signature: "F. McA."

Charlie Grey, who had been with us all of the evening, and reading with Florence, until Uncle Hugh commanded them to his presence, saw the entire movement, and my joyousness; so saying, "Please may I?"—Charlie was a pet you know—he peeped over my shoulder and read with me.

"That is beautiful!" said he. "A perfect gem! Let's see who it is by?—'F. McA.'" He was silent a moment, in which I feared Uncle Hugh would burst with laughter, then starting with the sudden suspicion that burst upon him, he exclaimed:

"That's our Florence, I know! I am sure it is, for it sounds just like her," and he read the poem aloud.

"What is it about Florence?" interrupted Aunt Betsey, with much impatience. "What does it say about her?"

Charlie explained the mystery in a few words. She was too much elated to sit still, so she laid aside her knitting and bustled about the room talking all the time. The idea of having one's name in print was to her coëqual to sitting upon the throne of England.

"I know that Florence is smart," she said, "but who would have dreamed of her making a writing-woman?"

All this pleased Uncle Hugh: it was his particular kind of enjoyment. Florence came in, looking very sad, and showing signs of her having been weeping, and our joyousness was not marked by her.

A brother never loved a sister more purely than Charlie did Florence. With a joy-animated countenance he handed her the magazine, requesting her to read a little poem that pleased him very much.

She received it carelessly, and glanced cursorily down the page. The crimson flushed to her cheeks, and looking up, first into Charlie's face, and then from one to another of the group that were enjoying her surprise, her eyes rested, half-rebukingly, upon Uncle Hugh.

He gave a hearty laugh for a sick man, and rubbed his hands for glee.

"I have promised more from the same portfolio, and the word of Hugh Starkweather never was broken."

"More of my poems!" and Florence opened her eyes wider than ever. "I did not think of publishing any thing for some time yet—my pieces are very imperfect."

"Whew! what a bait for a compliment! Puff & Co. don't say any thing there, do they, about remarkable talents in one so young?"

Florence looked down to the carpet; she really did not know what to say, but Aunt Betsey did, and she lavished all the sincere and overflowing praise of her good-natured heart upon her darling.

Florence attempted to thank Uncle Hugh for his interest in her, but he would hear nothing of the kind. He kissed her until she ceased speaking, and pinched her cheeks when she playfully recommenced. He had but one request to make of her, and that was for her to devote herself exclusively to the knitting of *blue stockings*, never failing to have a supply for the *Hearthstone Magazine*, that had a particular partiality for those of her manufacture.

Before retiring that night I went to the rose chamber. I found Florence alone, her book closed beside her, and her head bowed upon the writing desk. She smiled suddenly when she saw me, and was much surprised at learning the lateness of the hour.

"You are much encouraged now, Florence. You will persevere with more hope and assurance."

"Yes, I shall. I feel competent to-night of doing what I fear is far beyond my capabilities. Mother," and she drew closer to my side and breathed her words in a whisper, "nothing cheered and inspired me so much as the praise of Charlie Grey."

I gave no answer. Since the revelation of her feelings I always trembled when she so touchingly mentioned his name. I yearned for her to forget him. I sometimes wished, notwithstanding my attachment to the warm-hearted Charlie, that he would absent himself entirely from our house, thus excluding Florence from his society. She would not forget him then, but she might be spared the painful and constant warfare that she endured.

But did he not love her as a brother, and prize her sisterly affection and influence? Was not his a reckless craft-upon foaming waters, and would heaven forgive me of depriving him of an earnest saving hand? I would be silent: God would do well.

"I do love him, mother," she continued, with all the confiding tenderness of her nature; "I cannot help but love him, and when I try not to, I feel bitterly condemned. I have no hope of his ever loving me else than a brother. I stood by Birdie to-day before the large mirror, and I felt rebuked for ever cherishing such a dream."

I held her closer to my heart, and she continued, a calm spiritual smile illuminating her features as she spoke:

"I will pray that I may have a saving power for Charlie, that my influence may be hallowed, and my weak hand strengthened, that it may lead him aright. He shall never know how I love him. I will call him brother, though the name send frost to my heart."

"Alas! for her!" I murmured as I kissed her good-night. I thought of her deep affection and its noble yet martyr-like aim. "The sister is not the wife. God help her."

CHAPTER XIV.

An open foe may prove a curse,
But a pretended friend is worse.

GAY'S FABLES.

"HERE is my letter from Anna," said Florence, laying the letter in my lap.

My eyes moistened as I read it, she spake so tenderly of us all, of her visit at Daisy Lawn, and the varied memories it would ever give. There was a kind inquiry and a gentle message for every member of the household, Pruno, and Dickie, the pet canary, not forgotten. She had been anxious on account of the long delay in the answering of her letter, fearing lest some of us were ill, perhaps Florence.

"Let me still confide in you, Florence," she wrote. "Since my departure from your home I have deeply felt the absence of the gentle sympathizing heart that knew so well how to soften my griefs. I cannot write as I would speak to you, if you were sitting close beside me, now clasping my hand and looking up into my face with that sad thoughtful gaze of yours, that helped me to utter what I could not to others. I so truly feel the want of your advice, the upholding strength of your friendship, and its sweet and holy influence, that I can no longer conceal my sorrow, and the dread foreboding of its increase that is crushing me so.

"Walter has not yet written to me, but I was informed by his mother yesterday that he intends prolonging his stay at the parsonage. I can accuse myself of no cause for this cruel

neglect, and I bewilder myself in endeavoring to frame an honorable excuse for his conduct. God forbid that I should ever blame him unjustly.

"In the long letter that I gave to Birdie to deliver immediately upon Walter's return, I urged him so earnestly to write to me soon, that I was confident of receiving an early answer at least. Perhaps Birdie has forgotten to deliver my missive, she has so much to engross her attention. Oh, how I hope that is the only cause for his strange silence!

"I am bewildered, Florence, in a maze of dark uncertainties. I dare not doubt his former protestations of love, or call them hollow or frail. I try to submit patiently to this long dark trial, hoping—when my heart is light enough to hope—that the clouds will yet break away, and all will be clear again.

"You must conceal nothing from me upon this subject. You are my friend, and my confidence in you is unwavering."

That was but a brief extract. The whole letter revealed the intensity of her grief, firmly restrained from a passionate outburst by the angel gentleness, and the faint yet clinging hope that faith would not let expire. She truly loved, and her heart would sooner break than doubt.

Laying down the letter I thought awhile, not so much upon its contents, that tinged my meditations with an irrepressible sadness, and aroused me more fully to my sense of duty, as of the cause of this painful mystery. I would ascertain the controlling influences, the motives that had guided the action of each, and thus, perhaps, discover the foundation of the barrier between them. I resolved to talk with Angebell.

Since her return from school she had been more like a guest than a daughter in the house. She consulted me but upon affairs of the most minor importance, and never made appeals to my sympathy and confidence.

She called me "mother," but there was no heart-felt tenderness in the word, and I might have withdrawn my discarded interest from her had I not often, yes, very often, remembered

how fondly a loved hand held mine in years gone by, and yielded her, his darling, to my care, praying me to love and guide her for his sake. She was his idol, and it was sweet to hope that she might be led to his side again, but feebleness made me to despair, and faltering faith would prostrate me in the dust.

Florence stood leaning upon the table waiting to hear what I would say in regard to Anna's letter. She appeared surprised when I requested her to ask Birdie to come to my room for a little while.

"Do you want to see her alone?" she inquired, pausing in the door.

"Yes, I am going to talk this matter over with her. Then you will know better what to write to Anna."

"Poor Anna!" sighed Florence as she hastened to the parlor, where her sister was practicing a late composition of Charlie Grey's, a waltz that was quite the rage in the musical world.

Birdie came in smiling, and, seating herself upon a low stool at my feet, put her elbows upon my lap, and supporting her dimpled chin upon her hands, looked up very bewitchingly.

"Now what are you going to tell me this morning?" said she. "A dreadful secret, that I must promise never to tell as long as I live and breathe?"

There was a strange fascination about Birdie, and you could not remain long in her presence, when she was cheerful as then, without feeling its power. I was perceptible of it, and thought sadly of poor Anna.

"I have no secret to tell you," and I could not refrain from patting the rosy cheeks of the spoiled pet, "but I want to talk with you kindly and sincerely, and with as pure a motive as a mother can have for her child. Many years ago I promised your father that I would ever love and strive to guide his little Birdie, and I trust that vow is unbroken."

She looked very serious, and the mention of the hallowed

dead brought glistening drops to her downcast eyes. How true it is that every human heart has its "angel side."

"The subject of which I would speak to you, my Angebell, is one of deep interest and anxiety to me. By speaking freely you can relieve my mind of a painful perplexity, yet I cannot demand your confidence if you think me unworthy to receive it."

"Oh! you are not!" she replied, with warmth. "What would you ask of me?"

I felt surprised that a vague suspicion did not cross her mind. If there did, it was unbetrayed.

"Florence received a letter from Anna last evening," I said. She blushed slightly, and her foot patted the carpet uneasily. "She has not heard from Walter since he returned home; do you know the reason of his neglecting to write to her?"

"I do not. At least," she added after a moment's hesitation, "I should feel unwilling to break the confidence Walter has reposed in me."

"Anna is ignorant of having wounded him in any way."

"Does she really affirm that?" asked Birdie, with surprise.

"Yes, and I think it is your duty, as a friend, to inform her of the cause of the unhappiness she endures, if it is known to you. She will consider no confession too humble to make if she is the guilty one."

"That all may be, but it would prove useless now." She restlessly arose from her seat, and going to the window looked out into the garden with assumed unconcern.

"Why would it be useless?" I continued, determined to ferret out the truth if I could.

"Because it is impossible for him now to renew his engagement with her. If you think best to write to that effect you can. I'll risk the breaking of her heart!" and giving a heartless laugh, she moved from the window towards the door.

"Angebell!" said I, detaining her, "you inwardly condemn

such heartlessness. I ask you now, what it is my right to know, and your duty to inform me: are you engaged to Walter Lane?"

"I confess to no sense of duty in regard to this matter," she scornfully replied; "I beg to be excused from further inquisition. If Mr. Lane has any thing that he wishes to impart to you he will doubtless do so," and she closed the door rudely behind her.

I was overcome with grief and amazement. I had been fearful of an unconcern on the part of Angebell, but had not anticipated such heartlessness and disrespect. It served to let the light break through a little. I was lost in my meditations when Florence entered. She saw my dejection and her countenance fell.

"And what did Birdie say about it?" she softly asked.

I told her all that had passed between us. She was not surprised, but said it was just as she expected.

"I shall talk with Walter to-night," she added.

"Before Birdie?"

"No, I will ask to see him alone, and she would not intrude, I am certain."

She silently gazed at the carpet awhile, then at my face, and down to the carpet again. She was deeply troubled.

"Mother," said she at last, "Birdie's treatment of you makes it all look darker than before."

"In one respect, and in another I think I can see plainer."

"Yes, so can I. She is engaged to Walter, that is plain enough. She purported that Anna is the cause of this coldness. That looks dark again. I wish I could see Walter this minute! I am so impatient for him to come. I feel almost certain that when I talk with him strange things will come to light."

"I fear, Florence, that we are secretly, if not openly, imputing all this trouble to Angebell. We may be deceived in Walter. Let us be careful to defer our judgment."

"You are right, mother, and yet—" She stopped short, and said no more.

Very early in the evening, an hour or more before Walter was expected, Florence trundled her red-cushioned chair into the parlor, and seated herself there with her embroidery. Angebell, never suspecting her delegation, cheerfully entertained her by singing her favorite songs, and playing the little airs of her childhood.

There was a step upon the porch that Florence knew as well as Birdie. The latter arose to receive the expected visitor, looking anxiously at the little chunky form that usually left the room before he entered. But Florence appeared to have forgotten herself over her embroidery, and did not raise her eyes from the frame until Walter was standing beside her. Birdie was hanging on his arm, talking and laughing so merrily that he did not mark the more than usual sedateness of the little dwarf.

After a few moments of cheerful conversation, in which Florence took but little part, as her thoughts were of so different a nature, she laid her work down in her lap, replaced her needles and worsted in her basket, then leaning her head back in her chair, folded her thin little hands together, and fastening her eyes earnestly upon Walter and Angebell, who were engaged at the piano, she fell into one of her thoughtful fits of abstraction, which was broken by her sister, who seemed to have felt that intense gaze so searchingly fixed upon her.

"What now, Florence? Rhymes or sermons? An apt illustration of Alexander Selkirk's soliloquy for all the world; that woeful expression is an exact copy of the old story-book picture! Come, now, if you can't increase or share our happiness, for mercy's sake don't give us the blues by such owl musings."

"I did not mean to make you unhappy," she said; "I had almost forgotten myself."

"We believe in sympathy of souls," said Walter, smiling as he drew towards her. He wheeled an ottoman beside her, and sat down upon it with his hand upon the arm of her chair. Birdie left the piano-stool with no happy air, and went and stood beside them.

"Are our teachings for this evening to be of a philosophical, poetical, theological, or comical nature?" she inquired. "I see by the peculiar expression of somebody's phiz that we are doomed to a sermon of some kind."

"Let it be poetical," said Walter. "I think we shall then be favored with the highest capabilities of our instructor."

"Oh no!" broke in Birdie. "Florence excels in theology! You should hear her talk of responsibilities, human and divine; of love, angelic and earthly; of hopes heavenly, and hopes unsanctified. Come, Florence, repeat that sermon you gave to Anna, Charlie, and I, one evening down by the elm tree. I believe it was about guiding aspirations, or something of the kind."

"I shall not give you both a sermon," said Florence, smiling sweetly, as she took the jewelled hand of her sister, and added, "I am going to show a little partiality, which you must forgive, and submit to. I want to talk with Walter alone."

Birdie quickly withdrew her hand, while her eyes flashed, and the veins upon her forehead grew purple and full. Walter appeared discomforted at the gathering storm, and Florence pained and disconcerted, yet, nothing daunted, looked anxiously from one to the other. Birdie cleared her throat several times before she was able to speak.

"Of course you can have the privilege of a private interview with Walter, and the opportunity of doing something to poison him towards me. I understand your plans, and those of your co-workers, and when Walter has undergone the inquisition that I have, he may not wonder that I was greatly indignant at the thought of its being inflicted upon him."

"You speak unadvisedly," said Florence. "You accuse me unjustly when you say that I wish to influence him against you. I but desire a few moments' conversation, and I think that you are forgetful rather than meaningly unkind."

"Such palavering does not blind me: I understand you fully;" and turning to Walter as she withdrew, she added, "It is usual you know to give participators in one crime separate examinations."

Walter had a sincere regard for Florence, both for her intellectual and moral worth. He felt the pure and powerful influence she exerted upon all around her, and the deep searching power of her soft blue eyes. Yet she was a mystery to him, as she was to every one that had not won her open confidence. He loved Birdie, at least he then thought that he did, and notwithstanding his respect for Florence, yet the remarks of the indignant girl whom she had so highly incensed, placed a restraint upon his trust in her, and led him secretly to fear that Birdie's suppositions were true. So when Florence spoke to him with a tender sincerity that he could not distrust, and desired that upon the subject of interest to her as well as himself, there should exist a mutual and implicit confidence, he could not openly refuse the request he felt hardly willing to grant. Her keen perception quickly discovered this partial confidence, and she spoke less freely, although not less openly than she had hoped she should.

She frankly avowed her interest and sympathy in her friend Anna, and a desire that she might have a perfect understanding with him.

"I am her chosen friend," she said, "and feel it my stern duty to alleviate her mind upon this subject, as far as it is in my power. Will you allow me to state the reason of your not writing to her?"

"She is already acquainted with it, as fully, if not more so, than myself. Believe me, she is not so ignorant as you suppose," he replied.

"In the letter which she left with Birdie, for you, did she not express an earnest desire to hear from you soon?"

"I know the contents of that letter by heart, and if my understanding of it is correct, my silence is satisfactory to her."

"There is some misunderstanding, I am sure," and Florence shook her head thoughtfully. "There is something wrong; something that poor Anna is ignorant of; something that will break her heart, yet, I fear."

A shade of sadness crossed Walter's face. He was much agitated, and his utterance was difficult when he attempted to speak.

"This is an unpleasant subject to me," he said; "yet I cannot blame you for the interest you have taken in it. In writing to Anna, do not encourage her with a hope of our reünion: it can never be. The past is a dream, and the future I cannot foretell." His voice sank to an inaudible whisper, and averting his face, he gave a deep and irrepressible sigh.

Then the heart of Florence seemed bursting with all it would utter, and the flow of her tender sympathy and sisterly council would have gushed freely forth, had he not suddenly turned his face to her again. All traces of emotion were gone; not even a tear-drop was seen: it was cold and passionless as it well could be.

"You have fulfilled your trust of friendship," he said, with a dignified calmness. "You can do no more, but be assured that Anna is not ignorant of the cause of my silence, although she may be of my future intentions."

"Shall you acquaint her with those?" persisted Florence. "I think it your duty to do so."

"I will write to her to-morrow."

"Do not break that resolution." Florence arose, and took up her embroidery and her basket, to leave the room. She paused, and laying her hand upon Walter's shoulder, added in a whisper, and her words gave a paleness to his countenance:

"Remember, Walter, that Anna Clayton still loves you as fondly as ever, and this bitterness from you will crush out her life."

He essayed to reply, but she was gone.

"The darkness is denser than before," said she, after rehearsing the interview to me. "I am now sure that Birdie delivered Anna's letter to him, yet cannot but doubt its containing any thing that would tend to this coldness. Anna was sick and excited that day, and she may have been unknowingly indiscreet. That there is something wrong we may be sure."

"Then he did not acknowledge an engagement with Angebell?" I inquired.

"No; his confidence was cold and restrained. He does not understand me, and Birdie's remarks had fortified him with doubt. He was almost unapproachable. I thought I was fearless, but I see now that his conduct made me timid."

"You could not with prudence have said more. Your conversation may prove an essential benefit, by causing him to write to Anna, thus opening the door for an explanation between them."

I was sitting alone with Uncle Hugh the next day, who was rapidly recovering. Looking out of the window, he saw Walter and Angebell starting off for a ride.

"Didn't you tell me once," he inquired, "that Walter Lane was engaged to the Miss Clayton that was visiting here when I arrived?"

I replied in the affirmative. That puzzled him into a few moments' meditation.

"She is in Philadelphia now, isn't she?"

"Yes; that is her home."

"And he stays behind for the sake of courting our Birdie? Eh!"

I said that it did look something like that, but as Birdie

withheld her confidence from us all, we had no means for justifying or destroying the supposition.

"I've not been sleeping since I came here," and Uncle Hugh shrugged his shoulders, and elevated his slippered feet from the seat of the chair to the top of its back. "I think I can read such didoes like a book. Come now, little one, why don't you do as you always used to, and tell Uncle Hugh what is fretting you most to death? Who knows but he has common sense enough to help you out of your trouble. Things go bad: I see it as plain as you."

I had been tempted several times to lay the case before Uncle Hugh, knowing that his shrewd discernment and good judgment would explain much that I could not unravel, but a sense of the sacred trust imposed in me by the gentle girl whom it most deeply concerned, had, until then, prohibited me from so doing. But Uncle Hugh was not blind, and, as he said, had not been asleep. He had clearly read all that was passing, and only desired a declaration of my feelings upon the subject. I made an open avowal, and asked his advice as to the most prudent course to pursue. He was to maintain an ignorance of the affair, letting things pass on as if he knew or cared nothing about them, lest by an open interest, Angebell might accuse him of interference.

But, alas, for the sterling integrity of Uncle Hugh! His heart was too full to hold. All the rest of the day he walked uneasily about the house, now lying down, now perching himself in grotesque positions in the arm-chair, or throwing aside a half-finished cigar to read an article that could claim his attention but a few minutes. That he was about to do something, anybody that knew the good old man could not doubt.

It was just after sundown when Walter and Angebell returned. Uncle Hugh, with his hat and overcoat on, stood upon the porch to greet them.

"Now, young man, I am going to invite myself to a ride with you," he said with his irresistible good-nature when

Angebell had alighted from the carriage. "I have been shut up until I feel the cramps in my bones. I shall be for quitting here altogether if I am made a prisoner any longer."

Walter was pleased with the proposal, for he had a sincere regard for Uncle Hugh. He carefully assisted him into the carriage and drove off, looking very happy, and promising Birdie to return and spend the evening with her. Never before had I seen Uncle Hugh appear so comically serious, and I had a strong conviction, to use Aunt Betsey's mode of expression, that there was "something breezing."

Angebell, fatigued with her ride, laid down upon the library lounge, and was soon asleep. Uncle Hugh and Walter were gone an hour or more, and the noise of the carriage upon their return did not arouse her. I went into the porch to meet them.

"Go into the parlor," whispered Uncle Hugh, who had hurried into the hall in advance of his companion, "Mr. Lane has a few things to talk over with you to-night. Don't be backward in telling him all you can."

I obeyed his directions, and, going into the parlor, was followed by Uncle Hugh and Walter. From the countenances of both, I needed no telling that Uncle Hugh had broken his promise, and conversed freely with Walter upon the subject of importance and interest to us all, and I felt sure that if such was the case it had been done in a manner not to be disregarded.

"We must be short about this matter," said Uncle Hugh, throwing himself wearily down, "for I am pretty well tired out. But I knew that I shouldn't sleep a wink until a few of these things were brought around a little. Now, Carrie, what was it about that letter?"

"Yes," interposed Walter with deep seriousness, and unable to conceal his violent agitation, "Mr. Starkweather has conversed freely with me upon the unhappy circumstances that have lately transpired. I fear that I have been mis-

guided in some way. Did you see the letter that Anna wrote me?"

"I told him that I did not, yet could not believe, from her feelings that day, that she wrote any thing unkind. We granted her ten minutes for writing, but she prolonged it to an hour."

"An hour!" he exclaimed with great surprise. Then drawing a letter from his pocket, a half sheet, mostly covered upon one side, he added, "It could hardly have taken an hour to prepare that!"

"That is not all she wrote you," I replied, overwhelmed with the conviction that rushed powerfully upon me; "I saw the letter after it was sealed. I thought it contained two sheets or more. I have heard Florence express the same thing."

"This is all that was given me," he said, handing the letter to me. I glanced it over. There was certainly no deception in the neat chirography; that was plainly Anna's. It was merely a wish that he would receive much pleasure from his sporting excursion and return with renewed health and spirits. The light flashed upon me.

"This is nothing but a postscript, I fear. Anna stated in her last letter to Florence, that in the lengthy one she left for you she expressed a sincere desire to hear from you soon."

"This is all the letter I have," he said, restlessly pacing the floor. "This contains nothing of the kind."

"I'll go out of the room, and then you call in Angebell; perhaps she can explain it after all," said Uncle Hugh.

"Shall I call her?" I asked of Walter, who stood leaning against the mantel-piece, his face colorless, and his eyes fastened upon the floor.

"Yes, I would see her," he calmly replied, and so Uncle Hugh withdrew.

I paused in the hall with my hand resting upon the library door. My strength was failing, and the light of the lamp

seemed flickering out. The memory of the dead, and the watchfulness of heaven, restored my sinking consciousness, and girding myself with imagined strength, vitalized by prayer, I entered. The lounge was unoccupied, and the room was vacant.

I was sure that Angebell was there at the time of the arrival of Uncle Hugh and Walter Lane, and that she could not well have withdrawn without discovering their presence, as their hats were in the hall through which she would have to pass, and the carriage was standing before the open door. I went to her room, but it was dark and unoccupied, and after peeping into the rose chamber where Florence sat alone, I returned to the parlor thinking strange things and at a loss what to say.

Walter had not changed his position, but stood leaning against the mantel-piece, with Anna's letter in his hand. The slight movement that he made, and the visible change in his countenance when I entered, told me that he was aware of my presence, although he did not lift his eyes from the floor.

"I cannot find her," I said, advancing to where he stood. "She is not in the library, where I left her upon your return, nor in her chamber."

His brow grew darker, but he did not speak. Twice he essayed to do so, but remained silent. I heard Uncle Hugh walking up and down the piazza, and recalled him. As I stepped from the parlor to do so, close by the threshold my foot trod upon something, which I discovered to be a japonica blossom, and like the one Angebell had placed in her hair that evening, just after her return from her ride. I raised the delicate and crushed flower, and a dark suspicion came to me. My heart grew sick and shuddered at the burden it unwillingly received.

"So then you can't find the lassie?" said Uncle Hugh.

I stood gazing at the crushed japonica, vacillating between

my desires and a sense of open duty. It was only a suspicion, I thought—a just one seemingly—yet I felt unwilling to aid in casting an undeserved shadow upon the character of the wayward girl.

Uncle Hugh, who was silently and minutely watching my meditation, discovered that the faded flower I held was the cause.

"Well, and what is it?" he at last broke out; "we are to conceal nothing, you know."

"I feel reluctant in repeating only suspicions that may be unjustly founded."

"Let us know all," said Walter almost sternly, "and heaven keep us from unjust judgment."

"Yes, speak it right out," and Uncle Hugh made striking gesticulations. "It is the only way affairs of this kind can be righted. It's no play of blindman's buff."

I related my suspicions in regard to the japonica blossom. I had seen it in Birdie's hair when she lay sleeping upon the lounge, just a few moments before their arrival. I had found it close by the threshold of the parlor door. Had she been listening to our conversation, and guiltily hidden when I went in search of her?

"Florence sometimes wears those flowers in her hair," said Walter; "may be she has dropped this one during the day sometime."

"She has worn none to-day," I replied. "There were six blossoms upon the tree this morning. Birdie picked one this evening, and this, although sadly crushed, is evidently lately plucked. We will be certain in this particular," and I went into the conservatory where I found five blossoms remaining.

"It's all plain enough," said Uncle Hugh. "We need no dictionary upon the subject. By the way, when I left the parlor, I stood in the front door, and hearing some one run hastily through the hall, I looked, and saw a woman disap-

pear through the dining-room door. I thought it was Maggie busy about something that was none of my business."

"Before leaving, I want to be relieved of every unjust suspicion in regard to this letter," said Walter, looking sadly upon the little missive he held. "Do you think that Florence can cast any light upon the subject?"

"Perhaps so," I replied, and went to bring my child. I told her briefly what had transpired that evening.

"I am so glad," she said; then lowering her voice, she added, "and I am so sorry." She was reluctant about going into the parlor; she did not want to appear in condemnation of her sister, and she could not withhold a vindication of poor Anna's innocence.

She took the letter which Walter handed her to inspect, glanced at it with evident surprise, and then inquired, as I had done, if that was all he received.

Walter assured her that it was.

"Oh, it cannot be all she wrote you," she said; "for I plainly remember that there were but three sheets of letter paper in her portfolio when I opened it for her that day. She used all but a half sheet. The quality was the same as this, which I think is only the postscript she added after she thought her letter was finished. I went into her room when she was folding it up, and she laughed, and said she had written until she was too tired to write any more, and that you wouldn't think her very sick by the length of her letter. She was about to seal it, when she chanced to think of something else. She wrote that upon a half sheet, trembling with over exertion as she did so. I am sure that you have only the postscript to that letter. Let me look at the seal."

She examined it closely, and handed it to Uncle Hugh, saying that she thought it had been twice sealed.

Uncle Hugh rubbed his spectacles, and gave it a sharp inspection. He confirmed the suspicion of Florence, and when Walter and I had examined it we agreed to the same. We

stood looking at each other in silence, each one feeling in competent and unwilling to speak.

"I have deeply sinned," said Walter humbly, yet without a loss of his proud bearing. "I have suffered myself to distrust the love of one that is still dearer to me than life itself. I have been justly punished by a strange infatuation that blinded me to deception and cunning. I wish Birdie no ill: I forgive her. I would have chosen an interview with her before parting, but that is now impossible as I shall leave Dr. Grey's in the morning. Tell her for me, that pure love knows no deception towards its object."

Then he spoke with Uncle Hugh in a low confidential tone, thanking him for the undeserved interest he had manifested in his welfare, and the bold and upright manner he had adopted in rescuing him from an increase of sorrow.

He thanked me for the hospitality of Daisy Lawn, and expressed a sincere regret that a visit that had afforded him so much rare and never-to-be-forgotten happiness should be so closely blended with painful remembrance. "Yet I have learned a lesson," he said: "one that I shall never forget. I think I see clearly now, and the sight is sad enough."

He kissed Florence, and taking a gold cross from his watch guard, hung it upon the coral necklace she wore, asking her to ever keep and wear it for his sake and Anna's.

A flood of thoughts—many-toned, tear and smile-begetting—rushed wildly over me as I stood with Florence upon the porch, watching the departure of Walter Lane. A heavy burden had been lifted from me, and yet I bore a fearful heaviness. I did not look upon the unhappy events that had transpired, but the motives that had conceived them. Angel-bell was before me, and I saw deep stains upon the guiding principles of her life, and corruption that was defiling the purest well springs of her being. Yet through the darksome veil, welcome glints of sunlight burst, revealing her better impulses, germs that might at some future time, if faithful

hands toiled, and God smiled too, yield a vintage bountiful and rare.

"She is yours, Clara, to guard and guide." Memory repeated the soft whisper over and over again, until rebuked, I stood in my weakness and insufficiency. I looked down the years through which my path had been winding, sometimes amid the sweetness of Vallombrosa, and sometimes in places far less lovely; very dreary, perhaps, yet never alone upon Sahara's sands. I saw the constant Goodness that watched over me, the kindly Shepherd that loves his lambs though they go astray, and felt a sweet and unshaken trust, that, unworthy and erring as I was, there was still "Our Father in heaven," who would not forsake, or unwisely afflict.

I was preparing to go to my pillow, when Birdie came into my room. She was frightfully pale, and before she had spoken, her perturbed manner, the angry flashing of her eyes, and the quick heaving of her breast, revealed her intense excitement. She approached me with a mien almost defiant, and addressed me in a tone, not rudely loud, but full of bitterness and scorn, and the keenness of her remarks, their adaptation to wound, robbed me of my control.

"I am no longer to be the slave of your mean conspiracies," she said. "Since the death of my father, who would not have been blinded had he lived until now, there has been naught but a constant study on your part to injure in every way the character of a motherless child. I see your arts, and those of your active aids, and despise them as heartily as I do you. You have driven me from Daisy Lawn, which I hope you will enjoy hereafter, with the harvest that cupidity and oppression are sure to bring. I am disgusted with your society and character, and all pertaining to you, and am shocked to hear the name of my father spoken by your hypocritical lips. You may continue to deceive others, but I am versed in you completely. I shall go to Aunt

Fanny to-morrow, and when she is made better acquainted with you, she will be rejoiced in the step I have taken."

Having relieved her heart of its overflowing bitterness—only the overflowing, the cup was yet full—she swept haughtily from the room, closing the door with great violence. I had not once spoken, but my silence had not been from calmness or discretion. Had it been in my power, I should have given utterance to that which would have heaped fuel upon the flames.

CHAPTER XV.

From that day forth, in peace and joyous bliss,
 They lived together long without debate;
 Nor private jars, nor spite of enemies,
 Could shake the safe assurance of their state.

SPENCER'S FAIRY QUEEN.

ANGEBELL left us in the afternoon of the following day. Before her departure, I made several attempts at conversation with her, but all to no purpose, as she met my advances with insolence and scorn. Florence and Uncle Hugh were treated with marked disrespect, and the tender-hearted Aunt Betsey was overwhelmed with grief at the abuse with which her generous offers to assist in packing the trunk of the young lady were repulsed. She absented herself from the breakfast and dinner table, and ordered Maggie to bring her meals to her apartment, where she partook of them alone.

She made no inquiry after Walter Lane, nor the least allusion to the unhappy events of the evening before. She must have heard the remarks of Charlie Grey, who stopped his horse for a few moments before the door to tell us that he had seen Walter Lane safe upon the cars and off, for she was standing near an open window fronting the avenue. Shortly after, Charlie looked up, and, espying her, wickedly asked:

"Birdie, what makes you look so cross to-day?"

"Enough, I can assure you," was the short reply, given in quite a different tone from that of her interrogator.

"Oh, I can guess!" continued Charlie, laughing. "I have

seen another face this morning that was quite as sober. These separations are terrible things."

Birdie made no answer, but retired from the window.

"One of her old-fashioned tantrums, I suppose. It won't last long, and she'll come out brighter than ever," and Charlie whipped up his horse, and turned towards home.

Old Pruno, who was dozing upon the grass-plot, as usual, was the only one to whom she tendered a word of farewell. She patted his silky head, laid her cheek down upon it, called him the only true friend she had, and wept lest she should never see him again. The faithful old dog wagged his tail and blinked his almost sightless eyes in return for her caresses, and following her to the carriage, made an attempt to enter it with her.

"No, no, Pruno," said she, and his activity faded suddenly away, and, looking dreadfully disappointed, he dragged himself slowly back to the grass-plot and composed himself for another nap.

She bowed coldly to us all as the carriage moved away, but I saw her lips quiver and her eyes moisten as she sunk back upon the seat, and when the winding avenue brought the interior of the carriage for a moment to our view, she was bending forward and her face covered with her hands.

I knew Birdie too well to suppose that her bitter animosity would be of long continuance, and that before she reached New York the intensity of her feelings would have decreased considerably, yet she would not be restrained from presenting things to her aunt in an unjust and unfavorable light. Had her departure been less sudden, had she remained with us a few days longer, I doubt not but the entire tone of her feelings might have been changed by the patient exertion that we all would have made.

I resolved upon writing to Mrs. Lawrence and giving her a true and impartial account of the late proceedings in regard to Angebell. I felt it a stern duty to my family and myself,

and I knew the good sense of Aunt Fanny too well to suppose that she would condemn me for a moment if she saw things in their true light. A silence on my part might confirm in a measure the piteous tale that Angebell would be sure to rehearse, or betray a lack of interest at least in the welfare of my husband's child. I was bitterly wounded by Birdie's cruel unkindness, but was determined to regain her affection if I could.

I wrote a long confidential letter to Aunt Fanny, in which the excited state of my feelings led me to reveal many of my secret afflictions. Soliciting an immediate reply, the letter was despatched to the post-office that night.

After supper I rode up to Susan's, for Uncle Hugh's sake as well as my own. We were all very anxious to hear from Willie, from whom Susan had received a letter a few days previous. I found her sitting near the open door, plying her needle as usual, while Lucy, sewing also, and humming a lively air, was seated upon the threshold before her.

When I stated the object of my visit, Lucy, blushing and smiling, ran to bring the letter to me. I espied her taking a little slip from the envelope, which she slyly slipped into her pocket, and when I told her what I had seen so plainly, she tossed her pretty head, and trying to stammer out something in excuse, ran out into the garden.

Willie was delighted with his situation, and found in Judge Leonard a kind friend and guardian. He was making a slow but sure progress in his studies, and had, so far, received the praise and encouragement of his employer. He was contented and happy, only when thinking of home and the dear loved ones there, and then, if it was not for the sweet hope of making them more comfortable upon some future day, his loneliness would be insupportable. There was many a grateful remembrance of Uncle Hugh, and kind messages of regard to Aunt Betsey, Florence and myself.

We were talking about Willie and Lucy—of the wide dif-

ference in their characters; the noble ambition and aspiring intellect of the one, and the contented and artless simplicity of the other, yet the perfect love that seemed to exist between the two—when the carriage of Charlie Grey stopped before the gate, and its owner bounded out and hastened towards the garden where Lucy was.

He had come to ask her to ride with him, and was going to call for Florence also. Lucy's pretty and happy face was speedily encased in the tasty straw hat that made her look twice as bewitching as before, and off they started.

I seldom went to Susan's cottage without staying longer than I intended. I always found it a difficult thing to break away from her gentle and engaging presence. The stars were shining, and the horns of the new moon peering through the thick-leaved trees that shaded the road, when I drove slowly back to my home.

The next morning, Uncle Hugh, who was beginning to have quite the appearance of a well and hearty man, came into the room rubbing his hands, and looking unusually mischievous and good-natured, asked me what had become of Dr. Grey, the good parson he often met at Daisy Lawn during his previous visit. He said that he was suspicious that something dreadful had happened to the worthy divine, as we were so scrupulous to avoid all mention of his name.

I told him that his suspicions were incorrect. Dr. Grey was still the beloved pastor of our parish, but his health had been very feeble for some time past, and he seldom visited but the poor and sick of his congregation, and that he had doubtless sent him many a kind word of remembrance by Charlie, who was too careless and forgetful to deliver them.

"Dr. Grey has not forgotten me, I am sure," said Uncle Hugh; "and if you have no objections I will invite him to spend to-day with us. I will ride over after him this morning."

I was delighted with the plan, and Uncle Hugh went im-

mediately and harnessed the ponies, and soon he was driving down the road, rather briskly, I thought, for one of his steady habits.

He was gone for nearly two hours, in which time Aunt Betsey had ample season for the putting of things to rights, and ordering rather an extensive dinner, which, to my surprise, she did not help in preparing, but told Maggie to procure the assistance of an elderly woman in the village, who made herself useful upon such occasions. Long ere the return of Uncle Hugh, she made her appearance in the parlor arrayed in her new dove-colored silk, her finest and best muslin kerchief, while her slightly silvered locks were combed smoothly back behind the wide crimped border of her Sunday cap. She looked very neat, indeed, quite Aunt-Betsey-fashion, and there was a roguish twinkle in her eye, and a tormenting smile in the corners of her mouth, when she seated herself quietly in her corner and took out her knitting as if nothing was going to happen.

Florence, without her usual discernment, asked her very seriously why she dressed up for Dr. Grey upon that day more than any other.

"Ah, I don't know," she replied, busily engaged with an unfortunate stitch that had precipitated itself from her needle, and was sinking into depths profound; "when one has a new gown they like to wear it sometimes, you know; and as I never dress up only for company—and then for somebody particular—I thought I must to-day, for Dr. Grey is one of the best men in the world according to my thinking."

That satisfied Florence—she was very blind.

When the ponies came back, they brought Dr. Grey and Charlie, John and his wife, and Uncle Hugh. The excitement of their arrival was not over with, and they were scarcely seated, when Uncle Hugh glanced around the parlor and muttered to himself, yet loud enough for our hearing:

"Not enough to fill up the corners; better make a clear

sweep while we are about it." Then addressing me he added: "I guess I'll go up after Susan and Lucy. We might as well have a sociable time. I shall be going home before long, and I want one old-fashioned visit beforehand."

All joined in an earnest wish that Susan and Lucy should be immediately sent for, and Uncle Hugh quickly started to bring them.

"Let me go for them," interposed Charlie Grey; "my company can be better spared than yours."

But that was contrary to Uncle Hugh's plan, and he shook off Charlie with a playful yet firm "I won't do it," and jumped into the carriage, leaving Charlie to entertain us, as well he did, by performing several fine pieces of his own composition upon the piano and guitar.

It was sometime before Uncle Hugh returned, bringing Susan and Lucy, the most happy addition that could have been made to our party.

Susan looked so cheerful and happy as she hobbled upon her crutches from the carriage, wishing me a good morning with her soft blue eyes, before her lips parted with a word, that remembrance gives me joyance even now. She sat down by Dr. Grey, for whom she ever seemed to have an almost superstitious reverence and adoration, and assuming a posture and expression emblematic of resignation and repose, she silently garnered the words that he spake, and joined in the conversation but to give utterance to thoughts gentle yet deep—spiritual and pure—legitimate offsprings of her mind.

Aunt Betsey did not bustle around with her usual activity. It might have been a wise regard for her new dove-colored silk that fitted her buxom form so admirably, and which was destined, if always preserved with her cleanly care, to descend as an heir loom to her children and grand-children; but in naming them I anticipate. She was rather frustrated and looked seriously happy.

You, my dear reader, must know what is coming just as

well as I did, when—early in the evening, before the lighting of the lamps, each face of our happy group was softened into more beauty by the mellow shades of twilight—Uncle Hugh and our faithful Betsey walked slowly into the room and stood side by side before the sofa that Dr. Grey had cunningly contrived to have vacated. The pastor arose, and the marriage ceremony was performed in a solemn and impressive manner; and Betsey Wilkins, my faithful housekeeper and my kindest friend, was really my Aunt Betsey.

My suspicions had been so true that I was spared the unbounded surprise that fell upon the rest. Mrs. Brown, laughing and crying, was unable to say a word. Charlie expended his richest jokes; Susan sat very quiet and looked tearfully upon us all; Lucy ejaculated a whole vocabulary of interjections, and kissed the bridegroom, almost forgetting the bride; and Florence, half pouting at her dullness and lack of discernment, was very loth to acknowledge that it was wholly unexpected to her, but declared it was nothing more than she had been looking and hoping for ever since Uncle Hugh got well.

There is but little need of portraying the feelings of the worthy and eccentric pair, yet I was at a loss to decide which afforded my uncle the more pleasure, the winning of a good wife, or the complete success of his joke.

"But what am I going to do without Aunt Betsey?" I questioned with myself as I lay wide awake upon my pillow until long past midnight. It seemed impossible for me to keep house without her, and I was almost selfish enough to censure Uncle Hugh for depriving me of so valuable an assistant, without the least warning beforehand. Then, again, I knew that his kindness and discretion would guide him in this matter as in every thing else, and I should be spared all anxiety and inconvenience. I was too weak an invalid to bear the superintendence of the house and farm, and I could think of no one in any way capable of conducting that re-

sponsibility but my faithful Aunt Betsey. She was the true head of our household, and I but an auxiliary, dependent upon easy-chairs, soft pillows, and her motherly nursing.

And was Uncle Hugh to take her from me? That was rather a selfish interrogation I knew, yet it constantly occurred to my mind, and led me wondering what I should do without her. I was glad that they were married, for they were well-calculated to make each other happy. I was rejoiced that Uncle Hugh had at last found a cheering occupant for his lonely heart, one that would soften and bless, and make the harvest of his life precious and sweet, and that Aunt Betsey was provided with a resting place for her declining years, and an object upon which she might freely expend the exuberance of her warm affections; and yet, and yet—how selfish I was—I kept asking myself, "What shall I do without Aunt Betsey?"

I digested many plans, looked upon their dark and sunny sides, heard *pro* and *con*., and finally fastened upon one which I presented to Mr. and Mrs. Starkweather early the next morning when we sat at the breakfast table, Aunt Betsey pouring the coffee as usual.

It was a co-partnership between Uncle Hugh and myself in some pecuniary matters, somewhat connected with the farm, yet mostly in relation to my invested capital, that would make it preferable and conducive to the interests of both parties for him to make it his home at Daisy Lawn. Aunt Betsey's face grew radiant at my proposal, and Uncle Hugh was also pleased.

"That looks pretty smooth, no mistake," he said: "nothing would satisfy me better than to make my home here. We did not intend leaving you in some time, any way."

"It would have been a pretty move, indeed," and Aunt Betsey blushed as she spoke, "for me that had lived with you ever since your wedding-day, to give you the slip in a hurry. I know how much you lean on me, the poor sick thing that

you are, and I shall give you time enough to get every thing right."

Uncle Hugh had sat cogitating for some time, and the rest of us maintained silence that he might be the better able to perfect his meditations. He was never dilatory in his conclusions upon any subject, not even those of the greatest importance, nor did he form them with reckless haste, unmindful of every thing bearing upon them. "*If you have got any thing to do, do it,*" was his favorite and observed maxim.

"Well!" said he, suddenly discontinuing his meditations, and looking roguishly at Aunt Betsey, "I suppose that hereafter I must consult you as well as Hugh Starkweather about such affairs. What do you think of Clara's arrangement?" and before listening to her answer, he gave a deep groan, and murmured, "Independence and individuality gone! Self reliance annihilated!"

"You must not call her aunt any more," suggested Florence.

"Sure enough!" he replied laughing; "there is a difficult task for my dullness and perverseness. Well then, my dear Betsey," and he laid a particular stress upon the endearing adjective, "what are your wishes in this matter?"

Aunt Betsey blushed like a girl of fifteen, and tried to maintain her composure by smoothing her snowy white apron, that essential part of her morning attire the important change in her situation could not lead her to divest herself of.

"Daisy Lawn is home to me, and I should feel strange-like, enough, in any other place," she said. "Yet I want you to do just what you think best," and she dropped her eyes very submissively.

"A good obedient wife, no mistake," replied Uncle Hugh. "Why, I am thrown upon my own responsibility again, and have my old bachelor demand on self reliance. I cannot see the least objection to Clara's proposal, but agree with her in thinking it would prove of considerable advantage to us

both. I must first write to one of my agents, and if he concurs in my willingness to adopt it, and I cannot see why he should not, I will sell the old Haystack and make this my home. I did not intend to deprive you entirely of Aunt Betsey. I had thought of purchasing a place in your immediate neighborhood, but your plan is to me in every particular an admirable one, and well worthy of adoption."

In a few days a letter was received from the important agent, who held, as it were, the keys of my fate. The proposed arrangement had met with his hearty approbation, and so Uncle Hugh, who, as I before told you, never saw any need in unnecessary delay, resolved to put it into immediate execution. The Haystack was easily disposed of to a gentleman who had a short time before applied for its purchase, but Uncle Hugh had waveringly refused, thinking that if he should not succeed in securing *somebody* to enliven and beautify a more cheerful and modern home, he would choose to live out his days in the dear and familiar spot so closely blended with the fondest memories of his life. It did cost him a severe heart-pang to leave the old place, to cross the threshold of the low and dingy library, never to enter as its owner again, to walk slowly down the garden path, guarded by holyhocks and sunflowers, upon the brilliant blooms of which he had ever bestowed a sincere admiration, and to close the rustic gate, knowing that it would but seldom click to his going and coming any more. His eyes moistened, and for the next mile or two, he did not speak a word.

Peace and happiness, and the contented tranquillity that should ever hover about a home, making its inmates love to linger within its influences, were ours at Daisy Lawn, and removed, as we fortunately were, from the noise and bustle of active life, and the tormenting cares that burden the ambitious and worldly, our hearts and minds were hallowed with rest.

Yet, notwithstanding the sweetness of the atmosphere sur-

rounding me, and the calmness of the billows upon which I rested, I could not divest myself of an unending anxiety in regard to Angebell. She was my greatest care, although she had wholly withdrawn herself from my guardianship and influence.

In a reasonable time after the despatch of my letter to Aunt Fanny, I received an answer fulfilling in every particular my anticipations of what she would write. Angebell's story had been altogether different from mine, and calculated to injure me. Aunt Fanny had deferred her judgment, when listening to the recital of the injured girl. Knowing the passionate temper of Birdie, and that she should soon receive further information from me, she commended the course taken in regard to Walter Lane, and only blamed our timid delay in its furtherance. Since Angebell's return, M. Durand had renewed his flattering attentions to her, and although she was not yet fully decided whether to accept him or not, Aunt Fanny felt sure that her niece would not prove weak and foolish enough to discard so favorable an opportunity of elevating herself to an envied position in refined society. "I am sure that he loves her," she wrote, "and Birdie regards him as much as she ever will any one."

This principle was widely averse to those I was proud to cherish, yet I could only express the difference of my views to her without the least hope of their making an impression. "I would not advise Angebell to marry," I wrote in my reply, "one that she does not love with all the purity and fervor of her womanly nature, free from every shadow of pecuniary interest, resting solely upon virtuous worth, which is true nobility. Talk with her earnestly, my dear friend, upon this subject, that is to influence so deeply every remaining hour of her life, making them blissful, or embittered with deepest woe. I cannot impart to her my true interest in her welfare, but I hope that your feelings are the same as mine, and that they may control her actions."

But Aunt Fanny did not look upon things in the light I did. Love, to her, was an arrangement more wisely calculated by the amount of the united capital, the ascension to position and influence: in short, it was a business affair altogether. She was a business woman, and her love adventures had been conducted in her straightforward, mathematical style. There was but little moonlight, poetry, serenading, or pet-name calling about it. Her husband, fortunately for the peace of both, was her exact affinity, and there was but little clashing of desires or opinions.

In one of my letters to Aunt Fanny, I ventured to send a message to Birdie: a first step towards winning her to reconciliation. It was of a nature that touched her heart, and you know that she could not long remain angry with any one. When Aunt Fanny's answer arrived, sure enough it contained a short message from Birdie. And so Florence, who was encouraged by my success, and whose heart was almost broken by the coldness existing between her sister and her, sent her a little note one day through Aunt Fanny's letter, directed to "My Dear Birdie." It contained nothing relating to the unhappy events that had effected their separation, and in the affectionate reply that it elicited there was an utter silence upon that subject. We were all rejoicing in thus reclaiming in a weak measure Birdie to our circle again, and were encouraged in the hope that the frost would melt away, and the sweet germs of her affection shoot again from a genial soil.

There is but little need of telling you, and yet I suppose you would choose to be certain, what the next letter from Anna Clayton contained. It was a long one, with every page and the margins closely filled. Walter was with her again, forgiven and beloved, and she happy in the hopes that shone clearer and brighter than before.

"I have written to Birdie," she wrote us, "but she does not answer my letters. I fear that she feels unkindly to-

wards me, yet she must not, and shall not if I can help it. I do not deny that I was shocked at the intelligence Walter brought me, but I felt humbled with a sense of my own human weakness, and I could not fling reproach upon the erring of my friend. It recalled the sweet words of our Saviour, who said to those that denounced the frail and tempted woman—'Let those who are without sin cast the first stone.' "

CHAPTER XVI.

And wine will circle 'round the brain
 As ivy o'er the brow,
 'Till what could once see far as stars,
 Is dark as Death's eye now.
 Then dash the cup down! 'tis not worth
 A soul's great sacrifice:
 The wine will sink into the earth,
 The soul, the soul must rise!

FESTUS.

CHARLIE GREY was becoming famous in the musical world, where his undisputed and finely cultivated talents gave him an elevated position. Praise was showered upon him, friends gathered to his side, and bright hopes beamed steadily in his future. He seemed blessed with all that a young and ambitious heart could desire to aid in securing wealth and an envied reputation. In the large eastern cities where he spent a greater share of his time, he was welcomed to the most wealthy and refined circles, where flattering attention was bestowed upon him, and unbounded admiration for his talents and attainments.

And there was also a sad change in Charlie Grey—the shadow of an evil influence, was upon him. It was but faintly discernible at first, yet easily perceived by those whose affections were bound around him, and whose sympathetic hearts were chilled if a blight fell upon him. The great and deplorable weakness in his character—the one that he himself was ever conscious of—a lack of moral principle, and the need of a right rule of action, then showed itself in a

fearful light, threatening to destroy the hopes he might so justly cherish. He is an easy prey to the tempter who has no faithful and holy vigil to guard his heart.

During his visits from home, particularly when he was staying in our large cities, he was surrounded by companions that his reputation had drawn about him. Many of these were young men of literary and professional pursuits, and others were the sons of wealthy citizens, "*fast young Americans*," who were drawn like moths around the young musician, and finding in him a merry and entertaining associate, they fawned and flattered, and easily succeeded in making him one of their number. This information I gleaned, partly from his occasional letters to Florence, although he little thought they could reveal so much, and from conversations with Dr. Grey, who was deeply anxious for his son, with the painful consciousness that years had placed him beyond the arbitrary control of a parent, a restraint that his weakness of character demanded.

But in accordance with the earnest solicitations of his father he was coming home to spend the winter. He had wasted most of his earnings, and was greatly dependent upon the kindness of his parent. A good music teacher was much needed in the village, and when the news of his expected return was received, a hope arose that he would condescend to instruct the many that would gladly place themselves under his care.

This was a lucky opportunity to one with his pecuniary embarrassments. He had contracted several debts of a nature that he would not call upon his father to liquidate, and he knew that he must work them out himself. His ambition had been to maintain solely the position of a musical composer, but he then readily consented to assume the more arduous labors of a teacher. Reserving a part of his time for his own practice and composition, he was compelled to refuse many urgent applications from pupils who were de-

sirous to place themselves under his qualified instruction.

Among his scholars was the light-hearted Lucy Dean, who had more music in her voice and laugh than Charlie could ever charm from a piano or guitar, and that was the pretty compliment he paid her the day that he called at the cottage. Susan had told him her desire that Lucy should cultivate her musical taste and thus be made capable of earning a sufficient support, should she ever be left to her unhelped exertions. She had spoken with me upon that subject a day or two before, and I had heartily joined in her wishes. Uncle Hugh, whose interest was immediately awakened when it was named to him, promised Lucy a guitar, her favorite instrument, if Charlie Grey could be persuaded to make room for her upon his completed list of scholars.

When Susan presented her artless and earnest plea, Charlie sat in deep study for some moments. His time was then all spoken for, either by others or himself, and he had that very day refused several applications. But they were strangers or nearly so. Susan and Lucy were old and true friends, and had done him many a kindly deed in days gone by.

"If I do say yes," and Charlie's heart was too generous to believe for a moment that he could say any thing else, "you will have to take your lesson from eight to nine in the evening, and then you are stealing from me."

"And will you, Charlie?" exclaimed Lucy, joyously. "How good you are!"

Charlie laughed at the unrestrained demonstration of her happiness, and pronouncing her very selfish, yet bewitchingly so, he decided upon the two evenings that he would grant her, providing that she would keep still about it for awhile, lest the story should reach some of his disappointed applicants, "and then," said he, "there would be a storm you know, or a 'dreadful breezing,' as Aunt Betsey would say."

We saw but little of Charlie. He seldom came to Daisy Lawn, and when he did make us a hurried call, it was not

with the freedom or frankness of former times, when he would sit for hours and read and talk with Florence, or wander through every nook and corner of the old homestead with the familiarity of an inmate, making the halls ring with his contagious mirth. Yet we were not kept in ignorance, as I sometimes wished Florence might be, in regard to his conduct, which was not generally known, as Mrs. Brown ever felt in duty bound to rehearse all her trials and sorrows to her ardent sympathizer, Aunt Betsey, who in turn felt overcharged until she had imparted all to us.

It was a cold day, and the snow kept lightly falling, as if to add a few finishing touches to the drift picture out of doors. But Aunt Betsey was never afraid of the cold you know, or any other freaks of the fickle weather, so she had bundled up early in the morning and gone to spend the day at the parsonage. "I will be home before dark," were the last words that forced themselves through her thick veil and fur boa, as the sleigh-bells jingled away; and sure enough, at twilight, when we drew closer to the hearth, she came bustling into the hall, loudly stamping the snow from her feet, and laughing at our urgent invitations for her to hurry to the fire and get warm.

"Well!" began she, when her things were off and she was seated before the fire with her knitting work, that was as necessary an accompaniment to her talking as the piano or guitar was to the singing of Charlie Grey, "I have heard some sorry things to day; oh dear!"

Our curiosity was upon tip toe and impatient to be gratified. She went on knitting very quietly.

"I know some folks used to prophesy ~~such things~~ years ago," she continued, "but I never would hear a word of it. There was Mrs. Lindsay always telling about her Harry, that was such a likely lad that they thought to make a clergyman of him, but he died of delirium tremens when he was

twenty," and Aunt Betsey stopped short, as if intending to dream out the rest to herself.

"Go on, Aunt Betsey," said Florence, nervously: "do not keep us in suspense."

"Well, I've had a long visit with Mrs. Brown, to-day—a real old-fashioned talk. She feels bad enough, I can assure you, and so does John, and Dr. Grey."

"What has Charlie been doing now?" I asked, frightened at Florence's paleness.

"Oh, he has had another dreadful spree. 'Tis a sad thing that boy ever went to the city. He is out every night until very late, John says, but his father don't know it half the time, as John, out of clear mercy for the good man, hides it from him. About two o'clock, last night, there was a light rapping on John's window, and he got up to see what was wanted, and who should he find there but Hank Harmon, so drunk he could hardly speak. He told John that Charlie was out in the sleigh, and he had better be careful and not wake up the parson, but come and bring him in. John understood it, for he has done the like before, so he went out, and sure enough there was Charlie, drunk as he could be. They got him to bed, without waking up Dr. Grey. He has been sick enough all day, and his father has been waiting upon him, little knowing what is the matter."

"And is there no power to curb his madness?" I inwardly questioned: "no voice that can awaken his better nature to a redeeming struggle?" I thought of Florence, and his plea for her to shield him from temptation. I looked toward the little one, and she had bowed her head, and was weeping very bitterly.

"It is enough to cry for," said Aunt Betsey, hearing her sobs, and taking out her extensive handkerchief and wiping her wet eyes and cheeks. "If any good can be done for the lad, I hope that God will let me help to do it. Birdie might have saved him from this; if she had done what she ought

to, things would not have gone as they have. But I never did see any body lead him as Florence used to : I wish she could get hold of him again."

My remonstrance against the rather severe accusation upon Birdie, had no effect upon Aunt Betsey, who continued to affirm Charlie's unbounded love for the fickle girl, and the cruelty of her treatment to him. She only wished, and I joined with her with all my heart, that Charlie loved some one that was pure and good ; some one that could save him from the vortex in which he was plunging.

I wondered if he did not avoid Florence from a guilty remembrance of the sisterly trust that he had imposed upon her, and knowing that her acquaintance with his broken resolutions would awaken her every interest in his behalf, and an exertion of the influence he had acknowledged could sway him. He knew the exact light in which she would regard his conduct, but so deluded was he by the flattering praise of his merry companions, by the brilliancy and fascination of the temptations that his rising fame and new found friends brought around him ; and so stifled were the whispers of his conscience by the unholy voices that arose in its rebellion, that blindness came upon him, and choosing the chaotic path he was treading in darkness, and with no true and faithful guide, he saw not the slippery places, or the besetting dangers of the path. 'Tis the greatest delusion that vice instils, that of a firm belief in our own strength to resist her, and to withdraw from her our companionship when we choose.

Florence would not forget the sacred trust once given her, or the holy aspirations it had planted. The most ardent hope of her life was to fulfil that imposed duty, and to be one of his earthly ministrants, impelling him to the accomplishment of good and noble deeds. She had prayed for heaven to aid her in shielding him from temptation and sin, but she had never petitioned for the strength all-powerful, that must redeem him from chains so degrading and strong.

"The poor child takes it dreadfully to heart," said Aunt Betsey, when Florence lighted her lamp, and bade us an early good-night ; "she does love him like a sister, I know."

It would have been very difficult to convince any of the blooming village belles, who doated upon Charlie's society, and considered him the most agreeable and eligible candidate upon the list of gallants, that his character was not irreproachable in every respect. And when such a whisper would sometimes creep among them, making bright eyes open wide with astonishment, it was instantly smothered, or only harbored until the next sight of the good-natured and free-hearted Charlie Grey.

He was not exclusive in his attentions to any of the fair lassies that tormented their hearts in rivalries for his smiles, nor did he ever give any of them just occasion, by flattering compliment or marked gallantry, to cherish a single hope associated with him. This was wondered at by all, and many were the whispered reasons assigned ; some stating that he was engaged to Birdie McAlpine, others that he had fallen in love with pretty Lucy Dean, but that had few believers, as the affairs of Willie Blake were too well known by every body ; while the greater share endorsed the supposition that he had a betrothed in Boston, where he spent so much of his time.

"If it is so," said Florence to me one day when we were conversing upon that subject, "I hope that she loves him truly enough to appreciate his virtues, and discover and assist in eradicating his errors. But it seems very strange that he should do as he does if he loves a pure and virtuous woman that would shrink from a union with such degrading dissipation. I cannot believe that he loves any one that returns his affection, for if he did, that would restrain him I think."

"Love is sometimes but a weak attribute," I replied, "and then it may be so impregnated or influenced by the debasing qualities of our being, that it is deprived of its loveliness and

angelhood. Instead of controlling, it may be but a servile vassal."

"I cannot think," said she with softened enthusiasm, "that love, the purest fount of our humanity, can retain its heavenly nature when corrupting stains have been cast upon it. Then it is no longer worthy of the holy name, but must be ranked with earthly passion, selfishness or pride. Pure love knows no decrease: it is ever expanding and immortal."

Florence's intimate acquaintance with the character and disposition of Charlie Grey, his virtues, errors, and guiding impulses, and also her consciousness of the powerful influence she could exert upon him, led her to firmly believe that could she once more regain the brotherly affection and trust he had so wholly withdrawn, she might with divine aid and unwearied patience lead him from the grievous path he had chosen. It was fearful indeed to behold one of his talents and capabilities drifting to wreck upon a dark and stormy sea.

Earnestly did Florence strive to win him to our fire-side again, but all in vain. If he called he would remain but a few moments, and would then so sedulously control the conversation that no allusion could well be made to himself. He had lost the frankness that once characterized him, and seemed to avoid meeting the searching gaze of my child. He would not look into her eyes when she spake with him, but glance restlessly about the room, his whole conduct evincing discomposure and discontent.

And when he ceased to visit us altogether, and even months passed in which we had no interview with him, and the whispers regarding his dissipation were more painful and startling, Florence was not discouraged, nor did she even waver in the sweet faith that the blessed day would yet come when she might sow the seed she had garnered so long, and that it would bring forth fruit, yea a hundred fold.

She was constantly and deeply absorbed in her literary

pursuits, secluding herself in the rose chamber most of the time, and joining the household circle only at her meals and in the evening, when Uncle Hugh stubbornly persisted in her presence. If she then chanced to appear serious and thoughtful, he was the first to discover it, and drive every outward sign of her depression away by a well-aimed, yet unwounding joke, or a real funny story from his inexhaustible store.

It was a blustering March day that we received a letter from Aunt Fanny, bearing the intelligence we had long been expecting. Birdie was the betrothed of the old and wealthy M. Durand, and if their favorable anticipations were not clouded the bridal would be consummated in about a year. This delay was exceedingly averse to the desire of the aged lover, but Angebell persisted in it with a tenacity that could not well be overcome. Aunt Fanny was at a loss to account for her stubbornness, but gave her good-natured opinion that it was only one of Birdie's whims, and there was no harm in the child's having her own way in such a matter.

Birdie made a playful allusion to the affair in her letter to Florence, asking her to break it to Charlie Grey with all the tenderness she was capable of. He had almost forgotten her, she thought probable, yet if he was like the greater share of mankind, the marrying off of an old love would twang a little on his heart-strings. This was the first letter, since her abrupt departure from us, that contained the least allusion to Charlie, or any of the parties, excepting Florence and myself, that were at all associated with that unhappy affair. That she was the unhappy one whose heart-strings twanged at the remembrance of her old love was my conviction.

Florence had no opportunity of delivering the message to Charlie, but it reached him through Lucy Dean, to whom she entrusted it. He looked surprised for a moment when Lucy told him, and then resumed her instruction, as though he had scarcely heard or heeded what she said.

"She wanted Florence to break it very softly to you,"

continued Lucy, unmindful of her guitar, "but she cannot get a chance to see you, and so she wished me to deliver the message. Birdie thinks your heart-strings will twang a little at the remembrance of 'lang syne.'"

Charlie looked very serious, and huskily replied:

"If she does not have breaking of heart-strings I shall be thankful."

"M. Durand is very rich," said Lucy, emphatically; "she will have everything to make her happy."

"Not everything, Lucy," and he spoke so mournfully she thought he was going to weep. "Not everything, but almost nothing, for she does not love, and never can, the man that she is to marry."

Lucy did not know that Charlie could feel so deeply; she had never heard him speak so impressively before, nor had she ever seen him look so utterly sad. She thought she guessed the cause, and therefore made no further mention of Birdie, nor did he, but he forgot himself several times before she had finished her lesson, and sat silent and abstracted when he should have been paying her diligent heed. She pitied him with all her heart, yet felt restrained to express her deep sympathy. After he was gone she hastened to Susan's bed and waking her up, told her all that had happened.

"O! mother!" said she, "I do believe that I could have put my arms about his neck and cried, for I felt so bad for him, and kept thinking how it would be if Willie was to marry somebody else."

"It is something we may all cry about," said Susan. "It will be a sad thing for Charlie, I am afraid, and a bitter cup for poor Birdie. She is only planting thorns to walk on."

"And Charlie is so generous and good, and so sincere in all he says and does."

"Yes, Charlie is a good boy, and if he does love Birdie, as

I am inclined to think he does, he will take it dreadfully to heart."

They were not then acquainted with his unsteadiness, and it was not until sometime after that they discovered it.

In answering Aunt Fanny's letter I could not repress my deep anxiety and fears in regard to Birdie's acceptance of M. Durand. I wished the expectant bride prosperity and happiness, but with a feeble hope that they would be hers, and in my message to Birdie I went so far as to slightly mention the shadows of the past, asking if forgiveness should not drive them away, and we be once more united in our enduring love, firm as the affection that had first brought us together, the love then linked with the angels.

And how brightly shone the "angel-side" of her nature in the answer that I soon received. How touchingly it rebuked my heart for any unjust condemnation I might have cast upon her, for any blindness on my part, hiding the still living germs of her warm affections and noble aspirations, that struggled for a sunshiny existence. My soul renewed its courage, and felt girded with strength divine, and a faith and hope that my human insufficiency could not shadow.

You must read the letter, and then I know you will love our Birdie better:

"MY DEAR MOTHER:—

"For by that hallowed and endearing name I cannot help but address you, as long as I have a faint remembrance of the motherly care and affection you have ever extended towards so undeserving an object as I—I feel very unworthy of your continued interest in my welfare, your tender advice and consoling sympathy, and above all am deeply mortified by your plea for forgiveness. Have you indeed forgotten which was the erring one, and are you not truly sensible of the many insults that were heaped upon you?

"I know not what to think of myself, my dear mother.

To me, this Birdie McAlpine is the greatest mystery in the lists of humanity. I am ever a bewilderment to myself, and really wish that I could look upon my heart and discover, if such a thing were possible, a power of control that might curb my passionate temper, and the recklessness that ever leads me astray. There are so few deeds in the sum of my existence, nobly and well done, and shedding a cheerful light upon others and myself, that I often think that I must be wholly shut out from every true and pure heart, with no gift to overcome, by redeeming goodness, the barrier justly placed against me. If I could but love and forgive myself, as freely as you and Florence do, you might think differently of me sometimes.

"And yet I do not always think that I am so unloveable; that there are no sunny spots upon my heart, where, if a blessed seed was planted, it might bud and grow as in a genial soil. But then I feel that these sunny spots are very few, and so surrounded by the high thick branches, that only God can discover them, and then they are too barren for his great blessings.

"I was not created to bless, and to receive such blessings. There is our Florence, that I love and envy; she is sowing golden grain, and thousands will yet rise up and bless her. I plant but thorns; I have nothing else to scatter.

"I have never revealed myself so freely before, and presume that I never shall again. I do so now, because my spirit impels me to, and I obey impulse as I ever have. I am feeling very sad and lonely, and if I were at home now, I should weep in your arms, just as your petted spoiled Birdie always used to do.

"Yes, I am petted and spoiled, and surfeited with fawning and praising that disgusts me. They call me beautiful, queenly, and a catalogue of graces, too tedious to recall, but I turn from my mirror with sincere regret, for I cannot trace a single gleam of the soul-beauty that glows and radiates

from the sweet thoughtful face, and homely-dwarfed form that gives you all happiness there at home.

"But I will write in this strain no longer. Believe that I have a most deplorable fit of the blues, and thereupon let my despondency go for the ethereal inspiration of the occasion. I am tempted to tear this letter up. No, I will not; you shall have it for a curiosity.

"In regard to the unhappy events of last fall, the disgrace which I then brought upon myself, and the sorrow I gave to you, forgive them, if you can, and let me feel when I return to my childhood's home, and as the bride of one who professes to love me, that there is no bitter remembrance lingering upon the hearts dearest of all in the world to me.

"You did not mention Pruno in your last letter. I know that he is very old, and, as you say, 'quite childish,' yet I do want to see my old playmate once more. Aunt Betsey will nurse him for my sake, and keep him from dying until I have seen him again.

"Aunt Fanny sends many kind regards, and will write to you soon. Enclosed is a letter for Florence, and the reply must not be delayed. Uncle Hugh may kiss Aunt Betsey for me, and remind him not to forget his object in kissing her. As for the rest of my friends who may chance to inquire for me, give them any tender message your wits may prepare, and I will vouch it as original from me.

"Your wayward

"BIRDIE."

I wish that I knew the author of the sweet poem of which I am now forcibly reminded. Here is an extract, and are not the sentiments sweetly beautiful and true, and worthy of a place in the memory?

The huge rough stones from out the mine,
Unightly and unfair,
Have veins of purest metal hid
Beneath the surface there;

Few rocks so bare but to their heights
 Some tiny moss-plant clings,
 And 'round the peaks so desolate,
 The sea-bird sits and sings.
 Believe me, too, that rugged souls
 Beneath their rudeness hide
 Much that is beautiful and good—
We're all our angel-side.

In all there is an inner depth—
 A far-off secret way,
 Where, through the windows of the soul,
 God sends his smiling ray;
 In every human heart there is
 A faithful sounding chord
 That may be struck, unknown to us,
 By some sweet loving word.
 The wayward heart in vain may try
 Its softer thoughts to hide,
 Some unexpected tone reveals
It has an angel-side.

Despised and low, and trodden down,
 Dark with the shade of sin,
 Deciphering not those halo-lights
 Which God hath it within;
 Groping about in utmost night,
 Poor prisoned souls there are,
 Who guess not what life's meaning is,
 Nor dream of heaven afar.
 Oh! that some gentle hand of love
 Their stumbling steps would guide,
 And show them that, amidst it all,
Life has its angel-side.

Brutal, and mean, and dark enough,
 God knows, some natures are,
 But He, compassionate, comes near—
 And shall we stand afar?
 Our cruse of oil will not grow less
 If shared with hearty hand,
 For words of peace and looks of love
 Few natures can withstand.
 Love is the mighty conqueror—
 Love is the beauteous guide—
 Love, with her beaming eye, can see
We're all our angel-side!

And is there not more truthful power, more winning sincerity and love in those heartfelt lines than was ever found

in the bitter misanthropy of a Byron, the melancholy sentimentality of Rosseau, or the desponding earth and brother discarding spirit of many of the poets of times past and present?

The year of Birdie's betrothal passed swiftly by to us, the happy dwellers at Daisy Lawn, for our cares were light, and our sorrows so much like angel's visits, "few and far between," that the hours never dragged wearily along. We heard often from Aunt Fanny and Birdie, and they once encouraged us with the hope of a visit from them during the summer, but unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances compelled them to disappoint us. But we were to see them the coming spring, when after the bridal was consummated, Birdie and her husband, accompanied by Aunt Fanny, were to be our guests for awhile. This event was anticipated by us all with strange and conflicting emotions—hopes and fears that we seldom whispered to each other.

Anna remained the confidential correspondent of Florence, who had endeavored to produce a reconciliation between Birdie and her gentle friend, but all to no purpose, as the former resolutely avoided all mention of her in her letters, notwithstanding the repeated inquiries and solicitations of her sister. We were desirous that their friendship might be renewed in season for us to invite Anna and Walter to Daisy Lawn at the time of Birdie's return home, but we were obliged to yield that happy anticipation.

Walter and Anna were to be married soon. Their prospects were fair and bright, forgotten shadows behind, but naught but sunshine before them.

CHAPTER XVII.

Let us be patient! These severe afflictions
 Not from the ground arise,
 But oftentimes celestial benedictions
 Assume this dark disguise.

We see but dimly through the mists and vapors
 Amid these earthly damps;
 What seem to us but sad funereal tapers
 May be heaven's distant lamps.

BRYANT.

THE year had passed, and May had come—the flower-crowned month—that with all her joy and gladness, was to bring our long absent Birdie back to us again. And not only the month but the very week had stolen sweetly upon us, with the balmiest breath and bluest sky that the spring had known, and we all believed that upon the long looked-for Thursday it would not rain unless the showers fell from our eyes.

She had grown very dear to me, dearer than ever before, and I accounted the increase of affection to the confiding letter which you read in the preceding chapter. She had not written so freely since, but her letters had partaken of their former frivolity and almost heartlessness; yet beneath their cold exterior I beheld her heart, and the “sunny spots, so very few, and surrounded by the high thick branches,” that she thought none but God could discern them: I longed to have her with me again, the loved one, the forgiven.

Yet I trembled when I thought of her union with M.

Durand, confident that she did not love him, and that nothing but a sordid ambition, a heartless desire for the influence of wealth and high position, had led her to accept him. And in contemplating this grievous act of hers, that could but embitter the remainder of her life, I saw the triumph of principles that would, if unrestrained, chain and crush out all pure impulses. But I resolved to conceal my feelings from her as far as I could, knowing that they would be wounding to her; but I would strive to impress upon her mind the important responsibility she had assumed: that of making the happiness of another as well as her own.

“To-morrow they will be here!” had been repeated over and over by every member of the household since the first dawning of the day. Everything was in readiness for them, and the only employment that could engage us was talking about what we were impatiently waiting for.

Uncle Hugh brought a letter for Susan that night from Willie, as the directions and postmark plainly indicated, and as I had been longing all day to go up to the cottage, I got into the carriage as soon as he had alighted and drove in that direction, anticipating the happiness of Susan and Lucy, for it had been nearly a month since they had received a line from Willie, an unusual silence for him.

“He is coming home!” exclaimed Susan before she had finished reading the letter she had grasped so eagerly. “Lucy! Lucy! here is good news for you!”

She called very loud little thinking that the girl sat behind her chair.

“Here I am,” said Lucy, in a low broken tone, without arising from the seat.

“Oh, sure enough!” said Susan, not looking from the letter. “I thought you were out in the garden. Only think! Willie is coming home! He will be here Friday night!”

What could be the matter with Lucy? She turned white as

the linen she was stitching, and uttering a piteous moan fell forward upon the floor.

"Oh, the poor child!" said Susan, holding up the head that I bathed in cold water, "she has been so anxious about Willie that this good news was too much for her."

It was some time before she was restored to perfect consciousness, and then she began to sigh and to weep.

"Don't cry, darling," whispered Susan tenderly, "nothing will befall him before he gets home I trust. It is a long, long time since we have seen him, and this dreadful silence on his part has been a sore trial to you, but it will all be over now. Only think, the dear boy will be home Friday night!"

Not once did Lucy smile, but the sadness deepened upon her pale face, and when she was strong enough, she went out into the garden, and sat down alone.

"Lucy has the most tender heart I ever knew," said Susan when she had gone, "but I didn't think such a surprise would affect her so deeply. She will get over it before long, and be merry enough. I do wish they could be married. They would be happy together, I know."

But it was time for me to be at home, so bidding Susan good night, I went out into the garden where Lucy was, to deliver a message from Florence requesting her to spend the morrow evening at Daisy Lawn.

"Lucy," said I, startling her, so lost had she been, "I hope that you will be well enough to take tea with us to-morrow."

"Thank you," she replied, arising, "but I cannot promise you now." Then dropping her eyes, she added, "I cannot tell what may happen before that time."

"Nothing very serious, I hope," said I, hardly understanding her. "Florence will be very much disappointed if you do not come."

She did not promise, but gave a sad, sweet smile, and said:

"I have so much on my mind just now I cannot give you

an answer. But tell dear Florence to forgive me if I do not come."

Susan called me back to tell me something for Aunt Betsey. When I passed through the garden to my carriage I saw Lucy gathering a bouquet, mostly of violets, her garden's pride. As she moved slowly among the shrubs and flowers, plucking the choicest and sweetest blooms, and arranging them with tasteful skill, I saw that she was looking very sad again.

"Give these to Florence from me," she said with a mournful tenderness, her blue eyes swimming as she spoke. "Tell her to love them for Lucy Dean. They will wither and fall to pieces in a little while, but flowers always do, you know."

Yes, flowers always do. Poor Lucy Dean!

Her manner surprised me, and awakened my anxiety. Her sadness was very deep, and there was a mystery in all she said. I was half inclined to go back and talk with Susan again concerning her, but my fears might be groundless, and I would not give her unnecessary grief.

"Florence will value them, I am sure," I replied, searching her downcast face. "I am sorry that you are so depressed, Lucy, but you will soon have joy enough to make you happy again."

She said nothing, but followed me out of the gate, and kindly assisted me into the carriage; then grasping my hand as I took up the reins, she pressed it fervently, and whispering, "God bless you, good-bye," hastened quickly back to the house.

Her conduct bewildered and troubled me, and I drove home slowly, unable to banish it from my mind, or the painful suspicion that a concealed burden was crushing the light heart of Lucy Dean.

As I drew near the house I saw our whole family gathered upon the grass plot beneath the library window. Aunt Betsey was sitting upon the ground and bending over something

she seemed holding in her lap. Uncle Hugh was moving anxiously about, while Florence, sitting close by Aunt Betsey, and with her back towards me, completely screened the object of their attention.

My curiosity was deeply aroused, and my anxiety increased, when, drawing nearer to the spot, I heard Aunt Betsey's voice in a tone of lamentation, and saw her handkerchief applied again and again to her eyes. That Florence was also weeping I could not doubt. She was bent lowly forward, and Uncle Hugh was saying, in a consoling, sympathizing tone:

"There, there, Florence, my dear child, don't cry so. It won't do a bit of good, not a bit."

My arrival was unnoticed and unobserved by any of them. I hastened to the spot. Only one glimpse, and I cried too.

Old Pruno was dead!

He had been the household pet for sixteen years, the playmate of Birdie and Florence, and the favorite of my husband. He had been faithful and kind, home-like, and worthy of our affection. He was always sorry when we went away, and glad when we came home again. He had talked to us with his soft brown eyes and wagging tail, until we knew his heart as well as our own. We had taught him, when a little frisking puppy, all the funny and very smart things that had been the rare accomplishments of his middle age, and the awkwardly practiced diversions of his winter time. He had won a firm place in our affections, and though we had long marked his sightless eyes, his deafness, and tottering walk, and knew that he would die before many more days, yet we nursed him the more carefully, prepared his food with kinder care, and tried to keep old Pruno with us.

But the old dog was dead. His silken head lay in the lap of Florence, who patted it fondly, and putting her cheek down softly upon it, wept bitterly for her old playmate, that had clung to her path through sorrow and joy, ever affectionate and ever faithful.

"If he had only lived until to-morrow, it would not have been so hard," she said, in remembrance of her sister's return. "Birdie spoke of him in her last letter, and wanted me to show him something of hers every day, so that he would be sure and remember her. So this morning when he was out in the porch, I brought her old sun-bonnet, and laid it down before him, and he wagged his tail, and I felt sure that he did not forget her. But, oh dear! Birdie will be home to-morrow, and old Pruno is dead!" and she fell to crying again.

Uncle Hugh dug a grave out under the elm tree, the beautiful spot where Pruno had often followed Florence, and quietly dozed while she read. There we laid him, and many a burning tear fell upon his silky black hair ere the earth was thrown over him. Before we left the grave, we laid the green turf above it, and Florence transplanted her favorite white rose-bush to the spot. If you should go there now, you would find the mound, and at its head a low marble slab, upon which is engraven—

"Our Old Dog Pruno."

We had all been in the parlor some time, relating, as might be expected, the wonderful exploits and miraculous adventures of which Pruno was the hero, when the remembrance of Lucy and her boquet suddenly occurred to me. I had left the flowers upon the carriage seat, and Maggie ran and brought them.

When I gave them to Florence, I told her of the singular conduct of Lucy, her agitation upon hearing of Willie's return, the message she had sent with the flowers, and the unusual tenderness and melancholy of her farewell to me.

"I didn't know that Lucy was ever so very down-hearted," said Florence, unable to conjecture the cause. "She has been very sober for a month or more, but I laid it to Wil-

lie's long silence. O, it is nothing but a little cloud, that his coming home will soon drive away."

The next day, about noon, the bridal party arrived, consisting of M. Durand and lady, and Mrs. Lawrence, or, as we better love to call her, and as she is particular that we should, Aunt Fanny.

I could not think that Angebell was as happy as she appeared to be, but was rather fearful that her brilliant joyousness was but a mask to hide her deep dejection and melancholy. She met us with all her warmth and enthusiasm, clasping Florence in her arms and passionately kissing her, and suffering the rapturous Aunt Betsey to seriously rumple her collar and hat by one of her welcoming embraces.

I was not at all disappointed in M. Durand. He was just what the descriptions of him had led me to imagine him to be: somewhat above the medium height, of a straight and slender form, and scrupulously particular in regard to dress, although no useless ornaments or appendages could be discerned. He moved with commanding dignity, and his first appearance of haughty reserve might impress the unconventional with unfavorable ideas as to an agreeable acquaintance, but the benign mildness of his pale blue eyes, and the serene repose of his countenance, few could, upon further acquaintance, disregard. That he was proud and invincibly firm, his slow measured tread and quiet dignity, clearly indicated. Birdie seemed his pet rather than wife. She might lead him as a lamb by love, constant love and tenderness; but alas, for the strife, thought I, in which a mind and will so superior, should be her opponent.

Aunt Fanny had not been at Daisy Lawn for nearly two years, nor had she seen any of us during that time, yet she did not betray the least excitement upon meeting again, although we knew that she was glad to see us. She shook hands with us very quietly, and kissed Florence upon the

forehead. Then she went directly to the parlor, and stood before the old and time-marked portrait of her "dear Adel."

There was evidently a restraint upon Birdie when she was in the presence of her husband. She did not give way to the overflowing exuberance of her spirits, in the loud long laughs that used to gladden us upon her coming home. She was cheerful, yet there was a cold dignity about it after all. It was Mrs. Durand, not Birdie McAlpine.

Once, a short time after her arrival, the flood of her feelings burst like an avalanche over their bounds, and she did for a little while act out herself. Near the close of the afternoon we all went to take a stroll through the garden. Birdie was upon her husband's arm, and Florence, who was unable to reach as high as his elbow, had hold of his hand. They came to the grass plot where Pruno had been accustomed to doze for many a summer gone by, and where he had composed himself when forbidden to go with his mistress to New York.

"Where is Pruno?" she asked. "I shall not think I am welcomed until he has wagged his tail for me."

Florence hesitated, unwilling to communicate the sad intelligence.

"Where is he?" persisted Birdie. "Out in the barn? If so, let us go out there and see him."

Birdie stopped laughing when she saw the glistening in her sister's eyes, and heard her say that old Pruno was dead.

She forgot her dignity, her womanly bearing, her high-born husband, and all, and sitting right down upon the grass, buried her face and cried like a little child. Florence nestled close beside her, and when Uncle Hugh and I came up, they were weeping together, while M. Durand stood leaning upon his golden headed cane, smiling paternally, and waiting for an explanation of the strange scene. It was hard to make him believe that a dog was the sole cause of their lamentations. He had never a pet and companion so humble, and

was ignorant of the clinging affection their faithfulness could call forth. He thought they were mourning for some beloved servant, and when we told him all about it, he patted his child-wife gently upon the head, and promised her the finest hound in the country, if she would not cry any more. But Birdie declared she would never love another dog as long as she lived, but at some queer observation that Uncle Hugh made upon that point, she joined in a laugh with us all.

We went to the elm-tree and sat down by the newly made grave of old Pruno. His virtues were again rehearsed, his memories recalled, and made to glow brightly and warmly by the praise of his enthusiastic mistress, until M. Durand finally confessed a firm belief in the extraordinary virtue and talents of our pet, and did not at all blame us for our sorrow.

The evening came on chilly, as the spring nights often do, and Aunt Betsey put a cheerful fire upon the parlor grate, and Aunt Fanny, Birdie, Florence, and I, gathered around it. We had sat for more than a half-hour in its genial glow, no one speaking a word, excepting Aunt Betsey, who bustled in and out of the room several times, making diligent inquiry as to our comfort and wants. We made but brief replies and fell to our reveries again.

I had been looking at Angebell for some time. She sat upon the right of the fire-place, in the large easy-chair, her head resting upon her jewel-glittering hand, and her countenance inexpressibly sad, and bearing a shade of weariness and care. The tears came to her eyes, and she pressed the snowy lids tightly over them, and sighed heavily. Aunt Fanny was so lost in her cogitations, and Florence so busy in gazing out of the window, that it escaped unheard by any but myself. Poor Birdie! wayward lambkin! your burden was a heavy one.

It was almost dark, an hour past the expected time, but Lucy did not come. Florence grew weary of straining her eyes towards the avenue gates, that loomed up like spectres

in the deep twilight, and broke the silence by a wondering inquiry at the lateness of her friend.

"Is it Lucy Dean that you expect?" asked Birdie, aroused by her sister's voice.

"Yes," replied Florence, "and I shall be so disappointed if she does not come, for I wanted you to hear her play upon the guitar and sing. She has a decided talent and improves rapidly."

"So she is taking music lessons, is she?" asked Birdie, with a listless yawn. "Who is her master?"

"Charlie Grey."

Aunt Fanny awoke at the mention of that name, and inquired as to what had become of the roguish boy that used to play such mad pranks about the house, turning every body's head as crazy as his own.

"Ah, he is here yet," replied Aunt Betsey, who had got her knitting, and had seated herself among us. "He gives music lessons, and has more scholars than he knows what to do with. He isn't married yet, although the story is, he is engaged to somebody in New York or Boston."

"Engaged!" said Birdie, much surprised; "I hardly believe it, as I used to hear of him often when he was in New York, and am very certain that he did not then pay exclusive attention to any one. He was pretty wild, though," she added, in a lower tone.

"Yes, we know all about that," responded Aunt Betsey, with a heavy sigh and a pause in her knitting. "He has had some hard spees here this winter—oh dear! oh dear!"

"All for the want of proper discipline when he was a boy," remarked Aunt Fanny.

"Not so much the lack of discipline as the total disregard of it," I interposed in behalf of Dr. Grey, who I was sure had ever endeavored to fulfil his duty to his son.

"Now don't all begin to sermonize," said Birdie impatiently, arising and going to the piano. "Charlie is not a

criminal if he does differ somewhat from the deacon-side of humanity. There is fun in his soul, and it must out by some means or another. He is only a little '*fast*,' and that is fashionable, you know;" and she began to play a lively air that I secretly thought was hardly in accordance with the tone of her heart. She continued for a few moments, the keys laughing beneath her touch, when breaking off suddenly, she turned abruptly around to Florence who was still gazing out of the window, and said: "Oh dear! I feel so dismally dull! Tell Tom to get the carriage, and let us drive up after Lucy."

Florence sprang joyfully from her seat. "Oh, say we do!" she exclaimed. "Susan will be so glad to see you!" Then stopping short, and frowning as if some unpleasant obstacle had presented itself, she added in a lower tone, "But M. Durand, what will he think of our leaving him?"

"Oh, that's nothing!" replied Birdie laughing. "He is in the library talking with Uncle Hugh, who can entertain him much better than we." Florence hastened to give the orders.

The carriage was soon at the door, Florence and Angebell seated therein, and the reins in the hands of the latter, who would not hear of their having any one else to drive for them.

"Don't stay long," said Aunt Fanny; "M. Durand will expect some music this evening."

"We make no rash promises," replied Birdie gaily. "Who knows who we shall find up there?" and she playfully shook her head at her demure aunt, and even made an attempt to strike her with the whip as she drove away.

We went back and seated ourselves as before around the grate. Aunt Betsey fell to her knitting and reveries, but Aunt Fanny requested me to come and sit upon the sofa beside her, that we might have a talk together.

"I was sorry that you was dissatisfied with the choice of

Angebell," she said. "I am glad that she is now settled in life, and in a position so desirable."

I explained the reasons of my dissatisfaction, as I had many times before in my letters to her, but they were groundless in her eyes, and unworthy of a moment's reflection. Her chief argument was, that love was an unsafe and foolish guide to matrimonial alliances. Other interests, pecuniary and social, were of paramount importance. Angebell in becoming the wife of the rich old M. Durand, had attained wealth and a high influential position, therefore she had done well, very well. But I could not and did not agree with her, and knowing her rigid firmness, and the utter impossibility of the least wavering in her opinion, I maintained my sentiments in silence, and was listening to an elaborate defence of her views in regard to the sacred rite of matrimony when M. Durand and Uncle Hugh entered.

I accounted for the absence of Mrs. Durand and Florence, and felt justified in saying that they would soon return, as it was but a short distance to Susan's cottage, and their errand would cause but a brief delay. In a much shorter time than we expected we heard the returning carriage drive swiftly up the avenue.

"Is Lucy here?" anxiously inquired Florence as quick as the horse stopped.

"Not unless you have brought her," replied Uncle Hugh.

"That is strange," said Birdie. "Susan says she left home more than two hours ago, with the intention of coming here. We expected to find her here."

"Perhaps she called at Graham's," suggested Uncle Hugh.

"Very likely," said Florence; "and we must go and find out, for we left Susan feeling very uneasy."

Uncle Hugh told them that they had better get out of the carriage, and go into the house, as the evening was quite chilly and damp. He would drive around to Graham's, and

if Lucy was there he would go and tell Susan, and then bring them both to Daisy Lawn.

Birdie alighted, and M. Durand, who stood smiling her welcome at the door, put his arm gently around her, and led her to the parlor fire. Florence remained in the carriage determined to go with Uncle Hugh, and she manifested a great deal of uneasiness at his leisure in putting on his hat and over coat.

They drove quickly to Mr. Graham's, the honest farmer who had formerly the superintendence of our farm. Nelly, a rosy-cheeked, black-eyed girl of eighteen, met him at the door and said that she had not seen her friend Lucy for several days.

"So then she has not been here to-night?" called Florence from the carriage.

"No."

"Perhaps she is at home by this time," said Uncle Hugh hopefully, as he took up the reins and drove towards the cottage, the little windows of which winked and blinked at them through the trees.

Susan heard the carriage stop, and they saw her hobble across the room, and look out of the window as Uncle Hugh walked briskly up the garden walk. Florence sat in the carriage, her heart beating wildly with its alternate hope and fear.

"Is she here?" she exclaimed as soon as she saw the door open, and heard Susan make an audible reply to Uncle Hugh.

"No," replied he, and there was more despair in his tone than he was aware of. Florence was immediately making an attempt to scramble down from the carriage, and how she succeeded she could hardly tell, but she was soon in the cottage and standing close by Susan and looking up into her tearful face with the most tender sympathy and unfeigned interest.

"Did she say that she was going to our house?" asked Florence.

"No, she did not tell me so, although she must have known I thought that to be her intention. She has not been very well of late, and I told her she must come home early, and she kissed me and said that I must forgive her if she did not. I am afraid she has some trouble upon her mind, or is going to be sick."

"Well," said Uncle Hugh, moving restlessly about, "if you can think of any place the girl would be likely to go to, we will go and bring her home, for the roads are bad and it is dark as pitch."

Susan studied with painful intensity, and then with a faint gleam of hope upon her face she mentioned Sarah Parker's. She was Lucy's most intimate friend, and lived about a mile from there, and in an opposite direction from Daisy Lawn.

"She has not seen Sarah since we heard that Willie is coming home, and it would be just like her to go up there to tell her all about it."

"Oh, of course," said Uncle Hugh, "that would be real girl-fashion, and so we can't blame her. Well we'll go up there and see," and he moved towards the door.

"How good you are!" said Susan. "Florence can stay with me until you come back."

Florence did not hear that last remark, so busy was she in meditating.

"What shoes did Lucy have on when she went away?" she asked. "Do you remember?"

"No," replied Susan, surprised at the interrogation. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because the road is very good to our house, and if going there she would doubtless wear her thin shoes; while that to Sarah Parker's is so muddy and bad that she could not go without her thick boots."

"There is something in that," said Uncle Hugh.

"I'll go in her room and find out," and Susan went to the little bedroom on the south side of the cottage, the open door of which always displayed the whitest curtains, and the prettiest patch-work quilts that could be found in the country anywhere. She was absent for some time, and when she returned she was frightfully pale, and held a little slip of paper in her hand.

"Read that," she whispered, as she handed the note to Florence and sunk down in her chair.

Florence read it, and handed it to Uncle Hugh. Then she sat down upon the stool at Susan's feet, and putting her head in her lap, gave way to her sorrow. Lucy had gone, and this was the little note she left upon her bureau:

"MY DEAR MOTHER:

"Willie will be home to-morrow, and I would not see him for all the world. He loves me too well, and I am unworthy of him. He must forgive me and so must you, and would that you could both forget poor Lucy, but I know you cannot.

"I do love Willie—love him now better than ever before—but I have broken my own heart. I have been blind, yes mad, and I must go from you. Think of me kindly if you can. I shall always love you, and pray for you, although I can ask no mercy for myself.

"I entreat of you, my dear mother, to make no search for me, or outcry at my departure. It will be in vain. Nor think that I have gone in, or am to join, the company of any one. I go alone, trusting that heaven will be kind to one so unworthy. I shall be kindly cared for. A search would only cast disgrace upon me. Do not, I entreat of you, attempt such a thing for it will be useless. I am not to commit suicide; I have not fallen so low as that.

"Forgive me, dear mother, and Willie—O God! it breaks my heart!

"LUCY DEAN."

Susan was almost frantic with grief. The anticipation of Willie's return, and the crushing sorrow that would greet him at the threshold, overwhelmed her. Uncle Hugh nor Florence could not subdue her violent anguish, but swaying backwards and forwards in her chair, she wrung her hands and moaned most mournfully.

Uncle Hugh left Florence with her, and hastened back to Daisy Lawn with all possible speed to procure Aunt Betsey to go and sit beside her. He found us in the parlor listening to the sweet singing of Birdie, and unprepared for the startling intelligence he brought. It was communicated in his laconic comprehensive manner, and we had no time to make particular inquiries before Aunt Betsey was ready to return with him. We were impatient for Florence to get home, that we might receive from her a more minute account of the sad event.

M. Durand was much surprised at our earnest desire for an immediate and energetic pursuit. He advised a quietude on the part of her friends, not so much from a wish to spare the young girl from slander and reproach, as the proper mode of treating such unwarranted ingratitude and imprudence.

Uncle Hugh and Florence soon returned, bringing the letter, which was read over and over again by us all. It was a deep and agonizing mystery, and many were the conjectures we formed, in endeavoring to satisfy ourselves with an explanation. But all was dark, very dark, and we were burdened with a desire for light to penetrate the gloom.

Willie would be home on the morrow: Susan had determined to do nothing in regard to the matter without his counsel.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Oh! 'tis well that the future is hid from our sight,
That we walk in the sunshine, nor dream of the cloud;
That we cherish a flower, and think not of blight;
That we dance on the loom that may weave us a shroud.

It was good, it was kind in the Wise One above,
To fling destiny's veil o'er the face of our years,
That we dread not the blow that shall strike at our love,
And expect not the beams that shall dry up our tears.

ELIZA COOK.

"Oh! how can we tell him? How can we meet him with such dreadful news?" and Susan's tears came faster as Florence returned from the cottage door and said that she saw the stage coach coming down the hill.

Florence was calm and tearless, but when the rumbling of wheels drew nearer, and Susan's anguish became more wild and passionate, she felt the tumultuous uprisings of her own heart, and a struggle to retain her composure.

"Dear Father," she inwardly prayed, as she sat down by Susan and silently held her trembling hand, "be very merciful to us, and let thy goodness hold him up."

"I cannot bear it, oh! I cannot!" exclaimed poor Susan, dropping her head upon Florence's shoulder, and giving way to a fresh torrent of tears, as the stage coach emerged from the maple grove and stopped before the garden gate. Willie, with the activity of youth and happiness, sprang gaily out, bounded over the low fence with his boyhood's agility, and hurried up the garden walk, his bright eyes fastened upon the

half open door, where he expected to meet a face as radiant as his own.

"You must tell him, Florence, you must tell him," Susan whispered, as she heard his light footfall upon the porch and saw his shadow stealing across the floor.

"We must be calm," said Florence very softly to her, but the words were not heard, for Willie was within the room shouting a rapturous greeting, and soon his arms were around his mother's neck. He kissed her fondly and felt her hot tears upon his cheek, as she whispered a blessing upon him.

"But where is Lucy?" he inquired, hastily greeting Florence, and smiling and blushing as he looked around the room, and then stealing upon tip toe to the door of her little bedroom, lifted the latch as lightly as possible, and peeped in with a playful mischief, thinking so to surprise the one he was yearning most of all to see.

"Go in," whispered Florence, who was close behind him. "She is not there, and I have something to tell you."

Her mournful calmness threw an icy weight upon his warm gushing spirits, and casting a glance full of anxiety and alarm towards his mother, who sat weeping and wringing her hands as before, he obeyed the directions of Florence. She closed the door behind them, that their interview might not increase Susan's fearful excitement.

"Tell me quickly what it is," and Willie laid his hand upon the shoulder of the little one and looked piercingly into her face.

"It is sad news to greet you with, Willie," and the first tears she had shed that day came then, blinding her eyes so that she could not see the paleness of his face, but she felt the trembling of the hand upon her shoulder, "and I hope God will support you in your bitter trial. Lucy is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed he; "where to? Is she dead?"

"No, she is not dead. Hear me calmly, Willie, for your dear mother's sake, who is almost crushed with grief. Lucy

went away last night. Why, or where, we do not know. Here is the little note she left: it is all the information we can give you." She drew the letter from her pocket, and handed it to him.

He read it and sank down upon the bed, and bowing his head upon the foot-board, uttered a deep agonizing groan. The stroke had fallen heavily, and the wound was cruel and deep.

Florence buried her face too, and let the tears come as fast as they would. What was human solace in an hour like that? What words of balm had she in store? What consolation sufficiently divine to bind up and soothe the torn and quivering tendrils of so manly a heart? Her own feelings were too tender and human to vainly bid him be calm: she yearned for God to whisper directly to the afflicted.

Susan heard Willie groan, and hastened as fast as she could to the bedroom. She was so weak she could hardly support herself, but her motherly love and sympathy made her strong for the moment. She sat down upon the bed beside him and silently laid her head upon his shoulder. It was some time before he was aware of her presence, and then it was her passionate sobbing that aroused him. He put his arm around her and drew her closer to him.

"O! mother!" and the wounded heart quivered again.

There was a long, deep silence, broken only by outbursts of grief: that of Willie was not loud and tempestuous. His heart was too crushed to beat wildly; he had shed scarcely a tear.

"We have made no search for her," said Susan, when she was calm enough to speak; "I concluded to wait until you came home. Shall you try to find her?"

"No," mournfully, yet firmly.

"Why not, Willie?"

"For very many reasons: I cannot name them now. Let

her request be granted, and the strangeness of her departure kept secret."

"I thought of sending word to her sister Sarah. She should be informed of it, and may be Lucy has gone there. Shall we write to her to-day?"

"Yes."

"Shall I write the letter, or will you? If she is there, perhaps a word from you would bring her back."

"No, it would not; you must write."

But even had Willie's inclinations been different, so prostrated was he by sorrow, both in mind and body, he would have been unable to pen or dictate a letter. Susan was too much excited, and after beginning two or three, which she destroyed with a nervous impatience, she yielded to the entreaties of Florence, and allowed her to prepare one. Sarah was, as you remember, the sister of Lucy, who had formerly lived with Susan, but having married, settled in a country village about fifty miles distant.

That had been a long and painful day, and in its twilight Susan and Florence sat sadly talking with each other. The former had in a measure resumed her gentle composure, and the lovely and saint-like resignation that ever characterized her. These beautiful traits beaming so softly around a spirit so aching as hers, were like glistening water-drops upon a rose that has been bruised and torn by the storm.

They were talking of Lucy, of the singular gloom that had oppressed her for some time past, her emotion upon hearing of Willie's expected return, and of his inexpressible grief. They could remember nothing that would lead them to discover the cause of her mysterious departure. If she had had a lover of late, and they could not believe that for a moment, the intercourse between the two had been conducted with the most successful secrecy. But that was a groundless supposition, as Lucy was very seldom absent from home, and never in the evening, or for any length of time. She scarcely ever

visited her young friends, although she knew that privilege would be most cheerfully granted. It was a dark bewilderment, and they could only wander deeper into the mazy labyrinth.

"And what are we to tell folks when they ask where Lucy is?" inquired Florence, as Susan repeated Willie's injunction, that the affair should be kept a profound secret.

Susan thought a minute. She did not wish to repeat a falsehood daily: she was too conscientious by far. Others might have felt justified in framing a plausible, although untrue story for this emergency: she never could.

"She wrote she should be kindly cared for," said Florence.

"Yes, and therefore she must be among friends; at least, we may justly suppose that she is."

"But where?" said Florence, sadly.

"Would to heaven that we knew. Ah, Lucy!"

"We can say that she has gone to her friends, and must avoid the where, as best we may," added Florence.

"Yes, until we hear from Sarah, at least. I cannot but hope that she has gone there, for I know nowhere else that she would go to. She has no other relative except Aunt Betsey in the wide world."

"Dear Lucy!" and Florence laid her head in Susan's lap and gazed thoughtfully into her face; "how much Willie did love her."

"Don't say *did*, but *does*," and Susan kissed her forehead tenderly; "if he should cease to love her, he would not suffer so."

"That is true. Oh dear! how very sad it is!"

There was a click of the garden gate, and looking out they saw Charlie Grey walking leisurely towards the house. He was whistling as usual, and had a large and beautiful bouquet in his hands, which he doubtless culled from his valuable collection of plants. Charlie loved flowers as well as he did music, and that was one sweet germ in his heart that ever

cheered my hope for him. He loved all things beautiful, and possessed a most exquisite appreciation of beauty wherever it might be found; but he forgot the garden spot of his heart, where flowers choice and rare were perishing through neglect.

He saw the dim outline of two faces between the parting of the snowy muslin curtains, and thinking it to be Susan and Lucy, gave a good-natured nod, and a comical toss of his cap.

"He does not know that Willie is here," said Susan in an undertone, "and it is not best he should, at least while he is feeling so badly."

The lamps were unlighted, and the room was so dark that Charlie did not recognize Florence when he entered, but mistaking her for Lucy, threw the bouquet into her lap, saying:

"There's your ticket for good behavior," and, still deceived through the silence of the two, he drew a low chair beside her, and playfully stole one of her hands.

He started and dropped it suddenly; it was the withered and distorted one, and the instant he touched it he was aware of the presence of Florence. Disconcerted, he was attempting to stammer out an apology.

"There is no need of asking pardon, Charlie," said she, "I am the same Florence that I used to be."

"Yes, I know that you are, and always will be, but——"

He stopped short, and Florence urged him to proceed.

"But what?" said she. "Speak freely, Charlie, or I shall be forming strange suppositions. But what?"

"Nothing, now," and he tried to laugh it off.

"O you must tell me, Charlie. A 'but' so closely connected with my name must not be concealed."

"You always could take a secret from me, no matter how firmly I said *no*. I yield now as upon all former occasions, and will repeat the sentence I left unfinished. You are the same Florence, but I am not the same Charlie Grey that used to be."

"I know that, Charlie, as well as you." But it was a

subject he did not want to talk about, and Florence had pursued it as far as she did mostly from a desire to prevent the mention of Lucy, if possible. But Charlie soon inquired,

"Where is Lucy? She must not keep me waiting to-night, for after she has taken her lesson I am to call upon Mrs. Durand, or my old playmate, Birdie McAlpine, as I would rather call her."

"Lucy is not at home this evening," said Susan, with a slight trembling in her voice; "you must excuse her."

"Gone out, has she?" interrogated Charlie, moving restlessly upon his chair: "that is something unusual for her. Well, she has always been so attentive to her lessons, that, as I am at leisure to-morrow evening, I will call up then."

"No, I think it will be useless, as she may not be home by that time," and to avoid any further inquiries, Susan went out into the kitchen to get the candles for the evening. She was gone sometime, during which Florence took the boquet which Charlie had thrown in her lap, and put it into a small china pitcher that served for Lucy's vase.

"We will save these for her," said she, placing them upon the mantel-piece. Fearing she had recalled a painful subject, and feeling anxious on account of Susan's long absence from the room, she offered a half playful excuse, and went out into the kitchen.

She found her standing by the table, with a lighted candle in her hand.

"O! dear!" said Susan, brushing away the tears as she spoke. "I am afraid to go back again, lest my weakness should overcome me. It is so hard for me to control myself when he speaks of Lucy. He is so good, and has been so kind to her, that it does seem that we should tell him."

"Willie said we must keep it a secret."

"Yes, I know he did, and for his dear sake it shall be so. O! Florence, this is dreadful to bear."

They had but just reëntered the room, when Birdie and

I arrived at the cottage. We came to inquire after the state of affairs, how Willie had borne the fearful stroke, and if Susan's health would require the warmly proffered assistance of Aunt Betsey through the night. Florence was to return with us, and our stay must needs be short, as the spring night air was very injurious to her.

She met us at the gate, and told us that Charlie Grey was in the house, and warned us both to be on our guard against mentioning Willie's presence, or Lucy's singular departure, within his hearing. We charged our mind with that injunction, and after acquainting ourselves with a few particulars in regard to Willie, that only made us doubly sad, we followed her in.

Charlie and Birdie did not meet with the familiarity of other days. Yet it was, in a very great measure, owing to the restraint that the time and place cast upon her. Had they been in the parlor at Daisy Lawn, apart from associations so painful, she doubtless would have met him with the loud hurrah of old times, shook his hand with all her might, and kissed him of course; nor would the presence of M. Durand, have dampened her enthusiasm in that case.

But then there was the pale sad face of Susan before her, and her swollen eyes, telling of the crushing weight upon her heart. And she thought of Willie, whom Florence had said was lying motionless and silent upon Lucy's bed, unheeding all that was passing around him.

So it was not coldness, nor a haughty reserve, that caused her to extend but the tips of her gloved fingers, while she bowed and expressed her joy at meeting him, with the precision of a conventional drawing-room. But Charlie ascribed it to that, and with wounded pride, and tender chords quivering too, led her to believe by his stiff decorum, that he was not the Charlie Grey of glorious memory, of reckless swings, daring teeters, and the old gray pony, that used to carry two.

Susan wanted to see me alone, and I followed her into

Lucy's bedroom. She closed the door after us, and went up to the bedside, where Willie lay motionless, and with his face concealed in the pillow.

"Willie, my dear boy," said she, tenderly bending over him, and laying her hand upon his thick brown hair, "Mrs. McAlpine is here. Will you speak to her?"

He turned his face over. Ah! Willie, I shall never forget how despairing you looked.

He raised up from his pillow, and brushing away the hair that had fallen over his face, extended his hand towards me, and said something that I did not understand, so broken were his words. Then he laid back upon his pillow again, concealing his face as before.

"Oh! Willie!" and Susan sank down beside him, "it breaks my heart to see you suffer so!"

He made no reply, nor took the least notice of our presence.

"We had better leave him alone," I whispered to her. "Your grief will but increase his own. It was a powerful shock, yet I can but hope that he will recover safely from it."

She pressed down the pillow, and parting aside his hair, left a fervent kiss upon his forehead.

"God bless you Willie, my darling," was the true-mother prayer she uttered as she left the bedside. She paused before opening the door, to obtain a more perfect command of her highly wrought feelings.

I told her that Aunt Betsey would come and stay with her that night, and that she must if possible obtain some rest.

"I do try to be calm," she said, "but it looks so dark that I almost lose my faith. I have had bitter trials before this, but this is the hardest of all."

Florence was ready in a few minutes, and went in and bade Willie good night. Angebell gave Charlie such an urgent invitation to accompany us back to Daisy Lawn that notwithstanding his unwillingness, and the many excuses he

offered, he felt obliged to submit to her wishes. Nor did he afterwards regret it, for Birdie changed her manner towards him as soon as they were outside of the cottage. She sat with him upon the front seat of the carriage, and before they were half way home they were laughing and chatting to the old heart-tune of long ago.

Charlie Grey was well known to M. Durand, both by his musical celebrity, and the frequent mention of Angebell. He gave him a most cordial greeting, and if there had been any ill will in Charlie's heart towards the old man, it was dispelled before he had long been in his presence. M. Durand did not look at all serious at the familiarity between the two, but smiled benignly upon their merriment, and listened to the singing of their united voices with a face radiant with enjoyment.

Aunt Fanny, who never could help liking Charlie, notwithstanding his deviations from her strict rules of decorum, half jestingly reminded him of some love affairs that she was once perfectly acquainted with, as all the tender missives passing between the separated pair were condemned to her inspection. The remembrance did not seem to please him very well, although he did not intend that the keen eye of Aunt Fanny should discover it.

Long I lay awake that night after I had gone to my pillow. My thoughts were of a nature that would not be quieted, and although weary in body and mind, I could not repress them. Poor Lucy and Willie, and nearest to my heart at that hour, our Birdie.

She had had a long confidential talk with me that day, and she had revealed herself more fully, had confessed her faults and errings, her incapability to do right, until, overcome by the sadness of her own story, she had laid upon my bosom and wept.

"Oh, mother," said she in a half whisper, and looking

cautiously around the twilighted room, "I do not love M. Durand, and never, never can."

"Why did you marry him, Birdie?"

"Oh! I can hardly tell why. I shrank from it a long time, but was finally overcome by others as well as myself."

"Did you not know that it would make you miserable, that you sinned deeply against God and yourself in marrying a man that you did not love?"

"Yes; such thoughts did come sometimes, but they were always stifled. He loves me, mother, tenderly and truly, and surrounds me with all my heart can wish. There is no one else in the wide world that could love me as he does."

"Birdie?"

There was an unconscious rebuke in my voice. She comprehended me, and looked up searchingly into my face, as if half doubting my possession of her hidden secret.

"Shall I tell you where your lifetime mistake has been?" asked I.

"Yes;" and she dropped her gaze, and her brow and neck grew crimson.

"In selling yourself for wealth and a high position. Am I mistaken?"

"No, mother."

"And now, Birdie, though you have taken that step, it is your stern duty to do all that is in your power to increase the happiness of your husband. In neglecting that, you augment your guilt and sin."

"I shall never make him happy, for I cannot disguise my feelings or school myself as you teach. He will see my hypocrisy before long, and then he will be as miserable as I am. O! I do wish that I was dead."

"Do not speak so, Birdie, nor cherish such a sinful desire. You have erred most deeply, yet there are redeeming powers still living in your heart which, if cultivated with patience and faith, will shed a radiance around your life, illuminating

the past with a holy light, and casting blessed beams upon the future. You have chosen a path that is dark and rough, and the thorns your hands have planted will tear your feet, yet you must hope and toil, and keep them from wounding him that is to journey beside you. Remember, Birdie, that now the happiness of another beside your own is committed to your charge. And that it is in your power—yes, darling, it is in your power—to increase or destroy both."

"I am not good enough for so great a task. If I loved him—O if I only could love him now that I have married him!"

"Your feelings must control you no longer. You must yield to a right sense of duty."

"And that is weak before all that it has to combat with. But what is the use in talking this over, it won't do any body a mite of good," and, sighing heavily, she lifted her head from my breast.

"Do not think so, my child. I hope that it will lead you to an endeavor that will calm your turbid life. Shall it not?"

"I cannot promise," she said, turning her face toward the window where the lingering light was floating faintly in. "If I was only as firm in the right as I am in the wrong, there would be more hope for me," and she pressed her quivering lips tightly together.

"Do not despond, Birdie; you have power to make a noble example of your life. Arouse yourself to the effort; lean trustingly upon God, and he will not forsake you."

During our ride to Susan's our conversation had been resumed, and though the subject had been a sad and painful one to me, yet there was a joy-vibrating chord, and a hymn of gratitude ascending from my soul, that the icy barrier was gone, and I was permitted once more to hold our Birdie to my heart.

A slight allusion to Charlie Grey, and the unguarded remark she made concerning him, convinced me that our sus-

picious of her concealed attachment for him were well-founded. She did love with all the fervor of her being, and now that she had of her own will placed a stern barrier between them, she struggled, yearned, and wept to be free. And she was but three days a bride—alas, Birdie!

She did not openly reveal all this to me. She thought her love for Charlie a secret unknown by every one. She did not give just credit to our discernment and intimate acquaintance with her. It had not been an idle and creeping curiosity that had discovered it, but a deep and increasing interest in her welfare.

CHAPTER XIX.

Oh! it is hard to put the heart
Alone and desolate away—
To curl the lip in pride, and part
With the kind thoughts of yesterday.

N. P. WILLIS.

CHARLIE GREY called at Susan's early the next morning, and was much surprised to find Willie sitting upon the door-steps, looking very disconsolate indeed, and so completely absorbed in a reverie that his approaching footsteps did not arouse him.

"Well done!" he exclaimed, clapping him upon the shoulder, and giving a loud laugh when Willie sprang startled to his feet, "an early comer you are! I would as soon have expected to have seen Mahomet, himself as you. But are you sick? You look as much like a ghost as any thing. Come home to be doctored, have you? that is too bad," and his voice assumed an unaffected tenderness.

Willie decided the night before, after we were all gone, that it would be best to tell Charlie Grey about Lucy's disappearance, as he was her music teacher, and would make many inquiries and be much surprised at her abrupt departure at the beginning of a quarter. Willie had sufficient confidence in him to believe that he would not repeat the sad story to any one.

So he told him all about it, briefly, yet with words expressive of the sorrow it had brought upon him. Charlie had

ever been a friend to him, and Willie knew his warm heart too well to doubt his sympathy.

Charlie was silent with astonishment, and his face grew as white as Willie's, and he stood for a long time gazing vacantly upon the ground. Willie spoke to him once, but he made no reply. At last he said:

"So you have no idea of the cause of her leaving?"

"None whatever."

"Nor where she has gone?"

"We think it barely possible that she is at her sister Sarah's. We wrote there yesterday, and shall hear from them by Tuesday night."

"It is strange, very strange," said Charlie, departing. "You are wise in keeping it still; there would be little need in looking for her. It would only raise an excitement and injure her character."

Charlie was half way to the gate when Willie, in an undecided voice, called him back.

"I want to ask you a question," said he in a very low tone, and frowning as if his task was an unpleasant one. "Do you know of Lucy's having any other lover than me?"

"No, I do not. I never heard a whisper of that kind, or saw anything to awaken such a suspicion. Have you any reasons for believing that to be the case?"

"No, we have nothing to strengthen any conjecture we may form; but that one has haunted my mind, though I have been unwilling to give it a moment's credence, and yet—"

He did not finish the sentence, and Charlie, unobserving his hesitation, remarked again that it was strange, very strange, and bidding him good morning, walked slowly away with a troubled countenance. Willie bowed his aching head upon his hands again, and sat there in the sunshine of a glad May morning, with happy birds singing around him, and bright-eyed flowers smiling to the calm sky, without an answering

note of joyance in his heart, but a deep dark mystery bound around him that he felt that he must break or die.

The next Monday morning M. Durand and lady, with Aunt Fanny, were to depart for New York. We urged them to prolong their visit, but it was impossible for them to do so, as the bridegroom had business of a pressing nature demanding his return, and Aunt Fanny was engaged in a benevolent society that she was sure would suffer from her longer absence.

The morning of their departure came; a bright and balmy day it promised to be, though gloomy shadows gathered around our hearthstone. Aunt Fanny bustled through the house with her usual activity, packing all the trunks, and seeing that nothing should be left behind. Florence was in the parlor with M. Durand and Uncle Hugh, and deep in a discussion of some kind. M. Durand had, ever since the first hour of his visit, manifested a sincere interest in the little dwarf, and sought her society more than that of any other member of the family; and she had a high estimate of the old gentleman, and derived true and lasting pleasure from her conversation with him.

I was quite ill that morning; the exciting scenes of the past few days had been too much for me. Aunt Betsey was too busy to assist me in dressing, so with the little help that Florence could give, I had smoothed my hair behind my cap, and throwing on a loose wrapper dragged myself to my rocking chair, hoping, after partaking of my breakfast, to be able to meet with the dear ones in the library, the place we uniformly chose for our meetings and farewells.

I had been sitting half an hour or more, with but painful thoughts to bear me company, when the door was opened softly, and I, thinking it to be but Maggie with my toast and coffee, clung to my reverie without lifting my eyes.

"Mother," said a low voice close beside me. It was Birdie bending over me with her eyes brimful with tears.

"Oh, my dear mother," whispered she, kneeling beside me, winding her arms about my neck, and laying her head upon my bosom, "how can I go away from you? Without your influence I can never accomplish my duty."

"God is mighty, and nearer to your heart than I am, my daughter. Lean upon his arm and chide not the whispers of his love. Call upon him in every hour, and if you spurn not his control all will yet be well."

"But I am tempted and very weak. If God was near me such temptations could not overpower me."

"Doubt not, Birdie, that he is very near to you, but rather feel that your face has been turned from him, and your heart hardened against his pleadings. Look to him with the confidence of a child, remembering that he has told us to call him 'Our Father.'"

"I have no firm moral principle to guide me; I know and frankly confess it, and wish it was otherwise. But so it is, and that dreadful weakness in my character gives me this lack of confidence in my many resolutions to redeem, by some good and noble act, no matter how humble it may be, a little of my past waywardness. But I have no hope in myself now that I go from you."

"Do not speak so, Birdie. Human help is frail at the best, ever erring and sinful. God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever."

Then followed a silence broken only by the sobbing of the troubled one. Poor Birdie! my words and sympathy were a weak balm for one so heavily laden, and I yearned for the voice and companionship of him who had had long converse with the angels, for the dropping of one whisper, fresh and sweet from heaven, to cheer the fluttering soul whose purest thoughts were linked with him.

"Oh mother," said she, suddenly starting up, her countenance beaming with her newly-begotten hope, "won't you

go with me? Oh say that you will, and then I shall be happy!"

I was sorry to disappoint her budding anticipations, but my health at that time was so very feeble, that so long a journey would have proved presumptuous in the extreme. Angebell saw the force of my objections and submitted to them without a word of remonstrance, only sighing deeply and wishing that she might remain at Daisy Lawn.

"If I could but stay here with those that love me! If I had never left you as I did!"

"Birdie, it is your duty to remain with your husband now, making it your constant study to increase his happiness by your faithfulness, self-denial and kindness. Remember, that he is your husband, and the sacred vow you took before God, and let that ring upon your finger be a holy and daily reminder of the same, 'until death do ye part.'"

"Oh mother!"

The breakfast bell rung, and Aunt Betsey went whewing through the hall, to give a double assurance to the inmates of the parlor that their immediate attendance was expected in the dining room. Birdie did not heed the summons, but remained silent and motionless, with her face buried in my shawl.

"Breakfast is ready," said I to her, smoothing her hair and looping up with its brilliant band the heavy braid that had fallen; "do not longer despair, but begin from this moment to hope and be strong. I shall not have another opportunity of conversing with you, but only trust and call upon God, my daughter, and your aspirations will be realized."

She kissed me fervently, again and again, her heart throbbing as if it would burst, then she bathed her face in cold water, which did not remove the signs of her violent grief, and joined the family at the breakfast table.

While the rest were eating, Aunt Betsey brought in my breakfast, and waiting until I had partaken of it, lifted me up

in her strong arms as if I had been a puny child, and carrying me into the library left me alone in the old easy chair.

She had been absent from the room but a few moments when I heard some one ascend the porch and enter the hall without ringing the bell, and soon Charlie Grey presented himself, looking rather care-worn I thought. He advanced to where I was sitting, smiling a good morning and giving me a cordial shake of the hand.

I told him that the rest of the family were at breakfast, and so he sat down beside me, not contentedly it seemed, for his eyes wandered in and out of the window, and around the familiar room with a fickleness that attracted my attention. Supposing that he had come to bid his friends good bye, I remarked that they would appreciate his remembrance of their departure.

"I shall see them again before long, I hope," he replied, nervously rapping his brightly polished boot with the light cane he held; "I expect to go to New York the last of this week."

"Rather a sudden move, is it not?"

"Yes," and he changed the administration of his stick from his boot to the table, "a peremptory business call obliges me to leave so soon."

"How long before the musical world are to be favored with something new from you?"

"I have several pieces in the publisher's hands now. My business in New York concerns them."

"I hope that you will meet with your usual success." Charlie bowed and blushed slightly.

"Do you think of remaining absent long?" I continued.

"I cannot tell; it will be several weeks at least, and perhaps six months or more. I never calculate my time beforehand, you know."

"There will be grumbings among your pupils, I fear, if you forsake them long."

"They are grumbling already, but that is nothing. I endorse Uncle Hugh's motto: 'If you have got anything to do, do it.'"

Just then the family came in from the dining room. M. Durand and Aunt Fanny expressed a great deal of pleasure in meeting with Charlie once more before their departure, and expressed sincere thanks for the attention he had paid them, but when he told them of his intended visit to New York, they would accept nothing but a promise from him to make their house his home. Birdie said but very little; she was evidently heavily oppressed.

When the moment came for their departure, I could not follow them to the porch, so Uncle Hugh wheeled my chair before the open window. The last words that our Birdie spake, as she looked from the carriage and waved her hand, were:

"Good-bye, mother!"

I treasured up those words, and they are now as sweet and dear as any upon the hallowed catalogue I cherish. And though the years have been long and weary since they were spoken, often I lie upon my wakeful pillow and recall the young sad face, the dark and tear-dimmed eyes, and the quivering rosy lips that my gaze hung upon so fondly, as those sweet words, yes, very blessed, floated to the chambers of my memory: "Good-bye, mother."

"Good Father, keep her!" I murmured. Alas, dear Birdie.

"Oh! I do feel so lonesome!" said Florence, when the forenoon had nearly worn away, and she had been unable to find a single book in her collection worthy of supplying the vacancy the departure of that morning had left. "I am anxious to know how things are at Susan's, and it is so pleasant out of doors I will walk up there."

So selecting a book that she thought there was a bare possibility that Willie would like to read, in case he was a little

more composed, she started off, promising to remember all the messages we entrusted to her care. My eye followed the limping dwarfed form of my child, until a clump of shrubbery hid her from my view, and my emotions were far different from the surging flood that swept over my heart but a few hours before at the departure of the beautiful and fascinating Angebell.

Florence found every thing at Susan's much better than she had expected. Willie was more resigned, and Susan's eyes brightened whenever they fastened upon him, for she felt that the blow had not completely crushed him, but that he might yet revive from its effects, and be strong again, although bearing the scar of a dreadful wound.

She warmly welcomed Florence, and Willie, who had always loved her as a sister, drew his chair beside the little work-table where she and his mother were sitting with their sewing. They had resolved, for his sake, to make no mention of the unhappy occurrence that lay nearest to their hearts, and would associate with their every thought, and he did not speak of Lucy or aught concerning her until the stage coach rumbled by in its way to the village.

"We may hope for a letter from Sarah to-morrow night," said he.

"May we not expect one to-night?" asked Susan.

"No, there is no possibility of a reply so soon."

"I hardly wait for good news," said Susan, sighing and bending low over her work.

"Nor I," responded Willie, leaving his chair and going to the door, where he stood with his arms folded behind him, and his gaze wandering over the fair May landscape. The delightful rustling of young leaves, the merry carol of happy birds, and the sweet fragrance from the flowers that Lucy Dean had planted and loved, shed no balm for him, and he turned wearily to his chair again, but not to join as before in the conversation of his mother and Florence. The reality,

with the keenness of its birth-pangs, was with him again.

Susan and Florence stopped talking, and plied their needles in silence, occasionally exchanging significant glances with each other. Willie appeared unconscious of all that was about him, and was sinking again to his silent and abstract grief.

"My dear boy," said Susan softly, unable to withhold her sympathy any longer, "it breaks my heart to see you grieve so deeply; try and cheer up a little for my sake as well as your own."

He did not move or make a reply.

"Come here and sit by me, Willie," she continued. "I want to talk with you, and I would have you near to me."

Willie went and sat down upon the low stool by her side. It was the seat that Lucy had been accustomed to occupy.

"Your affliction is a bitter one, Willie," and she drew his head to her bosom, and twined his curly brown hair as she spake, "but you must not forget that there is a Wise One above who marks out the paths of men, and it is from his merciful and loving hand that blessings as well as chastisements fall."

She paused, but he said nothing.

"I can sympathize with you, Willie. Heavy burdens have been laid upon me, not once but oftentimes, and yet, when my dearest hopes had vanished—my friends proved inconsistent—my soul's best and purest affection cast like pearls before swine, and I wandered weeping, weary and alone, God and the angels drew nearer than before. I did not feel the soothing balm of their heavenly influence until I had lifted my heart, torn and bleeding as it was, up to the holy throne, and let the smile of God fall upon it. And I shall tremble for you, Willie, unless you cast your burden upon the Lord."

"I do not murmur against heaven," said Willie with broken accents. "My mother's prayers have kept me from that."

"You must pray, Willie: God alone can aid you. He is our only true help in trouble, able to deliver us in all time of our tribulation, and in all time of our prosperity; to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up those who fall." She clasped him closer to her heart, and with a countenance spiritually beaming with her Christian faith and love, she petitioned with a fervor that the angels must have wept to hear:

"O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace."

Then followed a holy calm, broken only by the monotonous ticking of the clock, and the occasional chirp of Lucy's pet canary.

The afternoon had worn away, and the night was slowly creeping on.

"Bring me the prayer-book, Willie," said Susan, pointing to the little stand where it laid. "Let us read the Psalm for the evening."

He brought it and laid it upon her lap, but the tears blinded her so she could not read, and she handed the book to Florence. It was the thirteenth day.

"Save me, O God; for the waters are come in even unto my soul.

"I stick fast in the deep mire where no ground is; I am come into deep waters so that the floods run over me."

Happy selection! But the sound of my footfall upon the walk interrupted the holy hour, and the intelligence I brought ruffled the serenity that was settling so sweetly upon their minds, and prevented the continuing of their devotion.

Upon the threshold I had found a little note, sealed, and directed in an unfamiliar hand to Mrs. Susan Blake.

There was a breathless silence while she glanced it over, and then read it aloud to us:

"Lucy Dean would remove from your mind, if possible,

all anxiety as to her present welfare. She has found a home, less dear to her than yours, yet it is accepted with gratitude. Make no search for her; it would be in vain, and detrimental to her character. Pray for and forgive her."

"Where did you find this?" said Willie, almost frantically.

"Right upon the threshold, partly under the door," I replied.

"It has been put there within the last fifteen minutes," said he, seizing his hat and rushing out of the door.

But his search for the bearer was fruitless, and he returned weary and disappointed.

"Could you obtain no clue to the affair?" asked Susan.

"None whatever. I made no inquiries of any one but Mr. Graham, who was coming home from the village, and from Tom Laison, who came off the river road, and neither of them have met any one. They did not know the cause of my interrogatories."

He took up the letter and read it over again.

"Lucy never wrote that," he said.

"Oh, no! that is plain enough," we all replied.

"It does not look like a gentleman's hand," said Susan, critically surveying it; "indeed, I feel almost sure that it is not; and if I can judge anything of character by a person's hand-writing, and you have all said that I can, I should say it was by a middle-aged woman, straightforward in action, and firm in purpose."

Susan was celebrated among her friends for her power of determining a person's characteristics, even if they were total strangers to her, by autographs and even single words, and we did not then feel incredulous of her opinion.

"But who can it be?" we naturally inquired. "It is not Sarah, I am sure," said Willie.

"She writes a much finer hand," said Susan.

"It plainly asserts that she has friends attending her," remarked Florence.

"And that she is to make her home with them, although she has a preference for ours," added Susan.

"Then why did she leave us?" There was a half concealed bitterness in Willie's tone.

"Would that I knew," replied Susan; "it would take a load off my heart. I cannot think of any place but Sarah's that she would go to, and she must have known that we would discover her if she went there. Sarah would certainly inform me, no matter how strongly Lucy opposed her."

"She is not there," said Willie, firmly; and his brows gathered darkness as he added: "Wealth and flattering inducements have lured her from our humble home. She has allowed her pride to master her love for you and me."

"It is hard to think so harshly of the poor girl," said Susan. "I know that she is easily influenced and led by others, and the taste that she has always exhibited for fine clothes and luxury, may, perhaps, have won her from us. And yet, how can we charge her with this without believing the committal of a deeper sin? What motives would tempt the presenter of such offers, and to what a miserable life must she submit in accepting them. It is wicked for us to judge her in our blindness. Let us rather remember her love and kindness, and imagine nothing that would cast a shadow upon her memory. God is good, and will not forget her or us."

But I did not think that the expression upon Willie's countenance while his mother was speaking, the slight curling of his lip, and the quick flashing of his eyes, betokened his accordance with her sentiments. Jealous suspicion had crept in among his fears, and his pride was now wounded almost as deeply as his love. He had not before allowed himself really to doubt Lucy's virtue and constancy to him. Shadowy conjectures had suggested themselves, but they had found no

lingering spot; now they were realities, and he frowned back their blackness.

He left the room and did not enter again until just as Florence and I were preparing to depart. Ah! there was a change upon him.

"Will you not come and see us, Willie?" I asked of him. "Daisy Lawn is the old homestead of yore, and will give you a warm welcome."

"Thank you, thank you," he almost cheerfully replied; "but I must go back to New York to-morrow morning, and I shall not have time to visit you."

"What, Willie?" exclaimed Susan, grasping his arm; "you do not think of leaving me so soon?"

"Yes, mother, I must. Judge Leonard will be unable to spare me longer, and further absence will prove a loss to me in a pecuniary view."

"What of that?" said Susan despondingly. "I believe that I shall always be unwilling for you to leave me again. It is harder now than ever before, and your visit home has been so sad."

"That is true, but my good mother could not help it, or it would have been far otherwise." Then he asked of me if I knew of a child of suitable age and attainments that could be procured to supply Lucy's place, as his mother must not be without some one to attend to her, and superintend the household affairs. Susan's health was gradually improving, although her lameness remained the same, and she received a comfortable support from the embroidery and plain sewing that she did for many of the villagers.

It was very necessary that she should have some one to assist her. I could think of no one competent for the place, but knew that Aunt Betsey or Mrs. Brown would not be at a loss about it, and therefore my first inquiry of Aunt Betsey upon reaching home was in reference to that subject.

"Yes, Susan must have somebody, and that right away

too," she replied. "I don't think of anybody now that would be just the one either. There's Nellie Hosmer, a good-natured child, old enough, and sadly in want of a home since her mother died and her father went off, but she is such a wild thing it would be crazy-like enough to fix on her." She pondered for some time. "But there's Mrs. Brown will surely know of somebody," she afterwards continued. "By the way, I heard her talking of a little Gettie Wentworth the other day that lives in the village with Mrs. Lee, who is going to New York, and cannot take the child with her. I shouldn't wonder if she would do. I'm going over to Dr. Grey's to-morrow morning, and I'll see about it."

Willie did not wait until night to see if a letter was received from Sarah, but took his departure about the middle of the afternoon. Susan urged him to remain until the next morning, and wept bitterly at his leaving her. He consoled her as well as he could, promising to write oftener than before, and told her to cease mourning for Lucy, and hoping to see her again. That night she received a letter from Sarah, expressing much sorrow and surprise at the course Lucy had taken, and regretting that she could give no information as to where she was.

Early the next morning, Dobbin, Aunt Betsey's particular favorite, was before the old-fashioned chaise, and away rode the worthy dame in the direction of the parsonage. Mrs. Brown, who was as early a riser as she, was out in the kitchen garden, intently surveying the beds of young and dewy vegetables, that gratified her exceedingly by their thriving condition.

Yes, Gettie Wentworth would be just the help for Susan, she thought ; and if Aunt Betsey would only wait until she had finished putting something upon the table for John, who was in a hurry to get away to his work—Dr. Grey was ill, and would not breakfast until an hour later—she would ride round to Mrs. Lee's with her, and see about the child.

Aunt Betsey agreed to this, and praised her friend in glowing terms for her care of her husband, but Mrs. Brown laughed, and said it was no more than she had always done to look after John's comfort, and no more than she always intended to do.

Soon the old chaise with two as good-natured and healthy-looking dames as ever smiled upon a happy country home, were driving through the quiet shady streets of the village. They stopped before a large white house, with wide piazzas, and cheerful green blinds.

Gettie came to the door. She was a delicate-looking girl of about twelve years of age, and her modest bearing and gentle mien won the warm heart of Aunt Betsey immediately. Before giving a reply to their solicitations, she introduced them to Mrs. Lee, who, after some kind and polite inquiries concerning Susan Blake, and the labor that would fall upon one in her employ, asked Gettie, who stood timidly waiting for her decision, if she was pleased with the offer, and advised her to accept it.

"Gettie is not very strong," she said, "yet is always willing to do all and even more than her strength will allow."

Aunt Betsey assured her with her usual volubility that the household labor of Susan was very light, but as she was a cripple, and unable to move about much, she needed some one that would kindly attend to her wants and have a true interest in her.

It was finally concluded that Gettie should go to Susan's that afternoon ; so after Uncle Hugh had taken Willie to the cars, he drove around to Mrs. Lee's, and found the pretty little girl neatly clad, her clean sunbonnet on, and her little bundle in her hand awaiting his arrival. She wept at leaving her kind friend Mrs. Lee, and when Uncle Hugh lifted her into the carriage, and she felt more deeply that she was going away from the house that had protected her when fatherless and motherless—she had known no other shelter—her little

heart swelled until she thought it would burst, and covering her face in her checked apron, she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

Uncle Hugh tried to comfort her, by telling her of the gentle affection of her new mistress, of the motherly care she would have for her, and the filial faithfulness that she must return; that Susan was not a rich woman like Mrs. Lee, but poor and feeble in health, yet her little cottage was ever attractive and cheerful, because of the sweet influence of its mistress.

Gettie brightened up considerably before they reached the place, and Uncle Hugh, by his good nature and tact, so far overcame her natural timidity and reserve that she talked freely with him upon the simple subjects he suggested, and related with her childish simplicity the sad adversity of her young years, the deprivation of both father and mother, and her suffering and want until Mrs. Lee had compassionated her.

They found Susan quite dejected at parting with Willie, yet she looked happy again when she saw the blushing innocent face of Gettie, and was assured by Uncle Hugh that she had come to make a home with her.

Gettie was not long in gaining the affections of us all, and Susan said that she loved her as she would her own, "and yet," she would sadly add, "she cannot fill the empty place that Lucy left—nobody can."

CHAPTER XX.

Ah! she was very dear to us,
Although her heart was prone to err,
And tempting angels ever seemed
To smiling tread the path with her;
We clasped her in our loving arms,
And when a blight her bloom did kill,
Oh God! our love remained the same,
She was our own, our darling still.

THE first letter that I received from Birdie after her return was laden with the sweet confidence that she had imparted so freely when with me. She was very unhappy, and M. Durand had accused her of being so, but by an equivocation she had relieved and made glad his idolizing heart again. She was weakly struggling to overcome her deficiencies of character, but a small failure would sadly diminish her hope, and weaken her purpose.

"I am so weak," she wrote me, "that there is no use in my resolving to do a good thing. I am irritable, and unreasonably selfish, and cannot be otherwise; I have nearly resolved to let the past go unrepented of, and the future take care of itself without any forethought from me."

She mentioned, as did also Aunt Fanny, Charlie Grey's presence at their house, and the delightful times they were having in his society, and that of his gay and agreeable associates, many of whom were gentlemen of musical talent and celebrity. He made his home at Aunt Fanny's most of the time, and Birdie frankly stated he was the only relief for her wearisome hours, and the dispeller of her soul-killing ennui.

I did not like the statement, and seriously wondered how things were going. Aunt Betsey was more voluble in her sentiments, and openly declared to us all that she thought it a disgrace in Charlie Grey to work himself between a man and his wife.

"Yes, that may be so," said Uncle Hugh dryly, "but what do you think of the woman that makes space enough between her husband and herself for somebody else to comfortably occupy?"

"There is something in that, I declare," said Aunt Betsey; "things do go strange-like enough with that child, and I shall always say, no matter how much Mrs. McAlpine may oppose me, that if she had been kept at home as Florence was, she would have come out in the end a little different. She was not a bad child, I am certain of that."

The next letter from Angebell was destitute of any reference to herself or the state of her feelings. She made no reply to the many inquiries my last letter contained in regard to them, and said only in respect to her health that it was as good as she might expect it to be. She told me also that M. Durand had purchased a valuable lot in the most fashionable part of the city, and was building an extensive and elegant mansion, and that she was heartily tired of the debates of architects and their unceasing consultations with her.

She said but little of Charlie Grey, but Aunt Fanny gave me several elaborate descriptions of the entertainments that had been given him by her and several of her friends, and the great pecuniary success he was meeting with from the publication of his late compositions and other sources, arising from his extraordinary musical talent and skill.

"But," wrote she, after a full and glowing account of the attractive qualities of the young man, "I really do believe that he is yet very much in love with Birdie, and she, from no other motive than to amuse herself and torment him,

smiles and bestows much flattering attention upon him. I do not entertain the least fear of a dishonorable intention on either side. I sometimes wish when I see them together—I never expressed this to any but you—that his circumstances and position had been more highly favored by fortune. But do not think that I am at all dissatisfied with M. Durand: far from it. He daily increases in my respect, and I feel truly thankful for the influence he exerts upon our wayward Birdie. She is already different from what she was—more dignified and womanly, filling her station well, and is the acknowledged centre of the circle in which she moves."

Now Aunt Fanny saw things in a different light from me altogether, and it would have been difficult to convince her that she was suffering from blindness and lack of discernment. She would accuse me of the same, if I were to charge her so, and even a statement of my fears and firm suspicions would only call forth her severe judgment and condemnation, without lessening the evil.

Three months passed, and within that time the confidence that Birdie had once given me was wholly withdrawn. She corresponded with me the same, but her letters were short and brief, and if fully covering a sheet, were but the rehearsal of something that I cared but little to know. She carefully avoided all allusion to herself, or the success or overthrow of her resolutions, but could I have a firm faith, knowing her weakness so well, that she had persevered in her laborious struggle, and was receiving the blessings that her toil would bring? My anxiety and fears for her daily increased, nor was I relieved by any information that I could gain.

Charlie Grey was still in New York, and had written to his father expressing his determination to remain there a year longer, giving several important reasons, solely pecuniary, that prompted him to do so. He might visit home during that time, but it was uncertain.

Willie Blake was sometimes spoken of, but not very often,

as they saw him but seldom. He never called upon them, and they could not learn that he frequented society of any kind, but confined himself closely and with unremitting diligence to his studies. He was progressing slowly but surely, and Judge Leonard often told his friend, M. Durand, that he was confident his clerk would yet make a loud noise in the world.

I began to dread the arrival of letters from New York, and instead of the thrilling pleasure that their coming once gave me, my heart grew sick with fearful apprehension, and I held them long in my hands, and asked the support of heaven before breaking the seals. I felt the approach of a new sorrow, and it was very well that I was thus prepared for the bursting of the tornado, or I should have fallen crushed beneath it.

Florence and I were sitting in the library one warm afternoon in August. It was the coolest room in the house, and we had eagerly sought it, she with her reading, and I with my sewing.

It was growing late in the afternoon, and the awakening of the breeze that had been stifled by the burning sun tossed the curtains playfully, and rustled the papers upon the table. We welcomed it joyfully, unheeding whatever disarrangement it might cause.

Florence had laid down her book, and slowly rocking her chair, was looking thoughtfully into my face.

"Mother," said she at last, in a melancholy voice, "I believe that we shall hear from New York to-night."

I made no reply, and she continued:

"The thought of hearing from there oppresses me. I almost wish that we would not get a letter. Do you?"

"If there is bad news for us, we may as well receive it first as last. A delay would not lessen its bitterness."

"It is now time that Uncle Hugh was here," said she,

glancing at the clock. Arising, she went to the window that looked towards the village.

"He is coming down the hill now. Oh dear! I wish he would drive slower;" and sighing, she went back to her chair and sunk dejectedly into it.

I could not elude her feelings, for the dark shadow was upon me, and although blinded with tears, I stitched away, secretly wishing with her that he would drive slower.

"But how foolish this is!" thought I inwardly, rebuking myself for such imagined ills; "we may as reasonably hope for good news as bad, and are only borrowing trouble before its time;" and yet, although convinced of the foolish part I was acting, and endeavoring to await Uncle Hugh's arrival with cheerfulness, the shadows lingered about me, and I found myself trembling violently, and the tears flowing faster when he entered the room, and just as we had anticipated, laid a letter, posted at New York, and directed in Aunt Fanny's familiar hand, in my lap.

It laid untouched for several moments, nor did Florence essay to open it.

"How foolish we are!" said I, wiping my eyes, and trying to laugh at our weakness, as I broke the seal and began reading to myself.

I read but half a page and the letter fell from my hands, and I sat staring wildly into the pale face of Florence, wholly unable to speak.

"Mother! mother!" cried she, starting forward and seizing the letter, "for mercy's sake what is it?"

She read a little way and dropped the letter as I did, but the dagger pierced her heart more deeply than it did mine, and uttering a shriek, fearful with its sorrow and despair, she fell forward upon the floor.

Aunt Betsey and Uncle Hugh rushed in, greatly alarmed. Arousing my fainting energies, and powerfully upheld by the excitement surrounding me, I lifted my darling in my arms

and would have borne her to the sofa had not Uncle Hugh interposed.

Aunt Betsey brought restoratives and bathed her head, and used every means to reanimate her, and finally succeeded in restoring her from her almost lifeless condition. She opened her large blue eyes and stared wildly from one anxious countenance to another, and to the earnest and tearful inquiries we made, gave but a look so meaningless and frightfully vacant, or accompanied by sentences so disconnected and strange, that my heart turned icy within me as the cruel fear fastened upon my mind that she had lost her reason.

We carried her to the rose chamber and laid her upon her little bed. She was gentle and harmless, moaning piteously, and calling for "mother, dear mother," when I was holding her tight to my heart and whispering in the tenderest tones, "my daughter, my own dear Florence, I am your mother."

Uncle Hugh and Aunt Betsey were naturally very impatient to know the cause of this sad affliction. I had not finished reading the letter, and felt unable to do so, and handing it to Uncle Hugh, I left my child in the care of Maggie, and followed him and Aunt Betsey into the dining room to listen to all that it contained.

And this is what he read me, and do you wonder that Florence, hoping and trusting as she had been, should have fallen so crushed beneath it?

"NEW YORK, August, 18—.

"MY DEAR CLARA:

"I am scarcely able to write, so, overwhelmed am I by circumstances of an exceedingly painful nature that have but just taken place.

"I will not endeavor to soften the news to you, for communicated in whatever shape it may be it, cannot fail to

agonize. I must also be brief, as my physician almost forbade my writing at all.

"I have often mentioned to you the intimacy existing between Charles Grey and Mrs. Durand, and the innocent motives I attached to their familiar intercourse; but I was blind, and wonder now at my lack of discernment.

"Mrs. Durand has eloped with Charlie Grey. Yesterday morning she left home, saying she was going to spend the day with a friend, and should probably not return until the evening. In reply to my inquiry as to the hour I should send the carriage for her, if at all, she told me that I need not mind doing so, as Mrs. B—— would doubtless return with her.

"Late in the afternoon M. Durand came home, very anxious to see his wife, as he thought it necessary to consult her taste in regard to some architectural ornaments for her sleeping apartment, in their new mansion. I told him where she was, and he started off for Mrs. B——'s.

"In about an hour he returned, and I shall never forget his countenance, when he entered the parlor. His appearance alarmed me, and I urged him to tell me what had happened. He was not excited in the least, but very calm. He told me that he had called upon Mrs. B——, but Mrs. Durand had not been there that day. He had inquired for her at several other of her friends, but could hear nothing from her.

"This excited his fears, but they were not confirmed until he called at the bank to transact some business. Then he discovered that Mrs. Durand had taken out, the day before, all of her personal property—the \$10,000 of her share from her father's estate—and had demanded it in gold coin.

"But I must not particularize now, as I am getting very tired, and shall soon be compelled to go back to bed again. Suffice it to say, that the steamer departing for Havre that afternoon had among its passengers a couple under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh St. Clare, corresponding exactly to

Mrs. Durand and Mr. Grey, and we have no reason to doubt, from all the information that we have received, that they are the guilty pair.

"Although the steamer was in port over an hour after M. Durand was led strongly to suspect that they were among the passengers, no entreaty of mine could persuade him to go in pursuit of them. He was as cold and firm as a rock to all that I could say, and when I declared my resolution of going after them myself, and bringing back my child by force, if need be, he forbade it with such a stern command that I submitted to him, but I shall feel condemned as long as I live for doing so.

"We have no reason to doubt that Charles Grey is her companion. Every item of information proves that to be the case. You will, of course, communicate this to Dr. Grey. O, if his child had only been blest with the influence and teachings of a mother, our darling might have been spared in her purity to us.

"Love to you all, and God help you to bear all this. Let me hear from you soon, and in my next I will relate more fully the sad circumstances attending this painful event. I have already written too much for my physical strength.

"Yours, &c.,

"FANNY LAWRENCE."

I had long felt the shadows deepening, and had known the night must come, but had not feared the approach of one so dark and terrible as that. There was no moon, and I could not see a star.

I left Aunt Betsey and Uncle Hugh pouring out the fullness of their grief together, and went back to the bedside of my child.

"O God!" I murmured, as the poignancy of my many sorrows thrilled my soul, "was not the cup bitter enough

without this last drop of gall? was not my heart weak enough without so terrible a blow?"

She was lying in Maggie's arms, just as she was when I left the room, whispering inaudibly to herself, moaning sorrowfully, and looking wistfully about the room, and asking,

"Where is mother? Won't she come to me now? Why does she leave me alone, and at such a time?"

The tender reproach of her words wounded me deeply, although I knew the perturbed state of her brain.

"Florence, Florence," said I, dismissing Maggie, and clasping my poor child in my arms, "I am your mother. Look up into my face: don't you know me?"

"You are not my mother," she said in a low disappointed tone, fixing her eyes full and searchingly upon my face, until my blood chilled beneath her gaze, "but will you tell her something for me?"

"Yes, any thing; what is it?"

She put her arms around my neck, and lifting herself partly up, laid her head upon my shoulder, and her mouth to my ear.

"You must not breathe it to any one but mother," she whispered; "if you do you can never be forgiven."

I promised faithfully to keep her secret.

"Well, then," she continued, satisfied by my assurance, "tell her that it is all dark now, and that I can't see to work any more, for he is gone—yes, he is gone."

"Poor darling! God bless you!" I whispered, as she unclasped her binding arms, and laid back upon her pillow, folding her hands meekly across her breast, and closing her eyes, while an expression of sweetest hope and resignation, softened by the burdens she had borne, settled like the shadow of an angel's wing upon her face.

I shuddered and turned away; she was too like the dead.

"Now," said she very sweetly, without opening her eyes, "I am dead, and before long the bright angels, those that

smile about our Christ, will come and kneel beside me, and this crooked dwarfed form will change, and be as beautiful as their own. Instead of that dreadful hump upon my back I shall have a snowy pair of wings glittering with heaven's radiance. Where do you think I shall pray God to let me go, even before I have seen the good world and all its glory?"

"Where, darling?"

"To the place where Charlie is. He will not see me or know that I am near him, but I will sink holy things in his heart, blessed words right from God that shall purify him and make him free from the stains of sin. I will hover over him all of the night time and day time, placing my angel wings between him and harm. And Birdie shall go home again—yes, and poor Lucy Dean. But do not speak to me any more now, for the angels are coming."

I could not look upon her as she lay there a silent image of death, and I felt unwilling to disturb her, hoping that she might thus sink into a slumber that would prove beneficial.

To Uncle Hugh was given the sad task of breaking the painful intelligence to Dr. Grey, and we were fearful of the effect it would have upon our dear pastor, as he was in very poor health, and already weighed down by the care and anxiety his son had thrown upon him.

During Uncle Hugh's absence Dr. Talman arrived. Aunt Betsey gave him the full particulars of the case according to her understanding of it, before he entered the room where Florence and I were. She had glowingly dwelt upon my child's affection for her sister, the deep interest she had ever in her, and the overpowering sorrow that such a separation must cause to one possessing a nature so tender and sensitive.

We all loved and placed implicit trust in our old family doctor, and his kind face and sympathising words were closely associated with many a hallowed event of our lives. His hair had whitened, and his step become infirm since I

first met him at Daisy Lawn, but his heart had grown larger and stronger, and the May days of his life had known no discontinuance.

He bowed silently to me when he came into the room, and softly approaching the bed, where I sat with my face turned from my child, he lifted my hand, and pressed it warmly, thus expressing his sincere sympathy.

My position had concealed the face of Florence when he entered, and it was not until his attention was drawn from me that his eye fell upon her. She was lying there still in the calm similitude of death.

He stepped back fearfully startled. "What! is she dead?" he asked in a husky whisper, and a face almost as pale as the one he had looked upon.

My eyes turned upon my child, and I quickly laid my hand upon her breast, but the faint throbbing of her heart was there, and I felt joyfully assured that she was indeed alive. Then I told him that she had a little while before composed herself in that position, saying that she was dead.

"She is sleeping now," he said, as he felt her pulse. "I apprehend nothing very dangerous in her case."

He made many inquiries of me concerning her attachment for Birdie, and the state of her health for the few preceding weeks, all of which I answered as faithfully as I could, yet feeling somewhat condemned for concealing what I knew to be the true cause of her suffering; yet, I could not, oh no, divulge to him the precious secret of my child.

Ah! how my heart froze when he calmly said this to me:

"Florence is a girl of deep and unending attachments, and I cannot, therefore, be surprised at the effect her sister's cruel departure had upon her. I can hope that she will soon be restored from this, but had it been a lover instead of a sister we might tremble indeed."

Those words, "a lover instead of a sister," thrilled burning through my brain, searing each promise that hope had

given, and added a twofold bitterness to my cup, that was already overflowing.

"Oh God," I inwardly murmured, "thou art kind, but why was it not only a sister?"

Dr. Talman observed my sudden paleness, and the emotion I struggled to conceal, and advised me, for my own health, which should be preserved for the sake of my child, to sit in another room for a short time, and leave my place to Aunt Betsey.

Dr. Talman had gone, and I was sitting alone in the library, contending with the grief that would be my master, when Uncle Hugh returned. I heard the carriage stop, and knew his voice, but did not raise my head to see if it contained any but him.

Nor did I observe the opening of the parlor door, but the voice of Dr. Grey aroused me. He was standing before me, and looking very pale and sad. That was always his appearance, but upon that day his face was more colorless than I had ever seen it before, and his sadness deeper by far.

He reclined upon the lounge, and Uncle Hugh hastened to bring him a glass of wine. He sipped but little of it; it was a powerless restorative for him.

"I did not feel satisfied with my interview with Mr. Starkweather," said he, after Uncle Hugh had left the room, "nor the intelligence he gave me in relation to this matter. I felt that you would have something more to convey, or would at least read me the letter bringing this news."

Maggie brought the rose-wood box that contained all of my letters, and the one received from Aunt Fanny the day before. I resolved to conceal nothing that related to his son, excepting the sacred secret of my child. I gave him a full account of the suspicions I had held for many years, concerning an attachment between Charlie and Birdie, and the hope I sometimes had entertained that they would be the makers of each other's lifetime happiness. I spoke freely of my

fears during his son's late visit to New York, and then read extracts from the letter that bore upon that subject, and lastly presented him with the one he had particularly desired to see.

He betrayed but little emotion while reading it, and I looked upon him as he sat there, with his thin lips compressed, and his dark eyes moving so despairingly across the sheet, while not a tear moistened his eye or a sigh escaped his breast, as upon a withering tree, fallen and lying so low that the rude tempest can not shake it any more.

He thanked me for my confidence, and the fresh light cast upon the subject.

It was very sad to hear him speak so tenderly yet without tears, of the mother, loving and kind, that was early taken from his only child, his precious son, for whom he thanked his God at the dread hour of her death: thanked him for that one blessing left, that he might live and hope for.

Charlie was indeed his all. It was a hard trial for him to bear, but he was nigh to God, and God was nigh to him in that dark hour of adversity. Earnestly he expressed his sincere hope that the arm of faith might not forsake me in all my sorrow, that I might not forget the Christ whose cross was heavier than mine, and whose love was able to bear me up. And then he repeated:

"The hills stand about Jerusalem; even so standeth the Lord round about his people, from this time forth for evermore.

"Our help standeth in the name of the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth."

It was drawing late in the evening, and Dr. Grey was fearful of the effects the night air might have upon him. He did not go in to see Florence, as Dr. Talman had strictly commanded that her room should be kept as quiet as possible, and entirely free from visitors, no matter who they might be. This seemed rather hard in the case of Dr. Grey, one

of the best and truest friends she ever had, yet we did not rebel against the good doctor's prescription.

"Let us be of good cheer," said he, when departing, "not forgetting the better land where our Father is; the better land only a little way beyond."

"Yes, only a little way beyond," I sadly whispered to myself, as I looked upon his sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, and wasted broken form. He had always seemed near to heaven, yea, within sound of the angels' converse, but at that time I thought him drawn nearer to the golden gates.

Discarding the strict and wise injunction of Dr. Talman, I remained with Aunt Betsey by the bedside of my child through the livelong night, and ere the gray shadowy beams of daybreak flickered faintly through the blinds, revealing the form of my slumbering child, and the wasted lamp, she had made known to me many a sacred chamber of her heart, leading me to hope and trust more purely than before. Waters, deep as those in which I was sinking, had been hers to pass through; waters foaming with madness, and sweeping her landward but to dash her upon rocks; yet God had not forsaken her when she called upon him, entreating him to save lest she should perish.

About midnight we were rejoiced to see a change in the condition of Florence. She was not perfectly rational, but she recognized us both, and calling me to her bedside, drew my face down to hers, and kissing me affectionately, whispered so low that only I could hear:

"Poor Charlie! Poor Birdie! They will never never come back again. We shall see them no more. Poor Charlie! Poor Birdie! we must always love them."

Her mind was wandering, and I knew it would be unwise to encourage her conversation, so bidding her go to sleep again, I drew away, and shaded the lamp.

"Come here, mother," called she, faintly. I had just

seated myself in the rocking chair, with an unconscious sigh of weariness.

"Lie still, deary," said Aunt Betsey, going to the bedside and smoothing the pillows. "There, go to sleep again, and then you will feel lots better. Mother must sit still, for she is dreadfully tired from sitting up all the night."

But I was standing by my child. She did not see me, and was importuning:

"But I only want her one minute; just long enough to tell her a little something."

I bent over her pillow.

"I went to see Charlie and Birdie a little while ago. Birdie will never come home again: we have seen her the last time. I looked on Charlie's heart to see if it was as black as I was afraid it was, but I found God-spots there, bright shining God-spots, although there were a great many thorns and bleeding sores."

She would have said more, but I hushed her. It was with some difficulty, for she was wide awake, and her disordered dreaming fresh in her mind, but she promised to go to sleep again, if I would but sing her the little hymn that her father used to sing every night when he took her upon his knee, before hearing her simple prayers.

I sang but one verse, I could not go farther—

"Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless thy little lamb to-night;
Through the darkness be thou near me,
Watch my sleep till morning's light."

She said nothing when I ceased singing; I stood a moment waiting for any farther request that she might make, but she made none, and I went back to my chair beside Aunt Betsey.

When Florence awoke the next morning it was to the full restoration of her reason. She had but a dim remembrance of the scenes of the past night, and the painful cause of her illness came up as a dream before her.

We had resolved to say nothing in her presence in regard to the recent events, until she had more perfectly recovered from the shock they gave her, although I could not believe that Aunt Fanny's letter was wholly obliterated from her remembrance, and I suspected the subject of her thought, as she sat nearly all the morning, bolstered up with pillows, silently meditating, and apparently unconscious of all that was going on about her.

I was alone with her. She raised her eyes from their sad reverie, and glancing cautiously around the room and seeing none but myself, she beckoned for me to come to her bedside.

"What is it, Florence?" I asked, trembling lest it should be a question I might fear to answer.

She looked steadily into my face.

"Tell me, mother, is it true?"

"What is true?"

"That Birdie has gone with Charlie Grey?"

"Yes, dearest."

Calmly she laid back upon her pillow, closed her eyes for a moment, and when she opened them again there was no moisture beneath their lids, but the gaze was milder, more heavenly than before.

"I knew that it was not a dream," she said. "It is a dreadful thing, but in God we can bear it."

She was silent a few moments, and then added:

"I can but remember the Psalm that Dr. Grey read so eloquently last Sunday:

"Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.

"The troubles of my heart are enlarged; O bring thou me out of my distresses.

"Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins."

"I have increased your sorrow," she said after a consider-

able pause, "and awakened serious fears. But let me this morning restore your peace, for I feel strong in the help of my Father. It is a bitter trial, and it fell suddenly and crushingly upon me, before I could arm myself, but I can bear it now, even if it does overburden my heart."

She spent most of that day in solitude, yet I did not once find her weeping. She was calm and resigned, and by those holy communions armed herself more strongly for the conflict in which she had at the first onset been so nearly defeated.

Before I had time to answer Aunt Fanny's letter, we received another from her giving a more minute detail of the unhappy event, yet nothing of interest to my reader, unless it was the state in which her feelings had subsided.

"After longer reflection upon this subject," she wrote in regard to the elopement, "I find myself justly indignant at the conduct of both, and willingly accede to the wishes of M. Durand that no effort be made to discover their whereabouts or to recall them. That Charles Grey should do as he has done, I am not so much surprised, after allowing myself to remember the lack of discipline and moral culture he has ever suffered from, although I kindly overlooked these important imperfections when he was a guest at our house. I denounce him entirely, and there is hereafter no place for him in my memory but as an arrant scoundrel of the blackest dye. Angebell has proved herself unworthy of our farther regard. She has cast us from her—a husband, mother, sister, and aunt—for one that cares only to work her ruin. There is no use in for ever bewailing such things. We cannot help it now, no matter how much we would have done to prevent it. By cherishing the offenders still, we secretly soften their crime, and that meets the condemnation of God.

"Look upon this affair in a straightforward manner, and do not allow your feelings to overcome or influence you in any way."

This is only a brief extract, but it will suffice to show Aunt Fanny's mind upon the subject. She had recovered from the prostration the first shock gave her, and was again actively engaged in promoting the growth and prosperity of the several benevolent societies with which she was connected.

M. Durand avoided all mention of the unhappy subject, and repulsed the sympathies of his friends with a dignified and cold silence; but a discerning mind, one that understood the character of the old man, could see that his very life was withering beneath a cruel frost.

He had sold his almost finished mansion, and was preparing to leave the city. Aunt Fanny wrote that he was going south for his health. How blind she was. Do you think he cared for prolonging his days?

CHAPTER XXI.

Love is not in our power,
Nay, what seems stranger, is not in our choice;
We only love where fate ordains we should,
And, blindly fond, oft slight superior merit.

FROWDE.

"I TELL you what it is," said Aunt Betsey, one morning after Florence had withdrawn from the breakfast table to seclude herself in the rose chamber, as usual, "something ails that child; she didn't use to mope around the house so sorry-like, or shut herself up in that lonesome room from morning until night." Then shaking her head very wisely, and pausing her coffee-cup half way to her lips, she added, in a whisper tone, glancing at Uncle Hugh and me alternately, "poor child, it does seem as though her heart had gone out of her."

"Birdie's conduct affected her deeply," said Uncle Hugh, "and yet she bears it more calmly than any of us, and does not allow her feelings to interfere with her literary labor. If any thing, she works harder than before."

"That's so!" and Aunt Betsey sat down her empty cup emphatically; "she writes from morning until night, unless she takes to reading something, and then she is as good as dead to all that is going on in the house. But, poor thing! she does so to keep her mind off her troubles, most likely, and it is well she does, for it would kill her to think of them all the time, as I do," and Aunt Betsey, absorbed with her grief, wiped her eyes with her napkin.

"She is unconsciously sinking beneath her sorrow," I said.

"She is not aware of its influence upon her. She has grown very pale and weak of late, her slumber is broken, and I often hear her talking in her sleep; yet if I speak with her upon the subject, she robs me of every fear, declaring that her mind is calm and her heart at rest."

"And yet," remarked Uncle Hugh, "we can plainly see the sad effects of her sorrow. She bears it with the angel faith of a Christian, but a wound so deep is not easily healed. I think that if she would leave home and mingle with new faces and scenes for awhile, it would prove vastly beneficial to her."

"So do I," seconded Aunt Betsey, "but I don't believe you get the child away from here hardly for the life of us all."

"I think myself it would be rather a difficult thing," I rejoined, "she is such a perfect home-body. An absence from home is needed in her case, and Aunt Fanny is constantly urging her to make a visit to New York."

"She will be unwilling to go without you, I am certain," said Uncle Hugh.

"So am I," responded Aunt Betsey; "but she really could not think of such a sick body as you going on such a journey. Why, my good woman, it would be the sure death of you."

"If Florence will go next week I will go down with her," said Uncle Hugh. "I have some dear old friends in New York, and only the sight of them would make my heart young again. Besides, I have some business to do there."

"Now that will be just the thing," and Aunt Betsey grew enthusiastic, "for we couldn't think of sending that poor helpless child so far without somebody very tender-like to look after her, and husband would be just the one to help her in and out of those awkward cars that always threaten to be the death of a big body like me. Florence must go, and I will see that everything is neat and trim for her. Susan can help me sew a little and we'll fix her off like a lady."

"I'll go and see what she says about it," and I went to the rose chamber, where I found her busily engaged with her writing.

She was at first decidedly averse to my proposal, but when I told her our reasons for wishing her to leave home for awhile, the interest every member of the household had in her behalf, and our united opinion that a change would prove beneficial to her, she asked:

"Do you think that the society of strangers, those that have no love or sympathy for me, can afford the solace that I find here at home?"

"No, Florence, nor must you expect the kindly interest from strangers that is given you at home; but here everything is blended with sad associations that keep your heart bleeding and sore. Absent yourself from us for awhile, and the sad story that you may read here so many times during each day will be partly forgotten among new scenes, and fresh topics for your study and observation."

"You are right, mother, in saying that I am sinking beneath my burden, and yet with this weary oppression my spiritual sense draws nearer to God. We talk sometimes of the worthlessness of earthly hopes, but never until now, when the dearest one I held is wrested from me, have I felt the great importance of human hopes as well as divine. We may yearn for holier things than earth can give, and make our whole life a prayer and an aspiration for them, and yet if we have no weaker yearnings, weaker because they centre upon things of earth, we lag wearily upon our way, and repine of the thorny, cheerless path we tread. The love and companionship of mortals is nearly as requisite to our happiness and eternal good as that of God. Indeed, I sometimes think that there would be no saving hope of one that had no tender heart-tie uniting him with a brother mortal. God forbid that there be any such."

"You know, mother, how faithfully I have toiled, and what

my object has been. I can but think that God has smiled upon my labor, and that yet the harvest will come in. I never hoped that Charlie should love me else than a sister—I never breathed so vain a prayer—but I felt powerfully conscious of the influence I might exert over him, thus restraining him from the temptations that beset his way. I think I looked upon him as the sculptor must upon his block of unshaped marble, which in his burning imagination breathes with the loveliness that it shall soon give birth. And if when his work is but just begun, yet sufficiently advanced to test his capability as a sculptor, and the fine adaptation of the marble for his design, a tyrannical hand seizes upon his budding statue, and with a conception knowing naught of purity and grace, fashions a monster frowning out the ugliness of a demon soul, what think you of the sculptor and his thoughts of that statue?"

"I understand you, Florence; but might not the sculptor nobly persevere, and obtain another block as fair to work upon, and bring forth from that an image of increased loveliness?"

"Oh, mother!" said she, the tears gushing fast as she spoke, "I am a very poor artist, and cannot obtain another block, and have not even such a wish. My fair conception still lives within the ugly statue, and from that alone can my dreams spring forth."

"And is the child going?" said Aunt Betsey coming into the room with a piece of beautifully embroidered muslin in her hand. "If she is, I'll make up these caps right off."

Neither of us said a word, and she continued rather impatiently:

"Why! haven't you decided by this time? Florence will be very foolish-like to say no to such a rare chance of seeing a little something;" and she spread the muslin out upon the table, and gazed at it with considerable satisfaction. "What, my dear child, do you expect to live in this great

big world any longer, and never go beyond one little village. Bless your heart! Then why is the world made so big, and why weren't we born with big iron balls on our heels, such as they put on the poor ranting creatures at the poor house."

"Are you very anxious to get rid of me?" and Florence looked up smilingly into her face.

"Mercy on us, no! But what do you ask that for? You know that we shall be lonesome enough after you are gone, and go moping around as old Tabby did the other day, when husband christened her kittens, as he called it, in the wash tub. That is the only cruel thing I ever saw him do, but I don't know after all but it was a good deed, for the place is overrun with cats;" and she would, no doubt, have proceeded to give a minute description of all the ailments, deprivations, virtues, and crimes, of the multitudinous feline race about Daisy Lawn, had not Florence interrupted her by asking how long we would want her to stay away from us.

"Oh, not a bit longer than you want to," replied Aunt Betsey. "You mustn't get to feeling that you don't care whether you ever come home again or not. You have been shut up so long that you have got to be the most like a little old woman of any thing I can think of, and care more for writing for papers, and seeing your name in print, than you do for us all. Now, ain't it so?" and she winked her mischievous gray eyes at me. "And there is another reason for your going," she added, after awhile. "Only think of Willie Blake that's all alone-like in that great city, and with such a dreadful load on his heart too. If you could only be with him for awhile he would get to feeling better I know, and perhaps fall in love with you, and then you would have the nicest husband in the world, and—"

"Don't talk so, Aunt Betsey—please don't," said Florence, interrupting her. "Think of poor Lucy Dean."

"It was foolish in me," was the reply; "but I was only joking, you know."

"Florence, have you made up your mind yet?" I inquired, reverting to the point in question.

"Not hardly; I have no inclination to go. If you could go with me—and I know that is impossible—I should feel differently about it."

"That is a foolish objection in comparison with the many reasons for your going. Aunt Fanny will be very kind to you, and you will often hear from home."

"Mercy on me, child!" broke in Aunt Betsey, with her usual gusto, "there are sights and sights of things in New York that you ought to be ashamed of not having seen before this. Come now, let's have no more words about it. We'll go to the village to-day and pick out all that you want to get ready with."

"Yes, Florence, Aunt Betsey has suggested a powerful incentive. To you as a writer, travel and sight-seeing is essential."

"I know it," she replied, "and have often thought of this before now. I shrink from meeting with strangers, owing, I frankly confess, to the unpleasant feelings my deformity often subjects me to."

I had surmised that something of that nature was the cause of her reluctance to leave home, as she had ever manifested the same diffidence even for a visit to friends residing but a few miles distant, unless I accompanied her. She might, very truly, young and timid as she was, and accustomed to the tender love and sympathy of all in her home, shrink from appearing alone as it were in a circle of strangers, who might perhaps recoil from her presence, or make kindly meant, yet wondering allusions to her deformity. The rude boys of the village had oftentimes made cruel and unfeeling remarks in her hearing, as she passed them on the street, and she trembled at the thought of the crowded thoroughfares of a large and bustling city.

"Yes, I will go," she said at last; and Aunt Betsey in an

ecstasy of joy hastened out of the room to tell Uncle Hugh to get up the carriage as soon as possible, for she must go with Florence to the village to do some shopping.

I wrote to Aunt Fanny that afternoon, telling her of Florence's intended visit to New York. The letter was soon answered, and contained many warm welcomes and protestations of the pleasure she anticipated. She flattered Florence upon the attention she would receive from her circle of friends, and every one acquainted with her talents. I having told her that Florence's present engagements were such, that it would be necessary for her to devote a part of each day to her writing, she promised in her reply, that a cozy sanctum, in the most secluded part of the house, should be dedicated exclusively to her.

That was a pleasant and consoling piece of information for Florence, and overthrew several powerful objections that arose in opposition to her visit. But to Aunt Betsey it was the most provoking of any thing she had heard, and almost constrained her to do all she could to keep the child at home. "For if she is to learn herself to death," she said, "she may better do it at home than abroad."

There was much less sewing demanded than Aunt Betsey had anticipated; and the small amount that Florence declared was all she needed, was easily accomplished without Susan's aid, and so Aunt Betsey's glowing dreams of fancy silks, elegant laces and the like, which were to be worn by the little hunch-back, were sadly put to flight.

"Now, my child," and Aunt Betsey spake impressively, "you surely are not going to such a gay place without a handsome new silk—say a blue brocade, like Mrs. Ray's."

"I do not need another new dress, auntie; my brown silk is as good as new, and only last month you gave me that pretty plaid one. I tell you, auntie, I never was made for a dress-maker's doll."

Aunt Betsey, with all her wit, could never dispute that

fact, and so she allowed her arguments to be overthrown, and yielded to her opponent by taking her in her arms, and kissing her again and again.

It was a September morning that Florence started off. I had seen her trunk packed, and with Aunt Betsey, contrived to hide many a little present within the folds of her dresses. I had arranged her hair in the plain old-fashioned style she always wore it; had laid her simple lace collar around her scarred neck, and tremblingly fastened it with the little pin, my husband's gift; folded her shawl about her, pinned it firmly and close, that she might not take cold, as there was a chill in the morning air; put on her little drab bonnet, with its face trimmings of blue, looped up the strings as tastefully as I could, and very slowly, too, I confess, and without once looking at her sweet thoughtful face; then holding her for a moment to my heart, I felt her warm lips pressed to mine, and heard a broken

"Good-bye, mother."

All of that day, and the next, and the next, and for many a day following, I wandered lonely and discontented from one room to another, now trying to compose myself, with my sewing, beside Aunt Betsey, or by walking beneath the elms, pausing, of course, beside old Pruno's grave, to conjure his form to bounding life again, or by stealing slyly away to the rose chamber, where all was still and vacant. There I would sit down in the little red-cushioned chair, rest my head against the easy back, close my eyes, and let fancy bring before me the absent one. But oftener my mother heart would follow on after her, to the fashionable drawing rooms of Aunt Fanny, where my "clipped-winged Birdie," was the centre of an admiring and sympathizing circle. I could see her soft eyes brighten, and her pale cheeks grow almost rosy, as she eloquently revealed to appreciative minds the depth and purity of her thought, and the beauty of her soul's conceptions. I could see her forget her absence from home, the wealth and

luxury surrounding her, the strange associations, the new faces and untried hearts, her young years and her misfortune, every thing but the subject of her conversation, which she made impressive with her soul-felt earnestness, and ennobled with her holy zeal.

My dreamings were very proud, I confess, yet I knew they were in a measure true, for Florence's gift of conversation was a rare and enviable one, and calculated by its depth and touching power, the illumination that it ever cast upon her intellectual face, the fewness of her years, and her distorted form, to awaken reverence and sincere regard in all that listened to her. It only needed congenial minds to overcome by a happy sentiment her natural timidity and reserve. And that she would be surrounded by persons of intellect and refinement, I knew from Aunt Fanny's position in society.

I will not weary you with a rehearsal of the various means we employed to break the monotony of the long tedious days of her absence; how Aunt Betsey, after much urging and demonstrating, succeeded in persuading Mrs. Brown to spend a day with us, and her good John to come to tea and remain the evening. How I would ride up to Susan's and visit with her, when I should have been upon the bed, merely because I could not bear to be at Daisy Lawn, where *every thing was missing*; how Uncle Hugh threatened to get cross, if we did not shorten our faces, and give honor to his jokes by a laugh once in awhile; and how Aunt Betsey and I would try not to laugh, and try not to cry, and yet persist in doing both when he would come back from the village, and torment us for an half hour at least, by alternate hopes and fears as to whether he had a letter from Florence or not.

But I must tell you a little of what befell her there, during the four weeks she spent so pleasantly.

Uncle Hugh, who remained in New York but a few hours, told us of the cordial welcome Aunt Fanny extended to them both, and her proud delight in recounting to Florence the

many things she had planned for her entertainment, the literary stars she had invited to meet her, the musical soirées intended, and the benevolent societies of all motives and interests to which she might devote herself, beside other very numerous arrangements, until the poor child was nearly overwhelmed with the tide rushing upon her; and fearing a responsibility that she had never borne before, and was then incompetent, she thought, to discharge, wished herself far away from her busy Aunt Fanny, and in the rose chamber at her dear quiet home.

She had an opportunity of a few moments' private conversation with Uncle Hugh just before his departure. She had carried herself bravely until then, stifling many a rising sigh, but as soon as they were alone she burst into tears and said that she wanted to go home again.

"Oh! fy! fy! Chickie!" and he playfully pulled her nose and pinched her cheeks; "don't think of getting home-sick so soon. You are to have grand times here, I am very sure; only think what the old lady is doing for you!"

Uncle Hugh ever persisted in calling our eccentric aunt "the old lady" when she was not within hearing. But, alas, for him, had it greeted her ears, for he would have been dismissed from her smiles for ever.

"I know she is very kind," said Florence, almost twisting the buttons off of his coat, "but what am I going to do with all the company she has invited for me. I never was among so many in my life; and only think, uncle, every one of them will be a stranger to me," and the tears came faster and faster, and putting her head against Uncle Hugh, she cried as hard as she could.

"Don't ask what *you* are going to do with so many strangers, nor cry your eyes red with fright at them. Why, bless your dear little heart, all you have got to do, to make them love you almost as well as I do, is to sit down and talk away with all your might, just as you do at home. I'll risk you,

Florence, don't you be afraid. Who else do you think is coming to see you?"

Florence wiped her eyes, smiled a little, and tried to guess.

"Not the governor, exactly," and Uncle Hugh looked most provoking, "nor his honor the mayor, nor the militia, but somebody of importance."

"Oh, I know," said Florence, gaily; "it is Willie Blake; you met him when you was out a little while ago."

"No, not Willie Blake, although I must hunt up the boy before I go, and tell him you are here, but my old friend Brown, the editor of the 'Hearthstone Magazine.'"

"Oh dear!" sighed Florence, "I dread it."

"But you needn't, for he is the best man in the world, only twelve excepted; a real home body, that cares no more for the conventionality of fashion than I do."

"If he is like you, I shall like him, but Aunt Fanny's fashionable friends will never afford me much comfort, I fear."

"Never be afraid to look clay in the face," was Uncle Hugh's quaint advice, just as Aunt Fanny's footstep was heard.

Uncle Hugh had told me of this interview immediately after his return, and I had been fearful that the importance Aunt Fanny attached to my child, would prove a sad incumbrance to one so inexperienced in society; but in a day or two a letter came, silencing my fears on that point.

The evening after her arrival she was introduced to a small circle of ladies and gentlemen, whom her aunt had invited solely on her account. Several of them were persons of literary celebrity. She timidly shrank from such an encounter, and was sorely tempted to beseech her aunt to excuse her from meeting them, but that her ideas of propriety forbade, and seeing no honorable means of escape, she summoned all her presence of mind, and even the parting advice of Uncle Hugh, and followed her aunt to the parlors.

"But, mother," she wrote, "I had no sooner met the kind

faces of those stranger-friends, and heard the sentiments of pleasure they expressed at meeting me—sincere sentiments I knew them to be—than they ceased to be strangers to me, and unconsciously I followed my dear uncle's advice, and before an hour had elapsed I was sitting in the midst of a group talking as freely as I would in our parlor. At the remembrance of it now, I think I must have been a chatterbox indeed."

After introducing me to several of the most interesting individuals of the evening, with a description of their personal appearance, manners, and impression upon her, she thus alluded to one of the particular friends of her aunt:

"Aunt Fanny had told me before the company came that she wished me to take particular observance of one Dr. Clyde, who she considers a man perfect in all his ways. She did not tell me whether he was married or single, in love or inclined to be; therefore there was an interesting mystery about him. He was among the latest guests, and struck me, upon his entrance into the room, as a very fine-looking man, quite intellectual, and calculated by his easy and social manner, to add much to the enjoyment of the evening. His dark eyes, so mournful in their expression, continually rehearsing as it were some painful remembrance, reminded me in a measure of our dear pastor, while his tall and manly form, robust and erect, made a painful contrast between the two.

"He is about forty, I should judge, and his years have not been idly spent. He showed by his conversation, and he is not a pedant, a most wonderful amount of information, that could have been obtained but by close study and deep research. He was very attentive to me, and to him I owe much of the enjoyment of the evening."

"Now that is just as I expected," said Aunt Betsey when I had read the letter to her, "that's just exactly as I expected. Florence McAlpine won't go down to New York for nothing."

"Why: what do you anticipate, Aunt Betsey?"

"What do I anticipate?" and she lifted up her snow-capped head majestically, "why, just what you cannot help seeing yourself. There is a love-match brewing, you may depend on't. I've been young once myself, and can see through such things plain enough."

"Don't be too hopeful, auntie. Perhaps this Dr. Clyde is a married man."

"No, he ain't, and if he is he ought to be ashamed of himself, going out to spend an evening without his wife, and sitting down close beside a young lady and talking to her all of the time. O, you needn't tell me; I understand it."

I told Florence in the letter I sent her that afternoon, of Aunt Betsey's firm suspicions, and jestingly hinted that they did look rather probable. She wrote in reply:

"We must give due credit to Aunt Betsey's discernment regarding the domestic relations of Dr. Clyde, although the hypothesis she forms is hardly justifiable. He is unmarried, and has called upon me several times, and kindly invited me to ride this afternoon. But Aunt Betsey must remember that Dr. Clyde is a rich and influential man, and an old friend and college chum of Aunt Fanny's husband. He manifests a sincere interest in my literary progress, and has done much to aid me. But Aunt Betsey must not surmise any thing like a love-match, for that is a great mistake.

"And now, mother, a little talk with you: I am sure that you were jesting when you wrote that you were half-inclined to entertain a like suspicion with Aunt Betsey. I confess that I gave rather an elaborate account of Dr. Clyde, and may have evinced considerable interest in him, but the idea of a love affair never once intruded itself, and you must not harbor such a conjecture.

"I acknowledge that I find in his society a pleasure, arising from his superior attainments, and his kind and unpretending manner of imparting knowledge. I cannot feel sufficiently grateful for his sympathy in my misfortune,

and my heart would severely rebuke me, should I award his kindness to any other motive than that of making my visit here pleasant and unburdened with lonely hours.

"But the lonely hours will come upon me sometimes, when my heart withdraws within its chambers and calls up its saddest memories. And as chime after chime floats down the past, and is lost in doleful echoes far in the future's depths, faith falls prostrate in her weakness, and unable to lift her pinions, can only turn her faint and tearful eyes toward the bright opening in the clouds, and hope for some angel hand to bring relief.

"And the solace always comes, either by a sweet influence settling upon my soul, so sweet that I know it is my answered prayer, or the rekindling of a hope that nerves me with courage and bears me fearless to the contest again. God is good, yes, very good to me, and it is not murmuring or repining that sends up this earnest longing: when will the morning come?

"I have seen Willie Blake; he called upon me last evening. Poor boy! he is hardly the same that he was but a few months ago, although I think the cruel, yet very probable conjectures that have fastened upon him regarding Lucy's disappearance, have somewhat embittered his feelings towards her, and transformed him from the gentle trusting person he was to a cold misanthrope. He seemed to almost doubt my sincere interest in him, yet his eyes did moisten at my mention of his mother. He promised to call upon me again, and I shall do all that I can for him.

"And yet, perhaps it is better for his heart to be armed as it is, excluding all emotions that would awaken his wounds to keenness of pain. But no, it is not."

Aunt Betsey was not at all satisfied with the argument that Florence thought would remove her erroneous impression in regard to Dr. Clyde. Her mind was made up, irrevocably so.

"His being rich and so dreadful smart is nothing at all," she said; "Florence is as smart as he is, I'll wager, and she has got the most loving winning way in the world, and if he is the sensible man she says he is, and I never knew her to be mistaken in all my life, he won't care if she is a hunch-back. Oh, she would make a precious little wife for somebody!" but Maggie was calling her to look at the preserves that had been over the fire full twenty minutes. So I was deprived of the oration that would have followed and been forwarded in an abstract to Florence, who declared that nothing afforded her so much real pleasure as the latest news from Aunt Betsey.

Shortly after, we heard from Florence again, and this extract may interest you:

"I frankly acknowledge an increasing interest in Dr. Clyde, and I find that he exerts a powerful influence over me. I discover myself relying upon his judgment of authors, his criticisms of my favorite poets and dramatists, and almost his standard for right and wrong. I am averse to a companion so capable of moulding my mind to his, and yet I would not discard the society of Dr. Clyde, for I am sensible that his influence is pure and ennobling; the sentiments he engrafts so deeply are worthy of my cherishing, and the holy thoughts he utters fit for my guiding precepts.

"He takes a true interest in my literary progress, and the encouragement he has given me is a new incentive to my endeavors, for I cannot doubt his judgment or his innocence of flattery. I ask his criticisms before sending articles for publication, and his suggestions are ever valuable."

Now this was all very startling to Aunt Betsey, and she could talk of nothing else until the next wished for letter came.

"I fear that I have in some way lost the friendship of Dr. Clyde," wrote Florence. "Perhaps in some temerity of conversation with him, I have betrayed a lack of information

wholly unpardonable; and yet, from my estimate of his character, I cannot believe that to be the cause. It is nearly a week since he was here: we have many other visitors, but none afford me the intellectual feast I enjoy with him.

"Aunt Fanny received a letter from Charleston to-day from a nephew of M. Durand, who says that his uncle is very ill and not expected to recover. It seems harder for one as old as he to bear a grief-bligh than young hearts like mine. Heaven keep him and the frail blossom he has lost."

There was a fervent response to that prayer, for we all were still clinging to that frail blossom that was lost. Time was passing, our hearts were aching, and our anxiety breaking our peace, yet, among the letters that came to us, none told of our Birdie.

Dr. Grey was slowly failing. He could preach but once upon Sundays, and then he came before his little flock with a step so slow, and eyes so heavy and speaking sad things, while his broken voice bore the echo of his inward lamentation, that old and young, saint and sinner, wept blessings upon him, and felt the shadow of a dreadful sorrow drawing near.

"A never ending curse will fall upon Charlie Grey," said one of the villagers to his neighbor one Sabbath day after the morning service. He was watching his beloved pastor as he slowly left the church, leaning upon the arm of faithful John Brown. Nearly the whole congregation had waited upon the porch to receive the feeble pressure of his thin hand, and to hear him repeat to them individually some blessed promise.

"Oh no, Birney, you are wrong," and the sturdy farmer brushed his sleeve across his eyes. "Charlie has done a black deed, to be sure, but his father will plead for him, and God couldn't refuse the prayers of that man."

And so thought we all, and our hope kept green e'en through the winter time.

Our anticipations of the news that the next letter would contain concerning M. Durand were fulfilled. He was dead.

"I forgive her," he said when dying. Those were his last words, and we fervently prayed that they might soon greet the ear of the wandering one, dropping a little balm, in a cup of great bitterness.

He bequeathed to her a small fortune, sufficient to maintain her comfortably through her lifetime. The remainder of his vast wealth was divided among his few relatives, and several literary and benevolent institutions. Aunt Fanny wondered at his leaving a dime to his faithless wife, and considered it a strong proof that he was bereft of his reason at the time. But his heart was not so hardened towards her he loved as to rejoice in the probability of her coming to want.

"I have something to tell you," Florence wrote in her next letter, "and it is quite a long story, and of a nature that makes me almost unwilling to commit it to paper. I cannot now sit down beside you, and read answers to all that I say in your mother-loving eyes, but it is necessary that I imagine myself before you in the deep bay window, the curtains closely drawn, and your hand around mine, before I can begin. Now is your curiosity fully interested? I am sure it is on tip toe.

"You remember in my last letter I mentioned that Dr. Clyde had not called upon me for nearly a week. I might observe his absence even for so short a time, as previously he had spent nearly every evening with me, making the time pass most agreeably, and ever enriching my mind with a new gem of knowledge.

"Last evening was a cold and stormy one, and I sat alone by the parlor window watching the passers by, or framing whispers in the steady pattering of the overflowing eaves; and yet, so busy was I with my thoughts, that I hardly knew what I saw or heard. I was aroused by the entrance of Dr. Clyde.

"He is so frequent, and welcome a visitor here, and has been so long the brother friend of Aunt Fanny, that the act of his entering the parlor unannounced is nothing uncommon. I was agreeably surprised at his sudden appearance, and expressed a sincere welcome.

"We were the only inmates of the parlor, and were likely to be for the rest of the evening, as Aunt Fanny had gone to a missionary meeting, and the storm would prevent callers. This I did not regret as my heart was overburdened, and I longed to converse with some one upon any topic widely different from my thoughts, and with sufficient freedom and animation to break the loneliness that would inevitably enshroud me should I be left longer alone.

"He wheeled his favorite chair beside me, and dropped wearily into it. I was inclined to be talkative, but found him unusually serious and silent. He would look me full in the face while I was speaking, and with an abstraction that I flattered myself to be a deep interest in what I was saying, but when I paused for his replies to my occasional interrogations, he would still remain silent, and searching my face as if heedless of all I had said.

"My position became exceedingly embarrassing, and I began to think him very rude, and determined to exert myself no longer in the entertainment of one so vastly inconsiderate of my comfort and feelings.

"Then came one of those long, dreadful pauses. I sat looking out of the window as if deeply interested in the hurrying, dripping pedestrians, who would occasionally turn up their faces to our cheerful window, while Dr. Clyde still kept looking at me.

"I could endure it no longer—my nerves were beginning to quiver—so turning my face full upon him, I inquired as good-naturedly as I could, yet rather bluntly, what he was thinking about.

"That broke his reverie, and he withdrew his gaze for a

moment, but only to return it with more speaking earnestness than before. He made no reply, and I was sorely puzzled.

"'You have looked at me long enough,' I playfully remarked; 'I have something that will interest you more,' and I arose to bring a volume of elegant engravings that Mr. Brown had presented me that morning.

"'No,' said he, laying his hand upon my arm, 'sit down again. I have much to tell you.'

"I sat down in anxious expectation, for his strange conduct had excited my curiosity to the highest degree. My sympathies were awakened, for he looked very sad.

"'Florence,' whispered he, and there was a thrilling depth in his tone that made my heart throb wild and fast, 'I love you,' and he took up my distorted hand, that twisted little thing, and pressed it to his lips.

"O mother! what could I say? I was unprepared for so much, and overcome, I withdrew my hand from his, that it might help to cover my tearful face.

"And thus I sat for some moments, my head bowed upon my lap. He did not speak to me, and O what a silence it was, to the tumult within my breast.

"Why should he love me, I thought? He that is so great, so good, and gifted, and capable of winning the smiles of the most beautiful and fair. Why should he love me, as those of his manly nature only can, with all the depth and sincerity of his heart, and all the strength of his soul? Why should he love me, the little chunky, 'the clipped-winged birdie'?

"And, mother dear, I had never dreamed of loving him. That sweet fount of my heart hath been absorbed by a truant cloud that floated away, and will never return a single drop to moisten the pebbles it hath left bare. I felt all unworthy of the boon he laid at my feet; but it was not the gem I have lost, and my heart will wear no other.

"'Florence,' whispered he softly, and I lifted up my face.

His eyes were tenderly fixed upon me, yes, and melting with the sweet hope he cherished.

"He put his arm around me and drew me closer to his side. Unconsciously I yielded. I was paying him deep and heartfelt reverence, forgetting all else for a moment.

"And do you not love me?" he whispered, folding his arm closer about me and kissing my forehead.

"That kiss aroused me, and trembling I drew from him. He looked wondering at me, thoughtfully and despairingly.

"I could not speak: my words were frozen at the fount, and that piercing gaze of his only made their utterance more impossible. How could I tell him that I did not love him, that I, ever grasping at the bright unreal, and hoarding but bitter realities, could not find in a nature so true and warm as his, an intellect so richly stored, and a soul so blest by heavenly attributes, an attraction that would draw me unto him, and makes me blest in clinging for ever to his side. But God hath not willed it so, and my heart, torn and bleeding as it is, would not forego its bent.

"And I told him, mother, yes, told him all. I laid my whole life bare before him—my cups of bitterness—my little and parched founts of joy—my shattered hopes of earth, and my glowing ones of heaven. He listened without an interruption, and when I had finished, he said:

"Hearts like yours, Florence, can love but once, and their beauty of existence is in the constancy with which they cherish their affection. Cling to your pure love with all the strength of your being, and if it does yield bitterness, it alone can sweeten your cup."

"He has seen Charlie Grey several times here at Aunt Fanny's, but has no intimate acquaintance with him. He entertains the highest opinion of him, and showed to me beautiful traits in his character that even I had not discovered. He expressed the most sincere regret at the painful and wicked step that Charlie has taken; 'yet,' he added,

and God bless him for the sweet hope it kindled, 'if he ever comes back again, and I think he will, as his home and interests are here, your influence, if he is thrown in your society, will not have diminished, but increased. The sad experience that will surely be his, will have made him more impressive and teachable, and your interest in him will have gained strength and vigor of action.'

"And then he told me a part of his history. He is now forty-two years of age, and oppressed with loneliness, yet resolved never to marry unless it can be a union of heart and soul, aside from every selfish interest. About twenty years ago he was engaged to the daughter of one of the most wealthy bankers of the city, a beautiful and fascinating girl, the undisputed belle of the circle in which she moved. He had fallen in love with her beauty, and she with his wealth and high standing in community. He expected to find in her heart and mind all the loveliness of her form and face, but as their acquaintance progressed, he was obliged to believe her a person of inordinate selfishness and pride, and destitute of an elevated excellence of mind. This discovery diminished his affection, and he was not at all pained by her inconstancy, when she betrothed herself to a wealthier man than he. He resolved that it should prove a lesson for him, and that beauty and wit should not be the winning attributes of his wife, but a purity and sweetness of soul, that, shedding its healthy influence upon all about her, should make his home a fitting place to prepare for that of the angels. And, mother dear, how very humble his confession makes me. I am the only one he has sought since then, and it is well, perhaps, that I do not love him, or his sweet dream might prove a sad disappointment.

"I know that you will approve the course I have taken. Dr. Clyde is too much of a man to fall with the defeat of his hopes. He will toil on as nobly as before, blessing others and bringing blessings upon himself, and will, doubtless, find

some day, some one in a radiant path of usefulness, who will clasp his hand in love and thank heaven for the untold happiness allotted her. He has promised to be my friend and to advise me as before. *I did ask him to be my brother.*

"God go with him."

My dear Florence! How I wept and called down blessings upon her that night.

That letter informed me that my child would be at home in three or four days. A long month she had been gone, and oh the joyous anticipation of holding her to my heart again.

CHAPTER XXII.

And though at times we strove to smile
Serenely for each other's sake,
We wept in secret all the while,
As if our hearts would break.
Yet shrined with many a sweet sad thought,
That loved one's memory lingers still;
For oh! she left a void that naught
But mournful thoughts could fill.

AMELIA WELBY.

FLORENCE had been home but a day or two when we received a letter from Anna, informing us of her marriage to her long loved Walter, and their intention of making a bridal tour through Europe. It was signed with the first autograph of her new name, Anna Lane, and the capital L looked very shaky, just as if Walter had been peeping over her shoulder at the time, marking the performance.

They were to embark so soon that there would be no chance of a letter reaching them from us before their departure. But they promised to write to us immediately upon their arrival at Paris, where they intended to spend a week or more, and hoped to find letters from us.

"Just like as not they'll come across our Birdie!" was Aunt Betsey's hopeful supposition.

"That is hardly probable," replied Florence, "but how I do wish that they might. It would be such a relief to hear something from her."

"Mr. and Mrs. Lane will take the same route that the run-aways did," remarked Uncle Hugh, laying down his paper to

join in the conversation. "They are bound for Havre you say."

"Yes, and from there to Paris."

"Charlie and Birdie are or have been there, no doubt," continued Uncle Hugh, "but it is not likely that Anna and Walter will hear anything from them."

"I'd look around for them," said Aunt Betsey with great demonstrations of her energy, "and if they were anywhere in the city I believe I'd find them."

"I don't doubt that," replied Uncle Hugh, with a mischievous twitching of his eye, "if you turned things topsy turvy, as you did to find your knitting work this morning."

The hunt for Aunt Betsey's knitting work had been the exciting business of the day. Every nook in the house had been ransacked, every cupboard explored, sofas pulled out, boxes emptied, and an unending list of questions asked and conjectures formed, as to where it could have gone to. But nobody knew, and who ever had so much perplexity as our good Aunt Betsey?

She hunted all the morning, and we grew dizzy with the dance of the furniture. Things that had been lost, irrevocably so, we thought, were brought to light, but where was the knitting work, that little white roll that was always in the basket upon the stand, in the corner of the sitting-room, or growing in Aunt Betsey's hands. There was a dreadful mystery about it, and she was beginning to scold, and to make things fly around in earnest, when Uncle Hugh, with the most provoking grin in the world—I wonder that Aunt Betsey did not shake him—walked leisurely into the house, and seating himself very composedly in his easy chair, asked what all the fuss was about.

"And you just begin to wake up to it, do you?" and she looked at him in astonishment: "Why, bless your dear heart, Hugh, haven't I been looking ever since break of day—and it's now going on three o'clock—for my knitting: that sock I

commenced for you yesterday, and could have finished to-day, just as well as not. I can't see where it has gone to," and she began to turn things over again.

"Well, well, don't worry about it any longer," drawled out Uncle Hugh, with a yawn; "it will turn up somewhere. I've got socks enough for myself and my twelve sons."

Aunt Betsey was obliged to laugh then, box his ears, and declare him dreadful "wicked-like," to plague her so.

"Where was you yesterday afternoon?" he asked.

"At Mrs. Brown's, to be sure. Why, don't you remember taking tea there last night?"

"Of course. Did you bring your knitting home?"

"Mercy on us, yes. I folded it up, and put it there in my work basket. Some one has taken it out, and forgotten where they put it."

"You are sure you put it in the basket, are you?"

"Yes, I am;" and she grew a little excited.

"Then I don't know who put it in my coat pocket last night when we started for home," he said, unfolding his "*Tribune*," and glancing from column to column.

"There now! I've done it!" and Aunt Betsey bounded towards him, and diving into his deep pocket, brought forth the veritable knitting work.

"Put it back, put it back!" said Uncle Hugh, holding her hand. "You put yours in your work basket, and some one has carried it off."

"O, you know better, Hugh Starkweather! I put this in your pocket last night, and you have kept it all day, and I worrying myself to death. You do deserve a scolding, but for the life of me I can't give it to you;" and she snatched her knitting at the great risk of pulling out all the needles.

"Tis strange how women talk," was the only remark Uncle Hugh made, and he was soon deep in the "*Tribune*," and reading an article that we knew, to use his own phrase,

"smacked of Greeley clear through," or he would not have been so very quiet.

In about six weeks after the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Lane, we received a letter from them, written at Paris. The news that it brought was of startling importance and painful interest to us. They had met with Charlie and Angebell, and the burden of their lengthy epistle was in reference to them.

They had been in Paris several days, and inmates of the — Hotel, when they accidentally learned from one of the servants, that an American gentleman and his wife occupied the apartment over them, and that the lady had been quite ill for several weeks past, and was then slowly recovering.

There is a firm bond of sympathy uniting countrymen in a strange land, and the hearty grasp of the hand is gladly given by a lonely traveller to any one, no matter of what degree, that speaks his mother tongue. Both Mr. and Mrs. Lane had but an indifferent knowledge of French, and choosing to make their tour with all the retirement possible, had not sought access, during their stay in Paris, to those circles where Americans from their own city might be found. They were rejoiced at the information given them by the servant, and Walter determined to form an acquaintance with the gentleman, and if no objectionable reason was seen, to have Anna visit the sick lady.

That same evening as they were sitting before the open window watching the motley crowd that thronged the street below, and comparing everything with something at home, they heard the sound of a piano in the room above them.

Fairy-like the keys were struck, and soft and sad was the familiar prelude that whispered to them blessed things of the past and of their home. And as they listened, Walter drew his bride closer to him, for old memories were awake making her doubly dear.

The song began, and with the first utterance of its words in a voice of exquisite sweetness and power, they started

suddenly, each looking almost wildly into the pale face of the other, and whispering with the same breath,

"It is Charlie Grey!"

They drew nearer to the window, and Anna, with her head upon her husband's shoulder, was sobbing like a child. He kissed her fondly and told her to be calm, but she felt the tumultuous beating of his heart all the while.

"We must go right up there," she whispered. "Poor Birdie is sick and will be glad to see us, I know."

"I fear not if we break upon them too suddenly. Where is your guitar?"

Her eyes brightened with the comprehension of his plan. She bounded lightly across the room and brought the instrument to him. He tuned it and returned it to her.

The piano ceased and some one threw open the blinds above them. Then the tinkling of Anna's guitar commenced, but it was very difficult for her to command her feelings so that she could sing.

Her voice trembled and her eyes filled with tears. She drove the present from her and the fearful shadows of the past, and transported herself to the old seminary hall of Madam Gearau. There she sang to the school-girl band that loved her well, and Birdie McAlpine, the fairest and brightest eyed of them all. It was the very song that Birdie loved, and sadly appropriate at that time:

"Joys that we've tasted, oh may not return,
Can the torch when once wasted continue to burn?"

Her voice faltered several times before the completion of the song, but it increased in pathos and clearness when she sweetly warbled:

"Many the changes since last we met,
Eyes have been brightened and tears have been wept;
Friends have been scattered like roses in bloom,
Some at the bridal, and some at the tomb."

When she had finished she put her head out of the window and looking up softly, asked—

"Dear Birdie, is it you?"

A shriek partaking both of joy and anguish was the only reply she received, and well they knew it was from Birdie, and Anna sprang quickly from her seat and seizing her husband's arm drew him towards the door.

They met a servant in the hall who gave them the number of the apartments occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Leigh St. Clare, the American gentleman and lady. They had never heard that name before, but they thought it highly probable that it was an assumed one.

They rapped at the door, but no answer was made; and Anna, so highly wrought up by her feelings that she was hardly responsible for her actions, opened the door without delay and entered the room. It was unlighted, yet she dimly discovered upon the sofa a lady supported in a gentleman's arms. Walter, fearing a mistake, hung back, but she went boldly forward.

"Tell me, Charlie, is Birdie here?" she asked, approaching the sofa. "It is so dark I cannot see your faces, but I know that Charlie Grey is here for I heard him singing."

"Yes, Anna, we are here."

The voice was feeble and sad, but Anna knew it; and she wound her arms about the thin and wasted form of the speaker, and held her close to her heart without a remembrance of erring and sin, of stains and imperfections, thinking only it was Birdie, dear Birdie, and that she loved her.

Charlie and Walter shook hands, but there was a coldness and reserve between them. They were men, and met as such, but Birdie and Anna had been school-girls together.

"Long after midnight," wrote Anna, from whose letter I now give an extract, "I sat by the bedside of Birdie. Had I met her in the street I should not have recognized her, she is

so pale and emaciated, and overcome with weariness of body and mind.

"She spoke tenderly of you all, particularly of Florence, and 'Oh!' said she, 'if I was only home again, with mother to pray for me, Florence to love me, and Aunt Betsey to nurse me, I think I might get well, and perhaps redeem myself yet. But it cannot, cannot be—the die is cast,' and she hid her face in her pillow, and moaned most piteously.

"When I told her that her husband was dead, and forgave her when he died, she shut her eyes and prayed for God to have mercy on her.

"I urged her with every plea that my affection could devise to return to you immediately, and obtain the home shelter you would so thankfully grant her. But she said she never could, and all my pleading was in vain.

"Charlie had been very kind to her; she said, more so than she deserved. She is very unhappy, and has often cruelly reproached him as the sole cause. She did love him, but love without purity cannot live.

"She called Charlie to her to give him the intelligence concerning the failing health of his only parent. Charlie has not the merry face and happy bearing that used to characterize him. He looked downcast and overcharged with care, and when Birdie told him that his father was lying very low, and could not live much longer, he only said that it was just the news he expected.

"So engaged was I with Birdie that I had but few moments' conversation with Charlie, but Walter says he betrayed, by many unguarded expressions, a great sorrow and heaviness of heart.

"They were to leave the next morning for England if Birdie's health would permit. Charlie had several engagements there that he had reason to hope would prove highly successful. I would have remained with Birdie all night, but it was necessary for us both to procure slumber, if such a

balm was in store, else she would be unable to endure her journey on the morrow.

"I cannot describe our parting: it was the most painful I ever experienced; and Charlie Grey, whom I never knew to do aught else than laugh until that night, wept as freely as Birdie and I.

"I did hope to see them once more before our separation, but early the next morning when Walter hastened to their room he found it vacant. They had gone.

"And God guard them I pray, and preserve them from the dangers that gather so thickly about them. Birdie cannot live much longer, I fear, beneath the load she bears. She told me that her physician had prescribed peace and rest as her only restoratives. 'But what matters it whether I live or die?' she said. 'I am but a sorrow to all that know me, and the greatest to myself.'

"I endeavored to obtain their post office address, for the few ensuing months, so as to give you an opportunity of writing to them. But they made no definite reply, although I am led to believe that they will reside for a short time in Liverpool."

That letter cast a deeper gloom around our fireside, and we sighed when embittered associations recalled the wandering one. Hope flickered on our hearts, and everything seemed in conspiracy to smother the feeble blaze.

Florence bore this increase of sorrow with more calmness than I had anticipated. That first blow, so terrible, so sudden, had prepared her for all that could follow.

"I do not expect that Birdie will ever come back to us," said she to me, after I had read the letter, and with a heart too crushed to weep was striving to pierce the frowning future: "she is going to die."

"And do you despair so soon, Florence? I cannot yield the hope, no matter what Anna has told us, that she will be with us again."

"God will be very good if he grants it so," she said, "but we have no reason for trusting that it is so ordained. Birdie was always frail you know, and unfitted to bear much. Her burden will crush her. We must steel our hearts for the coming conflict; it is very near."

Aunt Betsey, who, after listening to the reading of the letter, had gone to her room, and throwing herself upon her bed bowed low to the tempest of her grief, returned in time to hear the last remark Florence made.

"You speak the truth, Florence—indeed you do," said she. "Of course she is going to die, and away off among strangers too, with nobody to take care of her while she is sick but that highty-flighty Charlie Grey, that knows no more about nursing than old Pruno did. I tell you what it is, I feel it my duty to the poor child to pack up my things to-night, and start right off for England. If Hugh can't go with me, I can go alone. I can find my way easy enough. Oh, anything, but to let our Birdie die all alone and uncared for. Oh dear! oh dear!" and she sank down in a chair, and covered her face with her apron.

Just then Uncle Hugh came in and sat down by his wife.

"Don't cry so, Betsey," said he very kindly, "it won't do any good, not a bit."

"I know it," replied she, dropping her apron, "and it is wicked for me to spend my time so foolishly when I ought to be getting ready this minute to go to the poor child."

"Where would you go, Betsey?"

"To England to be sure, where Birdie is sick and among strangers."

"Whereabouts in England?"

That staggered her for a moment; she had not thought so far.

"Why, you would go with me, wouldn't you, Hugh, and we would search over every inch of the kingdom, but what we would find our darling."

Dear, faithful, long-loving Aunt Betsey! It required considerable argument, and much of Uncle Hugh's best and affectionate reasoning to convince her that her plan was a futile one, and that all that she could do for the unfortunate girl was to wait and pray, and prepare her heart for a heavy, heavy blow; for Uncle Hugh, as well as Florence, said that the next news from Charlie and Birdie, no matter how long before it reached us, would be very sad indeed.

"O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us."

CHAPTER XXIII.

He trod a road of pain on earth, to tread a way of joy in heaven,
And burned his breast with pity's flame, for those who prayed to be forgiven;
Beside the bed of death he stood,—he wiped away the orphan's tear:
And where he wandered through the world, they ever thought that heaven was near
CALFB LYON.

It was a bitter cold morning that Uncle Hugh and I started for the parsonage to deliver to Dr. Grey the news we had received from his son. Aunt Betsey bundled me up in the thickest shawls and warmest furs, and Uncle Hugh wrapped the wolf robes so tightly about me, that there was but little chance of my feeling the cold.

Mrs. Brown saw us drive up, and came to the door to meet us, and when she found out who was the inmate of the vast walking bundle, she threw up her arms in surprise at my temerity, and hurried me before the old-fashioned fire-place, and wheeling up a great rocking-chair, plumped me into it, and began to unpin and untie the bountiful protectives that Aunt Betsey had heaped upon me. She was talking all the time, as a matter of course, expressing her vast indignation and astonishment that we had not come intending to spend the day with her, and that Florence and Aunt Betsey had remained behind. Uncle Hugh was standing with his back to the fire talking with John.

"How is Dr. Grey this morning?" I asked. "We have come purposely to see him."

"Oh, he is about the same; he slept a little last night,

poor man. 'Twas kind in you to come up to see him this morning, for yesterday he wanted to talk with you very much, and about Charlie, I suppose."

"Do you think that any unfavorable news would hurt him?"

"Any news! Mercy on us! Have you heard from the boy? Just hark, John, hark; Mrs. McAlpine has got something to tell about Charlie," and she interrupted the conversation of the two men by shaking her husband's arm and directing his attention to me.

"Tell us quick," continued she, placing herself before me with arms akimbo. "Is he coming home?"

"I fear not at present," and I gave them an abstract of Anna's letter.

"Oh dear!" sighed Mrs. Brown, dropping heavily into a chair, when I had told all, "my hope stood up so high when you said you had news from the boy, but this has nearly killed the last bit of it."

"He will never come home again," said John in a low sad voice, looking vacantly out of the frosty window as he spoke. "The parson has been hoping to see him once again, but last night he gave it up, I guess, from the sorry way he talked to me. Charlie will have to come pretty soon, if he ever sees his father again."

"That's so," said Mrs. Brown; "it's enough to break one's heart to hear the poor man pray for that boy, Oh, it is sorrow enough, sorrow enough," and she arose, saying she would go and tell Dr. Grey that we had come to see him.

"If it will be likely to have a serious effect upon him if we deliver our news now, it might be better to withhold it for awhile," said Uncle Hugh, when she had gone.

"Oh, he has Christian grace to bear any thing," replied John. "Besides, he is much better this morning than he has been for some time past, but he can't stay with us long."

He sat bolstered up in his sick chair when we entered the

room. An open Bible and prayer book lay upon the stand beside him, and his pale face was radiant with the spirit of his devotion.

He reached out his wasted hand to receive us, and spake cheerfully of the bright morning and the beautiful pictures the frost had pencilled upon his window the night before, to give a pleasing variety to his sick-room life.

"Have you brought me any intelligence from my son?" inquired he, after talking for awhile upon his failing health, and the prosperity of his beloved little flock. "Do I wrongly interpret the language of your faces?"

I told him that we had received a letter the day before from Mrs. Lane, she that was Anna Clayton, who was then travelling in Europe, and while staying in Paris several weeks since, chanced to meet with Charlie and Birdie; that she wrote to us immediately, and although I would rather spare him from an increase of sorrow, yet I felt it my duty to tell him all.

"And I shall be truly grateful," said he, "for any information, no matter how painful it may be, that you can give regarding my son. He has long been the only tie binding me to earth, and not until of late have I been perfectly submissive to the decree of my going hence without seeing him again. But now a sweet peace is restored to my mind, and although I shall plead for him with my latest breath, for his preservation and redemption, I ask not his return to me before I die, for it cannot be. We are widely separate, and death is very near."

I read the extracts from Anna's letter that would interest him. He was very calm during it all, and showed emotion but once, and that was at the remark of Charlie, when Birdie told him of his father's near approach to death.

He closed his eyes and sighed heavily. "Then it is not ignorance of my fast decline that keeps him from me," he

said. "Ah, it is bitterness, indeed, but heaven bless it to my taste."

After reading the letter, we all sat in silence for some moments. The stillness of the room seemed to partake of the pastor's sweet serenity and holy peace, and I thought the atmosphere hallowed by the presence of invisible waiting ones. I could not speak; I felt unworthy of utterance.

"I have a letter that I wish to commit to you," said he to me; "you will find it in my *escritoir*, after I am gone. It is for my son, and I cherish a hope that if his life is spared it may yet reach him."

I promised to be faithful to this request.

"And my dear friend," continued he, taking my hand in his and fixing his sunken dark eyes upon me, "will you not interest yourself in his welfare, strive to lead him from the thorny path he is treading, impress upon him his utter dependence upon God, and the mercy that will freely wash out his many transgressions! Tell him, with all the earnestness you can command, of the prayers I continually sent up in his behalf, and the hope that cheered my dying pillow that he would yet be restored to me, not in this vale of sin and temptation, where he was so cruelly wrested from my arms, but in the better and purer land, where we shall bask in the love divine of our Saviour and never go astray. And tell him that I forgive his waywardness, and bless him for the joy he has given me. And although his hand planted the seeds of care and grief in my bosom, and even crushed me to the grave, my heart has not a fibre but thrills with tender love for him.

"And when he returns to his native land—and I cannot but think that will be some day, though poverty and degradation may be upon him, and he possess naught but the thorny gleanings of his unplanted harvest—for my sake, for the sake of the pure mother that gave him birth, and is waiting for me

only a little way beyond, welcome him to your home and save him by the help of God.

"Florence seemed ever to be his earthly angel. Indeed, he has expressed nearly the same to me when, with true contrition for his waywardness he has laid his whole heart bare before me. Her influence was powerful upon him, and she possessed a true understanding of him, and the frailties by which he fell. Repeat my petition to her, and, God helping you both, my hope for my son is strong."

"Thankfully and willingly," I replied, "would I receive the responsibility you lay upon me if my past experience had not power over my weakness. I receive it sadly, on account of my unworthiness, but with a determination to fulfil it as well as I can. I may answer for Florence with more confidence than I can for myself. Charlie has ever been beloved by her, and she sincerely regrets the course he has taken, and would think no trial too severe that would restore him to a life of purity and peace."

"And Mr. Starkweather," said he to Uncle Hugh, who had kept his face averted from us, "you cannot wonder at my anxiety for my son, and the interest I would arouse in my friends for his behalf. I know too well your generous nature and truly religious heart to doubt your doing all you can for his restoration. He is my only one, and I leave him unprotected in a world full of dangerous besetments and allurements."

"I can do but little, Dr. Grey," replied Uncle Hugh very feelingly, "but I will do all I can for Charlie, if he ever comes back. He shall not want for friends."

Dr. Grey looked weary, and we feared we had conversed with him too long, and so arose to go.

"Farewell," said he, smiling serenely as he spoke, "this may be our last meeting, for I feel that the messenger is very near, but the shadowing of his wings fills me with blessed peace. Hope and toil on in Jesus Christ our Lord, and

though your paths may be through darkness and tempest, the calmness of your death-home, your firmness even upon the crumbling brink, will more than repay you for all."

We knelt beside him, and he extended his shadowy hands over us, and for the last time we heard his beloved voice in benediction:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. Amen."

There are words and sounds that ever maintain a separate existence upon our memory. We may mingle with the cold unfeeling world, hear the songs of their revelry, and the lamentations and wailings of their woe, yet the music of our treasured and sacred voices blends not with the discord, but repeats in its sweetness from year to year, from golden locks to silvered hair, from the cradle pillow to the bed of death, the blessing or warning that awoke its utterance. And so lived and still lives that benediction of our sainted pastor.

Mrs. Brown said but little to us when we reëntered the kitchen where she and John were sitting before the fire. They both arose, and John assisted Uncle Hugh in putting on his heavy overcoat, and then, without a word, they went out to bring up the sleigh. Mrs. Brown warmed my shawls and over-stockings, and bundled me up as tenderly as Aunt Betsey would have done, and before putting on my large knitted hood, she kissed me, and whispered with sincerity of soul:

"This is a sorrowful world, the sorrowfullest place I know."

We rode silently home, and it was some time after our arrival before I could command my feelings so as to relate the painful scene to Florence.

She received the trust imposed upon her by her dying pastor, with a deep sense of its sacredness, and sincere gratitude, for with the smile and blessing of so good a man, she felt more confident of success in her labor of love. She

yearned to see him once more during his earthly stay, to hear his heavenly converse and have her faith supported and made strong by his firm reliance, and to taste of the glory that awaits the followers of the Lamb by his piercing and undimmed vision.

Uncle Hugh was going to the parsonage again late in the afternoon, and she was to accompany him.

But at the noontide when we sat around our dining table in sadness, for our thoughts would not blend with gladness, a messenger came from Dr. Grey's—

The keeper of our fold was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

And teach us, O our Father, while we weep,
To look all patiently on earth and learn—
Waiting in that meek gesture, till at last
These tearful eyes be filled
With the dry dust of death!

MRS. E. B. BROWNING.

It was Christmas Eve, but there were none of us to make merry. Silent and very sad we were gathered around the cheerful grate. Uncle Hugh sat in the darkest corner of the room, with his arms folded across his breast, and his head bent lowly forward as it always did when he was heavily oppressed by grief. Aunt Betsey sat beside him, and her knitting lay idle in her hands. Pussy came and jumped up into her lap, and receiving no attention jumped down again with Aunt Betsey's yarn tangled around her paws. That was rare sport for pussy, and the ball frisked round and round the room, but Aunt Betsey's thoughts were so absorbed that she never minded pussy and her mischief at all.

Florence's face had been buried in my lap for nearly an hour. I had lifted it up and kissed it once or twice, and she had whispered, "Oh, mother!" and hidden it again.

About ten we heard low footsteps, upon the porch, suppressed talking, and restrained laughter, and then a joyous song—a Christmas carol—greeted our ears. It was a merry one indeed, and the silvery laugh of the serenaders rang in oftentimes, but we could not smile.

Uncle Hugh went to the door and told them of our late

and heavy sorrow. They walked slowly away, and could laugh and sing no more that night. They all knew the light-hearted Birdie, and had loved her well.

That afternoon we had received another letter from Anna. It was dated but a fortnight after her previous one. They had been absent from Paris about a week, and were proceeding towards Switzerland, when Walter received a letter from home requiring his return to Paris to superintend some business affairs of importance. They went back expecting to remain but a day or two, and put up at the same hotel they had patronized before. They had been there but a short time when they learned of the shipwreck of the steamer that had left Havre for Liverpool a day or two after their departure from Paris. It was the "Maribelle," the same that Charlie and Birdie had taken, and among the names of the lost were those of Mr. and Mrs. Leigh St. Clare.

Mr. Lane accomplished his business as speedily as possible, and hastened to Havre to obtain the most minute particulars before writing to us. He conversed with several of the sailors and passengers who were saved from the fearful wreck, but all strengthened and confirmed the sad tale that those he sought were beneath the sea.

Oh how tenderly did the gentle Anna strive to communicate this to us, and beautifully her language was softened by the Christ-given words of love and consolation which she touchingly blended with it all. And yet the angels themselves could not have told it to us without bringing a heavy sorrow.

And Birdie, our wayward lamb, was lost to us. Her feet had wandered, wandered, and would turn back to us never more. Ah, she was close to our hearts, and torn and bleeding were the tendrils that bound her. God keep them from breaking.

Our Birdie was dead. We had learned to say that of her father who had mouldered in his grave for many a year. We were used to think of him as belonging not to us, and

our hearts were schooled to the bitterness of the separation. And we could think of our dear pastor, with the snow drifting above his grave, and believe that we should hear his kindly voice no more. But Birdie, our darling, our laughing bright-eyed one. Oh no! oh no! She would warm our bosoms again, and fill up the dreary vacancy in our home.

Our Birdie dead! Our petted one! Our Angebell, whose uncultivated virtues should yet redeem her failures! She was very young, dear God, and the brambles were thick on her heart, but the germs of sweet flowers struggled among them, and we had yearned and asked of thee to have them flourish. We have felt that she would be ours again, the sweetest dove of the cot. Help us, O God! Thy will be done.

Florence, we are dreaming. It is not so; Birdie will come home again, enter this very room, and we shall wind our arms about her, press her warm lips, and hear her endearing words. She will confess her error, and say that God has forgiven her, and we shall be made happy in her. And when death calls our Birdie, she shall be pillowed upon the breast of some of us, and her last whisper shall be a message of peace to us. She shall be laid by her father's side, and if you and I are living then we will plant the sweetest flowers around her grave. It were dreadful to think of her, our beautiful Birdie, laid beneath the sea, the slimy weeds tangling her soft brown hair, and the cold waves washing the cheeks that we should be the last to kiss. Let us read the letter again; we are fostering a cruel dream.

O God! be near us! Nestle closer to my heart, Florence; heaven alone can send sunshine to yours. He will never come back. You will see him no more, and the glorious work you hoped to perform must rest unfulfilled. Your mission is wrested from you, and you must plant another noble and absorbing hope in your young heart if you have strength to do so. Heaven help you, Florence.

Oh, that Christmas night! words are weak.

CHAPTER XXV.

Kind God, we had not looked for this;
Our hearts are very sore,
And yearning for thy better land
Where tears are shed no more.

AUNT FANNY came to us heart-broken and disconsolate. She would not have believed a month before that she could have wept so for Birdie, the unthankful girl as she had called her, who cast off her protection with keenest insult. But it is only inhuman hearts that can harbor aught against the dead that they have loved. Aunt Fanny had thought herself destitute of all sympathy for Angebell, and had severely rebuked us for tender allusions we sometimes made to her. She had excluded her from her prayers, believing that petitions for one so evil were wholly vain.

But when she heard that Birdie was dead, that the only child of her dear Adel had met so sad a fate, and had gone hence without one kiss of her forgiveness, the iron nature of her heart gave way, and bitterly she wept with us all.

I never before saw her so subjected to an emotion of any kind. She mourned almost continually, in the seclusion of her chamber, and when she joined the family circle, it was to talk about the memory of the dead. Incidents in the childhood of Birdie were recalled by her and tearfully rehearsed, and many little things that I had forgotten.

She never alluded to Charlie Grey if it could be avoided, and her feelings towards him were those of severe reproach,

and she deemed him the cause of her sorrow, and the suffering and death of Birdie.

"I can forgive him now that he is dead," she once said when conversing with Florence upon the subject, "but if he was living I do not think I could."

"Auntie," said Florence, "do you really believe that Charlie was alone to blame? Was he not influenced to do as he did?"

"What do you mean?"

"Not to exonerate Charlie Grey, or to accuse him as the sole cause of it all. He always loved Birdie, and her marriage was a terrible grief to him, and plunged him into reckless dissipation. I know that she loved him, but she, alas, was blinded by a —"

"Do not call her blinded in marrying M. Durand," interrupted Aunt Fanny. "But imagine her misfortunes had she been wedded to a man possessing the corrupt principles of this young Grey."

"I cannot agree with you, auntie," replied Florence; "but we will not dispute this morning, although I did hope to say something that would lead you to think a little differently. I do not consider Charlie alone in the fault, but Birdie an equal sharer of it."

Aunt Fanny was startled at that.

"Why, Florence McAlpine!" she exclaimed; "how dare you say so?"

"Because I believe it to be the truth. As I said before, Birdie loved Charlie better than any one else in the wide world, but she sacrificed the purity of her feelings to other influences. She was miserable in her union with M. Durand, and the wealth and high position he gave her were but dust to her hungry soul. She yearned for a young and congenial heart beating warmly with her own, and only that could satisfy her. She had proved the worthlessness of aught else, and was willing to sacrifice every thing—wealth, friends, and

even her honor—to obtain the balm she vainly thought would soothe and heal."

"You know better, Florence," again interrupted Aunt Fanny, rather harshly, yet looking kindly on the child meanwhile; "you are acquainted with Birdie too well to think that she would, from any persuasions born in her own mind, give up a home of luxury, friends, and dear relatives, to wander an outcast as it were in a strange land. Why, you would make out that she artfully seduced Charlie Grey to run away with her. Florence, you are crazy."

"I know what the child means," said Aunt Betsey. "It is just what I think myself, and the idea is not very crazy-like either. I don't heap all the blame on Charlie Grey, poor boy, who, for the life of me, I can't believe ever meant to be downright wicked. If Birdie had not been willing and wanting to leave her husband, all the powers of earth could not have made her do it. No, indeed!" Then shaking her head very sagely as she peered wisely over her spectacles, she added significantly, "it was a half dozen of one, and six of the other."

"Aunt Betsey has it about right," replied Florence. "We must blame them equally, but let a plenitude of love and forgiveness fall upon both. It is not for us to judge the dead."

Aunt Fanny said nothing more, and the interest of the conversation here died away. Florence withdrew to her study. Her increased afflictions had not interrupted her unceasing toil, but rather driven her to more complete devotion to her labor, as the only means of preserving her from agonizing contemplation. She was the most patient under her sorrow, the most hopeful and cheerful of us all. And whose burden was so heavy, and whose shoulders so bleeding and sore?

She absented herself until about the middle of the afternoon. She looked pale and weary when she entered the

library where we sat, and drawing her chair to the centre of the group, offered to read something of interest to us.

She was thankfully welcomed by us all, as the day had been wildly stormy out of doors, and very dreary within. And as I sat with my sewing idle on my lap, looking first at Aunt Betsey, who almost dozed over her work, and at Aunt Fanny, who sat in the warmest corner of the room, reading a thick publication relating to various missionary societies, and then at my own desolate heart, that could speak no word of cheering comfort, I thought that blustering January day had the most mournful winds, the darkest sky, and the maddest driving snow of any I had ever known. I longed for the night to come, and yet when I thought of those I had lately endured, those long unending hours of weariness, and no rest, I felt so utterly despondent, that I imagined naught could raise my spirits.

The past, what was it? and the future, what could it bring? But the pale serene face of my daughter rebuked me.

"I wish that Susan and Gettie were here," said she, going to the window. "The wind moans so, and every thing looks so dreary, that they must be feeling very lonely. It is going to be a dreadful night, and we would all be more happy together."

"So we would," responded Aunt Betsey; "and there's Jim been sitting in the kitchen all day; he shall harness up the horse, and the big sleigh, and put in all the robes he can muster, and go right up after them;" and she rolled up her knitting in good earnest.

"Put my foot stove in the sleigh," I interposed in Susan's behalf.

"And have him carry my large knit hood for Gettie," added Florence.

"Wait a minute," said Aunt Fanny, laying down her book; "I want to see Susan very much, and can't give up her coming here to-night, but she is so delicate, she will refuse

if there is any chance of her taking cold. I'll send my fur cloak for her," and she went to her chamber and brought it.

Jimmy was gone but a short time, and soon Susan and Gettie were smiling among us; but their smiles were mournful ones, like ours, for the shadows that had darkened the hearth-stones of both were about our hearts. We did not ask the cause of the other's sadness: there was little need of that.

Florence read us a sweet and touching tale. It was after nine when it was finished, and Uncle Hugh brought in the apples and nuts.

The wind was moaning dolefully, and the snow drifted fiercely against the windows. It was a dismal night.

"Where is pussy?" inquired Aunt Betsey, who had been looking for the last minute, from lap to lap, and from the sofa to the unoccupied chairs.

"Sure enough!" rejoined Florence, "she must be out in the kitchen."

Uncle Hugh, who called the petted Maltese the pride of his family, went immediately to the kitchen, to see if she was there. He came back disappointed, and soon the shrill voice of Aunt Betsey was calling, "Kitty, kitty, kitty," through the house.

"The poor thing will freeze to death if she is left out of doors to-night," said she, with great anxiety. "Hark! I heard a noise in the front porch, and it sounded just like her moaning, for all the world. How wicked I was to let her get out;" and taking a lamp, she went into the front hall, followed by Uncle Hugh.

We heard the opening of the hall door, and felt the strong gust of wind that it admitted.

"O dear!" shuddered Susan, "what a night it is!"

We caught a loud shriek from Aunt Betsey, and all rushed into the hall. We met Uncle Hugh with a heavy burden in

his arms. It was a woman that he had found lying upon the door-step.

He laid her on the lounge, and wheeled it nearer the fire. She was insensible from cold, and her face was covered with a thick veil. We drew anxiously around her, to behold her face when it was uncovered. Susan remained apart in the farthest corner of the room, but her eyes were fastened upon us with a deep inquiring gaze, as if to catch the first beam of intelligence our anxious faces should speak.

We removed one veil but there was still another. "Poor thing," whispered Aunt Betsey, "she did try to keep out the cold."

I trembled ere they lifted the other. There was something about that form, and the thinly clad foot that protruded from beneath the frozen garments, that made me shudder with a fearful apprehension. Why did Susan sit apart? Was she fearful too?

The face was so thin and white that Gettie turned away, hiding hers and saying, "she is dead, oh, she is dead!"

But Florence and I with the same instinct impelling us, drew closer to the woman. The dishevelled hair, the sunken cheeks and eyes, the image of death itself, could not deceive us.

It was Lucy Dean!

I whispered it to Aunt Betsey and Uncle Hugh. They would hardly believe me, but when they searched that thin sad face more closely, they said that we were right, and Aunt Betsey kissed the cheeks where tears were frozen, and smoothed back the disordered brown hair.

We did not need to tell Susan, for she read all in our looks and actions, and starting up suddenly hobbled to the lounge and throwing her arms wildly about the insensible girl, wrapt her to her heart with an embrace so passionate of joy and love, that we feared for a time that the excitement had unbalanced her mind.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" said she, kissing the cold lips, the hands, the forehead. "You have come back to make summer of my heart again and to bless Willie."

She would hardly yield her to Aunt Betsey, who, with Uncle Hugh, was doing all in her power to reanimate the girl from her alarming lethargy. They would have sent for Dr. Talman, for his services were needed, but he lived five miles from Daisy Lawn, and it would be impossible to get there such a night. Aunt Betsey was the best of nurses, and Uncle Hugh, while in the state of bachelorhood, had been his own physician, so between them both we felt sure that there rested considerable skill.

They succeeded in awaking a warmth throughout her system, but she was very delirious and talked strange and wild. She stared vacantly about the room and into the faces of each of us, and nearly broke Susan's heart by declaring that she never knew a person by her name.

"Susan Blake? Susan Blake?" muttered the sick girl, "why do they ask me if I ever heard of her? Oh yes, I know now why they do."

"And why, darling?" gently urged Susan.

"And don't you know?" and she locked Susan's wrists tightly in her hands. "Why, there was a Willie Blake, wasn't there?"

"Yes; do you remember him?"

"Yes, but he lived a long while ago, a great many years ago. They say he used to love me, and that I promised to be his wife some day, but they didn't know all about it, did they?" and she laughed hysterically.

"Poor Lucy!" whispered Susan, kissing her, and asking the presence of heaven. Then she withdrew to another part of the room, where she might watch every movement of the sick girl, hoping that she might sink into a slumber, that would calm the wild turbidness of her mind.

Aunt Betsey used every argument she could, to persuade

Susan to her bed, leaving Lucy in her care. But her advice was useless, for Susan watched all of that long and tedious night, in the chamber of her darling, now hovering over her bed with a faint hope that she would awake and give her a recognition, and then going back to Aunt Betsey's side to weep more bitterly than before.

Lucy said one thing in her delirium, that went like a poisoned arrow to the soul of her watcher. Susan was smoothing her pillow and softly bidding her to go to sleep.

"Sleep!" said she, in a husky whisper, and pressing her hand upon her heart, "I cannot sleep as I would, until this stops beating."

Susan moved away, for she could not bear to hear Lucy talk so.

"Come back, a minute," said Lucy, and Susan obeyed.

"If I do go to sleep, never to wake up again, carry me through the deep drifts—you can wade through them, for I did—and lay me down by little Tommy, for he is very cold, sleeping there alone."

"Who is little Tommy?" asked Susan, as breathless she put her ear to the girl's lips.

"He is my little Tommy, that the angels thought too pure for such a wicked woman as I to keep, and so they took him away; but he loves *me* the best."

Her Tommy! Bear up, Susan, and yield not yet. It may be but a hallucination of her disordered brain. Her Tommy! Hush Susan, do not repeat it over any more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"At Love's wild prayer dissolved in air,
Her woman's heart gave way,
But the sin forgiven by Christ in heaven,
By man is curst away."

THE morning dawned at last. Aunt Betsey extinguished the flickering lamp, piled a fresh supply of wood upon the grate, and then softly withdrew from the room. Susan sat there with her eyes shut, and so very still that Aunt Betsey thought she was sleeping.

But she was not; the perturbed state of her mind would not have allowed her a moment's slumber, and the first slight rustling from the bed caused her to start to her feet. She had been anxiously waiting for Lucy to awake, and she hastened to her, but fearing that the sudden sight of her familiar face to the poor girl, in case that her reason was even partially restored, might prove detrimental to her recovery, she went to the head of the bed and concealed herself behind the curtains, where she might behold every movement that was made.

Lucy appeared bewildered at first awakening. She pressed her hands upon her hot and throbbing forehead, and looked wildly about the room, whispering:

"Where am I?"

Her wandering eyes fell upon familiar things, and her memory did not fail her. She had been in that room many times before, and had watched over that very bed when Flo-

rence had lain there ill. A hectic glow flushed upon her cheeks. She attempted to raise herself from her pillow, but, weak and trembling, she sank back again.

She drew the sheet over her face and uttered agonizing groans. Susan was impatient to hold her in her arms, yet trembled to reveal herself. The most bitter school she ever had, was waiting there and striving to be calm.

"Oh, my God!" murmured poor Lucy, uncovering her face, and looking towards the window through which the morning light was streaming, "why did this morning ever break for me? Why was I saved for an increase of sorrow and shame?"

Susan could keep back no longer.

"Oh Lucy!" said she, dropping her crutches and throwing herself upon the bed, winding her arms about the startled girl, and drawing her in a loving embrace to her bosom; "you are with Susan that has always loved you, and ever will, no matter what comes upon you."

"Oh mother! dear mother!" sobbed her child, for such she was for all her sorrow; "I came for your forgiveness. Give me that, and then ask God to let me quickly die."

"Oh, do not talk so," said Susan, pressing her with a mother's tenderness. "I do forgive you; I never did hold a cruel thought for you, no never. I knew that you had not left me for ever, but would come back to comfort me once more, and so you have; God bless you, my darling."

"I shall never comfort you again," said Lucy in a low whisper, averting her face as she spoke, "and if I unburden my heart to you, yours will be heavier than it has been yet. Only forgive me, mother, and then I can die in peace."

"You will break my heart, darling," and Susan drew her closer to her bosom; "your leaving me so has been a dark mystery to us all, but I can forgive it, oh yes, and love you better than before. Oh, it will take a load off of Willie."

"For heaven's sake do not mention him," and Lucy sighed

deeply and attempted to extricate herself from Susan's arms, but she could not.

"You would not hold me so close," said she, "if you knew how wicked a thing I am. How can you, mother, how can you?" and she covered her face with her hands, and the tears trickled through her thin pale fingers.

"Because I love you, darling, love you dearly as life itself. Why did you leave me? was I unkind to you?"

"Oh God! to hear her ask me that!"

"I will not question you now, Lucy; you are too weak, but when you are a little better you must tell me all. I am as your mother, you know."

"Yes, and a dear kind mother you have ever been, too dear and kind for an unworthy girl like me."

"Oh, no, my dear Lucy, you need a love as strong as mine to cling to you now. There is a dread uncertainty resting upon my mind, as to what your sorrow is; but I know that, however forbidding it may be, it cannot destroy my love for you. But you tremble, and are growing more weak, and we must not talk any more now. Lie still and be as calm as possible, and I will go and get you something to eat."

"Is Birdie at home?" she asked, detaining her.

"No."

"Is Florence? I do want to see her. She will love me through it all, I know."

"Yes, Florence is here, and will come in to see you after the doctor has been here."

"What doctor? Dr. Talman?"

"Yes, don't you want to see him? We couldn't go for him last night, it was so dark, and the snow was drifting so. But Jimmy started early this morning."

"I hardly want to see him, and yet it will make but little difference. It would be wicked to refuse his medicine, but I do hope that God will let me die. He will be very merciful if he does."

"Oh Lucy! remember Willie and I."

"I do, and then I pray the more for death to come."

"Susan picked up her crutches, and was going away, when the sound of Lucy's voice again recalled her.

"I wish that Dr. Grey would come and see me to-day. He can soothe me if anybody can. Will you ask them to send for him?"

"Dr. Grey is dead; he was buried nearly two months ago."

"Then I cannot see him yet," was all the reply she made, and her eyes followed Susan sadly, as she left the room.

It was nearly noon before Dr. Talman came. We had all thought it best, though in wide variance with our wishes, to refrain from entering Lucy's presence, with the exception of Susan and Aunt Betsey, until the physician had seen her. Aunt Fanny, participating deeply in our sorrow, secluded herself closely in her chamber, and kept Gettie with her to bear her company.

Dr. Talman remained in the sick room some time, and his countenance was very discouraging to our hopes when he joined the anxious group in the library.

"Ah!" sighed he, shaking his head and slowly pacing up and down the room, "there is no hope for the poor girl, not the least spark of it."

"Oh, doctor, is it really so?" and Florence grasped his arm, and looked earnestly up into his face; "don't you think that she can get well again?"

"No;"—oh how decidedly.

"But can we go in to see her? Susan says she asked for me this morning. Do you think it unwise for me to talk with her?"

"No. You can all go in to see her if you wish, and do try to comfort the poor girl the little while she has to stay. It won't be long." And he leaned his head forward upon the mantel-piece.

Lucy Dean had always been a pet of Dr. Talman's, and he had even tried to persuade Susan to yield her to his adoption. He had once a large and happy family, but they were then widely scattered—some were in the better land. His spacious and well-furnished house was very empty and dreary, with no one but his faithful wife and a few servants to fill it. And Lucy looked very much like his long lost Rosie, the sweetest flower of his heart's garden, and she had the same joyous laugh, and pleasant voice, and he fondly imagined that its echoes would make his home something as it was in the brighter days gone by. But Susan loved Lucy too well, and Lucy was too much attached to her gentle benefactor to listen to the persuasions of the kind physician.

Florence and I went into the sick room together. Susan sat close by the bedside, her sweet face robed in its characteristic serenity, although there were traces of tears upon it.

The invalid feebly extended her hand as we approached her, and when Florence clasped it she drew her down upon her breast. Florence kissed her fervently, and called her by endearing names, but she met with no reply, not even a returning pressure of the lips.

"Dear Lucy!" she whispered, without lifting her face from that of her friend, "kiss me, that I may be sure that you know it is Florence."

"I do know that it is Florence, and feel forbidden to kiss lips so pure."

"O no, dearest, there is love between us yet, and our sorrow makes the tie the stronger."

A little while after, Lucy was surveying us both and looking very much troubled.

"What is it?" I asked of her.

"I was wondering who you were in mourning for. I have been gone a very long time, you know. Tell me who is dead?"

"Our Birdie."

"Is Birdie dead? Birdie McAlpine?"

"Yes. She was married last spring, you know."

"They told me that she was to be, a day or two before I went away. Poor Birdie, she was so young and beautiful. Why was she to die so soon?"

"Her husband is dead also," remarked Susan.

"How very sad," said Lucy. "And who else has gone?"

"Charlie Grey."

"Charlie Grey!" shrieked she, raising herself completely up from her pillow and grasping both of my hands and holding them with a painful tightness. "Are you telling me the truth, or am I dreaming?"

Her eyes glared so wild and piercingly, and her excitement was so intense, that we feared her reason had wandered again.

"Tell me!" she importuned, leaning breathlessly towards me, "when and where did he die?"

"About two months ago he was shipwrecked and lost, while going from France to England."

With an exclamation of irrepressible woe and despair, she sank back almost lifeless, and in a few faint words begged of us to leave her alone to die.

Susan remained with her, but Florence and I, with an agonizing perplexity, left the room. We found Dr. Talman and Uncle Hugh in the library, and deeply engaged in conversation.

"It looks more-mysterious than ever," Uncle Hugh was remarking when we entered.

"She will reveal it all before her death, I think," replied Dr. Talman. "If I ever saw a broken-hearted woman, she is one. I pity her with all my heart, and could not heap condemnation upon her."

"Nor could I," said Uncle Hugh, "but there are those that will, if it is noised abroad. It shall be kept still, though."

"Yes, it can be very easily. It is better, for her sake,

that she should die. Such stains are never washed off of a woman's name."

"No, no."

Then they sat in silence for some time. Their conversation partially confirmed the sad conjectures that sometimes arose in our minds as the cause of Lucy's mysterious disappearance and absence, and we were the more bewildered.

"Can we not justly believe, from what Dr. Talman and Uncle Hugh were saying, that Lucy has been misled?" asked Florence of me when we were alone.

"Yes."

"And would you have thought that of Willie Blake? No wonder that she wished never to see him again."

I made but a short and evasive reply, as my suspicions were widely different from hers, and of a nature, and well founded, I thought, to deeply pain her. I did not look upon Willie Blake as the guilty one, yet feared that in withdrawing that suspicion from Florence it would be replaced by another, sadder far to entertain. She should hear the truth from Lucy's lips.

"But how will she bear it?" questioned I with myself many times during the day, so firm was my conviction; "will it prove fatal to her? Should she not be prepared to meet it?"

Just before tea-time we were in the library alone. Florence had been with Lucy a great share of the afternoon, and then sat before the fire with pussy upon her lap, the same pussy that had been missing the night before, and found nestled nice and warm under the pillow on Aunt Betsey's bed. Florence was patting her tenderly and smiling at the pretty gambols she made. I put away my sewing and drew up beside her.

"What a happy thing this kitten is," said she, as pussy jumped up on to her shoulder, then down to her lap again, the better to play with her neck-chain. "She tempts us

sometimes to wish that we could change places. She scampered into Lucy's room this afternoon and was up on the bed before I knew it, and curled down by Lucy's pillow."

"What did Lucy say? She used to have a kitten very much like this one, some years ago. Willie gave it to her on her birth-day."

"Then I understand why she cried so when she saw it. She took it up at first and laid it upon her breast, and patted it for awhile, the tears coming faster all the time. Then she put it suddenly from her, and turned her face in another direction. But pussÿ came right back to her again, and curled down where it was before, and when I offered to take it away, Lucy would not let me. Susan said something about their old Tabby, but I was thinking of other things."

That last sentence was spoken in such an altered tone, and so desponding, that it awakened my interest.

"What were you thinking about, my child?"

"O every thing that is heaviness to us—Birdie, Dr. Grey, Lucy and the rest."

"Why avoid speaking of Charlie to me. Your cup is a bitter, a very bitter one, my darling, but there may yet be drops of gall mingled with it."

"O mother! it cannot be! God knows I've had enough: O how much!"

"But would you murmur and doubt his goodness if the bitterness should increase? His ways are not our ways, and he careth for us."

"O mother!" said she, closing her eyes tightly, as if to shut out the visioned path before her, "there is a prophecy in your words. I cannot read it, but its fearfulness chills my heart. Do not disclose it yet to me—not yet—not yet—for I cannot find the tendrils that can bear another burden without breaking."

I took her up into my lap—she was a wee thing, you know—and kissed her with an unspoken prayer.

"Do not let my words trouble you," I said; "I know of no certain sorrow. I only think that I foresee an approaching shadow, and a very dark one too. But my fears may be groundless, but if it does come—if it does——"

"O say no more, mother, do not say any more. I will arm myself for something yet unseen. I will trust in God, no matter what comes. But tell me, do you really think that I must endure more?" Her arms were around my neck and her soft eyes raised beseechingly to mine.

"I hope not, Florence, but we cannot tell."

Aunt Betsey called us to supper. Florence did not wish to go, and I left her alone.

Susan had tried several times that day to converse with Lucy upon the burden-subject of her mind, but she was silent to all her inquiries, only saying:

"You will not love me so well when I have told you. I want you should love me as long as you can. I shall die before many more days, and when I am going I will tell you every thing."

"We will send for Willie," Susan had told her early in the day.

"O no, not for me—I beg of you, not for me—I could not see him. But when I am dead and buried, and this poor aching heart is at rest, tell him that Lucy did love him always, and loved him when she died. He will not believe it, I am afraid, but O how true it is."

These gleamings at the stern reality of things but enveloped Susan's mind in a tormenting bewilderment. She conjectured many things, and, like Florence, cast a silent reproach upon Willie.

We had just finished our tea, when Dr. Talman arrived. Florence met him at the door, and he was surprised to learn that Lucy was yet alive. He had thought, when he left her in the morning, that she could not survive through the day.

Susan heard his voice and hastened into the hall, where he stood warming himself.

"O tell me, doctor, that you can save her," said she, seizing his hand and looking up imploringly into his face. "She has appeared a little better this afternoon, and I have hoped that she will get well again."

"There is but little chance for that," he replied, with a kindly decision; "if the body alone was broken down, I might, perhaps, restore her, but there is a deeper cause, one that human aid cannot reach."

"I know it; oh, I know it!" and Susan shook her head mournfully; "but I cannot bear that she should die."

"Have you sent for your son?" asked the doctor. "I have heard that they were betrothed."

Susan grew very pale at the mention of Willie. She scanned the doctor's face, thinking that he, too, harbored her conjectures, and why should he not? There was the same cause, but it was dreadful to her that any one else should.

"No, I have not," she replied, after a long hesitation, in which her troubled thoughts disarranged every answer she would make. "It is Lucy's request that we should not."

"That is rather strange," said he, and after considerable uneasiness he drew nearer to her and whispered:

"I suppose you have by this time heard her story. I don't know but my suspicions rest upon the wrong individual."

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Susan, regardless of Florence, who stood by; "do not breathe a name in connection with this unhappy affair until she has revealed all to me. She has told me nothing yet, and my suspicions were aroused by remarks that she made in her delirium last night. You, as a physician, must know more about it than I, but keep it from me, and let her confide it to me."

"It will be a painful story, I fear," said Dr. Talman, going towards the sick room. Susan and Florence followed. I was sitting by the bedside when they entered.

"Good evening, Lucy," said Dr. Talman, as he laid his hand upon her burning forehead; "you are with us yet I see."

The animation which she had exhibited for a short time during the afternoon had gradually died away, and all but the hoping Susan thought her sinking very fast.

"Yes, doctor," replied she, very feebly, "but it is only for a little longer. My pain is intense, but I shall be released when my Father thinks best."

He sat by her for some time, offering her wounded spirit soothing words of holy consolation. It was not in his power to ease her bodily pain, but his precious faith, the one sure and steadfast, that had ever been a G^ohead to his own heart, could impart a blessed balm to the sore-stricken and weary. She listened attentively to all he said, and her sunken eyes grew brighter, and her emaciated face radiant with the hopes that he rekindled. She felt the galling burden fall backwards, the thorny crown removed, and she, the wayward and sinning one clasped close to the bosom of the great source of love, smiled upon and forgiven.

"O mother," said she, as soon as he had departed, "I feel as if there had been an angel in the room. My heart is lighter now, and the sunlight of heaven falls more clearly upon it."

"Dear Lucy?" was all that Susan could say as she embraced her. Then she put her arm under the pillow of her darling, and held her close to her breast while unspoken prayers, eloquent with love and sorrow, were wafted upward from her lips.

"Where is Florence?" asked Lucy, after a long and unbroken silence, "and Mrs. McAlpine? They have been true friends to me; and I want to talk to you all to-night."

We went to her and sat down beside the bed as she desired.

"Do not hold me up any longer," said she to Susan, in whose arms she still rested, "for I have much to say to you,

and you must be very tired. I love to lean against you so, for it makes me think of long ago when we were all happy. Kiss me and lay me down."

Susan importuned to hold her longer, but Lucy would not consent to the affectionate and mother-like desire; but she wanted Susan to be very near to her, and asked her to lay down beside her with her head upon her pillow, and her arms about her.

"You all love me," began Lucy, looking from one tearful face to the other, "and I have brought you much sorrow and little joy, but may you never suffer what I have. I am too weak to talk much, every word gives me pain, but I cannot die until I have laid my heart open to you. Hear me kindly, for my story is a painful one, and its disclosures will startle you.

"You all know that I was betrothed to Willie Blake. God bless him! and send mercy to me. He loved me faithfully and deeply, and I loved him, but, alas, that he ever left me. Mother knows, and so does Florence, how little firmness I have, and how easily I am led by others; and that weakness has proved my ruin, and brought unhappiness upon you all, but the heaviest load to me.

"Charlie Grey is dead now, and I have no rebuke to cast upon him. God will judge him, and mercifully too. Do you wonder what he has to do with my misfortunes, and that he should be mentioned by me now? Oh, mother!" and she buried her face in Susan's bosom, "he was the father of my child!"

Susan shrieked and uttered many an exclamation of woe, blended with words of love and compassion for the dying girl, but my attention was directed to Florence. I had expected this revelation, and striven to prepare her almost shattered heart for the blow.

Dreadful and severe it came, but she bore it well. She did not exclaim, but sat so pale and passionless that I could

not divine her feelings from any outward sign, but I knew that a wild torrent was raging beneath that shroud of ice.

"Oh Lucy!" importuned Susan, "are you speaking the truth, or are you delirious again? You said something last night about your little Tommy, but I tried to think that there was nothing real about it."

"Yes, it is very real," replied Lucy, uncovering her face. "I called him Tommy after my dear brother, and he died only a month ago, and we buried him in the grave-yard near sister Sarah's, and I want to be laid beside him. Will you carry my body there?"

"Yes, darling," and Susan kissed her passionately. "You say in the grave-yard near Sarah's. Have you been with your sister all of the time of your absence?"

"Wait and I will tell you. My strength fails so rapidly that I must be brief. You know that Charlie gave me music lessons in the evening, and that he often staid quite late. You loved me too well to suspect anything wrong; and you know that there was nearly a month that we did not hear from Willie, on account of his sickness as he afterwards told us, and that Charlie was at that time so dreadfully disappointed by Birdie McAlpine, and that he got to be unsteady. I pitied Charlie, for he confided everything in me, and told me how lonely he was, and that there was no one left he could ever love but me. I told him of my engagement to Willie, and that I should never care for any one else, but when the letters did not come, Charlie was so tender to me, and the doubts grew so fast in my mind regarding Willie, that I did not repulse Charlie's fondness as I had formerly done, and I could not, for I was a submissive thing when with him. I did not love him, although I vainly thought at one time that I did. He never promised to marry me, or asked me to break my engagement with Willie. He said he should love me notwithstanding, and I now believe that his pretensions were not false. I have since thought, and have

reason to believe, that upon the night of our transgression he was slightly intoxicated. I did not suspect it then, or I might have been guarded.

"Three months after this sad error, which I trust my God has forgiven, we received the letter from Willie telling us he was soon coming home. You remember how that news overcame me. Never before was I so miserable as upon that day. I had been premeditating a secret departure for some time as I was then in an unhappy situation. I could not have met Willie, although I loved him, and longed to pour out the anguish of my soul to him, even if it were, as it must have been, without a hope of our future union.

"I had a little money that I had earned by sewing, just enough to bear me to sister Sarah's. I told her all, and implored her sisterly love to compassionate me. She did not reproach me with look or tone, but with her husband freely offered me the shelter of their home. The day after my arrival there Sarah received Florence's letter informing her of my disappearance, and wishing to know if I was there. Sarah did not want to deceive you, but she finally yielded to my tearful entreaties, and sent you the reply she did. I was sure that if you knew I was there you would come for me, and I thought then that I could never, never see you again.

"The note that you found under your door I wrote myself before leaving, and you must know that I expended much practice on it so that you should not detect my handwriting. I hired a little Irish boy at the dépôt to slyly put it where he did.

"Two months ago my little one was born. He is dead now, and it is well.

"And I have something else that it is very sad to tell you. Sister Sarah is dead."

We were all startled by that unexpected intelligence. Sarah was dearly beloved by us all. Susan was wont to

call her, "my eldest," and Lucy was her youngest, her darling.

But Susan made no passionate outbreak of sorrow, nor even uttered an exclamation of surprise. She only said, as she smoothed the wavy hair that escaped from Lucy's cap,

"She was a good girl, a precious one. Her's will be a rich reward."

"She was sick but a few days," continued Lucy, "and the morning before she died she concluded to send for you, but she felt a little better in the afternoon, so we did not write to you. About sundown she dropped away very suddenly. It was just three weeks after Tommy's death."

"And how does Frederick bear it?" inquired Susan, referring to Sarah's husband.

"Like a Christian. He sees God in it all."

"And the children?"

"They are too young to fully realize their loss, although they did cry as though their little hearts would break when she was buried. Frederick has carried them to his mother's, and he has gone west."

"And so you was cast upon the world again?"

"Yes; but I had before resolved to come back to you. The doctor had told me that I could not live much longer, and my strength was failing fast. After Sarah's death, I longed the more to be with you again, and I knew that you would forgive me, and love me as before, when you knew how broken-hearted I was.

"Frederick gave me money enough to bring me here. My ride was comfortable, and I suffered but little from the cold, although I was poorly clad, until I left the cars at the village last night, and took the stage. You know how dreadfully it stormed, and how bitter cold it was, but my heart was warm with the hope of soon seeing you, and every thing else was unheeded.

"The driftings now had so blockaded the roads, that we made

very slow progress. We left the village at dark, and arrived at your house just before nine. There were no lights, and I thought that you had gone to bed, so climbing over the fence, for a drift had covered the gate, I trudged slowly to the door. I cannot tell you what my feelings were, as I sank nearly exhausted upon the steps, and mustered up my strength and courage to rap loud enough to awaken you. 'What if Willie should be here?' I thought. 'He can see me die,' I thought again.

"I rapped until I grew discouraged, and then went to your bed-room window and tapped upon it. Receiving no answer, I felt sure that you had gone away to stay all night, and could think of no other place than Daisy Lawn. But had I strength to walk so far, and upon such a dreadful night? I feared not. I would lay down upon the threshold of the dear home I had yearned to enter once more, and instead of your sweet looks and blessed words, my mother to give me rest, the wild winds should howl about me, and the drifting snow cover me, and in the morning you might find me there, and kiss away my frozen tears.

"I wrapt my torn shawl about me, and sat down. Death was near me, I thought, and I called on God, and the angels, to be near me in the dread hour. But when I remembered you, I could not yield the hope of seeing you again, and of going from this dreary world without your kiss of forgiveness. O, no, I could not—I would strive to reach Daisy Lawn, and if I sank down on the road, some belated traveller might discover my body, and carry it there.

"So intense was my excitement, that I must have grown delirious before I reached here, as I can remember wading through a deep drift this side of the brook, and nothing farther. I awoke in your arms. God was good."

We were all weeping but Lucy. She laid there, and calmly talked to us of her sorrow, and the heavenly peace that lifted the burden up.

"Do not weep for me," she said. "Only a little while, and I shall be at rest, and in the bosom of our Lord. Tommy is there, and his pure young forehead is free from the stain that would have defiled it here, and when next I clasp him in my arms, it will be without an inward reproach. But tell me of Charlie's death. Why did he go to Europe?"

We told her the sad story, and when it was finished, she said,

"I pity them both. If Birdie had done what she knew to be right she would never have married M. Durand, but Charlie Grey; and then, perhaps, we would all have been happy now. But I do not reproach the poor girl, no, no."

Lucy was exhausted with talking so much, and we arose to bid her good-night. She entreated us to sit with her awhile longer, but Aunt Betsey, who at that moment came in, would not allow it, as she wanted the invalid to obtain some rest, if possible.

"Dear Florence," tenderly beseeched the sufferer, clinging to the hand of my child; "may I call for you if the angel comes before the morning? I would have you by me then."

"O yes, do not fail to do so."

"I wanted to tell you something for Willie, but I have not strength now. Only ask him to forgive me."

We did not sleep that night, for we thought the messenger would come before the morning. As soon as the dawn began to break, Florence crept from my bed and stole to the sick chamber. Lucy was slumbering, and Susan was watching beside her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Think of her mournfully,
Gently and humanly:
Not of the stains of her,
All that remains of her
Now, is pure womanly.

Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour,
And leaving with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour!

Hood.

"I wish that you would write to Willie for me," said Susan to Florence that day; "I do want him to see her before she dies."

"Yes, do Florence," appealed Aunt Betsey, "and tell him all about her troubles, and how nigh she is to death's door. He will forgive her, I know, and hurry home to tell her so too."

"I wish that Willie was here," replied Florence, "and think that he will have cause to blame us very much if we do not send for him. Shall I write this morning?"

"Yes," answered Susan, "but it were best not to let Lucy know anything about it. Even if she should consent to see him, the expectation would be very wearisome to her."

Florence got her writing materials and spread them upon the library table. Susan sat down beside her to dictate what she wished her to say. Florence waited in silence for some time.

"O dear!" sighed Susan, mournfully, "I cannot tell what I want you to write; no mother could. Tell him that I would have written in your stead, but Lucy cannot spare me from her sight. Tell him how broken-hearted and patient she is, and entreat of him for her sake, mine, and his own, to hasten here without delay. I must not stay longer, for I hear Lucy coughing," and she picked up her crutches and hurried away.

Florence did not write a long letter, as Uncle Hugh was waiting with his hat and overcoat on to carry it to the office in time for the mail, but there was a pathos in her brevity, and a tenderness in her laconic pleas, that could not fail of accomplishing their end.

The letter was despatched with a heartfelt desire from each of us that Willie would reach Daisy Lawn before the death that we knew to be fast approaching. Our hope failed us oftentimes before the expected day, and twice we gathered around her bed to see her die, but she was spared for love's sweet blessing, and the comfort that it gives the dying pillow.

The day came when we might expect Willie Blake. Lucy was still alive, but lying very low. She was slowly dying. She could only speak in the faintest whisper, and at the noon-tide, when the window blinds were open, and the sunlight pouring in, she had said:

"Is it already night? I did not think it would grow dark so soon."

Florence, who had been watching from the library window for an hour before the time, was the first to see the stage coach coming up the road. This wished-for intelligence was softly whispered to Susan, who left Aunt Betsey to fill her place by Lucy's side, and went into the library with us all. Scarcely a word was spoken, but breathlessly we watched the approaching sleigh. It stopped at the avenue gates, and a gentleman alighted that we knew to be Willie.

Never have I beheld so sad a meeting. We did not speak above a whisper tone on Lucy's account, but mutely pressed his trembling hand, and looked into his mournful eyes the overflowing language of our hearts.

We went into the library and sat down. Willie was the first to speak, and he plainly betrayed the effort that it cost him.

"Is she living?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Susan; "but is almost gone."

"Does she expect me?" he continued.

"No; but Florence will prepare her for it. She will break it better than any one else."

"I fear the responsibility," said she, "but will do the best I can," and she withdrew to Lucy's chamber.

"My dear Lucy," said she, as she sat down by the dying girl, "you are very low this afternoon I fear."

"Yes, Florence, I can almost hear the summons. I have but one desire ungratified, and that I suppress because I know it to be vain."

"What is it, Lucy? Can you tell it to me? It may not be as impossible as you think."

"Oh, yes it is; but I yearn the more wildly for it as my death draws nearer. Perhaps it is my reluctance to depart without it that has made me linger so long. Can't you guess what it is? Have I not told you enough?"

"Is it for Willie's forgiveness?"

"Yes, yes. Oh! must I go without it?"

"Do not despair, Lucy. Would you consent to have us send for him? He will come, I am sure, and freely forgive you."

"Do you think he would come? Yes; I know that he would. He did love me so, and was always kind and true. But there is no use in sending for him now. It is too late. He will come to my funeral perhaps, and you ask him for me to kiss me upon my cold lips, and say, 'dear Lucy,

I forgive you!" The angels will hear it, and tell it to me."

"Lucy," said Florence, looking expressively into her face, "if Willie was here now would you see him?"

Lucy fastened a piercing gaze upon her. "Tell me, is he here?" she exclaimed, starting up suddenly and falling back again. "Has he come? Speak! speak! or my senses will leave me!"

"Yes; he is here."

"Where?"

"In the library with his mother."

She shut her eyes, and remained for a moment in silence. The tears gushed down her cheeks, and her lips moved inaudibly. Then she said calmly:

"Tell him to come in. I would see him alone."

Willie quietly received the message, and releasing himself from his mother's embrace, arose to answer the summons. But he staggered before reaching the door, and Uncle Hugh sprang to support him. It was but a momentary faintness, which the nerving of his heart and mind overcame. Susan clung to his arm until he reached the sick room, and then whispering, "God bless you, Willie," came back to us.

Over an hour passed, and neither word nor sound was brought from Lucy's chamber. Susan growing uneasy passed through the hall, and paused a moment before the door, but the stillness of death reigned inside. She rapped lightly, but received no answer. She rapped louder, but no one came or replied; and so alarmed was she, that she opened the door and ventured in.

Willie sat upon the bed with Lucy in his arms. Her head was upon his shoulder, and his bowed down upon her breast. He did not look up at the sound of Susan's crutches.

"Willie," said she, going close beside him, and laying her hand upon him, "how is Lucy now? Has your coming made her feel any better?"

"Yes, mother," was the husky reply, "she is better now, and will never suffer any more." Susan shrieked wildly and fell upon the floor, but Willie thought not of the living, his arms were around the dead.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

We have been blessed; tho' life is made
A tear, a silence, and a shade,
And years have left the vacant breast
To loneliness—we have been blessed!

G. D. PRENTICE.

THERE was a great sensation throughout the village when it was known that Lucy Dean was lying dead at Daisy Lawn, and although the weather was very cold and fitfully stormy, and there were many high drifts between us and the village, nearly all that knew and loved the sweet girl came to pay the last tribute to her remains. We had closely concealed her sad story, and all believed—with the exception of the few intimately acquainted with her mournful history—that she had been visiting with her sister for some time past, but had come back to Susan to die.

"Poor thing!" they would tenderly say as they looked upon the thin face and sunken eyes from which the last vestige of blooming youth had departed, "she must have suffered very much."

And when her old schoolmates and bosom friends gathered around her, some clipping a little ringlet from her brown hair, or twining the purest buds that they had nursed through the winter time around her forehead, they would whisper softly to one another of Willie Blake, and that his heart must be breaking.

Her funeral was appointed early in the forenoon, and

though it was one of the coldest and most unpleasant days of the year, the house was filled with mourners. Willie was very calm during the service, but his countenance was the most woful and despairing that I ever beheld. Susan maintained her composure until, leaning upon Willie's arm, she went up to take the last look of her loved one. She bent down to kiss that meek white forehead, but her heart's tide overwhelmed her and she sank beside the coffin.

Throughout the service the wind had moaned dismally, and the sky been overcast with threatening clouds. But when the hall-door was opened and Lucy Dean was borne over our threshold to cross it never more, the howling blast was calmed, and the bright sunshine broke through. Were we superstitious in thinking that it was all for her sake?

Lucy's desire to be buried by her little Tommy was not forgotten, and Willie, with Uncle Hugh and Dr. Talman, attended the corpse to its burial-place, and saw it lowered to the wished-for pillow. Willie mastered his feelings until the earth was heaped upon the coffin and the sexton's spade was rounding it into form. The snow was falling fast, and had already thinly covered the grave. Willie stood with folded arms, and eyes mournfully downcast.

"O, that is the last of poor Lucy!" said Uncle Hugh, with a deep drawn sigh, as he moved away.

"Yes," said Dr. Talman, "her troubles are all over with now. Come, Willie, let us be going, it is late and growing very cold," and he put his hand upon the shoulder of the young man, who stood silent and motionless, gazing upon the newly-made grave.

The touch upon his shoulder aroused him. He looked vacantly about him, and then throwing himself upon the mound, exclaimed:

"O! I cannot bear it. It is too much, too much for me!"

"Willie," said Dr. Talman very tenderly, lifting him up from the ground, "a wiser one than you ordained these

things. You must not stay here any longer. Take my advice and come with us."

Willie moved slowly away, but looking back his eye fell upon the little grave by Lucy's side. He had not appeared to observe it before.

"O there is a dagger in my heart," said he, pointing to where little Tommy was laid, "and it cuts me afresh when I look at that."

"But don't talk about it now, Willie," gently continued Dr. Talman, "you will feel differently about it yet, I hope. We have but a half hour to get to the depôt before the train leaves. Let us make haste," and he quickened the lingering steps of the youth.

"I don't know as I can blame the boy any for feeling so," said Uncle Hugh, who trudged behind them. "Charlie Grey has turned out more of a scamp than I ever thought he could be. But he is dead, and we will forgive him."

"Let him be cursed," muttered Willie between his teeth. His companions immediately dropped the subject, and they walked the rest of the way in silence.

Contrary to their expectations, Willie insisted upon proceeding directly to New York, instead of returning with them to Daisy Lawn. They knew the disappointment that would be to Susan, but they could not change his intentions, and it was with not a little anxiety that they bade him farewell. Susan was deeply grieved when they returned without him, and was constantly tormented by fears until she received a favorable letter from Willie himself.

Susan and Gettie accepted an invitation to remain at Daisy Lawn several weeks. The cottage was lonely; the hillside never looked so bleak and bare, nor did the winds ever moan more piteously through the naked branches. The hearthstone was shadowed by the sorrows that had gathered upon it, and so was ours, and our mutual affections made us dearer to each other.

"Clara," said Aunt Fanny, addressing me in her abrupt manner, one evening, as we all sat in the library together, "I shall leave for New York one week from to-morrow morning."

"Oh, no!" I instantly responded, sincerely grieved by her intention. "You must not think of leaving us yet. Is there any thing urgent demanding your return?"

"Yes, a great deal," she replied, with an air of business, laying aside her work and spectacles. "I had a letter to-day from one of the managers of the 'Charity at Home Society,' stating that they intend to offer at their next meeting several important resolutions, that will affect the present organization of the society, and as I am president, they are desirous of my attendance. But that is not all. My life is in action, stirring action. I am idle here."

"But, auntie, you will be so lonely in that great house of yours, with no one but the servants about you," interposed Florence. "You are happier with us, and I believe it to be the strict duty of every one to be as happy as they can."

"That is very true, my child," and Aunt Fanny assumed her argumentative posture, "but is it not better to toil in giving happiness to others, though we deprive ourselves? When at home I labor for the poor and unfortunate, and I am more than rewarded by their enjoyment of the fruits of my toil. As you say, I shall be very lonely in my spacious house, if there is no one to occupy it but the servants and myself. But I have decided upon another plan."

"And are you sure that it will work?" sagely inquired the contemplative Aunt Betsey.

"Yes, I am pretty well satisfied that it will," and Aunt Fanny put her slippered feet upon the fender, and leaned back composedly in her chair, looking, meanwhile, at Susan very intently, who was sitting before her engaged with her embroidery, while Gettie was with Florence on the other side of the table. "Susan and Gettie are going back with me. They are to make their home with me."

"What?" exclaimed Susan, laughing at the coolness and decision of what she considered a jest; "Aunt Fanny is talking in her sleep."

"I speak truthfully and after due consideration," replied Aunt Fanny with a dignified composure. "I am a wealthy woman. I have a spacious mansion and none to make it a home. I love Susan and Gettie very much, and am sure that they have a true regard for me. I freely offer them a home, and the advantages of my wealth and position. Gettie, I will educate as my own daughter. They must not refuse. They will sin if they do."

Susan was overcome with inexpressible gratitude. The gentle Gettie, who had always unheeded Aunt Fanny's rough exterior, and loved her well, went up to her and kissed her. She uttered no words of thanks, nor was she chilled that Aunt Fanny gave her no embrace in return. She could not have expected that. Birdie was the only one that ever received that demonstration of affection.

Aunt Fanny told the girl to sit down upon the footstool beside her, which she very meekly did.

"You are a good girl, Gettie," said she, "and I want you should go to school, and receive advantages that will make you capable of doing much good in the world. Will you go and live with me?"

"Oh yes," quickly replied the innocent one, "if mother will go too. Will you, mother?" and her blue eyes beamed upon her she had been taught to call by that endearing name.

"I hardly know what reply to make," said Susan. "The offer is so generous and unexpected, and I am so unworthy of it."

"Hush, hush, none of that," interrupted Aunt Fanny nervously, "it is no matter what your thoughts are concerning yourself, as long as I deem you just the one to make my home a pleasant and attractive spot."

"Now, Susan Blake, let me tell you"—it was Aunt Bet-

sey's turn to speak—"that no one can live the Christian life you have through all your trials, without having some great blessing come down upon them at last. As she says, you will sin if you refuse. You are good enough for it, and a world more besides."

"Aunt Betsey has always a word in season," said Florence; "she has the right of it."

"Of course I have. Here's this tender-like Gettie, that was never made to work hard, as she'll have to, unless she has better fortune than is hers now. I tell you, Susan," and growing enthusiastic, she upset her work basket upon the floor but never heeded it at all, "that lass was made for a lady, and it's your duty, now you've got the chance, to make her one."

"Spare her from lady-ship!" ejaculated Aunt Fanny. "I have had some experience among those of that profession. A true woman is always a lady, but a lady, in the general acceptance of the term, is seldom a true woman."

Susan did not accept the kind and tempting invitation of Aunt Fanny without much thought and deliberation on her part, and a consultation with her few intimate friends. She felt that it was an important step to take, both in regard to Gettie and herself, and although it appeared to lie in the path of her duty, yet in her sinless purity of heart, she feared lest a selfish motive might sway her instead of a right.

A few days after the proposal was offered, Aunt Fanny was made truly happy by Susan's acceptance of it. And so the little cottage was sold, and after a week of busy care and preparation, Susan and Gettie, with Aunt Fanny, bade us farewell.

And then our loneliness was more complete. It had been a solace before, upon some dreary night, when the shadows came more chilling and dark, to go to the broad library window, that looked up to the hillside, and parting aside the heavy curtains, watch the glimmering of Susan's candle or

fire. And it was a pleasant balm when our afflictions pressed heavily upon us, to meet the quiet, faith-like beaming of her soft blue eyes, and to hear her sweet voice extolling the goodness of him that doeth all things well. Aunt Betsey used to say that the sound of Susan's crutches coming in the hall was the sweetest music she knew, and Uncle Hugh always declared that Susan was the best woman in the world, if Aunt Betsey would only allow it.

But the hillside cottage was vacant. It had passed into strangers' hands, and there was a cruel rumor afloat that when the spring came the wealthy gentleman who was its owner would tear it down and build an elegant country-seat in its stead. We could none of us believe, no matter how fine it might be, that it would appear otherwise than ugly to us.

We had but little to break the monotony of our life that winter, unless it was a bustling visit from John Brown and his wife, when Charlie Grey was sure to be the topic of conversation, his virtues rehearsed, and his errors forgiven, or a letter from Susan—a blessed thing it ever was—or one from Walter and Anna, who were still travelling upon the Continent, and sent us entertaining accounts of their adventures. Florence sometimes heard from Dr. Clyde. He ever protested a deep interest in her welfare, but never gave an expression that would lead her to surmise that he cherished his hope of the past.

"He is a noble man," Florence would sometimes say. "His heart is strong but not hardened; nor is it so tender that a blow may break it. He is fitted to contend with adversity, no matter in what shape it may come. God made him a hero."

And once she added, and in so low a tone that I thought she did not mean that I should hear her:

"Why was I destined to act but in a single conflict? Had I met with no repulse, that conquest alone would have satis-

fied me. But I was the disappointed, and can only weep over the defeat. I am a woman."

The long winter passed and the May month came. It was upon one of its fairest mornings, when the birds were most joyous, and the young leaves and flowers sweetly fragrant, with not a cloud to frown upon them, that Florence came from her study, that she had entered but a few moments before to devote the day to literary toil, and playfully snatching my sewing from my hand, threw it across the room, and said that she had appointed that day for a holiday, and I must also make it one.

"Well, what shall I do?" I inquired, leaving pussy to fold and unfold my work at her leisure. "It does seem almost wicked to work on such a beautiful day."

"We will have Jimmy bring up the ponies, and we will take a ride—one of our old-fashioned rides and talks, you know."

Of course *I knew*, and joyfully acquiesced in her plan, and in a short time we were seated in Uncle Hugh's old-fashioned easy chaise, and driving leisurely in the direction of Mrs. Brown's, or the parsonage, as we continued to call the place. We had not been there since the funeral of Dr. Grey, and the old associations that hallowed everything about the premises were not robbed of their freshness, but occurred vividly to our minds at the first sight of the tall red chimneys amid the lofty locusts.

"Mother," half whispered Florence, with a dreamy sadness, as we were passing the orchard under whose blossom-full boughs she had often played when a child with Birdie, Charlie, and Pruno, "I wonder if Charlie will ever come home again."

"For heaven's sake, Florence!" I exclaimed, painfully startled by her inquiry, "you do not cherish such a hope, do you?"

"Not hardly, and yet I cannot lose the blissful seeming

that I shall see him again. I feel it now more powerfully than before," and smiling at me, she laid her hand upon her heart, as she always did, when undergoing a powerful emotion.

"Your seeming is delusive, my child, and it is only imposing a bitter disappointment upon yourself to hope for a moment that it is real. Be assured, from every evidence that has reached you concerning his death, that it is impossible for you ever to see him here again. If you entertain the faintest hope to the contrary, it will yet be the disturber of your peace."

My words, so chilling and uncongenial with her happy train of thought, did not, as I hoped and expected, destroy the fascinating delusion. Her face was as radiant, and she smiled as serenely as before.

"Florence," I continued, knowing the power that such a charmed spell could exert upon her imaginative mind, and the thorns it would leave when its ideal beauty should vanish away, "it is wrong for you to hope so vainly. Will you give it up?"

She turned her face full upon me, smiling as hopefully as before.

"I cannot, mother," she said, and the words chilled me through.

"Heigh ho!" shouted a merry voice in greeting to us from the vegetable garden of the parsonage. Looking in the direction that it came, we espied Mrs. Brown, with a rake in her hand, assisting John in planting beets, carrots, and the like. She threw down her rake and John dropped his hoe, and both hastened to open the big gates for us.

John took hold of the bridle and led the ponies up to the door as carefully as if they had been the most spirited chargers of a royal stable, while Mrs. Brown walked close to the chaise making a multitude of inquiries that we had no chance to answer.

It was almost noon, and we could not have refused, had we been so inclined, to take off our things and stay to dinner, in the preparation of which the faithful John took as active a part as his faithful wife. He sliced the ham, and went to the barn and brought in the eggs, and all without an imperious order from the dame.

"Well, John," said I laughing at the adroitness with which he performed the household duties, "you must be a sincere follower of the Woman's Right's Mission. They would call you a pattern husband."

"I don't know nor care about any other woman's rights than hers," replied he, patting his wife upon her fat cheek, "we always did work together, and we are as happy as any body can be. If I am a pattern husband, you please remember my wife," and he proudly scanned her ample dimensions.

This praise was nothing uncommon to Mrs. Brown, and the easy grace with which it was received testified the same.

"And would you believe," she interposed after listening attentively to all that John had to say, "that Mrs. Wilkins gave me the lie the other day, when I told her that I had lived with my husband thirty-five years and never an unkind word passed between us. It is the candid truth, and if we live thirty-five years longer we can say the same, can't we John?"

"Of course we can," readily assented he; "we didn't marry for money: that's the thing of it."

After dinner we all went out to look at the garden. In remembrance of Dr. Grey, John had scarcely deviated in the most minute particular from the arrangement of the preceding year, when it had been superintended by his beloved master. He had planted the sweet corn in the same spot where its rustling might be heard from the library window; and beneath that window Mrs. Brown had nursed sweet peas and flowering beans, just as she had for many years, but, as

she has told us with a deep drawn sigh, with not a single hope that any one but she would love them.

"And here is Charlie's posy bed," said she pointing to a large mound in the sunniest spot of the garden. "Ever since he was a little boy John has spaded this up for him in the spring and filled it with the prettiest flowers he could find. And Charlie used to spend lots of his time here even after he was a man grown, and the sweetest posies he picked I have seen him give to your Birdie or Florence. But where is the child?" inquired she, discovering that Florence was not with us.

"I saw her going down to the other end of the door-yard," replied John who had silently attended us.

"How old-looking that child is getting to be," and Mrs. Brown shook her head gravely. "It's enough to make me cry right out to look at her at any time without her having such a sad broken-hearted look."

"She confines herself very closely to her writing and studies," I remarked: "she has hardly left the house until to-day for several months."

"Well now, Mrs. McAlpine, let me tell you that child is going to die unless she takes more air and exercise. Why, bless your heart, I couldn't stand it one week shut up in a little tight room as she is," and Mrs. Brown extended both of her large arms to illustrate her strength of endurance.

"I think that she is injuring herself by too close application to her literary pursuits," I said, "and have been resolved for some time to induce her to take a different course."

"Don't wait for her to say so," said Mrs. Brown, emphatically; "you don't know how much like a ghost she looks, because you see her every day. Why, I felt like falling right down when I first saw her this morning. But there she is," and she pointed to the bower where Florence was sitting; "just see what a sorrowful-looking thing she is."

Mrs. Brown spake very truly, for Florence was indeed ap-

pearing very depressed, as she sat there on the low rustic seat, her hands clasped across her knees, while her riveted gaze and deep abstracted thought, precluded a consciousness of our approach. Ah! well I knew her blissful, yet painful reverie! It was of long ago, on the sunniest hill of life, ere her feet wended down into the dark valleys,—when she sat as a student upon that very seat, listening to one whose voice was more than music to her.

"Now Florence McAlpine!" cried out Mrs. Brown, starting my child, and bewildering her for a moment, "I've just been talking to your mother about your pining so dreadfully, and I've told her the true cause of it, and now I only want you to promise to come and stay a fortnight with me, and I'll wager you'll have roses on your cheeks in no time."

"What would you do with me?" asked Florence, smiling.

"I know very well what I should do with you. You shouldn't open a book, or look at a sheet of paper, but I'd have you romping all over the farm, hunting hen's eggs, riding old Maje, and performing the wildest pranks you could think of. And you shouldn't have your fun alone either, for I'd go heart and soul with you."

It was very difficult for Florence to convince the good woman that it was altogether impossible for her to accept her kind and bewitching invitation, as her engagements at that time were such as could not be interfered with. She released herself from her unending entreaties by promising to take a walk or ride every day, unless the weather should prove unfavorable, and then she would have a game of grace hoops, or something else, with Uncle Hugh, in the spacious dining-room. That consoled Mrs. Brown.

With a great many messages for Aunt Betsey, and an equal share for Uncle Hugh, we bade the happy couple good bye, and drove in the direction of the cottage once occupied by Susan Blake.

By force of habit, the ponies stopped at the barred up gate,

but we did not alight, for we heard no clicking of the door latch, or sweet voices bidding us hasten in. The little window was uncurtained, and the withered remains of last year's morning glories were hanging about it. The garden was uncultivated, and high grass was growing in the walk. The fence was broken down, and cattle were feeding, where but the spring before, the careful hand of Lucy Dean had weeded the thriving vegetables! Alas! for the changes! their dreariness fell heavily upon us.

"O do drive on, mother!" importuned Florence, with a choking voice; "every thing comes upon me like a flood, while we stop here."

"It is so to me," I replied, as we slowly departed, "but I have had such a longing curiosity to visit the dear spot before the cottage is torn down. I never want to come here again."

"O, we do miss Susan so much," said Florence.

"And many more that last year took from us."

"What a bitter year it has been. Only think of it, mother."

"Poor Birdie."

Then we rode for some time in silence. We had very much to think about, and each knew the other's sorrow, for it was her own.

"And yet, mother," said Florence, breaking the stillness, "with it all we have been blessed."

"Yes, that is very true."

"Yet I can but love to dream of a sunnier path, one attaining to the pinnacle of my earthly hopes. Ah, mother! the prospect was once so fair, but the whirlwind and tempest have swept across it, and darkness covers it now. It is hard to be resigned sometimes, and so I live in the seeming of something brighter, something easier to be borne. And to absorb myself the more fully in that blissful ideal—to chain myself, as it were, one of its actors, and to have heart and mind wholly enrapt in a sweeter though imaginary exist-

once—I am writing a novel, in which the cherished hopes and aspirations of my life shall have a fancied fulfilment. Love shall endure its tribulation with a strength God granted, and with a holy trusting faith that receives, as its sweet reward, the redemption of its idol from the paths of temptation and error, and that boon shall be welcomed as far more precious than the earnest affection of the purified heart, that yielding to the blessed influence cast upon it, clings for ever to its earthly angel. And do not think,” and she blushed deeply, “that I consider myself the true heroine of that perfect love. Ah, no! she is but the pattern that I have vainly striven to imitate—a character that I would have made my own, had not my weakness rebelled.”

We were then at home, and I had no opportunity of talking more with her that night. I was thankful for almost any thing that would shut out from her the chilling dreariness of her young, yet deeply experienced life. Yet I trembled lest at the sudden vanishing of her blissful ideal she should fall despairing and helpless before the stern reality. I was troubled. My anxiety for my darling child but increased with her years. I had hoped that time would cover with fresh verdure the garden-spots that the frost had blighted—that the future might bring hopes disunited from those of the past—yes, and that her affections might bud and bloom again with a sweet dew falling upon them. But it was not so, and I could only trust and pray, “Thy will, O God, be done.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

Tell me no more, no more
Of my soul's lofty gifts! Are they not vain
To quench its panting thirst for happiness?
Have I not tried, and striven, and failed to bind
One true heart unto me, whereon my own
Might find a resting place—a home for all
Its burden of affliction?

MRS. HEMANS.

ALL of the summer time Florence applied herself with unceasing diligence to the advancement and completion of her work. She did not forget her promise to Mrs. Brown, and her memory had but little chance to prove treacherous, as upon sunny days the good woman was very prone to call and put her regulations in active remembrance, and when it was rainy and unpleasant Uncle Hugh would not dispense with a game of some kind in the dining room. Yet her recreation was slight in comparison with her toil, that wore heavily upon her, causing her to grow thin and pale, and subject to painful nervous headaches. But in spite of my anxious remonstrance, Dr. Talman's caution, and the outbursts of Aunt Betsey, Florence worked on every day the same, growing more depressed in spirit as her task drew near its close.

Late one October night I sat in the library writing to Susan. The clock had struck eleven, and I thought every one in the house had retired but me.

I sealed the letter, feeling that the three sheets, closely filled, did not contain one half of what I wished to express,

but it was vain to suppose that paper could convey all that I would tell to Susan.

Maggie had forgotten to close the blinds, and I went to repair the negligence. I was surprised to see a light from Florence's window. Ten was her usual hour for retiring, and Dr. Talman's orders were limited to nine. She had been depressed and abstracted all day.

I hastened to her chamber and softly entered. She was sitting by the table, her head bowed upon it, and her face buried in her hands. There was a pile of MSS. beside her, the results of her summer's toil. Birdie's daguerreotype was lying in her lap, one of Charlie Grey close to her cheek, and a lock of soft brown hair—alas! poor Lucy Dean—was waving upon the pages of an open prayer book.

Ah! Florence! where were you?

Unknown to her I stood for some time leaning upon the back of her chair. The influence of the place was upon me, and my heart entered into her sweet communion.

"Florence!" I whispered very softly.

She did not lift her head or make a reply.

"Florence!" I repeated as softly as before, and laid my hand lightly upon her.

"Oh, mother! was it you that called me?" She passed her hand slowly across her brow; she was bewildered by her sudden recall from dream-land.

"Sit down here in my chair," said she arising, "and take me upon your lap. I am so lonely and unhappy to-night that I want to be very near to you."

I did as my child requested, and folded my arms about her. I put my hand upon her forehead: it was hot and throbbing.

"It is late, Florence, almost midnight. Had you not better go to bed?"

"Oh, I cannot."

"Why, darling?"

"Because I could not sleep, and the hours would be so long. I am Florence McAlpine to-night."

"Who else have you been?" I asked, almost fearing that her reason wandered.

"I have been Zora, happy Zora Gregor. She is a character in my novel, and Herman is the one she loved. He was wayward and erring, and wandered from the sunshine of her influence, but she did not despair. God smiled on her faith and labors, and her hopes were crowned at last. I finished the story to-night, and I live in it no longer. I am not Zora. Where is my Herman, and his reward?"

"God's ways are not our ways, my child. Your history is uncompleted, and he ordains it in his love. The future may bring to you as sweet a boon as that granted to your fancied Zora. Do you despair of heaven's remembrance?"

"The grave cannot give back its dead."

"Look beyond, Florence."

"I do, and there is bliss and glory in the prospect, and even now, footsore and weary that I am, my hope revives at the thought of it. And yet I cannot forget the clanking chains I wear, or suppress my yearning to be free."

"You have lived too much in the ideal. You must encounter things as they are, as God has ordained them. The soul weakens in these idle seemings, and is rendered unfit for the stern realities that it must combat with. Don't you remember the nerving words of Longfellow? I have often heard you repeat them to others when their hearts were failing—

"Oh fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong!"

"And I can be strong," said she firmly, lifting her head from my bosom, and wiping away her tears. "I have been a hero in my struggle, and I will not yield at last."

The clock struck twelve.

"We must go to bed now," I said. "We will talk more to-morrow. Now your book is finished, you will have leisure hours to spend with me."

"Yes, and that will make me happy again," and she clung to my neck kissing me fondly. "I am rebuked for my murmuring whenever I think of you—it is so long since father died. Your cheeks have wrinkled, and your hair turned gray, but you are hoping yet."

I consented to sleep with her that night. Birdie's beautiful daguerreotype was kissed and wept over, and the soft brown lock of Lucy's hair pressed to our cheeks. "Poor Charlie!" sighed I, when I looked at the type of his happy face; but when I handed it to Florence she closed it hastily, and laid it away in the little rose-wood box where she hoarded her precious keepsakes.

Florence soon found a publisher for her work, and it made its appearance that winter. The success she met with was far beyond her expectations and mine. Although she had been a contributor to leading magazines, and literary papers, for a few years past, and had received from many who were higher up the gilded ladder than she, words of encouragement for her to persevere and wear the laurels she might easily win, yet it was not without much shrinking and foreboding that she sent her first book out to the world. Upon its reception she should receive a fresh impetus, or a sad discouragement. "For, mother," said she to me shortly after she forwarded her MS. to the publisher, "I can never write anything better. It is my whole heart—and experience is more powerful than imagination."

And it was indeed her whole heart, and I could not wonder that it made so many friends as it did.

I had felt almost sure that if Florence made her own experience the basis of her tale, it would be thrilling and pathetic, and characteristic of her purity and tenderness, but

I did not look for so faithful and touching a portrayal of the secret impulses and passions of the human breast; and after reading the book I sincerely responded to the remarks of an able reviewer of her work: "It has made us more intimate with our own heart, and more compassionate towards those of our like erring brothers."

Zora was blind; Herman was her tutor. There are very few with minds so pure and exalted as Zora's was, and with hearts so steadfastly fixed upon the sender of both the blight and the harvest. Herman was high minded too, and skilled in the philosophy of the ancients and the school of modern times. He had but little faith in men, and none in God as the kind Father that the Christian would call his own. Herman, with every blessing to crown him, denied the Divine Influence as firmly as Zora in her misfortune trusted and relied upon it.

Herman was the only dear friend the blind girl had, and he tenderly called her his sister. She thought his voice the sweetest she ever heard, and there was no music like his foot-fall. She was six years old when she lost her sight, but she had not in her bright childish memories so fair a face and so manly a form as she imagined Herman's to be.

She would have innocently disclosed to him her more than sisterly affection—she had not once thought about its return—had he not in confidence imparted to her his love for a beautiful girl, an inmate of Zora's home, who did not, alas, treat the blind girl with kindness. But Herman never knew that, for Zora could not breathe blame upon any one.

She heard him patiently and gave him her best advice, but oh, the world grew darker to her. She loved his voice the same, but it could not awaken the joyous chords of her heart. She grew sad, and he, enwrapt with the lovely Loraine, did not observe it. But she did not cease to love him. She prayed God to make her heart blossom more fully with love for him. She would live for him, tear with her bleeding hands the

brambles from his path, and impart her blessed faith to his disbelieving soul.

"Far lingering on some distant dawn,
My triumph comes more sweet than late,
When from these mortal mists withdrawn,
Thy heart shall know me. *I can wait.*"

Temptations came to Herman, and he wandered far from the path of happiness. He cast aside the influence of Zora, and even departed where it might not be felt. Disappointment and sorrow were also his, for the fickle Loraine gave her smiles to another. He plunged into a sea of dissipation, and was sinking beneath its turbid waters, but Zora, whose faith was in heaven, clung to him then, and rescued him by her angel hand.

I cannot tell you all the sorrow that Zora had, her many disappointments and few realized hopes. She did not despair. Herman yielded to temptation whenever it crossed his path. The grasp of evil seemed upon him, but Zora trusted in her prayers.

Many long years passed, in which Herman wandered only where vice and wickedness reigned. But disease fastened upon him, and he was brought home to his aged father's house. Zora hastened to his bedside, and it was during the long months of her continual care for him, that the saving light burst upon him, and he saw how blind he had been, how blind to God and Zora.

Zora's sight slowly returned, but she never saw Herman distinctly, until gray locks shaded his wrinkled brow, and then she said he was more beautiful to her than the vision of her girlhood, for God's seal was upon his forehead, and his eyes beamed with the faith-shown prospect of the better land but a little way before him.

I wept many more tears during the perusal of that story than the mass of its readers, I ween, for it was all very true to me, and Zora Gregor was my own dear Florence, whose

heart was then more fully revealed to me, than ever before, and I discovered many broken tendrils and bleeding wounds.

I had been reading a very flattering review of the work when Florence came in. She sat down before the grate, and taking pussy upon her lap as usual, smoothed her softly as she gazed dreamingly into the fire. I knew that she had not seen the article I was reading, as Uncle Hugh had but just brought the paper.

"Florence, here is a good word for you," and I held up the paper.

She looked towards it, and then back to the fire again, without saying a word. I was surprised at her disinterestedness, and continued:

"It is an excellent review; a candid one. It contains some valuable criticisms. Don't you want to read it?"

"Not now, mother, not now," and she sighed deeply. "It cannot satisfy me, no matter what it says."

"And has your ambition become so insatiable?"

"It is not my ambition that is thirsting so, but a deeper and holier attribute of my being, I trust. I am oppressed with a loneliness and a yearning that I cannot suppress. Fame can never give me the balm I seek."

"You are depressed again, to-night. It pains me to see you sink so beneath your trials."

"I do not sink; I stand alone."

"I am with you, my child."

"I do not forget you, mother. You are in my other world, my happy one. My existence is divided."

Just then Uncle Hugh came in, and the first sight of his face reminded me of the two letters he had left in my charge for Florence, who was in the parlor with company when they arrived. He had brought them from the post office with the paper that interested me so deeply that I forgot them.

"You must make Uncle Hugh promise never to deliver

your letters to me again," said I, taking them from my work basket, and handing them to Florence.

"What! more letters for me?" she exclaimed. "I do hope that one is from New York."

"One is from Susan, I am sure," said Uncle Hugh.

"Yes, it is! it is!" said Florence, when she had looked at their post marks and directions, "but it is strange she should write to me. I thought that mother was her sole correspondent."

"She has something in particular, for you," I said.

"Perhaps so," she replied, glancing cursorily over its pages, "but I don't think that she would write any thing that she would be unwilling for me to read to you all. I know she would not, and I must find Aunt Betsey, before I begin," and she started for the kitchen, where she was preparing some delicacy for the tea-table.

"Of course I can leave things just as well as not," I heard her saying as she followed Florence back to the library. "I'd let every thing spoil for the sake of hearing from Susan."

She sat down close to Uncle Hugh—their chairs ever had a strong attraction for each other—and Florence, blushing at some discovery she made in glancing over the letter, began reading it aloud, after playfully exacting our promise that we would never tell what we should hear.

Since the death of Lucy Dean, and Willie's return to New York, he had formed an intimate friendship with a young clergyman of superior talents and high reputation, who was sincerely devoted to the cause of Christ. His influence upon Willie was a saving one. He was growing cold, misanthropic, and sceptical, and Susan's heart was almost broken by his condition, and her own weakness and inability to obtain the conversion she so earnestly desired. She did not relax her energies in his behalf, but labored the more fervently when her hope grew less. Nor did she labor in vain,

for her son was restored to the sweet trusting faith of his childhood. He had been admitted to the bar a year before, and was rapidly attaining a high position; but feeling that a nobler cause demanded his strength, he divested himself of every selfish and earthly ambition, and was then preparing himself for the ministry, with the intention of becoming a foreign missionary.

"God sends something besides sorrow to those that love and serve him like Susan Blake," said Aunt Betsey, wiping her eyes. "She is getting a good harvest after all."

But the remainder of the letter surprised us most of all, and it was in reading it that Florence had several occasions to blush very deeply.

Susan was soon to be married, and can you guess to whom? Was she not such a person as Dr. Clyde would love and be proud to make his wife? Even so: he thought her the most like Florence of any one he ever met, and better adapted by her age for his life-time companion. Since she had been in New York she had been under his medical treatment, and had so much improved as to be able to walk without her crutches. The slight unsteadiness of gait, that could not be removed, her physician declared to be one of her most absolute charms. That Susan loved Dr. Clyde with all the intensity and purity of her being, every line of her simple, frank confession, touchingly revealed.

"Now, that is a letter worth getting," said Florence, when she had finished reading it. "It is more welcome to me than a hundred like some of those I have received lately, full of praise and fawning."

"And who is the other one from?" asked the honest Aunt Betsey, pointing to the neglected letter in Florence's lap. "If there is any more good news let me hear it before I go back to the kitchen."

"Of course," replied Florence, taking up the letter and

glancing at it. "Do you know any one in Savannah? I am pretty sure I do not. It is posted there."

"No, not a soul, and I hope I never shall, for it is a dreadful ways off," was the hearty response, as she hurried back to her work.

"It is from some of the extensive firm of Puff and Co., most likely," said Uncle Hugh, winking mischievously as he tore the wrapper off his *Tribune*, and put his privileged feet upon the fender Aunt Betsey had polished so brightly. "They are bound to turn that head of yours."

She made no reply. She had torn open the envelope and was deeply engaged with its contents. She had read but a little when she withdrew with it to her room.

Tea was soon ready, and Aunt Betsey called Florence several times, but not until we were about leaving the table did she make her appearance. She seemed very much excited, and wholly abstracted. Her cheeks glowed redly, and when she reached out her hand to receive her cup of tea it trembled violently.

"Did your letter contain any thing of importance?" I asked as soon as Aunt Betsey and Uncle Hugh left the table.

"You must read it," she replied.

"Is it from any of our relatives or acquaintances, or some of your literary friends?"

"It purports to be from a stranger."

"You have no acquaintances in Savannah, have you?"

"Not one to my knowledge. You must read the letter yourself. Come now to my room where we can talk together," and she arose from the table, having scarcely partaken of any food.

CHAPTER XXX.

I know that I have passions wild,—a temper stern, stern and rude—
A disposition ever prone to act the roughest mood,—
But oh! my heart is true and warm—it loves but only you!
And will you not forgive the past, and blot it from your view?

CALDER CAMPBELL.

"THIS brings a sweeter reward than any thing I have yet received," said Florence, handing me the letter. "I can hardly tell you why, but it has sent a sunbeam to the darkest recess of my heart, and my hope buds forth again."

"Kind heaven spare its blighting," I secretly prayed, receiving the letter that I was so impatient to read. Florence sat down before me, and leaning forward upon my lap closely studied my face as I perused the following:

"SAVANNAH, GA.

"MY DEAR LADY:

"I was alone in the world—unloving and unloved, a wanderer in sinful paths, and wearing a crushing load of despondency and woe, when your book, like an angel's message, was placed in my hands. God bless you, Florence McAlpine, for the heavenly deed you have done. Like Herman, a blessed light has fallen upon me, and I can but love the bringer of its warmth.

"I would be a man again. I would rise from abjectness and sin. I would merit the forgiveness of heaven for my waywardness, and breathe once more in trusting faith the prayers of my better years; and you have led me to yearn for this. God bless you, Florence McAlpine.

"I have talents that once promised me fame and happiness. I have noble soul energies, and aspirations for the pure and good, that have never been completely stifled by the unholy atmosphere that has surrounded them. I have a heart ever open to the appeals of the oppressed and unfortunate. I am not a wreck, oh no! but am yet strong and able to struggle and overcome temptation.

"But I want your continual influence to strengthen my efforts, and will you refuse to correspond with me, a stranger that I am, a Herman without a Zora? Point out to me the ways of peace and pleasantness, and impart your unwavering faith and heavenly hope.

"Have I written too freely? If so, forgive me, and believe it is the overflowing of a grateful heart.

"SELDEN MORTIMER."

"And what do you intend to do?" I inquired, laying the letter upon the table.

"Oh, I shall answer it," she replied, "and do him all the good I can. But mother—"

She paused, and dropping her eyes, fingered my watch chain uneasily.

"But what, Florence?"

"Oh it will hardly do for me to tell you, I fear," and she glanced up timidly to my face. "I have so many strange seemings, you know. Look at that handwriting again. Have you ever seen it before?"

I took up the sheet and studied it closely.

"No, I hardly think that I have, and yet there is something familiar about it; but Selden Mortimer is surely a stranger to us. The name is new to me. Did you ever hear it before?"

"No; and yet—"

She paused again.

"Speak freely, Florence."

"I doubt his being a stranger."

I was surprised at her strange and unlikely supposition. There were no grounds as I could see for the assuming of a fictitious name in such a case, even if the correspondent was personally known to her. If he was a former friend, and relied so much upon her saving influence, and was sincere in his desire for her help, he would have deemed it more prudent to present himself as an old acquaintance than an entire stranger. Her interest would be sooner awakened in his behalf, and she would be more capable by her knowledge of his past life, his mind and disposition, and the circumstances that had borne upon him, to accomplish the desired end.

"And who is there," I asked, after presenting this to her consideration, "among your acquaintance that you can suspect of acting the part of Selden Mortimer?"

She did not answer me directly.

"Your argument is a good one," she said, "and I know it were much better for me to trust to the probable, rather than to attempt, as I constantly do, to found a precious hope where there is nothing real for a foundation stone. I cannot remember the time when I had not something unseen and uncomprehended to grasp for and yearn after."

"The yearning for something better, purer, and more divine, is the greatest proof of our immortality. If earth granted all to satisfy us, and we had never occasion to pray and weep, we might well fear that the grosser attributes of our being had stifled our better nature. But why do you despond to-night?" and I lifted up the tearful face of my child and kissed it. "I am sure that the letter you have received should renew your strength and courage. Selden Mortimer may be only one of the many you have awakened to contest with the temptations that have been their victors."

"I am thankful, O very thankful indeed, and I can never express the strength that single letter has given to me. Every word is upon my heart, and hopes I may not tell are

making my life a summer time again, and doubts and fears shall not chill or blight them."

"And why does that letter affect you so deeply?" I asked, marking her sudden change from despondency to hope.

"Because I know it to be but the first golden sheaf from a bountiful harvest. I cannot crush the seeming of happiness that it is to bring. I know that the clouds are breaking, for I feel the sunshine upon me. You cannot sympathize or perfectly understand me now, as you live too much in realities to experience the foreshadowings of a dreamer like me."

Strange child! her words were indeed mysteries to me, and upon her calm, thoughtful face, or in the depths of her dove-like eyes, I could read their meaning no better. If I ever felt widely separated from Florence it was at hours like that—though she might be lying close to my heart—when she was surrounded by an ideal existence or carried forward to the realization of her sunny hopes.

I sat in silent meditation for some time, and Florence was as abstracted as I. I could not believe that my child anticipated or would encourage any thing more than a friendly correspondence with the stranger, and I felt confident that would be conducted on her part with her characteristic discernment and attention to another's feelings, yet with a dignity that would repel a boldness in the most presuming. Florence was too cautious—too bound up in her memories of the past—too fearful of the loss of her remaining peace—to contemplate a romantic adventure. No, I rather thought that the anticipations that the letter had awakened were wider and more exalted: those of doing good to the downcast and fallen, by her faith and toil.

"And she has a glorious mission," I inwardly whispered, as my eyes fastened upon the little hump-backed form before me; "she may well be thankful, and let her hopes blossom full and sweet, for heaven's sunshine is upon her."

She was smiling in her reverie—I had wept in mine.

Tinkle, tinkle, went the door-bell, arousing us both, and soon Aunt Betsey entered, saying that Dr. Talman and his wife, with John and Mrs. Brown, had come to spend the evening.

"Please ask them to excuse me," said Florence, imploringly, "I want to answer that letter this evening."

"Never mind your letter," and Aunt Betsey would have taken her in her arms if she had persisted farther. There was no use of refusing when Aunt Betsey's mind was made up to the contrary, so Florence said she would go in the parlor for a little while, and be excused at an early hour.

"I feel just like answering that letter to-night," whispered she to me as we passed through the hall; "my heart is full of things to say."

She had not appeared so cheerful in some time. She laughed and cracked jokes with Uncle Hugh and Mrs. Brown, and promised the latter to spend a day with her that week, and she grew enthusiastic while listening to an account of the merry exploits they were to have.

"Why, what is the matter with you to-night?" inquired Dr. Talman, sitting down beside Florence; "you must have lost that sober face of yours at church last Sunday. I am sure I saw it there at the beginning of the service at least; and this one," and he patted her upon the cheek, "must be of Mrs. Brown's manufacture."

"You are mistaken, doctor," spoke out Uncle Hugh from the corner, and looking very serious indeed. "I brought her a letter from Savannah to-night, directed very much in the style of writing that we see in youngsters' copy-books. We have none of us had a peep at it, and for some reason she went off alone to read it;" and having finished, he tipped back his chair again, and very dryly asked Dr. Talman concerning the influence of slaveholders at the North, and the probability of their kidnapping defenceless whites from the free States.

"That will doubtless be an interesting discussion," said Florence, smiling, as she arose, "but the answering of that very letter will deprive me from listening to it;" and begging to be excused, she overcame the urgent remonstrances of Aunt Betsey and Mrs. Brown, and withdrew to her chamber.

Our guests remained until late, and when they had departed, I peeped softly into the rose chamber. Florence was sound asleep, and smiling in her dreams. Upon her writing table, I espied a letter unsealed, and directed to Selden Mortimer, Savannah, Ga.

Early the next morning, before I had left my pillow, I heard the pattering of her bare feet in the hall, and soon she entered my room in her night dress and cap, and holding in her hand the letter she had written the evening before.

"You see I am anxious for you to read this," she said, climbing up into the bed, and nestling down beside me. "I want to send it to the office right after breakfast, and this is the only time we shall have to talk about it."

"It is a long one," remarked I, unfolding the large sheet, and glancing at the four closely-written pages: "you improved your time, after leaving us, I judge."

"I was not long writing it," was her reply; "my only trouble was when to stop, and now I feel as though I had not written half I intended to."

"He will bless you for that," I involuntarily said, when I had finished reading the letter, so calculated to afford a strengthening balm to one in Selden Mortimer's condition. Christian faith and hope breathed in every line, with an imparting power, and the interest she showed for the stranger could scarcely have been increased by a mother writing to an erring son. Here is a single extract:—

"I freely and thankfully grant you whatever influence it is in my power to exert for your saving behalf; yet mine must be very weak to that a father, a mother, a brother, or a sister, could extend, or any one possessing an intimate knowl-

edge of your past history, the events of your childhood, the misfortunes and adversities that may then have befallen you, the trials of your riper years, and your character and disposition. Have you a father, a holy man, whose prayers are ever burdened with petitions for his wandering son? If so, return to him, and his faith and love, emanating from the heart of his merciful God, will twine lovingly about you, and bear you up. But is he dead; resting at last from the sorrow you imposed so heavily upon him? Then treasure up his memory, and make his noble and blessed deeds the example of your own.

"Have you no mother, whose earnest prayers are ever heard in heaven? A sister, whose love for you knows no diminution, but increases when frowns darken around you? A brother, upon whose strong arm you may lean? Have you no loved one? Are you truly unloving and unloved? Then poor lonely heart, I pity you."

We did not have much time for conversation that morning, as Florence had anticipated, for we had all accepted the invitation of Dr. Talman and lady to spend the day with them. Dr. Wright, the new pastor, a young man who was rapidly obtaining the universal love of the parish, and his amiable sister Sophie, together with Mr. and Mrs. Brown, and several other families of the neighborhood, were to be there. It was to be a regular old-fashioned country visit, and the doctor was very particular to have us promise to be on hand by ten, A. M., and earlier, if possible. In remembrance of that, Aunt Betsey was up and stirring at an earlier hour than usual, and as upon all such rare occasions, had "every thing in the world to do." It was very necessary that breakfast should be out of the way in ample season; and that due praise may be accorded to the energy of the active woman, I will state that our bonnets and shawls were on, pussy put in a warm basket in the wood-shed, and a bowl of milk set down beside her, the house locked up—for Maggie was going to

spend the day at her sister's—Aunt Betsey's work-basket packed, and the ponies at the door, just as the clock was striking nine, and she then allowed us an hour to drive to the village, do a little shopping, call at the post office, and ride three miles farther; and sure enough, we entered Dr. Talman's parlor just five minutes before ten. All praise to Aunt Betsey.

In due time another letter came from Savannah, and this made Uncle Hugh surmise strange things, while Aunt Betsey was overcome with astonishment.

And Selden Mortimer did bless Florence for the letter she sent him, and called down the smiles of heaven upon her, for the consolation and strength it had afforded. His father, who lived a pure and holy life, was numbered with the dead, and his last breath was spent for his erring son. His mother, whom he only knew by his father's loving praise, died before his remembrance, and he was the only child. A Zora had once been his, who had a power to sway his every action, and that was for the right. But he was blinded by sinful allurements, and wandered as Herman did, and in his sinfulness wronged her so deeply that he could never brook her angel look again. That she loved him he was firmly assured, not from her lips, oh no, but from a reliable disclosure he had received to that effect, since they were separated, as then. "And she will ever love me," he wrote, "but the past, the chilling past of her life and mine, forbids my return to her. I was blind to her then, and my vision has been restored too late."

And Florence wrote in reply:

"Call yourself not alone in the world while your Zora lives, nor despair of her forgiveness, no matter how black your sinfulness may have been, if she has a woman's heart and loved you. Return to her, I entreat of you, and let hers be the hand to reclaim you; hers the influence to purify you; hers the voice to blend with yours in prayer; and hers the

heart to rest upon, yet support your own. Doubt her not. Shrink not from her presence, but, strong in a hope that will not fail, and a faith that shall lift you up, return to her and bring in the harvest of her life."

The time arrived when Florence might reasonably expect an answer, but several days elapsed and none came. She grew anxious and dispirited, and if the door bell rang, she would start nervously, and turn very pale. If Uncle Hugh came in from the office, she made no inquiry for letters, and would hardly raise her eyes, as he stood warming himself before the fire and emptying his overcoat pockets of their contents. And if he handed her any letters, her first glance was at the post mark. And one evening when she had been standing at the window, waiting for nearly an hour before his return, he brought her a letter from Gettie Wentworth. Her disappointment was plainly visible, and laying it down upon the table, would have forgotten it, had I not reminded her of it. That little circumstance surprised me, as Gettie was one of her chosen correspondents.

Our supper was a late one that night, and we were sitting at the table when the door bell was lightly rung.

"That's a faint heart, therefore one of our young lady's gallants," remarked Uncle Hugh.

"They may well have faint hearts," said Aunt Betsey; "she is no easy prize."

"And, therefore, very few strive to win," half absently replied Florence, who was listening to the opening of the parlor door, and Maggie's returning footsteps.

"Miss Florence is wanted!"

Florence turned very white, and overturned her chair in leaving the table.

"Don't be in such a flurry," said Uncle Hugh. "Who is it, Maggie?"

Maggie said that she had never seen the gentleman before,

and, indeed, she hardly saw him just then, he was so bundled up.

"'Tis some of her bookish folks, most likely," was the reasonable supposition of Aunt Betsey, and endorsed by us all. "The poor child has had enough to do with them of late."

We sat around the library grate, listening to Uncle Hugh, who read to us while we sewed. It was nearly nine, when Florence peeped in, and asked me in a low trembling tone, to come into the parlor.

"Why, my dear child, how violently you tremble!" I said, when the door was closed behind us in the hall. "Who am I to meet?"

"Selden Mortimer."

Instead of introducing me at my first entrance into the room, to the gentleman that was sitting in the easy chair, partially shaded from the full light, she grasped my hand tightly, and led me close before him. He arose, and bowed respectfully, but I was so disconcerted by the strange conduct of my child, who had not yet spoken a word, that I made but little observation of his personal appearance.

"Don't you know him, mother?" half whispered Florence.

I looked searchingly into that pale and emaciated face, caught the glance of that sunken gray eye, and exclaimed:

"It is Charlie Grey!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

I thank thee for the pleasant ways
In which my feet have trod;
I bless for all, both great and small,
But most for thee, I praise
Thy goodness, oh my God!

MARY M. CHASE.

Yes, it was Charlie Grey, but where was our Birdie? Was it an untrue tale that told she was pillowed beneath the sea? Was she living yet, and might we listen for her footfall, her sweet voice, and blissfully anticipate the restoration of our long lost lambkin? Speak, Charlie, do not groan so heavily. In mercy tell us all.

Yes, our Birdie was dead, and bitterly Charlie wept when relating the events of the fearful night of their shipwreck. She was cold and lifeless in his arms when he sank, as he supposed, for ever. He arose again, and was seen by a sailor, to whom he had granted a generous act of kindness. Jack was the commander of the life boat that was already so crowded it was hazardous to increase its burden, but he swore he would leap into the waves himself rather than leave his benefactor to perish. Charlie cared but little for life, it was embittered to him; but he remembered his aged father, his yearning for his son, and his fast failing health. He looked at the form that clung so lovingly to him, and thought of the watery grave awaiting her. It was very hard to unlock those clasping cold arms, press the last kiss to those frozen lips, and then push her gently from him—she who had erred so deeply,

and all for him. The wild waves caught her in their embrace, and, alas, for our darling Birdie, she would never come home again!

He reached his native land, broken down in mind and body, and but one aim in view, that of going home to die. While in New York, he secluded himself from all his former associates, making himself known to no one, and he was so altered in appearance that his most intimate friends did not recognize him. The morning of the day that he intended to leave for home, he chanced to meet in the reading room of the hotel a gentleman residing in his native village, and a communicant of his father's church. Charlie was unwilling to return without a foreknowledge of the state of affairs at home, the condition of his father, and the general feeling towards himself. He therefore seated himself beside the gentleman, who did not recognize him, and after a short conversation concerning the destination and previous location of each, he made inquiries relating to the principal inhabitants of the village, and lastly mentioned the pastor, Dr. Grey.

"Oh, he is dead, and there was never a greater loss."

Charlie had not expected that, and it came so suddenly upon him that he maintained his outward composure with great difficulty. His voice was less firm when he asked about the pastor's son, that was somewhat celebrated as a musical composer.

"Oh, he is dead too. He got to be rather unsteady, and left home some time before his father died. He went to Europe, they say, and was shipwrecked when going from France to England. It was a great pity he turned out so, for he had a noble heart, and might have made one of the greatest men of the day. He had warm friends too, and there are a good many of them left yet. His father died with a prayer for him on his lips."

Charlie turned away. He could not go home after that, oh no!

He went to Savannah, assumed the name of Selden Mortimer, and was engaged in a profitable occupation. Overcome by the wretchedness he had brought upon himself, and with no hand to save, no voice to cheer him, he plunged deeper into sin and dissipation than ever before. He strove to forget the past, and render himself regardless of the future, but the blessed teachings of a sainted father, and the influence of his sister friend, Florence McAlpine, were too deeply impressed upon him to allow him to rush blindly on to ruin. He saw his condition, and would sometimes long for the manliness he had discarded, and half resolve to return to his native village, and unheeding the bitter reproaches that might be justly heaped upon him, trust to the love of the few who still loved him, and with their help make a noble struggle to reform. He thought of Florence, but how could he meet one so pure? Would Birdie and Lucy Dean be by her forgotten?

He had nearly given up his hope of reform when Florence's book fell into his hands. Zora was to him no ideal maiden, nor did Herman dwell in dreamland. His vision was unsealed, and a hope that he had once deemed could never blossom in his heart again, shed a sweet fragrance upon his existence.

He saw his blindness to God and his Zora.

You know how he wrote to Florence, and the correspondence that passed between them. He followed the advice of her last letter, and returned to let hers be the hand to reclaim him—hers the voice to blend with his in prayer—and when he had become worthy of so pure a treasure as her heart, to lay his humbly at her feet, though undeserving of the soul-felt love and devotion so long expended upon it.

It was past midnight when he left us, and as I lay upon my wakeful pillow and recalled the wasted form and sad emaciated face of him who had revealed so much misery, with bitter regret and sincere contrition for an erring past, I could not

think it was Charlie Grey, the merry light-hearted Charlie of long ago. But the years had been long and dark since the gray pony cantered up the avenue with a laughing boy on its back, who was sure to win a little dark-eyed lassie to share his saddle and sport.

We had told him the particulars of his father's death, the interview with him the day that he died, and the letter that was left in my charge for his son if he ever returned. Charlie's grief, and the reproaches he cast upon himself for his neglect of his parent, were truly heart-rending. At the mention of poor Lucy Dean, the broken heart she carried to her grave, her prayers for him, and her tenderness to his memory, he suddenly arose from his seat, and muttering a bitter imprecation upon himself, started hastily towards the door. Florence grasped his arm and detained him.

"I have been mad to intrude here," said he, "with such a black deed upon me. Let me go, and may my presence here to-night be a secret and forgotten."

"No, Charlie," implored Florence, with touching tenderness, "that is in the past, you know, and you have a future in which to redeem yourself. Come back; O do not leave me so!" and she swayed him as it was ever in her power to do, and he went back with her to the sofa.

And then she poured upon his sin-torn heart the most blessed words her holy faith could prompt her to utter. She spoke of his father then watching him from above, whose last earthly hope had been that Charlie would be restored to the paths of virtue and rectitude, and having redeemed the errors of his youth by good and noble deeds, have the divine grace to strengthen and cheer him when death came upon him, and to lead him safely through the dark valley.

"Florence, you alone can save me," Charlie had said.

"Not Florence, but God," was her meek reply, her face glowing with her spiritual life.

"But how can I remain here! Will not every one—even my old friends—meet me with a curse?"

"No, Charlie, not one. Lucy's history was not known to any one out of our family—not even by Mrs. Brown—and your elopement with Birdie was kept profoundly silent by us all. M. Durand would not allow the least excitement regarding it, and to prevent its becoming public he left New York immediately for the South, and, as his friends supposed, to join his wife. Some may blame you for absenting yourself from a dying father, but you have many true and warm friends here yet."

We urged him to remain at Daisy Lawn over night, but he insisted upon returning to the hotel. He said that he should go up to the parsonage early in the morning, long before sunrise, that he might have an opportunity of wandering unobserved about the dear old spot, ere presenting himself to Mr. and Mrs. Brown, whom we were sure would lose themselves in a transport of joy at so great and sudden a surprise.

One of the most serious things I had to contemplate that long and restless night, was the most discreet manner of breaking the news to Aunt Betsey, who, with Uncle Hugh, had retired in unsuspecting ignorance of who the visitor was in the parlor.

I caught the first sound of her busy feet in the morning, and called her to my room.

"And who do you think was here last night?"

She rested upon her broom in deep thought.

"That Dr. Clyde, from the city?"

"No, but Charlie Grey."

"Charlie Grey!" exclaimed she at the top of her lungs, dropping her broom and almost falling with it upon the floor.

"You are crazy, Clara McAlpine! The poor boy is dead and sunk in the sea!"

And when she was convinced that what I had told her was

really so, and that she was not summoned to see him because he had something of a painful nature to talk over with Florence and I, and that he was then at the parsonage, and would not be at Daisy Lawn until after dinner, she ran, shaking the whole house as she went, to tell Uncle Hugh. She brought him to my room, with a frightful mass of words ringing in his ears. He persuaded her to sit down and listen with him to all I could impart, and when I had finished the sad story, Aunt Betsey's urgent request for the ponies to be immediately harnessed was granted, and she and Uncle Hugh got ready to ride over to the parsonage.

"God bless the dear boy!" said she, nervously trying to fasten her bonnet, in which she would not have succeeded had not Maggie come to her aid. "There's not a bit of hate in my heart for him, even if he has acted so wicked like. Lucy forgave him, and I am sure we can; God bless him."

We told them to be sure to bring Charlie, John, and his wife, back with them to dinner, and they did just as we bade them.

* * * * *

Five years have passed since Charlie Grey came home. He lives at the parsonage now, and my little Florence is his cherished and loving wife. They are very happy indeed, and the sight of their peace and quietude breaks the loneliness that sometimes hangs about Daisy Lawn. She was my only one, you know, and now that she is removed from my hearthstone, I should often weep and repine did I not know that she is the light and blessing of another.

She does not write books any more, and you may but seldom find a poem or tale from her in the magazines for which she formerly contributed. When her friends rebuke her for her withdrawal from the public, and her domestic seclusion, she smiles very happily, and says that her life is now a poem of the sweetest rhyme and measure, and it is dedicated to her husband and child.

Charles Grey is what God made him to be—a noble and virtuous man, upright in his dealings with all, compassionate and brotherly to the downfallen and weak, a faithful husband, and Christian father.

Shortly after his return home he wrote a letter to Willie Blake, confessing the wrong he had done to him and the pure creature that he loved, and imploring the forgiveness that God had granted. And Willie's reply was touchingly tender and kind, granting a sincere pardon, and calling down the blessings of heaven upon his boyhood's friend. They have not met each other yet, for shortly after, Willie sailed as a missionary to a foreign land; but Susan told me in her last letter that he is soon coming home. He has labored in a wide field, and his toil will bring him a blessed harvest.

Susan is the wife of Dr. Clyde, and their union is a happy one. She exerts a wide influence in the refined circles in which she moves, and although I am rejoiced at her good fortune, when I see her surrounded by wealth and luxury, yet I cannot but repress a longing for the little low cottage room, and the cushioned chairs by the window, so sweetly shaded with the sweet peas and flowering beans.

"I thought those were dark days," she sometimes says, "but they were sunny ones after all, and sweet to be remembered."

Aunt Fanny still labors most assiduously for charitable societies, and her endeavors to relieve the poor and oppressed have not decreased with her years. Gettie Wentworth is with her yet, and is to graduate this spring from a seminary whose pride is in sending forth true and noble women, fit for the stern contests of life; and when her studies are completed I anticipate a visit from Aunt Fanny and her; and Mr. and Mrs. Lane, who are now at their home in Philadelphia, have promised to come here at the same time.

John and his good-natured wife are at the parsonage, and

Mrs. Brown is to my daughter what dear Aunt Betsey was ever to me.

But, alas! for my faithful nurse. Twelve months ago she died, and old and young followed her in sincere grief to the grave. The house has a lonely quiet now she is gone; the fires do not burn brightly without her replenishing, and when I am sick or weary, I miss her—oh, how truly! Daisy Lawn seems almost deserted, and my eyes grow dim as I look now to the corner where her chair is standing vacant. Uncle Hugh will follow her in a little while. Grief has made him grow old very fast, and he moves slowly about the house, leaning upon his staff, seeming in search of something that, alas, he cannot find.

There is a childish laugh in the room, and looking up I see little Clara, my gray-eyed pet, who has come to stay all night with grandma. I kiss her, and bid her play with her kitten for a little while, and then I will talk with her; but she has grown impatient, and her dimpled hands are upon my paper, and she has clambered into my lap, so I bid you farewell, my dear reader, to tell a simpler story than this.

THE END.