

MARRIED FOR BOTH WORLDS.

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BY
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AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN JOHN," ETC.

JOHN BUNYAN, being asked a question about heaven which he could not answer, because the Bible had furnished no reply, very wisely advised the querist to follow Christ, and live a holy life, that he might by and by go to heaven and see for himself.

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"Do write the life of your friend Esther S——," said one who had just finished Miss Phelps' "Gates Ajar;" "it is a beautiful record of consecrated love."

I have attempted the work, but the sketch falls far short of the reality.

It is difficult to give all the lights and shadows of such a quiet, unselfish life, or to portray love as deep and pure as it is rare in this world.

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CHAPTER I.

"Human love is sweetest when it leadeth
To a more divine and perfect love."

"HARK, Esther! Is there a carriage at the door? I thought I heard one; and it is about ten minutes since the western train came in. Look out of the window, dearest; and if mother is here, bring her to me at once, for my time is short."

The person addressed was a young woman about eighteen years of age, with a slight girlish figure, and a face not beautiful to a critical eye, but with an expression of gentleness in the large blue eyes, mingled with one of decision in the well-shaped but finely-set lips.

"No, William, there is no carriage at the door, but there is another train at eight o'clock. I think she will surely be here then; our telegram must have reached her yesterday morning."

"Yes; I believe Dixon, at the post office, will be prompt; but, Esther, those Berkshire hills are covered with snow, and how deep it must lie in the valley! Poor mother! she has had a lonely life in the old parsonage. Her husband and children gone — all dead but myself, and to-morrow's sun will never rise for me on earth."

"O, William, my dear husband, do not say so! We hope to keep you with us some days longer. The doctor said that with care you might live a week. I promised not to deceive you in this matter, but to tell you the truth. These are precious hours. There, lie down, and I will give you some of your lavender and ether. You are faint and weary watching for mother."

"Yes, darling, I believe so. I am thinking how hard it will be for her to find me cold and speechless. I am the last, you know, the last of her flock that she loved so tenderly. I wanted to live to make her last days comfortable. We would have brought her here, Esther — here to this dear old city; and she should have had a nice sunny room in our home, that was to be, near the old church. It is hard to die now, when there is so much work for me to do on earth — wife and mother to love and care for — and — and, darling, I wanted to do more for Christ here. You will have to carry out our plans all alone now. Our little Sunday school down in the Hollow — there is a great work to be done there; but though ignorant and vicious, I am sure they can be reclaimed. Esther, I see a neat little church there in my dreams, and an industrious, thriving population."

"Yes, William, your plans shall all be carried out if possible. Now, rest a while; for I want

you to be bright and cheerful when your mother comes."

"I will lie still, Esther, and try to sleep; but you must pray with me first. I am so weak that I cannot frame the sentences myself. You know just what I need."

The young wife knelt by the bedside, and prayed in a clear, firm voice. It was a prayer wrung from the depths of a full heart, like a pearl from the deepest waters. When she closed, a sweet sleep had fallen on the sick man; and then the young wife bowed her head, and the pent-up tears flowed freely as she prayed — "O God, if this cup may not pass from me, give me strength to drink it."

This young couple had been married one year. It had been a year of rare and quiet happiness. They had begun life with a determination to live not unto themselves, but, taking Christ's example, seek out the lowly, the suffering, and the wicked, and while they

preached Christ crucified to them, show them also a way to honest industry and home comfort.

William was an enterprising young business man, who had been raised in the quiet and poverty of a country parsonage. His means were limited, but he had determined to win success in the old-fashioned way of honesty and faithful attention to business. His wife was the child of wealthy parents, and her refined city home was quite a contrast to the old house on one of the Berkshire hills, where William had passed his childhood. But the same active piety had pervaded both households, and this young husband and wife were one in spirit and in action. But just as they were about to move into a home of their own, William was seized with a fever, which, though subdued by the physician, weakened his system, naturally delicate, beyond the power of recuperation, and he sank slowly, but surely, to the grave.

There was no deception used when it was found he must die. The wife's love and her trust in God enabled her to bear up bravely; and while she watched day and night by her husband's side, that same love made her strong to bear fatigue and watching. Every moment was precious.

"William," said she one morning to him, when he had just wakened from a refreshing sleep, "do you believe our departed friends know what is going on in this world?"

"I don't know, Esther," he answered, slowly; "I don't know. I have been thinking about it; and last week I examined all the passages in the Bible which seem to have any reference to the subject. You will find them all marked in the old Bible which belonged to my grandfather, who used to say, 'God never conceals from his creatures any knowledge which will be good for them in this world. He has given to the patient student many keys to the secrets of

science—the path of a comet, the sights of distant worlds hidden from the unaided eye, the subtile juices of herb and tree, the hidden mysteries of ocean and mine. He has given him power to lay his hand upon the ocean's mane, and train the mettled steed to do his bidding; to catch the invisible, elastic steam to aid in the world's work, and side by side in harness with lightning to carry the world forward swifter than Time itself. But to certain kinds of knowledge he has said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther;" and to this last class, I firmly believe, belongs intercourse between the world of spirits and living men.'

"This was written before modern spiritualism had entered the little village where my father's parishioners lived in simplicity, satisfied with the faith as delivered to the saints, though in New York and Boston tables were turning and spirits writing. Swedenborg was unknown there, and the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress were their teachers in spiritual things.

"But I have been reading all that the Bible tells us of angels, and I think, — yes, I believe, Esther, — that God, who is a loving Father, will not permit our friendship and love — you see I use both words — to end with this life. No, dearest, I was won to you first, because I saw the spirit of our blessed Master in you; and he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. He never changes, and I think our love never will. I love you now; I shall continue to love you all through the ages of eternity. If God permits, I will come and minister to you, aid you in your work among the poor, and help you to live near to God. But, Esther, this belief is not essential to the performance of our duties here. We are to work and to learn. Life should have its quiet pauses, in which to gather rest for work, but no idle hours. The poor are to be ministered unto, the wicked to be reclaimed, and the sorrowing to be comforted. Your greatest consolation in my loss will be

work — work for God. Do not indulge in sentimental piety, in long reveries upon what I may be doing, or in fancying that I come to you in birds and flowers, in music or in the 'whispering air.' Of this, however, be assured: I shall continue to love you, to love you with all a spirit's intense love, and the consciousness of that will help you to say, 'Thy will be done' — *help* you; but remember the highest, truest submission is a will in such perfect harmony with God, that it can say, in the darkest hour, 'Let him slay me; I will trust in him.'"

This was the last, the only conversation which these two loving hearts held upon this subject.

The clock struck eight. A moment after it ceased, the shrill whistle of the locomotive roused the sleeper.

"I feel stronger now, dear Esther. I have

slept well. How clearly I see! The dimness has gone from my eyes, and every sense is quickened. Those rose-buds and that heliotrope were in the room this morning, and yet I did not perceive their beauty or their fragrance. Bring them to me; let me see these earthly flowers before I feed among the lilies, or walk upon the mountain of spices in the celestial gardens."

He had just taken the flowers in his hand, when his mother's voice was heard in the hall.

"My mother's voice! Ay, Esther, that is music to me. Hark!"

"How is William? May I go right to him?"

"Yes, yes, Esther, bring her right in. God is good to give me this strength before I depart. You must be strong for her, Esther, and help her to bear this loss. Mother has had great trouble; she is not strong. Her nerves are shattered, and her temper a little unbalanced by

sickness and poverty. I wish I dared — No, no, I ought not."

"What did you say, William? What did you wish? I did not hear the last of your sentence," said the wife, whose quickened ear and tender heart would not lose one word of the dying man; and if these words had been uttered, they would have reached her, no matter how low the tone.

"Never mind now, dearest. Go and welcome mother, and bring her to me."

The mother, a sickly-looking, bent old lady, entered and came to the bedside. Her eyes were dark, the features of the face sharp, the lips thin and compressed; and as she came there, travel-soiled and weary, in a somewhat rusty black dress, there was nothing attractive in face or manner. There was no resemblance between the mother and son. The broad, open brow, the large, light, expressive eyes, the soft, waving, abundant brown hair, and the placid,

beautiful expression, as if a light other than sun or star fell upon it, of the dying man, had nothing in common with the sallow, worn, unhappy face of the mother.

As she bent to kiss him, she exclaimed, "O, William, I cannot give you up, my last, my all, my only dependence. I cannot give you up, I cannot give you up!" and she sank upon the bedside with a groan that went to poor Esther's heart, and found such an echo there, that she had to turn away to gather calmness for her husband's sake.

"Esther, dear, please give mother that cup of tea which Bridget has just brought in. Now, mother, if you will drink that, I will talk to you. I have much to say, and but little time. Drink, mother; but when you come to the bottom of the cup, give me a little, as you used to do when I was a child."

The mother could not resist this appeal, and drank her tea; but her hand trembled when she

fed William, and she spilled the contents of the spoon upon the white counterpane.

"Never mind," said Esther, as the old lady appeared much annoyed. "I will spread this clean towel over the place."

"Now, mother," said William, "God has willed it that I must die. It is hard for me to leave you alone in the world. Do not make it harder by want of submission to his will."

"God has sent wave upon wave of trouble over you. I wanted to live to make a home for you, but it cannot be; and I have spent what little strength has been given me in trying to regulate your affairs, so that your little property will give you no anxiety."

"O, William, William, you must not die. Why did not God take me instead of you? Take me with you; I cannot survive your death."

"Be calm, mother," said the son. "Hear me

a few minutes, for there are some things which are necessary for you to know."

As he spoke, he laid his hand firmly and gently upon her arm, and even in that hour of weakness and suffering the stronger will and better poised nature prevailed. She was comparatively calm and still while he told her that he had released her little farm and homestead from mortgage, and that good Deacon Howland had promised to take his place, and see that the land was kept in order and the crops harvested.

He had thought of everything for her comfort, even to the wood for her next winter's fire, and the newspaper for her next year's reading.

When he finished, he was very tired, and the white circle about his lips, and the dimmed lustre of his eyes, warned his wife that he was taxing his strength too much. She gave him a little stimulant, and when he had drank it, he said, —

"Now, mother, kiss me and say good night. Then go and rest a while. If God spares me till morning, I want you to tell me about the dear old parsonage and the loved ones that have gone from there to heaven."

The old lady was very weary from her journey, and overcome with the excitement of the interview.

Precious as was every moment to Esther, she attended the old lady to her room, where a good fire and a warm bed awaited her. She bathed the tired feet, and rubbed the rheumatic shoulder, and left her, soothed, in a measure, to her rest.

When she returned to the sick chamber, the attendant said that the invalid had fallen asleep. And there he lay, with a face like that of the angel waiting for the resurrection of the Saviour.

In a few moments he opened his eyes, and smiled upon her.

"Esther, are you afraid?"

"No, darling. Why?"

"Because I am going to die, and I want no one but you with me. Will you stay? Have you courage?"

"Yes, William," with a smile that a seraph might have worn, and bravery like that of a martyr, putting down with a strong hand all thought of self and her own agony.

"Then come and let my head rest upon your bosom. There, that is right. We will meet again; I *know* it now."

The voice grew faint, a shadow passed over the fine features, and then a gasp as for breath. Esther dropped the fan with which she was fanning him, and laid her hand upon the forehead, while she bent her cheek to feel the faint breathing, if it were there. Suddenly his eyes opened, and with a look of earnest entreaty, like a loving child asking a favor, —

"Esther, will you remember my mother?"

"Yes, William, as long as her life is spared to us."

"Then I die happy. I know in whom I have believed. God is with me."

The head drooped towards her. One short struggle, and the spirit knew the body no more.

CHAPTER II.

"Earn life, and watch
Till the white-winged reapers come."

ESTHER was alone in an upper chamber — alone with her sorrow. It was midnight; but the city never sleeps, and the tread of the gay throng from the theatre in the next street was heard below, while the carriages rolled over the stony pavement. When these sounds died away, there came the echo of the watchman's monotonous tread. Still she sat there, pale, motionless, as if the life-blood had ceased to flow, but left her conscious, with such a strange feeling, like that of one who has been thrown from a great height, and lies helpless, bruised, and unable to rise. Her physical strength had been overtaxed, and, unconsciously to herself, every

nerve and muscle had been strained in the work of the last three months. She had smiled when her heart was near to breaking, she had read and sung when the unshed tears were kept back only by the effort of a strong will.

No other one had been allowed to wait upon her husband. She had prepared all his food with her own hands, and no watcher but herself kept the long night vigils when the beloved one was battling with the fever demon.

The strain was now removed, and the poor wife, with folded hands, sat alone, too worn to sleep, too weary even to undress herself. It was thus her mother found her, just as the morning sun brightened the windows of her rooms.

"My poor child, lean your head upon my bosom now; let me undress you, as I used to do when you were a child." Esther was passive, glad to be a child again. When the mother had chafed the benumbed hands and feet, combed

and smoothed the long, abundant hair, and put on a dressing-gown, she said, "Come, my child, come see William now."

Esther followed passively without a word or a tear. Her husband lay as if asleep upon the lounge — asleep, and dreaming of heaven, for a smile lingered on his lips. All expression of pain was gone, the high forehead was smooth and fair, and the hair was brushed one side with careless ease, as if he had just raised his hand to do it himself.

Esther laid her hand upon his forehead, and smiled.

"Mother, the light of heaven lingers here;" and while she gazed, a sweet peace stole into her spirit, and she knew that God had sent the Comforter unto her. She sat a while by his side, and then, at her mother's request, took some food, and went to her room to sleep. She was gentle as a child.

"I know, mother, he is happy. I shall go to

him when my work is done. Till then I stand between a precious memory and a great hope."

She slept for several hours. Her mother went into the room, and found her sleeping sweetly, with such a look of peace upon her countenance, that she wondered much, and said, —

"I thought my daughter could not live if William died; but God giveth his beloved sleep."

The mother was still by her side when she awoke.

"Mother, dear," she said, with a smile, "I used to think that I should not want to live if William died; but now I know there is work for me here. He told me so before he went home, and I have prayed to God to help me do it bravely and cheerfully. I shall never fear death any more. I am sure I shall die well if I can only live as Christ lived. Do you remember that beautiful extract which I read to

you a while since? I recalled the words as I was falling asleep.

"To-day, to-morrow, every day, to thousands the end of the world is close at hand. And why should we fear it? We walk here, as it were, in the crypts of life; at times, from the great cathedral above us, we can hear the organ and the chanting of the choir; we see the light stream through the open door, when some friend goes up before us; and shall we fear to mount the narrow staircase of the grave, that leads us out of this uncertain twilight into the serene mansions of the life eternal?"

"Yes, I remember it; and it seemed to me, when William died, as if I could almost see the track of glory which the angels travelled when they came to bear him home."

"I can hardly understand," said Esther, "this sweet peace and comfort which I feel. This world seems to be no place of rest, but a world for hard work, a discipline for a higher state.

Love, friendship, and all sweet family ties are given to us only to help us in our work. William, you know, had many plans to do good, and perhaps (I am not assured of this, however) he can aid me in it, though he is in heaven. At least, my love to him will be an incentive to me. I do not think he was taken away because I loved him so much. The trouble is, there isn't love enough in the world, save self-love. No, I wish I had been more worthy to love him. I think, mother, God and the angels loved him, too; and he is with them now, and still loves me. I think of him as looking down on this poor, wretched world of sin, and pain, and disorder, and saying to me, 'Live, love, and work as the Saviour did for it.' 'Consolation in work' were among his last words."

"I wish, Esther, that his mother could be comforted. She takes on dreadfully, and seems to think that God has dealt very hardly with

her. It is terrible to hear her saying every moment, —

“‘What shall I do in my old age? God has taken all. Why could he not have left me one? William was my dependence.’

“There she sits, rocking back and forth, the image of despair.”

“I will go to her, mother. She knows how dear he was to me, and when she thinks of my loss, she may learn to love me, and be comforted a little with that love.”

Esther hastened to Mrs. Gray, who still sat rocking herself, and moaning sadly.

“O, Esther, why didn’t you call me when my son died? Every word that he said was as precious to me as to you.”

“He died just after I left you, mother. His last care was for you.”

“O, Esther, I can’t bear it! I can’t understand why God should afflict me above all others. I am alone, all alone. He has taken my husband and three children.”

“All in heaven, I trust, mother. It will not be long before we shall join them. This affliction is but for a moment; and then, if we are purified by it, there is an eternal weight of glory.”

“Ah, but, Esther, you are young — not old, and worn, and paralytic. You are not friendless, and childless, and poor.”

“Not childless, mother; you are not childless. I am your child by as holy a tie almost as that of birth;” and Esther smoothed the gray hair, and kissed the thin cheek. “Come, mother, let us look at William. It comforts me; for though his lips speak not, the whole countenance is radiant with the glory of the angels that stood by him when he died.”

The poor old lady was somewhat soothed when Esther was near her; but the serenity of the latter was sorely tried, during the two days preceding the funeral, by the bitter moaning of the mother, who refused to be comforted.

Mrs. Gray was persuaded to remain a while in the city, though she fretted a great deal lest affairs should go wrong at home.

She suffered much from rheumatism; and one damp, cold day, notwithstanding the tender nursing of Esther, and the prescription of the doctor, her pain was not alleviated. At such times she mourned for her son, and would not be comforted.

"O, William, William, how dreary my lonely home will be! Don't you know, Esther, William always returned with me when I came to see him? and now I must go without him, and remain always in that house which seems now to me only like a tomb."

"But, mother, I am going with you. William's work is mine now. You will see how well I understand travelling, and what good care I shall take of you."

"Yes, yes, Esther, I know you are kind, very kind; and William loved you better, I

believe, than he loved his mother. But, child, you are young — not twenty yet; I am old and feeble. I can never have his loss made up to me. You will marry again, and be happy, while solitude and suffering will be my portion till I die."

Esther's large, beautiful eyes looked larger than ever, as she turned, with a look of amazement and pain, to the old lady; then her lips trembled, while around them was a pallor like that around the lips of the dying. Not one word escaped her; but her own mother, who was present, read that look of suffering, as Esther rose and left the room, motioning her not to follow.

Like a hunted hare she fled to the covert of her own room, and locking herself in, knelt to pray. For a few moments she felt the bitterness of death. In these days, which are, to most bereaved ones, the valley of the shadow of death, she had been so comforted by the

thought that death had only cemented her union to her beloved one! and now his mother, the very one who should have clung closest to her in her grief, had tried to hang a dark, terrible pall between her spirit and the glorified one in heaven.

It was hard to bear; made harder still by the repulsion which she now felt towards this woman, who in her selfish sorrow could thus trifle with the feelings of others.

"I must not feel so," she said; "it is sinful — *his* mother! How my heart went out towards her for his sake! How gladly would I be her servant, if need be, if I could minister to her wants!"

The next day was Sunday. Esther rose early, and, dressed in her plain mourning suit, prepared herself to go to the "Hollow."

Her husband had opened a Sunday school here. It was a wretched neighborhood, composed mostly of children whose fathers worked

in the iron works near by. Their homes were cheerless little shanties, and the whole appearance of the place was repulsive. The foundery, the shanties, a groggery, and a low grocery were all the buildings to be seen.

The school was held in a vacant room in the basement of the foundery. Through William's influence, two of the scholars — boys about fourteen years of age — had found employment, away from the settlement, with Deacon Goss, who was a benevolent and godly man. These boys hoped that they were Christians, and were efficient laborers in the school.

"Will you go alone?" said Esther's mother, as she saw her preparing to leave.

"Yes, mother; there is no danger. David and John are good protectors, and wicked as some of the settlers are, they loved William. Do not be anxious about me; I will return in good season to go to church with you at the second service."

It was a cold, but clear, bright morning as she walked briskly along the city streets. It was her first visit to the Hollow since her husband's death; but she was cheerful. "For now," she said, "I am surely doing the work appointed to me,"—recalling her promise to William.

As she turned into the low, dirty street, near the river and railroad depot, and just as she came in sight of the foundery, she saw David and John coming to meet her, each with a band of black crape on his arm.

The sight of this token of respect brought tears to her eyes; and it was with an effort that she replied to the boys' morning salutation, and to their remarks.

"We were sure you would come, ma'am, and we got the scholars all together; and they are very still, waiting for you."

Now, when Esther recalled the noisy scene which generally met her eyes as she entered the

school-room, her heart was glad; for she had doubted her own power to enforce order like William.

But when she entered the low, unfinished room, she was surprised to find every girl and boy seated, and the little rough desk festooned with black cambric, while some white flowers lay near the Bible.

These last, she knew, must have been obtained with some difficulty at that time of the year. Her worn, pale face, her mourning dress, and sweet smile had a very subduing effect upon these rough, uncouth scholars. There was scarcely a dry eye, while one or two wept aloud.

Esther felt strong in her work; and when, after they had repeated the Lord's prayer in concert, she attempted to pray herself, words were put into her mouth, and her whole soul went out to God for that school and that district, forsaken, as it had seemed to be, by God and man.

She went home that day encouraged in her work, and with more hope for the reformation of the place than she had ever dared indulge before. She was pained, however, to learn that work had stopped in the foundry for a while, and that some of the families were suffering for food and fuel. She had a week's work before her, in planning for their comfort and enlisting the sympathies of the benevolent in their behalf.

"They are a poor, miserable, drinking set," was often the reply which she received when seeking aid for them. "Hobbs, the owner of the foundry, is a reckless man, and an infidel, and has no interest in his workmen save to get the most out of them with the least pay."

"But there are little babies there that must not be left to die, and poor old women who are starving, and children without shoes and stockings; surely we must do for them," she would reply.

Thus she worked through the week, getting even Mrs. Gray to knit a pair of socks for a child — which work helped a little to draw her out from herself.

The next Sunday her school was increased by the addition of some of the workmen, who, won by what she had done for the physical comfort of their families, came to see if there was any good in the school. Esther was so interested in her work, that she forgot their presence when she prayed, otherwise than to remember how much they needed the blessings which she sought for them. Her humility and gentleness won their respect, and they sat down with the little children to spell out the "Sermon on the Mount."

CHAPTER III.

"The tongue can no man tame."

CITY life, with all its public attractions, — its lectures, theatres, churches, its museums and parks, — is still not free from the petty gossip which we are apt to think is peculiar to little country villages. Each *coterie* in the city has its members who make good the aphorisms of the apostle James: "The tongue can no man tame; it is full of deadly poison."

William Gray had not been in his grave a week before Mrs. Whitby was heard to say to her friend Mrs. Call, —

"What a strange little body is Esther Gray! Only think! She went to the 'Hollow' the very next Sunday after her husband died, and

during the week she was at Deacon Gass's and at Mr. May's house, and round among her lady friends, getting clothes and money for the poor families who are thrown out of work by the stopping of the foundery. She goes every morning to the cemetery with fresh flowers, but the rest of the day she is as busy as if she thought the world would stop if she took time to mourn in a decent way, like other folks."

"And then her mourning wardrobe!" said Mrs. Call. "The Seymours, you know, are among our best families, and if they are not rich, there is money enough to buy handsome mourning. One would have supposed they would have gone to Delamere's and ordered a complete outfit. Have you seen his late importations? They are elegant. I couldn't have believed it possible that black crape and bombazine could be made into such pretty trimmings, flounces, knots, bands, and

folds, that really make a mourning suit elegant! I ordered one when my baby died, and to speak the truth, Mrs. Whitby, it was the most becoming dress I ever wore. But there's Esther Gray, who certainly could have afforded elegant mourning (and it is so becoming to a young widow), just sent for one of the Burtons (the two sisters, you know, who belong to our church, and take in sewing, — nice folks enough, but they don't know anything about stylish dress-making), and said to the oldest one, —

"Miss Mary, I want you to purchase and make for me two plain mourning dresses, — you understand what would suit me, — and buy me suitable collars, &c., to go with them."

"She never had any goods sent to the house, nor any orders given to Madame Demery, who does make dresses elegantly! She gave her husband's mother a mourning suit. I suppose the old lady is poor, and they do

say she is a fretful, sickly woman. I know all that I tell you is true, because Mrs. Seymour's cook told my Bridget."

"Well, for my part, I don't like these odd ways. Esther Seymour used to be one of the prettiest and liveliest girls in town; and I don't know anything against her now, only she is so odd. One would suppose she might take time to mourn for her husband. When my brother died, I never made a call for six months, and though I did go to the opera twice, I went very quietly, in plain dress. I think there are some advantages in these customs. I had a nice time that winter, half of every day in a loose dress in my room, reading. I read Dickens, and a great deal of poetry that was so sweet and consoling! But Esther Gray is busy all the time, waiting upon those two old ladies (her own mother and Mrs. Gray), or else down to the Hollow. Well, everybody has their own ideas about things,

but it don't seem to me quite respectful to the dead!"

It was, perhaps, fortunate for Esther that none of this gossip reached her ears; but some of her calls of condolence tried and perplexed her. Dr. Clark, her pastor, was an exception. He had known her from infancy, and had watched, with deep interest, the unfolding of her character. He ran in for a few minutes almost every day at this time, but always with some book which he thought would interest her, or an account of some afflicted one in the parish who needed aid; never did he appear as if he came to give consolation. He spoke of William often, cheerfully, as if he were conscious of what was going on in this world; as if he were still the same in purpose, only with higher aims and clearer vision of the right and good.

These informal calls were a great comfort to Esther, but she never dreamed, in her

humility, that her pastor was learning a precious lesson from herself.

He too had known sorrow, having buried an only son, just in the prime of manhood. The sweet patience of Esther was a tonic to his own spirit. He knew how her heart yearned after the companionship of her husband, for he understood the sympathy of taste, the Christian love, the devotion of this couple, realizing his idea of an almost perfect marriage.

He appreciated her activity, and desire to do good. His own spiritual life was quickened, and his sermons were imbued with a deeper spirituality.

But there were other visits which tried Esther's patience severely. Mrs. Gracie was a near neighbor and distant connection of the family, and felt it her privilege and duty to act the part of consoler.

"O, my dear, dear Esther!" she exclaimed,

on her first call. "It is dreadful, dreadful! I know all the bitterness of your sorrow!" (She had lost a husband one year before, but was about to marry the second time.) "But time will alleviate in a measure. I have brought you in some sweet books of poetry. There are extracts from Byron, and Scott, and Tupper; then there is another book which has given me a great deal of consolation, 'Letters from the Dead.' It proves, without doubt, that in heaven they do pretty much as we do here, and that, if we could only believe so, they are with us and around their old homes all the time.

"I used to have such sweet, almost se-raphic, visions, that I would often lie abed all day in sweet contemplation. What matter how things went on in the kitchen, so I could have such delightful converse with spirits! I often repeated those lines of your favorite Watts, —

'My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss.'"

This conversation troubled Esther. That beautiful verse of Dr. Watts could not apply to her. She thought of the singing bird, in a spring morning, sitting on the swaying bough of a tree, rejoicing in its own music, happy in the ambient air, the bright sun, and the green foliage. But how could she "sit and sing herself away to everlasting bliss," when there was so much ignorance, and pain, and suffering in this world?

Mrs. Gracie had married, when quite young and poor, a man much older than herself, whose money was supposed to be his chief attraction. His main business here was real estate investments and bank stocks. Could heaven give him such pleasures?

And then, Esther did not want to die. "I

feel," she said to Dr. Clark, "that I don't want to leave this world till I know more about it, and have done more work for my Master. When I was at school, I wanted to go *through* the course, to graduate, to fit myself to leave; and I am sure God has something for me to do, or he would not give me such health and vigor to use for him."

"Don't trouble yourself, Esther, about Mrs. Gracie's sentimental reveries. Be strong and firm in the path you have marked out for yourself. God will lead you right, if you trust him. By the way, I had almost forgotten my errand. There is to be a sacred concert this evening for the benefit of the Old Ladies' Society. The music is by our best performers, who have volunteered their services for the occasion. They will sing many of those old tunes that your husband used to sing so much, and which he said his

mother, who was a great singer in her youth, taught him. We shall also hear, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and parts of 'The Messiah.' I thought it might do Mrs. Gray good to go."

"I am sure it will," said Esther, "for she seems to feel more interest in music than in anything else belonging to this world."

"*Belonging to this world*, my dear child! Our music here is like the crooning of an infant when compared to that which will salute our ears when we enter where seraphs sing immortal strains upon their golden harps, and where the redeemed from all-kindred and tongues shall chant that glorious anthem—'Worthy is the Lamb.' Sacred music brings us very near to heaven."

Mrs. Gray, the elder, was very willing to go to the concert when she learned that the tunes of her girlish days were to be sung.

A carriage was ordered; and Esther was

very happy when she saw the enjoyment of the two ladies at her side. Her own face beamed with rapture as she listened to Mendelssohn's *Elijah* — "He, watching over Israel." She was very lovely, even in her "plain mourning;" but her interest in her companions was such that she was not aware how many eyes were attracted towards her.

There was a crowd, and she made her way out very slowly. As she was guarding poor, rheumatic Mrs. Gray from the pressure of those around her, she heard a lady say, —

"Only see — there is Mrs. Gray! Her husband hasn't been dead two weeks!"

"She is too lovely to remain in seclusion," was the reply of the gentleman.

Poor Esther's cheeks burned, and her heart was pained. She hurried out, but not until a gentleman whom she had known before her marriage espied her, and came to offer his services to see her to the carriage. But good

old Dr. Clark, who was one of those fortunate persons endowed with a mesmeric power to understand the hearts of his friends, had already placed his wife in his carriage, and now came to aid Esther, but not till another arrow had found the mark the *archer meant!*

"Dear me! there's Mrs. Gray at a concert! I shouldn't think she would feel like singing."

The minister heard it, and drawing her arm within his, while poor Mrs. Gray leaned upon the other, he said, in a low voice, —

"Esther, Jeremiah prayed to be hidden from the strife of tongues. Keep your heart at peace. You have done right. This poor, weary spirit at our side has had her pain soothed, and is happier for the effort which you have made. If your husband knows it, he will approve."

O, the blessed peace of a kind word! Dr. Clark's presence was always like sunlight

and dew, bringing quiet and peace to the humble and the suffering of his flock.

Mrs. Gray became so restless, and was so desirous to go to her country home, that Esther did not try to detain her longer, but prepared for the journey. They could go on the railroad from Albany for sixty miles; but then came ten miles over the Berkshire hills to the little parsonage where the old lady lived.

"If William were here!" she kept exclaiming, while each repetition of the words was like a dagger to Esther's heart. The tears would come, and she could not avoid, now and then, going by herself to let them flow freely.

At the depot she found David and John, who had come to bid her good by, and ask if the school would be given up on the next Sunday.

"Because, we thought, ma'am, may be, we

could keep them together, and sing hymns, and read the Bible."

"Dr. Clark will send you a teacher, boys; but I shall be gone only one Sunday. Look for me week after next."

The boys' faces expressed great pleasure. They had feared to lose her for the winter.

"There, now we are nicely seated," she said to Mrs. Gray, after placing the old lady not far from the stove, and by a window.

"Are you comfortable?"

"Yes; as much as I expect to be in this world. O, Esther, I remember when I came before, how proud I was of William! I felt as if I had no care in this world."

Esther made no reply. Her heart was full.

There is an old parsonage in a little hill town in Western Massachusetts that was built more than a hundred years ago. It was the home of the first pastor of the place. Two large branching elms, now a century old, — for

they were planted by the same pastor, scarcely past twenty-four years of age when settled there, — shade the house from the summer heat, but rattle their naked branches in the winter storms, and make different music from the summer whispers of their leaves. It is a fine village, with wild, mountainous scenery around it, and a pretty river winding through it. Years ago the people were farmers. There was one church, one minister, one doctor, no lawyer, two stores, an academy, and a mail-bag twice a week. The modern spirit of improvement has come to this peaceful place, and it now has three churches; but though there is a larger population, there are no more regular worshippers than went up to the old house on the hill fifty years ago.

There are two lawyers, and they thrive; a mail every day, and plenty of loungers round the office, waiting for it. The circus, travelling theatre, and menagerie come once

every year, and carry off the stray change that used to be carefully hoarded by the poor for a rainy day. They have built a poorhouse, and have fifteen or twenty inmates.

If the good man who first gathered this church on the hill should come back, he would feel himself at home in his own house, for the parsonage has changed little since he left it. The elms were fifty-six years old when he bade them farewell—only about one score and five years younger than himself. Inside, the house has altered little. It was well built, like most work our forefathers did, and its solid timber needed only the outside polish of a coat of paint now and then. The very chair in which he sat and wrote those long sermons, full of the meat of sound doctrine and the logic of a mind that knew what it believed and grasped its creed tenaciously; the notch in the chimney, made for his clay pipe; the little round "light-stand,"

that held the home-made candle when he studied into the small hours of the night; ay, and the room where he prayed so much, for he was a man eminent for prayer,—all remain as he left them.

But the world outside! Ay, what would the old gentleman say if he should enter that house where spiritualists are turning tables and getting "communications" for their spiritual sustenance! or in yonder place, where a dapper young student is quoting Renan and Colenso, and talking of those remarkable *men*—Plato, Christ, Confucius, and Swedenborg!

Dear old man! How his heart would be pained! and how sadly would he turn to his old study, and, shutting the door, kneel to pray for these descendants of his former flock, that they might be led back to the good old paths!

It was to this house the two travellers came after a long, cold ride in a sleigh.

A young girl, in the capacity of half servant and half companion, came out to aid in getting poor Mrs. Gray into the house. There was a fire in the kitchen only. Thither they went. After drinking a cup of tea, the old lady sought her bed, which was in a small room adjoining the kitchen.

"Will you go to bed too?" said the girl, as she saw Esther's look of weariness. "I'll lead the way, ma'am," taking up a tallow candle.

"I *need* a guide," thought Esther, as she followed through the large, dreary-looking room, called parlor, across a spacious, uncarpeted hall, and up stairs to a square front chamber. The room was scantily supplied with furniture. A high-post bedstead, an old-fashioned bureau, a little round table, three uncomfortable, high chairs, and a braided mat before the bed, were all that it contained.

The weather was cold, some degrees below

zero; but the large, old-fashioned fireplace was securely closed by a wooden fireboard. To Esther, accustomed to a house warmed throughout to a summer temperature, and to an open sea-coal fire in her room, to plants, books, and all those nameless accessories which make home attractive, the place had an air of gloom which chilled her to the heart. She shivered with cold, and the thought would intrude that Mrs. Gray had been a little selfish and thoughtless in not considering her comfort; but she checked such thoughts at once as she recalled the loneliness and sickness of the poor old lady.

She threw open the heavy wooden shutter, and looked out into the night. The moon was hidden behind a cloud, while across the sky troops of clouds were massing themselves for a storm.

The branches of the old elms shook as if fearing the coming tempest. Esther closed the

blind quickly, for the prospect without was as cheerless as the view within.

The high bedstead, with its huge feather-bed and ample blankets, was more inviting. She was young and vigorous. The warm blood circulated rapidly in her veins, and amid sweet thoughts of heaven and the loved one there, she fell asleep. She was awakened in the night by the loud sighing of the wind, and the rasping sound of the branches of the trees as the wind swept them against the house. There came a sound which was new to her. It was the wind whistling through the long, narrow gorge between the hills. A storm had risen, and, as it increased, the house rocked to its foundation. It was well for Esther that she had heard her husband speak of these mountain storms, and the peculiar sensation when the house rocked. "But we learned not to fear," he said, "for we knew the foundation was strong, and the timbers heavy."

Esther recalled those beautiful words of David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; who maketh the clouds his chariot; who walketh upon the wings of the wind."

While repeating this psalm she fell asleep again; nor did she waken till the girl came to the door in the morning with some water, for any water left in the ewer, would have been solid ice by morning. To Esther, accustomed to her bath and warm dressing-room, this country life offered a great change. But her happy temperament surmounted these difficulties, and making her toilet as quickly as her benumbed hands would admit, she hastened down stairs to Mrs. Gray. This lady was up and busy preparing breakfast. The table was laid in the kitchen; and though the coarse blue ware was not attractive, and black tea not a pleasant substitute for the delicious coffee of her own mother's table, yet the bread

and butter were sweet, and her digestion was good. The wind had lulled, but the snow was falling fast, and had already barricaded the doors.

"We have one of our old-fashioned snow-storms," said Mrs. Gray, "and are snow-bound for one week. It takes a long while to clear out our roads in winter: the worst of it is, our mails do not reach us."

Esther's heart sank within her, for she remembered the last words of her own mother—"Write every day, my daughter; my heart yearns for you, whenever you leave me for a day; and yet I would not have you do otherwise than go with William's mother."

There was a look in that dear, loving face, as she said that, which pained Esther, and haunted her memory for many days after; but it was some months before she could interpret it.

She was surprised to see that Mrs. Gray

forgot her rheumatism in her work. She was one of those country housekeepers who prefer to do everything with their own hands, and nothing but absolute inability, at times, induced her to employ help, and this "help" was to be pitied; for it was impossible to satisfy the exacting mistress, whose ways were very peculiar. The house was rendered more cheerful after breakfast by an open wood fire in the parlor, but few books or papers were to be seen.

The Bible and Hymn Book were there, and Esther, at the old lady's request, read a chapter, prayed, and joined in singing one of those old tunes in which she delighted. The snow fell without, darkening the windows, covering hills, and filling up valleys; capping every fence, post, and roof-tree, and falling on the graves on Burial Hill till they looked like white billows carved in marble. It was a pure, but stern, cold scene. Esther

gazed from her chamber window upon it, thinking of the seeds, and roots, and bulbs, that nestled beneath this warm covering, and that would, in the future, blossom forth in greenness and beauty. "Beautiful type of the resurrection! I know that He who can change this landscape from its white robe of apparent death to the flowery mantle of spring can give me my beloved again!"

She struggled to throw off the homesickness which was creeping over her, and went down to see in what way she could aid the old lady. But the storm mood was upon her. "Everything was out of order. Strange that girls nowadays know nothing of housekeeping; everything had gone wrong in her absence!" and turning in the treadmill of her kitchen, she was "setting things to rights," as she termed it. Fortunately, Esther had some material with her, out of which she fashioned some caps and collars for the old lady; but

she was an adept at her needle, and the work occupied her but a few hours. She never indulged in crocheting and embroidery; not that she disapproved of them in others, but her time was fully occupied at home in household duties, plain sewing for the needy, and in systematic study. She was a dainty little housekeeper, deft in all those nice ways that make a home and a table so attractive. She knew how to make the whitest and lightest biscuits, the creamiest of cream tea-cakes, and pastry that was flaky without much shortening. Cooking, in her hands, was one of the fine arts. She longed to help her mother in the baking that was proceeding, but any attempt in that direction was repulsed, and she therefore contented herself with her needle, and the Pilgrim's Progress, which she found up stairs.

"The house is pretty much stripped of books," the old lady said. "You see I gave

grandpa's library to Charles when he was studying for the ministry; and what there was left, you remember, I sent to William. I see he has preserved them all. I have always had too much work to do to read anything but the Bible. All the other books belonged to Mary, who took them away with her when she was married. Charles, Mary, and William, all gone, and I am left like a dry and withered stalk!" Then she would weep, and refuse to be comforted.

The evening shadows came early on the house, the windows of which were already curtained by the driving snow; and when the old tall clock in the corner struck five, Esther found herself taking her tea by the light of one of those tallow candles. The long evening closed in; the wind had ceased; but they were completely snow-bound. The tired "help" went early to her room; the old lady dozed in her chair, while Esther wrote to her mother.

When Mrs. Gray went to her bed at eight o'clock, and the wood fire burned low on the hearth, and the candle low in its socket, Esther sat alone, longing for the voice, the one voice, that would have turned all the shadows of the old house to brightness for her.

CHAPTER IV.

"She hath no scorn of common things,
And though she seems of other birth,
Round us her heart entwines and clings,
And patiently she folds her wings
To tread the humble paths of earth."

THERE are moments when the intense longing for our dead comes, and will not be appeased; when we would walk over burning coals, or sail through arctic seas, or give ten years of common life for one word from the departed.

Esther put out the candle, for she did not quite like the idea of going to bed in the dark through that cheerless entry, and thrifty Mrs. Gray had left her no fresh candle. There was something weird and strange in the house, and the room, with its shadowy corners, and Esther

remembered what is sometimes said of the dead, — that, if they revisit this world, they come first to scenes familiar to them.

For a few moments she longed for this, — to see the semblance of that beloved form, to hear the echo of that voice once more. Such was her intense longing, that she knelt and prayed that William might come. While she prayed, this passage occurred to her: "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter."

She was quiet, passive, and never afterwards did she pray for the dead to return. She had relighted her candle, and was about going up stairs, when she heard the click of the garden gate, and, turning aside the curtain, saw a man closely wrapped in an overcoat, and wearing a fur-cap tied about his head, ploughing his way through the deep snow in the yard. He had a lantern in his hand.

As he knocked at the door, Esther hesi-

tated a moment about opening to him; but, recollecting the quiet character of the neighborhood, and fearing that some one was in distress, she withdrew the bolt, and stood face to face with a man whose manner at once disarmed all suspicion. He was evidently surprised more at seeing her than she was at his coming at that unusual hour.

Esther, we have said, was very lovely; and, as she stood there now, her figure, petite and graceful, framed by the old doorway, she never looked fairer, her large eyes full of curiosity to know what could have brought the stranger there at that time, and through the snow.

"Pardon me," he said; "I thought Martha Brown was here, and hoped to find nurse Giddings, who has been staying with her in the absence of Mrs. Gray."

"Mrs. Gray has returned," said Esther, "and nurse Giddings has gone to Feeding Hills."

The stranger looked disappointed, and was turning away, when, as if he thought his intrusion at that time of night, needed an excuse, he added, "I have a little child very sick. He cannot live till morning, I fear, and I hoped to find nurse Giddings, as the doctor is on the other side of the mountain, and cannot return till to-morrow. My name is Brainard, and I live in the little white house yonder."

Esther's eyes brightened. "Ay, it is the minister, William's friend. You knew my husband, William Gray?"

"And this is his wife, Esther, of whom I have often heard. I hope I may see you again; but I must hasten to my dying child!"

"May I ask," said Esther, timidly, "what is the matter with your child?"

"Croup. No hope, I fear;" and the minister's words were few, for the sorrow that choked them.

"Now, if you will take *me*," said Esther,

cheerily, "I will go with you. I have some experience in that disease."

The minister looked at her doubtingly.

"If you could come, your presence would be a comfort to my wife; but the snow is deep. My horse is at the gate; it is not far, and I can walk by your side; but how to get to the gate!"—looking at the two feet deep snow which lay in the yard.

"Do you see this fence comes near to the door? The snow is not deep on that. I can walk the broad rail. One moment, and I will be here in my rubber boots and water-proof."

The poor man was in perplexity and distress. In such times we grasp at straws. Had he known how Esther had tended many a poor, forlorn, ignorant mother, when her child was said to be dying with croup, he would have felt that it was something more substantial than a straw at which he grasped.

Esther walked the fence, aided by Mr.

Brainard, with the agility of a fawn, and, springing lightly upon the saddle, which was not quite so easy (being a man's saddle, and she sitting sidewise) as the padded and spring saddle of her own pony at home. However, she arrived safely at the parsonage, none the worse for her adventure.

She was ushered into a nursery, where a faint, delicate little woman was holding in her arms a chubby boy about four years old.

The little fellow was gasping for breath, and appeared in great distress. The mother was fear-stricken and almost helpless, but trying to force something into the mouth of the child.

Not many minutes passed before Esther was acting with her usual promptness in such cases. The mustard-bath was prepared, and other remedies, such as could be found in the house. It was a hard case.

The disease fought desperately for the child, but it was at last conquered by the persever-

ance and skill of Esther. Towards morning the boy fell into a peaceful sleep, and the mother sat over him, weeping tears of joy.

Esther was very willing to accept the offer of a room and bed for herself.

The "prophet's chamber," which almost every country minister keeps sacred to hospitality, was her resting-place. It was warm, cosy, and contained a small book-case of choice volumes, and a few good engravings on the wall.

Esther left her lamp burning, lest she should be needed again in haste. Its light fell on an engraving of "Christ blessing little children," and she fell asleep while contemplating it.

Her sleep was so sound that the bright winter's sun—a tardy riser himself in December—shone full into the east window, and saluted her with his morning smile, so bright and glittering in that snow-white land, that it opened her drooping lids. At the same moment a sweet voice at the door said,—

"Please, may I come in?"

When Esther opened the door, the little patient of the night stood before her, fresh and bright-looking, with the sweetest dimples in his little fat cheeks, as he said, —

"Mamma is making some griddle-cakes for breakfast, and we are to have maple sirup on them."

"How nice that will be, Freddie! I like maple sirup very much."

"I like it the bestest of any thing," he said. He was sent to call the guest to breakfast, but he lingered, watching her very earnestly, as she smoothed her hair, giving her curls a little moisture, and a few rolls upon her fingers, for Nature had been very generous to her, leaving little for the hair-dresser to do.

Freddie came gradually close to her, and, putting up his little red lips, said, "Mamma says I must kiss you, and thank you for making me well." Esther bent to caress him, inwardly thanking God with all her heart that he had sent her there.

Notwithstanding all the criticisms upon our New England ministers and deacons, and though some of our talented and witty writers have chosen to caricature them, there are rare apostolic men among them, — living epistles, read and known only in the villages where they live self-denying and pure lives, — men there are among them of good scholarship, who read not theology alone, but the best literature of the day; men of small means, but of great thoughts; poor in bank stock, but rich in good works.

Mr. Brainard, who stood in the little dining-room, ready to welcome Esther, was of this stamp. He ranked among the best of his class in college and in the theological seminary. Nature had given him a fine *physique*, and he, by constant physical training, had shown his gratitude for it. He could walk his twenty miles without fatigue; had botanized and geologized all over these Berk-

shire hills; inured himself to winter's cold and summer's heat; studied hard, and worked with his hands on his little farm.

When he left the seminary he received a call to a city church; but, with rare wisdom, he preferred to settle with this little hill church on a salary of six hundred dollars. The people would have increased it, but they were not rich, and he was not exacting.

He would have done very well had he married a wife who was fitted for this country home. But, like too many intellectual giants, he was won by the pretty face of a school-girl whom he used to meet in his college days going to school in her straw hat with blue ribbons, and her dainty little white apron.

Such doll faces generally have brains to correspond, and after the honeymoon was over, Mr. Brainard found that he had a darling little pet on his hands, who loved him dearly, but to whom bread-making was Greek;

the composition of a pie a mystery, and all the details of the kitchen unsolved problems.

When the poor husband found this to be the case, he was dismayed at first. It seemed to him incredible that a woman should be ignorant of these matters. He had supposed the knowledge of them came almost by intuition, for his mother, with her good health and household skill, presided in kitchen and parlor with equal ease.

His wife's own little patrimony was exhausted in furnishing her house and wardrobe. Servants were difficult to obtain in the country, and expensive when obtained.

Mr. Brainard sat in his study one day, musing upon the helplessness of his wife. He had breakfasted on half-cooked biscuit, muddy coffee, and a greasy doughnut. He was one of those men who do not like to submit to a curable evil. A bright thought

struck him. He sent for Miss Beecher's Cook Book and Domestic Economy, and studied them. Then he selected a few of the most useful receipts, as bread-making, cooking beef, mutton, and chicken, coffee, and griddle-cakes. He omitted cakes and pies. Step by step, little by little, he taught himself and his wife. Gradually they came to have a healthful table, though their bill of fare was simple. He could not leave his higher work for the complicated machinery of cakes, sauces, pickles, &c., of the *cuisine*. But fresh fruit and bread, meat and vegetables, good coffee and tea, were always found upon his table. If his wife was ill, he could attend to his own wants, and carried the nice precision of chemical analyses into his work.

The little doll wife, so sweet when she was married, became, like other sweets, somewhat soured by the trials of housekeeping and maternity. She was not so much to blame. A

Sevres china vase is not fit for every-day use in the kitchen. She loved her husband and her children, but the rough places were too hard for her delicate feet, and the burden too heavy for her slight frame.

Mr. Brainard realized his mistake, but, with the courage of a brave nature, he took the burdens upon himself, and never murmured. The great want which he felt was mental companionship. Poor little Mrs. Brainard never read a book through after she came out of school. She now and then read a memoir and poetical extracts; but she made and embroidered her children's clothes, and was never weary in taking care of her babies. Her husband gradually learned that sad lesson for a strong intellect—to live one part of his life *alone*. He sighed sometimes when he recalled the aspirations of his youth.

He bade Esther good morning as she entered the room, and he looked not at all

fatigued, though he had not slept at all during the night.

"I have just returned from Mrs. Gray's," he said. "I was afraid she might be anxious about you; and I had some curiosity to retrace our path of last night."

"I am much obliged to you for your thoughtfulness. I had been thinking that my mother would be puzzled to explain my midnight flight."

"She says you must not think of returning till the roads are broken out. This will make you our guest till evening. We will do our best to keep you from being homesick."

"I think you can improve a little of the day in sleep," said the wife, whose heavy eyelids and pale face spoke her own need.

"I feel quite refreshed," said Esther, "and am doing justice, you see, to these cakes and sirup. I need not go farther than my own room for amusement, for I saw Dr. Arnold's

Memoirs in the bookcase. I have not read them, and would like to do so."

"I'll bring my books — all of 'em," said Freddie. "I have lots of story-books; but the best story of all is 'The Ugly Duck.' Did you ever read the Ugly Duck?"

"No; but I would like to do so, Freddie."

"I will show you my dolls," said little Katie. "I have a lady doll, dressed in lace and satin, and her name is 'Lady Alice;' and then I have a 'Topsy,' the funniest little black-faced doll, with tumbly hair and short, red petticoat."

"And baby — what will our darling Minnie do?" said papa, to the little one-year-old pet, who sat by his side in a high chair.

She put up her little lips to kiss him.

"Ay, yes; that is what Minnie can do. She can love, and that is all. This world would be very gloomy without the presence of children, though they do fill our hearts with

anxiety sometimes. I wouldn't like to live over those two midnight hours again, Mrs. Gray. I was almost in despair when I knocked at your door. We have never lost a child, and this was our first experience of the croup."

"I'm all well now, papa," said Freddie, "and I like Mrs. Gray for a doctor very much."

"What's that? what's that you are saying?" said a bluff, stout man, with a broad, full face and a chest that looked as if its breadth might equal the length of his whole figure. "Look here! I have plodded through this snow, not stopping for a mouthful of breakfast, because I heard that that little fellow who is stuffing down griddle-cakes, greedy as a bear in spring, and whose cheeks stand out with fatness, was just gone with the croup! That's a pretty trick to play me, young man!"

While he was talking, the doctor took off his cap, and a huge scarf in which he was

wrapped, displaying a large, round head, somewhat bald, but with a crown of dark-brown, curly hair. He looked more like a presiding genius at weddings and merry-makings than like one who was never absent from the births and deaths of the village people.

"Ah, doctor, the child was very sick," said Mr. Brainard, who had placed a seat for the doctor at table, and taken some hot baked potatoes from the oven.

"Looks like it!" said the doctor, gruffly, as he took the proffered seat.

"Dr. Strong," said Mrs. Brainard, as she passed him a cup of coffee, "Freddie wouldn't have lived till morning if Mrs. Gray had not come to our relief. Excuse my rudeness in not presenting you before. Dr. Strong — Mrs. Gray. Mrs. Gray is the wife of William, whom we all knew and loved so well."

The doctor turned towards the slight, graceful figure with a critical eye. "*Mrs. Gray*

cured Freddie," was not quite to his taste. He was very tenacious of any interference in his kingdom, for he reigned supreme as the Esculapius of the county, and he was of the old school, with as firm a faith in pills and powders as in woman's utter incompetency to administer them without his permission.

But his study of the sweet, gentle face before him disarmed all prejudice, and he said to himself, "Cure the croup! *She* cure the croup! This poor, weak sister, the minister's wife, got frightened, and thought her child would die, and the very sight of that face gave her hope and courage. Croup! I should like to see those delicate fingers making mustard poultices, and rubbing that sturdy rogue!" But aloud, in his pleasantest manner, he said, with a shade of sarcasm in his voice, —

"How do you manage, Mrs. Gray, in such desperate cases as our Freddie?"

Esther explained, in a clear, simple way, but

using scientific terms where she could not well avoid them, the nature of Freddie's complaint.

The astonished doctor let his coffee cool, and his griddle-cakes remain on his plate, as he listened. Then, purposely asking questions in a scientific way, he learned that the little woman before him had studied the subject, and knew whereof she discoursed.

The doctor devoted himself to his breakfast for a few moments, and then suddenly burst out with the question, as if he could restrain himself no longer, "Mrs. Gray, I knew your husband from his infancy. I know, also, that he married a daughter of my old college friend Seymour, who was one of the successful men in life, and whose wife and daughters, I supposed, were of the butterfly species, or the lily family, who neither toil nor spin, but make life a holiday. How happens it that you can come up into the country, and go out in a storm that would keep a brave man at home, to cure a child with the croup?"

Esther smiled. "We have too much wretchedness and poverty in our cities, Dr. Strong, for any Christian woman to sit down with folded hands. William and I had a district in which we were interested, — 'The Hollow,' as it is called, — and so many children died of the croup there a few years ago, that I determined to study the nature of the disease. Doctors, you know, sir," she said, smiling, "want large fees in the city, and the poor mothers could ill afford the luxury of medical advice. They sent for us. William went with me; and we had twenty cases of real or apparent croup the last two years. We lost but one, and that one the child of a drunken mother. Then scarlet fever came, to try our patience, till I thought the district would be decimated. William had set his heart upon redeeming that vicious, poverty-stricken district, and he tried to follow the Savior in healing the diseases of the body, that he might more effectually cure

the leprosy of sin. I then turned my attention to that disease, and, aided by our family doctor, Dr. Bumstead — "

"Yes, I know him; a rare scholar, and a good man," said Dr. Strong.

"Well, he gave me books and instruction. My father had drilled me in Latin and French, so that I could read some works, which were of great value, in the latter language."

"And so you went through all this for the sake of Boggs's foundery men, as miserable a set as ever cursed a city, — and no wonder, for that Boggs is only out of prison because he is too great a rascal to get there."

"Then you know all about Boggs Hollow?" said Esther, in surprise.

"Yes; I spent one winter in attendance on medical lectures in your city, and boarded at Boggs's. It was near the hospital. What has become of his oldest son?"

"He died of delirium tremens, a few months ago."

"I might have foretold that. And his youngest son? He was a handsome boy of twelve when I was there."

"He is a partner of his father now. It is to be regretted that he did not leave home years ago."

"And so, if I understand you, you are trying to civilize that worse than heathen neighborhood! I say worse than heathen, for such a population, in a Christian neighborhood, is more hopeless than a mission in Siam."

"We are trying to *Christianize* it. It was William's work. His heart was in it, and we have had much to encourage us, sir. Two of the boys are in Deacon Goss's employment, having left Mr. Boggs, and are, we hope, Christians. They are a great help to me."

"The Boggs colony," as it is sometimes called," said the doctor, "are from the lower class of Englishmen, from the collieries in the old country, imported by Boggs himself, at so

much per head, and sold to him, body and soul. I should sooner hope to redeem the Caffres."

"We don't despair," said Esther. "You would see a change for the better now, if you were to visit them."

The doctor had finished his breakfast, and was taking his ease in an arm-chair, forgetful of Mrs. Burr's 'rheumatics,' or Mrs. Brown's twin babies, only two days old, when he was roused by a sharp knock at the door, and some one asking, "Is Dr. Strong here?"

It was the rough voice of Farmer Brown, who lived a quarter of a mile on the road below Mrs. Gray's house.

"Good morning, doctor; you are wanted at the old parsonage; Mrs. Gray has fallen down stairs, and broken her leg."

The doctor started at once, and Esther turned, with a look of anxious inquiry, "Mrs. Gray—my mother, you mean? Over there?" pointing to the parsonage.

"Yes, ma'am. She thought her girl—Martha Brown, my daughter, that is—was sleeping too long,—and I suppose she was, being as the snow settled on the windows and darkened 'em, and the old lady must needs get out of her bed, and go up the back stairs to call her. They're dreful narrer, steep stairs, and it was a dark mornin', and the old lady sort of rheumatic, and so she made a misstep, and went to the bottom. It was a livin' marcy that I happened along, for she might ha' laid on the floor all day, for all Martha could do. But she's taking on mightily now."

"Why, I was there at five o'clock, Mr. Brown," said Mr. Brainard.

"Yes, and the old lady was snug abed then. Pity she didn't lie there. She answered you, when you tapped upon the window."

"Mr. Brainard," said Esther, "can you take me to her at once?"

"My horse and cutter are at the door," said

Dr. Strong. "A young lady who can walk fence rails, and ride horseback at midnight in a north-east storm, can possibly venture into a country doctor's sleigh."

Poor Mrs. Gray was lying on her bed in the dark little bedroom near the kitchen, moaning piteously. The doctor, who knew his patient, ordered a fire in the parlor, and a bed to be made up there, and then, with the assistance of Farmer Brown, she was moved there, and her limb properly set.

"There!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, as he finished. "Blessed be fine ladies without nerves! You're the only young woman, Mrs. William, that I have seen for many a day, that can stand by and help set a limb. They all tell me that their nerves are too delicate."

"Ay; but, doctor, God has blessed me with vigorous health."

"'Tain't so much God's blessing you with it, as that he has given you common sense to

take care of yourself, and use your limbs, and eyes, and ears, and nerves as he intended we should; but there is a limit to human strength. I have given your mother some quieting powders. She'll sleep for some hours — Martha Brown, is there a good fire in Mrs. William's chamber?"

"No, sir; there is a great wooden fireboard up there."

"Well, Martha Brown, we'll take it down." And the doctor bade her come on with a pair of andirons, while Farmer Brown was to bring some wood.

When the wood crackled and blazed, he called Mrs. William to come and look at it.

"That's beautiful!" said he. "Talk about flowers and trees! Give me fire for beauty. There's a winter bouquet that beats all the flowers in the king's garden. Now, Mrs. Williams I am monarch of this village; there's none to dispute my power; not even the min-

ister, for his kingdom is not of this world; but mine is of the earth, earthy, and I am going to enjoy my power while it lasts. You are to stay here till your mother awakens; and, as your eyes don't droop much yet, here is a book, which a friend sent me, just published — 'Aurelian, or Rome in the Third Century.' It is about the early Christian martyrs; and as any one who undertakes to redeem Boggs's Hollow must be worthy to fight with beasts at Ephesus, I will leave it with you."

Esther hardly knew for which to be most thankful — the book or the fire.

Now that her mother had fallen asleep, she could not wholly repress a sense of homesickness. The face of her own mother was before her: "I cannot spare you long, my child;" and then the dying words of William, "Esther, don't forget my mother!" The dead have a strange power over us. Their words are more sacred than those of the living. Esther must

not think of home for weeks. That helpless sufferer, irritable and capricious as she was, was William's mother — his dying charge to her!

But how merciful God was in raising up friends at this time!

The doctor's cheery, bluff ways pleased her; and then his "Mrs. William!" How could he divine that no other title would please her as well?

Then Mr. Brainard. There was a reserved strength expressed in his fine face and well-shaped head that interested her much.

She found a quaint old low chair in the house, and, placing a braided mat before the fire, she sat down to read "Aurelian," and, in the sufferings of the early Christians, learn that the Christian life is a warfare, and not a reverie.

CHAPTER V.

"Is that you, Esther?" It was the weak, complaining voice of Mrs. Gray that Mrs. William heard, as she came down after two hours delightfully spent in reading of the sufferings and triumphs of the early Christians. Tried by their faith and works, how few of us modern Christians can say, "I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith"?

"Yes, mother; what can I do for you?"

"There is no one who can do much for me now, nor can I do for others. Troubles never come alone. I was sure, when William died, that something else — some other trouble — would happen. It all comes of that lazy Martha Brown. She never would get up early in the morning."

"Are you suffering much pain, mother?"

"No; I can't say it is pain, but it is worse; it is utter helplessness, and I can never walk again. O, Esther, God deals very hardly with me. My life is all bitterness."

"Would you like to have me read to you, mother? I have a very interesting book here. Perhaps we may forget our own trials in the greater sorrows of the early Christians."

"No, Esther; I never could bear to hear about martyrs. And yet, after all, it is no worse to be burned to death, and suffer for a few hours, than to endure such losses and afflictions as are sent upon me."

"It is about tea time," said Esther. "I will bring that pretty, old-fashioned round table to your side, and see what a nice little supper I can bring you."

"No; the hot tea-pot will spoil the varnish. That is a table which I had when I was married, and I am very careful of it."

"Never mind, then," said Esther. "There is an old one up stairs; I will bring it down."

After many perplexities, the supper was brought. Neither the sweetness of Esther's temper, nor the stolid patience of Martha Brown, was able to chase the clouds from the invalid. It was a dreary, cold night. Esther read a chapter from the Gospel of John, and prayed so fervently and so humbly, that Martha Brown said to Mrs. Brainard afterwards, "It seemed, ma'am, as if I was soaring up to heaven on wings. Even Mrs. Gray was peaceful after that. But, ma'am, she couldn't see Mrs. William go to sleep without letting fly one of her sharp arrers, as I call 'em. We had been a makin' a bed on the sofa, cause Mrs. William said that the old lady mustn't be left alone; and while we were a doin' of it, the old lady, says she, 'What did you do that for?' 'Why, mother,' said Mrs. William, 'I mean to sleep near you. I have learned the art of nursing,

and I am going to take care of you while I stay.'

"'Yes, that is it, Esther; *while you stay!* It is all very nice to have you here, and if William hadn't died, there would be a great comfort in it. But it will not last; no, it cannot last. You will give your love, and your very name, to some one else, and I shall be left all the more forlorn and lonely than if I had never known you.'

"I never saw, ma'am, a more beautiful picter than Mrs. William was the next minit. She had put on her long white night-gown, and was brushing that beautiful brown hair of hers, while Mrs. Gray was a talkin'. When she said this, Mrs. William turned round, and there was such a sad, grieved look in her face, just like that in your picter up in the minister's study — the 'Wounded Doe,' you call it, where the arrer has entered his side, and he turns and looks at the archer who shot him. She came

forward a step, her great blue eyes openin' wide, and her face pale as death. Then, all at once, there came a bright red spot on each cheek, and she said, 'Mother, I married William for this life, and, I believe, for the life beyond. I am doing his work here — a work which I believe God has put into my hands. I am content to live and work as long as God wills — to fourscore years and ten, if so be he chooses.'

"'The longest life is all too short to work for Him who died to redeem us. I know little of heaven, or its employments. God, in his infinite love to us, I believe, has concealed it. But this I do know; I loved William, not for himself alone, dear as he was, but because he closely followed in the steps of my Saviour. Such love cannot die. It will grow stronger in eternity. And I dare not dwell upon the happiness in store for us in the world where we shall see eye to eye, where we shall walk and

not faint, run and not be weary, study and know no lagging of the brain, no dimness of vision, but drink immortal vigor in. Such is my future life with William. The seed was sown here. Its roots were laid in a sanctified earthly love, but its perfected blossom and its glorious fruitage are in the Paradise of God. He has been with the angels but a few weeks, and yet twice in that time you have spoken of my love as temporary and earthly. Not so do I understand the true marriage.'

"I wish, ma'am, you could have seen Mrs. Gray. She was stricken dumb, like Saul of Tarsus, when a voice spoke to him from heaven at noonday; and if she had had her legs, I believe she would have lost the use of 'em, as he did. As for her eyes, she wasn't stricken blind, but they looked as if they were nail-heads, they were so fixed and moveless.

"Mrs. William didn't say no more, but turned round and finished brushing her hair;

but I saw two great tears roll down her beautiful cheeks."

"There," said Mrs. Brainard to her husband, "I was not mistaken. I felt, all the time that Mrs. William — as the doctor calls her — was in our house, that we were entertaining an angel."

"I cannot tell you," said her husband, "how much comfort her sweet face gave me, when I stood at the side door of the old parsonage, at the time I thought our boy was dying, — not an angel, my dear, but — what is better, for this world — a true woman, purified and ennobled by a great sorrow. I know something of their short married life, through William, who was very dear to me. He once said, 'Mr. Brainard, God has blessed me richly. Esther is not only my wife, but a beloved Christian friend, who has led me to a higher spiritual life.'"

"What a trial she will have if she remains with Mrs. Gray long!" said the wife.

"Her almost divine pity, like that of the Savior for the impotent and the 'possessed,' will sustain her. Poor Mrs. Gray is possessed with a spirit of unrest and fault-finding. It is partly owing to the severe trials of her life, and partly to the nature of her disease. This, Mrs. William will learn soon. Her knowledge of sickness and her medical reading will enable her to understand that some rash humor lurks in the old lady's system, which irritates her blood."

"But she needn't wound her best friends."

"Ay, we all do that sometimes, dear wifey."

Some weeks after this conversation, Mr. Brainard said to his wife, at breakfast, —

"What do you say to a ride over to Mrs. Gray's? The snow is well trodden, and the day is beautiful."

"What! take our three children? O, dear! How dreadful it is to live without a servant!

I never thought in my girlhood to come to this."

"Your most humble servant!" said the minister, bowing with a grace that a duke might envy.

"Can my servant sweep a room and cook a dinner?"

"Most assuredly, if necessary. Let me see; it is now nine o'clock. Do what you can, but don't get tired. I shall be in my study till eleven; then I will come down, and at twelve you shall see as nice a dinner upon the table as Aladdin would have had if he rubbed his lamp for the special purpose. Then I will harness Jessie, and we will ride over to see Mrs. Gray."

Not two minutes afterwards he was in his study, pen in hand, his books of reference all ready, his whole mind absorbed, abstracted from everything else, and fixed upon the glorious doctrine of Justification by Faith,

which was to be his theme for the next Sunday.

An inefficient, doll wife brings some compensations. Mr. Brainard's library was never invaded for the purpose of a feminine setting to rights. It was kept in order by himself, and in the darkest night he could lay his hand upon any article which he wanted.

He could tell in a moment if any person had entered in his absence. His sister once tried him by moving his inkstand two inches; at another by reversing his pen; but he detected the changes at once. He bent himself to his study like the skilled oarsman to his oars — calm, strong, with neither nervous haste nor lazy slowness, but with regular dip, making each stroke tell, and calm in the consciousness of a firm purpose and a strong arm.

Two hours of study like Brainard's was worth a week's undecided effort of undisci-

plined scholars. He was aware of no time, till his little alarm-clock struck eleven, and then, wiping his pen, and laying his paper-weight near the following sentence, — "Law is a word coined in heaven, however degraded by man; it retains some of its ethereal nature even in its coarsest forms. Its objects are not fields and houses, but motives, emotions, purposes, conscience, and the will. It is the sublimest object which a purified mind can contemplate; and I wish to restore this word to its highest meaning, without which religion must be degraded, and the Epistles of St. Paul cannot be understood. All religious knowledge revolves round this one point, Law — the privilege and protection of created beings, and the image and glory of an uncreated God," — "Whiz, whiz, whiz!" went the alarm-clock. The huge pen-wiper, always in the same place, received the superfluous ink, and the pen resumed its usual place in

the little rack, pointing, like the two stars of the Great Bear, always northward.

When the kitchen clock struck twelve, there were a nicely-cooked steak, some baked potatoes, and bread and butter on the table. Meanwhile the little doll wife had hushed the baby to sleep, put her house in order, and sat down, wearied and faint, in the chair which her husband placed for her. After eating a few minutes, she said, —

"Squire Marble has been here this morning, and he says that your sermon last Sunday gave great offence to some of your hearers."

"Ah! how so?" said her husband, cutting for her, as he spoke, another bit of tender steak.

"Why, you said that much thinking of heaven was not as good for the Christian as hard work for God in this world — that it would be soon enough to rest when we came to the heavenly mansions."

"Ah! blows the wind from that quarter?" said Mr. Brainard. "I am glad I have waked up some of my hearers. We have a set of sentimental Christians nowadays, that try my patience exceedingly. Only the other day, when I was calling upon Mrs. Chapman, whose daughter is bedridden with a spinal complaint, Mrs. Norris came in. 'What a nice new carpet you have!' she said to Mrs. Chapman. It was a rag-carpet, which Mrs. Chapman, with great labor and industry, had sewed and woven with her own hands to make her sick child's room more comfortable. It was bright and pretty.

"'Well,' continued Mrs. Norris, 'it is very pretty, but *I* can't even afford a rag-carpet. Never mind; the fashion of this world passeth away. When I get to heaven, the golden streets will be as free for me as for any one; or if there are beautiful carpets there, I may have as good as anybody. O,

dear! Mr. Brainard, I long for my heavenly home!

"Now, the truth is, Mrs. Norris is a selfish, indolent woman. She'll sit and sing psalms and read about heaven when her household needs her care. She might make a carpet for her poor rheumatic husband if she would set herself about it. I want my people to imitate Christ's active life, going about doing good, fulfilling all the duties of life, ever learning and ever working, till death, —like the dear old schoolmaster in Sterne, whose last words were, 'Boys, the school is dismissed,' —then leaving the body here for the spiritual life there. I must preach another sermon on 'Work while the day lasts.'"

The day was clear and sunny. The snow caught the swift rays of light and threw them back in a merry play of catch-and-toss. From every hill and house-top, and from the branches of the trees, the sparkling dance went

on, and the clear blue sky looked placidly down.

Mr. Brainard loved to commune with Nature in the solitude of these hills. She had charms for him in midwinter, and in all her varied changes he knew her well. He wooed her, and, in return, she supplied him with illustrations for his pulpit. In his humility he was ignorant that his pulpit-teaching was fragrant with the lilies of the field, and, through him, bird and beast, rocks and trees, spoke the wisdom of their Author. From these rides over the mountain roads he brought home material for his study.

This day, however, he found a subject for study in "Mrs. William." She was reading the Pilgrim's Progress to her mother-in-law. The old lady's sharp features expressed a shade of peace, like the troubled waters farthest from the Savior when he said to them, "Peace, be still."

But no sooner did Mrs. Brainard speak of sickness and care, than the flood-gates of complaint were opened, and the sharp, monotonous, querulous voice told over the list of its sorrows.

She was really doing well, under the good nursing of Esther and the faithful attendance of Dr. Strong.

"To speak truth, sir," he said one day to Mr. Brainard, "the old lady gets more of my time from my interest in studying that rare piece of womanhood. Now, perhaps you don't know, but I do, that the temperament of Mrs. William is naturally impetuous; the warm blood that mantles her cheek, and circulates so freely in nerve and artery, can be easily heated. She is warm, joyous, brilliant; would have adorned the Luxembourg, had she been born a Frenchwoman in the seventeenth century; and yet her whole character seems to be controlled by certain laws, that make

her, beautiful and brilliant, as she is, like a perfect machine, never working out of place or time."

"All your philosophy, doctor, will not explain it," said Mr. Brainard. "The key to the riddle is, 'Like Mary of Bethany, she sits at the Savior's feet.'"

"Ay, but tell me why we have no more Marys?"

"Not all our Marys have buried a Lazarus, and not many, that have, have learned to wait in silent submission till the Master shall come and call for them."

"Well, if it is her religion that makes her so patient with that poor, fretful old woman, it will do more to make me a Christian than all your sermons, beautiful and argumentative as I think them to be."

"It is such lives that make the preaching effectual."

"I brought her a letter from the office this

morning," the doctor replied, "and I would give a round sum to know what is in it. She read it while she thought I was talking with the old lady; but I saw her beautiful face flush at first with pleasure, and then turn deadly pale as she left the room and hurried up stairs. This afternoon she asked me if I thought Mrs. Gray was well enough to be left with Martha Brown. I said, truly, 'yes,' and I do, indeed, think it is a pity that so beautiful a creature should be shut up in that cold, cheerless room, with an old lady who would worry an angel, if angels had nerves."

As we have a more intimate acquaintance with Esther than Dr. Strong could claim, we will take the liberty to read the concluding part of the letter which excited his curiosity. It was from her own mother.

"My dear child, I do not mean to be selfish. I have prayed that I may be kept from it.

But I long for you with a yearning that is inexpressible. I have concealed from you the fact, that a slow but fatal disease is upon me.

"It would be neither kind to you, nor just to myself, to conceal it any longer. Dr. Hooper will perform an operation next week. If this is successful, I may live many years; if not, God knows how long, but not many months, in all human probability. I know what a comfort you must be to Mrs. Gray. Poor woman! She is sorely afflicted, and I grieve to take you from her. It is for this reason that I have kept silent so long, but it would be a great comfort to have you with me next week. I think your firmness and gentle care would help me in my hour of suffering. Come to me if you can; if not, write every day.

"I have written abruptly and briefly, because the effort of writing is very painful.

"Your loving mother,

"MARY SEYMOUR."

"'Come to you if I can!' Not many hours, dearest mother, will I stay away from you. Dear, patient mother!" Esther turned for comfort in this hour where she never failed to find it; but when rising from prayer, she said to herself, —

"I must now live *by the day*. I cannot bear the forward look into that lonely life without my mother! Day by day, O my God, give me the daily bread of consolation!"

Esther confided her trouble to Mr. and Mrs. Brainard. They decided at once that she must return to the city. Dr. Strong took her to the depot in his sleigh, and she found the ride on a bright winter's day quickly accomplished, well wrapped in warm skins, and drawn by the doctor's Canadian ponies.

"God bless you, my darling! Your presence has given me courage to bear it all."

Such were the words addressed to Esther, as she stood beside her mother when the sur-

geon had finished his work. With tears in her eyes, but a smile on her lip, Esther stooped to caress her mother. From that day, for nine months, she left her mother's side only for her daily walk and her duties at the Hollow.

It was all in vain to stop the progress of the disease, but not in vain as it regarded the comfort of the sufferer. Mrs. Seymour's room was like an entrance-chamber to the heavenly home. It was as attractive as a loving heart could make it, — pictures and engravings, not rare or expensive, but suggestive of the Christian life, and of the beautiful on earth. There was Faith, symbolized, turning with clear eye to the cross; Hope, with her anchor, looking heavenward; sweet pictures of childhood, a few landscapes, where "repose" seemed to have been the aim of the painter in the deep green wood and the quiet stream.

Then, every day fresh flowers came, always varying; and fruits, fragrant fruits, as grapes, oranges, pines.

"Now, we will have a day in the tropics," sometimes Esther would say; and amused the invalid by changing the pictures for some of richer coloring, and bringing all the fruits which she could procure from sunny climes, with ferns and palms from the conservatory. As spring came on, she one day proposed to her mother to remove to another room. When she returned, the dark carpet had been exchanged for a delicate green and white, the heavy curtains for white drapery, while snow-drops and lilies of the valley, with wild flowers from the woods, and green vines, were grouped in pretty carelessness, or twined gracefully in every part of the room.

Then, again, when the summer, with its tropic heat, overcame the invalid, and she proposed to try another room, but soon wearied of that, she found, on her return, the cool matting on the floor, the nettings in the open

windows, pictures of Arctic scenes — everything to suggest coolness.

It became a study to Esther to make that sick room as charming as possible. The new books and papers were always taken there first. But the most delightful part was the sweet intercourse between mother and daughter.

There was no shrinking from the great change that was to come, no ignoring the fact that it might come any day.

It became so frequent a topic that friends who went there said, that it was like standing on the Delectable Mountains to view the Promised Land.

Mrs. Seymour still kept her interest in all Esther's plans for the Hollow; and when the latter became wearied and heart-sick at times with the degradation and wickedness of those poor families, her mother's reply was, generally, —

"Take courage, Esther; my faith is strong that the district will be redeemed, and will

be a blessing to this city. I am very thankful that God has given you a missionary field at home. I used to fear that you would leave me for a foreign mission; but you are doing as good a work here in this wicked city. When I am gone, remember what I say — God has a blessing for the poor Hollow.”

She had suffered more than usual one day, and had obtained sleep only through an opiate. When she awoke, she seemed much refreshed; and, calling her daughter to her side, said, —

“Esther, when I am gone, seek your consolation in work—hard work for the degraded and wretched. Do not sit down and mourn for me. I shall be only born into a newer and higher life—loving you, thinking of you, perhaps praying for you. In God’s good time we will meet again. You have strewn my passage to the tomb with flowers; you have been dearer to me than I can express to you: kiss me, darling.”

Esther stooped to kiss her, but she could not trust herself to speak. William’s dying words were echoed by her dying mother.

Mrs. Seymour then turned her head, saying, “I will sleep again.”

They were her last words. From that sleep she never woke.

Just fifteen months, to a day, from the time of her husband’s death, Esther became motherless.

Her grief was in a measure calmed by those last words, so like those of William that they seemed to her a message from the other world.

“God helping me,” she said, “I will be wholly consecrated to his service, and learn that working for God is submission to his will.”

CHAPTER VI.

"Death never separates; the golden wires,
That ever trembled to their names before,
Will vibrate, though every form expires,
And those we love we look upon no more."

It was about a month after the funeral of Mrs. Seymour that Esther was called down from her chamber to see David Wells, one of the two boys who were her efficient aids in the Sunday school at the Hollow.

"I am sorry to trouble you, ma'am, but things are very bad at home, and I thought may be you could help me a little."

The poor boy looked pale and thin, and could with difficulty check his tears. Esther encouraged him to speak freely.

"You know, ma'am, my poor mother's bad

habit. She *will* take a drop too much, and sometimes is so bad that my father is obliged to cook his own meals when he comes home from work. I think this has fretted him, and made him a different man from what he would otherwise be.

"For the last week mother has been worse than usual; so that my little brother Sandy, six years old, has kept the baby hidden away, for fear mother would kill it. She has threatened to do so; and if it hadn't been for Sandy, the poor little creature would have starved to death.

"My father is a good workman; nobody understands better how to tend the 'fining furnace;' but, for some reason, the overseer and he have quarrelled, and my father has been turned off, and has no work. I think it is all owing to his being fretted so at home; and perhaps he gave the overseer some sharp words back. Mr. Owens is a good master,

and means to be just; but he is very stern, and somewhat quick-tempered.

"Father sits at home, neither eats nor sleeps, and says nothing. Sometimes, when mother rouses herself a little, and frets at him because there is no money to buy bread or coal, he goes down, and sits on the wharf, and looks at the river. Jim Nudd, who has always worked with him at the furnace, tried to get him to come down when he was sitting there late at night. Father says, 'Tain't no use livin', Jim — 'tain't; this world wasn't made for such men as Owens and myself to live together in; one or the other of us better leave it soon;' and then he'd draw his hat down over his eyes, and sit looking at the water, 'as if,' Jim Nudd said, 'it was charming him, as snakes charm birds.' I got permission to go home, and I haven't slept any for three nights, for fear what he might do. Now, he always thought a deal of you, ma'am,

and perhaps if you should say a few words to him, he might come to his right senses again; and if — if it only could be brought about that mother couldn't buy any whiskey, we should all be happier; but she manages to buy it at Gould's groggery, though I have begged of him not to sell it to her.

"I mustn't stay, ma'am, for I left Sandy to watch father, and little Bessie is hidden away up in the foundery."

"I will go to Mr. Owens, David. Perhaps, if we could find some work for your father, it would turn his mind."

"If we only could, ma'am; but work is scarce. It seems so hard, ma'am, that men that are willing to work find it so difficult to obtain a place. There are some men at the works working for half pay, and can't afford to have meat to eat oftener than once a week."

"I'll be at the foundery at two o'clock this

afternoon," said Esther. "You may meet me at the little bridge over the creek."

"Boggs Hollow" was so called from Boggs, an Englishman, who had erected these Iron Works some years before the commencement of our sketch, and brought over from England English and Welsh workmen.

He was a rough, profane man, but enterprising, and had a thorough knowledge of his business.

There were fifty families dependent upon him, in whose welfare he felt no more interest than if they had been so many cattle. All he wanted was their work, and that, self-interest taught him, was best secured by prompt pay.

He cared not how much they patronized the groggery, so that they were not too drunk to work.

He had consented to a Sunday school, and had given the use of one of the rooms in his works, simply because he did not like to offend "Sey-

mour and Gray," wholesale hardware dealers, whose trade he wished to retain.

It was a beautiful day in September when Esther started for her long walk. Her heart was sad, for matters seemed to be going backward at the Hollow. Three of her Sunday school children had died during the summer, and now the scarlet fever was making its ravages in the settlement. All her efforts to make it a temperance community were thwarted by the influence of the master's family.

And now here was Jack Wells, one of the steadiest of the workmen, in a way to do some desperate deed. Those who have had to do with the lower class of Welsh iron-workers know too well how reckless they become when excited. Human life is very cheap, in their estimation, at such times. Wells's wife was almost beyond hope of reform. She was most of the time in a state of semi-intoxication, and, though a tidy housewife and kind mother when herself, drink made her worse than a brute.

"If William were only here," thought Esther. "I fear I do my work with little faith, and am too weak for the task." She was praying inwardly for strength, when a pleasant voice said, "Please, Mrs. Gray, will you walk on to the 'refinery'? They are working the fining furnace just now, and father is sitting down under one of the trees, at a little distance, watching another man do his work. Perhaps you would like to see the furnace. I think the melted iron is a beautiful sight."

Esther went forward. Immense piles of "pigs," as they are called, were lying ready for the furnace. An iron furnace, or "refinery," is built on a mass of brick-work, about nine feet square. Upon this is placed the crucible. A hearth is formed by the union of four cast-iron troughs, through which a stream of cold water is made to circulate, to prevent them from being fused by the heat. The bottom of the crucible is of grit-stone or sand. There are six

tuyeres, or blowers, as they are called, which convey the air to the crucible. Water is also made to flow into these tuyeres, through which it passes, and escapes through tubes into tanks, into which the water from the iron troughs flows by means of siphon tubes.

The chimney is sixteen or eighteen feet high, supported by four cast-iron columns, so as to allow free access to the fire on all sides. The bars, or "pigs," of iron, when melted in the furnace, flow out through a tapping-hole in one of the shorter sides of the hearth, and the red-hot mass is cooled by cold water poured upon it.

Just as Esther came to the furnace, the workman was opening the tapping-hole, and, as he did so, the melted iron began to flow into the mould. What a rich color! How the iron glowed in that fervent heat, and melted like wax! Its golden glow almost blinded the eyes that looked upon it.

It was soon cooled by cold water, and then formed large plates of fine metal, ten feet long, two inches thick, and two feet and a half broad.

Esther was interested in watching the process. "It is very greedy for air and water," said David. "It breathes in four hundred cubic feet of air in a minute, and you see how it drinks water."

"And eats coke," said a workman standing near. "It takes four hundred weight of coke for every ton of metal we refine. But, ma'am, if you would like to see a beautiful sight, come over to the puddling furnace."

Esther followed him to what appeared to be a row of sheds, adjoining the roofs of which were some chimneys, from thirty to forty feet high. The furnace with which these communicated was very strongly built, encased with cast-iron, and held together by clamps or wedges, while the chimneys were strengthened by iron ties.

Within the furnace, the fine metal which had come from the fining furnace was piled up on the side of the hearth, the centre being left clear, for the hot air to circulate, and for working the charge. Slag and iron scales are thrown in, the doors and dampers closed, and fresh fuel added to the fire.

In about half an hour, the metal begins to melt, and flow on the bottom of the hearth. A man removes a small iron plate from a hole in one of the working doors, passes in an iron rod, and stirs up the molten mass. In a short time, the great plates of solid iron which were piled within the furnace begin to boil, as it were, and the color is a rich, golden red, making you think of a splendid sunset, or tropic flowers. The workman keeps stirring with an iron paddle, and the visitor's eyes are fixed upon that little opening as if thousands of topazes and rubies were glittering there.

The work of stirring this molten mass re-

quires practice and skill. The workman must keep steadily at his work; he must avoid exposing the metal too much to the air, lest it be oxidized; and it must be worked till it first becomes sandy, or "dry" (as the men call it), and then, by continued working, granular. Meantime the heat is increased, and the man works with his paddle till he forms a ball of the red-hot mass, weighing, perhaps, sixty or seventy pounds. Then it is ready for the heavy hammer, worked by steam, which compresses it again; or the squeezer, with its immense jaws, like those of some great sea-monster, which takes the fiery ball and flattens it as easily as a child crushes a sugar-plum.

It had been Jack Wells's business to stand at the puddling furnace. He did it rapidly and well. Long practice had made him perfect.

A new hand had taken his place. The intense heat annoyed him; the iron did not

work well; and he was confused and blundering. It was evident he was spoiling his work. Owens, the overseer, came along, and saw at once the clumsiness of the workman, and at the same moment his eye fell on Jack Wells, sitting idle under a tree.

In his anxiety for the furnace, he forgot his quarrel with Wells, and ordered him to his place.

But Wells, with an oath which was heard by the workmen, and which made Esther shudder, declared he wouldn't go near the furnace.

"Then get out of my sight, and never let me see you at the works again!"

Wells rose, clinched his fist, and with a look of sullen defiance, and a terrible oath, said aloud, "I'll be revenged on you — I will," and went away in the direction of his home.

It was evident that he had taken some fiery liquid, enough to inflame his blood, but not to stupefy him.

David hung his head from mortification that Mrs. Gray should see his father in this state.

"I'll run and get him home, ma'am; it is of no use now to speak to Mr. Owens; he'll never take my father back!" What will become of us?"

"Go home, David, and I will follow you."

When Mr. Owens saw Mrs. Gray, he came towards her, and expressed his pleasure at her interest in the works.

"I think myself, ma'am, there is no prettier sight in the world than molten iron as it pours from the furnace. I am sorry the work is half spoiled to-day by that stupid workman."

"Jack Wells has usually done this work, sir, I believe."

"Yes, and there is no better workman on the place. I had forgotten entirely that I turned him off last week for insolence. Those old hands, who think themselves necessary to us, are apt to be so."

"His conduct to-day, will, I presume, forbid his ever returning to his work."

"It ought to do so, madam. It is bad policy for an overseer to retract; but I am a hot-headed fellow myself, and I believe I was more than half in the wrong last week. I am sorry, both for his sake and my own, he was so outrageously insolent to-day."

"I fear his trouble led him to the grog-shop yonder, and when he spoke as he did, he was not himself."

"Very like. I have no fear of his threats; he is not as savage as that Welshman you see yonder. I wouldn't like to encounter that fellow in a dark night, if I were unarmed and alone."

Esther's hope for Jack revived. She walked away from the furnace, and Mr. Owens accompanied her as far as the office, which was in one part of what appeared to be a large ware-room.

Owens politely bade her good evening, and entered the office, while she turned the corner of the building, and was passing towards the workman's cottage, when the cry of an infant led her to stop and listen if she could tell from whence the sound proceeded.

She was not long in learning, for a door stood a little ajar, and when she went near she saw two children in the dimly-lighted place.

It was a room used for storing away odds and ends that accumulate in such an establishment. There was a pile of "pigs," some castings from the foundry proper, coils of rope, and a number of old flags. Upon one of these, folded so as to make a sort of bed, sat an infant crying. On the floor, a few feet from the baby, was little Sandy, fast asleep, his hands hanging by his side, his face pale, and his whole appearance as of one who slept the sleep of exhaustion.

Bessie was a pretty child, and had evident-

ly had such care as Sandy could bestow; for her face was clean, and her curly hair in order. But her frock was torn and soiled, and her little bare feet blue with cold, for it was a chilly day.

Esther stepped lightly in, seated herself on a coil of rope, and taking off the cashmere mantle which she wore, wrapped the baby in it, and took her in her arms, warming the cold feet with her hands.

She had a few sugar-plums in her pocket, which the little one ate greedily; and then, when she felt the warmth of Esther's hands and the shelter of her arm, she curled herself up and went to sleep.

Esther sat still, thinking she would let little tired Sandy finish his nap. As she sat there, she heard voices in the adjoining room, as of two men in angry dispute, and observed, at the same time, a small door, at the farther side of the room in which she sat, and that the bolt was withdrawn.

She stepped softly to the door, bolted it, but saw distinctly, as she did so, through a small, dingy pane of glass in the door, the overseer, Owens, and young Hobbs.

This Henry Hobbs was the only person at the Iron Works whom Esther felt that she could not encounter. He was a handsome man, fond of dress, showy, an idle loungeur, drove fast horses, and used his father's money freely.

He was nominally a partner in the establishment; but it was well known that he had no faculty for business, and that he spent a great deal of his time in New York city. On this account Esther seldom met him at the Hollow. His undisguised admiration for her, at one time, had so excited her disgust, that she shrank from his sight ever afterwards.

She returned with a light step to the coil of rope, and sat down to watch the children

asleep. The voices in the next room grew louder and more angry.

"I tell you, Hobbs, it is of no use concealing it any longer, and I am determined, for my own reputation, not to suffer this thing to go on. I have been hard at work for a week at the books, till my temper has become sharp, and my head in danger of a brain fever.

"Look here — ten thousand for horses, and the horses — *you* know where they are! Ten thousand more for gambling debts, and the old gentleman believes you never touch a card! Ten thousand more, for — I don't know for what — you do, however. I tell you the business won't stand it. I don't profess any religion, as you well know, but I mean to be an honest man, and as overseer here and treasurer of the concern, not another dollar shall go through my hands to you without your father's knowledge."

"I tell you, Owens, I must have a thousand dollars to-day, and I will!" bringing out a dreadful oath.

"Then your father knows before night just how we stand! Nothing but the closest management can save the concern from bankruptcy. There are only two thousand on hand to-day, and that must go to Freeland, as you well know."

"Then I will draw on the 'Commercial.'"

"You have already overdrawn our funds there."

"Have you no money on hand to pay the workmen?"

"Yes; but that is due on Saturday night, and I have never failed to pay promptly. You cannot have it."

"I tell you I will pay it back before that time. Do you think to bully me? You! What are you but a hireling, *my* hireling? for isn't my name in the firm? Give me the key to the safe at once, or I'll find a way to take it!"

The men waxed more angry; hard words and oaths came thick and fast. Owen's quiet

temper was roused, and young Hobbs, desperate, it would seem, for money, declared, with a dreadful oath, that he would not leave that place alive without money.

The noise aroused Sandy. He rubbed his eyes, and looked at Esther, and smiled.

"I dreamed of you, ma'am; but you didn't wear that black gown. You were all dressed in white!"

"Come with me, Sandy," said Esther, in a low voice. "Come quick, my child!"

She folded the baby closely in her own arms, and hastened away, those dreadful oaths still ringing in her ears. The building stood partly over the water, very near a dam. The counting-room and office opened on one side, directly over the brook, which runs, with a rapid current, to the river.

Esther walked on a few steps, then crossed the bridge, and took a little foot-path by the water's edge.

It was twilight of a beautiful September evening, and as she walked onward, slowly, beneath the alders that fringed the bank, and listened to Sandy's prattle, she forgot the fierce men she had left behind.

Sandy knew every flower by the brook-side, or at least had a name for them all, and could tell, too, where the best nuts were to be found in the woods, and where the blackberries were thickest.

"Please let me get you a few berries," he said to Esther. "If you will sit on this flat rock, near the brook, I will be back in a moment."

Esther was very willing to rest with her burden.

"You see, ma'am, this is where the boys crack nuts," he said, as he brushed away some nutshells with his cap.

Esther sat down and watched the brook. It was not clear and shallow, dancing over pebbles, but deep and dark at that spot, owing

to the damming of the water above; the willows bent over to kiss its smooth surface, and the alders whispered their secrets, as if they were sure the water was deep enough there to keep them.

Esther enjoyed the scene — the quiet evening, the flowing brook, the sleeping babe. Little did she think, as she gazed upon that water, that, even while she looked, it became the grave of one, the echoes of whose voice had scarcely died upon her ear!

Thoughts of peace were in *her* heart; but not many rods from her was a human being who could never look upon that brook again without seeing the face of a dying man, and to whom the sound of the falling waters would be evermore the dying groans of his victim!

Sandy brought his berries in a large, green leaf, and the three walked onward in the direction of Wells's house. Sandy gained permission to run across a field to "tell mother," he said,

"that the lady was coming," while Esther followed slowly the winding path by the brook. She had gone but a few steps when she saw Jack Wells coming from the direction of his own house to meet her.

"Please, ma'am, let me take the baby. It's very kind in ye, ma'am, to take so much care of the little un."

His manner was very respectful, and the tones of his voice subdued. He was ill at ease, and evidently mortified that Mrs. Gray should have seen his conduct at the furnace.

"She is a pretty child," said Esther. "I think you have much to live for in three such children as God has given you."

"They are good children, ma'am; but it all comes of your school here. That made David what he is, and he has kept little Sandy from swearing and drinking, like the other boys. 'Tain't no credit to me, ma'am."

"I had hoped, Wells, from seeing you at the

school lately, that you were setting your children a good example."

"And so I did mean to; but you don't know, ma'am, that I'm something like this brook. I can't go my own way—the water here is dammed up by stone-work, and wood-work, and iron clamping; and so it goes fretting and foaming over the dam, instead of going along to the river its own peaceful way."

"Ah, Wells, you mean you would be good if others were better. The Christian life is a battle, all the way, till death."

"Yes, ma'am; so that book says — 'The Pilgrim' — that David reads loud sometimes; but I have had so much trouble lately that I ain't myself, or I shouldn't have spoken so in your presence to-day."

"My presence didn't make it any more sinful, Wells. 'Thou shalt not take God's name in vain,' is for all times and places."

"Yes, ma'am; I know it. But Mr. Owens is

terrible 'ard on me. He wern't right himself, last week. Ye see, he ain't been in this country long, and don't know that the best workman can't make No. 1 foundery metal out of such pigs as come to our works. O, ma'am, I wish you could see the furnaces in the old country!" And Wells would have gone on, enlarging upon the defects of "cold short," and "long short," so common, as he thought, in the iron of this country; but Esther led him back to himself.

When asked what he intended to do, now that he was thrown out of employment, he replied that he didn't see much use in living, any how. "Ye see, ma'am, it ain't no good trying to have things decent at home. You knows all about it, or I wouldn't speak to ye so. I could go to the western country, and, may be, get work; but it's mean work for a man to leave his family, and I can't take *her*, you know. I wish, ma'am, God Almighty would take me."

"Wells, don't you think you ought to apolo-

gize to Mr. Owens for your insolence this afternoon?"

"But, ma'am, ye don't know how he cursed me last week, and all along, 'cause he didn't know I couldn't help 'long short' comin' from poor pigs."

"But, Wells, we have nothing to do with Owens's sin; it is your wrong-doing that we are talking about. If you were overseer, you would not wish the men to act as you did."

Wells hung his head. "No, ma'am; with my temper, I might knock 'em down with my red-hot 'dolly.'"*

"I think your own conscience would be easier, Wells, if you go and make an apology to Mr. Owens. It would be manly and Christian-like."

"I was the worse for a glass of liquor that Tim Munn treated me to, and my blood was all afire, when I saw that new hand spoiling them

* A machine to stir the melted iron.

balls; but I run away after I'd said them words, and plunged into the brook, and since then my head is clearer. I'm sorry I said 'em. But Mr. Owens is a hard fellow. He'll never take me back."

"Perhaps not; but you can do right, and leave the result."

After some further conversation Wells promised to do this, and Esther returned home, sure in her own mind that Owens would be only too glad to get his best workman back.

She was met at the door by the housekeeper, who had lived in her mother's family for many years.

"O, Miss Esther, I thought I must come and tell you that Mr. Edward is here! He has been waiting for you a whole hour. He's handsomer than ever, and so like a real born gentleman, and talked so beautifully about your mother! He has just returned from Europe, or he would have been at the funeral."

Esther's cheeks paled, and she looked troubled; but she said, —

"Tell Mr. Vinton that I will be with him in a few minutes;" and then went to her own room.

As she laid off her hat and shawl, and smoothed the curls which little baby fingers had deranged in play, her eyes fell upon a picture of her husband, which hung over her bureau.

"O that those lips had language!" she said to herself. "Ay! but they will speak to me when I shall learn the language of heaven. *Till then* — till then I'll work for Him who gave up heaven that he might show us the way. Heaven will be all the brighter for following in the Master's own path."

She leaned on the bureau a moment, gazing at the picture. "Those lips — they seem still redolent with the language of prayer. Hand in hand we prayed. Our voices mingled when

we sung. One wish, one thought, one love bound our hearts together.

"I must not, I dare not, think of the joy and glory of that meeting, when our angel voices shall join the song of the redeemed! Not yet, not yet! I would first be able to say, I have fought a good fight."

"Excuse me, dear child," said the kind voice of the housekeeper, who had opened the door "just a crack," as she said. "I knocked, but you didn't hear me. Did you forget that Mr. Edward is down stairs? I told him you'd be down soon. There he is, looking at your picture still, and if he wasn't such a nice, honorable gentleman I should be afraid he'd carry it away with him. He's grown handsome since he went to Europe. No wonder the papers print his speeches, and call him the Sisera of his country."

"Cicero, auntie," said Esther.

"La, yes; but t'other is a Bible name, and

I'm more used to it. But, dearie, put that beautiful jet and gold cross on your bosom, instead of that little plain brooch."

Esther placed her hand on the brooch as if to guard it. It contained a lock of William's hair.

"I'm ready, auntie;" and she went down stairs with a "far-off look" on her face, as if she saw beyond the present.

Mr. Vinton was a loved friend of the family. He had known Esther from childhood. He had loved her. The hope of securing her for a wife had stimulated him to aim, for her sake, at a high position in this world. He had succeeded beyond the aspirations of his youth. He was a high-minded, honorable man, scorning all that was base and mean for her sake; but keeping his love and his hope *from* her till he could place her on an equality with the noblest and best.

His disappointment was great when, on ob-

taining one of the highest offices in the gift of the state, he learned from her own lips that she was affianced to William Gray.

William Gray! a worthy man enough, a gentleman, if gentle manners, a high sense of honor, a scorn of all vice, constitute a gentleman; but one whose only ambition seemed to be to seek out the degraded and the outcast, the poor and the suffering, and strive to make them better; in short, as Mr. Vinton expressed it, "a religious enthusiast, who might, just as well, have married some obscure Methodist, or Quaker preacher, as the beautiful Miss Seymour."

On hearing of William's death, he went to Europe, determined not to ruin his own cause by impetuosity.

When he returned, it was to find Esther not only a widow, but motherless; and he hoped the more, for Mrs. Seymour had always desired his success, and the wishes of

the dead are sometimes powerful when the voice of the living fails in pleading its cause.

He remained to tea; he lingered late in the evening. Esther never looked more lovely. Her calm self-possession, — neither intruding her grief nor shrinking to talk of the loved ones who had gone, — her interest in all the reminiscences of her childhood, and the same sweet smile that used to charm him so much, — all served to deepen the attachment which had never grown cold.

But when he went from that house he was a sadder and a wiser man. None the less was he charmed with Esther; none the less did he respect her; rather were those feelings strengthened. From that evening he was her firm friend; but he never wounded her heart again by speaking of marriage.

"Strange!" he said to himself. "I am not a Christian, and I can't understand what she means by that love which is so sure to

meet its own in another world. 'Bound by a triple cord to heaven!' And yet she finds no fault with second marriages in others. Not a word of censure on her lips; but she *knows* that her marriage was for both worlds. Blessed William Gray! Well, there may be more in this religion than I have thought. I'll look into the matter. Of one thing I am sure; power and position do not give happiness."

Such was Edward Vinton's soliloquy, and it resulted in a thorough examination of the claims of Christianity, and a firm belief and practice of its precepts. It was by a bitter disappointment he was led to the true source of happiness.

Esther's day of excitement was not closed when she went to her room. She found upon her table letters from the country, the contents of which we will give in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

"So shalt thou find in work and thought
The peace which others cannot give:
Though grief's worst pangs to thee be brought,
By thee let others nobler live."

THE first letter which Esther opened was from Martha Brown.

"MY DEAR MRS. WILLIAM: I take my pen to inform you that we are all well, only Mrs. Gray has been very sick for the last week.

"I hain't much education, as you know, and never writ many letters; but when I went to district school I was a good speller, and that helps me astonishingly.

"I asked Dr. Strong to write to you, but he said he wasn't going to do no such thing; that the old lady wouldn't die for ten years' yet,

and you shouldn't be worried to death on her account.

"I told him how much good it would do the old lady if you would come and stay with us a while.

"He shook his head, and muttered something in Latin or some foreign tongue; and then he said 'Martha Brown, you remember that it is said a French nobleman and his wife once lived in a cottage a few miles from this very house —'

"'Yes, I've heard tell of it,' I said; 'but there ain't nothing left now but a cellar and some bricks.'

"'Yes, there is,' he said; 'for I found, the other day, a rare and beautiful lily, growing among the bricks of the old chimney, close to dandelions and nettles.'

"I said, 'I should have thought, as fond of posies as you are, you would have taken it away from the weeds and nettles, and put it into your own garden.'

"'That is what I did,' he said; for it made my heart ache to see that delicate lily among the briars and nettles.'

"I didn't know what he meant by talking about lilies and nettles; so I said, 'I ain't going to neglect my duty, Dr. Strong; for I promised to let Mrs. William know if the old lady was any worse. Don't you think you had better write and tell her that she's took the fever, and thinks she will die?'

"'I don't think the knowledge will give her any pleasure,' he said. I couldn't do nothing with him, and so I got my mother to come and stay while I writ you about her.

"We have had the typhus fever in these parts lately, and though the old lady hain't got it bad, like Jim Bell, the butcher, who died yesterday, yet she has what Dr. Strong calls a low type of it. She thinks it will settle in her leg that was broken, and is sure she will never walk again in this world.

"She keeps all the letters you write under her pillow, and cries over them when she reads them, which is pretty much half of the time.

"Mr. Brainard comes over once a day, but he looks so worn and tired that my heart aches for him. His wife is down with the fever, and he goes night and day to see the sick. 'Tain't no comfort for him to come here, 'cause Mrs. Gray worries and cries all the time about her trials and troubles.

"I do the best I can, but I 'ain't smart at all,' you know, for Mrs. Gray tells me so every day.

"Now I've writ you just what I think is right, and my conscience will be easier.

"Your friend,

"MARTHA BROWN."

The other letter was from Mr. Brainard.

"MY DEAR FRIEND: Mrs. Gray urged me so much to write to you, that I am determined

not to see her again till I have complied with her wish.

"She is ill. She thinks it is her last sickness. Dr. Strong, who is wise in his profession, is not alarmed about her, and thinks it unnecessary for you to take the trouble to come on that account. I cannot urge your coming at this time, when the typhus fever prevails in the village. It originated in the village tavern. The summer has been very dry, and some of our wells have failed. An old well, that had been covered for many years, was opened, and the water proved very bad to the taste and offensive in smell.

"I told Mrs. Gray that there might be danger in your coming. Her reply was, 'Esther never fears sickness, and it never comes near her.'

"Martha Brown is very faithful, and I will call daily and inform you at once if there is any danger.

"My wife has been ill, but we think her much

better to-day. The little ones often wish aunt Ettie was here, but aunt Ettie's older friends cannot urge her to come at present, though, as Martha Brown says, we must write, or the old lady will say again we are 'wanting her to die,' as she told Deacon Cobb last week.

"Yours, respectfully,

"H. BRAINARD."

Esther was not long in deciding what was her duty.

She rose early the next morning, held a conference with Dr. Clark, who promised to take "Boggs Hollow" under his special protection during her absence, and assured her that its interests should not be forgotten by his church.

At seven o'clock on the evening of the next day, she was at Ripley, a little railroad station, ten miles from Westbrook.

She was seeking for a carriage to take her

to Mrs. Gray's, when Dr. Strong drove up to the station in his neat little rockaway, the ponies looking as fresh and brisk as when she last saw them on the snow-covered hills.

"How fortunate! I am just in time, Mrs. Gray. I suppose you are on your way to the typhus fever, in imitation of that old Jesuit Loyola, who thought his followers were nearest heaven when freezing in arctic regions, or breathing the pestilential air of lazarettos and fever-ships."

Esther smiled, her fresh, bright face looking anything but pale and nun-like.

"How is my mother to-day?"

"She is doing very well. You needn't have come on her account, I assure you."

Meanwhile the doctor lingered, and seemed in no haste to ride, though the evening was coming on apace.

"Are you going to Westbrook, doctor?"

"That is my home, Mrs. William, and I have

half a dozen fever patients there; but, upon my conscience, I can't invite you to Westbrook."

"Then I will find some other mode of conveyance, for I must sleep in the old parsonage to-night."

The doctor did not reveal the fact that he had come down to Ripley every evening since Martha Brown mailed her letter.

"My carriage is at your service, and there is no other way to get to Westbrook to-night; but remember, I wash my hands of all responsibility. You go to Westbrook against my express wishes."

Esther sprang lightly into the carriage, and taking the reins, said, playfully, —

"Come, doctor, this is the only train to Westbrook, and if you don't hasten I shall drive on and prescribe for those fever patients of yours. You know you were once jealous of my skill in curing the croup."

A shade of sadness passed over the broad,

happy face of Dr. Strong as he looked at Esther.

"Just such food as Typhus likes to feed upon," he said to himself, with a sigh. But he drew on his riding gloves, and bowed low, as he said, —

"I will do my best to keep you out of the profession."

The ride was delightful and short, for the ponies were accustomed to a quick trot.

"I'm glad you have come at last," said old Mrs. Gray. "Nobody here knows anything about taking care of the sick. Martha Brown's hands are as hard as horn, and Dr. Strong don't realize how sick I am. O, Esther, I wish I was through with this life of pain and trial."

"In God's good time," said Esther.

Mrs. Gray's trials had made her selfish. It was midnight before Esther had satisfied all the little wants of the invalid. The excitement of the previous day, and the long journey of this,

led her to welcome the rest which she sought on a little cot in the same room with Mrs. Gray.

The sickness of the latter was, as Dr. Strong expressed it, of a low type, — tedious to bear, but without acute suffering. Esther's patience was severely tried.

"If I'm not mistaken, Job would have murmured, Moses would have spoken hastily, and Enoch never would have been translated, if he had lived with Mrs. Gray," Martha Brown once said to Mr. Brainard. Poor Mr. Brainard was feeling the pressure of severe trial at this time. His wife was sick, and did not recover as rapidly as he had hoped. There were so many sick in the village, that it was impossible to procure a good nurse, and the husband could get little rest, night or day. His wife was like a petted child, and wanted her husband constantly near her.

"I can't die, Henry; you won't let me die

— will you?" "Don't go away, Henry; your own wife is more to you than all the parish. Stay right with me, and let the deacons visit the sick." "Now, Henry, if I die, you mustn't ever marry again — will you?" "You'll be faithful to your own dear wifey; you will, I know."

Dr. Strong lost all patience with the doll wife, and congratulated himself upon being a bachelor. Esther found time, now and then, to see Mrs. Brainard a few minutes, and her strong, healthful temperament aided much in her final recovery. But there were six weeks of watching and patient forbearance before Mrs. Gray, at the old parsonage, or Mrs. Brainard, in the new, was able to sit up and mingle in the household employments. Mrs. Gray never did walk again without crutches, but she could sit in the kitchen and direct Martha Brown's labors, — "a fiery trial," as the latter called it, — and knit.

Meanwhile, Dr. Strong had quietly tried to guard Esther from the fever contagion. He soon learned her love of botany, and took her over the hills in search of the autumn flowers with which that region abounds. He found a saddle horse for her use, and congratulated himself, when Mrs. Brainard was at last well again, that all danger for Esther was past.

But to his dismay he was, one night, called to little Minnie — Minnie, the pet of the household, the baby who had nestled herself into Esther's affections, and wound, with her tiny fingers, a strong, silken cord of love around her heart. The mother was too weak, and nervous, and frightened, to be of much use. When the doctor found that the child was suffering with typhus, in its worst form, he drove directly to the old parsonage.

"Will you ride to Bald Mountain to-day?" he said to Esther; "there are some beautiful specimens of wild asters in bloom."

Esther consented, and he lingered many hours; and then, when he returned, proposed an excursion for the next day. But when the morning came, and he made his early call upon the little sufferer, Esther was by her side; nor did she leave her post for many days. The child could not bear to have her out of her sight, and Esther was happiest when the baby, with her little hand in hers, would sleep while she sang, or, when the medicine was offered, would say, "Minnie take it from aunt Ettie."

That the child recovered was owing to Esther's vigilance and care. She forgot herself, forgot even her usual precautions, went without sleep, in her anxiety. The doctor preached on the importance of sanitary measures; he invented fabulous stories of rare flowers on Bald Head, and of the gorgeous autumn leaves on the mountains. It was all of no avail, and only when little Minnie was pronounced decidedly

out of danger, did she consent to go home and rest.

"Yes; just what I expected. The good and beautiful die, that the worthless may live."

Such was Dr. Strong's answer to Martha Brown, when she ran out, as she saw him passing, and begged him to come to Mrs. William, who was suffering from a violent headache.

"I knew it; that's the red flag of the enemy," he said to himself, as he saw the flushed cheeks and the heavy eyes; but to Esther, cheerfully, —

"A little fatigue, Mrs. William. Keep your room to-day; this large chamber is very pleasant. Have as much air as you choose. I hope to see you well to-morrow."

But as soon as he was seated in his carriage he turned the horse's head to Aunt Patience Green's cottage.

"Now, Aunt Patience," he said to a comely matron, whose soft, gray hair and smooth brow spoke of an even temper and a good heart, "you must do me one great favor. You are the only nurse in this village that I can trust with a patient. I want you to put on your bonnet and shawl and go right up to the old parsonage. Mrs. William is sick; the fever is upon her. I think she will die; but if you and I work together there is a chance."

The good woman hesitated; but the doctor would take no denial, and she was soon installed in Esther's room. But so rapidly had the fever advanced that Esther was hardly conscious who it was that smoothed her pillow or bathed her heated frame.

It was a terrible struggle. Death was eager for its prey. For two weeks the beloved one hung, as it were, between life and death.

The doctor was unremitting in his atten-

tions, and Aunt Patience — calm, resolute, quiet — never faltering in her task. Martha Brown went round the house in her stocking-feet, lest she should deprive the patient of one moment's rest. Mrs. Gray wept, and prayed, and bemoaned Esther's devotion to Mr. Brainard's baby.

"I know she'll die," she said to Martha Brown, "because she belongs to me."

"I'm glad the old woman is lame," said Martha, spitefully, "and can't get up stairs. Mrs. William would be sure to die then."

The poor little wife, Mrs. Brainard, was roused from her selfishness by Esther's danger, and made, what were to her, herculean efforts to concoct jellies, broths, and nice dishes for the sufferer. She grew stronger by this earnest effort for some good out of herself.

Dr. Strong was troubled. The case baffled his skill. His genial face was clouded with anxiety. The fever had nearly reached

its crisis; he was making his third visit for that day, and saw symptoms which made him fear the turning-point of the disease.

He was walking back and forth in the large parlor of the old parsonage. Suddenly his countenance brightened.

"I have it! I am not cool enough to manage the case. Fool! that I didn't see that before. I will have Kittredge here before night."

He sent for Aunt Patience, and told her he would return in three hours with Dr. Kittredge, of N——.

"Why, doctor, he's as savage as a cannibal, and as hard-hearted as a millstone."

Dr. Strong smiled. "Yes; that's what I want;" and altering his directions somewhat, he drove off, putting the ponies to their quickest pace.

At eight o'clock that evening a gruff old man sat by Esther's side. She was tossing

wildly about in the delirium of her fever, now singing like an angel, as Martha Brown said, and then, with her white arms bared and tossed above her head, would pull at the curls which hung wildly about her neck, till handfuls of hair came out.

"Why haven't you cut those curls off? Poor nursing that! Do it to-day."

With a cold, critical eye he watched the sufferer. One would have supposed that he took pleasure in the strange antics of the fever demon.

He held the white wrist to note its pulsations, and turned the heated eyes to the light, with about as much nonchalance and as little tenderness as a horse-jockey examines an animal for which he is bargaining. No symptom escaped him. His questions to the nurse were short and sharp.

Esther was unconscious most of the time; but once she turned her eyes upon the stern

old man, and said, with a sweet smile, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Then, suddenly changing her attitude, she put both hands to her ears. "Those horrid oaths! Come, Sandy, let us go. I'll carry the baby. Come quick, Sandy!"

Now, Dr. Kittredge was known as a rough, profane man; and Dr. Strong enjoyed the reproof which he fancied the old fellow was receiving.

It made no difference to the latter whether the patient rained curses or blessings upon him.

When the doctors returned to the parlor below, the younger turned, with anxious eyes, to the elder:—

"A fine case of pure typhus, superinduced wholly, I fancy, by undue exertion in a vitiated atmosphere; might have been avoided. A splendid development—sound constitution—fine chance for fever when it once gets possession. What will be the result?" Dr. Strong

asked, trying to conceal, for the sake of his profession, as he thought, any manifestation of anxiety.

The old man shook his head.

"Can't tell yet. Order the nurse to follow directions closely. I'll call over to-morrow at midday."

That night, Martha Brown sat all the long hours in the further corner of the sick room, ready to aid the nurse, who did not leave the bedside. Dr. Strong remained in the parlor below; and poor old Mrs. Gray groaned and cried alternately, — the burden of her lamentation, — "The Lord hath forsaken me!"

Dr. Kittredge came punctually at the hour he had named. He sat a few moments watching critically as before, asked a few questions, and then said, as he rose to go, "She will recover. Dr. Strong will prescribe to-day."

The case, having lost its danger, had ceased to interest him.

He was no sooner out of the house than Martha Brown burst into a flood of tears. The patient, tired nurse laid her head back in her arm-chair and fell asleep. Mr. Brainard, who had called to see how Esther was, returned to his study, and knelt to thank God. Old Mrs. Gray said, "I hope he knows; but man is fallible, and these doctors can't always be trusted." Dr. Strong went home, ordered a steak and coffee from his housekeeper, and while it was preparing, astonished the woman by singing an old Thanksgiving anthem, such as was sung in his boyhood. He pounded the music out of his parlor organ, and his voice rang full and clear through the whole house.

His "O, be joyful!" was so loud that neither bell nor voice was effectual to call him to breakfast, and he had to be tapped, not lightly, upon the shoulder.

Those long days of convalescence, of weak-

ness, and languor; a sense of frailty, when we feel as if we were like a fortress that had been long besieged and battered till it had yielded only when defence was no longer possible!

There was no exultation with Esther in her recovery. When she was able to talk with Mr. Brainard, she said, "I felt willing to go. I fear I was too willing. The world is very beautiful to me, and this autumn I was learning a new lesson from rocks and hills. The universe, stars above and flowers below, had new revelations for me. But you know, Mr. Brainard, the attractions of heaven! No, you don't know, either, how I felt when I had one foot on that ladder, up and down which I saw the angels go, in my fever dreams. It is easy to lie here and die, but it is *living right* that tests the Christian's faith. I could not tell you so, for I was too weak to talk; but when you were all so anxious about me, I was sure

I should get well, for there is work for me to do. I know not now what it is, but before I go hence I have either a cross to bear or a task to perform. Pray for me that I may, like my blessed Master, *finish* the work he has given me to do."

"I can't understand it, Brainard," said Dr. Strong; "it is all a mystery to me. Here is this beautiful girl, with great natural vigor and force,—none of your soft, sweet, amiable little bodies, so sweet that we tire of them as we would of a dainty diet of candy,—but with a strong will and a buoyant disposition, *I* know, for I understand temperament better than you do; here she is, with beauty that wins admiration, money enough to make her independent of labor, a heart full of warm impulses, fitted to enjoy all this world can give, and yet death had no terrors for her!

"She was calmer, even, when she thought she was going to die, than when she knew she would recover. It is all a mystery. I can't understand it."

"To the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks foolishness," said the minister, smiling. "You are one of the philosophizing Greeks, doctor. Esther Gray has learned her submission in the school of Christ."

"Brainard," said the doctor, "if I could have such faith, I would go barefooted to the ends of the earth! I would freeze in the poles, or be roasted in the tropics. For it I could lay my head on the block, or wait the lions' attack in the amphitheatre of Rome; but — but — *but* —" and he dropped the reins and let the ponies walk, as if, for the time being, life had lost all charm for him.

"Except ye become as little children, ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven," said the minister.

"I must acknowledge that Esther Gray's religion has a rare charm about it. So lovely and winning that children welcome her approach, so fond of all that is beautiful on earth that she is enthusiastic in botany and geology, but yet lives as if seeing the invisible things of heaven. Such a life as hers, Brainard, is worth more than all your sermons, good as saints and sinners think them to be."

"Sermons are good for nothing unless enforced by such lives."

It was late in November before Esther recovered her usual strength and vigor. But her good constitution aided her greatly, and she came out of that fiery furnace apparently as strong as when she first took little Minnie in her arms, in the terrible crisis of the fever, which, but for her tender care, would have wrecked her life.

When Esther was able to walk, she came

down to sit with her mother in the cheerless parlor below stairs. Mrs. Gray was as near being happy as was possible to her nature, but she could not help bemoaning the fact that Esther caught the fever from little Minnie, and became jealous of the love and caresses of the child.

Esther was pained to see how lame and helpless the old lady had grown. A solitary, afflicted, unhappy old woman! Bereft of husband and children, unloved, and, we might add, unlovely. As Esther watched her from day to day, and perceived that her own presence had great power over her, that she could soothe and cheer her even in her most irritable moods, a new duty seemed rising before her.

She pondered it long and seriously. She thought of her dearly-loved and delightful city home, of the refinement and taste which surrounded her there, and of the cold, cheerless parsonage, with its whitewashed walls, its dark

paint, its bareness, coldness, and—its unhappy mistress.

The contrast was great, but William's dying words, "Esther, remember my mother!" "Ay, wouldn't I do more for him? He said, too, 'I shall still love you in heaven.' Could I show my love in any way so pleasing to him? She was fully persuaded, in her own mind, that she would henceforth make her home in Westbrook, with Mrs. Gray; that she would bear with her waywardness, and make her hard, barren life more beautiful, if possible. If this had not included giving up her work at Boggs Hollow, Esther could have decided the point sooner. She was sitting, one day, in one of her thinking moods, meanwhile grouping some autumn leaves which Dr. Strong had gathered for her, when that gentleman entered, bringing a basket.

"Here are some odds and ends which I thought might amuse you, Mrs. William. I

have been down to Ripley to-day, and you see the spoils."

The basket contained flowers, autumn leaves, oranges, grapes, and one or two new books.

"And here are some numbers of the Springfield Republican, which I have been reading on my way home. You and I are familiar with Boggs Hollow, and if I had not been before, your fever would have made me so. You used to be teaching those little heathen their Testament and hymns, hour after hour, in your delirium. I told you they were a set of irreclaimable savages, on a level with the beasts that perish, and no more immortal, I believe. Here is a proof that I am right." And, as he spoke, he unfolded a paper, and read, —

"Trial of Jack Wells for the murder of John Owens, overseer of the Iron Works at Boggs Hollow."

Esther started from her seat, and turned very pale, as she said, "Give me the paper, please, doctor. It cannot be!"

He handed her the paper. She ran her eyes over the article. The names were correct!

"Owens murdered by Jack Wells! It cannot be! He was not capable of it! And yet they were both passionate! Poor David! Read it to me, doctor. I believe I am not quite strong yet."

The doctor read: "It will be remembered by our readers that the overseer, John Owens, was missed from the Iron Works on the 17th day of September last. Three days afterwards, his body was found in Carrell Creek, with marks of violence upon it, which led to the belief that there had been foul play. Suspicion at once fell upon Jack Wells, and he was arrested. The circumstantial proof was so strong, that no doubt is left of his being the murderer. He had had some difficulty, the week previous, with Owens, and was dismissed for insolence. He, however, lingered around the works, and had been heard repeatedly to threaten ven-

geance. On the very day of the disappearance of Owens, he was seen to shake his fist in the overseer's face, and say, 'I'll be revenged on ye, I will.'

"The murderer was also seen wandering along the bank of the creek about nightfall of the day on which Owens disappeared. The preliminary trial took place in September, but, owing to some informality, the case was deferred. It comes up on Wednesday, and excites interest, from the fact that Judge Hammond takes his seat upon the bench for the first time, and our talented townsman, Harvey Dole, is prosecuting attorney."

Esther's eyes were riveted on the doctor, as he read.

"Harvey Dole!" said the doctor. "If he undertakes the case against the man, there is no hope, whether he is guilty or not. He'll make judge, jury, and the fellow himself believe he's guilty, if he is as innocent as I am."

Esther looked at her watch. Half past four in the afternoon. It was Tuesday.

"Dr. Strong, what time does the night train leave Ripley?"

"About seven o'clock," he replied, looking at Esther inquiringly. "Would you like a letter mailed before that time?"

"I am going myself to Albany to-night. I think I have a duty to perform there. Please look again at that article. Was it September 17th that Owens was missed?"

The doctor read again, "He was not seen at the Iron Works after September 17th."

Esther rose to make preparations for her journey. The old lady remonstrated, and declared that it was presumption and folly. The doctor read the expression on Esther's face, and was silent for a moment, and then said, —

"Mrs. William, I heard Mr. Brainard say that he was going to Dalton to-morrow, a station only twenty miles this side of the city.

I think he will take this train with you, if you desire."

Esther was only too happy for this aid, but her interest in poor Wells would have carried her through more difficulties than a night's travel alone in the cars.

While she is on her way to her poor friends, we will precede her to Boggs Hollow.

Owens was a bachelor, and took his meals at a hotel about a half a mile from the Iron Works, but roomed over the counting-room of the foundery. He was often absent for days together on business, and therefore his absence was not noted, save by the head workman, who needed some directions, which Owens had promised to give him early in the morning. Thinking it singular that he did not appear during the day, he went to the old gentleman to inquire what should be done.

Mr. Boggs was an old man — old, too, before his time, from hard work, exposure, and some-

what irregular habits. He had been laid up for some weeks with the rheumatism.

"Owens gone! Not been at the works all day! And to-morrow is Saturday," he exclaimed. "There is a large order for railroad iron to be delivered to-morrow, and he told me that he should have a busy time at the works till Saturday."

"Yes, sir; that's the very thing. A good many of the hands are idle to-day for want of his directions."

The old man swore roundly. "Where's Henry? Have you seen him to-day?"

"Yes, sir. He went off this morning in his gig, with his mare 'Fanny.' Sam Rix went with 'Billy.' There is a race, sir, at John's Park."

The old man swore louder, kicked the chair away, on which his rheumatic legs were resting, and ordered his horse and buggy. On his way to the Iron Works, he stopped at the bank.

"Has Owens drawn out the money due to Freeland to-day?"

"Yes," replied the cashier; "just after the bank was opened this morning;" and he turned to the check.

"All right," said the old man, and drove on.

The cashier took up the check again, after the old man had left, and examined it critically, then compared it with other signatures of Owens, gave a low whistle, then examined the signatures again through a small magnifying glass. Some one entered the bank. He put the checks aside carefully, and did not think of them again for many weeks.

Old Mr. Boggs, who never lost sight of his business for many days together, gave directions to his workmen, and remained for some hours at the works. He came down again on Saturday, and remained at the counting-room most of the day. When he opened the safe for money to pay the workmen at five o'clock, there was no money to be found!

Suspicion at once fell upon the absent Owens. He had absconded, of course, and taken the money with him.

Meanwhile a few men, whose suspicions had been aroused by Wells's threats, had been searching the woods and dredging the brook. About eight o'clock that evening they found the body, as we have stated.

Poor Wells was cooking some fish for his hungry children, while his wife lay on the floor in a drunken stupor, when he was arrested by the sheriff.

The man was so overwhelmed and shocked by the accusation, that his conduct strengthened the suspicion against him.

Sandy cried as they put the irons on his wrists, and begged them not to hurt father. "He never hurt Mr. Owens, for he never strikes us; he never does."

He followed his father, with the baby in his arms, to the counting-room, where they put him

into a carriage, and drove rapidly to the jail. Then Sandy went back, undressed the baby, gave her some supper, and rocked her to sleep, then threw himself down on the floor, and cried till sleep came to his relief.

The next day was Sunday. There was a funeral at the works, and all the workmen were present to follow their overseer to the grave.

David Wells came home. He had seen his father that morning, and felt assured of his innocence.

"Why, David, I had made up my mind to do as the lady wished, and had been watching all day for the overseer, to ask his pardon for my rudeness."

"I know, father; I believe you; but how can we make others believe it?"

"That's the thing, my boy. It's all agin me; I see it. Well, I've been wanting to die, and now I'm taken at my word; but I didn't want to bring you all to shame."

When David entered his home, he was surprised to find the house in order, his mother in a tidy gown and cap, while a comfortable breakfast of hasty-pudding and milk was on the table for the children.

"Yer dad's no the mon to do such a deed," she said. "I'll never rest the sole of my foot till I find him as did it."

She walked into the city to see her husband, and comfort him in her own rude way.

She quitted the gin shop, set herself to work to earn bread for her children, and from the moment of her husband's arrest was a reformed woman. On the day of the funeral she shut the door, and kept her children at home, lest they should be insulted.

The Boggs family followed the corpse to the grave as chief mourners, Henry Boggs wearing a badge of black crape.

The majority of these workmen believed in Wells's guilt, but they were confident that he

had had great provocation, and not one but felt more pity than anger for him, save the Boggs family. They were unwearied in their efforts to collect witnesses, and secure the verdict against the accused.

When the result of the first trial was made known, Henry Boggs was indignant at the stupidity of the lawyers in not detecting the informality of the indictment. "We should have had the fellow hanged and off our hands by this time," he said, when the second trial came on.

"See that all is right now," he said to Dole. "Get him hung, and I'll give you a thousand down myself."

Dole was surprised, and, looking sharply at young Boggs, perceived that he had been drinking.

"You seem to enjoy the idea of the man's hanging," he said.

"We'll have no peace at the works till the

fellow is out of the way. Don't forget that I'll take my oath that I saw Wells about two rods below the dam at half past four."

The lawyer made a note of it, and they parted.

The second trial drew out large crowds. Dole was to conduct it. He was a great favorite in the city, and was accounted very eloquent.

Many ladies were present, and the courtroom was so crowded as to render ingress almost impossible, and standing-room difficult to be obtained.

It was eleven o'clock A. M., on Wednesday, November 26, when Esther, accompanied by Mr. Brainard — for he would not leave her to go alone — left the depot, and took their way to the court-room.

There was a crowd about the door, and it was with difficulty that Mr. Brainard made his way to the entrance.

"No room," said the doorkeeper; "not even a standing-place."

Mr. Brainard took out a card, wrote a few words, and requested the doorkeeper to send it to the judge. In a short time, order was given for the crowd to make way, and Mr. Brainard and Esther entered and went forward to the witness-stand.

The Boggs family had seats near the bench. Henry Boggs, dressed in the height of fashion, was seated near a young lady, daughter of a well-known citizen.

David Wells—the shadow of his former self—pale and thin, was sitting near his mother, who was decently dressed, and held the baby in her arms, while Sandy sat at her side. His bright eyes and intelligent face showed that he comprehended fully all that was taking place.

They had given up all hope, and the look of utter despondency on the faces of all the family but that of Sandy was plainly written.

Henry Boggs was the next witness called. He described Jack Wells as a high-tempered, troublesome hand, who had taken advantage of his skill as a workman to abuse and insult the overseer, whose patience had at last given way, and he had discharged him.

Wells, he said, was poor, and in desperate need of money. He then swore to having seen the accused, at half past five o'clock in the afternoon of that day, near the counting-room in the foundery.

"That testimony finishes the forging of the chain around the guilty man," said a gentleman in a seat distant from the witness-box; "that was the hour just previous to the letting out of the hands to supper, when the murder was probably committed."

"Hush!" said his friend. "Vinton, who is that lady? and what is she doing here? Look! she has a face which an artist would choose for his Madonna."

Vinton turned his eyes to the witness-stand. His surprise was great to see Esther. She had been requested to lay aside her bonnet, and she stood there in her widow's cap and plain black dress, her cheeks a little flushed with the excitement of the occasion, but calm, self-possessed — first turning a look of sweet compassion upon the accused man, whose air of utter hopelessness was painful to witness. He had noticed the bustle around him when her name was spoken, and had once looked up. But he was ashamed to catch her eye, so debased did he feel himself.

David, too, wondered, but had no hope of any relief. Only little Sandy, of all the family, seemed to understand that she might be there for their sake. His bright eyes danced, his little face glowed all over with delight, as he plucked his mother's gown, —

"See, mother, see! I told you how I dreamed about her. She comes to me with

that same face in all my dreams — only then she is all in white!" and Sandy thought if she was only in white then, he would know she was an angel come to take father out of prison.

The crowded court-room was hushed as she gave in her testimony in a sweet, clear voice, so pure in its tones that she was heard by every one there. She gave a clear, minute account of the time spent with the children in the room adjoining that of the counting-room in the foundery, the quarrel of the overseer and Henry Boggs, her crossing the room to bolt the door, and the faces of the men as seen by her through the little window. The very words of the threat and the horrid oaths came to her, as if memory, too faithful to its trust, had recorded them for this hour.

"The foundery clock struck its half past four just as I was bolting the door, and I

remember that I compared my watch," she said, "when I returned to the coil of rope, and found that the time agreed."

She named the sums demanded from the overseer, his reply upon the state of the business, and his remarks on Henry Boggs's habits.

All Harvey Dole's cross-questioning failed to elicit the slightest inaccuracy in her testimony. When this was becoming very trying, evidently, to Esther, Vinton managed to make his way through the crowd to near where Esther stood. At one look from him the prosecuting attorney ceased his questions. Vinton had still another object in this move. He had watched Henry Boggs's face, had seen the flush of shame, the pallor of fear, and the fierce, eager look of the hungry tiger, ready to spring upon his prey.

It was proposed to call little Sandy as a witness. There were some objections made

on account of his tender age, and during the bustle thus occasioned, Henry Boggs sought to escape from the room; but Vinton's eye was upon him, and the attempt was frustrated.

Little Sandy was asked if he knew the nature of an oath. His reply was,—

"Yes, sir. It is to swear that you will tell the truth. And I know it is wicked to tell lies, because Mrs. Gray says so, and because the Bible says, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness.'"

He was permitted to testify; and he gave a clear account of his father, from the time of Esther's leaving him at seven o'clock on the evening of September 17 till the time when Mr. Owens was missed.

It was time for the court to adjourn; but the change of feeling towards the prisoner was marked in the appearance of the audience.

Young Boggs was arrested; nor would the judge, under the circumstances, permit bail to

be taken. The master's son and the workman slept under the same roof that night, within the stone walls of the prison.

The young lawyer who had done his best to defend poor Wells, but who felt himself too weak to contend with Harvey Dole and overwhelming testimony, was surprised that night by a call from the Honorable Mr. Vinton.

"I came to the city," said Mr. Vinton, "to see how my law student and friend would demean himself in this case. I had not wished your success. The affair has taken a different turn. Go on; you will clear that poor man; but I wish him more than cleared. There was evidently a base plot to make him suffer for the crime of Boggs. This must be exposed. Command my services if you need them; but it will be better for your reputation if you stand alone."

While they were talking, the cashier of the

bank called with the check containing Owens's indorsement, and dated September 17.

"I had my suspicions at the time," he said, "and now they are confirmed."

The cumulative evidence became stronger every hour. The clerk, Sam Rix, had heard and had seen a part of the quarrel. He had come to the counting-room door, found it locked, and had heard a strange sound, as of a heavy body falling; but he had been bribed to silence by a great reward.

When the court met again, and the case was given to the jury, they remained out but a short time. The foreman pronounced the verdict, "Not guilty," with a strong, loud voice.

Poor Wells bowed his head upon his hands and burst into tears. His wife and children gathered round him.

"Come, Jack — come home," said his now decently dressed and comely looking wife ;

"come home — there's a clean house and a good supper, and I'll always be a good wife to ye as long as I live."

"I've thanked God first, as she would have had me do," he said, "and now I want to see the good angel whom God sent to us."

He looked round for Mrs. Gray, but she had disappeared — only, however, to enter a carriage, that she might escape the gaze of the crowd. She had ordered another to convey the Wells family to their own house; but not till she had promised Sandy that she would go down to the Hollow in the morning and see the family.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Wouldst thou from sorrow find a sweet relief?

Or is thy heart oppressed with woes untold?

Balm wouldst thou gather for corroding grief?

Pour blessings round thee like a shower of gold."

ON the morning after the trial, the Wells family were all gathered in their home, waiting for Esther's coming — all save Sandy, whose boyish impatience could not be restrained, and who had stood, for some time, on the little bridge that spanned Carrell Creek, waiting for the lady.

"Please, Mrs. Gray, may I walk with you? They are all waiting to see you — father, mother, and David. John has come from Longwood, the baby is dressed in a white frock, and mother has put on the new gown

which a lady gave her yesterday. Mother sat still, and folded her hands, when David read in the Bible; and I heard her tell father, last night, that she would always be a good wife to him, and never drink another drop of whiskey. O, Mrs. Gray, I am so glad that I fell asleep in the old lumber room! If I had kept awake, you wouldn't have staid there. And I'm so glad I carried baby there! And — and — I'm so glad for everything! We are all so happy that we can't be any happier. I wish that you could be as happy."

"Why, Sandy, my boy, I think I am happier. I was so happy this morning, that I felt as if I wanted to come here flying, like a bird, singing on the wing."

"That's just as I feel; but I'm a little boy, you know, and not a nice lady; and so, this morning, I went off into that piece of old woods, and turned ever so many somersets, and halloed, and shouted, and sang Jim Crow, be-

fore I could sit still, and wait for you, as mother bade me. O, no, Mrs. Gray, I don't think you can be quite so happy as I am. You haven't had a father that was going to be — I can't say it; it's awful, but you know what I mean — and all the boys telling you of it, and calling you a murderer's child, and running away from you whenever you went out in the street. I've cried myself to sleep all the nights, and mother has cried, and we haven't had much to eat, and father was all alone, shut up in a cell.

"You can't tell anything about it. Now it is all over, and father is cleared, and everybody knows he wasn't so wicked, and all the folks are so kind! The governor spoke to father last night. O, Mrs. Gray, it seems as if you *couldn't* be so happy, because you never have been so miserable."

There was some philosophy in this; and, as Esther could hardly make it plain to the child,

she talked of something else. But the peace in her heart was deep and full. She could not doubt that her husband knew, and was interested still, in these families at the Hollow.

She had no fanciful speculations, no pet theory about the intercourse of spirits. She dreamed no dreams, and saw no visions; but the passage, "Are they not all ministering spirits?" occurred to her as she came out that morning, and William's voice and features were more vivid to her mind's eye and ear than usual. "I am doing my Father's work — not alone, for God is with me; my *husband* is with me."

The thought that she had been the means of saving poor Wells softened all the sorrow that she had been called to bear. The keen air, the sunlight, the blue sky above, were full of God's love. "And heaven will come at last. Yes, my husband, our work is still the same. Your active spirit is not *resting* now. You did not want rest. No; you are working still, with an

immortal spirit's power and strength. Perhaps you are with us here. Of one thing I am sure. Your love for me is the same. Have I not kept my heart pure in its love for you? Has it not grown stronger since you have been in heaven? Blessed be God that human love may be so purified and made strong by love to God, that it will *never* die! that the death of one will only strengthen the tie, and the release of the other left *on* earth be only like setting free a bird who has been kept from its mate. How it shakes its wing, and mounts up, all quivering with impatience, as, with unerring instinct, it goes direct to its loved one! There will come a day when I shall thus soar away. But I must not think of this." And then long years stretched before her; years during which patience must have its perfect work; years of forbearance, of self-denial, for the poor, querulous old lady whose only dependence for comfort was upon herself.

Such had been Esther's thoughts as she walked that day to Boggs Hollow, and a sweet thankfulness filled her heart that she could do this for William, her husband, for whom God had other work in heaven.

Who shall say which was the happier, the workman at Boggs Hollow, rescued from an ignominious death, or Esther, with that peace which knows no will but the will of Him to whom her life was consecrated? Compare, as far as finite man can do so, the happiness of Him who suffered in Gethsemane and on the cross, to redeem a world from sin, and the happiness of an earthly sovereign, who has gathered to himself the glory and honor of one short life! The Savior taught us the way to the deepest, fullest joy; but our faith falters when we see the fire that refines, and hear the roar of the billows which almost overwhelm; Gethsemane and the cross, before we can say, *It is finished.*

It was necessary that Wells and his family should leave Boggs Hollow. Old Mr. Boggs would not hear of his remaining another day on his premises. There was a small foundery at Longwood, where John lived, and they decided to go there.

There was one sad thought in Esther's happiness: she could do no more for the school at the Hollow. The owner had declared, with an oath, that he would have no more praying nor teaching on the premises.

The path which she had marked out for herself was made all the plainer; but how could she leave these poor, degraded families, for whom William had worked and prayed? She remembered his prophetic vision just before he died, — "Esther, I see a neat little church there, and a thriving population."

"Ah, dear William, what would you say now?"

It was sad to see the family, upon whose

influence she had reckoned so much, leaving the settlement. But — "God knew best."

"Never despair," said her good old pastor, Dr. Clark, who had walked out to the Hollow to meet her. "I am learning to distrust my own wisdom, and henceforth shall try to remember what a short-sighted creature I am. All this fall I have studied how to keep the knowledge of Wells's imprisonment from you, and hoped I had succeeded. I believed him guilty, and supposed it would only give you pain, as you had no power to do him good. I came near, being the death of the man in my mistaken kindness. Let us commit the poor people of the Hollow to God. He may bring light out of darkness."

When Esther returned to Westbrook, it was her determination to devote herself to the comfort of William's mother. The little property of the old lady was nearly spent; what

remained was invested in the old parsonage and a few acres of land. It was with reluctance that she consented to any changes being made in the house, or any addition to the furniture. She did not wish to be under obligations to any one, "not she; common crockery was good enough for her, but if Esther wanted a china cup, she could drink from it; but a steel fork and blue ware answered her purpose."

In Esther's own room a great change was visible. The white paint, delicately tinted paper, the mossy carpet, her own furniture, — precious from its associations, — a few choice pictures, the portraits of her husband and mother, all combined to make it a pleasant retreat when mind and body wearied of the monotony below stairs.

Esther would have chosen some other path in life. She would gladly have consecrated her life and her money to the missionary

cause. Such a work as Miss Fiske was doing in Persia, or that of Mrs. Judson in India, would have been welcomed by Esther.

But her duty was made so plain to her own conscience that she took up her cross bravely and bore it. She was a blessing to the village of Westbrook. Wherever there was poverty, sorrow, or sin, Esther was there.

One or two girls, daughters of farmers, had been to the city, and, tempted by those who lie in wait for the unwary, had gone astray, and afterwards returned to their native village to hide their shame and die. Esther sought them out, and without one word of reproach, but with sweet pity in her heart, and the Savior's "Go, and sin no more" on her lips, she won them back to life and virtue.

Many wondered, some scoffed, Dr. Strong looked thoughtful; perhaps Mr. Brainard

alone fully understood her character. She had studied the life of the Savior till she had become imbued with the spirit of the Gospels.

It did not occur to Esther, when testifying to the innocence of Jack Wells, that it would of course lead to her being called as witness in the trial of Henry Boggs. No act of her life had been so repulsive as this.

The Boggs family spared no money in obtaining counsel. The best talent of the city was employed to plead for the young man. When Esther stood again in the witness-stand, the fire of cross-questioning was merciless; but, with firmness and modesty, she stood there apparently calm.

The trial resulted in a verdict of "Guilty," but the punishment was commuted to imprisonment for life.

It was terrible to see this young man led away, in the flush of opening manhood, to

that huge stone tomb that a second death only would open for him.

Esther returned from that second trip to the city looking more worn and weary than in all her life previous.

Time passed in the old parsonage, bringing only increasing pain and infirmity to Mrs. Gray. The rheumatism became chronic. It affected her hands till they bore scarcely the semblance of their former comeliness. She was for many months bedridden. Esther found, after much searching, an invalid's chair which was so constructed that the sufferer could wheel herself about the house.

Esther, whose love of nature grew with her continued residence in the country, found some hours for study each day. The botany and geology of that region afforded her recreation and health. No country-bred farmer's daughter could outwalk her, or equalled her in strength of muscle.

She had lived in Westbrook five years, when one of those great commercial convulsions which sweep over the land as often as once in a decade, came like a tornado into our cities. Some of the strongest commercial houses were wrecked in the tempest — among others, the one in which a part of Esther's inheritance was invested.

When Esther received the news, she went to the city, looked into the affairs of the house, convinced herself of their integrity, but of their inability to save a part, even, of their own means. Quietly investing what remained of her own fortune in a safe way, but in a manner which lessened her income, she returned to Westbrook — never revealing to Mrs. Gray her misfortune.

"Mrs. William" spared no money to alleviate the suffering of her mother.

Martha Brown became weary at last, and when a farmer with six motherless children

asked her to become his wife, she said, "Yes," at once.

"Tain't no worse taking care of six children than 'tis livin' with a woman as never knows when she is pleased."

Esther encouraged the marriage, and helped Martha Brown to get ready for the event.

"I wouldn't leave ye at all, Mrs. William, but ye see my temper is naterally none of the best, and I get riled up every day, so that I'm growin' bad, and shan't be fit for heaven at all if I stay much longer; but my sister Patty will come, and may be her disposition will stand it better."

But Patty was not asked to come. Esther found a woman who came every day for two or three hours and assisted her in the kitchen; everything else she did herself.

From that hour Mrs. Gray's temper appeared to soften a little.

"A sign, perhaps, that she is near death,"

said Mr. Brainard to the doctor one day. "I have always thought that Mrs. Gray's irritability was the result of disease in a measure, and that, as the body grew weaker, the mind would become more placid."

"Near death!" exclaimed the doctor. "Not so near as some others I might name, who are loving and gentle as lambs. No, Mrs. Gray may yet live ten years. Behold the patience of the saints!"

The doctor had been attending the minister's wife for a slight cough which troubled her. He saw what others did not detect—that her days were numbered. He had seen, too, how the little woman, whose intellect was far from brilliant, and who had been a dead weight upon her husband, taxing his physical strength, trying his patience, and lessening his influence, had grown stronger and more self-reliant, happier, too, under the sweet, silent influence of Esther. Now, suffering had come to finish the work.

Mrs. Brainard's love for her husband and children was the redeeming trait; it was as deep as her shallow nature permitted, but selfish as the love of the weak-minded generally is.

Suffering often elevates such a character; and when the wife found that she must die, the knowledge was almost like the new life which came to Undine at her marriage.

She was helpless, for she had never learned self-reliance; but she found in Esther's strong, healthful temperament a support and comfort.

It was only when she came to the house that Mr. Brainard could go into his study and give himself to his work.

He knew then that he was walking in the valley of the shadow of death with one who looked up to him to strengthen and sustain her.

It is at such times we learn to be strong. Mingled with the sound reasoning and logical acumen which distinguished his sermons, there came sweet thoughts of the heavenly rest, calm

words of submission to God's will, glorious visions of that life beyond this, where the redeemed shall go on from glory to glory, knowing the fullness of joy forever.

The whole village felt the influence, and the church grew strong and increased.

There was no busier little woman to be found than Esther Gray.

She was an early riser, and gave her first hour to God.

"When first thine eyes unveil,
Give thy soul leave to do the like,"

was a favorite quotation.

Then came the care of the helpless one, who was as dependent upon her as an infant.

Mrs. Gray, we have said, could neither feed nor dress herself. Esther never allowed another person to perform this duty. It was difficult to persuade the old lady that, as she could do no household work, she could wear a neat cap and a black silk wrapper in the

morning, and thus save the painful toil of dressing twice. The force of habit was strong, and she preferred to wear the old blue calico and dreary black cap. But there were some points on which Esther was as unyielding as Graylock Mountain. She would put on the fresh cap every morning, and a becoming dress. She would cover the little round table with nice linen, and put thereon the white china; the coffee must be settled with an egg, though the old lady insisted that a bit of fish-skin was just as good and more economical; the bread must be of the nicest flavor, and the corn-cakes of fresh meal. Esther's love of the beautiful mingled with all her household duties. Summer and winter she managed to have fresh flowers on her breakfast table, though sometimes in winter it was only a few green leaves and a geranium blossom. Dr. Strong had added a conservatory to his other bachelor luxuries, and as he visited the old parsonage

professionally to see the old lady every few days, he never came without a bouquet.

The doctor was a scientific man, well known in all Western Massachusetts for his botanical and geological attainments.

The superficial, school-girl knowledge of women generally had always moved his ridicule, and he had often said that he ran away with both hands on his ears when he heard a lady use a scientific term.

But it was observed by Mr. Brainard that the doctor never came to him, as formerly, with his rare flowers or new specimens, but passed on to the old house on the hill.

One day Esther was moulding some bread. She wore a becoming little cap and a white linen apron, and, with sleeves rolled up, was working the white dough vigorously; now rolling it into a ball, and then pounding with her little white fists till it was flat, then turning it over and over, adding a little flour, and pound-

ing again, with might and main, all the while singing a hymn by Wesley : —

“Son of the carpenter, receive
This humble work of mine;
Worth to my meanest labor give
By joining it to thine.

“Careless through outward cares I go,
From all distraction free;
My hands are but engaged below;
My heart is still with thee.

“O, when wilt thou, my life, appear?
Then gladly will I cry,
‘Tis done! the work thou gav’st me here;
‘Tis finished, Lord!’ and die.”

Her voice rang out, clear and sweet, in the old kitchen. The door was open into the adjoining room, and the old lady’s chair was drawn near the door, that she might not feel lonely.

The snow lay so deep in front of the house, that the doctor had entered by the little side entry that led to the kitchen; and, as his knock

was not heard, he had opened the door while Esther was singing the first verse. He stood listening to the music, and watching the bread-making, till two loaves were moulded out, and put into pans to rise, when Esther turned, to place them near the fire.

“There is another of Wesley’s hymns,” said the doctor, “which my mother used to sing; it came to my mind when I saw what you were doing, and heard your voice, —

‘Man doth not live by bread alone;
Whate’er thou wilt can feed;
Thy power converts the bread to stone,
Or turns the stone to bread.’”

“Dear, good Wesley,” said Esther. “I thank him almost every day for his hymn. I hope to hear him sing in heaven. — What have you there, doctor?” as the doctor opened a little basket, on which lay a curious flower, on a little cotton.

“Something which I have been puzzling my

head over for an hour this morning. I cannot classify it."

"Just go into the parlor a moment, and sit with mother till I wipe this flour from my hands, and I will look at it."

"Come here, doctor, and look at my eyes. I am sure I'm growing blind—of course I am, for it is almost the only trouble left to fall upon me," said the old lady.

Before the doctor was through listening to the complaints of the old lady, Esther had quietly taken the flower, and examined it, and written upon a card, *Thea — viridis*. "Some friend of yours is introducing the tea-plant into this country. Some years ago, William brought me a flower like this. He studied it a while, and then carried it to Dr. Gray, who analyzed it for him. William likes botany very much."

The manner in which Esther spoke of her husband annoyed Dr. Strong. She used the

present tense, as we do when our friends are living, but absent from us.

Moreover, her manner was cheerful. There was no minor key in her tones at such times. She never said, "Life was so pleasant when my husband was here! but it is dark and desolate now;" she spoke of him with a smile, and, when the anniversary of her wedding came, her room was bright with flowers, and a fresh wreath was twined around his picture.

She spent the anniversary of his death at his mother's side, trying to soothe the deep gloom which fell upon the old lady at such times. The doctor would shake his head and look puzzled, as he entered his carriage after calling there.

"I can't understand it. It's all a mystery—that gifted woman leading such a humdrum life here, and as happy as if she were the centre of a brilliant circle—a position for which she is well fitted. If—but—" And then the doctor

reckoned his gains, his bank stock, his pleasant home, his lucrative practice; and then he asked himself, Can it be that I should fail because I am not a member of Brainard's church? Does not the minister know, and cannot Mrs. William understand, that I love God, worship him through his works?

"But still my human hands are weak
To hold your iron creeds;
Against the words ye bid me speak
My heart within me pleads."

The doctor shook his head, and "If — but" were again on his lips. "She loves this world, enjoys nature as few hearts are capable of doing, lives here as if she might stay always; and yet, all the time, I can think of her only as an angel that is in this world by mistake; or like the magnolia, that gorgeous flower of southern zones, but which nature, in some generous moment, permitted to grow in one spot in New England, and only there, in all the north."

One morning in early spring he called, before breakfast, to see Mrs. Brainard. She had lingered through the winter only because of the gentle ministration of husband and daughter, and of Esther, whose presence brought healing. She had been watching with Mrs. Brainard. The doctor found Esther in the hushed and darkened room.

"Come, Mrs. William," he said; "your patient sleeps well. Come with me out into the air and sunshine of this spring morning. A ride will do you good."

Esther was glad to go. The contrast was refreshing, from the sick room to the beauty without. All nature was waking from its winter's sleep, the leaf buds of the trees were opening, the grass was green on the hills, robins were seeking where to build, and a few birds were giving a rehearsal, as a promise of the jubilee with which they would inaugurate the return of spring, a few weeks later, when the

choir would be full with the sopranos and altos that were yet to come from the south. A few farmers were already at the plough, and though the cows were not yet turned out to pasture, they were feeding by the wayside, and the sheep were scattered over the hills. The smoke was curling from the houses in the valley and on the hill-sides, and over all the soft sunlight of a spring morning rested like a father's smile on a beloved household.

Esther drank in the scene as the thirsty hart drinks from the water-courses.

These two lovers of nature had become so well acquainted that the silence of the first few minutes was understood. It was the hush of silent worship. It was broken by the doctor.

"Mrs. William, there are moments when I desire no other world than this. I shall have learned but little of this, before I shall be called to another. I wish that the resurrection

of the body, in which you believe, were only a rejuvenation here; and yet, in all my practice, I have scarcely found a person who was not glad to go when death came. I suppose that pain, disappointment, and the thousand ills of life wean us from it."

"I do not wish to die because I am weary of this world," said Esther. "I look upon this world as one only of the different stages through which the human soul must pass; each successive stage higher than the last, till — but, no, we cannot conceive to what heights we may attain; what glory is in store for the redeemed soul! But first of all comes the discipline of this life. We must not shrink from the lesson, learned, perhaps, with groans and sighs, in tears and blood. Christ taught us by Gethsemane and the cross, and I believe no one is fully fitted for the happiness of heaven till he has tasted sorrow here."

"That reminds me of my mother's words

on her death-bed," said the doctor. "She had seen many trials; had buried husband and six children. I, alone, of all the family, was left to minister to her wants. 'My child,' she said, as she lay resting, after a severe spasm of pain, 'the sufferings of this present life are all lost now in the glory of the heavenly world. I see a glimpse of it as one sees a beam of sunlight through the rent of a heavy curtain. My husband and children are there. I know it, my son; in a few minutes I shall be with them!' These were her last words. I wish I could believe it was no delusion."

Esther turned her eyes to the doctor with a strange wonder in them.

"Doctor, didn't the Savior say to the disciples, 'I go to prepare a place for you'? Would the disciples, then, not know each other in heaven? Did not Jesus know, when he said this, that John, who stood by his side, would watch the dying bed of his mother? Ah, doc-

tor, you have not read revelation as you have studied God's elder scriptures, — the Book of Nature, — or you would have no doubt."

"But, Mrs. William, you have no faith in the so-called communications of spirits."

"I do not judge others," said Mrs. William; "for myself, I need none to assure me that my loved ones are waiting — no, not waiting, but, amid the activity and rapture of heaven, are thinking of me, and will welcome me with such joy as perfected love only knows! What a strange idea (to express it as you would, doctor, how *unphilosophical*), to suppose that the rupture of a blood-vessel, the swift flight of a bullet through the heart, the deadly touch of pestilence, could destroy the soul's power of loving, or erase from memory the dearest records on its scroll! No, doctor; the Gospel of St. John teaches a different lesson. The human love which is purified by the love of God will never die.

The sanctified friendships of this world are bonds which death cannot sever."

"And how of marriages?" said the doctor, in a low, earnest manner.

"And marriages," said Esther, "that are not of the earth, earthy, a marriage that is the true union of two souls who are redeemed and purified by that love which is a consuming fire, casting out the dross of selfishness and impurity, is a marriage for both worlds, a union as immortal as the spirits that love!"

The doctor was silent, but drove slowly, as if he would lose no word. She said no more till they came to the summit of the hill, from which they had a prospect of the surrounding country. Hill and valley, woodland and water; the distant Connecticut, like a thread of silver, running through meadows of richest green; Holyoke and Mount Tom, old sentinels, always at their posts; little villages, looking like clusters of white houses

amid trees, — all gleaming now in the sunlight.

"I always think of Moses on Mount Pisgah when I come up here," said Esther. "It is a type of what the Christian sees in imagination when he reads St. Paul's vision."

As Esther spoke, a little ragged, barefooted boy came running to the carriage.

"Please stop, doctor. Father has got the cramps, and mother wants some *palagolic* for the baby!"

The doctor's face clouded a little; but the professional blandness soon returned, and, asking Esther to excuse him a moment, he took his portmanteau and entered the farm-house.

From that hour the doctor ceased to say, as he rode his rounds, and counted up his gains, "If" and "but." The "mystery" of Mrs. William's life was in a measure solved — the secret of that sweet patience made known to him.

"It may be all a delusion; but that idea of a 'true marriage' is very beautiful. If she is right, the mistakes of life are beyond computation."

A letter, written about this time to a friend, will give a clew to Esther's views of marriage:—

"Our spiritual joys had been one, and even the throne of grace was lonely without his presence and the clasp of his hand; for we had united in our secret devotions, and bowed together in our family worship. A day or two before our parting, he said to me, 'Do you believe in the presence of departed spirits?' I replied hopefully, but not confidently. He said, 'I think it may be so.' 'Then,' said I, 'I shall think of you as with me in our accustomed hour of prayer.'

"'O,' said he, with an expression of peculiar joy, 'that will be sweet. I did not think of that.'

"The next morning, — the one preceding his death, — he referred to the subject again, and expressed confirmed belief and undoubted assurance of its truth, saying, 'I know it is so; you may be sure of it.'

"This was very gratifying; but having always been accustomed to rest upon Scripture as the ground of faith, my heart wavered. I did not wish to console myself with a delusion, however pleasing; for I knew that would separate, instead of uniting us, when his spirit had entered upon that world where *all is truth*.

"In the first hours of my bereavement, my support was God, and my consolation my husband's joy, and the thought that the world was entirely crucified to me. But soon my heart began to ache with loneliness, and in agony of spirit I cast myself at God's feet, crying, '*Where is he?*' The sweet answer came, in the words of Jesus, 'With me in Paradise.' Here was a fixed place, a definite idea! I

knew where he was, and with whom. Then my heart longed for a vision of Paradise, and I tried to look therein through the Bible.

"I will give the record of some of those hours of study. He who was worthy to open the book, and loose the seals thereof, has raised the veil, and we behold Abraham, the father of the faithful, receiving to his bosom the sainted Lazarus. He also holds converse with a lost spirit in another world, declaring (by his reminding him of it) his perfect acquaintance with the earthly lives of both.

"Now, would this knowledge be delegated to him, and withheld from others?

"May not all the redeemed be reading daily the history of God's mercy and judgment in the annals of earth?

"As part of the church of Christ, may they not know, as soon as the angels, when repenting sinners turn to Zion?

"In the mount of transfiguration it was not two angels, but two of the redeemed, that came and talked with Jesus, and in reference to this earthly pilgrimage and death, with a more perfect understanding than the disciples who were daily with him.

"God has condescended to reveal to us much about heaven and its bright inhabitants, that they may be the subjects of our thought and interest, even while we dwell in houses of clay.

"When the spirit is freed, and its vision enlarged, shall it then be confined to *one* world? Shall it not be able then to look backward more perfectly than it now looks upward?

"The souls under the altar (Rev. vi. 10) knew that their blood was not avenged on the earth; and Paul, after speaking of the martyrs, says, 'Seeing we are *compassed about* by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight,' &c. Again he says, 'Ye are

come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and *church of the first born*, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the *spirits of just men made perfect*, &c.

"Now, if we have come to these, they have been received, and we are, in a sense, among them, that is, of their company — companions. They see us, know us, and the only impenetrable veil between us is our bodies of clay, which, of course, veil not only us, but them. Abraham is represented, in the parable alluded to, as receiving to his bosom one of earth's beggars. The angels had carried it to him, that, perhaps, in that calm resting-place, he might receive his first impressions of immortality. Moses and Elias shared in the glory of the mount of transfiguration, and talked with Jesus, not as strangers, but as if accustomed to such converse.

"In Rev. xxii. 8, 9, John is about to worship the angel, who forbids him, saying, 'I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book.' What can be plainer than this? A prophet of the Old Testament is again a prophet of the New. The first was a ministration of grace; the second, of glory. It led him to earth, to communicate with one still in the body; to impart instruction to that church of which he had been, and was still, a member.

"God uses his saints in his kingdom, and while part of that kingdom still lingers in the wilderness, their footsteps will be among us, and perhaps their words in our ears.

"Revelation is rich in heavenly scenery, and while we gaze with wonder to behold the Lamb surrounded by the living creatures and elders, we listen with joy, for their song is redeeming love. They are our kindred in Christ.

"Rev. xxi. 12 and 14 may serve as a clew to the names of the four and twenty elders.

"In 2 Kings vi. 15, 17, we see that Elisha had the power of discovering spiritual presence—a gift imparted probably at the time of Elijah's ascension, for he saw him as he went up.

"Thus far, the study of the Bible on this subject has given me great light. God has thrown me into the furnace of affliction, but I will glorify him in the fire, and trust him in the deep waters. We are to build gold, silver, and precious stones upon the foundation Christ has laid. Some of these precious stones may be pearls of beauty lying in the depths of the sea of sorrow; then must we go down and struggle with the tide to gain them. Better that the billows go all over us, than lose one gem."

CHAPTER IX.

"Fold her, O Father, in thine arms,
And let her henceforth be
A messenger of love between
Our human hearts and thee."

"Yes, she must die," said Dr. Strong, in answer to a question from Esther. "Mrs. Brai-
nard comes from a consumptive family. That
fair, delicate complexion, narrow chest, undue
length of arm, and weak brain, are all inher-
ited. My skill is of little avail in such cases.
I can do better when, as is sometimes the case,
there is more strength of intellect. Then I can
make my patients understand that God's natural
laws are imperative, and that a penalty in-
variably follows their disobedience.

This poor little woman has a warm, impulsive

heart. She loves her husband and children — with a self-absorbing, half animal love, it is true — but even that redeems her faults, in a measure. She clings to life, but I am surprised to find her so submissive and gentle in her sickness, when she has heretofore shown herself so self-willed and so helpless. There is no obstinacy like that of a weak woman. Poor Brainard! He is like an eagle with a broken wing. With an intellect of rare power, he is fettered by this weak wife. I can think of nothing, when I see him in his household, but a mighty war-horse, such as Job describes, whose neck is clothed with thunder, set to grinding bark in Sol Smith's mill."

"Doctor," replied Esther, "there is nothing more beautiful than to see a man with his physical and mental power lifting the weak so gently over the rugged ways of life. I differ from you. Mr. Brainard is no eagle with a broken wing, no blind Samson grinding in a prison-

house; for, with all the wife's weakness, the love and mutual trust of this couple have made Mr. Brainard's work, all these years, like that of Jacob for Rachel, 'but the labor of a few days, for the love he bore unto her.'"

"Well, well, perhaps it is so. I am a bachelor, and don't understand such things. It is a happy family — no doubt of that; but it is so because of Brainard's true nobleness of character."

"Have you not seen growth and progress in his wife?"

"Yes, she is not the same woman she was when she married — as much progress as we could expect from a mind that has such a frail body."

While this conversation was passing between the doctor and Esther, the minister and his wife were in the nursery of the little white parsonage. Love and suffering had brought out all the better traits of the little woman.

"I must die, Henry. I have talked with the doctor, and he has frankly told me so; and I have been thinking, as I lay here so helpless and so dependent, that it will be better for you, when God calls me home. I see now what a weak, helpless woman I have been; but I have loved you, Henry, and have tried to do my duty to the children; since Esther Gray has been with us, I have known the difference between a strong, healthy, intellectual woman and such a weak little wife as I have been. You know how selfish I have been, wanting you to be my husband always, *always*, ALWAYS, Henry; you know what I mean. I have heard you talk about guardian angels. Last night I dreamed that I was in heaven, and that God permitted me to watch over you and the children; I thought how sweet it was to make some amends to you for all the trouble I had given you here. I felt so strong without this poor, diseased body! It didn't seem like the heaven I was

expecting, because I felt no separation from you. I loved you more than ever, and—and what seemed strange to me, I prayed for you up there in heaven. You and the children were still mine.

"O, Henry, it was very beautiful, and I am happier for it, and more willing to die; but it was only a dream, I suppose. Henry, I don't believe I shall love you any the less because this consumption wastes my body. You have been not only my husband, but my guide to heaven. I thank you for all your patience with me. I see all my faults and weakness, and your forbearance. I am not so selfish now as I have been, and if you should marry some one else, after I am gone,—some one more worthy of you, like our own dear Esther, for instance,—I do not think it would trouble me, up in heaven. I will watch over you just the same, if God permits. I love you so much, dear Henry, that I should rejoice in anything which would add to your happiness."

A coughing spell interrupted the conversation. Her husband held her in his arms till it was over, and then, laying her gently down, said, "Mary, my love for you has increased as the years have gone by. You were never dearer than now; and I believe, with you, that death will not lessen it, and —"

She laid her little thin hand on his mouth, and said, with a smile, —

"I am a stronger woman, now that I am dying, than I was in life; make no promises, no concessions to my former weakness. I am so sure that you will be very dear to me when I am with the angels, that I am happy. God will order your path, because you will trust in him. I hear Esther's voice. Please ask her to come in.

"Esther, will you watch over my children? Will you help their father to fit them to live useful lives? I do not say, fit them for heaven, for I have heard you say so often that, being

fitted for living rightly here, we are prepared for another world. Will you promise me to look to little Katie when I am gone? Will you guide her in the way she should go?"

Esther promised that, as long as she lived, she would never lose sight of little Katie. She was a bright, promising child, inheriting, as is often the case with daughters, the fine physical development of her father.

"She loves you now," said the mother; "but you will sometimes talk of me to her, — will you not? — that she may still love me, even if I am not with her."

"She will love you more than ever," said Esther. "It is always so. We love, on earth, imperfectly; but when our friends have passed away to heaven, our love grows stronger."

The dying woman turned her eyes to Esther with a sweet, imploring look.

"You will pardon me, — I am so near death, I am sure you will, — if I ask the question, Do

you believe your husband thinks of you, knows what you are doing, loves you still?"

Esther's eyes grew bright. Her whole face flushed, as she said, —

"There is not a shadow of a doubt in my mind. We were both disciples of Jesus. He has prepared a place for us, and where he is, there will we be. My dear friend, the earthly, sensual love of this world is only a lure to lead souls to darkness, despair, and death, and the sanctified human love a chain of gold to bind us more firmly to heaven. I am as happy in William's love now as if he were here, but not as if I were in heaven with him. That comes by and by, when my work is done here."

"And this makes you so happy here?" said the minister's wife.

"Not altogether. I must work to be happy. I do not ask for heaven till I have finished the work God has given me to do."

"And I — alas! Esther, I am dying, and have lived so useless a life!"

"You have *loved* much," said Esther, "and therefore I think you will find work in heaven."

A sweet smile rested on the face of the sick woman, as she laid her head back upon the pillow.

"I am a poor, weak little woman — weak in body, weak in mind; but our Savior let the weakest come unto him. Yes, I believe he will find work for me in heaven. O, Esther, I feel as if God was taking me in the right time. My children need a stronger mind to guide them. Perhaps I can do something for them in heaven."

Her death was very peaceful. She never had speculated upon this mysterious change. No doubts disturbed her peace. Her fear of death was only the fear of a child going alone into the dark. This fear was taken away, for she felt the presence of God, as she drew near the dark way. Like a child who clings to a father's hand, she went into the other world,

From that time little Katie clung to Esther. She was taught by her, and was as much at the old parsonage as the infirmities of old Mrs. Gray would permit. The latter was not fond of children, which fact Katie soon learned. She governed herself accordingly; was quiet when in the big room, studied the old lady's wants, waited upon her with a light step and a kind word, so that, at first only tolerated, she came to be almost a necessity.

The old house grew brighter for the presence of the little girl. The child was a blessing to Esther. There was one hour of the day sacredly devoted to this friendship. The old lady retired to her room immediately after her supper, which was always at an early hour. She grew more and more helpless, till she needed as much care as an infant. It was piteous to see the deformed hands and feet, and the weary, disappointed look of one who, having always been an active housekeeper, must sit idle all the

day. Esther read aloud two hours or more daily, and when the old lady was in bed for the night, she read a few verses of Scripture, and sung a hymn. The singing soothed and comforted the poor sufferer more than any opiate. Then Katie and Esther would sit an hour on the west porch if in summer, or by the firelight in winter, and talk or sing, as the mood was on them; but there always mingled with their talk some reference to the mother in heaven.

"Let us keep our loved ones in our minds. They cannot be unconscious of our interest, and perhaps we may find, when we meet in heaven, that they have been with us in those hours when their own memory was so sacredly cherished."

Little Katie would twine her arms round Esther in these precious hours, and say, "Auntie, my mother said that I might love you dearly, and I do, with all my heart; and sometimes I see mother in my dreams, looking at me

with such a sweet smile, that it makes me feel as if I wanted to go to her; and once I dreamed she said, 'I am so happy, little Katie, that I thank God every day that he let death open my eyes and heart to know how much my husband and children have loved me.' Auntie, this was only a dream, but I thought that perhaps all the real, pure love there is on earth lives forever. I never shall dare now to tell any one I love them, unless I do sincerely; for when they die, they may find out my deception."

"Yes, my darling; and one of the delights of heaven will be, that we shall have no fear to tell our loved ones how much we love them. Our faltering tongues will be unfettered, and our spirits free from the bondage of a timid silence."

"Auntie, dear, I wish you could hear my father pray with the children, Freddie, Willie, and myself. He don't pray as he did when

mother was here, but more as if he knew all about heaven and mother. I always feel as if the angels were in the room when he prays."

"When a Christian dies, we sometimes get a glimpse of the Celestial City, as its gates open to admit our friends," said Esther.

CHAPTER X.

"I shall know the loved who have gone before,
And joyfully sweet will the meeting be,
When over the river, the peaceful river,
The Angel of Death shall carry me."

It was a bright summer afternoon, just before the early tea hour in Westbrook, when our old acquaintance, Martha Brown, now a comely matron, with two sturdy little boys at her side, climbed the hill to the old parsonage.

As she came near the house, she caught up one of the little boys, and, giving him a hearty shake, said, "There, now! Stop catching butterflies, and behave yourself; and you, Josiah, don't you let me see any naughty ways while we are in the house. Sit still and behave yourselves, both of you."

"Children must be seen, and not heard. That is what my mother told me when I was a child. I see Mrs. William at the door; she saw us coming. Make your manners, boys."

The boys took off their hats, bobbed their little round heads, and said, in obedience to their mother's command, "Speak up, boys, so as the lady can hear," — "Very well, I thank ye, ma'am," as Esther inquired for their health.

"Lawful sake, Mrs. William, how you have slicked up! I shouldn't have known the old place. What a sight of difference light paper and paint do make!" said Martha, as she entered the parlor. "And them picters! I allers did have a hankering arter picters. Boys, look! there's that 'Faith' I read you about in the Pilgrim's Progress. And there! O, what's that, Mrs. William? Is it the Delectable Mountains?"

"No. That is a view in Switzerland," said Mrs. William. "That is a beautiful picture, .

Martha. It was sent to me by a friend in Europe."

"Yes. I knew 'twas a nice one, because, you see, it is more like nater than our Sally Ann's picters that she made at the school. Her sky is the color of my indigo pot, and her grass and trees are all one kind of bright green, while her sheep are dead white. Now, I've allers lived in the country, and had my eyes open; there's as many shades of green in nater as there are colors in folks' hair.

"She painted a 'Cottage Scene,' as she called it, where there are three little pigs eating out of a trough, and they stand in a row, like a class before the schoolmaster. Now, ye never see pigs eating together but one of 'em has his foot in the trough.

"Then her hoss, that is standing by the plough! It is a long-bodied, long-limbed critter, like one of them hosses on a race-course. Now, a plough-hoss has a short and thick body, and

stouter legs and shorter neck. And as for her cow, why, I wouldn't give ten dollars for a cow like that in her picter. I want a cow with a straight back and short legs, and great, round, soft eyes."

"How do you like this picture?" said Esther, leading her to an engraving of Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair.

"There, that man knows cattle!" exclaimed Martha. "Here, boys, come see *these* hosses."

"That is a copy of a woman's painting," said Esther.

"I ain't no ways surprised," said Martha; "that's jest sich critters as I should paint, if I only had time for fancy work; but, ye see, what with the dairy and the farm hands to board, and eight children, — six on 'em the first wife's, and two of mine, — I hain't time; the nearest I come to 'ornamental branches,' as the papers say, is cutting strips for a rag carpet.

"But I must tell you about Sally Ann's

mourning-piece. That is her best. There is a great white monument in the centre, with a cloth hanging over the top of it; then there is a weeping willow, hanging its branches almost to the ground, and under the willow, close by the monument, with his handkerchief to his face, is a picter of a man, dressed in black. That is my husband, you know, weeping at the tomb of his wife.

"I had very peculer feelings when Sally Ann wanted me to buy a frame and hang the picter up in the best room. I didn't know how I should feel to see my husband over the mantle, *always* a weeping for his first wife.

"But I remembered what you once said to me about keeping fresh in our hearts the memory of the dead; so I squelched down all bad feeling, and said, says I, 'Sally Ann, you have painted that beautifully, and the next time I go to Ripley I'll buy the nicest frame at Hall's store. You must always remember,

dear, your own mother. I ain't as good as she is, for she was always a praying and reading the Bible; but I'll do my best to make your father happy, and you must love me a *little*, though I don't ask all the love you gave her.' When I said that, Sally Ann burst right out crying, and put her arms round my neck.

"'I do love you,' she said; 'and I love you all the better for letting us talk about our dear mother in heaven. I think she loves you for being so kind to us.' I was struck all of a heap, and I cried too; and, ye see, I got a frame right away, and paid for it with my own money, and I don't mind a bit having it up over the mantle.

"But, Mrs. William, don't you think our minister will marry again? He has been a widower now going on three years. Folks have done talking about your being the minister's wife. I told 'em in the first place they needn't talk about it at all; 'twan't no use; but they wanted it to be, and they *would* talk."

Esther's eyes filled with tears, and the words of our Savior were recalled to her mind: "Have I been so long with you, and hast thou not known me?"

"Martha Brown, aren't you coming in to see me?" cried the well-known voice of Mrs. Gray from the kitchen.

Martha started. The old habit was still strong which led to moving quickly when Mrs. Gray spoke.

She went into the kitchen, which was as neat and pleasant as good housewifery could make it.

On one side of the table, which was already laid for supper, sat Mrs. Gray, in her large rolling chair.

She was now seventy-five years of age, thin and pale, with worn, pinched features, such as great suffering often brings. Her hair was almost as white as the cap she wore. She was dressed in a black silk wrapper and plain

white neckerchief. She could not use her hands, and was unable to feed herself. She had eaten her supper, and was now waiting for a chat with Martha Brown, while the boys ate the strawberries and cream which Esther had provided for them.

"I heard you speaking of our minister, Martha. Did you know he was going away?"

"Mr. Brainard going away! No; that is news. We cannot spare him."

"Yes; he told me this morning he had decided to accept the call to Philadelphia. Just as I am going to die, he must go — my luck, you know! I hope the other world has something good in store for me, for I have had nothing but trouble in this. You see how helpless I am. I can't feed myself at all."

"Well, you have had a world of trouble, ma'am, no doubt of it; and then to see your hands and feet now! I heard old Mrs. Mooney say that, when you were a girl, you had the

smallest foot and the prettiest hand of all the girls in town."

"Yes; and I was proud of 'em too. I used to bind my hands tight at night to keep 'em small, and wear thin stockings and high-heeled thin slippers. Dr. Strong says that I am suffering for that now; but, la! he don't know everything. I think it was the hard work I did after I was married."

No one ventured to dispute the matter with Mrs. Gray, for the least opposition irritated her.

"Martha Brown, I'd like to know if you don't find it a hard life taking care of a farm and eight children?"

"Why, as to that, Mrs. Gray, I have a good husband, and if there's hard work, there's a deal of comfort with it. Hard work don't hurt us, if we have a contented mind."

"I'm glad if you like it; but it is no desirable place to be mother-in-law to six children, with two boys of your own."

"Well, I was never bright nor handsome, Mrs. Gray, and had no great expectations in this world. I have more blessings than I dared pray for."

Esther smiled as she looked at the hands, brown and large from hard labor, and the face rather coarse, too, from much cooking over a stove and exposure on the rough hill farm.

The world has many patient workers in its by-places, and, now and then, some good souls, who, without any claim to smartness or beauty, or very refined notions of what constitutes true marriage, are yet worthy of all praise for the patient performance of their daily toil. They are the neutral tints in life's landscape, without which the picture would be sadly defective.

When Martha's boys finished their strawberries and cream, they were sent into the orchard to play, while Mrs. William and Mar-

tha drank their tea. The door of the kitchen opened into a porch, from which there was a fine view of sunset; and as Martha watched the changing hues, — the swift weaving of the king's evening robe, — she said, —

"When I go out to milk, Mrs. William, I always calculate my time, and set my stool where I can watch the sunset. I never thought so much of looking at the sky and the clouds, and of wild flowers, till you came to live here. To be sure, I had a hankering after a farm, with meadow and hill land, and nice cows and sheep; but when you told me about the beautiful things in this world, I opened my eyes. Since then I find something new and beautiful every day. I hope I shall see something in heaven as beautiful as Violet Mountain and our brook road."

"Ah, Martha, what is that you are saying?" said Mr. Brainard, as he came upon the porch.

"I hope heaven will be as beautiful — I

mean with hills, and valleys, and brooks — as Westbrook," said Martha.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, my good woman, the glories of that place; neither can the most vivid fancy paint them. I dare not sit and think of heaven long, lest I forget to do my work well here."

"It is not many that will get there," said Mrs. Gray. "I don't care so much what is there, if I can only get in. Once inside the gates, and rid of this dreary world, I shall be content."

"Saved as by fire," said Dr. Strong, who had come in, as was his custom on a summer's evening; "brand plucked from the burning — isn't there such a phrase?" he asked, in a low voice, of Martha.

"It takes a long time for some folks to get there, doctor," she said. "Some crops is longer ripening than others; there's our russets ain't fit for nothing till November."

"The air is cool, mother," said Esther; "let me wrap this shawl round you, and wheel your chair out of this breeze."

Tender as a mother with a child had Esther been in all her ministrations to William's mother. Fifteen years she had watched by her side, never wearying, day nor night. She received few words of kindness in return—no warm demonstration of love. The trials of life seemed to have turned all sweetness to gall, all tenderness to stone. It made no difference to Esther. She was ever gentle and kind, till she became the wonder of the village.

"Do you understand it all?" said Dr. Strong to Mr. Brainard. "Is she doing penance for former sins, or working out salvation by a life of self-denial?"

"Neither," said the minister, smiling. "It is all a work of love. The marriage of William and Esther was one of those rare unions

where two became one in life's purposes—one in their future hopes. The last words of William, on his death-bed, — 'Esther, remember my mother,'—are almost as sacred to her as the same words spoken by Jesus to the beloved disciple. I have watched the unfolding of her character, the beauty of her daily life, with the greatest interest. I have gathered from that life what a power there is in a true marriage. We felt it in our own household. The gentle wife of my youth, whose love was stronger than death, is dearer to me now in heaven for Esther's life on earth."

"I comprehend, in a measure; 'see through a glass darkly,' as you would say; and through that glass comes one ray of light to show me why Esther could be neither the doctor's nor the minister's wife in Westbrook."

"What God hath joined together let no man put asunder," said Mr. Brainard.

Twenty years have passed since the opening of this simple story — since the hour when William Gray bade his wife farewell till they should meet in heaven.

A poor, worn old woman of eighty has just breathed her last in the front room of the old parsonage. Her dying words were, —

"Esther, Esther, dear, keep your hand in mine. I have been a harsh, stern old woman. I see it all now. But through you I learned the way to heaven. I shall bless you to all eternity. Forgive me, darling; and let me rest in the old churchyard between my husband and daughter. Come closer, my daughter; I want to kiss you."

It was the first offered kiss in all those years. The tears rained from Esther's eyes — tears of gratitude and love.

"I shall tell William of your devotion to his memory, my daughter."

"He knows it all, he knows it all now,"

said Esther; "but he will love to hear from your lips that I tried to fulfil his last request."

Her hand was pressed, but the power to speak was gone.

The day after the funeral, Esther sat alone in the west porch. It was a September evening. There was a soft, brooding haze in the atmosphere, a perfume of ripening fruit in the air, and a sunset of gold, crimson, and purple, as if the clouds had gathered their tints from the rich hues of the dying autumn flowers.

Esther sat there, with folded hands, resting after toil, and drinking in the beauty of the scene. She was alone. Mr. Brainard and Minnie had come from their distant city home to the funeral; but the minister must be in his pulpit on Sunday, and the two had left on the last train (there is a railroad now at Westbrook), and the woman whom Esther

employed to aid her during the last illness of her mother had gone home to a sick child.

Esther sat in the porch till the soft gray of twilight was spread over the landscape, and, longer yet, till the harvest-moon came up from behind the hills, to stand like a sentinel in silver armor over the night.

She was locking the doors for the night, when she heard the well-known voice of Martha Brown, —

"You will not lock me out, when I came so far to stay with you?"

"Come in, come in, Martha; but sit down, and rest; you are very much out of breath."

"Well I might be. I ran hard to get here before nine o'clock. I knew Mr. Brainard and his daughters went to-day, and I heard that Jane Dole's child was sick, and you were left alone. It is so terrible to be left alone the night after a corpse has been in the house, that I couldn't stay away from you. Here, now, you are all

alone, and not a soul in the village offered to stay with you."

"I was not afraid," said Esther. "I thank you for your kindness, but I was not lonely."

"It is so scary and gloomy when a corpse has just been carried out," insisted Martha.

"Before my husband died," said Esther, "I was timid. I had been so from a child. I could not sleep alone, or be left a moment after nightfall. But since his death, I have had no fear. I seem to have been delivered from bondage, and I should sleep as sweetly alone in this house as I used to do, when a babe, in my mother's arms. I can't understand it. It is a mystery to myself."

"Well, now, that does beat all. I thought the time, of all others, when folks were most afraid, was just after a death. I am going to stay and get breakfast, any way. I know you are tired, for once, though you will never say it."

Esther smiled. "I think I am, Martha."

Esther was now the mature woman of middle age — fair, clear-eyed, beautiful still. She was healthy and vigorous, but there had been a long, heavy draught on her strength — a burden which she had borne bravely, nor suffered one impatient word to escape her lips. To-night, she was like a tired traveller, who has just dropped his burden, and feels *awearry, weary*. Martha was delighted to be permitted to wait upon her, and when she was in bed, she tucked the bed-clothes in as she did round her little boys at night.

"There, you darling little woman! You just go to sleep, and don't you get up in the morning till I call you."

Then she drew the shutters, took the lamp away, and Esther closed her eyes to sleep, in that perfect peace which those feel whose hearts are at rest in God, and who know that loved ones who are in heaven watch beside them.

It was late in October before Esther returned to Albany, where she intended to spend the remainder of her days. For some years she had not left Westbrook, and in the mean time great changes had taken place. She had heard of some of them by letter, but now her eye was to see, and her ear to hear, what a change had been wrought at Boggs Hollow.

It bears the name now of "Stuart's Iron Works." Boggs senior died in less than two years after his son's conviction. His estate was insolvent, and the works passed into other hands. Great improvements had been made in the furnaces — new buildings erected, and a row of small brick tenements for the workmen, each with a plot of ground in the rear. The largest and neatest house belongs to the overseer, our old friend, Jack Wells, while that pretty little cottage embosomed in trees is the home of the active, gentlemanly agent, once our little David.

When Esther rang the bell at the door of the overseer's house, a comely woman of about sixty years made her appearance. Her broad, pleasant face brightened like a lake in the sunlight, when she saw her visitor. They sat talking in the best room, when Mr. Wells, as he was called, came in, having heard that Mrs. Gray was at the works.

There is something noble and grand in the tears of a strong man who weeps from gratitude. Wells gave Esther the large, powerful hand, every muscle of which had been developed till it seemed to have gathered to itself the strength of the iron which it had moulded with such skill.

He gave his hand, but he could not speak. He tried, but tears choked all utterance. When, at last, he became composed, his first words were, "Have you seen the little church?" This had been built by the workmen, with a little aid from friends, and was just completed.

They had no minister yet, but evening meetings were held at this time, for Sandy, the little, warm-hearted, blue-eyed Sandy, was now at home from the seminary, where he was studying for the ministry.

The best room was soon filled, for David and his wife came over from the cottage, Sandy from his ramble in the woods, and Katie from the school where she was now teacher. Esther sat down to the tea-table as welcome a guest, perhaps, as had ever visited the works. She went to the meeting in the evening, when Sandy gave them a lecture from the words of Isaiah—"Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise."

Sandy's lecture justified the remark of his brother David, "We thought we would educate Sandy for a minister. He wanted to study and pray or sing all the time, and father said, 'Let him learn the trade, and he will do it well.' You know father don't like any 'short iron,' or 'long iron,' as he terms it, in his works."

At Mr. Wells's particular request, they sang the hymn, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord." He used to hear it sung when he was a boy, in the old country. There were fine bass voices in this congregation of workmen, and when they sang the last verse, all joining, it seemed to Esther like a foretaste of the joy of heaven, —

"The soul that to Jesus hath fled for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell shall endeavor to shake,
I'll never — no, never — no, *never* forsake."

William's words now came to her mind, sweet almost as those of the inspired prophet — "Esther, I see, in my dreams, a neat little church there, and a thriving population." God had led them, by a way they knew not, and through troubled waters, to a haven of peace.

Esther's life was one of activity. Her long life of patient forbearance fitted her for work among the poor and lowly, the wretched and

the sinful. She was a missionary where few of her own sex dared to go. Among other places, the jails and prisons of the city were not forgotten in her ministrations. One day she was gratified to find men at work making repairs upon the state Penitentiary. She had regretted the crowded state of the prison, and the lack of suitable ventilation. Two or three men were at work on the tower. As Esther lingered on the grounds, a couple of prisoners, under charge of one of the guard, passed by where she stood. As they looked up to the tower, one of them said to his keeper, "Do you think they will let me go up there, and take one look? It is twenty-one years since I have looked beyond that high wall," pointing to the wall that bounded the prison grounds.

"Go on," said the guard, sternly, giving him a smart blow with his rod. "*No talking.*"

The man went on, with that look of habitual and hopeless submission so well marked in

old prisoners. Esther heard the request, and sought out the superintendent, who was on the grounds.

"Yes, yes, he shall have one look," he said. "Poor fellow! he is in for life, and he is only a little past forty now. Here, Hills," calling to one of the attendants, "go and detain Boggs (No. 36) in the inner yard a moment, till I come."

"*Boggs.*" Esther heard the name, and looked at the grizzled beard, pale face, and haggard eyes of the convict. Not one trace remained of the handsome, gay young fellow who, twenty-one years before, murdered the overseer of the Iron Works, and threw the body into the river.

"It cannot be," she said to herself; but she passed on with Captain Hardy, who said, kindly, "Come, Boggs, you shall have one look from the tower. You may come with me."

The man bowed, without speaking, and went

with a slow, measured step up the long flight of stairs. When there, he took off his cap, gave a long, searching look, turning slowly round, that he might take in the whole view, but gazed longest in the direction of Boggs Hollow. The new buildings and the little white church were distinctly seen in the distance.

"It is all altered—very much changed," he said, and went slowly down. "Thank you, sir," he added, when Captain Hardy left him. No other words escaped his lips. The stony silence of the cell alone witnessed any other expression of feeling.

"Yes, it is the same fellow," said Captain Hardy to Esther, who had waited in the office to make some inquiry of the superintendent. "He is well behaved; we have no trouble with him; but he is in for life. It is one of those cases where there is little hope of obtaining a pardon."

Esther's life among the erring would make a large volume, if it could be written, but she was very quiet in all her work. She glided, like a ministering angel, into the homes of want, carrying with her food for the body and medicine for the soul. She prayed with the convict, and comforted the fatherless and the widow. She never shrank from contact with the vilest. Like our blessed Master, she felt that there was more power in the *touch*, in that love which gathered the wanderers home, than in the sternness which bade them reform, but keep their distance.

Her friends, the Brainards, came often to see her. The boys had chosen their vocation — one to preach the gospel, the other the printer's trade. Minnie was her father's housekeeper, the joy of his heart, and the comfort of his age. He worked hard, and no doubt shortened his life by his activity in his profession. After his death, Katie married in Albany. Thus,

when Esther came to a green old age, she found a daughter and a home. There is little to be said about her death. The end of such is peace. Katie went to her room one evening, as was her custom, after Esther had retired for the night. On going to her bedside, she noticed an unusual pallor on her countenance.

"Auntie, are you ill?"

"I am faint, Katie, dear. Raise my head a little." Then her eyes grew very bright, and her countenance was radiant as that of an angel. "I am coming, William. It is the anniversary of my marriage to-morrow, Katie. Don't you see William? Look! look! He has come for me. I shall celebrate it in heaven!"

Thus did she pass through the celestial gates.

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