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THE YEARS THAT ARE TOLD

BY

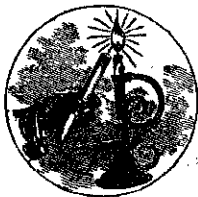
ROSE PORTER,

AUTHOR OF "SUMMER DRIFTWOOD FOR THE WINTER FIRE,"
ETC., ETC.



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"Every man has a history worth knowing, if
he could tell it, or if we could draw it from him."

"Life, if life is rightly lived,
Is one long orison. All faculties,
Employed as God would have them used, are
steps
Upon the stairs by which man climbs to heaven."

Day-Dawn.

"The childhood," said Milton, "shows the man as morning shows the day."

"The child realizes to every man his own earliest remembrance, and so supplies a defect in our education, or enables us to live over the unconscious history, with a sympathy so tender, as to be almost personal experience."



THE YEARS THAT ARE TOLD.

I.

I, JANET STERLING FLINT, an old woman now—think! my wedding-day is well-nigh fifty years by-gone—have consented, at the solicitation of my children and grandchildren, to pen out for them some brief record of my life; consented to gather up memories that stretch away back into my childhood, and on through my youthful days—on even to this time of old age—though the defining them will, I fear me, be as vague a task as the striving to define when within the heart love first woke into conscious being, or when thoughts first began. For, I suppose, hidden behind the tangible

recollections which I can frame into words, there are volumes of received impressions. I suppose, too, all through the first decade of my life, there were events, many and many, of interest as deep, perchance, as some of the remembered ones, which, because of the emotions they stirred in my child-heart, stand for me as types of years, seeming like milestones that mark the different points on some broad, far-leading road.

My child-world! It was such a small place, bounded almost by father and mother arms and nursery walls.

I was full three years old before even a ripple from the great pulsing, restless outside stole in to break my peaceful calm.

So well I remember that first hour, when the gates leading out began slowly to swing open for me. I had been playing all day. The nursery floor was strewn with my toys.

I think it must have been one of those sparkling, clear days that come now and then in December, for from early morning till late afternoon the room was flooded with

sunlight. Even in my babyhood I loved so well the bright sunshine! and I was so happy that day until it began to fade, so happy till the twilight shadows stole in; but, then, when the sunshine was all gone, I remember I lay down on the floor and sobbed and sobbed because I wanted it to stay, the beautiful sunshine. Ah! little child, so all unlearned then, that out of the westering sun,—the fading light, would dawn my first memory-treasure. No coaxing of nurse, not even the caressing soothing of my gentle mother, could hush my weeping that hour, when first I wept for vanished sunlight.

But when caressing and coaxing had failed, I suddenly felt myself lifted in strong arms, and I knew my father held me—held me close and safe; and held in my father's arms, my weeping ceased; yet I did not forget my sorrow,—the sorrow that, in sob-broken baby-words, I whispered, telling him how I was afraid of the dark; how I wanted the light to stay. And then—it all comes back to me like the pages of a book

yesterday read—my father carried me out from the nursery, verily *out*, into a broader world, and pushing aside the curtain from the window in my mother's dressing-room, he pointed toward the still glowing western sky, where, brighter than the after-glow of sunset glory, shone the evening star.

Straightway, as I saw it, I forgot my tears, and smiled and laughed with joy. I was only a three-year-old child, and I was in my father's arms.

But I was quiet when he said:

"Listen, Janet—my little Janet—papa's own little girl, and never forget that papa told you, when God takes away the sunlight He always puts stars in the sky, though sometimes, little Janet, you will not be able to see them because the clouds come to send down the rain that makes the flowers grow."

Over and over, during many an after year, my mother repeated those words to me, and yet I always feel as though I remembered them quite by myself.

It was thus I received my first tangible memory that was freighted with a life-lesson. Such a blessed lesson of safety in a father's arms; of comforting and soothing; of childlike trusting and joy, that out of fading sunlight beautiful stars were born.

II.

After that first distinctly recalled hour, a great throng of happy days—days that made up years—are blended in my memory in something of the same sweet confusion with which flowers strew sunny meadows in Spring; and then comes a never-forgotten time.

It was an April morning; gentle showers and flitting sunlight vied with one another for mastery; and thus in a mystical way nature became again to me interwoven with a life-long "memory-hour," for that day in our home—our aforetime happy home—hopes and fears, tears and smiles, gave place to one another almost as quickly as the

shifting clouds and flitting sun-gleams, and at noontime, when the clouds had won the victory and steadily the rain fell, in our home, too, fears and tears had banished smiles and hopes.

It had been a long, lonely morning to me; not once had I seen my mother; not once had I been taken into the darkened room where my father lay struggling with mortal illness.

Very disconsolately I had been standing by the window looking out on the changing sky.

Seven years my life had counted then, and many thoughts had dawned in my mind, many questions were loudly pleading for answers.

Wearied from listlessly looking forth, I laid my head down on the broad window sill, and began telling myself a wondrous story, woven of childish fancies, for I was wont, even in those days, to tell myself stories.

So absorbed was I, that I did not hear

the door open, and not till my mother's hand was laid upon my shoulder did I know she had entered the room. Yet, was it my mother? That was the first quick inquiry my heart made as I lifted my eyes to her face; for that first look, it told me some change had come over her, something had gone from her smile, and, I was such a child, I never guessed it was—Hope.

But, as she spoke, and took my hand into hers, I nestled up close to her, and knew it was really my own dear mamma.

"Janet," she said—"Janet, your dear father wants to see his little girl."

And my mother led me from the nursery across the hall into the darkened room.

It seemed to me full of strangers, and when I stood by my father's bedside, he did not seem like my dear papa, only his smile was quite the same, and when he took my hand, his was so cold, and his voice it sounded so far away when he murmured, softly:

"Janet, papa's dear little girl."

Then my mother lifted me up, and I kissed him, and some one said:

"Bid your dear father good-bye, Janet."

But I shook my head at the words, and softly whispered:

"No; it is morning. Good-morning, dear papa."

And so all unlearned was I, I did not know that it was in truth that very hour the dawning-time of an endless morning to my father.

He only smiled in reply.

Then they took me from the room.

After that a great stillness was over everything. Nurse only spoke in whispers, and when I wanted to draw my little chair close to the window, so that I could look out again, she said, "No," and hastily drew the blinds to.

And that great stillness, it lasted for three long days, during which I hardly saw my mother, and was never taken at all to my father's room; and when, over and over, I

asked nurse "Why?" her answer was ever the same:

"Your father has gone away, Miss Janet. Good little girls must not ask questions."

So the mystery and awe of it all, stole in and in, to the deep recesses of my heart.

Not till the Sabbath evening came, did I know what nurse had meant by saying my father had gone away; and then I only understood in a half dim way my mother's words of explanation—a dim way that waited, waited long for the years to make it plain. But years, they do not bring the solving of that enigma; they do not uplift the mystery which overhangs the path of him who passeth through the dark waters over to that other shore; and yet they unfold, if our hearts are trusting in Christ, the truth that bids us go when our call comes, singing, even though heart and flesh fail, the creed-song:

"Firmly I believe and truly
God is Three, and God is One;
And I next acknowledge duly
Manhood taken by the Son.

And I trust and hope most fully
 In that manhood crucified;
 And each thought and deed unruly
 Do to death, as He has died.
 Simply to His grace and wholly
 Light and life and strength belong,
 And I love, supremely, solely,
 Him the Holy, Him the Strong.

"And I take with joy whatever
 Now besets me, pain or fear,
 And with a strong will I sever
 All the ties which bind me here.
 Adoration aye be given,
 With and through the angelic host,
 To the God of earth and heaven,
 Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

And if we have that song in the heart, are
 the waters dark? Is the river a swollen,
 turbulent stream? Verily I think not.

III.

It is such a precious heritage of childhood—the ability of passing from event to event, place to place, almost as easily as birds flit from bough to bough of a leaf-

laden tree, for, if little children realized all that is often meant by change, alas! how early would they lose their childhood.

Following those silent days in our home, came weeks of confusion, yet I scarcely heeded it, except by noticing that, in a certain way, I was left much to myself, that nurse relaxed somewhat in her wonted vigilance, and seemed more absorbed in taking from drawer and wardrobe my Summer and Winter frocks, my sashes and pinafores, than she did with care of me. I noticed, too, that instead of putting my things in their wonted places, she folded and carried them into my mother's dressing-room.

Then I remember, there came a day when nurse bade me dress my dolly for a long journey; and I had hardly finished tying the bow-knot in dolly's pink shoe,—it was such a hard task for my little fingers,—before nurse called me, to come and be dressed myself, in a white frock and pelisse, which I had never worn before, and the sash she tied around my waist

was not one of my bright plaid, blue or pink ones, but black, like the ribbon around my new straw hat; and when I asked nurse to please exchange it for a sash my papa used to call pretty, she shook her head, and looked very grave, as though I had said something naughty.

Just then my mother came into the nursery, and, without a word, took my hand, and led me downstairs, through the hall to the porch, where all the servants stood. I remember I thought it so strange, some of them were crying, just as hard as they could cry.

Then I was lifted into the carriage, and in a moment we were driving swiftly down the avenue,—in a moment, we passed through the home gate,—*out* on to the broad high road—just my mother and I, nurse and dolly. We must have journeyed all day long,—a blank day to me, for I cannot recall one hour after our starting, till I awoke at night-fall, from a child's heavy sleep, to look with bewildered eyes

on strange faces and surroundings. But after that first minute, I never felt strange in the dear home which opened so wide to me its doors of welcome.

I sometimes think there never was so happy a home, all the world over, as that where I spent my young days—and yet do I not now know a home even happier?

Sometimes I think, too, the secret of those days leaving so few distinct impressions, was because of this very happy carefreeness, for while the poet truly sings, "memory is possession," "I have all that I enjoy," on looking backward, it seems to me the happy memories that have left the most vividly-abiding impressions on my mind, are those which were inwrought with some heart-stirring emotion that was in a certain way akin to pain.

Perhaps this is why, now that I am an old woman, I recall my young dream-days with a distinctness that robes them almost with a present reality; for while I was so happy in love's dawning hour, I was half-

sorrowful too, for with that dawning came the knowledge that for the love of one I had consented to leave my mother, Aunt Fanny, and the dear home at B——, and, from this intermingling of joy and regret, every heart event of my "morning-day" is impressed on my memory, with something of that clearness of recollection that the Alpine traveler tells us lingers about every step of the ofttime rugged upward path, that led to the summit of the mountain peak, from which he caught the first ray of sunrise brightness—the ray that unfolded for him into a glory vision.

I think this is the reason, too, why all that is associated with the awakening of the soul into a life of communion with Christ, is so never to be forgotten. For, while the gladness and peace of feeling His love thrills the heart with joy, yet not till that love is felt, is the sinfulness of sin realized; not till then are they blended—the joy over His love, and the grief over our wrong.

It was such a change to me, the coming

from the quiet home, where I had known for seven years no other companionship than that of my father, mother, and nurse, into the merry, many-companioned life of my Uncle Max, and Aunt Fanny's home. Aunt Fanny,—I wonder if there ever was any one like her!

I do not suppose she was really very pretty, though I thought her beautiful, and her smile, it was beautiful; and whoever saw Aunt Fanny without a smile on her face? for when she was sobered by care, as she was sometimes, the shadow was as transparent as the gossamer mist veil, which only dims, but does not hide the golden sunrise of an August morning. Yet Aunt Fanny's smile was not so much her charm, as her gentle voice—the voice, always so full of that music which is born out of a kindly heart.

Even little children involuntarily paused to listen to her lightest word, and just because of this charm of utterance, it never seemed hard to obey any command of Aunt

Fanny's; reproof from her, too, was not like reproof from any one else, for her very tones of sorrow over the error were always inwrought with notes of forgiveness.

It came about quite naturally that I should be left much to my aunt's care, till at last, she counseled and directed me, almost as she did her own children; for after my father's death, my mother was never strong, and much of the time unequal for the prattle and breezy excitement of a healthful, gleeful child like me.

Yet, I always went to my mother for the great decisions; I always told her my chief troubles and happinesses; and it was she, my own dear mamma, who made plain for me many of the puzzling questions that came with my increasing years; she, who pointed me toward glints of light, that opened,—continue to open even now, into gleams of radiance; she, too, who never let me forget my dear father, and who kept warm in my memory the tender lesson he taught me that night, when first I wept,

because the beautiful light was fading into darkness.

IV.

Of all my loves and delights in the new home, baby Max was the chief; and thus many of my most precious memories are associated with him, something as the perfume of flowers is associated with the blooms.

Max was the first tiny baby I had ever known, and his, seemed to me such a wonderful, mysterious little life.

The hour of his morning nap was almost a perfectly happy one to me, for then Aunt Fanny was wont to bid me put aside my lesson-books and come to her for a quiet time, during which she undertook to teach me the first puzzling French words, that my little lips were too timid to utter before Miss Graves, our governess, and my cousins, Madeline and Edith.

But it was not only the puzzling French

words I learned at these times. No! there were other dear, more lasting lessons Aunt Fanny taught, while I stood by the side of baby Max's dainty cradle, and watched the rosy-cheeked darling while he slept.

Dear little baby! over whose face smiles played even in his sleep.

I think it was from my much wondering why he thus smiled that first I came to feel the nearness of that Unseen Presence, which is ever about little children, and which Aunt Fanny interpreted for me in a quiet morning talk—a talk, after which I used to think almost I heard the gentle whisper, and felt the restraining guidance of the angel who was ever close beside me—when I slept and when I woke.

I cannot remember when first I came to know that there was always an Eye watching me, "the Eye of the great God, my Father in heaven," as nurse said; but this knowledge I only grasped in a far-off way; something as one grasps a far-distant look-out from a mountain-height, where wide-

flowing rivers, rolling valleys, dense forests, and the high hills all blend in one great distant view—a something too vast for a child's sight to take in.

But the constant nearness of a dear angel-friend, who at night and morning flew up to the wide blue (which was just a veil, I thought, hiding the golden city where God lived) to carry the record to the great God, my heavenly Father, and the dear Jesus, of what I had done—I, little Janet; this was something I *could* grasp and understand.

Ah! how I used to picture that golden city—for golden I knew it to be—when every glimpse I caught, through the peep-holes in the blue sky, were golden, coming-in glints of star-beams; and how I used to fall asleep wondering would my angel come to sing the same sweet song to me, while I slept, that Max's angel sang to him—wondering whether, in my slumber, I smiled too; and it was so beautiful to feel, when I was good, my angel was glad; so sorrowful to

know, when I was naughty, my angel was grieved.

Thus the ever-nearness of the angels became to me a consciousness of something very dear and real.

And are they not very dear, very real, and near, the angels?

Is it meaningless, that old-time belief, that with the coming of a little child into this life of conflict and struggle, there comes, too, an unseen guide to guard and watch the new-born dweller on earth up the way of life's pilgrimage?

The sacred page tells us that, in "heaven, their angels do always behold the face of the Father in heaven."

This was what Aunt Fanny taught me; and if there was something of mysticism, something, perchance, of fancy in her teaching, it rang loudly with the sterling ring of the old coin; of that stalwart hero in the faith—Luther, whose creed was broad enough to find a place for the angels.

"From early childhood," he wrote, "I

would accustom a child, and say to it, 'Dear child, thou hast an angel of thine own; when thou prayest morning and evening, the same angel will be with thee, and sit beside thy little bed; will take care of thee, lull thee to sleep, and guard over thee, that evil may not come near thee.' "

Anyway, Aunt Fanny's teachings filled a place in my heart, that needed filling with just this gentle, restraining influence, though, forsooth, some might have called it not a wise way of governing, not so good as a word of command; but it was her way (and it seems a very sweet way to me), and by it she made none the less, rather more real the presence of Christ; for full well I realized the saddest part of wrong-doing, sadder, far sadder than making the angels sorry, was the disobeying and grieving Him, the loving Jesus—who was once a little baby like Max, a child like me—the dear Jesus, who loves all little children so well; who, when on earth, called them unto Him to bless, them, and held them in His arms.

Often and often those days would I ask Aunt Fanny to tell me what kind of a child it was that Jesus called to Him, and set in the midst of His disciples; and my little heart would glow with eagerness, thrill with desire to be like that long-ago blessed child, who, Aunt Fanny said, must have been always gentle, kind, and good.

Thus it was that I came to feel ever close to me that

“ Presence which is not to be put by.”

V.

I have always been very glad, because I loved him so well, that circumstances connected with baby Max led to the illuminating of a central light in my soul's history;—a light which has tinged all the following years of my life—for the impressions received on a Sabbath long ago have never faded from my memory.

It was a Spring-day Sabbath: the garden

borders were gay with tulips, hyacinths, and star-like jonquils; every breeze that stirred the lilac and syringa bushes, which grew down by the garden gate, shook out sweetness from their nodding blooms, like incense waved from golden censers.

The air was jubilant with the song of happy birds, and we all rejoiced because of the beauty, for it was the morning when little Max was to be carried to the House of God for the baptismal rite.

Almost a week before, nurse had told me that on the next Sunday baby was to be taken to church to receive his name, Hugh Maxwell, and much I had wondered what she meant; but all the week Aunt Fanny had not once sent for me to come for a quiet time with her, and my mother was not well enough to explain it to me till the very end of the day, which had been so crowded full of deep emotions and perplexing questions to my child-mind. I thought it so strange why they took baby to church—why the minister sprinkled his little brow with drops

of water—so strange that Aunt Fanny and Uncle Max should stand up before the church full of people and give their baby, their own dear little baby Max, away, even to God; and that was what the minister said they had come to do.

But at twilight, when nurse said I could go and sit with my mother for an hour, all the strangeness, all my wonderings were made plain.

My dear mamma was lying on her lounge, and she bade me creep up and nestle close beside her; and then drawing my head down upon her shoulder, she smoothed the tumbled curls back from my forehead, while in a low voice she told me of a Sabbath long ago in my babyhood, when she and my father had taken me to the church in our old home-place to receive my name, Janet, and to give me to God to be His own little child; just as Aunt Fanny and Uncle Max had taken their baby that morning to receive his name, and to give him to the Lord. Then, in language easy for me to under-

stand, my mother told me what was meant by the giving a little child a name "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;" what was meant, too, by parents thus openly consecrating their little children to God and Christ.

Consecrating! It was a long word for my childish knowledge, but my mother unfolded its meaning for me; and ever since that dear blessed talk with her, though I have often wandered far away from the Holy Jesus, yet I have ever felt (except for a brief, brief time,) the truth my mother then impressed upon my heart, brooding over and guarding me like sheltering, protecting arms. So closely, even then, I seemed to enter into the feeling, that when my father and mother offered me to the Saviour, as He had bade them do, He, the dear Christ, took me for His own; and that ever when I was in trouble, when I was tempted to do wrong, or when I was very glad—indeed at all times—His arms were open as a shelter-place for me, and because of His name linked with

my name I never could be a stranger to Him.

After our talk, my mother offered a simple prayer, holding my little hand in hers, and then she gave me her good-night kiss, with the whispered words:

"God bless my little daughter, and help her always to remember she is His child and Jesus' little follower."

Ah! how I pondered over that talk, and how wide and far-reaching its meaning became as my knowledge grew with the years.

And how glad I was, when, like a revelation, came to me the thought that the great flood of waters that covered up the high hills and mountain peaks was the Lord's baptism of the world,—the world, that was naughty like my little heart, and that needed the typical water of regeneration to touch it with baptismal drops that would wash away the sin, because they *were typical*.

I was nearly twelve years old before my ponderings over my mother's words took

thus a definite form in my mind; but then I seemed to understand, child though I was, that one meaning (is it not one of the most precious?) of the bow of promise is the same meaning as that held in the sign of the cross. The wonderful meaning, that even though up from the earth, sprinkled and washed clean from sin by the baptism of mighty waters, briars and thorns upsprang again; yet, because of the bow in the sky, we may rest assured, when the time of trial is over, there will be a new earth, a beautiful earth, all fair and glorious, fit for the King.

Just as our hearts, even though sprinkled with the consecrating symbolic water of baptism, are sinful hearts again, yet because of the sign of the cross, after their trial time, they will live again, new-born, washed clean in the last great baptism when the soul passes through the river of death into life. I suppose I only recognized all this in a child's confused and yet clear way, too; but very plainly I know I did recognize, even at that early age, that trusting in Christ was

the only safety ; that no sprinkling of baptismal drops could seal the soul as an inheritor of eternal life with Him in heaven ; that only entrance could be found there through His forgiving love.

I remember so well when first the thought of the flood as the world's baptism came to me, how eagerly I ran to my mother to ask, "Was it then that God gave the world its name, Earth, just as my name, Janet, was given me in baptism?"

But my mother did not answer my eager question ; she only smiled, and asked me :

"What else did you receive on that day beside your name? What did the earth receive after its baptism?"

And she left me then to answer her question to myself.

It was a long, long while before I fully knew the significance of my mother's words ; but afterward, long afterward, recalling her smile, I seemed to know she was thinking of the dove with the olive-leaf, the beautiful green leaf that was the sweet witness that

after the water of baptism, up from the earth there sprang again every growing thing—fruit-bearing trees, grains for food, flowers for beauty, herbs for healing.

And when I asked my mother did she mean that as God gave all this to the earth, so Christ gives unto the soul of those sealed by baptism heart-plants to tend and nourish up from their budding to their blossoming, and on to their fruit-bearing time? she drew me close to her, and, as she kissed me, she softly said:

"Yes, my little Janet, that was what I meant."

And with her kiss there fell upon my brow a tear.

Was that tear a mother's baptism of love and spiritual desire for her child?

And then we talked long of the fruits of the Spirit that ripen in human hearts ; those fruits that even a child may tend from the time the green shoots of the wondrous plants first appear in the heart, unfolding their beauty of budding, blossoming, and ripening.

Think of those spiritual fruits that are heralded by flowers—the heaven-hued blue blossoms of “Love;” the rosy blooms of “Joy;” the pure, white buds of “Peace;” the tender green shoots of “Long-suffering, Gentleness, and Goodness;” the golden flowers of “Faith,” and the modest unfolding of violet-dyed “Meekness and Temperance.”

Over every one my mother lingered, making plain for me what they meant,—those typical fruits, against which Paul said there was “no law;” and, I suppose because I was always imaginative, from that day to this there are certain flowers that seem to me, in a mystical way, almost like voices of the very virtues numbered in Paul’s list. And all through my life I have found myself almost unconsciously wanting, in my times of special need, of one or other of those clusters of spiritual graces, the flowers that hint them to me.

So on my wedding-day I wore them;—roses, red with joy; lilies—pure white, and

peace-ful lilies; forget-me-nots, blue as heaven’s over-arch of love; and loudly they rang out their song that day, chiming it over and over, “Love, joy, peace! Peace, joy, love!”

And for so many after-times, when fretted and wearied from the little wearing perplexities and worries of life, when oppressed by its greater trials, a green leaf, a blade of meadow-grass, has whispered to me:

“Be long-suffering, be gentle, be good.”

And how often I have needed to fold close to my heart the golden-hued flower that sings of faith, so often that between my Bible leaves there lies a bit of yellow jasmine, broken long ago from the vine that overhung a window in my girlhood’s home, and on the very same leaf there lies a withered violet,—for the violet flower, it ever murmurs to me of meekness, which means submission to God’s will, and of temperance, which surely signifies moderation and control, even in the hour of one’s bitter grief; so I laid it there, the violet, next to the golden

faith flower, when my baby died. My baby! for sorely I needed then meekness, temperance, and faith.

But this has not to do with my child-time history, when just standing on the border of the first decade of my life I was so happy in possessing the new thoughts and hopes that every day brought me.

Sometimes since, I have wondered, was I not then, even though wrapped in the dim undefinableness of a questioning child-religion, nearer than I have been often since to the ideal of that life, of which we are told, "Except ye become as little children ye shall in no wise enter in."

VI.

Those early years when dim queries began to wake into definite questions in my heart, were very happy years; for while I loved to muse on the new thoughts that every day's study suggested, I was at the same time thoroughly a childlike child. I do

believe there never was a twelve-year-old girl who took more delight with a dolly than I did; and my cousins Madeline and Edith neither of them cared half so much as I for a merry romp with Sandy and Jim, their brothers, or counted half so eagerly on the coming of holiday times.

All out-door pleasures were such joy to me. A Summer ramble I regarded as something to be desired more than richest gifts; while a Winter-time snowfall, which came but rarely to our half-way Southern home, held for me more pleasure than the most fascinating pages of my best-prized fairy-tale books; for, as I used to tell Aunt Fanny, it seemed almost like being a real true fairy one's self and living in fairyland; when the sunshine made a cloth of gold of the pure white snow, and sparkled, like glistening gems, from every ice-tipped twig and tree bough.

On looking back, I think my life was like a poem those days (and has it not, spite some shadows and sorrows, been poem-like

ever since—my happy, happy life!)—a poem which might have developed into a sickly, fancy-weaving, over-wrought mental life, had it not been for my perfect health, and the ever-watchful care of dear Aunt Fanny, who, whenever she saw “Janet’s dreamings”—as my more practical cousins used to call my fancies—were taking too strong a hold upon me, never hesitated to break them off, and to give me in exchange some commonplace occupation for brain or hands—the making of some tiny garment for my dolly, the weeding of a flower border, the arranging of fresh, beautiful blooms in vase or basket for my mother’s room, or some all-absorbing task of dusting, or the being allowed to help in the preparations of the wonderful compounds for puddings and cakes, which in those days were carried on under every mistress’ own eyes, and in which Aunt Fanny was so skilled—these were among the tasks Aunt Fanny would set me. Indeed, there seemed no end to the simple diversions, that had the charm of

useful employment which is such a delight to a child, that Aunt Fanny could devise; yet sometimes even they failed, and then I was sent for a merry play with little Max and the wee girlie who came when Max was scarce more than a tottering baby.

But the crown of all my most-cherished memories of those days came to me just as I stood on the threshold of my thirteenth birthday, and somehow, after that, I seemed to step out from the Dawning of my life into its Morning.

Perhaps it was the knowing that I was so soon to exchange childhood for girlhood—so soon to stand

“Where the brook and river meet.”

Or, perhaps, it was the trembling of my heart as I

“Gazed with a timid glance
On the brooklet’s swift advance
On the river’s broad expanse,”

that led my thoughts to turn much backward, and center around the few recollec-

tions that were beginning to grow shadowy as Winter flowers of the time before God called my father from earth to heaven. I felt such a great homesickness for my father—my own dear papa. No one else could ever call me as he used to, with just the same tender note of fatherhood-love sounding in the words, "Janet—papa's little Janet."

I lay awake the night before my years counted thirteen—wide awake—and I could not keep the tears back, because I so wanted my father; and yet I know I smiled, too, for my mother had told me my papa was very, very happy in the beautiful heavenly home, where he could behold the dear Christ, and see "my angel," too.

As I lay there weeping, and yet smiling, all suddenly, like a moonbeam shining from between rifted storm-clouds, came to me the feeling that, while my father *seemed* so far away, he was in reality very near my mother and me; and I caught a glimpse of what a glad though mysterious thing it was

—the going, as my papa had done, to heaven, where, like the angels, he could behold in the "sea of glass that is before the throne" my mother's and my every deed mirrored.

The sea of glass—is it true?

"A sea before
The throne is spread; its pure, still glass,
Pictures all earth-scenes as they pass:
We, on its shore,
Share, in the bosom of our rest,
God's knowledge, and are blest."

In the quiet night hour—the holy and still night hour that followed my thinking thus—my childhood glided swiftly into girlhood, for on the morrow I woke to enter on my "teen time," as my cousin Sandy called it.

But the feeling of my dear father's nearness, that came to me that night-hour, has always stayed with me—has always seemed to me such a beautiful, tender seal, set by the loving Jesus to the close of my earliest remembrances, letting them end, as they

began, with a thought of my father—my father, who died when I was but a child.

Then came my birthday morning, and almost straightway I began to feel a longing stirring in my heart to turn the onward pages of my life's story; and how often those days, with a note akin to impatience, my song was:

' I wait for my story—the birds cannot sing it,
 Not one, as he sits on the tree;
 The bells cannot ring it, but long years, O, bring it!
 Such as I wish it to be."

Morning.

"The morning of the soul
Has heavenly brightness in it."

"God taught me to read ;
He lent me the world for a book."



I.

THE years that bridged over from my thirteenth birthday on to my sixteenth, they were such sunny, quickly-fleeting years, I always keep them in my memory; something as I keep the recollection of the wide water-scape that stretched out before the windows of the old-fashioned farmhouse, where, in those days, we were wont to go, my mother and I, for a month or two every Summer-time.

Very happy days those were, when I would wander, all the livelong mornings, up and down the sandy beach, finding rich treasures among the indrift of sea-weeds; and curious shells that lay in wave-like ridges up along the shore.

I know there must have been storms during those weeks we spent at the sea-side. For, when was there ever a Summer without storms? Just as I know there must have been stormy times in my own life, during those years. Yet all my memories of that wide expanse of water, all my memories of that time in my life, are aglow with brightness; and it always seems as though my heart was then, in a certain way, like the ocean water, which caught and held only the sunshine, only the reflection of the heavenly blue, the rosy hues of early morning or sunset glory; or better still, the tender, silvery light of moonbeam kisses.

And my heart's life, it was typified, too, by the rippling, tiny wavelets that I stirred, as with gay, thoughtless hand, pebble after pebble I would send skipping over the waters; but skip though they did, now up, now down, they sank at last, those pebbles; but the wavelet circles they stirred ever widened and crept on and on, farther even than my eye could follow.

How far did they go—out to the very centre of the wide ocean?

Thus I used to wonder, and interwoven with my wonderment was the strange mystery, that while the wavelet my pebbles falling had stirred was stealing on, perchance, to break on the "low-lying shore of some beautiful land," the *place* where the little pebbles fell grew quiet, almost motionless again.

And here was the life-type, for just so has it been with those years to me; the thoughts that were born, the emotions that came to me during them, seemed to fall upon my heart lightly as the pebbles fell into the ocean,—seemed to only stir a place as soon calmed as the ocean water; and yet on and on the emotions those years brought, the impressions they left, crept, like the widening wavelet; and again and again, as life broadened out for me, I met them, those impressions, that my own heart had helped to make in girlhood's happy, care-free time; when in very truth I skipped as lightly over

earnest life-realities as the pebbles skipped over the fathomless waters. Yes, I found them again, those life pebbles—found them awaiting me, when maidenhood, with the coming of my sixteenth birthday, dawned.

How I dreaded the coming of that sixteenth birthday; for then Aunt Fanny said, "Janet must leave home for awhile, and learn more of life, through the discipline of boarding-school experience."

And to Aunt Fanny's words my mother did not say "Nay," though the sigh that ever followed them seemed a sort of mute remonstrance with the years that had so ruthlessly first stolen her baby, and now were taking her young girl away from her; for even nurse, who stayed with us after I ceased to need her care, as my mother's maid, said:

"When you are sixteen, Miss Janet, you must leave off your girlish ways."

Well, the dreaded day came at last; and for my mother's sake, I strove to hide my tears, strove to smile and speak gaily; but,

oh, how I did dread the home-leaving. Even after all these years that stretch between that long-ago time and this present hour, I cannot recall my heart-sinking when I found myself alone among strangers, for the first time, without a sigh of pity for the young girl who once was.

Yet they were all kind to me at school; and before many days had gone by I had made friends, and was eagerly enjoying the wide fields for study that opened out before me. Still the whole atmosphere of the place was all unlike my dear love-warm home.

But I must not tarry to picture those first school-days, though they are every one stamped on my memory with detailed minuteness. I often think how like in essence is the keeping of youthful memories to the prompting that leads one to note every opening leaf in the early Spring; while as Summer-time comes, and the leaves go on unfolding and increasing, till every tree and shrub, vine and growing thing is robed in a mantle of green, we scarcely heed them;

just as when life experiences multiply with increasing years, we find our hearts merging the days into weeks, the weeks into years, scarcely lingering to divide the little events from the great.

But, after all, it makes but little difference whether or no our days and hours stand out boldly, like headlands on an ocean's shore, if only we have ruling in our hearts that faith which can gather up life's lessons, whether learned through smiles or tears, and embalm them in the sunshine of sweet memories; for tear-dimmed memories can be sweet—sweet and precious even as the smiling ones.

II.

While I must not tarry to describe in detail my school days, there are yet certain impressions and memories, linked with them, that as I look back cry out to me:

“We have had a strong formative in-

fluence on your life; pass us not by, as you tell your story.”

First among them, was the coming in contact with opinions and ways of thought, utterly unlike what I had been wonted to.

I soon made friends, and it was scarcely more than my second Sabbath at B—, when Ruey Flint asked me to come to her room, for the quiet hour, just toward twilight, which we were allowed to spend as we liked.

There were only three other girls, besides Ruey and myself, admitted to these times of quiet talk, which we kept up all through our school-time years. Ellen Jay, a tall, fair-haired, lily-like girl, with a heart pure as a lily, and a voice so bell-like in its clearness, it always seemed fraught with some message from the land of song. Poor Ellen, she was truly the singer of our little band; but alas, such rainbow songs were hers,—for the sun, it almost always seemed to shine for her, through a veil of tears, so sorrowful was

her life, as the world counts sorrow, and yet so heaven illumined.

Next to Ellen, comes to my memory the very look and attitude of Martha S——, a dark-eyed beauty, bright as a sunbeam; and close by Martha, I always keep the recollection of little Dora Fenn,—laughing, winsome little Dora, who could be so earnestly thoughtful too.

But queen over them all reigned, to me, Ruey Flint, even then, before I knew that Ruey, in many things, was a sort of type of Ruey's brother.

Dear Ruey! how often we used to tell her she was made for a life full of perplexities and cares, because she was so calm and stately; never a school worry,—and our paths were thickly strewn with them,—could cause a shadow to cross her face.

Those four girls were my best friends during all my stay at school; and they continued dear friends on beyond school days. So dear, that our friendship, though from all but Ruey I have long been sep-

arated, is, I think, like those flower roots, that only during Spring and Summer send up bloom-crowned stems, but that live on just the same, even when the falling leaves of Autumn and the snows of Winter come to cover them up from nodding their flower-bells at one another,—come to cover and keep them safe from every chill, that they may be ready for another blooming, when the next Spring-time comes. Ah! it is so sweet to feel, that friends, though far separated by distance, long divided by time from interchange of word or look, will, like the flowers, wake after the Winter of life to another blooming time, where friendship is perfected and where Spring is perpetual. How well I recall our talk that evening when first I met those four dear companions in Ruey's room.

It was a season when all over the land the spirit of the Lord seemed specially hovering, and touching with reviving beams the hearts of the Lord's people, rousing, too, with new desire, hearts that were strangers

to His love, as manifested through our dear Immanuel.

Love thus manifested, what a wondrous love it is—a something so inexhaustible, so boundless, and yet at every step of our way so satisfying, if we will only open wide our souls to take it in,—so satisfying, that we are not oppressed by the sense of there being richer blessings than we receive, even though with every passing day we learn that our yester draught of that love was but a hint of to-day's full cup.

My companions, all but Ruey Flint, were standing that Sabbath evening just outside of the fold of Christ. I think their hands were on the very latch—their feet on the very threshold; but each one halted before entering, held back by some subtle influence. With Ellen Jay, it was a sense of her own unworthiness to accept promises so full and gracious. With Dora, the fear that the love of worldly pleasure would tempt her to seek some fruit forbidden, if she numbered herself among Christ's fol-

lowers. And Martha, the great, wearisome problem of life's contradictions, the cry of suffering humanity—she wanted it hushed, before she could believe in the Fatherhood of God, her King. What word of earth-wisdom could meet their perplexities? Who could make it plain to Ellen, that self, worthy or unworthy, was nothing; that Christ, only Christ, was all she needed? Who could open Dora's eyes to see pleasures deeper, truer, in that Heavenly Friend's keeping, than any earth-joys could afford? Who could make Martha know that without the very life-contradictions, the very groans of suffering, the Fatherhood of God would be but half complete?

What word of wisdom is there for souls thus perplexed? None of human growth, but a wealth of divine inspiration—a Bible stored full of them.

This was what Ruey told them.

In my own heart there were troubles, too. The emotions that were stirring the minds of my friends were something new to me. I

had grown up always to call God my Father; Christ had ever been to me a friend to whom I could tell my gladnesses and my troubles, and the holy angels, they had always seemed near to me. Was there more required? Was there something deeper than this feeling, which seemed part of my life as naturally as belonging to my mother did? Must I have some experience before I would, in very truth, be a Christian? Was there, indeed, something more required than I had? And Ruey's look, when I asked her, seemed to say, "Yes, something more."

And loudly my heart called out, "What is it—what is it?" Ah! how often since I have been met by the same question; for near fifty years of life as a pastor's wife brings one into close contact with heart-questions, and over and over again has it been asked me: "What is the secret that makes some Christians as different from others as flowers laden with sweetest fragrance are different from odorless blooms?"

What is the something beyond, that some grasp, and that others never seem to touch? Why do some stay in a half light, while others walk in the full radiance of the Sun of Righteousness?"

How can we explain that something?

I have now and then thought silence the only way—silence, with that look in the eyes that used to come to Ruey's when I asked her that question. But unless the secret is in the soul, the look will not be on the face. "How explain it?" again I say. Why, it is as difficult as the trying to analyze what love is—love, that seems so typified by the songs of the birds of the air. And did you never know a bird that sang all day long in its forest home—a song that soared away heavenward—that when caged, sang scarcely at all, only chirped a few notes that were hardly melody so much as sighs? Just so I think the love that is defined in why and wherefore loses its heavenward-ascending song—loses its joy-note of melody in the process, and in a certain way becomes

like the odor, which is but an essence exhaled by distilling, and not the true, sweet, untrammelled breath of the flower.

No; love to Christ—the altogether lovely One—is something too complete to cage into explanation, or to bound by why and wherefore. And is it not so, too, with our dearest earth-loves? We love, but all the reasons we cannot tell even to our own hearts, they are so many and so wondrous dear.

But the difference in Christians—surely it is answered by their difference in trust—their difference in surrender of *all* to Christ.

Full surrender! It means the losing of self-will in the will of God, just as the rain-drop loses itself when it falls into the ocean and becomes one with the boundless expanse of water; and yet the rain-drop, while it becomes part of the ocean, has still an identity of its own which catches sunbeams and reflects them—moonbeams and holds them. But the explaining of this losing of self—this abiding in Jesus—it is something no heart

can tell another heart, not even the nearest and dearest, for it is something—oh! the sacredness of it—just between Christ and ourselves.

III.

Eagerly interested in my studies, and deeply stirred to my very heart's centre by my new desires for a life more truly like the Great Example life—counting, too, every passing week of the school term as bringing nearer the time of return to my dear home—the days sped like a dream; and dream-days many of those days were to me, too.

But why do I write *those* days? Is not *all* life like a dream—a very solemn dream—and yet one that is truly symbolized by our night visions, when sober realities are robed in garments of fiction; for do we not, when wide awake, robe many and many a real day in a garment woven of fancy?

I am not sure but this power of fancy is a

blessed possession, though we are so wont to think good, plain sense far better; at least it has been a blessed possession to me, for memory brings up, as I write, some of my youthful fancies that have helped to smooth over many a rough place.

It so often happens that insignificant tasks, which in themselves are nothing, from some natural distaste become really repugnant and burdensome.

Now when I was young, sewing was to me something specially dreaded—I mean plain sewing, long seams, and the hemming of yard after yard of ruffling. I could not feel interested in it, and yet my cousins were happy all the morning long thus occupied. Not till I wove a little romance of my own about sewing did I become reconciled to it; and my romance—it was as childish as my heart was when it framed the simple story; yet even now, though my hair is white and my years number almost the appointed threescore and ten, never do I come in contact with a wearisome bit of

sewing-work without calling up my youth-time scheme for accomplishing the task easily.

It was only this: I made a story to myself, in which the spools were my heroes, and I called them prisoners, bound with chains, and the chains they were represented by the closely-wound thread or silk that encircled the little wooden holder, and every needleful I broke off left one measure less in the prisoner's chain; and when my spools were empty, I called them free.

In much the same simple manner I used to weave stories about my almost every task. A garden border to weed became straightway to my imagination a fairy-peopled forest, and every weed my hands pulled. I called a tree less in the forest that hid the little fairy people away from the sunbeams.

As I grew older, my earth-bound fancies deepened, till they came to embrace spiritual interpretations; and then the weedy garden-bed stood to me as a type of my own weedy

heart-garden; the thread-chained spools came to signify heart-faults, which I must strive to break off and separate from my life as I did the bits of thread from the spool, that I, too, might not be a prisoner, but free.

And I repeat, that I think this "fancy-power" has been a great blessing to me. Often I wonder—when I hear women, solitary women, and, alas, sometimes wives and mothers, complaining that life is dull and prosaic to them—if this faculty of inweaving bits of poetry (homely poetry though it be) into even the most "hum-drum duty," as they call it, does not greatly help to keep a cheerful spirit. And I do not think it unscriptural; for is not the book of Nature one volume of the Lord's book? And when we think how, in God's world, many things which we are apt to call common and dull, are full, if we will but open our minds to read them, of suggestions more wonderful than most wondrous page of magic tale, it seems to me we are justified in letting fancy weave stories, and frame them in golden frames if

it will, about even the simplest, dullest duties, though, as I said in that foregone line, it does not need fancy to make life a poem; for just following out the real story of our most insignificant surroundings, we find ourselves fenced in by realities more wonderful and entertaining than *fancies*, so wonderful that, with such ever-present entertainment, I wonder that any can call life dull.

Only pause to notice for a minute. I lift my eyes from my writing-table, and they fall upon the glowing coals in the grate. Where do they come from, the brightly-burning, warmth-giving coals? What are they made of?

"Gas and sunbeams, with a small percentage of ash, or earthy salts, which need hardly to be taken into account."

This is what the scientist tells us; and, led by this learned guide, let us follow the gas and sunbeams till we "come to the life of the growing plant, which laid hold of the gases in the air and in the soil, of the

carbonic acid, the atmospheric air, the water,—for that, too, is gas,—and drank them in through its rootlets, breathed them in through its leaf-pores, that it might distill them into sap, and bud, leaf, and wood. But it had to take in another element, without which the distillation and the shaping could never have taken place. It had to drink in the sunbeams,—that mysterious and complex force which is forever passing from the sun as heat and light. So the life of the plant seized the sunbeams, and absorbed them, buried them in itself, no longer as life and heat, but as invisible chemical force, locked up for ages in that woody fibre. So it is Lord Lytton tells us, in a beautiful song, how

“‘The Wind and the Beam loved the Rose.’

“But nature’s poetry was more beautiful than man’s. The wind and the beam loved the rose so well that they made the rose,—or, rather, the rose took the wind and the beam, and built up out of them, by her own

inner life, her exquisite texture, hue, and fragrance. What next? The rose dies; the tender tree dies, decays down into vegetable fibre, is buried, and turns to coal; but the plant cannot altogether end its own work. Even in death and decay it cannot set free the sunbeam imprisoned in its tissue. The sun’s force must stay shut up, age after age, invisible but strong, working in its own prison-cells, transmuting them, or making them capable of being transmuted by man, into the manifold products of coal, coke, and gases, delicate aniline dyes, and what not, till its day of deliverance comes. Man digs it, throws it on the fire a black, dead-seeming lump. A corner, an atom of it warms, till it reaches the igniting-point, and then, like a dormant, live thing, awakening after ages to the sense of its own powers, its own needs, the whole lump is seized, atom after atom, with an infectious hunger for that oxygen which it lost centuries since in the bottom of the earth. It drinks the oxygen in at every pore, and burns;

and so the spell of ages is broken. The sun's force bursts its prison-cells, and blazes into the free atmosphere as light and heat, once more returning in a moment into the same forms in which it entered the growing leaf a thousand centuries since."

Strange it all is, yet true. "But of nature, as of the heart of man, the old saying stands, that truth is stranger than fiction." Ah! surely after such a reading of but one of the commonest every-day usefals, no reason is there to call life dull.

IV.

At the time of my school-days, or rather, my school-years, (but I mistake in using those words "my school years" as though they covered only some limited experience, when *all* life is school-time), vacations were differently arranged from what they are now, and, with no holiday time except the days of Christmas, New Year, Thanksgiving, and Fourth of July, the regular

routine of school rules and study were unbroken, and the home-going time came but once at the end of the ten long months; and yet my two years at B—— sped rapidly, and the time for saying farewell to school and school-friends came almost before I was ready for it; even though I longed with all a young girl's longing for home and my mother.

Weeks before the time of my last return, it had been planned that Uncle Max was to come for me; but just the very day he was to start he was taken suddenly ill, and that illness, which proved a mere temporary disorder to Uncle Max, opened the way for me into such a wondrous glad new life.

How strange it is the coming of many, even the greatest events of our lives, through such seeming nothings!

I think no one who pauses to trace the influence of events, can doubt the guiding, even in the very least things, of that Father without whom not a sparrow falleth; and yet, while we recognize this, how truly we

see, too, that ever hand-in-hand with God's guiding is found our free-willing.

In all the circumstances of that home-journey I was so perfectly left to choose my own companions, and yet I knew I was guided in my choice.

Only two days before school closed, Aunt Fanny's letter came, telling me of Uncle Max's illness and bidding me journey as far as H—— in company with some school-friend, saying that at H—— my Cousin Sandy would meet me.

Now, there were half a dozen girls going the same route, but out of them all I chose Ruey Flint's companionship, though that delayed me a whole day from home, and at that time of my life a day seemed as much as a week does now.

Thus it happened that I came to know Ruey's brother Ralph,—my Ralph—my ideal, who from that very day of our first meeting has reigned king of my heart.

My ideal! That was what I called him, sitting in the twilight talking to my darling

mother only a week later,—a week later, when I did not know that before many swift-going weeks had counted months, he would become something more than my ideal, something all my own.

My ideal! I have often queried since whether I had an ideal, before I met Ralph; or whether straightway he touched into reality some undefined, undeveloped aspiration in my heart, and that thus I throned him.

The feeling that it was thus is very sweet, very precious to me; for if it is true, even in only half a sense, that "by the ideal a man loves one may know what the man really is," it is indeed beautiful to feel my girl-heart recognized, in Ralph, qualities noble and true, and that called forth an earnest longing to attain to the same standard, to feel the same aspirations which he felt; and that in a certain way, something as the water-brook reflects the bankside beauty, my heart longed to be like him; even though with no more of reality than the reflections

mirrored in the stilly water, my heart mirrored, or, alas! *mirrors*, his goodness; for I fall so far short of being what I desire, and what the wife of Ralph, the mother of our children, should be, and above all, what one who has for years called herself God's child, Christ's follower, should be.

As I am writing out this record for my children and grandchildren, to them it seems due that I should give some description of their father and grandfather's personal appearance when first I knew him; yet I cannot very well do it, for every feature, every expression of Ralph's was in youth, as it is now in old age, so all-satisfying to me that words utterly fail to portray him. Neither can I detail how our acquaintance grew quickly, as flowers spring up, bud, and bloom in early Summer, from interest to friendship, deepened from friendship into love.

Such a happy love, to which my heart at morning, noon, and nightfall whispers over and over the old saying, which is ever new, "Every day I love him more."

And I do not think this ever-increasing love for my Ralph hurts me; for if love is pure, as it must be for a worthy object, surely it will from its very nature shut out idolatry, and is not that the great danger in human love?

I remember somewhere reading these words, "To us in our life here below the love of the creature is given to educate us for the love of God." And how true I have found them—how the earnestness of all life deepened to me after I came to know Ralph! I think it must always be so, and that the coming of love always brings greater earnestness, even into the simplest events of every-day life.

How tenderly, too, the endless interchange between those who love of their very best things, leads on to a life of upward growth, and this growth, which is nourished by the constant giving in times of trouble, and amid the wear of little worries, as well as in joyous times—it holds, I think, a broad hint pointing toward

the secret that perpetuates happiness, not only between married lovers, but in every friendship; for where and when we give the most do we not receive the most?

And yet there is much danger, in our earthly love, of our becoming selfish and forgetful that the promise-linked command, "Give and ye shall receive," is very broad, embracing not only those whom we love, and to whom it is a joy to minister, but the outside people, too—the unlovely and the loveless; for there are such people.

V.

The journey from B—— to H——, that now is accomplished in a brief half-day's car ride, in that long-ago time of which I tell, required an early start—full an hour before sunrise, and then not till twilight had given place to night gloom, did the glimmer of the distant lights of H—— begin to shine like the sparks of far-off sentinel fires, bidding the weary traveler take

courage, for his journey was well-nigh ended.

A livelong day's journey, in an old-fashioned stage-coach—it is something almost unknown nowadays, something that will soon be quite unknown; for even up among the White Hills the march of progress is stamping its iron foot on creeping grass and mossy bank, over stony pass, and through precipice-lined ravines; and the old stage-coach, with its echoing horn, that penetrates into the deep recesses of the hills and forests with almost a musicful note, is fast giving place to the rushing steam-propelled car, and the shrill, discordant whistle that startles bird and deer from covert and nest. The dear old stage-coach days! I suppose it is because I am an old woman that I cling to them greatly, in preference to this modern and speedy transit from place to place.

Slow; yes, I know they were slow, and the mails we only received them twice, or, at the best, three times a week, while now scarce an hour of the day but brings us some

missive from absent friends; yet do these frequent missives, which sometimes contain hardly more than a word or two, make up for the weekly, many-paged, journal-like letters of the olden time?

But, after all, the secret of my lingering fondness for a stage-coach journey may all come from my recollections of that long-ago ride from B—— to H——, when with the exception of a quiet old lady, my companions were just Ruey Flint and her brother Ralph. It seemed to conduce, such a journey, to the growth of acquaintance, very differently from the speedy car-ride. Now, that day when I first traveled with Ralph and Ruey, everything from the hour of our starting helped forward and induced a natural expression of feeling and interchange of opinion.

It was so beautiful in the early morning, when the mystery of night still hovered over the world—a tender mystery, that vanished before the baptism of sunrise. The fresh morning air, it was so sweet, laden as

it was with the perfumes of clover blossoms, wild honeysuckles, and the wealth of flowers that were studding the roadside banks and fields for leagues away. And the sky, too, with its wonderful blending of softest violet tints, just touched with a faint rosy blush; and far-off banks of blue and purple-hued hills that we must cross before our goal was reached—they all helped to make such a beautiful picture that morning,—all helped to waken a high romance of feeling,—all helped to enfold every mile of our onward journey, (though part of it led through sandy plains, crossed amid the heat and glare of mid-day,) with a veil of poetry.

For the first half hour I was silent, my heart was so jubilant over the thought that I was going home; and, when I am the happiest, I am always the quietest, just as I cannot help thinking, the still, deep water-brooks that creep along quietly on their onward course, through meadow and plain, are happier than the sparkling cascades, that toss their spray-shining drops out into the

sunshine, and beneath which hundreds of admirers stand.

But I found myself taking part in Ralph and Ruey's conversation before long, like the brooklet, creeping on till it blended with the broad river, for Ralph's talk that morning, it was broad and onward-flowing as a river.

Ralph Flint's life only numbered twenty-three years then; he was just standing on the threshold of his manhood days.

For a year by-gone he had been pursuing his theological studies (for like his father and grandfather before him, he had chosen for his life's work that service which is content to minister, rather than to be ministered unto) with an old and much-respected teacher of divinity, who gave instruction to one and another college graduate who sought his counsel; for at that time theological seminaries were scarcely known in our country; and Ralph's mind and heart were glowing with longings to attain to the realization of the spiritual life, of which he

caught, it seemed to me, then, and seems to me now, a wonderfully clear glimpse. And yet, when I think of what Ralph is now, I realize that then he was just waking to the discernment which told him that "spiritual truth was not to be grasped so much by logical understanding, nor by the possession of what is termed good common sense, as by that something which is beyond understanding, beyond common sense, the something that is only illumined by love and consecration to Christ's service." That holy love which lets the lover see behind the veil, even into the very heart of Christ; that love which answers the puzzling question, "How can I know of the doctrine?" By Christ's own word, "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or man." We are so apt to reverse that saying, and demand the *knowing* first, and then the doing—but only as we *do*, Christ said, we know.

It was of the development of this spiritual nature, the having ever in the heart that

hunger and thirst which only Christ and His illumining can supply with nourishment, of which Ralph spoke; this something, that must be developed by a different training than that which educates the intellect or wakens the imagination.

How well I remember, though it is fifty years since it all happened, Ralph's saying:

"If we would but follow the heavenward prompting that God plants in our souls,—would but tend the heavenward seed,—how quickly we would be led to spiritual outlooks, spiritual promontories, from which we could catch glimpses of the beyond, that would nerve the arm, and strengthen the hand to struggle and battle with a fearless courage through the breakers and dashing waves that lie between us and that far-off country."

"But how are we to keep it alive in our hearts, this spiritual plant," half timidly I asked, and it was the flash in Ralph's eyes, as he turned to answer my question, that

made me call him from that hour, my ideal,—my king.

I do not think he had noticed me much before,—I do not think he noticed *me* much then; I think it was my question which revealed to him a heart longing to enter on a richer, fuller spiritual life, that rivetted his attention.

"How are we to keep it alive in our hearts?" he repeated my words before replying to them, and his reply, in its simplicity, was much as one would answer a child.

Ralph always treated me from the very first, as though in a certain way I was a child, and yet he has ever been wont to show to even the slightest opinion or word of mine, a deference which (I can whisper it to this little record, since it is for our children and grandchildren) almost amounts to reverence.

"Do you ever think," he said, "that God has given you a temple to build, a spiritual temple, for which the Lord provides, if you

will but use them, the materials? A fair temple, that you can only rear as you accept Jesus' words, 'I am the door,' for your entrance plea. And the very first God-provided stone in that structure is conscience,—conscience, that even a little child recognizes, the inner voice which tells the heart this deed or thought is right, that wrong. The being able to fearlessly bring into its light for judgment, our very selves, our all—this is to become pure-hearted and true; and to firmly lay this stone in the heart's temple is no easy task; the only way to cement it there—this sentinel stone—is to test our thoughts and deeds, by letting the full light of God's law of right shine upon them; and with a wide-awake conscience as a foundation-stone, the uprearing of the temple is half accomplished."

After a minute's silence, Ralph pointed toward an old-fashioned farm-house we were just passing, the door of which stood so ajar, that it gave us a broad look into the great kitchen, with its wide, open fireplace,

which only half filled the great chimney, that in those old-time homes was the central feature of the house. The old chimney, with its openings into kitchen, sitting-room, and chambers, that seemed to hold all together, as from that one outlet many a bright flame ascended, that gave warmth and cheer for the different needs, as the different uses of the rooms in the house demanded.

"They always remind me," Ralph said, "the central chimney-places in man's home, of the place prayer should fill in our spiritual temple,—prayer, that ascends not only from or for one need, but from and for many, and yet, to ascend, must, like the firewood blaze, find its upward way through only one entrance."

As Ralph ceased speaking, I could not help softly repeating the question and answer lines,—

"Say what is prayer, when it is prayer indeed?
The mighty utterance of a mighty need.
That man is praying, who doth pray with might,
Out of his darkness into heaven's own light."

Prayer, how we stay outside of it, calling so many and many a formal repetition of words prayer, while only that is truly prayer which brings us heart to heart with the Lord to whom we pray, which stretches out the hand of faith, sure of a hand-clasp in return.

In Ralph's definition of that spiritual life which he called temple-building, he placed close beside prayer the crystal stones of meditation,—crystal stones, which reflect not only the things of sense and sight, but the unseen and eternal too; "and," said Ralph, "may we not fill in the crevices and corners, that need filling in every building, with the lives of good men that have been written for our example and warning," but he continued, "as, when a traveler enters some far-famed cathedral of ancient build, his eyes are raised to the over-arching dome, on which are pictures marvelous in their wondrous beauty,—a dome that is upheld with a fret-work wrought with the fair, precious stones, numbered in Revelation's page:

"The jasper-stone clear as glass,
And second sapphire, third chalcedony,
The rest in order,—last an amethyst,—"

so let our gaze be thus lifted up to Christ, who, like the dome of the cathedral, over-arches the building, brooding over and sheltering it from storm and peril, and who sends downward into our up-looking souls revelations of light and love beyond compare for beauty and joy-giving."

This is the substance of what Ralph said the first day I met him; and if there be those who shake their heads and say, "unnatural talk for such young folk!" I tell them nay, it was not and is not unnatural; for whether we aged people remember it or no, youth is a time of great earnestness, though we are so apt to call it a thoughtless, heedless time. Yet, when, in what after year, is the soul stirred more than it is when first brought face to face with life-laden solemn questions, that touch not only the here, but the hereafter; and does not that spiritual temple-building truly touch them

both, the here, and the there? But I am moralizing beyond even the privileged bounds of an old woman.

VI.

It was quite, quite dark, when we reached H——; and though I peered eagerly among the crowd standing about the coach-yard for my cousin Sandy, he 'spied me first. How pleasant it did seem to hear his familiar voice, and what a joyous company we were, as half an hour later we sat down around the bountifully-laden supper table at the H—— Inn.

I thought Sandy so improved during the ten months of our separation; and he talked so well to Ralph and Ruey. Ralph seemed to attract Sandy right away; and before Ruey and I left them, to go to our room, I heard him warmly urging Ralph to visit him for a few days during his (Sandy's) vacation, and to my amazed delight I heard Ralph as warmly accept the invitation.

With the words of acceptance singing like a glad song in my heart, I followed Ruey and our kindly landlady up the narrow stairway, which led to the little room Ruey and I were to share.

What a never-to-be-forgotten night that was to me!

How we did talk—away on till gray dawn was nearing—before we slept; and our theme, it was Ruey's home—Ruey's brother.

We were but young things; Ruey's years numbered less than mine, and my record counted up only eighteen Summer-times.

Intimate as we had been all through our school-days, Ruey had never told me much of her brother, for she was a girl of great dignity and a goodly share of reserve; but that night her reserve vanished, as mist before sunrise, and she pictured for me in glowing words the days of her childhood, when Ralph was her only young companion in their quiet home up among the New England hills; and then she told me of her

mother, who died when she was scarce more than a child; and of her father, who, though somewhat stern and silent, was so well-beloved by the village people among whom he had labored as pastor for twenty-five years and more; and she told me, too—dear, good Ruey—of all her plans for making her father's home cheery and joyous again, as it used to be before her mother died.

But my selfish heart, it listened far more eagerly to the stories of Ralph and his boyish doings than it did to Ruey's loving, filial plans. Indeed, even after all these years, I am half-ashamed to tell that while Ruey was talking of her father, I fell asleep—to dream of Ralph.

And then came the next morning—the hurried breakfast, followed by the parting from Ralph and Ruey, for their homeward way led up toward the heart of New England, while Sandy and I turned southward.

Another day's coach-ride it took before we reached home—a day quite unlike its

sister, yesterday, for Sandy's talk was so different from Ralph's.

It was nearing sundown when we arrived. Oh, the joy of that home-greeting! They were every one down by the garden gate to meet us; but it was my own darling mother who first folded me in her arms, then Aunt Fanny claimed me, and then I was hugged and kissed by them all. My eyes they grow dim, as I recall that long-ago happy homecoming, dim with tears, and my heart it sighs out, even though it is an old heart, for a look at the dear faces that smiled on me that hour—dear faces, that I will not see again till we meet in the Father's home; and that meeting—it will not be long in coming now.

The joy of my home-greeting was but a prelude to the joy of the beautiful Summer days that followed.

My cousins were all at home; and I think young folks were never happier than we; for if, now and then, some slight cloud did arise, it was in very truth so golden-lined

we straightway forgot the cloud, because of the glow behind it.

How little we thought that it was the last Summer we ever would all spend together in our father's home as children—for Uncle Max was like a father to me, too.

But youth—it is such a transition time, and changes come so apace to the homes that number young men and maidens in their circle.

There was scarce a week, all that Summer-time, Sandy or Jem did not have with them some college friend for a day or two; but oftenest of all came Alfred Steele; and all together—my cousins and their friends—we would go out into the sunshine for long walks and rambles, sometimes not returning till near nightfall, if we were in search of some special flower-treasure that could only be found by long seeking: for my cousins all loved botany, and never wearied when the prize they sought was some wonderful lily-cup or rare fern.

As for myself, I did not care much about

the botanical value or rareness of the flowers. I just loved them for their own sweet sakes; and I better liked the simple, common names, which seemed so much more naturally to belong to the lowly-growing, hidden-away things, than I did the difficult botanical titles that Sandy was so fond of repeating. So I was wont to linger, in company with Max—a well-grown lad now—and his little sister, by the side of some quiet brook, where we could look deep down into the stilly pools, or under the shade of some stately pine tree that gave forth a refreshing breath from its odorous gums; and then I would tell the children stories, or tell myself stories, while the little ones gathered flowers or filled their baskets with the blueberries, that grew so plentifully on every bank-side.

It was during these Summer-day rambles my Cousin Madeline and Alfred Steele began to spell the first syllables of their "love-story;" and so quickly they spelt it out, that story, that scarce six months later

Madeline stood among us arrayed in her snowy bridal-robe. So the first break in our home-circle came.

But I must not tell Madeline's story; I must keep to my own.

It was an August day, a sultry day, when there was hardly breeze enough to stir the grass-blades, and when the flowers drooped their heads, and the cattle, grazing in the meadow that stretched out beyond the garden, had the look of cattle in some hazy, half-misty picture—they were so motionless as they grouped together under the shade of an old oak tree.

It was too warm to stay in the house, too warm to ramble off to the woods, and so I took my book and sought the garden nook, which had, from the time I was a child, been my favorite retreat for thinking and studying-hours.

It was a hidden-away place, half concealed by overhanging vines, that formed a natural arbor over a rough seat Sandy had long ago made me out of twisted

bits of wild grape-vine and gnarled tree-branches.

Spite the heat, I found it cool and shady there, and dropping by my side my broad-brimmed sun hat, I snuggled up into a corner of the rustic bench for a long, quiet morning.

It was all so still—even the song-birds were silent, hushed by the heat; the hum of the busy honey-hunting bees was the only sound that broke the quiet—the busy bees, that so revel in sunshine.

But the silence, it did not last long, for before I had time to turn more than a dozen pages in my book I heard Sandy's well-known voice calling, "Janet, Janet!" and before I could reply, he pushed aside the leafy screen which hid me from the garden walk; and Sandy, he was not alone, for by his side stood Ralph Flint.

Ah! if I had thought the Summer happy before, what was it after Ralph came? for though he did not stay longer than a few brief days that first time, his visit was re-

peated over and over during the Summer and on into the Autumn; and before the Autumn had glided into Winter, while the glory crown of crimson and gold, the rich mantle of russet and brown, was still on maple and oak; while the garden borders were all aglow with their last tribute to the fading Summer, then it was that I, like Madeline, listened to *my* story—the story

“The birds could not sing,
The bells could not ring.”

And—well—well, the Autumn of that year, it was gladder than the Summer, though I called that the gladdest, gladdest Summer of my life.

VII.

My darling mother, how her tenderness touched me those days, when she did not say nay to Ralph, even though he asked her to yield up into his keeping that which was dearest to her in all the wide world—her right to the first place in my heart; she

only smiled and blessed us both, and though tears mingled in with her blessing-words, they were baptismal tears.

That Autumn day—the day which ever lives in my memory with the glow of Autumnal glory on tree and shrub—the day which was to me robed in all beautiful color—was followed by a time of much excitement to us all, and not until after my Cousin Madeline's wedding did we resume our wonted life at Aunt Fanny's.

A life that seemed very quiet after all the stir of Madeline's bridal days; especially quiet to me, for only a few hours after the wedding-party, which comprised Edith. Sandy, and Jem, left us, Ralph bade me good-bye for a long separation, but a separation that was to be our only one. For after much consultation and many forebodings as to my youth and inexperience, my mother and Aunt Fanny had at last yielded to Ralph's pleading, that when the Summer came we should begin our life together as pastor and wife, in the quiet village where

Ralph's from-time-to-time preaching had led to his receiving and accepting a call to become their settled minister; though he was not to enter on his duties till early Summer, desiring a few months more of study and preparation.

The deciding of our future plans thus, gave me much to do during the remainder of the Winter—my last Winter of girlhood; for I think however young one may be, when they marry, and however truly one may keep their young heart,—and if hearts are pure and true, I think they keep always young, even though years may age the features and silver the hair;—the assuming of all the responsibilities that marriage brings—launching one out, as it does, from childhood's home and guidance—must ever be a solemnizing and sedating thing. And above all, in my case, the becoming a pastor's wife in those old times, when a pastor's wife held quite a different office from that she now occupies, demanded, indeed, that I should lay aside my girlish, dependent ways.

A great help those quiet weeks of preparation were to me, for my future life.

In my time, a bride's outfit was quite different from what it is now; there was no such thing as purchasing by wholesale, as it were, dozens upon dozens of costly and elaborately-trimmed garments, but every stitch of the plain sewing was done at home, under my mother's and Aunt Fanny's directions, and though nurse claimed the privilege of making a goodly share of "Miss Janet's garments," many were the long seams my own fingers accomplished; many were the piles of snowy linen my own hands helped to stow away in the red chest, double the size of my school-trunk, that Aunt Fanny had bought me in the neighboring town.

But the help I received for my future life—it did not come from the long seams my fingers sewed, though they did help patience grow a bit, I think; but from the words my mother uttered, as with her dear hands, that always could do what other

hands failed in, she plaited dainty laces and soft muslins, or twisted into graceful knots the faint blue or violet ribbons, that were the brightest colors that were then deemed suitable for a minister's wife.

Dear Aunt Fanny, she too gave me much help, taking me right into her confidence, and telling me many of her own experiences, many circumstances connected with the developing life—heart-life, I mean—of us young folk, which proved of much help to me in my future.

Yes, I have always felt it was a great benefit to me, that time of familiar intercourse with my mother and Aunt Fanny; they were so unlike in their methods of thought, while yet they were in sympathy, because both were living in the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness; yet the circumstances of their lives, and their natures too, led them to take such different looks at life. The great grief of my father's early death, it gave a coloring to all my mother's after-years, and her feeble health inclined her,

too, to much meditation; so that her counsels to me were like some far out-look toward twilight, on a midsummer's day, when all nature is robed in softened, mellow hues—even the rough and jagged parts.

Many of my mother's sayings seemed so to breathe of a something beyond this world, that I would often lay aside my work, and nestle my head down on her shoulder, as I used to do when a tiny child, and whisper to her, that the thoughts she gave me I would keep all my life long, for my breviary of holy utterances.

Aunt Fanny's talks, they were like walking on an Autumn morning across some breezy common, when every breath seems vigor-laden.

And so they counseled me, those two, after their own views—my mother bidding me 'remember that my great desire must be to learn much of Christ, to become like Him, and thus to help my Ralph in becoming like our Heavenly Guide;' bidding me, too, to be mindful, when I entered on my

life with Ralph, "never to hide from him aught that had to do with myself, even though sometimes he might not be pleased."

And then, like the ringing note of a clear bell, Aunt Fanny's voice would chime in, as she would say :

"Remember, too, Janet, even in the dearest, most satisfying human love, 'there is always a place that forbearance must fill.'"

And, with a smile in her eyes, that was a tender light, she would continue to tell me how happiness between husband and wife "lay in the depths of the heart, amid the cares and sorrows of life, as well as amid its joys;" that, though I thought my love so complete then, it would require many and many a sober hour, many and many an earnest prayer, and longing for and with each other, before our happiness would be really complete, and abiding; for"—and (spite Aunt Fanny's words, she looked as though she never had been thus tried,) she would add:—"You will find, Janet, even in this dearest love, there will be need of patience, before

you thoroughly know and understand one another."

At her words, I used to shake my head and say :

"No, no, auntie, my love for Ralph is complete now; we do now understand and know one another."

"Wait and see, Janet," was wont to be her only answer; and the waiting, it has indeed taught me; I was then as a child, who thinks because he beholds the bud, he knows the beauty of the flower, the richness of the ripened fruit, that only time can teach him, so little did I know then, all Ralph would become to me. Thus the days numbered weeks, and the weeks months; and the long seams to be accomplished—they grew fewer and fewer, while the piles of snowy linen grew larger and larger; and the buds on maple and elm began to swell, the grass in the meadow to lose its dry and yellow hue, for a tender, misty hint of green; and in the garden borders, yellow-eyed and purple-leaved crocuses were peep-

ing up; fragile snow-drops, too, in sheltered nooks, and violets from under the withered leaves, all coming out for a look at the sunshine.

VIII.

June was the month we chose, Ralph and I, out of all the twelve, for our wedding-time. June, the flowers' month, the month of nature's most beautiful and wondrous unfoldings; the month of promise, too, that whispers from its upspringing grains, blossom-laden trees and vines, of a glad harvest by-and-by, an ingathering time of full-eared corn, bearded grain, ripened fruit, and clustered juice-full grapes.

And we prayed, Ralph and I, that our June day would lead into a Summer that nature's blossoming and ripening would but faintly typify, so full we wanted our lives to be of fruit and flowers; and how full Ralph's has been, who can know so well as I, his well-nigh fifty-year wife? Yes, it is well-

nigh fifty years since that day; well-nigh the time for us to sing our Harvest-home song.

As I gaze down on my old, withered, time-worn hand, that now so feebly guides my pen as I write this story of my life, how strangely it thrills my heart to think, *then*, it was a dimpled girl-hand, soft and white—the very softest, whitest little hand ever a maiden had, Ralph used to say. And now—well, well—if my hand has grown old, my heart it is young; and, as I sit here, I live again in the days of my youth.

And my Ralph, sitting in the twilight, only on the night by-gone, he held it, my old hand, just as tenderly as ever he held my young one; and his whisper, as he stroked the old wrinkled fingers, it was love-full as ever his words of youthful admiration were, though he no longer called it soft and white; he only murmured the poet's words:

"This little hand
Was always gentle; none like thee

Can smooth a pillow in all the land,
Or sweeten the sick-room delicately ;

* * * * *
A tender, loving hand to me."

Yes, I am living over again the days of my youth, living them over so vividly that I almost seem to hear the patter of the rain on the roof the night before my wedding-morning ; a gentle rain, that touched every leaf and flower into beauty and freshness. And it comes over me, too, how, as the rain fell that night, I wept till my pillow was wet with tears—not that I wanted aught different, for I was happy, oh, so happy—only, only such a solemn, solemn thing it is to step from a known life into an unknown.

And then came thoughts of my mother, and the going from her ; for though we had tried to persuade her, she would not come to us, not at first. She said :

"No, it is better you begin alone ; better you learn to know one another in the daily, hourly intercourse of home-life, just together, you two, with no third one by, even if it be a mother."

This was what she said, and Aunt Fanny thought her right ; and looking back now, I, too, am sure it was better.

Blended in with my tears over parting with my mother, there came into my heart a great longing for my father, the dear papa who used, when I was a child, to hold me so close and safe in his strong arms. I wanted his blessing on my wedding-morning.

And did I not have it ?

Then came thoughts of Ralph, and all I longed to be to him ; and I grew frightened at the thought of his goodness and knowledge, contrasted with my faulty heart and little learning ; and, as I wept, I fell into wondering why Ralph had ever chosen me, Janet Sterling, for his life's companion, his heart's dearest earthly treasure ; and though I could not then, cannot now, answer that *why*, the joy that it was so made me smile and laugh outright with gladness ; and so, while the tears were still on my face, like the rain-drops on the flowers, the sun rose.

My wedding-day was prefaced by the Sabbath. On the Saturday, Ralph, Ruey, and their father arrived.

I was timid as a child about meeting Ralph's father; so timid that I fain would have run away and hid quite out of sight, in my old nook in the garden,—and,—I would not go with the others down the walk to meet them; but then I don't suppose that was so much from timidity as because I wanted Ralph all to myself, just at first; and I think he wanted me thus too; but Ralph was never selfish, and, after a moment, hand in hand, we went out into the hall to meet his father, who, in a brief forty-eight hours, I was to call my father too.

So gentle and kind was the pressure of that old man's hand, so tender the way he kissed me, I straightway lost all fear of him out of my heart.

Then followed the glad meeting with Ruey.

I must not linger over that day, though I remember it as though it were but yester-

day; neither must I tarry, for there is great danger of an old woman like me becoming prosy and prolix, over the Sabbath that followed, when, standing in the village church, in the very place where I stood on the following morning to be sealed Ralph's wife, I stood to confess my love for Christ my Lord as the first great love in my heart.

It may seem strange, nowadays, that I should thus unite with the church visible the very day before my wedding-morning,—it has ever been so beautiful to me that it was thus,—and yet quite naturally it came about; for in that long-ago time the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the church we attended but twice during the year; and though my heart was fixed in its purpose of thus confessing Christ six months before, there were reasons that led me to delay.

From sunrise to sundown that Sabbath was, in very truth, holy time to me; a beautiful, sacred prelude, I felt it, for my after-days.

And then came its morrow,—the sweet

day that dawned through the half-drawn curtain of my window.

The sweet day ! when every flower and blossoming shrub in the dear home-garden seemed laden as never before with wealth of blooms,—seemed to give out a sweeter fragrance than ever I had known ; and, in my girl-heart, I felt as though the old familiar friendly plants and shrubs were thus giving out glad hopes for me, on my bridal morning, through their beauty and fragrance.

I lay awake till long after sunrise, waiting to be called, as I used to when a child, and listening to the early song of the birds.

And then, only a few hours later, when the sunshine was falling in broad beams on hill and vale, Ralph and I went forth to begin our life's journey together ; and as I had long before left my babyhood's home, so I again passed out, *out* from my girlhood's shelter-place, into a broader, fuller life of loving, learning, and doing ; and our going out it was sped with prayers and blessings.

Noon.

"Like the swell of some sweet tune
Morning rises into noon."

"Pray ever, and work ever.
Say at noon, Thy will be done, for it is good,
And so go forth more apt to do it."



I.

THE first look at my new home, how well I remember it; for a week or more after our wedding-day we journeyed toward it,—a week or more of golden days; and during the latter part of the time, I was hourly becoming more and more familiar with the wild beauty of the New England hills.

Yet I was all unprepared for the loveliness of the close surroundings of our village, and my delight was unbounded, as the rumbling old stage-coach entered the long, shady street, that led for three-quarters of a mile or more through the centre of the township, — a far-reaching township, that embraced dwellers for miles and miles

away up among the hills, and down among the valleys.

Long before we entered the street, we had caught glimpses of the upward-pointing spire of the village church; sometimes it looked scarce more than a white finger, as we saw it through some framework of evergreen or maple boughs, and then again it would loom up and rest against the sky, like some white light-house column on ocean coast.

The church was built on the summit of a hill, and just at the foot of the hill was the minister's house,—our home,—an old stone house, with a sloping roof, that extended out beyond the house wall, and made a broad covering over the stone-flagged court. Over on the westward side, just beyond the court, was the old well with its swinging bucket; and beyond that, stretched our garden plot, where grew a few half-stunted lilac and syringa bushes—so bleak was the exposure, so chilling the wind from the hills; back of the garden, which was di-

vided from it by a tangle of willow, alders, and dogwood bushes, a swift-flowing brooklet rippled over its pebbly bed. And it is all much the same now as it was then.

The entrance to the house was by a straight walk, bordered on either side by stately poplars, and only a few paces from our front gate the ascent of the hill to the church began—a steep, hard walk, something like the doctrine that the village people had been accustomed to hearken to, till my Ralph came to reverse for them their aforetime Sabbath lesson, which had been law first, law middle, and, alas! often only law at the end; but with Ralph it was gospel, then law, and then gospel again, for the amen of all Ralph's sermons has ever been gospel,—the good news brought to us by our loving Saviour.

It was the end of the day when the coach stopped at our garden gate; the street was all bathed in the tender glow of sunset glory, and bits of sunbeams still danced among the high tree-tops, while the vane on

the church steeple shone like an arrow of light pointing eastward, as I raised my eyes up toward it, just as Ralph lifted me down from my perch on the topmost seat of the coach; and then, holding the gate wide open with one hand, Ralph led me inside, into the dear home inclosure; and spite the curious eyes that were peering out from behind drawn blinds for a look at the new minister's wife, we lingered for a moment in the wide porch, to take our first look together from our home-door.

A wide porch, with broad-seated, high-backed settles on either side of the doorway; a shady porch that was overhung with wild honeysuckle and sweet-briar roses.

Only for a moment we lingered, and then we turned to enter the open door; and so with all the dust of my journey about me, with my hair blown into a disorder as wild as the sweet-briar roses that grew a tangled mass about our door-way, I was brought face to face with a goodly array of "our people,"—the committee who had

been appointed to welcome us, and I know I blushed and trembled like any child before that verdict of eyes. Then all in a maze of bewilderment I heard Ralph introduce me to one and another—and no sooner had he said their names, than they seemed to slip from me,—and then Ralph was called to superintend the bringing in of our luggage,—my red chest, his bag, and a case or two of books and little home treasures that my mother and Aunt Fanny had put together for me. And there I stood, trembling, and listening to words of stiff reserved greeting from the deacons' wives and daughters; and so wide-awake was my every sense, so overwrought was I from the excitement and long journey, my ears seemed to have a double power of hearing; and while I listened to and answered the words addressed to me, I also heard the half-whispered comments the outer circle of young folk were making on my appearance, my youth, the cut of my pelisse, and the shape of my bonnet.

And then Ralph returned, and said, in his quiet way, a few words of greeting to the people of our charge, telling them that always they would be welcome to our home.

As Ralph ceased speaking, with a ready politeness they one by one came up to bid us good-night, saying:

"Mrs. Flint"—how strangely my new name sounded—"must be tired after her long journey."

So we were left alone, though not till I had been led to the well-stored buttery, and had had pointed out to me the pats of golden butter, huge loaves of snowy bread, and rows of pies one and another had brought as evidences of good-will; our tea-table, too, those kindly people had spread with every dainty their simple tastes could devise; and willing hands had arranged the furniture Ralph had selected in a neighboring town, and had had sent on a few days in advance of our coming. They had unpacked, too, and found places for the con-

tents of the boxes my Uncle Max had forwarded a week before.

Left alone! Ralph and I in our new home. Ah! the sacredness of that time. I think that first hour in married life, when thus together husband and wife stand on the threshold of home-life, with no eye but the Heavenly Eye of love beholding them, is almost as full of heart-stirring emotions as the wedding hour; quite as holy a time. I know Ralph thought so; for when with eager, girlish haste I caught his hand and would have led him into every corner of the house, he checked me, as he did when I eagerly began to talk of the people just gone; and drawing me to a seat by his side, he opened his pocket Bible, and read aloud the few verses that make that constellation of promises in the brief Psalm that Luther called "the wedding song for Christians;" and then, kneeling side by side, my hand clasped in Ralph's, our home was consecrated—our home-life begun.

II.

And now—I hardly know how to tell it without giving a wrong impression, and, perhaps, conveying the idea that I was not happy the first few months after my marriage, was not satisfied with Ralph, when I was more and more every passing day—there began for me one of the most trying periods of my life.

I have often thought the first few months after marriage are apt thus to be a trying time to most young women. In my case, it was particularly full of almost hourly bewilderments, which I could not carry to Ralph; for from an hour after our early breakfast till noon-time he was occupied with sermon-writing; and though we had long afternoons together, they were broken in upon by calls to receive, and visits to pay.

I do not know that I have clearly expressed that I was by nature quick and im-

pulsive, and, like all impulsive people, often out-spoken when silence would have been the wiser course.

I was too totally unlearned in much, that, to the people among whom my lot was cast, was as common as the air they breathed; I often wonder now, when I recall with a smile my ignorance, and the blunders that cost me many a cry when Ralph was busy with his sermons, at the patience those self-poised, clear-headed, thrifty New England farmers' wives and daughters had with my ignorance, when first I came to live among them.

Everything was so totally unlike what I had been used to.

Not even "the most fore-handed" of our people, according to the country phrase, then kept a regular servant, though now and then they did hire in an extra hand at harvest or house-cleaning time; and many were the words of surprise that were said to me—words that in my girlish sensitiveness I interpreted to mean disapproval—when it was known that I, the minister's wife, knew no

more than a child about the mystery of butter and cheese-making; and as for a half-day's washing or ironing, was no more fit for it than a baby. This was what they said, and this was how they reconciled themselves to my keeping a maid-of-all-work, a bright, cheerful little maid, who has never left me, though her then brown hair is as white as her mistress' is now—my faithful *Mehitable*.

How often I was made to feel those days, that many a staid matron thought it would have been far better if Ralph had chosen for his wife a real helpmeet—such as one of their strong, rosy-cheeked, frugal daughters would have been.

One old lady, even in my presence, made bold to ask Ralph, "Why he had chosen such a delicately-reared slip of a girl from the South, rather than a New England maiden?"

For, though Uncle Max's home was only in the northern corner of Maryland, Eastern people called that South.

And yet every one was kind to me, won-

derfully kind, when I think of my blunders; why, at the very first sewing society that I attended, I had to confess, when they asked me to take a seat at the quilting frame, that I did not know at all how to run my needle through and through and on across the wide block; and as for knitting, which I can now do with my eyes shut—footing a stocking or thumbing a mitten—was a task quite beyond my skill.

And my housekeeping—Ralph was satisfied with it; but what mistakes I made!

But these annoyances were my lesser troubles, for Ralph always laughed at me when I repeated them to him, and said:

"You will learn in time, Janet, and your bread will be lighter, your butter more golden than the most noteworthy of them all can make, your mittens and stockings the best thumbed and footed in all the village."

But there were other failures that I used to tell Ralph, remembering my mother's counsel never to withhold aught from him

that would bring a shadow for a moment over his face; and yet those other troubles, they always made him more tender of me, only the shadow made me sorry spite the tenderness; and thus almost unconsciously, I drifted, as so many a young wife had done before me, and has done since, towards the unrestful breakers, that murmured, "perhaps Ralph was disappointed in me; perhaps he had thought me more like Ruey." But just here let me say, I never drifted far; I only heard a very faint murmur of restlessness, and yet that hearing, it was enough to give me a great sense of kindliness and sympathy with young women, who drift so far that their hopes of happiness are well-nigh wrecked, over the subtle, mischief-making "perhaps" whispers.

Those troubles to which I allude in my own experience, were greatly caused by a religious education quite unlike that of our parishioners.

The governing idea of Uncle Max's home, of my mother's and Aunt Fanny's life, was

love to God and love to man. "Not to love God, that was sin; but in loving Him, was deliverance from sin." This, and a sense of the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Christ, was the essence of all the theology I knew, and my home-learned knowledge quite rounded my religious experience, with the brief exception of my school years; and then I had but caught glimpses, from which straightway I had turned aside, into the sea of perplexing doubts, and heart-tearing convictions of sin, which distressed some among my school-mates; and while I was conscious that Ralph, Ruey, my mother, and Aunt Fanny possessed a something I had not yet grasped, I was happy, going on in the simple way of my childhood's faith.

But this simple trust, that was unquestioning, that had been in my heart since childhood, was not in accordance with the then commonly-received views of New England people, and my ignorance of the stereotyped words, "conviction of sin, a new heart, a convert, predestination, and free-will," and

many like expressions, led me into much trouble; for I utterly failed so often in answering the questions put to me, or else I so quickly spoke out my own views, which to many seemed strangely free and broad, numbering, as I did, among the followers of Christ some who, as an old deacon told me, with a grave shake of the head, "As yet had not been under conviction;" and when I asked him, "What was conviction," his former gravity settled into stern rebuke, as he turned from me with a sigh.

And then there came to my heart the same sore trouble that I had felt when I once asked Ruey much the same question; and for almost a week's time, I carried the trouble with me; for I instinctively felt it was one of the questions that would bring a shadow to Ralph's face, and those silent days, they made one of my "near the breaker" weeks.

But I told Ralph at last, and what blessed comfort he gave me, even though he said so solemnly, that it almost frightened me: "Re-

member, Janet, that trust to be real faith, must reign in the heart at dark times as well as glad."

Oh, how well I remember Ralph's adding:

"If God sends us trial, Janet, can you trust then?"

It was a year or more before the trial came; and when it did, how my heart shivered and sank under the fiery ordeal. How I learned, through blinding tears, that much of my trust had been scarce more than the natural outgrowth of a happy life. How slowly I learned, that to say 'mid darkness 'God's will be done,' that to go forth bravely to bear and do it then, is no self-taught lesson, is only Christ-taught.

It is a never-forgotten afternoon, that on which I had that quiet talk with Ralph. Right after our noon-time meal, he bade me put on my bonnet and shawl, and accompany him on a round of calls, over on the west hill district.

It was a lovely day: the air was soft and

balmy, everything seemed touched with a peculiar beauty. Rain had fallen in the morning, giving the leaves a brighter glow of green, and the blue of the sky, it was seen in patches between the cloud banks that were still floating overhead.

I forgot all about my troubles when out in the beauty with Ralph, and we were joyous as two children, finding pictures in the clouds, airy castles, or snow-capped mountain peaks; or we would linger with delight to gather and stow away beneath the wagon's seat, some delicate fern cluster, or sweet, lowly-growing flower; the New England flowers were so unlike our Maryland blooms, I treasured every new variety to press for Sandy.

A joyous day I called it—one of those days when

“ 'Tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.”

But my joy it all fled, when, an hour later, Ralph knotted the reins of our sober,

slow-going horse, around a cedar post, and we alighted at Deacon Hand's,—the very old man whose look had so condemned me, because of my answer regarding conviction.

Mrs. Hand advanced to meet us; and then husband and children were all speedily summoned from work or play, to come and see the minister and his wife. Even the farm hands were called in, too, that all might have the benefit of Ralph's words and prayer; and the minister, in those days, was expected to say some word to each one, of counsel or reproof.

I seem to see myself, now, sitting in the high, straight-backed chair, hearkening to Ralph's voice, and,—foolish heart that I had,—trembling at every pause in the conversation, with a sickening dread lest the deacon should turn to me with some perplexing question; and hardly had the echo of Ralph's prayer died away before the dreaded word came, and that word—it led me to tell Ralph, as we drove home in the gloaming, all about my trouble.

Ah, what a beautiful thing love is! how its slightest caress of touch or look lives in the memory! I can feel it now,—the tender touch with which Ralph drew my shawl up close around me,—for the evening air was beginning to grow chill—and how he let the reins hang loose, and drew me close to him, while in tear-broken words I whispered my fear that I disappointed him,—that I was not all he expected in a wife,—my sorrow that I was not more like Ruey; and then—but not till after I was comforted and reassured that I was just all he wanted,—did I go on to tell my other trouble of how I failed in answering the questions Deacon Hand and others put to me, and of the great fear that perhaps, after all, I was not a Christian, because I had not known conviction,—could not talk of election and the doctrines; that perhaps I had done wrong in partaking of the sacramental elements; and Ralph he unhesitatingly said, No, I had not done wrong,—telling me that there were some chosen by Christ to follow Him from child-

hood,—some who walked with Jesus without ever knowing the discipline of doubt,—some who scarcely needed to feel the discipline of chastening; and yet, he added—with the look that was on Ruey's face, when, long ago, I had asked her, "What is it that makes faith mean so much more to some than to others?"—"There is a nearness to Christ, Janet, that you do not yet know,—a nearness that I cannot impart to you,—a nearness learned only through the Psalmist's words, 'Taste and *see* that the Lord is good.' God grant," and Ralph's voice sank almost to a whisper, "that you may learn this great nearness through joy, rather than sorrow; and yet sorrow is the oftenest bringer of that peace which is as much beyond happiness as sunshine is beyond moonlight."

Almost, when I recall my after-experience does it seem to me as though Ralph had some premonition of the sorrow that was to come.

Then Ralph spoke to me of the sacra-

ment, and of my fear that I was not fit to partake of it, saying:

"We go to the Lord's table, Janet, to remember Him,—not to remember ourselves and our unworthiness, but to remember Him; we are so apt to forget this."

And while Ralph's sentence was but half completed, we stopped at our garden gate.

III.

It was almost a full year after our wedding-day that a great joy came to us.

A God-given joy; a dear little child to call our own,—a dear little child whose wondering eyes followed my every movement.

They were sometimes so full (my baby's eyes) of mute questioning—sometimes so bright, with a strange look, as though he saw some vision of far-off beauty.

Did he?

Does God let little babies look behind the blue sky?

Many a little baby has rested on my bosom since,—babies dear to my mother's heart as ever children were,—yet never one has nestled there, with such a sweet sense of rest and comfort as that tiny baby boy, who lay there well-nigh fifty years ago now,—fifty years ago, and yet I can feel the pressure of that little head, the touch of that baby hand, see the look of those wondering eyes, as though it were but yesterday that I held him in my arms.

So well I remember, after baby's coming, how the days crept on,—every one joy-laden,—till the time drew near when Ralph and I smiled at one another, saying, in low voices, so tender and holy are the sacred titles:

"Soon now, baby will call us by our new names, father and mother."

And I thought to teach him to say first, father,—but our baby—God never let him utter an earth-taught word.

Ah, the love that came with that little child, my heart thrills with it now.

God alone knew how we loved our baby,

and yet,—yet it was God who took him from us.

For only a brief twelvemonth after he came, silently as the flowers close their eyes when the night shadows begin to fall, so our baby closed his little eyes, laid his little head on my bosom, and there I held him close,—close to my warm beating heart,—held him closer as I felt the little form growing chill and cold,—closer and closer, and,—then Ralph, yes it was Ralph who softly whispered :

“Baby sleeps now, Janet;” and a great sob broke his words, “sleeps safely, in the bosom of Him who carries such lambs, with a tenderness greater even than ours.”

And it was Ralph who loosened my clinging hold of baby’s little form, and laid him down, so still, so cold, in his cradle-bed.

Ralph, who led me away, and I could not weep, tears they were all gone.

My heart it was like a stone, I never said a word, no, not a word even in reply to Ralph’s tender pleadings.

Everything seemed to have slipped away from me with the closing of my baby’s eyes. I even let them carry him out, my baby, and lay the little form, that was so dear,—so dear! under the violets to sleep. And still I wept not.

I even folded up with my own hands the half-worn baby garments, and put them out of my sight, and still I shed no tear; my heart, I say, seemed like a stone; and Ralph, he was so patient with me, he never once upbraided me for my rebellious grief; he was only tender and loving; but no tenderness touched me those dark, dark days of my life; my heart seemed just centered on the baby my arms were so hungry to hold, my eyes so hungry to look upon. No, Ralph never upbraided me, even when from his words of gentle soothing I turned impatiently away.

And the days—they slipped on till the Sabbath came. It was on the Monday our baby died, and yet I had not shed a tear; I had refused to be comforted.

It was a dreary Sabbath, the rain fell in torrents; it made my heart shiver to think that it was falling,—falling all day long, that cold, pitiless rain,—on the little, lonely mound beneath which they had laid my baby's form. Such a dreary day, when all the beautiful promise of the Spring, that only a week before had budded out in violets and anemonies, seemed to have vanished, just as the joy had vanished from my heart.

I wandered listlessly from room to room, I was too restless to stay in any one place, and the house seemed so desolate and still; for, because we were in sorrow, my Ralph did not neglect his duty, and so in the chill of the morning, when the rain was just beginning to fall, he had driven away over the hills to preach for the old minister who had come to us for baby's funeral, and who,—he was such a kindly-hearted old man,—had promised to exchange pulpits with Ralph, who could not write a new sermon for our people for the Sabbath following our grief.

I think that old minister at first was shocked at my stony sorrow. Then I think he was pain-stricken, for when I went to him at noon-time to offer some slight hospitality, he said hardly a word to me. But later in the day, when his Sabbath duties were over—and his horse stood pawing at the door, impatient to start on the homeward road—he came up to me, as I stood looking out on the pouring rain, and gently as a father he took my hands in one of his, while he laid the other kindly on my bowed head; and thus he stood for a minute, silent, and I knew he was praying, that servant of the Lord, praying for me; and then he let go my hands, he lifted his baptismal touch from my head, softly saying, as he turned to leave the room, "Child, you had better 'look up.'"

Fifty years ago, almost, is it since that old man uttered those words, and yet they live in my heart, freshly as the memory of yesterday's sunshine.

"You had better 'look up,'" and it was

only down, down I had been looking, down into the grave,—my baby's grave,—down into my own bitter heart grief; and looking down, all I could see was the blackness of darkness—even God's love was all hidden, Christ's pity all forgotten.

Was there light for me if I looked up? would I see it again, my heavenly Father's love, my Saviour's tender pity, if only I lifted my gaze heavenward?

And all suddenly came ringing out loudly in my heart the memory of the words my father uttered, when I was a child, bidding me remember "that when God took away the sunshine, He always put stars in the sky." Were the stars shining there for me in my bitter grief, stars,—stars of hope shining there for me? And then came the thought of Ralph's words, "that many could trust in the daylight of gladness, but, alas, not so many in the midnight of sorrow."

And, ah! if old Deacon Hand could have looked into my heart then, truly he would have felt I knew at last the meaning

of conviction of sin, so plainly I saw all the doubt, all the rebellion against God's will, that had been struggling for mastery over my faith during the by-gone days of grief.

And,—for I was young then, young and impulsive,—I hastened from the room, and throwing about my shoulders a thin shawl, never heeding the pouring rain, I passed down the garden-walk, through the garden-gate, and on to the hill-side, where they had made my baby's grave.

I felt such a longing to weep there, for I was weeping,—the very first "look up," it had unsealed the fountain of my tears, and I wept and wept; and as I wept, I whispered so low, that only the ear of ever-listening Love could hear the words, "Thy will, not mine."

I think I must have wept there, on baby's grave, for full an hour; I know it was quite dark when I felt a hand laid gently on my shoulder, and straightway I knew it was Ralph's touch, and then he lifted me from the ground; and almost carrying me, he

brought me home,—home, into the light and warmth; and with tenderness like a mother's, he took off my dripping shawl, he led me to the fire, he rubbed my numb, chilled hands in his warm hands, and then he folded me in his arms, and I whispered to him the words Christ had helped me to say, while I was weeping on my baby's grave, "Thy will, not mine, be done."

IV.

After that came a time of blankness to me,—weeks during which they thought with every morning and at every night-fall I would go to my baby, so fiercely through my veins raged the fever that followed my bitter rebellious grief, and the exposure of that hour out in the pouring rain.

It was months before I slowly began to come back to life and consciousness.

I remember so well the waking from

what seemed to me a long sleep,—I gazed with such wonderment about the room; I did not understand why it was all so still, why the light was so dim, and then I lifted my hand to reach out for my baby; I wanted to feel his little form, but I was so weak, my hand fell again by my side,—and then my gaze rested on Ralph, whose figure, spite the shadowy light, was clearly defined, as he sat leaning his head upon his hand, just in front of the half-open window; and Ralph—he looked so worn, so weary—great tears rolled down my cheeks as I gazed on his dear face. But when I whispered, "Ralph, Ralph!" the look of weariness seemed gone in a moment from his countenance, so eagerly he greeted the first note of return to consciousness in my voice.

Ah, the minutes that followed! when Ralph, holding my thin, wasted hand in his, knelt by my side and murmured over and over his tender joy, his grateful thanksgiving to the dear heavenly Father who had given me back to life, and to him.

And all the time I never once asked what it meant; never asked why Ralph wept in the fullness of his gratitude; and, stranger than all, I did not ask for baby.

I do not think it could have been more than ten minutes, after I called Ralph's name, that a quiet step approached, a gentle hand was laid upon my forehead, and I heard Aunt Fanny softly saying, "Janet must sleep now."

And, without a word, I drank the cooling draught she held to my lips, never questioning how she came to be with us, but just closing my eyes, as she bade me; and like a tired child, with my hand still in Ralph's, I straightway slept.

A sleep, they afterwards told me, that was peaceful and refreshing as the slumber of a little infant,—a slumber all unlike my tossing, restless sleep of the by-gone weeks.

It was midnight before I awoke, and Ralph was still kneeling by my side; still he held my hand in his firm clasp; he had never moved all those hours, so fearful was

he of waking me,—my patient, tender Ralph.

Had he been praying all the time? When in a faint whisper I asked him, he did not say nay.

With that second waking came a fuller return to consciousness,—came the longing for my baby; yet, though I missed my darling (God only knew how much), all bitterness had gone from my heart, for the words, "Thy will be done," that Christ (without Him how could I ever have said them) had helped me to say in the hour of my submission—they had stayed with me all through the weeks of my illness; though much, very much during that time had slipped away from me—so much, that over and over I would ask Ralph to tell me every particular of our baby's sudden illness and falling asleep. I never could call my darling's going to Jesus *dying*.

After that, every passing day brought me new strength, and it was scarcely a week later when Ralph carried me in his strong

arms to the easy-chair, that Aunt Fanny, with the aid of my faithful Mehitable, had with much painstaking lined with soft cushions for me.

They had drawn the chair before the wide open window, where I could look out on our garden-plot and the banks of the brook, catching glimmers of its rippling water through the leafy openings; I could look on beyond, too, to a wide stretch of meadow-land.

It was a mid-summer's day when I took that first outward gaze after my illness, and it was early Spring when I had taken my last look on God's beautiful world. Then the willows, down by the brook-side, were only tinged with a misty tint of green; the budding twigs of the alders were beginning to unfold, the violets and the anemones just peeping up from under the withered leaves of last year's fall. But willows and alders hung heavy with their Summer's green; the violets and anemones had long ago closed their eyes when I

looked out on that mid-summer day; and up from the meadows, where the grass was then just beginning to spring, came the sweet breath of new-mown hay. This change in nature made me realize, as I had not done before, the long while I had been ill,—made me realize that time had numbered months since I last looked on my baby's face,—and perhaps it was that,—perhaps it was the great beauty of the dear outside world of sunshine and fresh air—sunshine which I loved so well—that overcame me quite: and I laid my head down on Ralph's shoulder, and sobbed and sobbed,—yet my heart was full of peace.

When I grew calm, I had a dear talk with Ralph—one of those blessed talks, which, spite the years that have come since, always stay in my memory.

I tried to tell Ralph what wonderful lessons I had been learning—learning through my sorrow—of that Hope “which enters within the veil—that Hope which is as an anchor of the soul;” I tried to tell him

how I had found the blessedness, that I called that "something" of which I had asked him and Ruey, and which they had told me was incommunicable—was the "secret of the Lord," that He, and He alone, could impart to the soul.

And then we talked of our baby, our little child that was safe, safe for ever in Christ's fold; and while we talked, though my heart was hungry and thirsty for my child, yet blended in with the yearning was such a sweet sense of security, in very truth a hope that penetrated with light through the dark veil of my anguish, telling me that it was all right, God's taking the darling from us—all right; even though at first it had seemed such a hard, hard way of learning the difference between saying, as I had at night and morning ever since I was a child, "Thy will be done," than it was from praying as I did that hour when I knelt on my baby's grave, "Grant that I may do Thy will by submitting to it, by putting into my resignation the same earnestness, the same

heartiness that I put into obedience in outward action.'"

Yes, I told Ralph how that prayer touched the very core of my heart.

And as we talked thus, it seemed as though Ralph and I were so much more to one another than ever before, and yet I had thought we were all before.

Ralph spoke so tenderly to me of the difference between resignation which is passive submission, and that resignation for which I had prayed—a resignation that could smile amid trials, knowing their very severity is ordered by Him who "doth not willingly afflict" His sorrow-bowed children,—who "pitieth them like as a father pitieth."

How strange it is, the catching as we do through trial hours such wonderful glimpses of God's love, of Christ's nearness—glimpses that never we have so vividly seen before, never so thrillingly felt, never known as so deep, tender, and abiding.

Ralph did not leave the subject with my expression of peace, but he went on to tell

me that, though Christ had given me a revelation of His peace, that blessed "peace that passeth all understanding," yet that my heart—our hearts, Ralph said, were very weak, very prone to forget the only way to keep that Christ-given peace speaking in the heart, smiling in the life, was to remember daily, hourly even, that counsel of the Psalmist's, "Bind the sacrifice to the horns of the altar."

The sacrifice, Ralph went on to tell, meant the submission of our wills to God's will; the altar, the place of consecration; and the binding, our prayers.

And then after a few more words, words so dear I cannot write them out, Ralph said we must talk no more, for I was still very weak.

And Aunt Fanny came, and said I must not sit up any longer; so Ralph carried me back to my bed; and as I laid my tired head down upon my pillow, he bent over me, and kissing me, softly whispered:

"Janet, my white dove."

"Why do you call me thus?" I asked; for Ralph had used the words so often to me during the last few days; and as I raised my eyes to his face for a reply, I caught a look there, half of pain, half of tender love, and with the eagerness of sickness, almost impatiently I repeated: "Why do you call me your white dove?"

It was Aunt Fanny who replied, without a word; for she lifted from the dressing-table my hand-mirror, and, as she held it before me, I saw why Ralph called me his white dove.

We did not any of us speak for many minutes. Then I raised myself up in the bed, weak as I was, and clasping my arms around Ralph's neck, I whispered;

"Will you love me just the same?"

And Ralph's whispered answer told me:

"No; not just the same, but more and more."

But that picture in the mirror, spite Ralph's words of unbounded love and tenderness, I could not forget it.

Was it truly my reflection I saw there? Was it I—that pale, thin-faced girl, whose eyes were so sunken, so large, so deeply blue, whose hair lay so smoothly banded beneath a close-fitting little cap—hair, snowy white—was that *me*, Janet?

Yes, I knew it was; I knew it was why Ralph called me his white dove.

I did not mind so much for myself that “touch of snow” upon my head, even though it did frame in so strangely, that white hair, my young face; but I did care about it, oh, so much, for Ralph’s sake.

He had always liked so well the sunny brown tinge of my long, wavy hair; so well, that often playfully I had been wont to tell him if he were not so good he would be proud, yes, proud of his little wifey’s nut-brown locks; but now all their beauty was gone.

But then if I could really be his white dove in heart and life.

Oh, how I prayed that I might be heart-pure as a dove, heart-stainless as a lily; and

yet, though I thus prayed, I could not help being sorry, for one likes to keep even the rippling curl or shade of the hair, and the rosy cheek of youth, for the sake of one who loves them; and Ralph did love my girlish looks,—that I knew,—but they were gone.

Dear Aunt Fanny, she seemed to read my thoughts; for when I lay awake quite into the night, she came and sat beside me, and said, in her clear voice:

“Janet, Ralph’s little lily wife—dear child, be Christ’s lily, too, pure and stainless.”

And then she sang me to sleep, and her song it was sweeter than any lullaby that ever hushed a troubled child.

Afterwards Aunt Fanny copied for me the words she sang that night.

“As pure as mountain snows
Of gleaming white,
And sweet as fragrant rose
Formed to delight—
So pure, so sweet, my longing soul would be
A lily fair, oh, dearest Lord, for Thee!

" In holy, sheltered ground,
 Oh, let me grow ;
 Thou wilt keep guard around,
 For well I know
 It doth Thy loving, tender heart delight,
 To feed among Thy lilies pure and white.

* * * * *

" Shine bright, and still more bright,
 Oh, glorious Sun !
 Clothe me in purer white—
 Thou hast begun.
 Perfect in me Thy work, O, Heavenly Love !
 Till in Thy garden fair I bloom above.

" Thy garden knows no drouth,
 Watered by Love ;
 Oh, soft wind from the south
 Upon it move.
 Send forth its spices—by Thy gentle might
 Draw forth rich fragrance from the lilies white."

V.

That half-hour by the open window—
 when I sat up for the first time after my
 illness—was followed by a speedy return to
 health—at least comparative health; and
 only two weeks later Aunt Fanny left us.

She was greatly needed at home. Early
 in September Max was to enter college;
 Madeline and her baby, too, were coming
 home for a month's visit; and my darling
 mother was very feeble that Summer, and
 unequal to any care-taking.

Spite my mother's feebleness, every mail
 —and the mails came twice a week to our
 village—brought me a dear letter from her
 —such helpful, comforting letters.

My mother was a very close Bible stu-
 dent; and never did she pen a page without
 leaving on it some "precious life-text,"
 which she almost always associated with
 some experience of her own, that was
 calculated to help me—her child; and that
 made the sacred verse a more living truth
 to me.

I think, from her frequent times of
 sharp illness, she realized—as no one who
 had not been thus tried, could—just what
 the coming back to strength meant—real-
 ized how the sort of half-languor that hung
 about the first weeks of recovery, naturally

inclined me not only to physical dependence on the strength of others, but to a fuller sense of spiritual dependence on Christ; and she understood, too, the peculiar realness of heavenly over earthly things, which great illness so stamps upon the mind.

And so she warned me—my dear mother—that when I was well again, and surrounded by the cares and perplexities of daily life—busy with the duties God had given me, as a minister's wife—I must expect there would come hours when I would almost feel a home-sickness for the quiet time my illness had afforded for meditation.

"Sometimes," thus she wrote, "you will feel as though your heart were famishing for communion with Christ, such as now you enjoy; and at such hours, Janet, remember, 'When the land of Egypt was famished, Pharaoh said, Go unto Joseph; and Joseph opened all the storehouses;' and a greater than Joseph you may go unto, my child—even Christ—Christ, with

whom communion will be just as open to you then as it is now; for all you have to do—and what life too busy for it?—is to reach out the hand of faith, for only a touch will bring Him near then, as truly as your hours of meditation do now.

"Think, Christ felt and spoke to the woman who touched His garment's hem, amid the pressing crowd, as quickly as He spoke in answer to Mary's words, when she stood before Him alone, in the quiet of the sepulchre garden."

I remember, in the letter in which my mother wrote thus, how she went on to tell me she thought, as the revolving lamp of a lighthouse signal let its beams fall on stormy waves and on quiet harbor-places, on rocky coast and treacherous reefs—just so Gospel words revolved, and gave out light for our every hour of need; broad beams of illumination for quiet harbor hours—meditation times; bright gleams of radiance for wild-tossed, tempest-driven mariners; gentle, steady rays for hidden-danger

coasts—hidden reefs of spiritual temptation.

But I did not mean to write all this out of my mother's letters, only they are so dear to me—her letters—I love to recall them; for I have them all now, though they are yellow with age, though the ink has grown pale with time; yes, I have them all safely laid away in the corner of my red trunk—my wedding trunk, that now I call my treasure-box; for it will never go another journey—that old trunk. What a pilgrim it has been in its day; but now, like its mistress, its journeying-times are over.

How I missed Aunt Fanny during my recovery, and yet I found, making it easy, traces of her loving thoughtfulness at every turn, and how *Mehitable* had improved under her efficient directorship—why, it was quite wonderful.

After Aunt Fanny had gone, our parishioners seemed to feel a special care over me, and their daily kindnesses were numberless,—kindnesses that I knew were shown for

Ralph's sake, and that made them so doubly dear. Hardly a day passed without some near neighbor, or some comer from over the hills, knocking at our door to ask after Mrs. Flint; and their errand was never a mere inquiry about my health, but always they came laden with some token of good-will—a pat of fresh butter or a basket of eggs, a jug of cream, or some such farm luxury.

Even Deacon Hand remembered me, and, as Autumn drew near, drove up to our garden-gate to leave, as he told *Mehitable*,

“A yaller pumpkin for Miss Flint.”

And that huge pumpkin—it was indeed to me a golden pumpkin, for I felt by it the old deacon said, he had pardoned my aforetime error of speech.

But amid all the kindness, how I missed my baby. How my heart would cry out for my darling—not rebelliously, Christ knew it was not in rebellion—but yet it was weepingly; and He wept for a dead friend. One great blessing of that time was the learning to know, as I did, the real hearts of our peo-

ple—such tender, kind hearts as I found beating beneath many a rough, stern, almost uninviting exterior; and in learning to know them thus, I found the wisdom my mother had shown, in not coming to live with us, till I was engrafted into the affections and knowledge of our people; for if she had been with me, I would not have been brought into such familiar intercourse with many of the farmers' wives, who came with some word of counsel, or strength-giving cordial, that they would not have offered, had I had my mother to take care of and counsel me as I was coming back to strength.

I often told Ralph, as I came to know them well, those dear New England people, that it seemed to me as though their hearts were something like southern fruits, they were so mellow, and full of the sunshine of human kindness, spite their rugged, stern exteriors.

It always has seemed to me as though this heart-mellowness were peculiarly typified by the truly tropical fruits. Think of it—the

prickly, rough outside of the pine-apple, what a luscious heart it covers; the juicy orange, how it is encased in a thick blanket of peel; the mellow banana, that in taste is balmy as the breath of the south wind, its outer rind is acrid and repulsive. I cannot remember one of the really southern fruits that has a stony heart, like our northern cherries, plums, peaches, and apricots.

Ralph used to laugh at my fancy, and remind me, that every one of those stony-hearted fruits grew at the South, though, perchance, they were foster-children.

And then he would playfully ask me:

"Did I mean that the exterior of all New England people was stern and repellant?"

And spite my snowy locks and sobered life, I would throw aside my work, and nestle my head down on Ralph's shoulder, while I told him, "No, no, none were more tender,—though dearly I loved and admired the dwellers of the South, for my father was a Southerner,—none were more beautiful to me, more noble, than the sons and

daughters of rugged New England, for was not he, my Ralph, New England born?

VI.

Late in the Autumn of that year, Ruey came for a long visit, the first she had made us—for visiting in those days was not the common event it is now.

It was such a pleasure, the having Ruey, and she listened with such tender, heart-felt interest to the story of our baby's brief earthly life—so many of my darling's little, winsome ways, that I never could write, I could tell her.

I even unpacked for her the parcel that held the mute treasures, that were yet so voiceful to me, for every crease in the little white slip he wore that last day, every fold in his soft blanket, seemed to whisper of him; and the little half-worn shoes, that never had lost the shape of my baby's tiny feet, I let Ruey hold them in her hands, and I let her hold, too, baby's picture-book, with

the torn, crumpled pages, that his little fingers had turned over and over—he so joyed in the gaily-colored prints.

Yes, I showed Ruey all my treasures, even to the curl of flaxen hair.

Oh, my darling, my darling! how my heart ached for him, as I gazed on those few things, that, with his cradle-bed, were the only tangible tokens of baby left in our home, for all his other little garments I had given to a poor young woman whose need was sore when God sent her a child.

If they were few, those tangible tokens, what heart-treasures Ralph and I had,—dear memories of baby-smiles, the memory of his little cooing, song-like voice, the voice that never uttered one word; memories of the bright look of his eyes, the touch of his baby hand, memories that we have never lost, never; but the moths, they have almost destroyed the soft blanket; time, it has yellowed the snowy-white muslin of baby's slip, and from the picture-book the gay colors have all faded.

Ruey was a great comfort to me. Ralph was much absorbed just then with parish work; many of our far-away living parishioners he had not visited all the Summer long, so much occupied had he been with home cares, and watching by my sick-bed; and often he would start quite early in the morning, and be gone till near nightfall. We were very busy, Ruey and I, with our needles, for I had many stitches to take that Autumn time, I had little garments to prepare before mid-winter came.

I recall so vividly one morning, when tired with sewing, I took up a volume of Shakespeare, and read aloud to Ruey, till I came to the lines:

"So find we profit
By losing of our prayers."

And then we fell into talking of what a mysterious thing it is, the finding profit thus. Ruey said, "she did not think the lines should read 'by losing of our *prayers*,' but 'by losing of our *pleadings*.'"

I was so glad when she said that, for it made plain to me, that my cry "God spare my baby's life," that night my darling was taken, was not really a prayer, but a pleading, and I think there is a great difference between the two; so many things we plead, we solicit God for, without really and entirely with our whole hearts, sealing them with the Christ-given prayer signet, "Thy will, not mine." I never said those words at all, that night I asked for baby's life; and unless our petitions are thus consecrated, surely they are not prayers, they are only pleadings,—only pleadings; while if we pray, with submission in our hearts, even though it be an hour of great darkness to us, yet we can—with the same confidence a trusting child feels as he puts his hand into his earthly father's hand, when walking through some dense forest mid nightfall shadows—put our little knowledge of what is best for us, as we pray, "into the hands of infinite wisdom and infinite love with perfect confidence that

the final decision will be the best answer to our real and deepest prayer." Trusting thus it is, that we realize the promise, "Every one that asketh receiveth," receiveth that which he really wants, though his specific petitions should be refused.

Sitting in the twilight that evening before the lamp was lit, Ralph, Ruey, and I had a long talk about prayer.

Ralph asked me, what I thought prayer meant?

Now, that is a very broad question, and one which it needs much pondering to really take in and reply to, and my answer, it did no more than touch the surface of what was in my heart. But Ralph took up my fragmentary, undefined words, and like some master musician, he played upon the strain of my thoughts, till he tuned them into harmony, till he made them ring with solemn, deep bass notes, and lightened them up with bright, airy, heavenward-ascending treble sweetness. Ralph dwelt long on "prayer, as the characteristic of man's

higher life." Turning the leaves of his Bible, he read us of those holy men, who walked with God, holding open and lifting up to the Heavenly Eye their every thought and aspiration; and then Ralph followed the prayer-path through the age of sacrifice, on to the petitions of David's heart, that heart which was so "athirst for God,—even the living God." On to the coming of Christ, "who revealed the secret of prayer's acceptance," saying, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, ye shall receive." On to the writing of Paul, the Apostle, who enjoined "Pray without ceasing," "continue instant in prayer." And then Ralph said he was sure, as Luther was sure, when he wrote the words, that "all who call on God in true faith earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired; although not in the hour or in the measure, or the very thing which they ask, yet they will obtain something greater and more glorious than they had dared to ask."

Ruey said she thought "that faith to offer the prayer of faith, was as much a gift of God, as any Christian grace, and like all Christian graces, was only to be found in the soul that had lost self-will in Christ's will, the soul that no longer prayed "Help me to do," but cried, "do *all* for me."

Then Ralph repeated to us the saying of that old-time saint who advocated mental prayer, which, he was wont to say, "consisted rather in listening to God than in speaking to Him, and is that attitude which prepares us to receive spiritual gifts, rather than to ask for them."

Afterwards, Ralph warned us of the danger of regarding prayer too lightly,—not that he meant, he said, that any trouble was too slight, any want too insignificant, any joy too trifling to tell Jesus, whose heart of sympathy was awake to our every need, even though it be a need no greater in seeming importance than the recorded falling of a sparrow—that least of birds, of

which, we yet are told, "the Father taketh thought." But Ralph said: spite this, we should ever be mindful, that approaching the Lord in prayer, even with Christ as our Mediator, is a very solemn thing; should be mindful, that "the angels veil their faces before Him, and cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth."

How then dare we sinful dwellers on earth approach the presence of the Almighty, except with sacred awe and holy reverence! What a mystery it is, a mystery that yet is plain to the heart of faith, the going to God as we do, bowed in reverence, full of trembling awe, and yet with no fear, only love in the heart,—love to Him, the altogether lovely One, into whose presence we approach with something, only infinitely more, of the sense of joy and satisfaction which we find in speaking to a dear friend of whose love and sympathy we are sure,—sure as a child is sure of her father and mother's love and sympathy; a happy wife of her husband's; a trusting friend of her friend's.

Ralph said, too, we must remember that blended in with the love which moves us to seek God in prayer, must be the determination of the will to thus seek Him, even Jacob's determination, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," and Jacob wrestled until the breaking of the day, wrestled till he saw the Lord, till, "as he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him."

I found, not long ago, in a recently published volume of sermons, the essence of Ralph's definition of prayer; and rather than trust to my recollection of my husband's words, though I think I have them every one in my heart, I copy from the printed page the definition that is as like Ralph's as an echo is like the call that wakened it:

"Prayer is emphatically religion in action. It is the soul of man engaged in that particular form of activity which presupposes the existence of a great bond between itself and God. Prayer is, therefore, nothing else or less than the noblest kind of human exertion. It is the one department of ac-

tion in which man realizes the highest privilege and capacity of his being. And in doing this, he is himself enriched and ennobled almost indefinitely: now, as of old, when he comes down from the mountain, his face bears tokens of an irradiation which is not of this world."

That spiritual radiance, how beautiful it is, making even a plain face lovely. Ah, why among professing Christians do we so seldom see a countenance bearing the "angel look," the look that comes and impresses itself upon the face of one whose soul reflects the light of indwelling holiness—the look that is born of prayer, that shone on the martyr Stephen's countenance, when "his face did shine."

Surely if we do not all have that shining look we may have the "Christian countenance that beams with uniform peace, uniform cheerfulness, uniform kindness."

But I am dwelling long on those days of my life, too long, and I must speed over many a full sheaf of garnered years; for

every year, whether or no we pause to tell its story by words, is a sheaf garnered up *there*, and kept in the great Record Book, where our lives are kept, not as we write them, but as God sees them.

VII.

Before I speed on with my story, I would fain linger and gather up certain impressions that I have only lightly touched upon in this record of what I call the Dawn, Morning, and Noontime of my days.

I presume in every life it is, as it has been in mine, that certain words, certain events, which, at the time of uttering or occurring, seemed of not much importance, yet stay by one till they come to fill a place that influences all the after-years.

As I have said before, that saying of my father's, when I was a baby girl crying for the sunshine, "Remember, Janet, when God takes away the sunlight, He always puts stars in the sky,"—all my life long it has

been to me a golden memory, which has helped me time after time, when my soul has been bowed by trouble, outside cares, or inward trials, to smile, because though I had lost the sunshine I had still the stars.

The Star of Hope! I never really knew what that heaven-born hope was till that time of bitter grief for my baby, when the old minister bade me "Look up,"—and I looked.

And hope, because I was looking, it led me within the veil.

How wonderful that verse is, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

Ralph says I might well call it the controlling or promise text of my life, I so often repeat it; and every time I say the words, they seem fuller to me of meaning, they hold so much,—no pondering could exhaust them.

Think, the hope *we have*—a hope that is sure as an anchor, and that links our present

with our future,—life here with life there; for this hope it “entereth into *that* within the veil whither Jesus is for us entered.”

I always keep it so close, that hope verse, in my heart to its companion verse, “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure.”

The circumstance that led to this latter text becoming so precious to me was a very simple one. Always from a child, as I have before expressed, I was fond of finding in everything life-types or analogies; and those days, when I was recovering from my long illness, when I was too weak for hand-work, I used to sit morning after morning by the window, looking out and reading meanings from nature’s wide-spread page that stretched before me.

The beautiful page of green pasture-lands and still waters,—for there were stilly pools even in our quickly-flowing brooklet—of far-away hills and forest trees; and sometimes breathing life gave me teachings, too, as well as the inanimate things, for I could see

the mowers busy with the harvest ingathering; I could see the cattle grazing; and nearer than those pictures I could see old Widow Blodget busy with her bleaching down by the brook-side. She was an infirm old woman, one of our parish folk, who earned her scanty livelihood by superintending, in Summer, the whitening of the Winter-time home-spun linen that the farmers’ wives for miles and miles away were wont to entrust to her; for none could equal the Widow Blodget’s skill in the mystery of clear bleaching.

Great stretches of white it made, that outspread linen on the green grass, and up and down, up and down, with her sprinkler, hour after hour, spite the glare of midsummer’s sun, that faithful old woman would toil that not one breadth should become dry.

I watched her for many mornings, till at last I called her to my window, and asked:

“Why do you keep the linen moist all the time?”

“Why, Miss Flint,” she replied, “be it

possible that you don't know it's the keeping of it sprinkled that helps the sunbeams to draw up along with the moisture, which the sun always is a-drawing up, the yallerness out of the flax, and the smuts and dust that gets woven-in like with the threads?"

"But do you not get tired," I queried, "going back and forth so often?"

Then she smiled,—that wise old woman,—and said:

"I never knew the thing, Miss Flint, that was worth the doing, that folks didn't have to work for; and work, mostly, does tire one."

And as she hobbled off to her task, she added:

"They be yaller as saffron, some of those breadths that be spread out, now; but along of a week's time I reckon they'll be white as a snow-field, for the sunbeams is mighty powerful in cleansing."

This was the sermon Widow Blodget preached me; and it was in its light that I took up my Bible and read, with a heavenly

illumination shining on it, the verse, "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself;" and the fitting-in of Widow Blodget's words as the practical interpretation of the verse, it seemed to me so apt; for was not my heart, like the linen, needing whitening,—needing the beams of the Sun of Righteousness to draw up and away from it sin-stains, to cleanse the inwrought threads that were so far,—so far from being the pure white threads of holiness; and did I not know if, like Widow Blodget, I was faithful in doing my work,—the work of prayer,—the Heavenly Sun would make my heart pure and white,—would help me up the rounds of the "Ladder of Perfection,"—the seven blessed rounds,—to the topmost one,—the blessedness of the "pure in heart, who shall see God."

But I must not linger over the life-helping impressions which I treasure most; and yet I want to impress it as one of the truths this record of my life may teach,—that nothing comes singly to us; that

every lesson God teaches, goes hand-in-hand with some other lesson, if we will open our hearts to seek it; that everything in Nature—in life—is full of meanings that are only half-revealed by the visible,—meanings that require we should look behind the tangible and the seen; and this we are taught by little as well as great things.

This double fullness of all things, it so intensifies life, that I think even if we sometimes feel inclined to push the analogy-finding away from us, fearing it may be naught but fancy-weaving, we may find encouragement that it is more, by recalling the lives of some of the mighty thinkers that earth has known; for, as has been truly said, "Shakespeare, Chaucer, Homer, and Dante saw the splendor of meaning that plays over the visible world; they knew that a tree has another use than for bearing apples; and corn, another than for meal; and the ball of the earth, another than for tillage and roads. They knew

that these things bear a second and finer harvest to the mind of man,—being emblems of his thought,—and conveying in all their processes a natural history and a certain mute commentary on human life."

I said I would not linger; and yet I turn back for a moment to dwell on that saying of the Widow Blodget's: "I never knew the thing that was worth the doing, that folks did not have to *work* for."

Sometimes it seems to me that we are in great danger of forgetting this truth, in our modern-day life,—I mean the spiritual life,—and that there is creeping in a religion that is delightful and inviting, beautiful and soothing as the strain of some zephyr-stirred Æolian harp, but that hides out of sight the truth—that the Christian life, the Bible tells us, is a life of conflict with temptations from without and temptations from within; a life that requires us to "labor to enter into rest,"—to "fight the good fight of faith," armed with the "breastplate of faith and love," and

having for our helmet "the hope of salvation."

It is in thus doing, as well as receiving, that we become truly a part of the vine. "I am the vine," Christ said, "ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." The abiding, *that* is our work; and it requires constant vigilance,—“Watching and praying,”—“seeking and finding.”

And just here would I say that if I gave the impression in what I formerly wrote of silence, as sometimes the best interpreter of what the soul cannot tell, yet knows, of the depth of the riches of love revealed in Christ,—my meaning was, that I think what we *are* is a much more potent influence for good, than what we *say*; for mere words are like a passing breeze; but *real* living is the thing. And at this present time, when there is so much talk of the Higher Life, I sometimes feel a great longing to say: Lose the words Higher Life in *real living*; be true to the Christ-law,

Love, and you will live it out, for "Love is higher than duty; but the reason is, that love, in reality, contains duty in itself. Love is duty, and something more. Love is a noble tree, of which duty is the trunk. Love is a beautiful plant, with a beautiful flower, of which duty is the stalk;" and all acceptable obedience flows from love; all true love produces cheerful service. We do not really love God if we do not seek to obey Him. Ah! if this love rules in the heart, we need not talk of the Higher Life, but we will act it, and our constant prayer will be:

"Light! more light! to see
What is that true and perfect will of God,
That we may help to do it,—not as tools
That know not what they fashion; but as hands,
Whose heart is in their work; and whatsoe'er
It be, this above all, more faith to cry,
In darkness or in light, 'Thy will be done.'"

But I must not pause to gather up more of these fragments that have helped to fill my life-basket with crumbs of bread, which are satisfying and nourishful to the soul;

and yet I want to dwell for a moment on words Ralph said to me the very first day I met him.

It was during that stage-coach journey. Ralph was talking of the spiritual temple God gives us to rear in our hearts; and, among other utterances, he referred to the help we should find by reflecting on the lives of good men, whose histories are recorded in the Bible, for our example and warning.

The word warning—I thought it so strange why Ralph should use it. How could these example-men be warnings to us? My inquiry led me to study their histories for an answer; and truly I found them full—those histories—of solemn, solemn warnings,—especially for hours of sudden temptation; for “sins of surprise have given rise to the remark, that almost every great saint in the Bible is recorded to have fallen into the very sin from which their character seemed likely to guard them.”

Ah, what a warning to us, ringing out

from the sacred page, that to abide in Christ, that to be hid in Him, offers the only refuge-place where sins of surprise cannot find entrance.

These seem veritable fragments that I have gathered up, yet they are surely multiplying fragments; and, as the outgrowing branch is of more value than the green shoot, as the up-welling water is of more service than the deep-hidden spring, so, God grant, these hints I give my children and grandchildren may lead them to broader seeing and broader doing; may prove seed-grains that will grow and flourish in their hearts.

VIII.

I cannot slip over the dear years that made the Noontime of my life without telling what they brought; those dear, dear years, that were so laden with rich, God-given blessings.

And yet, were I to detail them, my story

it would fill volumes, for it was during those years that God sent to us our precious household band.

The little children, who came so quickly one after the other, that when, in their childhood-days, they stood grouped about their father's knee, it was hard to tell which was youngest and which was oldest.

The Afternoon-time of my life, when it came, our children's ages were no longer questioned, for Herbert was almost as tall as his father, and Fred, our merry lad, he was only an inch or so behind his brother—so tall they grew.

How my mother's heart glowed with pride and joy over the strength and beauty of my lads' early youth; and with joy and pride, no less, it glowed over my girls. Our graces!—Eleanor, fair-haired and gentle—the child that never gave me a care; Fanny, sunny-tempered and gleeful as a young wild-bird, quick and impulsive, but always loving; and Ruey, our youngest—Ruey, my helpful child.

My life was so busy after the coming of my darlings,—finger and heart busy, so many stitches it took to provide the Winter and Summer garments,—so many prayers it took, so much thought—the guidance of those youthful souls.

As is always, I suppose, the case in a large family, my children were so unlike—the government that suited Eleanor was all at fault with Fanny; Herbert and Fred, they, too, were quite dissimilar.

We kept them all at home with us during the noontime of my life,—Noontime, the sunniest part of all the livelong day. Ralph aided me with their studies, after they had exhausted the limited instruction given in the old red school-house, aided me till our Herbert was twenty years old; and then,— But I will turn on to the afternoon of my years, before I tell of Herbert's home-leaving, for, with that leaving, many changes dawned for us,—changes that brought shadows, some heavy and far-reaching,—shadows, some that fell across our aforetime sunny dwelling in the form of a cross.

Afternoon.

“Forenoon and afternoon and night—forenoon
And afternoon and night—forenoon, and—what!
The empty song repeats itself. No more?
Yea, that is life; make this forenoon sublime,
This afternoon a psalm, this night a prayer,
And Time is conquered, and thy crown is won.”

“Life is God’s school, and they that will listen
to the Master, those will learn at God’s speed.”

“Give rest, O God, in action
To wait on Thy correction,
Devoid of fear.
Faithful and strong to do,
Hopeful whate’er the view,
Since I have naught to rue
If Thou art near.”



I.

THERE had been so many more comings to our home, than goings from it, till the time when Herbert left us for college.

Never but one solitary going forth before from our dear flock—for when my children were young, and I used to make almost annual visits to Aunt Fanny's, Ralph and the little ones all went with me.

No; only one of our treasures had ever gone from us before unaccompanied by father or mother, and that was our baby boy,—the little darling whose grave every spring-tide is a violet-strewed bed,—so thickly flowers grow there.

This second going forth, it was all unlike

that first, for our baby, we knew he would not return to us; we knew no human love, even though it was a mother's, could wake the little sleeper.

But our Herbert, he went from us in the full strength of his young life—left us with high hopes, with the halo of return encompassing the sorrow of parting.

The college term was to last till Spring-time, and for six months we were to be separated from him,—and six months, looked forward to, seem so much longer than six months looked back upon.

I could not keep the tears from my eyes as I packed my lad's trunk, and scarce one article of apparel did I lay in it, without something more than a tear,—something better, a mother's prayer; though, after all, are not mother's tears prayers?

It was an Autumn morning when our boy left us, one of those days when the falling leaves, the frost-nipped flower-stalks, seemed to ring out in full chorus, "The time of change has come."

How little I thought as the far turn at the end of the village street hid the stage-coach and Herbert's waving hat from our sight, and we turned away from the garden-gate, that that Autumn was to bring us yet another change, was to frame for us another going out, that would be haloed with no hope of return.

No; I never thought any shadow, beyond the missing of our boy, hovered over our home,—so silently changes come, so noiselessly shadows fall like dew in the still night-hours.

I have not mentioned before that my dear mother and nurse were members of our home-circle. They came to us just about the time God gave us our Eleanor.

My mother had been a great help to me with the children—not that she ever, by look or word, attempted to use the authority which, as she said, God had entrusted to Ralph and me; but her counsel was so much to me, and her gentle, sweet piety, the indwelling love which shone in her

every deed and word, it exerted such an influence for good in our household, and, indeed, all through the parish,—for every one loved my mother, she possessed so wonderfully the gift of ready sympathy,—not one of us ever had a trouble she could not soothe, never a joy she did not smile upon.

I had not thought of her as especially feeble when Herbert left us; she was never strong; perhaps that was why I noticed no change; and yet afterwards, when I recalled the last day she spent with us, I remembered many little things that were not just after her wonted way; I remembered how she felt chill as night drew on; how she asked Fred to push her easy chair close to the fire; and oh, the picture of it all, I see it now—how she called my girls about her, and told them of her early days.

We were all somewhat sobered that night, we so missed Herbert; and it was sweet and tranquilizing to me to sit there in the glow of the fire-light, leaning my head on Ralph's shoulder, and smoothing the curls

back from my Eleanor's broad forehead, for she left her grandmother's side, and came and sat on a low stool at my feet.

Sweet and tranquilizing to listen to my mother's voice, as she talked of her youth. Like mosaic work, my mother's conversation always seemed to me, she understood so perfectly the inter-blending of solemn, sombre-hued stones of truth, with the lighter bits, that were wrought of delicate fancies, but fancies that were truths too; and when she gave advice, it was always so choicely given, that it fitted into its place, leaving no jagged, rough surface to irritate or wound. When the lamp was lit, my mother unlocked the treasure-drawer in the work-table that stood by her side, and from the drawer she took out many a souvenir of her by-gone, and to us all she gave some memento that night. To my girls each a trinket she had once worn; to Fred a seal that had been my father's, a quaint seal with a curious device; for Herbert, she laid aside a remembrance, too, and with each gift she associated some word of wisdom.

Not till the clock struck nine, and nurse and Mehitable came in to evening prayers, did my mother cease telling us of the past. After prayers, she bade us all good-night, with her wonted tenderness. Then leaning on Ralph's arm, he helped her to her room; and when I went half-an-hour later to tuck her up in bed, and give her another good-night kiss (mother and child so change places as the years come and go—"my baby," my dear mother often and often used to call herself), her blessing was the same as it had been for years.

And when I asked, "Do you feel well to-night, mother?" she replied with a smile brighter even than her usual smile, though that was ever bright: "Yes, Janet, child. Well, so well—I am going to sleep now."

It was midnight when I was wakened by her voice.

Talking in her sleep, Ralph said she was.—I went to her bedside to listen. Yes, she seemed talking in her sleep, though her eyes

were wide open; and afterwards I knew her soul was wide awake too.

Her mind had wandered; she thought my father was by her side; she thought I was still a baby girl; and then she grew restless, and I sat down by her till the restlessness passed away; and before long she began to talk again; but this time it was not to my father—it was not of me, her child;—no, her heart was fixed then on Christ and Heaven.

"Open the door; let me in, Lord Jesus," she murmured; "let me in soon."

And she folded her hands like a little child, while quite distinctly she repeated the words of the child's prayer:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Then she slumbered so quietly, I never guessed the truth.

And so I left her.

"Sleeping peacefully now," I told Ralph. The sun was an hour high when next I

entered my mother's room. Nurse was there before me;—and, straightway I knew the sleep that I had called so peaceful—it had been the waking-time to my mother, the beautiful waking-time, out of earth's shadows into heaven's light.

Could we repine, though we missed her sorely, sorely, that it was over—that patient, trustful life? Could we repine that up on the hillside, by my baby's little mound, they made another grave? Repine, that from our home another had gone forth never to return again!

No, we did not repine, though we missed her; I, her child, most of all; yet I would not have called her back to earth. But the loss of a mother, ah, what a place it leaves empty! for, what love is like a mother's? And though I, her child, had drifted far beyond the quiet stream of infancy, beyond the flowing brooklet of youth, drifted beyond the swift-going river of middle life, out into mid-ocean, yet I wanted my mother just the same; for age does not les-

sen love—and love, it so yearns to keep its treasures.

II.

“Behold there came seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, after them seven years of famine; let them gather all the food of those good years, and that food shall be stored against the seven years of famine.”

What typical verses these are to me; how they seem to frame in my outward and my inner life.

Seven years of plenty God gave me,—rather should I write well-nigh seven times seven years, a time full of precious opportunities for food-gathering; for though during that time I had known something of sorrow, though the angel of mystery and silence had entered our dwelling and borne away our baby, my soul was led by that grief into a richer experience of the “plenty,” the consolation, the nearness of

Christ that sorrow can reveal. And after the falling of that heavy blow there had dawned for Ralph and me such a succession of calm, joy-laden "good" years. Surely, surely during them I ought to have gathered up food enough and to spare for any seven-year famine time!

And when trials came thick and pressed about me sore, when I was led, as I was for a time, during the afternoon of my days through the years of famine, I did truly find the food of trust, love, and dependence on Christ, learned during my joy years, was a store against the days of famine.

And even at the very darkest hour, through God's mercy, I never lost the sureness out of my heart that in love were our trials sent,—in love, though the chastening did for a time seem grievous.

My tears, they never refused to flow as they did in the bitterness after baby's leaving; and is not the falling of tears in hours of grief, food and refreshment for a famished soul? Ah, so true I think the lines:

"Thank God, bless God, all ye who suffer not
More grief than ye can weep for.

* * * * *

Thank God for grace,
Whoever weep; albeit, as some have done,
Ye grope tear-blinded, in a desert place,
And touch but tombs,—look up! Those tears will run
Soon, in long rivers, down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun."

Chastening! yes, God sent it in abundant measure, filled our cup with it to running over; and yet all the while His love was full of the tenderest tenderness, the gentlest pity for our weakness, and the warmest sympathy for our grieving.

Sometimes I have felt, recalling those years of trial, that till they came I was almost a stranger to what it means, "Christ suffered for us;" "for till we suffer, how can we know what suffering is? till we learn the power of pain, how can we know its value?"

And when we do thus learn, taught by Christ, though perchance "we may not be able to put our knowledge into human language, we learn how the sufferings of

Christ pass into our souls and chasten us into a love of holiness."

The year which took my mother from me was a very solemn time of my life; I seemed so brought face to face with earnest realities; I realized so as I never had done before the intense sacredness of being a mother,—for how could I think of all my mother had been to me without its intensifying my own motherhood, without its filling my soul with a great longing to be truly a mother in watchfulness and prayer to my children,—my children, who needed my prayers, my watchfulness just as much, I knew from my own experience, now that they had grown up into young men and maidens, as they did in their time of helpless infancy.

My mother had been a year in heaven before I fully realized what her loss was to me.

Yes, it was quite a year, for Autumn had come again,—a stormy Autumn, that was followed by a Winter that closed in early, even while the almanac counted the days

of Fall, for the first week in November found every tree leaf-bereft, and the brooklet's waters were already ice-bound.

The twentieth day of the month,—I never have forgotten that date—snow clouds hung heavy over against the horizon, snow clouds that grew and grew all day long, till toward nightfall they had reached over and covered every patch of blue sky.

The wind blew cold and biting, too, and moaned drearily among the tossing branches of the trees. Everything gave token of a stormful night, and I shrank with dread when a sharp knock at our door was followed by the entrance of one of Deacon Hand's sons, who came to request that "Mr. Flint would come over quick to their place, as his father was a-dying."

The lad never lingered for a reply, and yet he was hardly gone when Ralph followed him. He was always so ready for every duty, my Ralph, no storm ever delayed him: so cheerfully he went out into the blowing wind and already falling snow-

flakes; I stood at the window and watched him till he was quite out of sight.

It was long after midnight before my husband returned; for hours the storm had been raging in all its fury, blinding sleet and snow were dashed against the window-panes, and drifted high on the door-step, the wind that only moaned among the tree-tops at nightfall, blew a fierce gale.

I made everything ready for Ralph's return. Fred piled the fire high with warmth and light-giving hickory logs, and we hung the lantern on the gate-post, the night was so dark.

And then,—for the children would not leave me,—we listened and waited for the sound of Ralph's cheery voice, calling, "Home again." But midnight came and went, the storm raged on, and Ralph he did not come till toward morning; and when he did come he was so weary, so worn, he hastily drank the warm tea we had ready for him, and with hardly a word of explanation as to the cause of his long delay, with

hardly a word of regret over our night-watch and great anxiety, he threw himself down on the lounge and fell into a heavy sleep, and that sleep was followed by weeks and weeks of illness.

Not for days did we know the story of my husband's perilous ride home,—know of his brave struggle through the blinding snow. It was such a new experience for me, the having Ralph thus laid by, prostrated and unequal for any care.

I felt so alone, without him or my mother to turn to; and yet, though that was a time of great anxiety,—for, for days Ralph hovered between life and death,—there was much of sweetness in that time to me, too,—much that was soothing in the ministering to my husband. Even though my frame was often very weary, my heart very sad, yet it was such a joy—the knowing no touch was like my touch, no care so grateful to him as the care his Janet gave, no voice so quieting as the voice of his white dove; and over and over he told me this.

And then the long night-watches, which I would not let them share with me,—when I would promise Fred to call him, if there was the least need,—they were wonderful times to me; times when Christ came so near, so close,—times when Ralph would utter such dear words, I used to tell the children my night-watches gave me strength for my day anxieties.

The very stillness of them, the sleeping world, the mystery of darkness, it seemed to enfold us, and hold us, as it were, in the very hollow of the Father's hand; and thus the loving Father was preparing me for the coming days,—teaching me, by His own uplifting, the truth, that “at a very small height above the surface of the earth, the noise of the tempest ceases, and the thunder is heard no more.” But down into the valley God soon led me,—into a valley of shadows,—and our cup of chastening it seemed full—full to overflowing.

Either from the strain of anxiety for her beloved father, or from over-exertion, to

save me from fatigue, my gentle Eleanor drooped like a lily that bows before the cold wind; and so quickly the subtle disease sapped my child's life, that almost I thought she would not linger with us till the Spring buds opened.

So they lay, my treasures, Ralph in one room,—Eleanor in the next. Ah! that time of famine,—how could I have borne it, but for the store of trust garnered during my “good years.” So swiftly Eleanor drooped, that before March had blown its rough blasts over our eastern coast, they told me I must no longer keep from Ralph the sorrow that was drawing close to us.

How well I remember the hour when I told him,—so tenderly I learned in it the truth of Aunt Fanny's words, that sorrow binds hearts closer together than even joy does. How truly I learned, too, that, clinging to and comforting one another, our great grief seemed almost changed into a blessing from God.

And is not all grief to a Christian a bless-

ing from God?—only we hug the trouble so close, so close to our weak, human hearts, sometimes we cannot see the blessing it conceals.

Ralph was quite calm when I told him,—quite calm,—though he “shuddered with unlanguage pain.”

Only a week later, in the tender gloaming hour,—leaning on Fred’s arm, for he was too weak to walk alone,—Ralph went to our child’s room, and sweet words he said to her of comfort and support; and the dear child, she grasped the full meaning of her father’s words.

She lingered with us for more than a month after that,—lingered till the first flowers of Spring came.

The experience of my Eleanor is very precious to me. Christ was very near to her; and she was so true,—so like herself,—all through her illness. She never had hours of over-wrought emotion, she had no ecstatic experience; her dying was like her living,—gentle and true.

She was always a timid girl; and she shrank back from death,—mortal death; she shrank back from the grave; and yet, though she was timid, her fears did not dim her faith.

Dear child! Over and over she would ask Fanny, during the first days after she knew she never would be well again, to read to her the poet’s lines:

“ Deep on the convent-roof the snows
Are sparkling to the moon;
My breath to heaven like vapor goes,—
May my soul follow soon!
The shadows of the convent-towers
Slant down the snowy sward,
Still creeping with the creeping hours
That lead me to my Lord.
Make Thou my spirit pure and clear
As are the frosty skies,
Or this first snowdrop of the year,
That in my bosom lies.

“ As these white robes are soiled and dark,
To yonder shining ground,—
As this pale taper’s earthly spark,
To yonder argent round;
So shows my soul before the Lamb,
My spirit before Thee;

So in my earthly house I am,
 To that I hope to be.
 Break up the heavens, oh Lord ! and far,
 Through all yon starlight keen,
 Draw me,—thy bride,—a glittering star,
 In raiment white and clean.

“ He lifts me to the golden doors,—
 The flashes come and go ;
 All heaven bursts her starry floors,
 And strews her lights below,—
 And deepens on and up ! the gates
 Roll back, and far within
 For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
 To make me pure of sin.
 The Sabbaths of Eternity,—
 One Sabbath deep and wide,—
 A light upon the shining sea,—
 The Bridegroom with his bride ! ”

But as the days sped on, she ceased to care for earth-words ; she only asked us to read her of Christ ; and so we read her the “ Let not your heart be troubled ” chapter,—read her of the “ Good Shepherd,”—“ the Door ” that would lead her in the safe enclosure,—lead her within the fold.

Only the day before the summons came, my Eleanor drew my face close down to hers, and whispered :

“ Tell me, mother, is it wrong for me to dread the dying,—is it wrong ? ”

And, oh, the look in the child’s eyes !

“ No, not wrong,” I told her, “ not wrong.”

Surely—surely it is not wrong ; for did not Christ,—the Father’s well-beloved Son,—shrink back from that hour ? Did not He—He who knew its full agony as none have known since—cry, “ If it be possible, let this cup pass from me ” ?

And oh, the blessedness ! He, our loving Saviour,—in bowing to that hour,—in drinking to the dregs that cup of anguish,—won for us, His followers ; the blessedness, the grace which now He gives His trusting children for their time of sore need.

The grace that I knew my Eleanor would have ; yes, I knew when the hour came she would “ Fear not ; ” she would know Christ had come, too ; He would come and lead her across the waters. And He did come ; and my child,—my timid child,—she smiled when the hour came.

It was towards morning when I saw the change creeping over her dear face, when we all gathered about her, when her father laid his hand in blessing on her head, when he prayed God to comfort and support her, when he prayed Christ to be with our child.

She knew she was going, and she smiled, a sweet, peaceful smile, and though her voice was very low, very faint, she whispered:

"I fear not, Christ is with me; father, mother; hold my hands till I go." And so she clung to her earthly parents' hands, clung till she clasped the Heavenly Father's hand!

And we knew, even while the slight pressure of her dear fingers still lingered with us, our child was with her Saviour.

III.

Herbert came home to us not long before God called Eleanor, and he stayed

during all the Spring and Summer, pursuing his studies with his father. As Spring advanced, Ralph's strength rapidly returned, and on the first June Sabbath he was able to preach again.

It was a very blessed Summer to us all, for though our home was shadowed, though we missed Eleanor every hour, yet it was a time when Christ drew very near to us; so near, that our children—Herbert and Fred, Fanny and Ruey—publicly in our village church confessed their love for the Saviour, and together we gathered around the sacramental table,—together, father, mother, and children; we obeyed Christ's command, "This do in remembrance of me."

So much of a mother's heart-life is inwrought with that of her children, I find it very difficult for me to omit from these pages my children's experiences, and yet I feel I have no right to detail their lives. I feel the confidence with which children open their hearts to a parent, is something too sacred for a parent to divulge. I feel,

too, that since this record is for my children, not of themselves will they wish to hear, but of me, their mother.

And so I will strive to touch but in outline, their histories,—histories, which I must refer to, for the changes the years brought our children touched very closely on Ralph's and my life. But just here it is enough for me to say, that God greatly blessed us in our children,—greatly blessed us.

And now I turn back to the Summer that followed Eleanor's death.

Life! It never stands still; days, they come and go, whatever our sorrows may be,—days, that bring us duties,—days, that thrust us out into life, much the same life, seemingly, that we lived before the shadow fell across our years.

I never realized this as I did after our Eleanor's departure, when almost unconsciously, after a brief time, we quite naturally accepted this ordering of nature, and though we did not miss her less, did not love her

less, we smiled again. My girls began to sing once more over their morning tasks; one by one we resumed our wonted ways, took up our aforesaid duties and pleasures; and it was well that it should be thus, though sometimes my heart shrank back from it, as though it were a slight, a seeming forgetfulness of Eleanor.

But, I repeat, it was well.

It has ever been a very mysterious thing to me, this bearing, as one does, the constant sense of loss, the constant blank of separation in the heart, and yet the coming back to one's natural cheerfulness.

Yet, while I call it mysterious, I feel it explains much.

Often I think, how, if we interpreted the heart by outward seeming, we would call it forgetful of the dear ones gone; when in reality, the cheerfulness, the brave taking up of life's duties, is a loving tribute of remembrance. No, never let us say our loved ones are forgotten, even though we seem the same after their loss; for, do we not

keep them still in our hearts?—keep their every look, their every remembered word,—keep them so close that sometimes when the light is dim, when we sit alone, we softly whisper their dear names, and almost it seems as though they heard our whispers.

And who can say they do not?

Yes; love, if it be indeed love, and not the mere empty name, never dies,—it is a something for ever.

Not a few earth-counted years can bound it, the love, that in its purity and fulness is like a flower that lies on the bosom of eternity—never to fade, never to end, for eternity is endless. Ah, the flowers, the flowers, that lie there, the many, many flowers.

IV.

I said it explained much, the seeming the same after a great sorrow, and yet the always carrying about with us the sense of

our loss. And one thing that it helps to make plain for me, is the puzzling question of motives; for does it not symbolize the way in which we carry about with us the constant sense of Christ's presence? the way in which motives take rise in thoughts of Him, recognized thoughts, even though we may not give open expression to them;—I mean when we *do*, without explaining *why* we do, and yet we perfectly know the why.

I have a friend, a wise woman, who shakes her head and differs from my view of motives; and because the subject is one of great importance in my estimation, I will state my friend's views, and then my own, and thus my children and grandchildren can follow whichever opinion they deem the best. My friend says:

"I believe in spontaneous action—action that is born out of love to Christ; but that does not pause to think *why* do I do this, but does it because the influence of love prompts the deed. I go to my Bible-class," thus she told me, "on a Sabbath morning,

with no thought as to why I go; I just go because the love sends me. If I pause to reflect on the why of my deeds, I would become an egotist. I believe in looking at Christ, and not at self and motives; and I believe that His love will guide to love-deeds, that they will upspring from the heart as naturally as water flows from a mountain brook that is fed by a hundred hidden streams; and so not thinking of my motives, I just do as the Lord leads me."

This is my friend's belief, and there is much in it that I assent to; but it seems to me barren of the sweetest essence of loving-service. For spontaneous action, though it be born of love, can it be as full of true love as the action that recognizes *why* it acts?

Does the mother-love, that from a natural impulse, an impulse love-born, grasps her child when his little feet have wandered close to some perilous precipice height, mean as much to that mother, as the love that with patient, prayerful solicitude, day after day, year after year, seeks to win back

her child who has wandered from virtue's paths?

Truly, I think not.

The spontaneous action, what is it,—when compared with the unwearying love?

We walk through a garden, where rarest flowers bloom, and the gardener bids us gather the fairest of the blossoms. With laden hands we turn from the garden-gate, and there we meet a dearly-loved one, and because of our love, freely and gladly we say: "Take our flowers"—and yet we gathered them with no special thought of our friend, only the meeting him woke the love-impulse that prompted us to give our treasures.

Were they worth, those flowers, though they were so rare and beautiful, as much to our friend as the one wild rose, with the morning dew still glistening on it, that we had sought with the recognized thought "we will gather a flower for our friend!"—the thought that, perchance, had led us in searching for it, by some rocky-tangled

path, up-hill all the way. Ah, dearer, far dearer is that wild rose, that we gathered, because of recognized love to our friend, than any cluster of fairest flowers that we can gather and offer him from love's spontaneous impulse.

Just so I think it is with our love-deeds for Christ:—when we look at the motive that prompts them, they mean so much more to us, than when we do them from unconscious or sudden impulse.

If it be objected, that this looking into the why of our doings may promote self-thought, may dishearten, because it so reveal the sins of our heart—sins that, like the thorns that encircle the rose-stalk, seem to spring out of motives, that on the first look seemed pure,—I reply in the words of another:

“He has not yet drunk in the spirit of the Bible, who shakes off the sense of his sins, who says I will watch the life, not the impulses; the words, not the thoughts; the conduct, not the character.”

Yes, I differ from those who say this look-

ing into the heart will dishearten; for “what is the joy of the Christian, but the deepening sense of the overshadowing love of God, revealed in Christ? and, when we feel the power of that love, it is that we most feel the sinfulness of sin; that we more deeply feel, too, what a rest it is, to be upheld in our weakness by God's strength; what inspiration it is to have Him in our thoughts; what purification to confess our sins to Him.” And while I have found, through my long life, that it is better not to think of ourselves too much,—better to think much of Christ, and to earnestly seek after likeness to Him,—and when we have failed, to rise and go on, still trusting in God (“there is so much more meaning in that word *trusting*, than we commonly think”), yet I have found, too, that this is one of those mystery places which hold the “*work* out your own salvation, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.” Mystery places! that we cannot explain by words, and yet that are reconciled to the

heart of faith; for motives are in one sense like gifts; God gives them, and yet unless we accept, and act upon them, they are but half complete; for, it is giving and receiving that makes the perfect gift. And it seems to me, that "the retaining of that glow of light and love which is secured by meditation and prayer, protected and guarded by self-watchfulness, will be found a great and eminent advantage in the acquiring of the habit, not only of doing what is right to be done, but of doing it with a *conscious* purpose and intention of pleasing God."

I remember reading of John Wesley, that he used to try to impress upon his soul the thought that at every moment of his life he was pleasing or displeasing God.

There is to me something so stimulating, so strengthening, so helpful in the thought that I can please God;—a sweet sense of blessedness seems to glow from it—it gives a holy importance to all duties; it throws over every deed and thought a light and

glory. "I can please God." Ah, if we but whispered it to our hearts at every step of our way, how different our lives would be!

And, how it magnifies life to feel, that, hid in Christ, through Him, His grace working in our hearts, we can thus please God.

How wonderfully, too, true thought and wide-awake consciousness, followed by practical achievement, help the growth of spiritual life; we never retrograde so rapidly, I think, as when we become the subject of passive impressions, and mere "mental familiarity with truth, pleasant excitement of emotion, devotional rapture, admiration of the beautiful and heroic in duty, if not associated with a purpose and persistent practical virtue, do harm to the soul rather than good." But when we go forth from such refreshment of feeling to actual life duties, in which we are determined to do all for God, when we pause with every passing hour, though it be but

for a moment, to realize the nearness and observance of God, to lift a prayer to Him, and to gain a *distinct consciousness of our intention* to please Him—then “we” will find the world itself will be a church to us, the streets of a city as the aisles of a cathedral, worldly life a spiritual worship, business engagements the service of a priesthood!—and daily work thus discharged, however humble it may seem in itself, will be to Him to whom it is thus done as fragrant as altar incense, as melodious as the voice of a psalm.”

I fear I have not clearly explained my meaning. The truth I want to impress is this, that our meditated actions of love to Christ—our recognized actions, not those that spring from impulse,—are the ones that, to my mind, make the blessedness of service, for it is not our service that is of importance, but the spirit in which we do it.

V.

I was so slow in learning that my children had glided out of childhood,—so slow—that though Fanny’s love, for the one, Ralph and I have long called a dear son ripened under my own eyes, I woke to it as suddenly as one who at nightfall goes to sleep in some quiet home-haven, but who at morning wakes to find his moorings loosened, his boat drifted out into mid-ocean; and almost as suddenly Ruey’s love dawned upon me.

They seemed young to wed,—my girls,—and yet they were both older than I, their mother, was, when Ralph sought me.

I thought the excitement of the girls’ weddings, and the parting from them, would be enough for a long, long time; but almost over-lapping on the eve of Ruey’s marriage year, Herbert married too; and Fred, he never was long behind his brother; and before the flowers knew a second

Summer's blooming, he brought home to us for a brief time, his fair, blue-eyed bride, like our Eleanor, in her gentleness, her winsomeness; and so they all flew away, our nestlings, and made nests of their own, and we were left alone, Ralph and I alone, in the home-nest.

My heart yearns to tell every particular of the dear children's happiness, every particular of their going forth. I long to picture my Fanny as a glad young mother, my Ruey as a smiling bride. I want to tell of Herbert's and Fred's happy choice, but I must not.

I feel a great desire, too, to dwell on many of our friends, the dear life-long heaven-lasting friends, that I have among our people; and there have been deep, soul-stirring experiences, that God has let me share with Ralph in connection with our church people, that I would fain detail, but I feel as I do toward the confidences of my children, that the inner-life experiences which a pastor and his wife

come to know, they have no right to tell.

Twice during Ralph's pastorate, the spirit of the Lord has drawn very near to our village and the surrounding country, and never, I think I may truly say, has there been a time when there has not been some among our people anxiously seeking a Christ-like life.

After our children's marriages, we urged our sister Ruey to come and make her home with us, but she only came for long visits; she never called our home, her home.

Dear Ruey! I think Ralph and I noticed the mark of the years on her, more than we did on ourselves. My long-time whitened locks made the coming of age less apparent on me; for the silvering hair, it is so apt to herald the change from youth into age; and my hair, it had been snowy white almost ever since I was a girl.

And now I come to a time in my life when a silence,—a restful silence,—seemed to

brood over me. My mid and latter afternoon years, they were such peaceful years,—they were, too, so interwoven with the lives of others that I cannot well write their history.

Peaceful years, I call them; for though scarce one of these latter years have dawned and set, without recording for us the passing over to the “beyond,” of one and another of those with whom our early life was associated; yet

“Age is a time of peace, so it be free from pain,
And happy has my life been.”

In our Afternoon it was that Aunt Fanny died; and Ralph’s father, he passed away quietly, just as we were entering our latter days.

Sometimes it almost seems as though Ruey, Ralph, and I were the only ones left; for my cousins, all but Sandy and Max,—Baby Max, as I used to call him,—they have all gone up the “shining stairs.”

Late afternoon,—and we stood on the

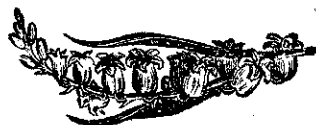
threshold of our doorway, as we did in our morning. We looked *out*, as we did then,—out toward the church, and eastern hills; for though the sun of our days had far westward sunk, yet our look,—Ralph’s and mine,—was still eastward; for

“Our life lies eastward; every day
Some little of that mystic way
By trembling feet is trod.
In thoughtful fast and quiet feast,
Our thoughts go traveling to the East,
To our incarnate God.
Fresh from the font, our childhood’s prime,
To life’s most oriental time.

“Still doth it eastward turn in prayer,
And rear its saving altar there;
Still doth it eastward turn in creed,
While Faith, in awe, each gracious deed
Of her dear Saviour’s love doth plead.
Still doth it turn at every line
To the fair East.”

Yes, there we stood in our home doorway, looking toward the East, where the Morning Star rises,—while we talked in softened voices of our children on earth,—of our children in heaven.

But I cannot write of my last Afternoon year, for it only ended yesterday; and, though that yesterday,—though all my “yesterdays look backward with a smile,”—yet the near time, I cannot write of it as I can of the far past.



Eben-Tide.

"The evening of life brings with it its own lamp."

"So we pass on, while both ends of our existence touch upon Heaven."



I.

EVEN-TIDE! We have come to it,—
Ralph and I.

Fifty years, one week from this day, it will be since our wedded life began.

And they are coming,—our children,—to keep the golden wedding-day, in this dear home of ours. I have promised to have ready for them then this record of my days.

Half a century! It is a long while to have dwelt in the same home.

Half a century! Fifty years, that have been to me beautiful as a dream!

This dear home,—how many joys have bloomed for us in it; how many sorrows have made it sacred!

As I recall my years,—the fifty by-gone years,—so incomplete my record seems,—some of the years that I have left untold,—they seem to me fuller, as I remember them to-night,—much fuller of dear heart-memories than some that I have recorded.

My story,—rather my life,—it seems to me like a half-strung harp; for Ralph,—my husband,—his love has rounded and shaped my years into a musical form; and many and many are the chords that ring out into sweet strains his love has tuned,—his love, my Ralph's,—and that dearer love, my Saviour's.

But what of the broken chords, the jarring notes. Ah! what of them?

Like panoramic pictures, the past floats before me to-night; pictures that begin away back; and because I never was a singer of sweet songs, I take the rhymes of another for the voice of my heart-pictures;—for I needs must tell of them in song, so like a song my life has been.

The first, see, it shows:

“Two lovers by a moss-grown spring :
They lean soft cheeks together there,
Mingled the dark and sunny hair,
And heard the wooing thrushes sing.
O, budding time !
O, love's blest prime !”

And now the canvas moves on, and—

“Two wedded from the portal step ;
The bells made happy carollings,
The air was soft as fanning wings,
White petals on the pathway slept.
O, pure-eyed bride !
O, tender pride !”

The next picture, how my heart thrills
as I look upon it, as I live in it, for it points
to—

“Two faces o'er a cradle bent ;
Two hands above the head were locked ;
These pressed each other while they rocked,
Those watched a life that love had sent.
O, solemn hour !
O, hidden power !”

And now the scene widens—

“Two parents by the evening fire ;
The red light fell about their knees
On heads that rose by slow degrees
Like buds upon the lily spire.

O, patient life!
O, tender strife!"

And now it lessens, but yet—

"The two still sat together there,
The red light shone about their knees;
But all the heads by slow degrees
Had gone and left that lonely pair.
O, voyage fast!
O, vanished past!"

And now,—slowly, slowly the canvas
moves, and we come to the last picture;
for lo!

"The red light shone upon the floor
And made the space between them wide;
They drew their chairs up side by side,
Their pale cheeks joined, and said, 'once more.'
O, memories!
O, past that is!"

Come to the last picture;—I have come
to the last page, too, and Ralph and I—very
close are we to our last earth-day.

How they unfold to me, these last years,
what wedded life really is—unfold it with a
beauty, even the happy starting-days did
not know.

Think how we have conquered, Ralph and
I, temptations together; how we have count-
ed many a joy and many a sorrow together;
how we stand hand-in-hand still, though our
hands are old and trembling, looking into
one another's faces to read the love, that has
grown with every passing year, and waiting
for the Master's home-call.

It is sweet to wait as we do,—not weary,
as from some toilsome pilgrimage, but
catching glimpses of the "Dear Country,"
the "Holy City" that John, the beloved
disciple, saw in his old age.

Ah, yes; it is a blessed portion thus to
wait, when our prayer is not, "Lord, take
us away," but when softly we say, "Come,
Lord Jesus, in Thine own good time,—
come."—



"What then? Shall we sit idly down and say
 The night hath come; it is no longer day?
 The night hath not yet come; we are not quite
 Cut off from labor by the failing light;
 Something remains for us to do or dare;
 Even the oldest tree some fruit may bear,

* * * * *

"For age is opportunity no less
 Than youth itself, though in another dress;
 And as the evening twilight fades away,
 The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day."

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