

BACHELOR BEN.

BY
ELLA A. GILES.

"DEEDS ARE FRUITS—WORDS ARE BUT LEAVES."

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TO
HON. DAVID ATWOOD,

EDITOR OF

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AS

A TOKEN OF REGARD

THIS VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

BACHELOR BEN.

CHAPTER I.

So it is that each man has bread to eat that the world knows not of. So it is that each man is richer than the world estimates him to be.—HOLLAND; *Gold Foll.*

The little nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love.

—WORDSWORTH; *Tintern Abbey.*

A lamp is burning brightly upon a table, burdened with a medley of books, pamphlets, letters and papers scattered promiscuously over its surface. A capacious easy chair is placed in close proximity to the grate, from which the glowing anthracite is diffusing its blessing of warmth and comfort through the room. This luxurious sedan appears at first glance to be vacant, but, looking again, we see, curled up among the puffings of crimson rep, the form of a little white kitten. It yawns and stretches lazily a few times, and bounding quickly, alights upon an arm of the chair, then turns its head and surveys, with truly kitten-like solemnity, the various objects of the

apartment, giving special but innocent and guileless attention to a remote corner occupied by cages of feathered songsters, who have dropped their pert heads under their wings to dream the unsuspecting dreams of happy birdlings. The firelight casts gleams and shadows upon the beautiful paintings that adorn the walls, and they almost seem to look down protectingly upon mistress pussy, who purs softly as her green orbs meet the calm, sweet gaze of a Madonna beaming from her gilded frame. Then, with a congratulatory yawn that her lines have fallen in such pleasant places, this stormy night, she curls herself again into a round, white ball, and subsides with infinite satisfaction into another nap.

Slumber on, pussy, and dream not of the cold wintry winds that come sighing so drearily down the streets of the great city. Forget, if you will, in this cozy nest, the thousands of houseless, homeless and forlorn fellow-kittens that are howling dismally outside of just such inviting nooks as this. Use all the powers that have been bequeathed you by your illustrious ancestors, to banish the memory of the desert of loneliness and neglect in which you were living, when suddenly this oasis loomed before your vision, and you,

shivering, were admitted to this haven of comfort and rescued from the jaws of a frozen mortality, by the hand of BACHELOR BEN.

But, forget not, most fortunate and favored kitten, that while there are human beings with hearts so full of love to God and man, that they seem already to have

“Spirits wing’d for Heaven,”

the wide world is thronged with people, and they are not all thus governed by the wondrous power of kindness that belongs to your broad-shouldered and broad-minded master. His heart is so full of sunshine that it overflows every hour of his life, and vents itself through the avenues of his sparkling black eyes and genial smiles, dispelling shadows and brightening the path of whomsoever he meets. He makes no professions of goodness, no *profession* even of religion, yet his every act is pervaded by the fresh aroma of Christian Charity, that never fails to arise in subtle incense when this grace, or virtue, is truly practiced. For many years it has been dispensing itself, but its force is not yet spent. You will search in vain for any clouds hovering above the broad, bald forehead, or any shadows lurking in the merry

eyes underneath. You and I, pussy, know not his past, but we can read in his features, that if he has had war with the world—and what man of his age has not—he has also tasted the sweetness of peace. If, in those battles, he has sometimes lost—and what man has not—he has also gained victories. I will not cut the printed leaves of his Past just now, but will study his Present, which is open before me, and following him in the Future, watch the lines that Time traces on the still unwritten pages of his life.

There is the tramp of feet ascending the steps, and the sound of a latch-key at the door. Bachelor Ben has been out to get his supper at a boarding house a few blocks distant, and now he is going to spend a quiet evening with a pile of fresh newspapers that he draws slowly from the pockets of an overcoat, as he divests himself of that garment. Now, he stands with his back to the fire and his hands folded behind him, as if feasting in its glorious presence, which so penetrates his being, that the bald forehead shines like a mirror in which are reflected the elements of thorough self-satisfaction and physical enjoyment. There could be nothing more natural for him to do, after he is clad in dressing-gown and

slippers, than to occupy the easy chair, and end his day's work by indulging in a reverie.

Pussy is lifted into his lap, but so gently is she handled, that aside from rolling her eyes in momentary surprise, and dreamily closing them again, she seems to be unconscious that her position has been changed.

"Well, Snowflake! This has been a bitter cold day, and it's a bitter cold night outside. Did you know it?"

Pussy knows it fully, but she makes no demonstration of the fact.

Silence reigns for a few moments, unbroken, save by the monotonous ticking of the bronze clock over the mantelpiece and the peaceful purring of Bachelor Ben's companion.

Ben runs his fingers through his hair and seems to be buried in thought. There is a dent between his eyebrows, and he begins to knit them perplexedly, as if trying to solve some problem within his own mind.

"It was a strange beggar woman that I met down on the corner just now, and I can't understand it at all."

There is a slight movement of pussy's ears to signify that she cannot understand it either.

"But the strangest part is the note, Snowflake, and now wake up, pussy, mine, for I must talk to *somebody*," and the kitten receives a tap that startles her into a listening attitude immediately.

"I met-a-beggar-woman-out-on-the-corner. Do you understand me?"

Pussy stares a silent assent and in various ways evinces great interest in the subject.

"And, after I had given her money, for I couldn't refuse any one on such a night as this, the woman thanked me, and as I left her, placed this scrap of paper in my hand. Now listen, and I will read what is written upon it."

"If you would save a life, open your door to a stranger at the hour of midnight."

"And now what shall we do, Snowflake; open the door and perhaps admit — an assassin?"

Pussy stands up fiercely and glares about her as she hears his portentous tones, but after a few strokings from the hand she loves, she crouches back and half closes her eyes, as if ashamed of her symptoms of animosity.

"Yes, she was a strange beggar woman, and there was something in her face as the gaslight fell upon it that haunts me yet. Those lips of hers seemed not used to asking alms, nor those

fair hands to receiving them. Her garments were tattered, but she folded that old worsted shawl about her shoulders right royally. She was no ordinary beggar; I believe she was a lady in disguise, and begged only that she might find a friend to help her in some distress. Although she asked for money, it seemed to me for a moment as if it was not that which she really wanted, and in my hesitation, I felt that she was trying to read my very soul."

Ben resumes his reverie. The coals glow yet brighter and brighter in the grate. The warm air is soothing and tranquilizing, and the bald head could not be more glossy and shining if it had been veritably polished. Were it not that the problem remains still unsolved, the occupant of this cozy room would be in a state of serene content. As it is, he is puzzled and perplexed. Shall he open his door to this stranger at the wierd hour of midnight? Shall he heed the mute entreaty of that woman's eyes as she handed him the paper, and relieve the man or woman for whom she pleads admittance? The face, under the gas-light, seems to come before him again. On it, he believes he can see the impress of nobility and truth mingled with despair. There was

but little said. A plea for money and then a word of gratitude; only this, and the rapid thrusting of the paper into his hands; but it seems to him now, as he thinks it over, and remembers the glance from wonderfully brilliant eyes, and the majestic motions of the form as it vanished from his sight, that the whole event, which occupied scarcely three minutes, was like a superb piece of acting. The thrilling voice with which she asked for aid was so widely different from the faint tones that proceed from every day applicants, that it almost seems as if he heard them yet. If he had not now that scrap of paper in his possession, he could almost believe himself to have been dreaming. So unreal was it all, and so unlike any other phase of poverty, he had ever witnessed.

"Whoever and whatever she may have been, there is one thing certain; the woman was in trouble, and there may be a life at stake in this matter as her note would imply. What shall we do about it, eh?"

Pussy is surprised to find her face taken between his two large hands and raised on a level with his own. But she submits to this treatment meekly, and the green orbs peer straight into the bright black eyes in a most friendly manner.

"Answer me, Snowflake. What shall we do about it?"

The wind whistles around the corner, and the shutters rattle against the window-pane, but pussy replieth not. She is thinking that if people want her to answer them, they must cultivate the capacity of adapting their views and conversation to subjects within her comprehension.

As I said before, Bachelor Ben makes no profession of religion. Some of his most intimate friends would be spell-bound with amazement, could they see him now, as he deposits the white kitten upon a rug by the fire, and takes from one of the drawers of a mahogany book-case, a small volume with the words "Holy Bible" engraven thereon. As he returns to his seat and opens it, his eye rests for a moment on the fly-leaf upon which are traced in a pretty feminine hand — though the ink has paled and faded until scarcely legible — the words:

"To my boy Ben. Whenever he is perplexed or in trouble, here he will find knowledge and relief."

It is a long time since he took this little book from its resting-place. Something prompts him to do it to-night; perhaps the unseen presence

of the sainted being who penned the inscription to him years ago.

It is not always, but yet it is often, that one turns to the sentence most needed in, and particularly applicable to, certain moods and wants, without premeditation or design.

Thus it is, to-night, with Bachelor Ben. He turns the pages almost without being conscious of doing so, for his thoughts are wandering now towards her who gave him this precious book. Suddenly his eye alights upon the words :

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby many have entertained angels unawares."

It is enough. He needed but a glimmer of encouragement. The problem is solved. He will open his door at midnight and entertain the stranger.

CHAPTER II.

A man who wakes up to the consciousness of having been created for progress and perfection, looks with new eyes on himself and on the world in which he lives.—CHANNING.

He had two selves within him, apparently, and they must learn to accommodate each other, and bear reciprocal impediments.

—GEORGE ELIOT.

Benjamin Grant and Theophilus Steele are business partners. Their firm is known as "Steele & Co."

The former owns more than a half-interest and his cognomen is therefore most prominent. But, according to his statements, there is so little charm for him in the things that concern this world, and apparently so little value to be placed upon merely worldly goods, that the unpretentious title of "Co." would not, in the least, detract from his importance in his own estimation, if he, instead of Bachelor Ben, were to bear it.

A good judge of men and manners would say of Theophilus, when they met him at his business desk, that he is keen, crafty and avaricious, with an eye to gains, whether great or small, and a mind sternly bent upon taking to himself as great a quantity of the filthy lucre as can be amassed in

the short span of years that is allotted to individuals, upon this terrestrial ball.

But among his fellow-churchmen, and to the world at large, he affects utter indifference to everything that does not pertain to the salvation of his immortal soul. Perhaps in his inmost heart, he really feels himself superior to all the numerous temptations of vanity and ambition, and being blinded by self-aggrandizement, his soul does not realize that its progress is hindered by the imperfections and inconsistencies that surround its tenement of clay.

But we will not dwell upon these latter points in his nature at present, for he is under bereavement, and instead of dissecting his character in search of his besetting sins, we will extend to him the hand of sympathy.

It is but two years since the partner of his joys and sorrows departed this life. Not long afterwards, his only child was also taken away, and he is left, aside from the comfort that he claims his religion gives him, quite inconsolable.

It is, perhaps, not out of place to add just here, that it is not the fault of Theophilus Steele, that he still remains a widower, for he made an effort to gain another help-meet, but fortune did not favor him.

While Bachelor Ben is sitting in his room with the white kitten purring upon his lap, and the problem of the beggar woman is obtruding itself into his reveries, Theophilus is facing the wintry storm on his way to his office.

When he reaches it, he is shivering from cold, and he chafes his blue hands vigorously against each other in a vain endeavor to create a circulation. His long, thin nose is just discernible above his upturned coat collar. Pinched and colorless is the state of this nasal appendage, and it would seem as if no great change needed to take place in order that the unfortunate member might be converted into an icicle. His gray eyes have a vacant and sorrowful expression, and they are at present suffused with tears. Whether the tears were caused by the frosty air outside, or the lugubrious thoughts awakened by the inspection of the crape on his hat, which he is balancing dejectedly upon his knees, after taking a seat by the fire, of course, I am unable to state. But from whence they flow or whatever their source, they are certainly very appropriate manifestations on the part of these same gray eyes, and eminently fitted to exhibit the outward grief of the bereaved individual to whom they belong. In fact, nothing could add more to the impressive

appearance of this afflicted man, than the pearly drops that, as he sleepily gazes into space, trickle slowly down his smooth, pale cheek and are brushed away with a solemn flourish of a black bordered handkerchief.

He claims to be truly resigned to all the calamities that overtake him. Although within a few years, he has been tried in the fiery furnace of affliction, he secretly congratulates himself upon the patient look of perfect peace and obedience to higher laws that are, he believes, engraven on his countenance, and, as he sits alone, smoothing the shiny hat with the crape band, and rolling his eyes upward, he thinks how wonderfully spiritualized are all his affections and desires. If faces do reveal the soul within, they also serve sometimes as masks to hide its workings. But the masks cannot always last, and when there comes a rent upon their surface, past repair, then the little threads of selfishness and avarice display themselves, no matter how cunningly and skillfully they may have been woven together out of sight before. It is an indisputable fact that Theophilus Steele secretly glories in tribulation with far more pride than patience.

I know that in this life of ours, we meet with many sincere and devout Christian workers; but

these carry their own crosses silently, quietly performing acts to lighten those of others, without vain-glory or ostentation. The heavier the cross, the less do they complain of its weight, and the more seldom do they boast of their own strength. They do not look to Heaven and say to the Father, who is listening there—"Thy will, O God, not mine, be done," and then look down and persistently plan to do their own in spite of Him.

Theophilus Steele does not appear to have awakened to the consciousness that the lessons of earth, teaching us to abhor evil and cling to that which is good, are means of a noble growth in human nature. Had he but done so, he would look with different eyes upon the beautiful world in which he lives, but which he claims is so detestable to him. While he ignores these lessons, he will gain no perfection; he will make no progress.

If aware of his manifold infirmities, he so covers and hides them with his professions of religion, that he deludes many friends, and perhaps himself, with the veneering. The precious morsels of comfort which he invariably derives from scrutinizing for a few hours the long columns of accounts in his office, are as necessary to his happiness and peace of mind as is his spiritual food. And on this

night, he remains a long time in his place of business, gloating with intense satisfaction as his eyes roam over the pages, and he counts the gains that promise to be his at the end of the year. He finally closes the books and proceeds homeward with brisk steps, humming a congratulatory hymn. It is one that he often sings in church with great fervor, and as his voice rises loud and clear, it is not at all improbable that the possession of an exceedingly devotional nature is therefore attributed to him. In this hymn occur the lines:

"My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."

When he reaches the block where his partner, Bachelor Ben, has a room, he observes the window, and seeing that a light is still burning brightly, he pauses and ascends the steps.

The supposition is, that Ben has not retired, and some slight matters of business which occur to Theophilus can be settled now.

Since we looked into this room, a change seems to have taken place. Bachelor Ben's head has fallen upon his shoulder, and he is fast asleep.

Pussy is stretched full length upon the rug, trying to warm herself by the embers that are fast becoming cheerless and blackened. There are

no bright rays dancing upon the wall, and the scene, in comparison with that of a few hours ago, is bleak and desolate.

Theophilus listens at the door. All is quiet within. Then he raps timidly and follows this plea for admittance by taking a survey of the situation through the key-hole, never pausing to think that this proceeding is beneath the dignity of a gentleman.

If the thought does enter his mind, it is quickly dispelled by the sight that he witnesses. As the sound of the knocking greets the ears of Ben, he starts up wildly from his seat and glances hurriedly about him.

This is not quite unaccountable, for he has probably been dreaming. But it is not all. He opens a drawer and taking out a revolver places it swiftly in his breast, at the same time taking off his watch and depositing it, together with his pocket book and other valuables, in one of his cast-off boots which is lying behind a coal scuttle.

These things naturally fill Theophilus with surprise. He might defend himself and his property in the same manner, were he to receive a visitor at so late an hour in the evening, but he has always labored under the impression that his partner is a

very brave, courageous man. He has been known to visit him before at nearly as late an hour as this, and has been greeted by a hearty "come" from Ben, in immediate response to his rap.

These unusual demonstrations of fear create in his mind increasing wonderment.

He raps loudly again and watches the result.

Ben hesitates a moment, then quietly crosses the room and raises the window, probably so that in case the person outside should be a robber or cut-throat, his cries for help could be heard. He sees Ben coming towards the door, with an expression of courage and resolution on his face.

Just at this moment as he is kneeling upon the steps, surrounded by darkness, something brushes past him stealthily and as he rises, his hand comes in contact with a soft substance.

Theophilus is a coward and he quickly crouches back and slinks around the corner as the form of a woman disappears and Bachelor Ben opens the door.

The sound of the bronze clock striking twelve and Ben's voice arise simultaneously.

"Stranger, if I can save a life you may come in."

The draft from the window extinguishes the light.

The city clocks strike also.

The wind howls but there is no other reply.

Theophilus listens almost breathlessly for whatever shall come next.

All remains quiet until suddenly Ben appears in the door-way again with a lamp.

He holds it high and looks about him.

Then his eye rests upon an object below him.

He reaches down and Theophilus stares as he sees him lift something and bear it into the house.

CHAPTER III.

No system, religious or political, I believe, has laid it down as a principle that all men are alike virtuous, or even that all the people rated for £80 houses are an honor to their species.

— GEORGE ELIOT.

While Theophilus Steele stands looking with all the powers of discernment his optical members are capable of, into a certain apartment, we will leave him for a few moments, and glance into the precincts of his own home.

It is located on a fashionable avenue. The house is a massive structure of stone with a handsome front and large dormer-windows. It is fresh and new, for it has only been completed a short time, and was built for the purpose of winning a new mistress, whom it might have dazzled for a season, but who, as my readers already know, changed her mind and turned a deaf ear to the expressions of devotion from its owner. Had it not been for the prospect of an increase to his already far from meagre income at the time of his expected marriage with a young heiress, this palatial residence would never have been erected.

The house occupied by the deceased Mrs. Steele was a humble domicile on a quiet street. Theophilus

knew only too well that a girl whose youthful attractions, combined with her exceeding wealth, had made an impression on his heart, would never consent to accept his hand if it led her a captive into so unpretentious a dwelling.

Like many an individual before him, Theophilus Steele felt that the roof which had sheltered his first help-meet, who took his hand "for better and for worse" in those days of the long ago, when every indication proved that the latter predominated, but who toiled cheerfully with him and denied herself many things, to promote the former, was not good enough for one who had not shared his adversity, but who would seem to be the means of enhancing his abundant prosperity.

Theophilus feels that the money invested in this magnificent mansion has been wasted. How gladly would he return to the old home with its uncomplaining mistress. How gladly would he now recall the child that was his, one year ago, if it were in his power.

But wife, child and lady-love have all been taken from him, and he has left him only the splendid fortune that he has been hoarding for years and this great house which seems to him sometimes almost like a prison.

But above all the things that he has lost, he misses most a something which the truly honest and unselfish never fail to find in their consciences—peace. There has been that in his life which he can now regret with gall-like bitterness, but which it is beyond his power to change.

Since the final completion of his house, it has been presided over by Mrs. Sharp, she being the widowed mother of his deceased wife. Owing to circumstances over which she had no control, she was not present either at the death or burial of her daughter's child.

When Theophilus Steele's affianced bride disappointed him, then he bethought himself that his mother-in-law was the proper person to provide for his earthly wants, and to superintend the affairs generally of the earthly tabernacle in which he dwelt. So, when a letter containing the sad news of the death of his babe, and his intense grief thereat, was followed by his summons, she came from her far-distant country home with obedience in her manner, but many a twinge of animosity in her heart—the latter spirit caused by the thought that she was ignored and her presence not requested at a time when she felt that it must have been needed by her grand-child. While she

mourns for the dead, it is not in her power to refrain from menacing the living. It is in her nature, however, to give Theophilus sly thrusts with her tongue for his previous neglect of her in her widowhood and poverty, whenever an occasion offers itself. In appearance, she is quite tall, with quick, black eyes that she opens fearlessly. They perhaps sparkled when she was young. There is more snap than sparkle in them now. Her hair has changed from brown to iron gray, and she wears it short on her neck. It is cut so squarely that it stands out defiantly under each ear, producing, if one were at all imaginative, the effect of horns. There is something quite forbidding in the sternness of her countenance and the spasmodic movements of her body. Her whole aspect does not impress one as being at all prepossessing, yet I decidedly affirm and unequivocally declare that Mrs. Sharp, in spite of her crabbed, brusque manner and reckless tongue, is good at heart, and I will sum up my remarks upon her character with the somewhat trite but expressive statement, that her "bark is far worse than her bite."

One would suppose from the outward splendor of Theophilus Steele's house, that its contents are equally chaste and beautiful. I cannot forbear

stating that in this respect, it wonderfully resembles its owner. There is a fair outside, but the furniture is meagre. There are none of those objects of art and refinement that one would naturally expect to find upon entering. If the house had only been furnished before the heiress proved false and fickle, by what a wealth of beauty and taste would Mrs. Sharp now find herself surrounded. But that expenditure on the part of Theophilus was procrastinated, and he deems himself in this instance more fortunate than he can express. The rooms that are not actually necessary for his own use, he has not deemed it best to make habitable. There is a common ingrain carpet upon the dining room floor, a table and chairs and a few other articles, indispensable for every-day living, but nothing to make the home atmosphere cheerful and inviting. This room at the rear of the house, with windows overlooking a neighbor's back yard, aside from Theophilus' own sleeping room, is the only one upon which he has deigned to spend time or money. When Mrs. Sharp received the letter, she inwardly praised him for his thoughtfulness and consideration in adding a postscript, to the effect that it might seem more home-like to her, if she selected for the

furnishing of her private apartment some of those articles that had become endeared to her through long association. So she gathered together an old-fashioned Brussels carpet, which, though still bright, began to show that it had seen better days, a few pictures with old-style and somewhat tarnished frames, a capacious rocker, cushioned with large figured chintz, and in fact a perfect medley of household treasures, that, after the permission to retain, she found it hard to part with at the last. But she had no sooner entered the barren rooms, than Theophilus' motive for desiring, in the kindness of his heart, to make his house seem home-like to her, flashed through her mind. Then Mrs. Sharp mentally determined, that not one article which the drayman was that moment unloading should find its way into any other than her own private room, to which he had alluded, nor add to his home comfort. And Mrs. Sharp carried out her resolve. So this night we look in upon her, seated in the old-fashioned rocker, with as great an air of appreciation in the presence of the shining fire-place, as Bachelor Ben has in the presence of his. In all this immense house, there is only a light in this one room; only a fire in this one grate, and only this one woman sitting here alone,

musings by the glowing embers as Bachelor Ben mused by his.

At first, we can see the rapid motion of her fingers, and if we listen, can hear the click, click of her knitting needles, but by-and-by the sound ceases and the work falls upon her lap. She, too, is indulging in a reverie. Thoughts of the only child she ever had mingle indistinctly with those of the little grand-child who came just before the dear one's death. But the hard lines upon Mrs. Sharp's face do not soften, though a tear finds its way into her eye, and trickles slowly down her cheek. She thinks how different this great house that she is living in would be to her, if the little one had been spared, and she could but hear its voice echo through the long, lonely halls. She wonders if the paid nurse whom Theophilus chose for its guardian was as kind to it as she herself would have been, and another tear arises at this uncertain picture in her mind, of the baby whom she never saw. But she brushes it away, chiding herself for being so tender-hearted, thinking that there is a reason for her being so discontented and nervous in the fact that she sits so much alone in this great, gloomy prison, as she terms the costly structure, fresh from the hands of the architect.

Ah, there is more than one skeleton in Theophilus Steele's mansion. He could not have made this woman happy, when he bade her enter into his home, for there is little of the element of happiness in her composition; but he could have made her surroundings pleasant with things more grateful to the eye than empty rooms and bare, staring walls on every side. He need not have welcomed her to his home to do its drudgery without placing in her reach some of the lighter feminine duties to perform. He could have given her plants and flowers and birds to tend, for, though she is sour and often cynical, she is a woman still, and deep in her heart she is as alive to these womanly possessions as any one, and she longs to-night, as she sits in the rocker, swaying violently to and fro, for the presence of the little one who died, more than Theophilus Steele can realize.

And she wishes that something — anything — would occur to break the monotonous desolation that she feels while under his roof.

CHAPTER IV.

Tender as a woman; manliness and meekness
 In him were so allied,
 That they who judged him by his strength or weakness,
 Saw but a single side. — WHITTIER.

He whom we left listening and staring outside of Bachelor Ben's window, hears the door close, and watches eagerly through the shutters. His face is pressed closely against them. Whether right or wrong for him to thus enact the part of eavesdropper, his curiosity does not permit him to question now. His interest, we may say his ex-cruciating inquisitiveness, is at its height when an inconsiderate gust of wind refuses to pass him by, but seeing his intensity of gaze, feels slyly about for some method of interrupting it, and turns around the corner with startling force, trying to bear him onward with it. But he braces himself to resist the intruder and the winter wind that has only succeeded in chilling him thoroughly goes howling and shrieking down the street in disappointment. Another gust, fuller of mischief than malice assails him, secretly and suddenly lifting his hat from his head, whirls it rapidly down the block out of sight. While searching for this

valuable article of head-gear he loses the first scene of the tableau that is transpiring in Ben's room. His impulse is to pursue his way homeward, but the vein of curiosity that runs through all human beings, to a greater or less extent—will not permit him to adopt this honorable course. So he softly treads upon the frosty earth, that despite his efforts to the contrary, persists in echoing back each foot-step in winter's own crisp chorus of sharp tones, and, once more gaining his point of observation, stares with unabated zeal through the window. It is no exaggeration to say that Theophilus is electrified with astonishment as he beholds the attitude of Bachelor Ben.

The fire in the grate seems to have been rekindled and is burning brightly. Ben sits in the same arm-chair, with the white kitten moving backward and forward and rubbing herself gently now and then against the rockers. The bald head fairly glistens in the glow from the blazing coal, as it bends under the weight of two white, chubby arms that encircle his neck. Two beautiful, round blue eyes peep over the back of the chair and seem to gaze straight into Theophilus' own, with a wondrous power that startles him. And a beautiful, roguish, childish face, with fair, clustering ringlets

of golden hair, rests trustingly on Ben's shoulder. Theophilus watches and wonders. The dog Ponto sniffs a new atmosphere and creeps slowly out from his hiding place under the sofa. He surveys a roll of something behind Ben's chair, barks faintly at the animated rival in Ben's embrace, turns his eyes again toward the parcel, and proceeds to thrust his inquisitive nose into the very depths, from which he draws, with many a portentous growl, first a little frock and then a miniature pair of hose that he tosses daintily in the air. One of them falls in the vicinity of Mistress Pussy, who thereupon seizes it between her paws as if tenacious of her portion of the spoils, and rolls it deftly to and fro at her own sweet will.

Theophilus scarcely knows what to do. It is a strange scene of domestic happiness for him to witness at this nocturnal hour. He sees Bachelor Ben glance at a scrap of paper lying upon the table, hears him begin to whistle softly as the baby face falls down upon his arm, and his charge is asleep. Then Theophilus decides that whatever these remarkable demonstrations indicate, he has no right to interfere. Whatever his partner's secret is, it has nothing of a grievous nature about it, but seems rather conducive to ecstasy.

CHAPTER V.

'T is best to pray;
But praying ever best succeeds,
When seconded by manly deeds. — SAGE.

We have witnessed the mysterious charade by means of the inquisitive mind of Theophilus Steele. He could not, however, describe it to Mrs. Sharp without implicating himself as an eavesdropper, so on this morning after the event, he wends his way toward the office, thinking deeply, and, perhaps all the more confusedly, from the fact that he has as yet found no outlet for his superfluous ideas. The sun is shining brightly from its golden car, but the air is still very cold. Its very keenness is bracing to any but those having such extremely sensitive nerves as Theophilus. He passes on shiveringly, with his head and shoulders enveloped in a large gray shawl, and his fingers encased in a pair of fur mittens. There is no feature discernible under the heavy muffler, excepting a pair of frosty eyebrows and his long, thin nose, which somehow seems always to act as sentinel and keep guard over the faculties of an inquiring mind that might otherwise lose the scent of many a secret. When he reaches his partner's abiding place, he scarcely

knows whether to pass or enter. Ben's own hale and hearty voice decides the question. This personage is standing just outside the door, with his hands in his pockets. He is beating a brisk tattoo upon the steps as if to keep himself warm by exercise. His black eyes shine and sparkle with the radiance of the stars as he hails his partner. Theophilus has a foretaste of what is in store for him; otherwise their mischievous twinkling might not be so fully appreciated. Ben leads the way. The door is slightly ajar, and the tones of a mocking bird can be heard singing, chirping and whistling as if the ecstatic joy of a whole May morning is lodged in his throat, and he is determined to free himself of his melodies.

"Dost like the picture?" asks Ben, smiling. "What do you think of my two snow flakes, eh?"

The child and the kitten, both fair enough to deserve their titles, are playing together on the bright rug in front of the grate. It does not take long for Ben to tell the story of the waif, and Theophilus is as surprised as possible under the circumstances. He is tempted for a moment to tell that it was not quite unexpected by him, but such a proceeding on his part would reveal a phase of his character that he would prefer to keep buried out

of sight. He would like to forget that those tracks of a man's foot just under the window belong to himself. It does not take long, either, for Ben to add that this little snow flake, which came to him in the bleak, wintry storm, has found its way swiftly into his heart, and that he will not send it again into the world to melt away from his sight, but will adopt it as his own.

Theophilus thinks this is a rare opportunity to moralize. He must not let it pass; so he spreads his cold hands above the fire and looks down serenely upon the beautiful being that is chasing childhood's joyous morning away in trustful contentment, well pleased at making friends with Bachelor Ben's pets—the kitten, the dog and the noisy mocking bird.

"It is a noble deed for you to adopt this waif, Ben, and God will reward you for it. He has led her to you, and I have no doubt it will be a means of grace. Every dollar that you spend in caring for and educating her will be to you a treasure laid up in Heaven."

"You touch a tender point there, Steele. It is only the question of dimes and dollars that troubles me; you know I am not as wealthy a man as yourself," ejaculated Ben.

Theophilus likes to be talked to in this way and replies pompously: "So much the greater will be your self-advancement. The sacrifices you make will develop all the generous qualities of your nature, and in rearing this child to a noble, Christian womanhood, you will every day be lending to the Lord."

"I am glad that you look upon my plans thus favorably." There is mischief lurking in the corners of the speaker's eyes as he rolls them towards Theophilus in an expressive side-glance, but it is not observed.

"Let me see, Steele; you and I have been in partnership some fifteen years now, have we not? and you, I know, have amassed a snug little fortune; in fact, my friend, I remember, even a little enviously, in my present mood, that you are a millionaire. Suppose you place some money in the Bank of Heaven, yourself, by adopting this child instead of leaving it in the uncertain hands of your humble servant, who can scarcely see his way clear for paying his weekly board bill. You have a beautiful home, with no wife or children to share it with you, or inherit it after you are gone. You've more money than you can possibly spend upon yourself and Mrs. Sharp, while she lives. You

could educate this child far more liberally than I can."

Theophilus slowly turns the crape banded hat around his hands and softly strokes its glossy surface. When he replies, his voice is as smooth and as soft as the texture of the hat itself, and his tones are as measured as the ticking of the clock, or the gentle, even-purring of pussy at his feet.

"My friend, you do not know what a mockery it would be for me to take to my heart this little one. When you speak of it, you forget my great loss only one short year ago. I could not do my duty by it. My affections could not enfold it as they might once have done, for they are weaned beyond recall from any treasure that this earth possesses."

Ben pulls the baby upon his knee, and pats the golden locks caressingly, as if to say: "I thought so dearie," but he continues aloud, "Well, Steele, there is this much about it, I may be attempting more than I can carry out. There is one thing I have never told you. I have a sister with six children and a miserable husband who is a drunkard. Not a week of my life passes that she — poor woman — does not appeal to me for aid. Whether I can also feed and clothe the body and mind of

this waif, with this constant drain upon my purse, I am, after all, not quite sure. Perhaps my better way would be to send it immediately to the poor-house, and let it grow up among a hundred other cast-off, nameless children. I can't bear to think of doing it, however. It's a wonderfully beautiful little snow-flake, and just as innocent and pure as those whose company it traveled in last night when they fell from the sky. What shall I do, Steele? Send it to the lonely poor-house, eh?"

Baby pulls his beard with her plump, white hands, and looks up into his face fearlessly. She is not at all alarmed.

"After mature deliberation," replies Theophilus, with his gray eyes gazing straight into space, "I think it would be, at least, the safer way. Blood will tell, Ben; blood will tell, and you have no means of knowing her parentage. She might, after all your care of her, grow up to disgrace you. I, for one, should not like to run the risk of keeping her. Under other circumstances, I should feel it my duty, as a Christian, to protect her from the contamination of the outcasts of the poor-house. But why send her there? I have thought of a better place yet. Take her to the Foundlings' Home. It is my duty and privilege to preside over the Sab-

bath School at that place. I could take a peep at her occasionally, and see that she was brought up to know and love the Savior, and to feel the force of religious influences."

"Pshaw! ejaculates Ben, with so explosive an accent that baby looks up wonderingly, while pussy, who is rubbing herself affectionately against his boots, gives vent to a plaintive mew in consequence of his having implanted one of his feet upon her tail. He feels somewhat ashamed of his impatience, and quickly apologizes.

"Beg pardon, Steele. But I should think you would have learned by this time not to prate to me about religious influences. There is such a thing as making the gospels trite by too frequent repetition of Bible phrases. The principles of one's religion are to be found in his own moral judgment and feelings. If these are congenial with one's true belief, they color vividly the affairs of real life, and are intimately connected with it. I am sometimes, in spite of myself, almost tempted to question the utility of Sunday Schools, when I see the want of consistency and power in the life of instructors. You know I am a sort of flaw-picker any way, and I proposed relinquishing the child just now to see if you, with your many pro-

essions of Christianity, and your immense sums of idle money, would not offer to provide for its future wants. What you consider a noble deed in me, you consider an unsafe action in yourself. Forgive me for my bluntness, when I tell you that your course this morning only verifies a theory that I have long entertained in my own mind, as to the personal applicability of the sermons that not only you, but numerous others, are constantly preaching to me, i. e., laying up treasures in the world that I know is far sweeter and more glorious than this. Now that we are on the subject, Steele, I wish you would tell me exactly what you believe to be the meaning of the exhortation: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.'"

"I believe the meaning of those divine words to be, that we shall place our minds on heavenly things, paying no heed to the follies and pleasures and the passing pains of this world. But we must await the leadings of Providence in all things, being not rash or precipitate in lavishly expending the riches which He helps us to acquire, until they aid us in promoting His cause. Riches and honors, and all earthly glories, the true

Christian gives freely to Him, to do with as He wills."

"Do you not realize," asked Ben, "that when you talk like this, you are indulging in the merest cant? One would think to hear you, that you expected to actually stand before the Great White Throne, with all your bonds in your hands, and say: 'Here, Lord, is my all; so many seven-thirties, so many mortgages, so much loose change. Do with it as you will.' I think you must be blind not to see that God's glory can best be promoted by goodness and generosity, actually shown towards the feeble and helpless in the world. I believe God has a safe, with locks so intricate and strong that thieves cannot break them, and it is here, on this earth, that we can deposit our money or our treasure at any moment, for he employs cashiers on every side. It is true, that God himself keeps the key, and we may sometimes begin to doubt if we shall ever receive the interest due us, because we knock faintly a few times and the door refuses to open. But there is no barrier that can obstruct our pathway to this safe, if we rightfully and truthfully search for it. The doors of the kingdom will not always be bolted, and sometime, Steele, you may be surprised to find that these

men, who call themselves saints on earth, have nothing but blank leaves in the Great Account Book, while sinners — so called — are being credited for thousands of dollars' worth of stock in the joys of eternity."

Ben speaks with infinite good nature, and Theophilus knows his own ground, which is heroic patience, too well to take offense when assailed with hints of insincerity by the world's people. No, he will advocate his own cause, and if his intellect will not allow him to coin into words any new ideas, then he will repeat the old lessons of the church and the catechism, and he rolls his gray eyes deprecatingly, as if mourning because his listener is so mistaken in his views, as he solemnly replies:

"You would serve the world, Ben, but you forget that you cannot serve God and Mammon. It is only men of shallow thought who are governed by worldly considerations."

"I agree with you there, Steele, and it is only men of shallow brains who consider the attainments of worldly power or wealth, as the greatest success in life. In my opinion, he only is a wise man who deems the road to moral excellence, through the paths of fidelity to the cause of Christ

—success. But if he has the form and not the spirit of Godliness, let him beware, for all the churches in Christendom cannot supply sheep's clothing for wolves, that will not finally wear out and leave the wolf in his own garments, beyond the power of practicing hypocrisy."

"That is very true," replies Theophilus, his lip curling in an uncertain way, "yet, after all, 'earth's but a desert drear.'"

"I cannot understand this strange antipathy to the world," says Ben, "and this dismal impression of it. It has seemed to me sometimes as if it must be the effect of mental or moral weakness, and I have wondered if it would not be a difficult thing to find it in a really sound mind. I have never found any high system of instruction, teaching us that we ought to go through the world quoting only the solemn passages of Scripture, when there are so many cheerful messages. I have never yet found lessons teaching us that we ought to go through our lives, from the cradle to the grave, blind to the beautiful and glorious objects about us, and the untold blessings that creep into them from everyday cares and promote, in the end, our best interests. Oh, Steele, this is a grand world in which we live! The green forests of June and the

golden ones of autumn, the lofty hills and mountains, the winding rivers and the fruitful valleys. It's altogether too good a world for us, prate about its worthlessness as you will."

Theophilus has a sneaking sympathy with Ben as he hears his whole-souled voice, but will not allow himself to show it. He has not actually experienced enough of the blessed comforts of religion, to be able to comprehend and forcibly argue on their merits. He feels his own inadequacy thoroughly, but he persists in holding himself up as a conscientious Christian, when he is really only a cautious coward. There is but one true aim in his life, and that is—to make money. He wraps his cloak of religious professions about his shoulders, and it covers his heart from the gaze of men.

Ah, what a pity and a shame that this beautiful garment is so defiled, and the fair lining that should be so redolent with sweet perfume, and so lustrous in its tints, is worn only on the outside, and daily allowed to fade on the form of a hypocrite.

There is one person who understands this man thoroughly, or at least believes he does, and that person is Bachelor Ben.

Fifteen years of association and daily intercourse

have proven to him that in his partner's composition, there is far more greed than goodness; far more love for money than morals, and a greater degree of pious affectation than the real kindness and affection that belong to genuine piety. He does not disguise before Theophilus the possession of this knowledge, neither does he approach him with sarcasm or ill-humor, but whenever he can bring forward a subject that would naturally afford ventilation for his own opinions in opposition to those which are erroneously set forth by his questionably sincere friend, he delights in doing it with, however, the most cheerful and friendly manner accompanying them. There are men, silent always as regards their inner lives, that exert a wonderful influence upon all who come near them, and who speak eloquently in acts, rather than in words, of the beauty of the Christian life. It is not so with this pious prattler of whom we speak, for his influence, if he really exerts any very powerful one, upon his friend, is pernicious to his cause, and from his own inconsistency, he may even go far toward preventing Bachelor Ben from proclaiming himself before people—what they can but feel and know him to be already—a Christian.

Theophilus is the first to resume the conversa-

tion, but he glides adroitly into a different subject, saying, soon afterwards, that the hour is getting late, and he will go to the office.

"You'll not see me down, this morning," Ben remarks; "I must be looking about for some woman to take care of my new pet. Cats, dogs and birds, I can provide for easily; but, when it comes to a precious little human incumbrance, I own to an astonishing amount of ignorance. What would you advise me to do as I am now situated? I have been planning the whole night long, but I'm not quite decided what plan to pursue."

"I should advise you, if you really intend to keep the child, and educate it as your own, to engage board for yourself and it, also a nurse, in some private family. You could in this way oversee its education, and know that it had good care."

"Yes," ejaculates Ben, reluctantly, and his characteristic dent of perplexity finds its way into the space between his brows. "Just so." Then he pulls out his handkerchief and wipes a few drops of perspiration from his bald forehead, as his eye roams over the various features of his pleasant, smiling, home-like room. "Yes," he continues, with a long-drawn sigh, "I suppose I can leave this room, after the years I've lived in it with my

family of pets; but it will be a struggle, Steele. It will be a struggle," shaking his head dolefully. "It will seem like mortgaging my own chance for happiness."

"You have strong attachments for small and perishable things, I perceive," says Theophilus, in a satirical tone.

"Why, Steele, there's not a nook or corner of this room that is not interwoven with every hour of my life since I left my mother's home, an ambitious and hopeful lad with few pennies and bleak prospects, and took possession of it. That was when I first came to the city to earn my own livelihood. It was a boarding house then, but the building changed hands, and everyone left but myself. All the other rooms—as you know—are rented for offices now, and this is the only one that has a particle of the home element about it. I've gradually collected all these paintings and this furniture out of the occasional savings of my income, and if I were to live in a veritable palace now, I could not feel so well-satisfied with my surroundings as I do with this one cozy realization of all my home hopes and longings."

"But you can remove these same possessions to some other quarter. It will only be change of

location. You are not obliged to part with anything."

There is the genuine business ring in Theophilus' voice now, but Ben is too much interested in a retrospective view of his apartment to perceive it.

"Just so," he replies absently, "You see that west window. Well, the cage containing the Mocking bird and the other one with the Canary, have hung on those same hooks, in that same spot, for as many as nine successive years. You see Ponto, lying by the door. He has guarded it for me since the first night I stepped over its threshold, with always a bark of welcome at my coming and a growl of good cheer at my going out. I know there are other windows in the city where my birds can hang and sing just as melodiously, and other doors that Ponto can watch by. But it is only this wee, winsome waif that could beguile me out of my bachelor's den."

Neither man could tell quite how it all came about, but Theophilus replies in his business tones, which are in this instance rigidly—and, I may say, frigidly—business-like, that there are certain vacant rooms in his house that can be placed at Ben's disposal for a certain sum. We must not forget to add the latter qualification.

After a few moments' conversation upon the subject, the matter is decided upon, and Ben is free to take the waif, birds, kitten, dog, and any other possessions, into Theophilus Steele's mansion whenever he chooses.

The owner of this same mansion does not stop to question whether the admission of these new inmates into his house will be agreeable to Mrs. Sharp, or whether she will find the additional care of them at her table quite pleasant and profitable. These are minor considerations, for who among the mortals of earth would pause to think of the comfort of so infinitesimally unimportant a being as a mother-in-law?

It is arranged that Theophilus shall proceed immediately to the office, while Ben takes the little one to its new home, and oversees the removal of his household goods.

"Mrs Sharp will gladly take charge of the child for a few days, until you succeed in finding some one," says Theophilus. Then he closes the door and passes down the street, well pleased at the thought of the profit which he will derive from the vacant rooms in his costly home.

CHAPTER VI.

"O, my ain fireside, maun I bid ye adieu?"

"If we wish to succeed in life, we must take men as they are, and not as they ought to be."

A novel scene, that of a bachelor in his dearly prized den, trying to bundle up a baby.

"Cold weather, this, to take a tender little flower like you out to get chilled and frost-bitten," Ben is saying, as he pins a dainty, white flannel blanket under the dimpled chin. "I wonder how much little folks like you need to wear, such weather as this, any how? Those pretty, pink kid slippers are fine enough here on the carpet. I wonder if children wear such fairy-like things to trot around in the snow. Guess I won't let you walk this time for fear dampness will take the color out of 'em."

Baby surveys the articles with the pride natural to her sex, and thrusts the toes upward into the air while planting the tiny heels into the floor with a force that would at least seem to promise utter annihilation to their pinkness, if not to the heels themselves.

"How about the curls? It is snowing a little out now. It seems to me that sometime in my

life, I have heard it was not advisable for curly heads to go out in the storm. Are these artificial curls? Eh?" and Ben takes a shining tress in his hand, trying in vain to straighten it. Then he shoulders the infant, after first placing his handkerchief around its head and awkwardly tying it in three knots. Upon closer inspection, it occurs to him that this head-gear is not particularly becoming to the youthful features; also, that it will not be a very good protection against the elements of snow and wind. "Guess we'll take this off, dearie, and find something else. You might catch the earache; or, worse yet, the toothache. Perhaps you haven't any teeth yet, eh? Oh, yes; a whole row of them, just like pearls, too," he adds, as the rosy lips open quickly to display them.

After spending ten consecutive minutes in picking at the knots, almost exhausting the patience of baby as well as himself, and meeting with repeated failures, he concludes to let the knots remain tied, since they refuse to be otherwise, and tries to pull the handkerchief off over the face; but the chin is so plump that the noose will not slip from under it, so he pushes it back and it encircles the little one's neck, standing up defiantly and hiding all but the upper part of the face. The child looks

thoroughly uncomfortable, and its forlorn appearance appeals to Ben's sympathies, as he puts it back upon the rug and surveys it critically.

"Perhaps there is an overcoat, or something that will be just right for you to wear on this occasion, among your things. But girls don't wear overcoats, do they? What is the name of their coats, anyway? Let me see. I think I read somewhere that, for young ladies, basquines were extremely fashionable. That's the word, dearie, basquine! I'll see if you brought one with you in your trousseau." Ben searches diligently, turning over first one thing and then another, until he suddenly brings to light a garment that looks suspiciously like a "basquine." It is a bright scarlet sacque, with a quilted lining of white silk, swan's down for a border. He kneels upon the floor and looks first at the article in his hand and then at the waiting figure before him, on which he earnestly desires to place it. He puts it on upside down, but it covers the little face so effectually, that the blue eyes try in vain to play a game of peep-a-boo. He is not satisfied with the result any more than the baby, who begins to weary of his mode of treatment, and cries piteously. Ben is getting a little nervous and finally plunges the chubby fists into the arm-holes,

and fastens the garment behind, which is really not the proper way, but answers the purpose very well, and which result gives him intense delight. Then, after all his efforts, a happy thought comes to him, and taking from a peg in an adjoining closet a well-worn article of his own, he puts it on baby's head, and, presto! baby's head has disappeared, and a scarlet cloak, surmounted by a grotesque looking cap, is apparently walking backwards toward him. He feels utterly and hopelessly discouraged, and makes thereupon a brave resolution, which he utters aloud.

"Well, little one, there's something wrong, but I cannot quite make out what it is. I think you and I will wend our way to Mrs. Sharp's, before anything else occurs to try our agitated nerves. The cap experiment is a failure. Don't begin to cry again, now. It will ruin your pretty eyes. Suppose I wrap you up in my great-coat and so end the matter. Hope it won't be the end of you, too, dearie. You'll not be so inconsiderate as to smother before we reach our destination, will you?" Once again he shoulders his burden, and goes out into the street, for the first time in his life, perhaps, carrying a baby. When he reaches Theophilus Steele's house, the heavy snow storm

almost blinding him, the tones of baby, who is kicking, squirming, floundering and crying in distress, echoing from the great-coat on his arm, and the vision of Mrs. Sharp standing in the chamber window above, peering down at him inquisitively, his heart begins to fail him, and he dreads to ring the bell for fear she may not give his charge so cordial a welcome as Theophilus led him to expect. However, Ben is brave and rings the bell. Then he tosses the great-coat swiftly up and down, and moves it to and fro, getting more and more excited and very rosy and warm about the face, while he sings as soothingly as he can —

"Hush, my dear; lie still and slumber,"

and awaits the appearance of Mrs. Sharp. He hears her footsteps on the stairs, and gazes at the heavy carved doors, as they swing open to admit him, with no little trepidation. The iron-gray locks on each side of the head are forbiddingly visible, and the dark eyes of Mrs. Sharp seem to demand an explanation for this unexpected call. He hastens to give it, but finds it exceedingly difficult to express himself, and while he stands wondering what he shall say, bewildered by the cries of the infant, and confused by Mrs. Sharp's expressive

countenance, she assails him with that most powerful weapon on all occasions — her tongue.

"What under the sun has brought you here this time of day, I cannot imagine. But if you have been so impulsive as to pick up some beggar's child on the street, thinking I will tend it for you, I assure you of your mistake. If that's a baby you have — and I should think it must be from the sound — I tell you frankly in the outset, that I will have nothing to do with it."

To say that astonishment is depicted on Bachelor Ben's ruddy countenance, is to convey but a feeble idea of its expression. He somewhat expected, from his previous knowledge of her nature, that he might, perhaps, meet with rebuffs from this woman at first, but is not prepared for rebellion before his story is told and his plans laid before her. In fact, he had supposed that a gun must be loaded before one would care to pull the trigger; that a pistol would explode only upon the provocation of careless handling; that a woman's curiosity would suggest questions and replies instead of intercepting the latter and blockading their course, even when they were balancing upon the tip of one's tongue. But he stands just inside the door now, with the crying stranger in his arms, looking the

personification of manly meekness, profound disappointment and presumptuous bashfulness.

Finally, he manages to stammer forth: "I am very sorry to have intruded, Mrs. Sharp. If this is my welcome, of course, I will presume to stay no longer. Good morning, madam." His hand is on the door-knob, but he removes it quickly, when he sees Mrs. Sharp brace herself firmly against the panel.

"I didn't say you shouldn't come in and warm yourself. Don't take offense so easily, man."

"No offense, madam. No offense at all, only I — well, I —"

"Yes, I understand," interrupted Mrs. Sharp, "I've no objection to hearing what you have to say for yourself, if you have a mind to come into the dining-room." It is not a very cordial invitation, and Ben almost wonders why he shows so little independence of spirit as to accept it. But he follows meekly after her and enters the cheerless room. The kitchen door is open, and an occasional whiff of warm air finds its way by that avenue, otherwise there is nothing to take off the chill.

"It's as cold as Greenland here," says Mrs. Sharp, using the oft-repeated comparison, without stopping to think of the stupendous exaggeration.

"But Theophilus is so stingy — I suppose I ought to say economical — that he disapproves of keeping many fires going. Be seated, won't you?"

Ben subsides into the stiff, cane-seated chair that is thrust forward, resting the great coat and its occupant across his knees. Mrs. Sharp takes a chair on the opposite side of the room, leaving what seems like an interminable space between them, and folds her hands majestically, as if waiting for him to proceed with the explanation.

Poor Ben! The atmosphere is far, very far from inspiring. He knows of but one source from whence can come a ray of encouragement, so he spreads open the great coat, and the little scarlet figure emerges into full view, its crying turned to cooing, in its delight to be released. Mrs. Sharp looks up and gives a short, hysterical gasp of surprise, but says nothing when she sees its rich apparel, and knows from this that after all, it cannot be the child of poverty.

"Isn't she a little beauty?" asks Ben, holding her aloft, admiringly.

"Beautiful children don't deserve our compassion as some of those miserable, little half-clad, half-starved wretches," replies Mrs. Sharp, on the defensive against being won by the bright, childish

eyes that are looking at her. She has not yet asked the question which, above all others, Ben supposed would be addressed to him first; "Where did you get her?" He determines to bring about this consummation, which will help him to commence the story. "These are pretty fine clothes, too, for a waif, I should imagine."

"The clothes are good enough," is vouchsafed as a brusque reply.

"It requires a pretty long stretch of imagination to conceive of a parent relinquishing such a child as this, eh?"

"I should think so," says Mrs. Sharp, turning her eyes away and trying to look very stern and indifferent, as two little arms are stretched towards her gleefully.

"Parents or guardians must have been very hard hearted and unnatural, eh?"

"Very," is the laconic answer.

"How do you think it ever came into my possession, Mrs. Sharp?" he asks, in the depths of exasperation.

"I am sure I have no idea, sir, unless the child ran away and you found it."

"I found it, yes. But, I must own, under rather peculiar circumstances."

"I have heard sir," says Mrs. Sharp abruptly, "that you are very liberal and generous in your contributions to the poor and needy. I have heard, also, of your trying to do good in a very inconsiderate and impulsive way. Theophilus has already warned me against being too greatly interested in any object of charity that he said you might be likely to bring under my notice. I remember that he told me of your giving a deaf and dumb man money, and afterwards, while passing down the street, finding him engaged in a noisy altercation with companions at a lager beer saloon, not only hearing them, but taking a prominent part in their dispute. And so, sir, when I saw you coming through the gate, I knew what to do. I made up my mind that you would try to appeal to my sympathies in some way, and I see that you are doing so now. I have troubles enough of my own, without you bringing any new ones to enlist me in."

"Just so," says Ben quietly. "But do you think this that I have brought you is a trouble? Why, she's the cheeriest bit of childhood I've seen this many a day. What would you think, if I told you that she was mysteriously left at my door last night?"

"Left! At your door?" queries Mrs. Sharp,

now fully aroused. And Ben tells the story of the waif, from its advent to the present time, not even omitting to mention the bargain made with Theophilus.

"Then you are really going to adopt it as your own?" she remarks, at his conclusion.

"Yes, Mrs. Sharp. It was mine from the moment it smiled at me from the depths of the thick shawl wrapped about it. May God help me to do my duty by it always."

"That is something that many a man has not done by his own child," replies Mrs. Sharp spitefully, as she thinks of the malice she bears her son-in-law for his neglect of her when his offspring was living. "And you are going to take rooms here, are you?"

"That is the arrangement. Will such a proceeding be agreeable to you?"

"It has not been my privilege to have a voice in the matter, since Theophilus did not deign to consult me. So it makes no difference whether it is agreeable to me or otherwise. As for your lodging under his roof, he had a perfect right to decide, and also as to your sitting at his table, but whether you find the food cooked or uncooked, concerns me entirely. I have never made a practice of keeping

boarding-house yet in my lifetime, and I do not intend to do so now."

"If our hunger cannot be appeased here, then we will have to give up the rooms, won't we, little one?" Ben says, by way of experiment. He is beginning to learn how to get on with this woman, he thinks.

"I may have no idea of letting you go hungry, still I think Theophilus would have shown more sense if he had consulted my intentions as to feeding or starving the people he chooses to send here. That reminds me. You say this child came to you last night. Has she had anything to eat to-day?" And here, for the first time, the womanly interest evinces itself.

"Oh, yes," answers Ben proudly, "I gave her some breakfast of crackers and cheese and herrings. I found that her taste was so depraved, she wouldn't eat anything but crackers, so I gave her Snowflake's milk, and made the kitten go off in the building and catch a mouse. As for myself, I made out very well on what I had. Didn't dare go to my boarding-house for fear I'd be tempted to tell something about the baby, and I thought it wasn't best to do that until I had decided whether to keep her or not. And now there is one more point to settle,

Mrs. Sharp. Could I get you to take care of her until I can find some good nurse? I suppose she won't need much attention; only a little watching now and then. She is old enough to amuse herself."

"You speak as if you knew all about it, sir. It's my opinion you don't know anything at all, when you say she will amuse herself. Children of her age need all the care that can be given them. And as for amusement, it just takes a mother or a nurse from one day's end to another, to furnish that which is pleasant and healthful for them."

"Is that so?" asks Ben submissively. "Why, I thought it was exactly the opposite. I thought the children amused the people who had charge of them." There is such a merry, mischievous light in the speaker's eyes, that Mrs. Sharp can scarcely tell whether he is joking or in earnest. "Would you prefer, then," he continues, "not to oblige me in this matter? Of course, there is no law of necessity compelling you to do so."

"Certainly there is not," Mrs. Sharp makes answer, as she moves her hands and picks nervously at her dress-skirt. "I'll look after it to-day, however; I don't see as there is any other way for me to do, without appearing like a heathen."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, then, for this instance of civilization on your part. If it should ever be in my power to do a favor for you in return —"

"I do not ask for favors or thanks," she interrupts quickly, "for anything I do. If I did, I should be subjected to many denials in this house."

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Sharp, the reward for well-doing is sure to be given some time to every one."

"I've had very few rewards in my lifetime; but I don't say that anything I've ever done has been worthy of them. I may do a thousand things and have them counted only as one, because they are of so little importance," says the abused lady, in an injured tone.

"Our humblest tasks are important, and the rewards of our slightest deeds of justice and charity felt in some degree immediately. We are thanked for them within ourselves, if not by human lips."

"Thanks," continues Mrs. Sharp, crisply, "is a word that is difficult to understand while living in daily companionship with some people, and it is a word, besides, that a mother-in-law almost believes must have been stricken from the world's vocabulary."

Bachelor Ben thinks of his partner, with his cold

calculation and his unsocial nature, and understands something of her bitterness and resentment. And so he says to this woman with the harsh voice and the harsh sentences that sometimes, aye, oftentimes, keep pace with it and make discordant sounds, words that, in spite of her chronic ill-humor, sink deep into her heart and touch keys that awaken a tender chord. "We are seldom asked, Mrs. Sharp, to bear with the infirmities of others more than it is in our power to bear, and patiently, too. We are never asked to accomplish impossible things. He leads us through no fields that are too large for us to cultivate, and, in some way, adorn. Do not be discouraged, Mrs. Sharp, if your labors are not always appreciated, and your wishes not regarded. Let your aim not slacken when once you have made up your mind to do the best you can, and if you attain in the slightest degree your object, you will in the end have much to rejoice over. You came here to do your duty by your dead daughter's husband. I can believe that it is not always pleasant for you; but, should you fail on that account? Be of good cheer, and, in the end, there will come to your ears and your heart approbation in the tone of Heaven. Think of it. How beautiful it sounds!—'She hath done what she

could.' Why, my dear woman, you have sat here in this great house alone, and visited with your own self, until your name is affecting your nature. There; now I've told you what I think, and I feel better."

"I've no doubt you do, sir," says Mrs. Sharp, indignantly; but there is a dull flush on her sallow cheek, and a softer light in her dark eye, as she turns away from him quickly, and adds, "and if I were any but the crabbed old creature I am, I suppose I wouldn't hesitate to own that you've made me feel better, too."

And so it is that Bachelor Ben goes through the world, finding beauty and goodness where others can see but ugliness; touching pure gold where only rough iron is visible; showing bits of bright blue sky to those who are gazing only on threatening clouds, and pointing out the roses on the bush of life that seems sometimes to bear but piercing thorns. He wends his way through the long hall, soon after this, and passes out of the carved door, with a cheerful spirit, whistling softly, as is his wont, when satisfied. He has swayed a heart by the force of a sympathetic emotion, and left the little one in good hands.

CHAPTER VII.

Good-will makes insight, as one finds his way to the sea by embarking on a river. — EMERSON.

Scarce three days have elapsed ere all Bachelor Ben's household possessions have been removed from their olden haunts and occupy the front parlor of Theophilus Steele's heretofore inane appearing mansion. Passers-by have been wont to observe the closed blinds and the dismal features of this elegant domicile; for, after all, human homes are not so unlike human faces, and as cheerfulness within radiates from those windows of the soul—the eyes—so does it betray its presence in houses by the bright objects peeping out through panes of glass. And there is not an eye turned toward the large bay-window in Ben's room, whether it belongs to the woman of fashion or to the scissors-grinder, tugging his machine and "stopping to rest a bit" and look around, that is not refreshed by the vision of the smiling plants and birds suspended there. And sometimes, the people walking by look up to see that, instead of the blank, forbidding shutters, there is the nose of a little white kitten pressed against the glass, and life and activity beaming on every side.

Theophilus is not insensible to the charms of beauty, and he likes, as he opens the gate and ascends the broad steps, to see the change in the appearance of his home. He likes, even, to hear the singing of the birds as he enters, and really enjoys the glimpse of brightness and comfort that he catches through the half-closed door of his front parlor. It takes away a little of the gnawing memory that has been crushing his heart of late. But he enjoys it most of all because it costs him nothing, and because it brings at the end of each month a little more into the tank of wealth which, though well filled already, he holds out to catch fragmentary drops.

It is, perhaps, what might truly be called an eccentric family party that we shall find assembled around Theophilus Steele's breakfast table this morning. There is no sunshine from the heavens to creep in at the back window of the dining-room and brighten its atmosphere of dullness. Neither is there any sunshine on Mrs. Sharp's face, as she presides at the head of the table, to provoke cheerfulness from those around her. She pours the coffee, and its fragrant aroma pervades the room, but as it steams in the cup and its odor arises and greets her nostrils, it suggests to her mind no ten-

der thoughts. The coffee is excellent, and she knows it, but her success in this art does not dispel a certain vexed, unamiable mood that seems to have fastened itself firmly about her, the luxury of which she makes no effort to deny herself. Ben feels that the temperature is freezing, but determines there shall be a thaw if it is in his power to bring it about, so he makes a feeble attempt to break the ice.

"It's quite a cloudy morning. Prospects rather uncertain for pleasant weather."

"Yes," replies Theophilus dubiously, looking towards the window.

"Are you anything of a weather prophet, Mrs. Sharp?" Ben asks affably.

"I am not anything of an anything but a mother-in-law!" is the ungracious answer.

"Oh, just so," replies Ben, laying down his fork in astonishment. "I thought, perhaps, you could tell us whether there was going to be a storm or not; that was all." Ben feels thoroughly uncomfortable, but he looks more mischievous than anything else.

"If you are dealing in double-meanings, sir, as I am well satisfied you are, then I can tell you that there is going to be a storm, and that you, sir, are the cause of it."

"I?" exclaims the innocent offender, surprisedly.

"Yes, sir; you. You have had this child here three days, and haven't procured a nurse for it yet. Do you think I can curl her hair and keep her dressed prettily all the time, when I have breakfasts and dinners and teas to get for two men? No, sir. There's a storm brewing, and it will burst upon you right speedily, if you don't manage to change the programme."

"Suppose you spend less time upon the child's apparel, Mother Sharp. It is not necessary that the curls should consume any of your attention. The child is just as happy without them, and they only tend to make her vain."

"If I spend less time upon anything, Theophilus, it will be upon your meals; and, as for that baby's curls, humph! They'll never be tangled so long as I have anything to do with them."

"I am sorry I have been so unfortunate in finding a competent person. But I will do my best to-day, and I promise to find some way to relieve you of this care before night."

"It's my private opinion that Theophilus is the proper person to find some one to relieve me. If he had any genuine humanity in him, he would hire a servant."

"What would you do with yourself? You would not be contented here a day if you had not something to employ your mind," suggests Theophilus.

"You would give one to understand that I am contented here now," she says, with a snap in her eyes and a snarl in her voice.

"Ah, no," Theophilus ventures to answer, with a long-drawn sigh.

"You ask what I would do? Why, I would take care of the child myself, if anyone had ever asked me to," she says, with a gulp in her throat, which she tries to disguise by pretending to be choking over a swallow of coffee.

"You would?" And Ben smiles, and gives a long, low, contented whistle.

"Yes, if I had ever been asked, without having to beg the privilege. But, as it is, I will have nothing to do with the child—nothing whatever. So you may get some one as quickly as ever you can."

Oh, the mischief lurking in the corners of Ben's black eyes, and the dissatisfaction shining from Theophilus' gray ones! Both of these men know Mrs. Sharp far better than she knows herself.

"I wonder if you and I couldn't look over those accounts together, this evening, Steele. Procrasti-

nation will pass us if we don't do it soon; and he is a fast walker. We can never catch up with him if he gets too far ahead."

"Very true," replies Theophilus. "But there is a church sociable that I have promised to attend. To-morrow evening, I know of nothing that will prevent. Perhaps you will go with me. We are urged to bring our friends outside of the church and congregation. These meetings are very enjoyable, indeed, and, I think, promote brotherly love and Christian fellowship."

"I should think so," says Mrs. Sharp, putting as much pepper in her voice as she does upon the article of food she is in the act of seasoning. "Theophilus, I would like to have you tell me, candidly, did you ever find any real enjoyment in a church sociable?"

"Not what the world might call enjoyment. I have, however, passed many a pleasant evening in that way, and found great profit to my soul in this part of social life among my fellow-churchmen."

"Well, I'm very glad if you do," says Mrs. Sharp. "For my part, I've never attended a sociable that deserved the name. They are stiff, formal gatherings, even at their very best." In my old home, I have been introduced to very

pleasant people, and imagined I had made new friends in the fraternity; but, when I met them again, they would appear astonished to see me bowing to them, and I might as well be the Shah of Persia for all their remembering to extend the hand of good-will to me, or recognizing me as a sister in the church."

It would seem as if Mrs. Sharp must be ill-treated wherever her lot is cast, and Ben feels a wave of sympathy sweep over him, so he does not wait for it to pass on, but he does his best to console her while it surges generously and sounds in his ears.

"Although you have been unfortunate in your experience, Mrs. Sharp, if you will accept of my escort, to-night, I will go to the sociable, and perhaps we may have a pleasant time. I will promise, for my own part, and several friends to whom I will introduce you, not to mistake you for the Shah, afterwards, either."

"Thank you, sir. I may be a lonesome and somewhat abused person, but it's no sign I should be escorted by over-grown boys. I am not in the habit of accepting kindness from every gentleman who is so condescending as to offer it."

Ben thinks the weather prognostications are

more threatening than ever, but he scarcely dares to make any more remarks upon the subject. In fact, if he cannot dispel the clouds, he will try to shelter himself under an awning of silence. But, by-and-by, it occurs to him that Mrs. Sharp may repent her uncomplimentary retort, and he will give her an opportunity to be conciliatory if she will. "Do you use the ground coffee?" he asks as he performs a circular motion with a spoon in his cup of this aromatic beverage.

"Having never cooked any in the kernel, I am not able to say," she replies, determined to be contrary.

"Just so," says Ben, soothingly, shaking his head as if quite impressed with the wisdom of her reply.

"I think, Mother Sharp, that you purchase the coffee and grind it yourself; do you not?" suggests Theophilus, mildly.

"I think, Theophilus," and she imitates his tones as closely as possible, "that I've never had anyone to help me, or do it for me, since I came into your house."

After this, the meal proceeds in unbroken quiet, until the little one, who is sitting in a high-chair between Ben and Mrs. Sharp, is so unfortunate as to spill the cup of milk that it has, in the inno-

cence of its heart, been trying to balance upon its teeth without the aid of chubby, awkward fingers. The clean frock, to say nothing of the table linen, is thoroughly saturated. If there is one feature in this restless woman's nature that stands out more clearly than all others in her everyday duties, it is Mrs. Sharp's love of order and cleanliness. If her equanimity of temper had been undisturbed already, the accident would have occasioned much disturbance; but now, when every fibre of her repellent disposition seems to be cross-grained, it produces a most hopeless tangle of ill-natured threads.

"There! now, you've done it, haven't you?" she exclaims, rubbing the table-cloth, the frock and the baby's face with her napkin, and using equal force upon each. Baby vouchsafes no reply, but looks up into Mrs. Sharp's face with her big blue eyes full of wonderment. "Don't you know any better than to be so careless as that, you naughty child!" says the indignant dame. Then it is that the little face grows grave and grieved, and the rosy lips pucker and quiver tremulously, but she does not cry out; she only turns to Bachelor Ben for protection, and stretches her hands towards him over the arms of her high chair. And Ben takes her upon his lap and lays the head with

the shining curls close upon his broad breast, while he pats it gently with his ever-comforting palm.

"You'll spoil that child before she has been here a week," says Mrs. Sharp.

"Have you lived in this world so long, and not learned that it is useless to cry or to cause crying over spilt milk? I am sorry that the accident occurred, very sorry indeed; but I think several profitable lessons have been learned from it. Baby has been taught something about the attraction of gravitation, and still another lesson, which is, to whom she shall turn for sympathy when she is in trouble or distress, and who will always endeavor to give it when it is in his power. As I am to be her guardian and protector in the future, I am willing to have her know that I will never sanction any rebuke that is given her undeservedly."

"I understand you, sir, perfectly, but if you object to my gentle mode of treatment, you will be filled with horror at a nurse girl's chastisement." In numerous ways, Mrs. Sharp has warned Ben of the insufficiency of these persons. It would seem as if she owed the whole race of individuals serving in this capacity a whole-souled spite.

When the meal is concluded, Ben takes the child and goes to his own room. Theophilus pushes

his chair back and commences to read a newspaper. Mrs. Sharp begins cleaning the table and clatters the dishes in as reckless a manner as she has her tongue. She is scraping vigorously upon a plate, while Ben's dog Ponto stands near her, wishfully wagging his tail and gazing up into her face expectantly.

"Dogs and cats, and birds, and bachelors, and son-in-laws and babies! The world is full of them. I hate them all."

"It cannot be possible, Mother Sharp, that you entertain an aversion towards the helpless children," says Theophilus, peering over the top of his newspaper.

"Yes, I do, Theophilus, and when the little one that Bachelor Ben has brought here does something bright and cunning, I won't let myself look at it, for it makes me jealous and hateful to think that Providence should have taken my own little grandchild away, and helped this waif to work its way in here instead. Can't you see that I am getting as much attached to it as I would if it had belonged here?" Her voice is harsh, but there is a world of pent up feeling slumbering in it, and a dull red spot is burning on either cheek.

"You have a very singular way of showing affection, judging from the manner in which you rebuked it, only a few moments ago," is the sarcastic rejoinder.

"And you are a pretty Christian to throw it in my face. What if I have a singular manner of showing affection? Can I help it, if God made my nature like a gooseberry bush, that has plenty of thorns and nothing but sour fruit, that puckers one's mouth and sets one's teeth on edge? I'm very sure I do just that to Bachelor Ben every time I speak. He doesn't know me. You do, Theophilus Steele, and you know, too, perfectly well, that it's your duty to get a girl for the kitchen and let me take care of this child, since you never sent for me to come and take care of your own. I'm a lonesome, old woman, if I am not always agreeable."

"I am sorry you are lonesome; I shall pray daily for you, that your life may yet be made happier. By doing as you wish in this matter, you will be assuming a great responsibility, and I would advise you to continue on in the old way, and let Ben do as he intended."

"Etiquette, in my estimation, does not require us to thank people for bad advice, especially when

given unasked," says Mrs. Sharp, "and praying for one's friends, while slighting them purposely yourself, is a sin, according to my logic."

"Whether good or bad," returns Theophilus, "you will be quite apt to follow my advice in this instance, and say no more to Ben, for it is not my intention to make any change in the domestic *régime* that has been followed in my house for the past few months."

"If Bachelor Ben asks me, I shall do as I choose, and if you refuse to do as I wish, I will leave, and you can search for another house-keeper. You cannot change me into a state of submission and sweetness, any more than you can the berry I mentioned."

Theophilus makes no reply this time, but buries himself in his newspaper. By and by, he takes his pencil and note book from his pocket, and if one cared to watch him, they would see, by glancing over his shoulder, that he has estimated, roughly, the amount of a year's wages at so many dollars per week, and that when he puts it back and draws on his overcoat to go to the office, he looks more calculating than ever. He will say nothing more upon the subject to Mrs. Sharp or Ben, but let things take their course, and if it must be, then it

must, he thinks, with anything but pleasure or resignation.

He no sooner leaves the house than Ben issues from his room with the baby on his back, crowing and laughing gleefully. By this time, Mrs. Sharp has the table cleared, and is engaged in sweeping out the dining-room. She pays not the slightest heed to his entrance, but brushes crumbs and dust from the carpet as if her country's fate hangs on their immediate annihilation.

"Can you spare me a moment's conversation, Mrs. Sharp?" asks Ben.

"I never allow anything, nor anybody to interfere with my work. Whatever my hands find to do, I do with all my might," she answers.

"Which is the proper rule to obey, and the only one that leads to success. Perhaps you can accomplish just as much, however, while I am talking. I am willing to have you continue your work."

"Anything but men in one's way. They are certain to plant themselves where the broom ought to be planted," she replies.

"And perhaps the wielder of the broom would be so inhuman as to ignore one's existence and let the weapon do double duty. For fear of the deplorable result in my own case, I will return to

my room. When you are at leisure, please let me know."

Mrs. Sharp feels somewhat ashamed, but you would never dream it from her face, that is surrounded by a cloud of dust, and wears such an imperturbable expression.

After patient waiting on the part of the good-natured bachelor, he is enlivened by a rap upon his door and the voice, gruff for a woman's voice, that penetrates it, "I suppose there is nothing to hinder you from coming in, now, if you want to." Again she is seated on one side of the room in the stiff-backed chair, while Ben and the baby are on the other.

"I will bring forward the subject on my mind immediately, Mrs. Sharp."

"Do so, if you please; for I've any amount of work to do," she answers.

Ben is not one of those exceptional talkers who likes to be limited as to time, but he submits to the decree that has gone forth, and makes the proposal to Mrs. Sharp, that she take the child under her charge for a year at least, and if this arrangement is not satisfactory to both parties at the end of that period, either will be free to sever the engagement. After various roundabout and unamiable evasions,

she consents. She cannot refrain from being slightly crabbed about it, though she really craves the duty. "If you desire my services any great length of time, I shall be surprised," she finishes by saying.

"We will see about that," replies Ben, vaguely; "and now I will go and talk with Steele, and see that some one is procured to assist you in your work. You must determine the rate of compensation for yourself."

"Do not speak of such a thing as that, if you do not wish to insult me. I will have no pay for doing what I consider my duty; though you may think me a strange woman, to use that word as applying to myself. You might as well offer to pay me for watching the rising of the sun or stars as to suggest paying me for watching over the growth of that child."

Ben appreciates the poetry of her speech, and remembers it a long time afterwards, even though the stern prose comes immediately, and tries to banish it.

"You needn't feel any delicacy in the thought that this will be an extra expense to Theophilus. You are thinking of it, I know, by the dent between your brows. He has picked up his fortune with the diligence of a hungry raven, and now let

him spend some of it in the cause of the young doves; and, if he croaks over the necessity, it need give us no uneasiness."

"I cannot feel thus, Mrs. Sharp, since he once refused to adopt it as his own, and advised sending it to the Foundlings' Home. I have too much independence to allow him to spend an extra penny on its account. I would far rather have it bring a little money into his purse, as it does now."

"I understand how it is with you. I should and do feel the same, and you must not thwart me in my resolve. I will say no more, neither do you, about his getting a servant. But I will do the work of the house and take care of the child, too. I can do it if I make up my mind, only—I shall cultivate the sour berries as long as he cultivates stinginess, and give him many a meal of them in their unripe state, with very little sugar to make them palatable," says Mrs. Sharp. And Ben believes her.

And so, little waif, your present destiny is settled. Tossed and rocked upon fretful billows, how uncertain, until now, has appeared the shore where you should find a resting place. With two friends to watch and tend you—one, manly, generous, strong and good—both, willing, in their own way, to befriend you as you glide on towards womanhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

The gravest events sometimes dawn, with no more noise than the morning star makes in rising. — DUFF PORTER.

The first four years of the child's life with Mrs. Sharp passed so quietly and uneventfully, that I deem it best to omit any particular mention of them, other than that this little one had its full share of the bumps and bruises that befall unfortunate humanity, and recovered from the black-and-blue results with its stock of vitality unexhausted. I know I could best appeal to your sympathies by picturing this waif as a frail and feeble being, overpowered by the wasting influence of whooping cough; the beautiful eyes made almost sightless by a visitation of the measles; its fair complexion escaping ruin from the indentations of chicken-pox only by a miracle; its life completely blighted by the rasping reproofs of Mrs. Sharp's tongue, and the joys of childhood condensed in the misery of a premature maturity. But to conform to truth, and what I consider a most blessed reality, I must confess that the health of the far-famed Hebe could not, in her infancy, have exceeded that of this youthful beauty, who grew and flourished as

rapidly as morning-glories in the sunshine, but, unlike them, did not so speedily droop and fade away.

Theophilus Steele saw that it was possible for Mrs. Sharp to continue on in what he termed the old way, so he did not exert himself to procure the aid that she had requested, and whenever Bachelor Ben proposed to do this himself, he met with so decided an objection and rebuff from the lady in question, that he finally subsided into a state of quietude upon the subject.

"Whenever I make up my mind to do a thing," she said emphatically, "I shall do it, and you might as well try to stop a barrel from rolling down hill by saying the word, as to try to make me have a servant in this house, if her wages do not fight their way out of Theophilus Steele's pockets." And Ben would see the fire of determination in her eyes and answer, "Just so," in his good-natured, pacifying way, because he realized that opposition on his part would be useless. But he considered it no disgrace to his strong, sturdy manhood, to go often into the field of labor of this hard-working woman, to lift a tub or a boiler, and no pollution to his hands, to kindle the fires when the morning hours seemed to chase each other too rapidly for the consummation of a house-keeper's

many plans and labors, While Theophilus slept, and perhaps snored serenely—though no one was ever known to acknowledge that proclivity as belonging to themselves—Ben was most frequently up betimes, with two little feet planted on his knees, as he tied the strings of a pair of stubbed shoes, that took more dollars than he could have imagined possible to keep in a state of preservation at the toes. "Yet, in spite of his self-denials and charities," ejaculated Mrs. Sharp, one night as she drew her needle in and out of a button on one of his shirts, "it does not take any very great powers of discrimination to tell which is the happier of the two."

Theophilus Steele seemed to be growing more indifferent towards the world and more deeply buried within himself every month. There were heavy circles under his eyes, and he looked like a man who had troubled dreams. One day he was left alone in the room with the little one, whom Ben had named Bertha, and she tried to climb into his lap, attracted by the gold watch which he was winding, but he pushed her rudely away, and after that time, she always shunned him.

It is a bright spring morning, and little Bertha is playing in the garden, romping with the old dog

Ponto in childish abandon, and laughing gleefully as he thrusts his cold nose roughly against her, and sends her rolling off into the grass. But Ponto grows weary of his sport after a time, and disappears, leaving her to depend upon her own resources for amusement. She lies down upon the ground, forgetting herself and everything else, in watching the sky above her head, with its boundless arch of blue and its wonderful, fleecy clouds, sailing gracefully like ships at sea, only when one glides against another, there is no explosion and no wreck. The fairy-like visions of childhood cannot be explained. Their intangible forms are not to be portrayed, either in words or upon canvas, but certain it is, that Bertha is enraptured with her own dreams and thoroughly happy in her own soliloquies, or she would feel the power of certain large, dark eyes that are fixed upon her from the crevices of the iron fence not far away. She is blind, however, to all but the vista above, until she hears a voice, and starts up quickly to ascertain its source. She looks about on every side, wondering if some of the goblins with innumerable orbs—of whom she has heard—are not coming, and does not feel quite certain of her safety even, when she hears the voice again.

"May I come in, little girl?"

Bertha sees, for the first time, the form of a boy, perhaps a few years older—certainly a whole head and shoulders taller than herself.

"I don't like boys," is her first exclamation.

"Perhaps you'd like me. I am sure I should you, for you're so sweet and clean."

"You are not very clean, are you?" says Bertha, laughing.

"No," replies the boy, his face flushing quickly, as he surveys his grimy clothing. "Boys have to work, you know, while girls only have to play."

"Do they?" and by this time the tidy little girl stands close to the untidy little boy, with only the fence between them.

"It is so pleasant in there, and so dry and dusty out here. I have never played in such a nice garden as this. Is it fun?" asks the boy.

"I guess so; but I've never played anywhere else. I guess you can come in here if you want to. You don't mean to chop me up for anybody's breakfast, do you?"

The youth replies in a horrified negative, and going to the gate, Bertha stretches up to reach the latch and admit him. It is too high for her, and he is under the necessity of admitting himself. It

is well that Bertha is ignorant of the subject of woman-suffrage, or she might feel more humiliated at her failure. He follows Bertha back to the lawn, but when he reaches it, he pauses and lifts his soiled cap from his head, baring his brow to the rays of the sun, and shading his eyes with his uplifted hand. "My mother told me to always raise my hat when I looked at a handsome picture. It just seems to me that this is the handsomest picture I ever saw, leastways I was ever 'lowed to look at; the pretty, green grass, and you standing there so sweet, little girl, telling me I may come in."

"Why, you are almost crying," says Bertha, taking the brown palm between her own, and looking up into the boy's face. He brushes away a tear with his ragged coat sleeve, and gives a little sob that goes straight to Bertha's heart. "Can I help you any?" she asks, pressing his hand gently.

"There can't anybody help me, only the people who give me odd jobs; and I suppose you haven't any, have you?"

"I guess not, if you mean work to do."

"Perhaps I ought to go away. I don't believe I belong in such a place as this, for it makes me sober and lonesome, and, when I'm doing odd jobs, I can sing and whistle as lively as anybody." But

Bertha urges him to remain, and she will show him Ponto when he comes back. In fact, she holds forth so many inducements, in such a winning way, that he finds it hard to go out into the street again. So hand in hand, they pass through the garden, one skipping, dancing and laughing, the other treading softly and almost reverently upon the earth that is not covered with dust and coal to correspond with his clothing, but is carpeted with fresh, smiling sod that only makes the clothing seem the dingier.

While they are chatting, Theophilus Steele comes home to dinner, and, as he walks from the gate to the house, the two figures come suddenly out from behind a clump of evergreens. "This is my new little friend," says Bertha, shyly.

"And pray, how did you come in here, sir?" Theophilus exclaims.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I will go away," answers the youth, turning aside. "But have you not some odd jobs that I could do for you?"

"No; I have not to-day. Come into the house, Bertha."

"Not, unless you'll give him some money to buy something nice with. Fritz—that's his friend—has been out of work, and this poor little boy

hasn't had any breakfast to-day, only a crust of dry bread."

"He must earn it, then. There is a way provided for everyone. There must be a way for him. Come, come, Bertha," says Theophilus.

"No, Mr. Steele; not unless you let him come, too, and give him something to eat. I said I didn't like boys, but I was wrong, and now I'm going to make it right anyhow."

"Please, sir, I am very poor, and if" —

"Run home, now, I've nothing for you. It is not best to encourage begging, especially in the young, for it makes them indolent."

"I do not wish to beg, sir. I am too proud for that. I meant, that if I could black your boots, or do something, I would be thankful for a few pennies."

"I haven't any change, to-day, I am sorry to state. That is right; do not beg when you can earn, for it is degrading. I presume some one will help you," says Theophilus, trying to lead Bertha away.

"No, no!" says the little miss, emphatically, stamping her feet upon the walk, and keeping close hold of the brown hand.

Mrs. Sharp's voice is heard from a distant corner

of the house, "Come in, this minute, Bertha; you have been out long enough, now mind."

She is forced to relinquish her grasp, and is lifted up the step by Theophilus, whom she begins to dislike now, more than ever; but the tidy little girl cannot part from the untidy little boy like this, so she breaks away and follows him swiftly to the gate, where she lingers long enough to whisper, cheerily, "I do like you, very, very much; you just come here to-morrow morning, and my Uncle Ben will help you."

CHAPTER IX.

"The hand of the giver is ever above that of the receiver."

Nothing useless is or low,
Each thing in its place is best;
And what seems but idle show,
Strengthens and supports the rest.

—LONGFELLOW.

"Any odd jobs, sir?" Ben is passing through the gate, and stops to throw a kiss back to Bertha in the window, as the voice reaches him. Owing to the fact that the little girl was tired the night before, and that Mrs. Sharp consigned her to the oblivion of sleep earlier than was her wont, he heard nothing about the new friend of whom Bertha had intended to talk with him privately. Now that another morning has come, it has slipped her mind, and the memory of her last hopeful words is among the things that were. Ben glances momentarily at the ragged urchin, as one does at the many such who always abound in a large city, with their various pleadings, and replies, "Not this morning, my lad."

"I'm sorry, sir. The little girl thought you would help me," and there is a tremor in his voice that attracts Ben's attention sooner than anything

else would, for he is not proof against real disappointment and grief in any form.

"What little girl do you mean? My little Bertha?"

"I don't remember her name; but it's the one that played here in the garden yesterday, and said—and said, sir, that I might come in and play on the pretty green grass."

"Then she has some idea of the Good Samaritan, I'm glad to learn. And she thought I'd help you, did she? Eh?" and Ben looks down quizzically, as if there was some doubt in his mind as to whether she knew much about it or not.

"Yes, sir," replies the boy, with a wonderfully eloquent glance, "she came running back to me, and said, 'you just come here to-morrow morning, and my Uncle Ben will help you.'"

"And you believed her, did you?" asks Ben.

"Yes, sir, I believed her because she was so sweet."

"Believed her, simply because she was that," says Ben, slowly. "You are not the first one of your susceptible sex who has done the same—and been deceived. Heigh ho! Well! how did you suppose I could help you, my lad?"

"Odd jobs, sir?" says the boy, in a mechanical

manner, acquired by frequent repetition of these words.

"But I haven't any for you. Supposing I give you ten cents, seeing Bertha encouraged you, and then you can run home," remarks Ben, drawing out his purse; "won't that do as well?"

"I think it would, sir," answers the boy, frankly, "only I promised my mother, when she died, that I would never beg, and I would rather do some odd jobs for you, sir, to make it even like."

"Where do you live, my lad?"

"I'm an orphan, sir, and I live with Fritz, and he is very good to me. But he is out of work and can't find anything to do since the factory he was working in burned down."

"How about stealing? Did you promise not to do that, either?" and Ben wonders that this little ragamuffin should have inspired such interest in himself.

"My mother was an actress, sir, and she wanted me, some day, to become a great actor. If she had lived, perhaps I would; but, as it is, I can only go around doing things for people until I get older, for I'm all alone in the world, excepting Fritz. My mother left me with him. She didn't need to tell me not to steal, sir. She knew I would never do it," says the boy, proudly.

"Just so. My mother thought the same of me when I was a youngster, too. Trust is a blessed thing in this world, but it's rare. Suppose you take this fifty-cent piece down the street and change it for five tens, and when you come back I'll give you one of them for your trouble. I am short of change, and it will be an accommodation to me. You can meet me at number 29 Fulton street."

"Yes, sir, I'll do it," replies the boy, meeting his keen glance fearlessly, and disappearing down the block.

"So much by way of an experiment," quoth Ben, as he himself walks in the opposite direction. "My theory is, that there are too many suspicions against, and not enough confidence in, people nowadays. I believe the boy will come. If he doesn't, then I'll consider my theory partially exploded, or at least weakened." Ben reaches his office and forgets all about his fifty-cent piece and his theories, for there is a press of business that keeps his brain in a state of activity, and crowds out all else.

When he goes to his dinner, and gets within sight of home, he suddenly remembers the incident of the morning, and realizes, with a pang which he cannot dispel, that the urchin whom he trusted has

proved unfaithful and untrustworthy. He says nothing about it to Theophilus, who is walking with him. It seems almost too much like a proof of some of his companion's doctrines, and Bachelor Ben is prejudiced too strongly in favor of his own, to relinquish an iota of them without a struggle. It hurts him to think that deceit should have hidden itself behind the lad's frank eyes, and it grieves this large-hearted man to think that his mother—if the boy told the truth in the matter—should have believed him incapable of stealing, and seen from her throne in Heaven that her son had not the power to resist temptation. "Well!" silently muses Bachelor Ben, as he passes through the gate followed by Theophilus, "I hope few mothers and few people, find their trust belied so thoroughly as I did mine in this instance. If I ever saw honesty depicted in a countenance, 'twas clearly portrayed in the youthful features I saw this morning. I'm fifty cents poorer, and an atom of distrust in physiognomy richer, since I last crossed this threshold. The boy did not come to me, yet I can but think it is an exception to the general rule, that faith in people makes people faithful; that trust provokes trustworthiness. How sorry I am that the lad disappointed me."

Ben hangs his hat in the hall, and as he opens the door of his room, Bertha comes running to meet him, her cheeks flaming with excitement, and her blue eyes brimming with pleasure.

"What has happened to make my pet so joyful?" he exclaims, as he draws a chair to an open window and lifts her into his lap.

"Oh, something very nice, Uncle Ben."

"And now you'll tell me all about it, won't you, dearie?"

They are pleasant moments in his life, these chats with Bertha, into whose youthful sports he enters with a zest that banishes all business cares, and brings a genial, contented smile upon his face.

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it when I get ready," and the little girl looks roguish and merry.

"Is it about Ponto?"

"It isn't anything about a dog," is the reply, in tones of infinite disgust.

"About the kitten, then?"

"No, sir," she answers, shaking her head and shutting her lips tightly together.

"Then it surely concerns the Mocking-bird or the Canary."

"Oh, you never can guess, never," she says, looking up mischievously.

"Is it yourself?"

"No, not particular. But it's about my friend," she adds, coquettishly.

"Just so; I had not thought of its concerning me before. Now I have guessed correctly, haven't I?"

"Only half. I have another friend now, you know. He's a boy."

"Oh, he is," returns Ben, laughingly.

"Yes, and he's been to see me this morning, only he didn't come purpose, and he left something that I've been keeping."

Ben has not noticed that Bertha's hand is closely shut together, but he notices it now, and some of her animation proves contagious in his case.

"He left some money, did he not, Bertha?"

"What made you guess so soon," she answers, disappointedly. But he is working vigorously at the chubby fingers, trying to unclasp them and get possession of their treasure. They rebel awhile, but finally open slowly and display, lying placidly in the hollow of the plump palm, four ten cent pieces. "He wanted me to tell you," and Bertha pauses a moment to collect her scattered thoughts and repeat the message properly, "that he forgot what number it was you told him to call at, and so he couldn't take you the change where you said,

but he would leave it with me, and I must not forget to give it to you, and he was very much obliged to you, sir. That's what my little friend said, Uncle Ben."

"He did right, and you did right; and the obligation is all on my side, ahem!" Ben puts her down, and going to the mirror, brushes the scanty locks that lie on either side his bald forehead, and leads her out to dinner, feeling immensely thankful and relieved.

His morning's experience is so good a proof of the truth of some of the observations he has made at various times during his association with Theophilus, that he cannot forbear giving the details as the meal progresses.

"It's only a wonder to me, that you didn't trust him with a ten dollar bill," says Mrs. Sharp, as he concludes.

"I would not be at all afraid to do it now. In fact, the boy or man who is faithful in little things, is quite apt to be in great."

"If you presume, after this one test, to believe in the honesty of one among a hundred street-beggars, it will be good enough for you, if you do lose your money. Your generosity is all impulse, with precious little judgment."

"No, it isn't either, Aunty Sharp," interrupts Bertha, defiantly, not understanding, in the least, what they are talking of, but feeling bound to defend her protector from any sin that may be laid at his door.

"Tut, tut, child, I did not say that impulsive generosity was not better for the world than the ungenerous impulses I'm always displaying. I'd like to see myself getting money changed by a young vagabond, simply because he happened to have an honest face above his ragged shoulders."

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Sharp, it is worth something to have met one who was too proud to beg; too conscientious to accept compensation without earning it, and too honest to steal. I'd like to do something for that urchin's advancement, to show that I appreciate him. He was a bright looking boy, and I 'took a fancy to him,' as the phrase goes. Probably I'll never see him again."

"When he had your money, you expected to see him. Now, that there is no reason why you shouldn't, you have less faith. You are an incomprehensible sort of a man," remarks Mrs. Sharp. "It's my private opinion that the boy will always be on hand after this, with an idea that you are a good subject for him to have a confidence game with."

"I wonder if you are not speaking of the boy I saw with Bertha, yesterday; the ragged little fellow that seemed to be all eyes?" Theophilus says, in an absent-minded way.

"Yes; the one you sent away, Mr. Steele, and wouldn't let have any dinner, when he hadn't had much breakfast, and made me go and leave him when I didn't want to; and he was my new little friend; and I said I didn't like boys, and I did and wanted to make it right," exclaims Bertha, breathlessly; "and I told him something, but it wasn't anything about you, for you ain't good to little children."

Ben bestows a glance that is as near reproof as he can make it, upon Bertha, and she is silenced for a time. Theophilus looks at the child sternly for a second, but vouchsafes no reply. She does not quail before him, as he would wish to have her, but looks at him intently, as if, when denied the privilege of talking, she would show her far from flattering opinion of him in her glances. Theophilus looks gloomy and dyspeptic. It would seem as if every mouthful of food he eats on the occasion of this noonday repast produces immediate indigestion in its most painful and despondent form.

"What is the lad's name, little one? Or, hasn't

the acquaintance progressed so far as that, yet?" asks Ben, trying to banish Bertha's antagonistic humor.

"Harry Antonio -- something. I don't remember the rest," says Bertha.

"Quite an aristocratic title for one in so humble a position," remarks Theophilus.

"Harry Antonio Dumonde, Oh, my!" says Bertha, proud of her memory, and laughing heartily upon her success in saying the whole name.

"Dumonde!" exclaims Theophilus, and there is a scarcely perceptible increase of pallor in his face. But he commences coughing, and this serves to prevent anything more being said by the man who, for a moment, is taken off his guard by a name.

But cognomens, of themselves, signify little, when there are so many people bearing the same one, and Theophilus is soon at ease again, chiding himself for his momentary embarrassment, and congratulating himself upon the fact that it has been unobserved. So it is, men seek to hide their own misdeeds, but the memories of them are ever ready and waiting to spring into existence at the touch of a magic word, or the breath of imagined suspicions. A guilty conscience is never free from the haunting fear of detection, even though all truth

may seem to be buried a thousand fathoms deep. There has come to be a frightened, crouching dread in the expression of Theophilus Steele's gray eyes when one chances to meet their gaze — which is not often — and a nervous twitching of his mouth that, in certain moods, is unpleasantly prominent. He often paces back and forth in the garden for hours, with his hands crossed behind him, and his head bent towards the ground. But where the little Bertha plays and revels in nature's smiles, he would seem to meet with frowns, from the sullen way in which he returns to the house and shuts himself in his own room.

CHAPTER X.

"To be is better than to seem."

It was many a day before Ben encountered the boy again; but he often alluded to him as the truthful lad with the dark, honest eyes, and, although scarcely realizing it, he watched the young faces, as they passed him in the street, with a sigh of disappointment that the one he had become interested in, and would most like to see, was not among them. One clear summer evening, as he was on his way home, he was startled suddenly by hearing the words, in wondrously familiar tones — "Any odd jobs, sir?" They came from a shop-door, and he stepped towards it; but, by the time he reached it, the speaker had disappeared, and he gazed at the surging waves of humanity in vain. The form of the boy was not to be seen, and the voice not borne to him again. But there was an urchin in front of him who, being one of the poverty-stricken brotherhood of rag-pickers and "odd-jobbers," might serve his purpose.

Bachelor Ben saluted him, and the boy came up, hopefully, for the hearty voice had in it a genuine ring of generosity that was not to be mistaken,

and this grimy little stranger, with his snub nose and empty pockets, had come to be an accurate judge of human nature as portrayed in the accents of human voices, through the vicissitudes of his oftentimes disheartening career. And this lad — after a remuneration — was only too glad to give what information he could with regard to the member of his fraternity who had just gone out of sight. He promised to see that the boy whom Ben was in search of should know that he asked for him, and would tell him to be on the corner the following morning that he might see him. Bachelor Ben was not one of those who did favors because it was convenient, or because the necessity for them was thrust under his notice, but it was not at all beneath him, not in the least at variance with his daily principles, to go into the by-ways and hedges and search out the fallen and oppressed, that he might aid them in rising a little higher in the scale of life. The next morning, when he passed the aforementioned corner, the acquaintance of the night previous was there, with half a dozen other individuals of the same unfortunate persuasion following closely at his heels. Ben surveyed them all, with his hands in his pockets, each and every lad watching, with animated expectancy, to

see him draw them out, for his fame had already spread abroad; but he did not draw them out this time. The dark eyes he had hoped to see were missing. After an inquiry or two, a chorus of sharp, young, half-fledged bassos hastened to inform him that the boy he had heard last night was sick this morning, and could not come.

They would each and every one be glad to do for him whatever he wished in their humble way; but he waved them all aside, and, after a time, managed to learn from number one, where his friend might be found. It was several weeks before Ben could spend time from the hurry of business cares to renew his search. He almost wondered, himself, that he did not forget the boy. But so it is; men are led through paths that they do not understand, for reasons that they know not of, and they look back sometimes and see that all things work together for good.

One night, after tea, Theophilus and Ben started out and proceeded for some distance down the avenue together. "Won't you attend the Missionary Society with me, to-night, Ben? You might find some little gems of knowledge in the questions that are to be discussed," said Theophilus.

"I've no doubt I could; but I might dissect

them, and think more of their source than of the truths themselves. Many of your speakers preach things that might benefit me, if they would only prove their entire belief in the things they utter by practicing them. I like eloquence; but it does not move me to hear fine words from men in public, if I have seen the littleness of their everyday eloquence in private. Why, it's like standing on the shore and throwing bait towards a poor little forsaken fish that has seen the hook you have used all day, and knows that you can be as harsh and cruel as your smile is tender. Men will stand there at your Missionary Society, to-night, and talk, who have carried their hooks about them for months—tantalizing their wives, putting their sharp points straight into the mouths of their debtors, jerking many a poor man's penny into their own pockets, and catching warily many a nibbler in the vortex of speculation, and yet bring tears into the eyes of their audience by their eloquent appeals for humanity. I'm the little fish who has had too good a view of the hook. They cannot catch me, so I'll go on my way rejoicing, and pay no heed to the charming bits of bait they throw out in their oratorical way."

"Their cause is good; and I should hope that,

because a few of its champions are known by you to be inconsistent men, you were too sensible to turn a deaf ear to the cause itself. It is the same with the church, the home and the farm. The workers in them may fail, but the work is as noble and as well worth doing as ever," said Theophilus, with more truth and less ostentation than usual.

"I believe it; I agree with you heartily," answered Ben. "But let no man set himself up to be a worker in the cause of benevolence who is not kind and charitable in his own daily life. Let no man choose to work for the good of homes if his heart is not as clean as his hands, and his own altar as sacred as he can make it. And as for the farmers: there's many a man working for them in public, who hesitates long before he clasps their rough, toil-worn hands in hearty greeting, or welcomes their outlandish forms without a touch of scorn and pride. Can true doctrines be taught successfully by false teachers? I don't believe it. A farmer can't raise good crops by talking eloquently about the way in which they ought to be cultivated. He must toil in the fields himself, and put his principles to the test in his own individual case, and, if his harvest is large, we shall listen to him

and feel that he has proved by his own action the worth of his cause, besides ennobling his occupation. I know some of the men who are to address you at the Society to-night, but if I listened to them I might smile when they wanted me to weep; for I should think of half-paid, hard-working servants and victimized fishes in the ocean of trade, whenever their voices grew tremulous with apparently pent-up feelings. And I should chuckle irresistibly whenever they made a gesture or forcible illustration, because I could see the hook while they thought me spell-bound by their wonderful arguments. If everyone would practice, so far as lies in his power, in private what he preaches in public, how glorious the lowliest calling would be. But, while in every branch of labor, so many forget the words 'Woe unto you, O ye hypocrites,' there will be need of Sincere Societies more than anything else."

Here the speakers parted company, one with the ostensible intention of going to the meeting where, according to Bachelor Ben's ideas, there were so many hypocrites, and the other, flaw-finder though he surely was, to walk on, and on, until the gas lamps occurred farther and farther apart, and he reached that part of the city which was almost

wrapped in darkness. He did not know that Theophilus paused a moment after leaving him, as if wondering what it was best to do.

Theophilus had never yet, although he had watched with unremitting diligence, found any evidence that Bachelor Ben was insincere in a single statement he had ever heard him earnestly utter, and it galled him that he, the man whom all men, but Ben, looked up to reverentially, should so often have found no other way to defend himself from his good-natured assaults, except by maintaining patient silence. His cold, gray eyes fairly glittered at the thought that by following him this night, he might find something crooked enough in his movements to be worth the straightening some time in the future, when he began moralizing to him on human inconsistencies. He began to think there was much crookedness and many turnings before he saw Ben stop, but he doubted if he could obtain any clue after all, when, after rapping loudly a number of times, he could dimly discern a man's form, and see that Ben was admitted to a large, dark, gloomy looking house, from whence proceeded but one feeble ray of light, and that in the chamber above. He wondered if his long walk would result in only this one circumstance, and if

there was no way by which he could learn the reason for this evening stroll of Ben's.

It was not, as you already know, against Theophilus Steele's principles — his private ones — to peer through key-holes or windows, but there was danger of broken bones, if he ascended the rickety steps, he thought, and there was certainly nothing inviting in the dismal, unlighted windows. He was sure that naked poverty walked in this place, and claimed the inmates of this house for its own. He felt that this mission of Ben's was a purely charitable one. Yet he had often wondered that the latter was so uncommunicative of his plans and purposes. His curiosity was now aroused, and he would hover around in spite of darkness, and appease it if he could. And so he watched, and stared, and wondered, as he did the night Bertha was left at Ben's door. After several minutes of unbroken silence, he distinguished the light growing dimmer and dimmer, until it disappeared entirely; then the window nearest which he was standing, on the first floor, reflected its rays, and he unscrupulously stepped up to it and unhesitatingly looked within. What he saw, was this: A tall, strong-looking man, with a German face, bearing a candle, Bachelor Ben following closely, with

his hat in his hand, and the flickering lights and shadows playing a game of hide-and-seek upon his bald forehead. A sleeping boy lying on a heap of straw in a lonesome corner, with a pale, sick face and wasted features. He saw Bachelor Ben approach, lay his hand upon the forehead, and gently push back the tangled locks of jet black hair. Then he saw the boy's eyes open slowly; saw that they were unusually large and lustrous, and that in them, there was an expression of instant, joyful recognition. He saw that the wasted hands were stretched forth, and that Ben knelt down and stroked them tenderly. Then he listened attentively, but he could not hear what Ben and the German were saying. His curiosity, for it was nothing else but the idlest of curiosity that could have kept him so long, was gratified, so he went away. He took a street car after awhile, and attended the Missionary Society the remainder of the evening, listening to speeches, that no doubt appealed strongly to his heart, for the redemption from sin and suffering, of all the helpless mortals of earth. If he drew comparisons in his own mind between the people around him and Ben, away off in the dark alley, it was because he could not sufficiently control his own thoughts to prevent this

natural consequence after his evening's experience. He was not quite prepared, however, a month afterwards, to hear Ben make the statement at the dinner table, that he had adopted a boy. "Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Sharp," he added quickly, "He will not be brought here. He is a poor, little orphan that I found living with a German. In fact, he is the manly, honest little fellow that I've known formerly as 'Bertha's Friend,' 'Odd Jobs' and Harry Dumonde. I happened to encounter him again." Ben did not boastingly own that he had searched him out, "and I found him sick, almost dying, wasting away with fever, and suffering from want of care and proper nursing. The German — Fritz by name — told me a very pitiful story in his broken English, of the American mother having died of consumption in his native land, and leaving the boy with him because he had been kind to her. He is a hard-working, ignorant young fellow, with, however, a great, good heart beating under his coarse, flannel shirt. Of course, I can do a great deal better by the boy than he, yet he refused, for a long time, to give him up. He has consented to do so now, providing he can see him once a week and keep track of him. Of course, I've no objections to that. I rather admire his

faithfulness. I thought first I'd let the little fellow work his way up in the office, commencing with what seems to be his ambition, odd jobs, but I've thought better of that plan now. He ought to be in school, so to school he goes the day after to-morrow. I've found a nice family where he can work for his board, and I can oversee him."

"It's a wonder you don't pay the highest price for that in some aristocratic family, where he can acquire gentility of manners," remarked Mrs. Sharp, who was in one of her ill-natured moods.

"In the first place, I couldn't afford it. In the second place, it would be his ruin. I am anxious to see what can be made of him, but he must help to make himself. I will do all I can for his improvement, and give him to understand that he must do the same. Taking the two things together, he will be quite apt to make a better specimen of a man than he could otherwise have been. I'm not at all sorry I became interested in him, and hunted — a place for him to board." Ben was so frank that he almost acknowledged what he had been doing — hunting out another life to build up into virtue and usefulness, but he saved himself in time, and never dreamed that Mrs. Sharp understood him perfectly, and was moralizing over this

further proof of his goodness; in her own way secretly commending his conduct, and longing to say something to the contrary. Neither did he know that Theophilus dogged his footsteps and witnessed the result of his search, for he did not look at all suspicious of having done such a thing while Ben was telling his story, but stared straight into space in a very indifferent and disinterested way.

CHAPTER XI.

A few seem favorites of fate
 In pleasure's lap carest;
 Yet, think not all the rich and great
 Alike are truly blest.

— BURNS.

We are glancing at a panoramic view of the life of the hero of this story, otherwise a continued narrative might reasonably be expected. If the scenes you view appear disconnected, I beg you, reader, to believe the statement of the person who manages the shifting of the curtain, that there are links which connect, what that responsible individual deems, the most important tableaux, what matter if the minor pictures are sometimes omitted, and a blank canvas is held up for your imagination to people with scenes and incidents?

Many years have passed since Bachelor Ben adopted for his own the little waif that was left at his door. School-days have come and are going swiftly by. The truth, candor and independence of the child Bertha have developed into rare attributes of those wondrous qualities in the maiden, and Bachelor Ben is proud of his charge; proud, not only of the graceful form, the beautiful dark-blue eyes with their heavy silken lashes, the

broad, fair forehead on which are mirrored intelligence and lofty aims, and the winning smile with which she thanks him every day for his care of her, but proud of the simple, unaffected goodness that he has been the means of aiding into their perfection.

For fifty years, Bachelor Ben has welcomed the sun and waved away the shadows, and we find him now as genial and merry-hearted as if youth were not so many miles behind, and old age coming, with such swift footsteps, to meet him.

And Bertha—

Standing with reluctant feet,
 Where the brook and river meet,"

is the joy of his own and Mrs. Sharp's hearts, as she moves through the great house that, with its three occupants who have all passed life's meridian, would otherwise seem to be lacking in freshness and delicacy.

The threads of silver are fast creeping into Ben's scanty locks, while Theophilus Steele's head is growing white, and care is digging deep lines on his sallow face. Mrs. Sharp is still crabbed and brusque, and her black eyes but look the keener, since time has fashioned firmly, and beyond recall, the restlessness of her character into her aged fea-

tures. Her hands, once so busily employed in household duties, have naught but their knitting, and often, not even that to do now, for, after a long season of toil and wasting of strength, that perhaps might otherwise have been longer retained, Theophilus Steele finally saw fit to lift the load from her shoulders, and engage a servant in her stead.

Then it was that Mrs. Sharp remarked, in her characteristic manner, "I'm sure I don't know how he happened to do it, unless he was afraid I'd work myself to death, and the remainder of his days be haunted by my spirit throwing dishes and kettles and broomsticks at his head. And if I had been permitted to throw 'em, I'll warrant you I would have taken good aim."

Ben has prospered, and has furnished for Bertha a suite of rooms in as fine a manner as the fastidious taste of any bachelor, or the aspiring mind of any modern young lady could desire. But that portion of the mansion over which Theophilus reigns himself is still as scantily and meagerly filled as when Ben entered it, years ago. Mrs. Sharp sits often in the old-fashioned rocker, in her own private apartment, and the large house is as eccentric and incongruous as ever, while its inmates are

striking representations, each in their individual way, of Joy, Hope, Misery and Discontent. For fear of difficulty in distinguishing each, on the part of the reader, I will state, that Bachelor Ben, with memories of what he has done and what he yet means to accomplish, is Joy; that Bertha, waiting upon life's threshold for the blessings that she expects to find within, is Hope; that Theophilus Steele, with his canting phrases of the heaven that he has not truly felt the glory of, is Misery; and that Mrs. Sharp, her heart filled with something from the three qualities, is Discontent.

While Theophilus has lost physical vigor, he still retains the calculating capacity that marks him a prominent business man, fortunate in speculations, greedy in gaining whatever can be gained, and never faltering in his journey down the avenues where wealth points the way — beyond comprehension to some benighted souls, perhaps, that the man of millions could also be the man of misery. But poverty and pleasure do go hand in hand, so do riches sometimes clasp the fingers of remorse, whose grasp they struggle in vain to loosen.

Joyful Ben and miserable Theophilus are spending an evening in their office, both working busily at their desks. One is oblivious to everything but

the row of figures before him; the other drumming idly with his fingers and whistling, casting an occasional glance towards the window, as the rain-drops patter softly against the panes, for spring showers fall gently, since they come not with the malicious spite of wintry storms that hide earth's verdure, but to gladden and refresh it, and, like angel spirits, who "go about doing good," they would make as little noise about it as possible.

But Ben finally becomes tired of whistling and listening to the drip, drip, drip outside, and, astonishing as it may seem, Theophilus becomes weary of the figures; so the two men get into one of their controversies. Ben leans over his desk, with his pen behind his ear, and looks at his partner, who is picking up and putting away things preparatory to closing the office.

"Didn't I hear you talking with some of your friends, to-day, Steele, upon the subject of a new church?"

"Yes, we were discussing the matter, and, in fact, have been for some time past," is the reply.

"You are not going to form a new organization, are you?" asks Ben, with a droll smile. "In these times of new parties, new departures, and new

things generally, I suppose it wouldn't be at all strange if you did."

"In building a new house of worship," says Theophilus, glancing at his shiny hat upon the peg, and pausing to listen to the rain outside that threatens to mar its gloss, "In building a new house of worship, I should earnestly hope that we would cling to the old creed."

"Just so," says Ben, beginning to sharpen a pencil that lies on the desk before him. Theophilus entirely ignores the interruption, and continues, "It is to be of stone, with a lofty spire, and stained glass windows. In fact, adds the speaker, solemnly, "as handsome an edifice as can be put up without too great a pressure on the finances of the church and congregation."

"By-the-way, how much is it your intention to subscribe towards this edifice? if I may be so inquisitive," asks Ben.

"I have not fully decided. I shall, however, plant as many roots in the vineyard of the Lord as my circumstances will allow, when the time comes, knowing that they will bear much fruit."

"When do you expect to partake of this fruit, Theophilus?"

"Not until I am admitted to the green pastures

that lie on the other side of Jordan, when my share will be given me."

"Wouldn't you feel a little easier about the matter if you could somehow manage to get a taste of it here, before you cross the dark, uncertain flood? Don't you think it is possible for you to do so, Steele, if you plant the roots according to the right method?"

"No, I do not. As punishments come after this life, so do rewards; I do not expect to get either on this earth."

"Then I pity you. I've never planted a vine — either literally or figuratively speaking — that I've not had my reward in seeing it grow, if nothing more, and if the soil proves poor and nothing thrives, then I have the satisfaction of thinking that I did my duty. When the image of a stunted vine creeps in, I accept it as my punishment for not planting it at a different season, or for the careless handling of some other vine that I might have planted in the past. I believe that earth is a place of rewards and punishments, but what we don't get belonging to us here, we are sure to get when we leave it."

"I noticed that you were very much interested in the sermon last Sunday, and I even dared to hope

that you were becoming enough interested in the cause of Christ to subscribe something for our new building. I think you would never regret it, if you were to help the church, even if you disbelieve in it."

"I do not disbelieve in churches, but I do disbelieve in many churchmen. I think churches are grand helps, but their members do not all avail themselves of these helps. I believe in Christ, ay, that I do, but I don't believe in the real sincerity of some men who call themselves Christians. God's church is the world, and when we help that to be better and holier, we are best building up the church. I think it will be a good thing for you to invest your money in this new project. I have no doubt it will be for me also; yet I do doubt if all we can give will be worthy of a reward if we do not remember at the same time, that worshipping in churches is the form of religion, and that the substance lies in our own lives and acts."

"Then you do not approve of decorating the sanctuary and of making it a temple of beauty."

"I believe in making it as beautiful as human hands can make anything, and as exquisite and rare in its workmanship, and of sacredly consecrating it to the Father above; but a church is of no

more value than any other structure that is equally pleasing without, if it is as hollow within, and be not filled with living truths."

"It seems to me you are very inconsistent, my friend. You believe in us, and yet you refuse to join us."

"Did I say that I believed in you, Theophilus Steele?" says Ben good-naturedly. "Pooh! I believe that you are an excellent business partner, and that profits are greater than they would be if you were not sailing with me in the boat of trade, and I think we two have sailed together so long that there might be a financial wreck—on my part at least—if we were to dissolve partnership. I think you are sharp and shrewd, and I do not doubt your honesty in only one thing, and that, as you know, is in the religious beliefs which you profess."

"As I am the most capable of judging of my own opinions, we will not discuss that point. Men have always differed upon these things. They always will, I fear. But I shall pray for the time to come when there will be one fold, and one shepherd; one truth, one gospel and one baptism."

"Pray away, Theophilus. But people's prayers will not be answered until praying people exhibit a

different spirit. Charities must be broadened and hearts be liberalized, and then I believe there will be one fold. But it will take a long time yet, if men cling so tenaciously to their particular creeds, and forget that the Good Shepherd cannot unite them unless each member of the fold will come down from the stern, immovable mountains and the rugged hill-tops that are the most acceptable to them, and herd together in the peaceful valleys in greater unity."

"You would have them herd in the valleys of sin, Ben, and of unbelief, with Satan for the Shepherd."

"You are mistaken; I would have all men believe, but they must not forget that there is no place where Satan so delights in making a social visit as in the Christian church. He only cares to make formal calls upon his own disciples, since he is sure of their support, but with Christians, he feels he must exchange more than the civilities of politeness, and he plans to always appear before them in his most tasteful apparel, and use, in their presence, his choicest language, that so they may long for his society and secretly cherish his memory in their hearts."

Theophilus believes that he would be justified in

taking offense, if he did not feel, deep within his own mind, that he himself needs, according to Ben's logic, to be the recipient of only formal calls from his Satanic Majesty. If he were but loyal to his own cause, and practiced truly what he professes, how boldly would he defend himself against the innuendoes and open assaults of Ben's statements. Innocence is brave and strong in declaring itself, and its fair brow flushes speedy denial when abuse is hurled upon it, while guilt has none but feeble weapons and seeks to hide itself under evasions and resemblances of honor.

Ben sees the selfishness lurking under Theophilus Steele's piety, and he says to himself daily: "Shall I let him think I believe him to be true, when I believe him to be false? Shall I encourage insincerity by ignoring its existence in him, and thus assent to his canting theories? No; it is not thus that my God would have me espouse His cause. He would not have me stab the sinner. He would have me love him. But He would have me stab the sins which I see and hate. He would not have me pretend to see but the graceful, curling smoke of the pine, when I can distinguish the odor and know it to proceed from sulphur. I will bow to Theophilus Steele, the man, because he is a man,

and because God made him in his image; but the false theories of the man, I will not recognize as aught but enemies. May God forgive me my trespasses as I forgive others, but may He also fight against the evils of my nature as I fight against those of Theophilus Steele, and those like him. God would have us wrap the mantle of Charity about the sinner, but He would never have us seek to disguise to ourselves the presence of sin. The halo of compassion is beautiful, but the heavy atmosphere of justice must blend with it or it is but mist." And so Ben carries out his principles, much to Theophilus Steele's discomfort.

When the two men leave the office, they proceed together towards their home, each carrying an umbrella, for it is still raining steadily. When they go up the walk leading towards the house, both see the bright light in Bertha's sitting-room, and hear the cheerful tones of her piano, as she glibly fingers the keys. But when they enter the house they part—as they have for many a night—one to be warmly welcomed by a daughterly kiss, the other to go silently on to his own room, where there is naught but loneliness—cheered by no bright word of greeting. But so he would have it. These are his boarders merely, and he has given

them to understand, on more than one occasion in the past, that their pleasures are not his to share or to increase.

Bertha comes out into the hall to meet them to-night, and laughingly exclaims: "Why, Uncle Ben, your coat is fairly dripping with water. One would think you must be the veritable rain-king himself. Take it off before you contract the 'rheumaticisms,' as Rip Van Winkle would say. Here's your nice, dry dressing-gown, that I beg you to wear as an antidote."

"Thank you, Doctor Bertha. Any more prescriptions?" is the answer, as she shakes the rain-drops from the cast-off garments, and hands him a pair of slippers.

"Yes, just one. You must come into my room and sit by the fire a little while. I had one put on the grate purposely, because it is so very damp to-night."

Ben follows with willing obedience, and the door closes, shutting out from Theophilus a cheerful scene of home-like welcome.

"I had a daughter, once, who might have greeted me like that. I am getting older every day, and need her, but she is not here to care for me. Would to God I might feel her touch upon my brow to-

night, as Ben does Bertha's. There is nothing for me but blank solitude, and no one to care whether this damp clothing chills me or not," he thinks, for a moment. But, as he enters his own room, the after-thought starts up to meet him, and he continues to himself, "Why did that girl ever come here to remind me continually of my loss, with her rare sweetness and beauty, and her loving ways? I could almost hate her for them — and I do." His teeth are clenched together, and he grates them passionately as he stands eyeing his desolate hearth. "There has not been a day since she came into this house, and there will not be a day until she leaves it, that she will not awaken dreams of what might have been, had I not known the heiress who jilted me. Ah! why did I do that, years ago? and why can I not forget it all, instead of watching with envy every bright look that Bertha Grant gives Ben, and long for her to go away out of my sight, since I, too, cannot have the same from my own child? I hate the world that I live in, because it shows me such black, ugly things, down deep in my own heart, but above all, I rebel against this girl whose every action brings them plainly before me."

Bachelor Ben has not been in long, before Mrs.

Sharp enters Bertha's room also. Theophilus is nervous and dreads to be alone, so he goes to the lonesome dining-room in search of her, and afterwards up the stairs, and raps upon her door, but meets with no response. Anything for company to distract his thoughts from himself, and take them out of the dismal groove into which they have fallen. But he does not find Mrs. Sharp, and so he goes back to his own room, muttering to himself: "No one cares for me in my own house, though there are plenty of people outside who think me a saint. And think it they shall, so long as I move among them. Her rooms are the pleasantest in the house, because Ben made them so, but if they were the plainest, it would be the same. They would be sought by Mother Sharp and Ben, for Bertha is the magnet. But she does not attract me. She rather repels me, and I am haunted and agonized in her presence. Her purity and sweetness are like a daily thorn in my flesh."

CHAPTER XII.

The weakest among us has a gift, however seemingly trivial—which is peculiar to him, and which, if worthily used, will be a gift to his race forever.—RUSKIN.

"There is a world of poetry in these mysterious ties of love."

There are machines called colleges, with wheels in the form of books, and preceptors, which are scattered all over the land. And these same machines take in boys and—if they have strong faculties of right and capabilities for good—after grinding and disciplining them turn them out men, if they have truly and sufficiently availed themselves of advantages, qualified for the posts they mean to fill in life.

Harry Dumonde was placed in one of these great knowledge-giving machines. He once submitted himself to Bachelor Ben, and was plucked from the field of ignorance and poverty. Then he submitted again, and was drawn into the primary department of a graded school, where there was no little husking done. Then higher, and higher, into machines that crushed and broke, preparatory to the finishing process, and finally, with all things perfected in readiness, he entered the mammoth ma-

chine which was to complete the transformation and grind him into scholarly development.

It took many a week of hard, mental labor, many an hour of persistent study, but he was now approaching the end. Bachelor Ben was waiting proudly and eagerly for the graduating day to come. He made no secret of his deep interest in this young man. There was not one among his friends who was not familiar with the name of Harry Dumonde, but he never thought to add that his interest had stood more than one practical test.

Harry's life had been busy, full of mental and physical labor since, when a little lad doing "odd jobs" and living with the stalwart German, he had been befriended by Ben. The last time Bertha saw him, he was an awkward Freshman, who came to spend a few weeks of his vacation with his benefactor.

There was, then, a bashful boy and coquettish school girl friendliness between them, made, however, a little unpleasant at times by the sparring of two independent young tongues that would have their own pedantic speeches to make in spite of disagreement and diverse opinions. Although their mutual friend and helper, Ben, would have had them on the best of terms, he found it impossible

to promote the brotherly and sisterly feeling between them that he desired, in his two adopted children.

In childhood, she had always termed him her "little friend," and he had looked upon her as the "sweet little Bertha," but when she saw him the last time, he was at so verdant a period of his existence, that it was as much as she could do to keep from smiling whenever the scant curtain of down upon his upper lip came within range of her view. Each felt amicably inclined towards the other in absence, but companionship brought him an air of patronizing indifference to her charms that vexed her. She was the younger, yet she had matured more rapidly and, he thought, considered him rather too boyish to be worth conversing with to any great extent. She believed his affectation of indifference to be real, and he believed that her cool demeanor proceeded from an idea of superiority in herself. There was no sense in this shadow of a misunderstanding, but there never is any sense in the disagreements of any true lovers, and it is an utter impossibility to explain them until they float along towards the sunshine and finally explain themselves. So one day when Bachelor Ben informed the household that Harry was in the city,

and was coming to partake of tea with them, it was, with what she tried to convince herself, the utmost disregard for his opinion, that Mademoiselle Bertha arrayed herself for the visit. She was a young lady now, but she tried to forget that he must have grown into a young gentleman. His voice had been melodious only in the gruff, uneven cadences of declining boydom then. She was not fully prepared for its deep, rich tones as she heard them when he ascended the steps with Bachelor Ben. The sun was just setting gloriously in the west, and Bertha sat near an open window, stitching upon a piece of embroidery; but when she heard the familiar, yet changed tones, her nimbly moving finger paused, and she leaned her head forward to listen, while the sunshine played in rippling gleams upon her wavy, brown hair, and lighted up the beautiful blue eyes bent upon the open door beyond. She wondered why her cheeks should take occasion to burn. Then she heard Ben laughingly tell his companion that Bertha must have hidden herself somewhere for fear of appearing too glad to see her "little friend," or else she would be coming out to meet him as usual. He would go and find her. This speech resulted in putting her on the defensive at once. Ah! 'twas a pity she should

have overheard him. The blush upon her face was so becoming, and withal she made so pretty a picture sitting in the window, her rosy lips dimpling in an irresistible smile of welcome. But all fled in a moment, and she arose from her graceful position before Harry entered. She banished the embroidery and consigned it quickly to the depths of her dress pocket, and much of the sunshine lay behind her as she came forward to meet him. To be sure, she retained the pleasant smile which she felt was due to everyone; but the sparkling, girlish expression had all vanished, as she took Harry Dumonde's hand in greeting. She had not known before how glad she was to see him again, and now she struggled to hide the fact from him.

When he left her, she was the pretty, winning school girl, with scarcely enough tact to disguise her likings, but enough candor and abruptness to plainly exhibit her antipathies. Now, as she stood before him, he felt her to be a rare, beautiful woman, with the gestures of a queen and the unapproachableness of those same regal personages. No one would think now that she had hidden herself. Her manner quelled the thought, and proved that she was above it, without her saying a word, and Harry thought she was not glad to see him at all.

Hands can clasp hands in absence, and seem to feel each other's throbbing pulse, but the thought, "Here we stand together," makes presence even more intangible, sometimes, than when miles of separation intervene. This is the thought that crosses Harry Dumonde's mind as he realizes that he is standing before the person whose memory has been like a radiant star, leading and guiding him on when the darkness of discouragement seemed to surround him.

"I am happy to meet you again, Harry," said Bertha, simply.

"It gives me pleasure to hear you say that, Bertha," he replied, with so much masculine ease and self-possession, that Bertha surprisedly contrasted it with the former bashful look and tone with which he had been wont to meet her. Conversation persisted in lagging, until Ben entered the room. There were many things passing through the mind of each that must needs remain unspoken, so Bertha asked a few trivial questions, and his

"— Answer, oft at random made,
The wandering of his thoughts betrayed."

"College life has improved our Harry, hasn't it, Bertha?" asked Ben.

"The observation of so short a time will not

allow me to judge," she replied, laughing, "and besides, Uncle Ben, you do not state explicitly in what respect."

Bachelor Ben would do better not to particularize too much on points of this kind, if he wanted to adjust love matters, but he did so want to help them on, in his good-natured way, that he grew quite reckless.

"Why, in looks, classic profile, in manners — and has agreed with him generally. In fact, Harry is an admirable specimen of manhood. Don't you think so yourself, Bertha, eh?"

"I always thought him very good looking," she replied, evasively.

"And now?" asked Ben.

"I think him decidedly handsome," was the frank answer, after a moment's pause. Harry acknowledged the compliment, but it was not for beauty of feature, that he would have Bertha praise him. Ben felt this, and exclaimed: "He has not applied himself to study so long for the mere purpose of chiseling his profile, but if strokes from his mental hammer have also aided in physical perfection, I, for one, am not astonished nor at all sorry. The spirit of one's pursuit moulds itself into the face. Study tells upon the student, and we are

quite apt to distinguish him wherever he is. Mathematicians are sure to wear, in time, the expression of an intricate problem upon their brows. Young ladies given to useless and frivolous amusements are quite certain to betray a meaningless simper when they seek to show depth of character. Those like my Bertha, here, who are kind to everyone—, notwithstanding certain lofty ways that would seem to say: 'Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther'—have goodness beaming from their faces, and cannot disguise it, even when they attempt a little bit of evasion and conversational surgery. There is this much about it, Harry: Bertha is dreadfully independent, and, like Mrs. Sharp, cuts sometimes with the skill of a practiced surgeon, but she has the greatest quantity of healing salve in her composition imaginable, and the dear girl has a wonderfully successful method of applying them."

"I must be careful not to exhaust my laboratory then, Uncle Ben. And Harry, I must humbly own that I am not so good as Mrs. Sharp, if I do resemble her in this respect, for she always heals when she hurts. It is not all who do."

"Just so," answered Ben. "But Harry must know that my Bertha never hurts purposely. It is

only when her weapon slips a little, and her patients cannot blame her for what she cannot help."

"Perhaps they can blame her for not steadying her nerves, before she begins, however," added Harry, looking both earnest and mischievous, and thinking of former disputes.

"Thank you, for the suggestion," said Bertha, giving him a quick glance, and nodding her head jauntily.

Ben felt uncomfortable, and did not like this dallying of words between his two favorites. It seemed to him that both were at peace with all their friends and at swords' points with each other. It was not as he would have it, and Bachelor Ben, who seemed never to have managed many very serious friendships on his own account, thought he would try his powers upon this apparently waning one between Harry and Bertha. He did not stop to think that troubled waters proceed from various causes, that will right themselves, perhaps the sooner without the use of oil, nor that the swords' points might be shown while the sheaths lay deeply buried out of sight.

Theophilus came home after a time, and deigned to enter and converse with them. He treated Harry very graciously, and they seemed to be on

quite congenial terms by the time the summons for supper called them all into the dining-room. Theophilus had seen even less of Harry than had Bertha, since he had grown to man's estate, and he could but acknowledge to himself, after talking with him awhile, that he was worthy Ben's commendations.

"What calling do you intend to follow?" Theophilus asked, casually.

"I am not quite certain, sir, what profession I am best fitted for. It is a question that, I think, requires no little thought and consideration. My best friend here, Mr. Grant, advises journalism, and I would dearly like to please him, but I have found, sir, that there is one thing colleges cannot do—they cannot manufacture genius."

"Exactly," replied Theophilus. "Genius is a gift that Providence is responsible for. Neither the lessons of this world, nor the schools of any denomination can confer it upon mankind. They can bring out its traits more prominently and improve such talents as have been bestowed. Of course, there are people with one talent, and others with five. The one can be strongly developed by study, but the other four cannot be added. That is what you mean, is it not?"

"I think it is," answered Harry, a little mystified. "The practice of law has also been strongly urged upon me, and I am inclined to think more favorably of that profession, just now, than any other."

"There's a deal of money to be made in it. I think it would be quite wise for you to adopt it," said Theophilus, in his calculating way.

"I presume there is. But it might not be an intelligent selection on my part. My own case might prove, as many others have done, that scholarship is not the measure of a man's power, but that success lies in individual capability."

"That is right, Harry, my lad. Years ago, I trusted you not to steal. Now I trust you not to enter any profession, simply to get a living," said Ben.

"Be an anomaly, Harry," interrupted Bertha, earnestly. "Be a first-rate, honest, Christian lawyer."

"Why not espouse the cause of religion?" asked Theophilus, almost ashamed that this came as an after-thought, and not in his first proffered advice. Enter the ministry and preach the gospel to every creature."

"I am not qualified for that, sir," replied Harry,

soberly. "I am so perplexed by doubts myself, that I could not be a teacher. I lack the personal power that a minister ought to possess."

"But you can gain it, Harry," said Bertha, quietly. "There is a great, big book, full of texts, that you will certainly have to comprehend before you can be a just lawyer. There are so many ways of promoting the cause of which you speak. I do not think that the gospel needs always to be preached from the pulpit, Mr. Steele."

If Theophilus heard, he did not heed, but continued: "Yes, my young man, decide now to take up your cross, enter the field and labor for the redemption of mankind from the sin and wickedness of which the world is so full."

"It is not my calling, or, at least, does not seem so to me now. I must be cured of blindness before I can lead the blind."

"But are you trying to be cured? That is the all-important question," said Theophilus.

"Yes, sir; I trust I am."

"Then all you have to do is to say the word, and your eyes will be open to the truth. Join the church, and the doors of the Kingdom will be open to you."

"Yes, lad," said Ben heartily, "Join the church

if you can. I would like to see you in it, but when the doors have closed, dear boy, and shut you in, don't try to slyly pick the locks and go outside for a few whispered words with Satan, that are going to further some selfish, unchristianlike plan of your own, but stay in and bravely carry out its principles."

"Exactly," said Theophilus, simply because he could think of nothing else to say at that moment, and gazing fixedly at nothing in particular. Then he revived a little, and after a moment or two relapsed into one of his sentences of obscurity. "When you once make up your mind to accept the light, at that moment you will find that you no longer walk in darkness."

"I am not surrounded by utter darkness now," said Harry, running his shapely hand through his dark hair. "I have welcomed many a ray in my life, but the one grand, penetrating beam that I have heard others tell of, has not come to me. I have longed for it—and do long still."

"Long awhile longer," said Bertha, whispering softly, and giving him a bright, hopeful look, "and you'll find your way out of the labyrinth. It is not a sudden flash. It is a growth."

If Harry found this silent advice very grateful,

and if it stimulated and moved him more than a hundred words had sometimes done from the pulpit, neither Theophilus nor Ben were any the wiser.

"Do you not think," said Theophilus, "that by searching the scriptures, you can familiarize yourself with their lessons, and, in time, find it your duty to preach them? The world is getting into a sorrowful state of wrong and sinfulness, and we need just such young men as you to put on our armor and stand up boldly for our cause. You believe in it, do you not?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I believe in it fully. But there are many things I do not and cannot understand, as yet. I feel that the work of the ministry is not that which I am fitted to perform. I should want to preach because I felt moved to do it, and because my Creator intended me for that work, and not to be the mouth-piece of any theological school. I should want to be able to write earnest sermons that would touch the heart, rather than sensational ones that would affect the head. Of all mockeries, I think the mockery of religion is the most inexcusable, and insincerity in this cause the most damning."

"Just so," said Ben, trying to refrain from giving Theophilus a side glance, indicating his appre-

ciation of this innocent thrust. "Do not be guilty of choosing any profession that you do not feel actually in the spirit for embracing. If you did that, as a lawyer, you would find yourself flimsy and powerless in argument; as a physician, discouraged by the first visitation of a sleepless night, and as a minister, preaching by rule and praying by rote would result in no profit, either to yourself or congregation."

"A servant in the vineyard of the Master, be he ever so humble, is ever worthy the respect of men," said Theophilus, as if it were a great consideration.

"Yes; if he be a faithful and devoted servant. I hear of many a false prophet, many a wolf in borrowed habiliments," said Harry.

"Yet, the very name, minister, is full of meaning. Let one enter a stranger's door, and his sacred calling insures, as a general thing, the reverence of the people living in it. There is no garb more prepossessing than that of a priest or a preacher," said Theophilus.

"Yet God will recognize His servants, not by the cut of their clerical coats, but by their deeds. I cannot believe otherwise than that the life is the exponent," said Ben, feelingly.

"We will keep out of argument on these sub-

jects this time, if possible," remarked Theophilus, and since he could not even make his own views plain, he showed great wisdom, but his assurance was astonishing as he added, with suavity, "You have your opinions and I have mine. They have clashed again and again, but I cannot make you look at these things in the right light."

"The right light, eh?" said Bachelor Ben, meditatively, and the dent came between his brows as he saw that the two young people were listening attentively, and he wished his influence to be good. "You think I am on the wrong side, Steele. I would like to be on the side of the church, for I know that Christ instituted it, but I cannot, so long as fixed creeds lie in my way. I cannot, as I now feel, get on the side you wish without being a sneak, for I could not go straight through. I would be obliged to climb over, creep under or go a long way round. Bertha has gone straight through without any obstructions, and if you can, Harry, I hope that you will do the same. But as regards the question we have at issue, I want you, my lad, to decide for yourself, and I think you are pretty sure to do it. No one can judge of the bent of your mind so well as yourself. I do not wish to influence you in the slightest degree in this matter.

But you must remember this: it is better to be a first-rate switch tender, carefully sending people on to a safe and honest track, than to be a fifth-rate minister of the gospel. And remember, also, that you cannot grow as God would have you, when you are out of your place."

Bachelor Ben turned to Bertha a moment after this and said, with a merry twinkle in his black eyes, "That lad will make a preacher by-and-by, dearie, and he'll be a first-rate one, too."

The tea-table chat had an end, as all chats do, and Ben and Theophilus found it necessary to go to the office for the evening. Harry proceeded towards the hall for his hat, with the intention of accompanying them. Bertha realized the importance of her position as hostess — and perhaps a little something else that she would not have cared to let others know — and came out —

"On hospitable thoughts intent."

"Must you go now, Harry?"

"I had thought to do so," he answered, holding his hat and idly twirling it, with just the faintest tinge of his former bashfulness.

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Ben. "Stay here and make yourself agreeable to Bertha. It is some

time since you have seen each other. You will need to be getting acquainted over again. She wants you to remain, I know from the way in which the 'rose-tint deepens on her cheek.' How poetical I am becoming in my old age. Must be something inspiring in the atmosphere."

There is something inspiring and suggestive of poetry in the scene before him. Even Theophilus can but observe it, as he surveys the two forms. Harry, tall, straight and manly, looking, perhaps, as wishful as he did years ago, when Bertha said that he might come in. Bertha waiting, with downcast eyes, for his decision, not begging him to remain by her side, but proudly willing to have him.

"I shall return early to-night. Better stay, Harry," advised Ben, gratis.

"Is it agreeable? Would you prefer that I should do so, Bertha?"

"It will be perfectly agreeable, but I should prefer you to act your own pleasure," said Bertha, toying with a locket attached to her gold necklace.

"Then I must assuredly remain," he replied, frankly.

"Make yourselves amiable then. I shan't be gone long." Ben's words implied a faint doubt of

their being quite apt to make themselves as he suggested, otherwise the mood of excessive amiability might have sooner fastened itself upon them. As it was, he almost frightened it away. Then the encouragement he offered when he stated that he should not be gone long was not the most comforting thing that he could have said, under the circumstances, nor the most conducive to social converse, for lovers do not like to be limited, and cannot freely exchange their sentiments, when they are expecting every moment to be interrupted by the arrival of a third party. Whenever Bachelor Ben tried to help this friendship, which was far deeper and at a more mysterious stage of development than he dreamed, he seemed to hinder. The course of true love had its old established reputation to keep up, and, even when it might as well, it would not run quite smoothly.

The evening passed pleasantly, take it all together. If they did not fully agree upon all the topics discussed, it gave greater zest to the conversation, and perhaps, if anything, increased their interest in each other. When Ben returned, he found them laughing over the anecdotes of college life, which Harry was relating with great animation.

When Harry took his departure and bade Bertha good-night at the door, he felt as if all the glory of the sun and stars was concentrated in Theophilus Steele's house, and when Bertha closed the carved, rich door behind him, and shut out the sound of her own clear, woman's voice, the darkness of evening came upon him with a vivid contrast, and brought a sudden awakening. Then he looked back at the lighted window, where the shadow of a graceful figure fell softly upon the curtain, and thought, "I have a work to do. It will be years before I can dare to ask her. May God bless and guide my Bertha."

CHAPTER XIII.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. — *PROV., xxviii: 13.*

"Business calls me to the sea-shore for a few weeks, Bertha. How would you like to go with me?"

"Strange question for you to propound, Uncle Ben. As if any girl's love of adventure would permit her to say nay to such a proposal, without better reasons than I have."

"Just so. Get yourself ready by next week. And you too, Mrs. Sharp, if you feel equal to the journey."

"I've never seen the time when I was not equal to a journey, either up hill or down yet in my lifetime, when once I made up my mind to attempt it. And when it comes to going straight across the country by rail, I don't see why I shouldn't be able to go as well as anybody."

"Very true," said Bertha quietly, "and I will finish your new dress, so that you may be resting until we go."

"I've not complained of being tired yet, that I know of."

"And I'll buy some fresh ribbons for your best cap, too," continued Bertha, paying no heed to the interruption. "Why, you'll be so 'captivating' when you once get it on that you will scarcely know yourself. You must have a new bonnet, also. Your old one looks shabby, and I know you don't approve of things that have degenerated into that condition."

"It must be I don't approve of myself then. It's hard telling which is the shabbiest, my old bonnet or my old body."

"You won't feel that way after you've inhaled the fresh sea-breeze, Mrs. Sharp," exclaimed Ben. "It's wonderfully invigorating. I've no doubt it will put a new soul into you."

"Then I don't care to go. I wouldn't mind having a new, young body, but when it comes to soul, I'd rather have my old, surly one, after all."

"I was speaking figuratively, Mrs. Sharp," laughed Ben, "and meant that it would increase your supply of animal spirits."

"Worse yet, then. It's one reason why I would like to go with you, to get away from animal spirits. Old Ponto has been whining and barking around until I'm all out of patience with him. It just seems to me that he will never die, but stay

here and appeal to one's sympathies. It's precious little sympathy he gets from me, however."

"So I judged," said Ben, "when I saw you putting straw in his kennel and feeding him on the fat of the land, yesterday. That reminds me of an original conundrum: Why does Mrs. Sharp resemble the dog whom she professes to dislike?"

"Because they are both old and ill-natured, and snap and snarl at every one who comes near 'em," replied the lady in question, without a moment's pause. "I think that's the first conundrum I was ever known to guess."

"Incorrect. Guess, dearie!"

"Because she has always been a true friend to Bertha Grant, in spite of certain barking propensities."

"Just so. But it isn't the answer I had thought of at first. I should have used the well-worn words, 'Because her bark, like Ponto's, is far worse than her bite.'"

"Thank you, sir, for the compliment. It is rather doubtful in its nature, but it is of the kind I've had all my life, and I'm getting used to 'em."

"I am not through yet, Mrs. Sharp. If you are like Ponto in one respect, you are in another, also. He has been faithful to me for many years. So

have you, and Bertha's answer was by far the best."

"Humph," was the expressive sound that issued from the old lady's lips. "There is such a thing as dogs being chained to one spot, and being faithful because they can't very well be anything else. I was chained to this house because my own home was broken up, and besides I was left too poor to live very comfortably away from it. Bertha was brought here in spite of me. If I've done her any good, it's been because I couldn't help it. I never asked you to come here, that winter morning, and leave her with me. But when you did, I couldn't neglect her without being like a heathen. It's quite a consolation to me to think I've never done anything worse than nearly scold her head off, for she has turned out to be as good as girls will average — though nothing to be proud of."

Ben looked up and pursed his lips, preparatory to ejaculating "Just so," but found upon consideration that he could not quite agree with her in her amendment. As for being proud of her, he could not help feeling like that every moment.

Bertha spent a few days in performing the numerous feminine duties that devolved upon her in getting herself and Mrs. Sharp ready for traveling.

If she thought of herself last, it was but another instance of the success of the training received, and the result that had come to her through Bachelor Ben's influence. She was full of unassuming, every-day goodness, seeing the many opportunities that life presents for making friends feel that there is such a thing as real friendliness in the world, and getting often into the transparent vehicle of self-forgetfulness, from which she could look out and see more clearly the places where help was most needed. But in her nature there was a certain calm independence that asserted itself in favor of the right and against the wrong, with, at times, almost startling vehemence. Her blue eyes could soften with pity, and they could flash with an in-born pride. When she believed a thing to be right and just, she was fixed and immovable in her statements about it. She would sacrifice nothing for the fulfillment of selfish purposes, and the path of duty, even in its minor details, she never shirked from treading firmly, in spite of thorns and brambles. She was filled with womanly gentleness, yet she was gifted with strong self reliance, and these added to her physical charms made her a power in Theophilus Steele's home.

The morning arrived on which Bachelor Ben

and his friends were to begin their journey. Bertha arose early, with anticipation giving new glories to the sunrise, as she saw it from the out-look of her chamber window. She was not going to Harry, but she was going towards him. There was a vague pleasure in the thought that even though she should not see him they would be nearer to each other. Her heart was light and her step elastic as she descended the long stairway, in her pretty gray traveling suit. Ben was at the foot of it, with satchels in hand, waiting for her, and his beaming eyes glancing up at her with the kindliness that had never been known to alter.

Mrs. Sharp was sitting upon a trunk near the door, waiting for the hack to come that was to take them to the train. Her chronic ailments, disquiet and dissatisfaction, had been vastly augmented by a sleepless night, caused by the fear that she and the other would-be-travelers might oversleep in the morning. She seemed to be musing in the most thoroughly misanthropic way, for she paid not the slightest heed to Bertha's cheery greeting.

Bertha had long since become accustomed to her peculiarities of temperament, and was not to be ignored like this. "Did you sleep well last night, Auntie Sharp? Are you in good journeying order?"

"Sleep! The very word is tantalizing. I never closed my eyes until just two minutes before I ought to have been opening 'em. This is a pretty time of day to be compelling an old woman like me to be up and stirring."

"There is no compulsion in the matter, Mrs. Sharp," said Ben, good-humoredly. "You can sit on that trunk all day, if you wish. Nothing could induce us to make you go away, if you would prefer to remain at home."

"I've not said I did want to remain at home yet. As for my placing myself upon this trunk for the day, I'm inclined to think Bertha would offer some objections. Girls are full of vanity everywhere, and she has her full share of it. If she had her choice between the delectable contents of this trunk and the decrepit personage on the outside, there is no doubt in my mind as to which would go to the sea-shore and which wouldn't. What is a bit of faded gentility in comparison to a lot of fresh gew-gaws?"

"Let me see," exclaimed Ben thoughtfully, with the dent forming itself gradually into its accustomed place. "A bit of faded gentility, h—m, compared with a lot of fresh, h—m, gew-gaws! Why, they bear the same relation to each other

that a well-conned, well-worn, dearly prized letter from a beloved friend does to a lot of pleasant unimportant little notes and addresses that are waiting to be opened."

"Humph! It's not necessary for you to waste your energies in solving an answer to everything I say, as if it were an enigma. They are not my forte. But why, in the name of common sense, don't the hack come, when it is twenty-five minutes of train time," said Mrs. Sharp, jumping up quickly and taking a survey down the street.

"Because," replied Ben promptly, laughing with the zest of a boy, instead of a man of fifty, "Because it requires only fifteen minutes to reach the depot, and the hack driver probably knows it."

"There! I'll not speak again. You and Bertha can't find anything more improving to do than stand there and ridicule me. I believe you are laughing at my new bonnet. It makes me look homelier than ever, I know, but Bertha is responsible, and if she is ashamed of me, I can't help it."

"Ashamed of you, Auntie Sharp, my next best friend? As well might my house plants, that I've watched over and tended from day to day, be ashamed of me. There are three things that I am, oh, so gratefully proud of and thankful for. The

guiding love of my Heavenly Father, of Uncle Ben and of yourself. Had it not been for these, where would I have been to-day? God only knows."

"I am glad to hear you talk like that," said Theophilus Steele, appearing on the scene with only a half-awakened expression in his gray eyes. "If you so truly appreciate these blessings here, you will be more fully prepared to enjoy untold ones hereafter. Although you were a waif, Bertha, parentage unknown, and, I may say, indeed, most lamentably uncertain —"

"There! There! Theophilus. You've said enough," interrupted Mrs. Sharp, irritably. "Although we know nothing of her parents, she need never fear that they consisted of vulgar people. There is not one element in Bertha Grant's character—though I do not say that she is perfect—that is low-born. Dainty rose-buds don't grow on coarse mullen stalks, you know as well as I."

"And if they did," said Bertha, gently, with a crimson flush on her fair neck and brow, a little tremulousness in her soft voice, and a great tear rolling slowly down her cheek, "Bachelor Ben would pluck them just as soon and just as tenderly. 'When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take thee up.' This was the

promise ages ago, and it was fulfilled even unto me."

"Just so. And rose-buds, dearie, have their own individuality to be proud of, whatever they may spring from, or whatever they may grow on."

Bertha glanced up into his face through her tears, and her rare, sweet smile penetrated to the farthest corners of his heart, and warmed them into gladness, while Theophilus looked on and felt, with the gloomiest of all longings — envy, that his own heart was cheerless and frozen. He had wittingly wounded the feelings of youth; youth in its beautiful morning, when threatening clouds could not be too long waved away by friendly hands. Did it grieve him? Something surely did, but it was not that thought. His hasty words had dimmed the blue eyes that a moment since had sparkled with pleasure. Yet it was not that which troubled him. The indications of pride and pain that suffused Bertha's face had not escaped his notice, but from his very nature he could not condescend to revoke his utterance now. Of all galling things to some sensitive persons, allusions to lowliness — or rather lowness — of birth are the most galling and humiliating. "I am holier than thou," touches the very dregs of pride.

The hack came rumbling up to the gate. The trunks, the satchels and Mrs. Sharp were hustled out of sight in a hurry, but Bertha turned back and held out her hand to Theophilus. She was independent and self-reliant, yet she was slow to resent and quick to forgive. She had been wounded, yet she was too generous to wish to show it. She was but human, yet she lived so far as possible, and governed her acts as powerfully as temptations would allow, by the wonderful rule — the golden one — that we have all heard so much about.

"Good-bye, Mr. Steele. We are bound for the shore of the deep, blue sea. Send your best wishes after us, will you not?"

"Certainly, certainly," he replied, in an absent-minded way. He even omitted to cant any of his pet phrases in the ears of the departing travelers, he was so deeply buried in his own thoughts. He went in and roamed about from room to room. The house seemed like a great desert with Bertha gone, notwithstanding his dislike for her.

"If I were not above it," he said, looking grimly at the vacant chair in which she was wont to oftenest sit and sew or read, "I would almost curse the day that I refused to take her, when Ben asked me to. If I had made use of that opportunity, her

presence might have helped to fill the great void that I feel more and more as I grow older. Away with such thoughts; I will not have them. Oh, that she should ever have come here to remind me of my loss. And yet, it is a great deal worse since she is gone, for she adorns my home and brightens it as nothing else can, after all."

Ah! Theophilus Steele, your heart was not quite proof against the Christian virtues of the noble Bertha, and you found, in spite of yourself, that she had a softening influence upon your bitterest moods.

"If my child could only have grown up as pure and as true," moaned the sorrowing man, with his head bent low upon his hands. "If her voice could only resound through my house with as glad tones, what a man I might make of myself yet. But it is too late. The world believes in me, and even if I could, I would not have them stand face to face with my past, as I stand with it. My life has been a mistake, a failure, after all, and now I can do nothing; I am powerless to avert my calamities. May God pity me. I am alone, all alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wait, my faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end.

— TENNYSON.

The travelers reached their destination without accident or delay. Two weeks glided by in the most restful of leisure for Mrs. Sharp, who grew—for her—to be remarkably quiet and patient in her discomfort. Bertha entered so enthusiastically and heartily into the enjoyment of those days, that they seemed to her like a continued dream of pleasure.

They greeted Bachelor Ben one morning on the long piazza of the hotel at which they were sojourning, and found him looking merry and mischievous.

"I wonder what project you have in your mind now," said Bertha, stroking his beard, "something that inspires you with the idea—

"I could a tale unfold."

What are you going to do for our amusement to-day?"

"Nothing, dearie, simply nothing. I am going to be very busy. You and Mrs. Sharp are to roam upon the beach; read, if you feel inclined; climb

the hills; in fact, follow your own desires implicitly."

"I can imagine myself climbing hills," said Mrs. Sharp. "I am about as apt to attempt it, as a blackbird would be to make her home in a robin's last year's nest. I'm not quite as nimble as I was thirty years ago, and even if I do appreciate the things that have to be climbed for, it's no sign I should make myself any stiffer by trying to reach 'em."

"Just so. But I presume Bertha cannot withstand the temptation. Here is a volume of Dickens for you, to entertain yourself with during her absence."

"No, I thank you, sir. If I'm going to read Charles Dickens' works, I'll just sit out on the piazza of this hotel and watch the faces and motions of the passers-by, the rich and the poor, the strong and the feeble. It will save me the trouble of putting on my glasses to look at a printed page."

"She refuses the book and chooses for herself a most excellent substitute, so I'll leave it for you, Bertha."

"I will lay it aside until some stormy day, when I can't go out to see anyone, and my friends cannot come to see me. I shall be surrounded by them

then, in spite of gloomy weather, and thank Dickens sincerely for the good company he gives me."

"What will you do with yourself to-day then, eh?"

"I am in a mood for Longfellow, up here among these hills, beside the sea. But I'm like Auntie; I will read him without any bound volume. By-and-by, I will wend my way in and out among the rugged rocks and the overhanging trees. I'll gather some mosses to take home with me, and watch the transparent vapor over the waters. I will look upon the great, grand waves as they come rolling up to the shore, and in all these things, read many a poem of Longfellow, since he has shed over them the halo of his own tender thoughts."

Ben left them, soon after this, free to do as they chose. Mrs. Sharp and Bertha carried out their inclinations, and far away from the city's smoke, the latter revelled in the spot where she could not only "Look through Nature up to Nature's God," but also catch the meaning of His servant in the realm of poesy.

When Ben returned to them at night, he was accompanied by Harry Dumonde. He had been to the College which was located not far distant, and brought back a pleasant surprise. Harry came to

spend the Sabbath, and this was on Saturday evening.

After church on Sabbath morning, the two older people were content to sit down quietly in their own rooms. It was, of course, quite unaccountable why the two younger ones did not do the same, but almost ere they were aware, they found themselves pacing to and fro together on the beach, chatting on any subject but that which laid nearest their hearts. They spoke of books and book-makers; finally of their favorite characters in romance and history. And all the time, there was a story with a fond hero and lovely heroine running through Harry's brain, which he dared not repeat on account of his poverty, and his own dim, uncertain future.

The conversation drifted along until it gathered upon its surface the dangerously personal question: "What qualities do you deem essential to manly character, manly greatness, Bertha?"

"I have never summed them up, Harry. Perhaps I had not better do so aloud, for my ideal is very exalted. You might smile to hear me enumerate his strongest points."

"No, I shall not smile. I believe it is well to have a high one. I ask for your ideal—not from

curiosity—but because you, yourself, Bertha, are so pure and good, I want to make myself something better and more worthy than I am. Your ideal may help me to cling more resolutely to my own. It may be a stepping-stone for me."

"Then I will give it to you freely," said Bertha.

They had paused for a moment on the sands, and Harry sat upon a rock looking up into her face as she stood glancing far off across the blue expanse of water, with the sea breeze parting her wavy hair and fanning her cheeks into freshness.

"The first quality I deem essential to manly character is—religion; not the religion that declares itself merely in outward acts and silent kindnesses to others, though these belong and are necessary to it, but the religion that is not ashamed nor afraid to declare itself boldly in the cause of Christ. A man is not at his best until he has done this. (He may approach, but he cannot reach my ideal, until he has stood up before all his friends in a Christian church, and let them know that his principles are founded upon God's great rock, though his feet should often slip.) It is a simple act of loyalty to a cause that, although often abused, is right and true."

"And the second quality?"

"Is courage; that which makes a man patient in trouble and strong to resist temptation. But, Harry, I do not need to name the rest, when I pause to think of it. For are not all the loftiest virtues of which human nature is capable, implied in this one word—religion? If a man has not some of it in his soul, what is he? Truth is its vital principle, and true piety, when wisely directed, makes a man brave, and patient, and cheerful, and heroic."

"Would your ideal—if he is a young man, and I suppose he is—be willing to nerve his soul with deep and stern resolves, and, in order to accomplish the fulfillment of cherished views, put far off into the dim years of the future the thought of claiming the hand of the woman he loved?"

"If the fulfillment of those aims would bring nobler results to himself or to the world, then he certainly would nerve himself to put far off all thoughts of the cherished woman," said Bertha, a red spot burning brightly on either cheek, her form erect and her blue eyes full of intensity.

"There is one more question, Bertha. Putting aside the thought of aims and purposes, there is often the bread of poverty to be eaten. Now I want to know about this: Do you think a man—

your ideal, for instance—would be justified in asking a woman to share it with him, to tread the road with him wherein there are many sacrifices and denials, simply because he loved her, not seeing that he could add happiness or blessings to her life, yet wanting her for his own; taking her out of pleasant surroundings that were a surety, into most doubtful and stormy paths; through the desire for possession," and Harry's dark eyes kindled, as he saw the deep blush on the cheek of the fair maiden, who, he felt, understood his meaning.

Again, Bertha looked straight out upon the waters. Her clear voice never faltered, though her white hands clenched themselves so tightly together that the purple veins seemed about to break their delicate covering.

"If such a course were going to trammel the manhood of the man or the womanhood of the woman, I should not consider it justifiable. But if each could make the life of the other more full, more free; if together they could endure poverty and drink the dregs, and climb up higher gradually to where there was something better, I should look upon it in a different light. But, Harry, a strong, resolute man can accomplish so much for himself and humanity. Work and plod upward for awhile,

unfettered by promise or vow; conquer some of the things that appear impossible, before you dream too much over the possible."

"It is words from women like you, Bertha, that take one out of the grooves of sentimentalism, and help him to learn one of the hardest lessons of life, —

'Learn to labor and to wait.'"

Although Harry had marked out a course for himself, the same course that he would now pursue, a word or a glance from Bertha would have changed it. She was brave, and she did not abuse her power. She encouraged him to press on towards the honors of the honorable, and showed him clearly that there was a woman in the world who was worth the winning. He longed to take the hand that he knew would not fetter him when it could help, and tell its owner this, but her words had inspired him to conquer the seeming impossibilities, and he believed, then and there, that Bertha Grant would be ready for him when he should have made himself ready for her.

She would have promised him that day, in spite of poverty, but she was too noble to do it. She felt that there might come hours when the years of study that he had planned would rise before him,

and he would regret that he had not waited awhile before he exacted that promise. She was endowed with a keen foresight, and did not forget that Harry had as yet seen but little of the world, and might meet others who charmed him more; and she realized how uncertain was the future. Yet she would watch, and pray, and trust, and it would be better for him than that she should come to be a clog upon his footsteps. Marriage was not to her an Elysian field, to be entered by maidens as soon as the gate was open. It was something to ponder upon, and if she entered, it would be feeling that she and the man of her choice had been tested and made strong for a mutual life-work.

She turned the current of the conversation, after a few moments, and talked with Harry about his profession. When they spoke together about the life of a preacher, Harry smiled a little mischievously, for he was thinking, as he heard her, what a grand minister's wife she would make.

And so they paced the beach, and their words were sometimes grave and sometimes gay. The wind rippled the waters, blew back her brown hair until it lay in tangled ringlets about her face, and

then it wafted her voice back to Bachelor Ben, as he came out and stood upon the piazza and looked upon his favorites.

He heard her cheery tones and mused there by himself: "Well, there is music in my Bertha's heart, but it is not always dances, and quadrilles, and waltzes, and polkas. There are heavy sonatas and deep voluntaries, with occasionally light glee-some airs running through them. Her religion is her life, and because she is so sincere in this, she sees its brightest side. It is not to be put on when she enters the sanctuary, and laid aside, away out of sight, when she goes out, but it is with her a living, breathing principle; not threatening gloomily that annihilation is to be the end, but eloquently hopeful from every point of view, and sent to her to widen the range for feeling and enjoyment. I've no doubt she is talking to that lad now about preaching, and she always goes about those things in the right spirit, so she is quite likely to win. She does not prate in old-time catechism style, nor argue in the new one, but she stands up with calm assurance, does my dearie, and says: 'I am not ashamed of God's cause, because it is true.' It will be a little strange, after all my fault-finding, if the two children I have reared

turn out to be a minister and a minister's wife, eh, old man?"

Bachelor Ben would not have hesitated to make that speech before the whole world. But as he turned to go in, there was such a passionate heart-throb, so full of regret, and agony, and longing, that it seemed as if the whole world must have heard it. Can the reader doubt that, sometime, in this man's life, since he was so loving and so lovable, there had been a story not unlike Harry's and Bertha's?

CHAPTER XV.

In fact, he would be willing to sacrifice a little something for public good, if by so doing, he could keep his head above water. — HOLLAND.

Harry returned to College, and a few days afterwards, Ben, Bertha and Mrs. Sharp were again ensconced in their own home. The two latter were sitting on the piazza one warm afternoon, one busily cutting the pages of a magazine, the other briskly plying her knitting needles as if at that moment it was the sole occupation that would save the nation from going without covering for the feet. It would seem as though something of unusual import must have occurred to vex her, had not her mood of brusqueness been so habitual.

In front of them were flower-beds that Bertha's hands and care had encouraged into grateful bloom. She looked up from her book and paused, with her paper-cutter suspended in mid-air, nodding slightly as if returning the salute her flowers seemed to bestow upon her, as they saw their young mistress smiling out upon them, like a specimen of their own genus. Perhaps they thought her a lofty forget-me-not, with her white dress, her blue eyes and her pink cheeks.

"Isn't my garden looking finely now?" she asked.

"It looks well enough," said Mrs. Sharp, never taking her eyes off her work.

"Does Mr. Steele like flowers?" continued Bertha. "Uncle Ben is always complimenting me on my success, and never passes my bed of pansies without looking down into their modest faces. I think I never saw Mr. Steele cast a glance in that direction. As I grow older, I begin to think that I have taken too great liberties in his house in more ways than one. In fact, his utter indifference to my flowers has suddenly reminded me that I never asked his permission to have his front yard cut up into hearts and squares and diamonds."

"What if you didn't? Its too late to mourn about it now," said Mrs. Sharp.

"I don't really mourn about it; I only doubt my own right and propriety in not consulting his taste."

"Taste! It's precious little of that he has about anything. I don't suppose he cares particularly for flowers,—people without finer sensibilities than he has never do. If they happened to grow too near the walk, I presume he would'nt hesitate at all to trample 'em under foot. Just as if a thing that

had life enough to grow and blossom, hadn't life enough to hate to be crushed and broken. I'll tell you what I think, Bertha. I think flowers and things ought to be growing on every side of that man to soften his obdurate heart."

"What has he been doing now to annoy you, I wonder?" said Bertha, half-smiling.

"It's no sign because I am his mother-in-law," said the much abused dame in a harsh tone, "that I shouldn't notice his faults and discrepancies and call your attention to 'em if I want to. I can free my mind to you if I choose, and if Theophilus don't like it, then he needn't be so under-handed. I am older than he is, and he may think I'm likely to leave this world first, yet I'm not ailing at all and he is. Theophilus Steele is miserable. I think it wouldn't be at all strange if I lived ten years longer. But I shall be surprised if he lives five. He doesn't spring from a long-lived family. I do."

Bertha made an attempt to say something in reply, but Mrs. Sharp paid no heed to her.

"Now this is what he took occasion to do, while we were gone. He summoned a lawyer or two and made his will. I suppose being left here alone, he couldn't help thinking, what if he should die suddenly. Probably got a little nervous and fearful.

He has a plenty of relations on his own side that are good, hard working people, well worthy of any help he could give 'em. But they were never mentioned in that will. He just made provision that his old mother-in-law should have a comfortable living—the only wonder is that he mentioned me at all—and left all his property to be distributed among different benevolent institutions. I learned this from a very reliable source, or I shouldn't repeat it even to you. I may grumble and fret, but I'd never say a word against the actions of my dead daughter's husband, if I didn't see and know that there's a flaw in 'em."

"And yet the institutions you mention are doing a great amount of good, and many of them are in need of these gifts from wealthy men," said Bertha.

"I suppose they are," replied Mrs. Sharp, beginning to knit again vigorously. "I don't dispute that, but according to my way of thinking, he could give a little less for show, and more for his own peace of mind. I don't believe in quarreling about wills. Of course, every one has a right to dispose of his property as he chooses, but when his way of doing it is all based on pride instead of principle, it takes a better woman than I am, to distin-

guish the difference between that kind of generosity and stinginess."

Bertha felt that this was a matter upon which she had no right to talk, so she picked up the pearl-handled paper cutter, and carelessly tried the experiment of balancing it upon her fore-finger. After a few moments silence, Mrs. Sharp resumed her narrative, but her voice was a trifle softer, and the hand that held the knitting-needles, trembled a little.

"There's another thing, Bertha, that I've never mentioned to anybody. I don't know why I do it now, only because you are a little like the kind of people that one feels like telling their troubles to. I am an old woman and can see my full share of 'em, lying there on the road that I've traveled over. They make some people better, but I've never had ever so small a one that it didn't increase my spitefulness. I never had but one child, Bertha, and she was sweet and good like you. There is something about you this afternoon that has kept reminding me of her. Perhaps it's the way you are dressed, and yet it don't seem so either. Well, my only child married Theophilus Steele. I hope he was kind to her, and I think he was, in his way. I don't believe she ever knew him

as well as I do, after all, for she was so patient. She could overlook a thousand things about him that I cannot, and if they were my last words, Bertha, I should pray that she might have liked him just as well at the last as she did at the first."

Through all the years that Bertha had seen the black eyes flash and snap, she had never seen them dimmed by a tear. If Mrs. Sharp had wept, it was in secret—perhaps when everyone's back was turned towards her, or in the darkness of night, when her head touched the pillow. She ceased talking for a moment now, and turned her face aside, but not before Bertha had time to observe that she was crying.

"It is not often I feel like this," she said, breaking the silence, "but I commenced to tell you about my daughter. I never cared for the dresses she used to wear, even if Theophilus had offered them, but he never did. I believe they are all packed away in one of those large trunks in his room. I can't help feeling differently about some of her jewels, though she hadn't many. There were some brooches and a number of rings. I have always felt it that he didn't give me at least one of them for a keepsake. I remember in particular a ring with a band of pearls, that her father gave her

when she was about your age. I have wanted it, Bertha, to give to you, and have been almost tempted to ask for it sometimes. Certainly no one has a better right to it than I have." She had no sooner finished her sentence than Theophilus himself came through the gate, and, of course, put an end to further conversation on the subject that had moved her.

It was about this time that the people in the church of which Theophilus Steele was a member rejoiced in the completion of a new building. The dedication took place, and, as they were largely in debt, it was thought a wise plan to raise the money on that occasion by subscription. There was much competition and excitement. The names of the donors, and the amount given were read aloud, as the tellers brought forward little slips of paper that seemed so insignificant, but were really of so much value. If anything could make Theophilus happy, he must have been so when hundreds of heads turned in his direction, as his name was announced for the most generous contribution of all.

On the afternoon of the same day, he and Bachelor Ben were sitting upon the piazza, talking upon various subjects. The latter had attended the dedi-

cation ceremony with him, which took place on the Sabbath: "The better the day, the better the deed," was chasing itself through his mind, yet he could not bring himself to apply the old saying to the event which he had witnessed. He did not object to the dedication on the Lord's day, but he disliked the manner in which the church debt was settled, for that which was raised for God was fuller of the rivalries and jealousies of men, than any worldly scheme he had ever known them to invest in. The time that ought to have been peaceful, harmonious and holy, seemed to him full of bickerings and strife. There was less soul-raising by the minister than money-raising by a vociferous man, who reminded him of an auctioneer. Ben was secretly exercised over the whole morning's experience, but he kept his torch behind him until the darkness of Theophilus Steele's mind gave him an opportunity for dispensing its rays.

"We had a highly profitable meeting this morning, did we not?" asked Theophilus, pride in his share of the church fund welling up to the surface, and betraying itself in his voice.

"Not very profitable to your purse, Steele, eh?" returned Ben, quizzically.

"It is always profitable to have a new lease of

life in the everlasting church above," replied Theophilus.

"Just so. But do you think that your contribution, of itself, could procure that lease? Was it even a partial payment of what you owe the true church of which you speak—one-fourth of your debt in heaven?"

"It was a good round sum of money," said Theophilus, with a doleful business ring in his tone.

"Oh, not so much for a man in your circumstances. It is a drop, merely. You will never miss it."

"Do you think I am a mint? Don't you know, sir, that it far excelled any previous subscriptions by any member? If you can point out a person who deserves more commendation than I do, in the erection of that house of worship, then I would like to have you do so," said Theophilus, forgetting himself for a second. "It is not the praise of men I crave, yet I think it unnecessary and unjust, sir, when they refuse to recognize my munificent gift."

"I am not sure that I can point out the person who deserves more credit than you. God Himself is best able to do that, for He credits not the sum, but the sacrifice. There was a woman sitting just in front of you—a dreadfully shabby-genteel-looking

sort of woman, if I may be so uncomplimentary—who gazed at her ragged kids, from which each and every individual finger was, to a greater or less extent, protruding, and, with a glance of agonizing indecision, she stroked them again and again, and doubled up her hands in a truly scientific way, so that the finger ends didn't show at all. I became interested in the performance, and watched her narrowly. She moved along a little, and whispered to her companion. I could hear every word distinctly. She was asking the price of kids at the present time. I presume she had not purchased a pair for five years. 'Two dollars for the best,' was the reply. She struggled with her pride for a second or two. I declare, I was so much interested that I struggled as hard as she. And what do you think she did, Theophilus?"

"Turned a deaf ear to the cause of the Master, I have no doubt; pampered her feminine vanity, and refused to help with her mite," said Theophilus, benignantly.

"No such thing! That woman just turned around, as brave as a lion, and asked me to lend her a pencil, and I saw her write down \$2.00. Now, Theophilus, perhaps you will not relish my saying it, but, according to my theory, that woman

— whose dollars, I'll warrant you, are few, and whose wants are many — that woman, who probably takes as much pride in her gloves, or would if she had the chance, as you do in your hats, will find, sometime in the future, that her lease was as great as that of the millionaire who sat behind her."

The hearer did not take the trouble to manifest whether he relished it or not. The thought that he had given so much from his worldly possessions, for the benefit of a good cause, was not in itself, so satisfactory. It was the applause of the public that he desired. Although, from the very penuriousness of his nature, he made a sacrifice, he knew, as well as Ben, that it was not made with the proper spirit. He had retailed maxims, that he knew by heart, without feeling them, for a great many years. He could not make Ben believe that his words always flowed straight from his soul, as the river to the sea, and he did not try so often as formerly. He felt thoroughly what few people ever do, and that is, that he was understood. It might be a great source of consolation to some. It was not to Theophilus. Sometimes he made a feeble attempt to argue his cause, but he always failed, because he was insincere, and he found it rather

humiliating to arrive at the conclusion after their controversies, that Bachelor Ben, out of the church, was a better Christian than he was, in it, and he began to feel, as old age crept on, that it was a far better thing for a man to be true to false doctrines in religion, or in anything else, than for a man to be false to the true ones. He had given generously for public good, and tasted the pleasure of public applause, which was well, but there is a little, inward monitor; a mysteriously welcome visitor — self-applause — that he could not coax into his heart. The words, and the daily life, of his partner, that he had been watching for years, frightened it even farther away. To feast upon the praises of men, is to find in the end that one has made but a sorry meal, and learn that —

"Each pleasure hath its poison too,
And every sweet a snare."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Think that *To-day* shall never dawn again."

God's ways seem dark, but, soon or late,
They touch the shining hills of day;
The evil cannot brook delay,
The good can well afford to wait. — WHITTIER.

Harry Dumonde's German friend, who had brought him across the sea, had always remained interested in his welfare, and followed his course from year to year, with unflagging friendliness. Harry was sitting in his room one evening, with a student lamp burning brightly upon the table before him. It threw its rays upon the book on which his eyes were fastened, and shaded his dark, scholarly face. There was a rap upon the door, but he failed to hear it at first, so deeply were his thoughts engrossed in his mental labor. It sounded again, not softly and timidly this time, but a gradual crescendo of raps in quick succession, that finally amounted to pounding. He looked up, just as a portly man, roughly clad, entered without further ado.

"Aha, mein dear Harry poy! How you does?" was his hasty salutation, as he put forth his red, brawny hand.

"Why, it's yourself, is it, Fritz, my friend?" returned Harry, in surprise.

"It surely vos no odder man. Would odder man come fifty miles to shust look on your handsome face, mein Harry, poy? No," said the German, his blue eyes opening widely, while he shook his head slowly, and his long, flaxen hair swept his broad shoulders.

"You've taken me quite by surprise, but I'm glad to see you. I'm always glad to see you, Fritz," said Harry, looking kindly into the rugged face.

"Yes, you vos goot poy. You vos not like some odder proud, young mans what would soon forget to remember old Fritz."

"I hope I may never 'forget to remember' so faithful a friend as you are. But sit down, Fritz, and we will have a nice visit, and you must tell me what started you off so suddenly," said Harry.

"What started me off mit so soon?" asked Fritz, in amazement.

"Yes," replied Harry, "what was it that caused you to come here and see me so unexpectedly?"

"Aha! You ask me dat? Why, what a funny leetle poy you haf got to be," said Fritz, laughing heartily. "When I wants to see mein friends, I

shust goes mit the railroad where they be's. I said to mein frau this morning, 'Guess I will shust go and see mein friend once more, before I goes and gives him up.'

"Before you give me up, Fritz? I don't understand you. You have not kept track of me all these years to desert me now, have you?"

"No; I never gives up liking you. It is not that. But what I means is this: Mein duty to you ends, when you is of a certain age. That was mein promise to your mother, to always watch and tend her darling leetle child until he growd to be a man, twenty-three years of old, and then to give — no, I means dat not. Something must be the matter mit me, to forget to remember what I cannot tell you yet awhile."

"What was it that you were to give me, Fritz. You are speaking in enigmas, to-night," said Harry, looking bewildered.

"Perhaps I is. I don't know much, but you will be glad when I gives you — Oh, I talks too much mit mein tongue."

"Did my mother leave something for you to give me? Is that it, Fritz? Oh, tell me quickly. I am sure that is what you mean."

"Oh, no; not anything at all. There! that is

lies, and he what lies shall die. But mein Harry, poy, don't ask me any more tings. I cannot tell you. It is not yet time."

"And you have come all this long distance to tell me something, and now refuse to do it. How strangely you act to-night," said Harry, peering into the rough, honest face.

"Yes, I feels strangely too. There is something laughing down in mein heart, because you is almost twenty-three years of old, is you not? Aha! You looks like the bootiful voman, mit the dark eyes and the handsome face, what told me to care for you, and then give —. There! Old Fritz makes fool mit hisself. He always do that when he took too much drinking."

"Oh, Fritz! Have you been drinking? I thought you never did that now," said Harry, soberly. "It will ruin your body and soul. It will make your wife and little ones unhappy and miserable. It will take the money out of your pockets and the brains out of your head —"

"Aha! Never mind 'bout that, Harry, poy. I never had much brains mit my head anyhow, nor much moneys mit my pocket," said Fritz, running his fingers through his flaxen hair, thoughtfully, then putting both hands in his pockets and stand-

ing on his tip-toes, Fritz looked merry and mischievous, until he happened to see Harry's grave face. Then his attitude underwent a sudden change. He crossed the room, and, putting both brawny palms on his young friend's shoulders, spoke up very earnestly: "Oh, I is fooling you. I has not been drinking at all. Believe old Fritz when the words come mit his lips. He never drinks any more. He knows it is bad for him; very bad for him. No, I has not tasted any liquors, but shust a little lager. That is so true as I stand here mit mein hands on mein Harry poy's shoulders, and Fritz don't lie, he don't lie, oh, no."

"I don't believe you do, Fritz, and I am glad to have found myself mistaken. But when a man has been intemperate once, the shadow follows him, and even if he reforms, when there is something strange and unaccountable in his actions, people are quite apt to say: 'Ah, he's been drinking again.' So if you do not want me to accuse you of it, Fritz, you must not behave so mysteriously. You must explain your conduct to me."

"Yes," said Fritz, doubtfully, rolling up his big, blue eyes towards the ceiling, "but you is not old enough. I would rather let mein Harry poy think

I had been drinking ten barrels of whisky, than to part mit mein honesty."

"That is right, Fritz; that is right. If it is something you have promised not to tell, I will not urge you further, now."

"Oh, you is goot poy, but Harry —" and here the German face grew very thoughtful, while the blue eyes surveyed the two brawny hands spread upon either knee. "Something might happen to me before I sees you once more. I might be killed when I goes home mit the railroad."

"I hope not Fritz, though none of us know what fate has in store for us," said Harry.

"And I might lost what shmall, leetle stock of brains I did got mit my head, hey, Harry, poy?" said the German, looking very sober and very much perplexed, as if many things were crowding and rushing past each other through his dull mind.

"It is possible Fritz, though I hope no such calamity will befall you."

"But we never knows, we never knows," said Fritz, shaking his head solemnly.

"No; life is full of changes, and in the midst of life we are in death," said Harry, moralizing, student-fashion, "but we are both looking on the gloomy side. The sunny hours of life are too

short for that, Fritz. Look up here, and smile in your natural way."

The German made an attempt to obey him, but the smile was a very sickly one. He had something to tell Harry, but the time had not arrived, and the great, unsolved problem of living and dying obtruded itself into his mind, and the practicability of taking the old father, whom everyone can but have heard of, by the forelock, was puzzling him sorely. He did not want to break a promise, but he began to ponder upon the uncertainty of human plans and purposes, and wondered vaguely if the grim monster might not step in and prevent him from fulfilling it after all. Harry watched him silently, and thought best not to interrupt him in his soliloquy.

Fritz looked up after awhile, and shook his head very dejectedly, as he said: "You is not twenty-three years of old, is you?"

"Not exactly; but I am not many months younger," said Harry, smiling.

"That is so; that is true," said Fritz, nodding, "but mein promise has noding to do mit months."

"Yes, I understand. Well, keep your promise; I can wait, and so can you. It will be good discipline for my curiosity, perhaps."

The topic was changed after this, and Harry and his old friend talked as pleasantly together as if one were not an ignorant Dutchman, clumsy and awkward in speech and manner, with rough hands and clothes, and the other, an intelligent, well-dressed young gentlemen, stealing an hour from his books with as willing a heart, for this old, home-spun relic of faithfulness, as he would for a friend clad in purple and fine linen, who had knocked at his door. Tales of "mein frau" and her hopeful offspring, of earnings and expenditures, were poured into listening ears, and Harry laughed and condoled with, congratulated and advised, as occasion demanded. How Bertha Grant would have smiled, could she have seen her hero then.

The time came for the visitor to depart. He held out his hand to bid his host adieu. "And when shall I meet you once more?" he asked.

"You will not be apt to meet me again until after I have graduated," said Harry. "I shall return to the city then, and I will come and see you."

"That is goot, and then I shall show you mein shmall, leetle Fritzes."

"I should like to see them very much. If you are as good to them as you were to me, despite your poverty, when I was a youthful Fritz myself,

then they must certainly be attached to you. Yes, I will come and see you as soon as I return."

"The first place what you brighten mit your dear, goot, handsome face, will that be mein plain, leetle house?" asked Fritz, with proud animation.

"Perhaps not the first, surely the second," said Harry, blushing like a school-boy, in spite of himself.

"There now," said Fritz, bluntly, "mein Harry poy gets red mit blushes, shust like I used to vos. What vos her name? Don't be afraid to tell old Fritz. He can keep a secret. He will not tell. Oh, no."

"You are sure you will not tell it? Well, then, her name is—"

"What for you stop so soon? Oh, I know, her name is sweet to speak mit your lips, and so you waits. Her name has been made holy-like mit your love, and so you stops a minute. That is right. But you will speak it softly to old Fritz, your friend."

"Yes," said Harry, "her name is Bertha."

"Humph, Bertha! Fine name that. Is she goot?" said Fritz, looking down to the floor, thoughtfully. "What is the matter mit mein tongue. Of course she is, or mein Harry poy

would not go to see her first. Well, it is all right. But if she should keep you so long by her side that you forgot to remember me, then wherebouts should I go to find you? For I must keep mein promise by that time."

"Harry assured him that he would not be forgotten, but Fritz insisted, so he wrote the address of Theophilus Steele upon a card, and gave him explicit directions how his residence might be reached. Fritz did not feel quite secure, however, and the door had no sooner closed behind him than he paused in the hall outside, and placed his finger on his lip, in deep meditation. "One day, we is all alive; next day, we is all dead. We makes our plans shust like it vos not so. This is not right. To-morrow is shust like the wind; perhaps it will blow hard, perhaps it will not blow at all. When we has tings to do, we puts them off too long, and they never gets did. A voman dies, and she looks into mein face mit her dark eyes, and gives me someting for to keep for her child. I keeps it years and years, as she told me, and then I goes off mit the handle and kicks mit the bucket, and mein life is gone, and I has not yet done all mein duty's. This is is not right, oh, no."

"What is the matter, Fritz?" said Harry, cheer-

ily, opening the door and peering into the long hall of the college dormitory. Fritz walked slowly back, entered the room again, closed the door and turned the key. Harry watched him, with an amused smile.

"You is going to be a lawyer, is you not?"

"I am not so sure now," said Harry. "What if I should be a minister, a preacher? Wouldn't it do as well?"

"Aha! What a funny leetle poy you is got to be. You try to make me laugh by talking like that, and so I does. Aha!"

"I don't know why you should be so pleased, my friend," said Harry. "I am not trying to make you laugh. I am in earnest."

"Well, perhaps you is. But there is so pig a difference mit a lawyer and a preacher. You don't know which to be, and it makes me to laugh. Aha! A lawyer plays tricks mit peoples and gets moneys sometimes, but a preacher is goot, oh, so goot. I thinks you had better be a preacher, mein Harry poy. That's what old Fritz tells you to do. But you knows shust a leetle 'bout law. You can—what you call it?—draw a wills, can you not?"

"Draw up a will? Perhaps so," said Harry, a little dubiously, but willing to humor his oddities.

"Now here is pen," said the German, going to the table, "here is ink, here is paper and here is Fritz. I wills everyting I got to mein families, 'cepting one, and that is some tings for mein Harry poy. Write it down shust like that."

"Yes," said Harry, smiling, and scratching vigorously with his pen.

"Said tings," continued Fritz, with his thumb elevated in the air and his hand going through rapid gesticulation, "give to me by his mother when he vos one leetle child, to keep until he vos —"

"Yes, I know, interrupted the dignified magistrate, "until he was twenty-three years of age."

"And if I should die, he can get them from the top of mein old chest, and know that Fritz did not break his promise, nor leave the world without doing his duty's."

Harry was excited over this intelligence, and very curious to know more about his possessions, but Fritz was firm, and he could but acknowledge him to be right. He took the pen between his clumsy fingers, and spent between ten and fifteen minutes forming the hieroglyphics that stood for his signature and made the paper valuable.

"If you come to see me, then I will give it to you, if I is there. If you comes not, then I brings

it to you where we said. But if Fritz has gone off mit the handle, or any tings like that, then you gets it from the old chest what Fritz brought from the old country mit him."

"Yes, I understand, perfectly," said Harry, though he really felt himself to be in a mystery.

"And now good-bye, friend Fritz, until I see you again. It seems as though I could not wait, but I suppose I can."

"Yes, you shust wait, and you shall have it safe. Keep mein wills, and it will be all right anyways," said Fritz, as he departed.

Harry sat down again by his table, but the books upon it remained unread and unstudied the remainder of the evening. He was thinking; thinking of his dear mother and her death in a foreign land; of Fritz, to whom she had trusted him, and of the true and tried friendship of the man who had been faithful to that trust. And when he extinguished the light to retire, he murmured: "I have a lesson to learn that seems to stare at me from every side. It is the lesson of waiting. Ah, what a hard lesson it is; what shall I be? The answer comes: 'Think long. Do not decide hastily — wait.' My mother's message is withheld — wait. And even Bertha has said — work and wait."

CHAPTER XVII.

'Tis cheap and easy to destroy. There is not a joyful boy or innocent girl, bouyant with fine purposes of duty, in all the street full of eager and rosy faces, but a cynic can chill and dishearten with a single word. — EMERSON.

Theophilus Steele and Bertha were standing upon the verandah in the moonlight. The old man and the young girl. Life in its winter of discontent. Spring in its radiant hopefulness. Whitened locks resting on bent, stooping shoulders. Waving ringlets clustering around a strong, fair neck. Dim, gray eyes, full of longing and misery. Bright blue ones, looking out fearlessly from untroubled depths. Tightly-drawn, thin lips, lisping canting phrases. A rose-bud mouth, with strong, self-reliant curves, giving utterance to cheerful truths. These were the contrasts one of them could but feel, as he surveyed the girlish form upon his doorstep, and then turned his eye inward and looked upon himself.

Theophilus knew, that in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, his heart was warming daily towards Bertha Grant. The more he struggled against it, the more he saw in her to admire and love. She had noticed a change in him. But she

was human. She could not so soon forget the antipathies of childhood. He tried to flatter, but she would not listen. He put aside his former indifference and reticence, but it did not warm her into any show of interest in, or awaken any affection for himself. He even tried to confide to her his state of loneliness and discomfort; but she continued to believe him cold-hearted and inconsistent, with some selfish motive which she did not understand, slumbering underneath his altered moods. She had heard him prate too long, and seen him practice too little, to have her opinion of him change thus suddenly. His presence jarred upon her, and she wished herself away from him. He had ignored her in childhood, and slighted her youthful pleasures. Try as she would, she could not forget it. She was leaning idly against a pillar, sweeping her white hand to and fro amid the branches of green woodbine trailing over it, when Theophilus' voice startled her.

"Why do you avoid me so, Bertha? I am an old man. The world has few pleasures left for me. Why do you seek to deny me that which I am beginning to feel when you are around, as I might the presence of my own lost child?"

"Do you ask me why, Mr. Steele? I cannot tell

you. I do not wish to make you feel any more lonely than you are; but do you not know, sir, that 'just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined?' You taught me to shun you in my infancy. You gave me no caresses. A child notices these things always. I was unusually sensitive, or you, sir, must have been unusually harsh towards me, for they sank deep into my heart. I pray to forget them, sir, for I would wish to be sheltered by the roof of no man to whom I willfully brought more sorrow or disquiet than joy. Forgive me if I wound you; but in all my life, you are the only person who has treated me coldly or unkindly. If the dear God above had planted my lines in less pleasant places than He has; if I had been brought up like many another outcast in my place, to expect more chidings than kisses from those around me, then, indeed, I could have borne these things from you. Believe me, when I tell you that it is not my fault that I do not like—aye, even respect—you more. You have asked why I avoid you. I give you the reason and answer, by saying: I cannot help it."

"What have I done, Bertha? Was I ever known to strike you?" asked Theophilus.

"Strike me? Ah, no; not with whips or lashes,

but can you think of a time, until recently, when you have not struck me with unkind, forbidding looks? Do you not know that children delight in pleasant smiles, and treasure them like jewels? You used to glance so kindly at the little ones in the Sabbath school, that I longed for you to wear that expression all the way home. But no; those smiles of yours were like the bright autumn leaves that one looks upon; they changed, as from the biting of some unseen frost, and faded away. I could gather sunny looks with the other children, but when I tried to awaken them here at home, they turned to dark frowns, and you chilled, even as Uncle Ben warmed my heart. It is not quite unaccountable to me, then, that since my earliest recollection, I have looked upon you as my enemy. I do not say these things to you in a retaliating mood, but to give vent to a feeling that has long lain dormant in my mind. I have never even hinted to another what I have said to you to-night. Your own questions called it forth."

"It is too late for me to disguise it, Bertha; I am, so far as human happiness goes, a ruined man. The word, peace, is obsolete. There is nothing, absolutely nothing in this world but vanity," and for once there was sincerity in his tones. "I crave

your friendship, Bertha. From my heart, I ask you to like me. I know I have not treated you as you would like to have been treated, but there is Mrs. Sharp, with her harsh words and fault-finding temperament; you seem to be deeply attached to her, in spite of them. Why this difference?"

"Ah!" said Bertha, with a bright smile, "I can forget those harsh words, for they were long ago eclipsed by good deeds. The pointed arrows of sarcasm, the peculiarities of temper, can be overlooked to a great extent, if they prove subordinate to real kindness of heart. Mrs. Sharp, with her crabbed speeches, is far more of a Christian to-day, than many a soft-spoken, smooth-tongued woman, for, under her various faults of speech, which surround her like a steel armor, there gleams sincerity of purpose. If the words she has uttered to me have sometimes been like little, piercing thorns, her every act has been like a flower in bloom, and made the garden of my life seem more prosperous and fuller of fragrance than I could have dared to hope. She has chided me often with her lips, to hide her happiness in a surprise prepared for me, or the result of her efforts in bringing about some unlooked-for good."

"I am surprised to hear you speak in tones of

approbation of a bitter tongue. They are any thing but desirable to have in one's household," said Theophilus, in a hard, pitiless voice.

"Bitter tongues are not a fortunate inheritance," said Bertha softly, "for they never bring any more peace to the possessor than to others, as you and I can see, Mr. Steele, by watching the restless nature of Mrs. Sharp. We have never found anything like aloes in the food which we have eaten from her table. It has always been genuine and wholesome. If there has sometimes been a little of that distasteful quality in her manner, not only of administering food, but of performing favors, I must own that I would rather take my portion of her legacy of aloes in that way, in her words, than in her acts. Since it is not the predominating characteristic of man and woman kind in general, I believe I can cull more sweetness out of life than bitterness, and quite forget in the end that a little of its influence crept in to mar my happiness."

"Do not change, Bertha," said Theophilus, laying his hand upon her head for the first time that she could ever remember. "The hearts of men in this world are fuller of bitterness than you can know, I mean even the bitterness of sin. Cull all

the sweetness you can, but never yield to temptation. Never sacrifice your honor to your pride. Never relinquish your peace of mind that you may gain a coveted treasure for yourself. I am speaking from my heart. I stand before the world a respected man and an earnest Christian worker, but I stand before you here to-night, who are the purest of the pure and the truest of the true, and declare myself a miserable man, a sinner, drinking the cup of sorrow to the very dregs; my misery all brought upon myself; my sin committed wilfully and knowingly."

"What do you mean, Mr. Steele? I am shocked to hear you talk like this," said Bertha.

"I mean nothing. Forget what I have said. I spoke because my heart was full. Do not betray what I have told you. Do not try to care for me, if you cannot. I only ask your pity. I only ask that you will glance kindly into my face sometimes, as I grow older and sadder. The world must still believe me good and unselfish. I cannot have it otherwise. You only can look upon me as I am, and I can turn to no one else for sympathy but you."

"Indeed, I am sorry for you. I never thought to hear you talk like this," said Bertha, turning away her face.

"Perhaps you never may again," added Theophilus, "for I am not often so unmanned, so full of utter desolation as this. You have won my heart's best love and my confidence; you proud, fair girl. Keep them as sacredly as you would your own father's. I do not deserve, but I crave the pity of all young, true souls, like yours. Ben is no nearer to you, in fact, than I am. Learn to care for me as you care for him, and " —

"Never ask it, Mr. Steele. You have my compassion, if you are in trouble, my pity if you have sinned in some dreadful way as your words imply, and my prayers, my earnest prayers, but do not ask aught else."

Bertha felt herself almost trembling with fright, that this cold, stern man, who had always slighted her, should stand before her now and plead for her pity. She was tempted to go into the house, for the light shone brightly from Bachelor Ben's window, where he sat writing, and she longed to be with him. She would have gone to him then, had she not been so strong and brave, so helpful in her nature.

Theophilus was silent, and she could distinguish through the gathering darkness that his head was bent low. She could hear him sighing, not osten-

tatiously, but with half suppressed sobs of long pent up emotion. If it had been any one else in grief like this, she would have taken his hand between her own soft palms and comforted him gently. But there seemed to be an impassable barrier between them, and try as she would, she could not approach him in any but a reluctant, half-resentful mood. Finally, she conquered self and personal feeling enough to advance a few steps towards him.

"Whatever it is that you have done, I hope you will not forget that there is One who can and will forgive you; whose mercy endureth forever. You have my sympathy, but try to understand how impossible it is for me to be slighted for years and forget it in an hour. The impressions made upon my mind by your long indifference to myself and all that has pertained to me have perhaps hardened me, but if you feel that I can in any way lessen your trouble, call upon me and I promise to do all in my power to lighten the weight of your burden."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Light mists, whose soft embraces keep
The sunshine on the hills asleep. — WHITTIER.

The summer months and mid-winter drifted slowly by. There was little in the life of the inmates of Theophilus Steele's house that is worth recording, until the month of June; that glorious consummation of spring-time's hopes and budding aims.

For many weeks, Bertha had looked forward to the time when she would take a journey with Ben, and, arriving at their destination, witness the graduating exercises of Harry's class. The long-thought-of day at last was near at hand. The morning on which they were to go, dawned bright and clear. Bertha was dressing in her room, standing before a mirror, binding up her brown hair, and smiling irresistibly to see the reflection of her own blushes that a certain anticipation called forth. She was not without her full share of pride in her beauty. She liked to enhance her charms by wearing tasteful garments. She chose warm-hued ribbons for winter, and delicate tints for summer. She delighted in plumes

and flowers, and laces. She fairly revelled in dainty slippers, fresh kid boots and nicely fitting gloves. She would not have been essentially feminine in her tastes if she had not; yet she did not don her finery regardless of occasion or appropriateness, nor throw on enchanting articles in a bewildering mass of lavish profusion. Her appearance was one of exceeding nicety in toilet, but it was never so conspicuous that one would observe the entire details of the apparel before glancing at the wearer. She had selected the daintiest and most pleasing of the articles that constituted her wardrobe, and folded them away to take with her. For, was she not going away among strangers? And was it not natural for the maiden to long to be worthy of admiration for the sake of—some one? Just as the last tress of pretty, shining hair was fastened back, and she was surveying her coiffure with not inexcusable pride, there was a rap at her door. It was the housemaid, who came up to tell her that Mr. Steele had been very ill all night. Bertha hastened down stairs and joined Mrs. Sharp at his bedside.

"Why did you not call me before?" she asked hastily. "Have you been up long?"

"I was up before daylight, but what was the use

of waking you, Bertha?" asked Mrs. Sharp. "Young folks are often the best nurses, but it's no sign that they need to be disturbed of their night's rest."

"Has he had the doctor?" said Bertha, pointing to Mr. Steele, who was then dozing.

"Yes, Ben went for him. He came immediately and pronounced Theophilus a very sick man. I tell you, we have had a time of it, but he seems to be quite easy now. I think it is the effect of the morphine."

"And you are tired out, Aunty; I know you are. I am very sorry indeed, that I should have slept so soundly, when I could have aided you, if I had been up."

"There, there, don't mourn about that. I shall soon get rested. I can't stand it so well now, when I lose sleep, as I could once. I'll go and lie down a few minutes and rest myself," said Mrs. Sharp, who had tried to keep up, but was finally obliged to succumb to weariness.

"Do so," said Bertha, taking the old lady's arm and leading her away. "Try to get a few moment's sleep, if you can, and I'll call you if anything is needed."

"Don't go away without letting me know," said

Mrs. sharp, "for he might not be able to make me hear. Have you packed all your things? There is a little paper of trinkets that I bought you yesterday, lying on my bureau. Perhaps you'd like to have on something that sparkles when Harry graduates. Girls are so silly about some things."

"Thank you, Aunty, dear. It was very kind in you to think of me. I will find them. Now go to sleep and rest, if you can," said Bertha, attempting to leave her. Mrs. Sharp thought she was too sober and troubled, and called her back.

"Why, Bertha, you're not going to let Ben gaze at so solemn a face as that, all day, are you?"

"Do you think Mr. Steele is going to be ill long?" asked Bertha, not replying to her question.

"The doctor says he will not recover right away. But I don't think doctors always know so much about the future as they claim to. They may be skilled physicians and able to read some signs in the face and pulse, but it's no sign they are prophets."

"Just so," said Bachelor Ben, peering into the room in search of Bertha.

"Come, dearie, and eat your breakfast. We haven't any too much time."

Bertha followed slowly and thoughtfully. She

was wondering if, after all her hopes and plans, duty was not going to keep her here. But she could not suppress the struggle in her heart, and felt almost like declaring that nothing should prevent her from seeing Harry Dumonde receive his diploma. It seemed to her, then, that of all the people in the world, she ought to be the first to take his hand and bid him God-speed after his long and arduous college course. Whether he wanted her encouraging words or not, she felt that it would be a joy to speak them. No matter if she were not his heroine, he was her hero, and she wanted to go to him. Others might crown him with the honors of applause; she held quietly and firmly in her heart the wreath of a woman's best, true love, that had been weaving itself through long months, and man was never crowned by a fairer. Ben looked at her mischievously a number of times before he spoke.

"One would think you were going to a massacre with me, Bertha, from your doleful silence. Harry wouldn't feel greatly flattered if he could see how soberly you meditate upon going to him."

"It is not that, Uncle Ben. It is because I am thinking that I ought not to go at all," said Bertha, decidedly.

"What! Not go to hear Harry deliver his carefully prepared oration? I presume he has written it more for your approval than that of any one else," said Ben, glancing at her burning cheeks.

"But, Uncle Ben, I am needed here. Mr. Steele is very ill, and needs care. Aunty is not really able to be about, herself. There was never a course of duty more clearly marked out before my eyes, than that I ought to stay and relieve her."

"We need not be gone long, but I shall stay if you do," said Ben.

"No, I will not hear to that for a moment. Harry will be disappointed. It will look as if we were not interested in him, and we are, you know, both of us," said Bertha, frankly.

"Yes, both of us," said Ben, rolling his merry black eyes, and making a laughable grimace. There was a consultation of some length and animation, as to whether both should remain, or only one. Bertha was victorious in the end, and the matter was decided. "I shall stay," said Bertha, firmly. "My going is not a matter of necessity, and I—, —"

"Just so," ejaculated Ben, soothingly. "I know you want to go with me more than you dare express, but you are a brave girl, and are bound to

make yourself do what you think is right. I couldn't shake your resolution if I tried, and, considering all things, I will not be so regardless of Mrs. Sharp's comfort as to try. But if I could remain, and you could go, Bertha, believe me, I would do so. In fact, I don't know but that we could arrange it in that way. You are a sort of a sister to him."

"Ah, don't mention such a thing as my going alone. Let's not talk about it any more now. I will stay and help Mrs. Sharp; you go and cheer Harry by your presence. There is nothing quite so satisfactory after all, as to feel that one is doing one's very best. See, I am resigned, Uncle Ben," and she smiled sweetly in his face, though she had relinquished a pleasure dreamed over for many a day.

Ben went away, and the great house was very quiet for the next hour. Mrs. Sharp slept long and soundly, and when Bertha looked in upon Theophilus, she found him breathing heavily, under the influence of a powerful narcotic. If she stood by the window and indulged in a "good cry," no one was the wiser, and it was not because she regretted her decision, but because she was like all other women, she could not help it. It was a refuge, and brought a vast deal of consolation.

Her blue eyes, that had in them so happy a light when awakening, were red and swollen now, but she hopefully repeated to herself the lines —

"So I, in a faith that comes to me,
Believe in a land beyond the sea,
Where my brightest fancies stand supreme
In grand perfection, beyond my dream."

Poor Bertha! There was poetry in her mind just then, but there was prose, stern prose in the atmosphere. Mrs. Sharp had slept long enough. In fact, she was just discovering by the clock that she had slept too long, for she came through the hall as rapidly as old age would allow, and went to Theophilus' room. She found him resting peacefully, after his night of suffering, and went out of the room quietly. As she did so, she discovered the lonely figure by the dining-room window.

"Bertha Grant! Why are you here?" she exclaimed.

"Because I thought best to stay here with you. Now you must not scold me, for I will not listen," said Bertha, playfully.

"Did Ben go?" asked Mrs. Sharp, her voice as piercing as a knife.

"Of course he did," said Bertha, with a vague dread of what would be said to her next.

"If you had to endure a sound whipping, and were obliged to be fed on nothing but bread and water for a whole month, you would not be sufficiently punished for taking advantage of my nap like this. If you staid to take care of Theophilus Steele—and I suppose you did—I must tell you that it was a mistaken sense of duty. He has never seemed to care whether you lived or died, and you are under no obligations to him whatever, that you have done one and not the other."

"Hush," said Bertha, fearing that her voice might penetrate to the room of the sick man.

"I'm sorry he is sick, and I'll do what I can to forward his recovery," continued Mrs. Sharp in the same key, "but it's no sign because he arouses my sympathy that I should think him changed into a saint. Did you stay because you thought yourself necessary to his comfort? You are a foolish girl if you did, and not worthy the lover that will sigh because you don't appear."

"I staid, because I knew you needed me. Do not rebuke me, Aunty, for doing what I knew to be right. I am not sorry that I gave up the journey. Believe me, I am more contented here, helping you, than I could have been to go and leave you alone, with this sick man in your charge. When

the Doctor comes again, I will receive his orders, and you will tell me how to execute them. You will be head nurse, but I will be your assistant."

"Humph! I'm sorry for that young man, Harry, if he ever marries you. There is no doubt but that he will want you sometime, for you will make people like you a little in spite of themselves. You are as stubborn in your own way as any person I ever saw. I would as soon try to eat a stone as I would to change your will when once you have made up your mind to do a thing. In that respect, you resemble me, only that you have a pleasanter way of talking about it. Well! Stay here and treat that man kindly, if you will, but I warn you of one thing: You will never get any thanks for it."

"But when I do it, it is not so much for him as for you, Aunty."

"Then you certainly don't deserve any gratitude. A girl that will disappoint her lover, for the sake of staying with a cross old woman like me, is not worth caring for, though I've no doubt he would think her all the better qualified for a minister's wife."

Bertha felt not only amused but embarrassed, and tried to escape Mrs. Sharp's quick glance by

going in to see if Theophilus wanted anything. He was awake, but seemed to lay in a sort of stupor. She went forward softly and laid her hand upon his feverish forehead. The touch seemed to startle him, and he looked up into her face languidly, and asked: "Who are you?"

"I am Bertha. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Oh yes! Only, Bertha. But so like —"

"Like whom, Mr. Steele?" asked Bertha, bending over him in surprise.

"Like my wife, Bertha, as she looked when we were both young."

Bertha smoothed back the gray hair from his face, and lightly drew her hand back and forth on his forehead until he slept again. She had heard what he said, but soon forgot it, deeming it one of the vagaries of a fevered brain.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Man should be taught as though you taught him not,
And things unknown, proposed as things forgot."

Ben was met at the station by Harry. The look of eagerness upon the face of the latter was not unnoticed. He came forward to greet his friends with some laughing exclamation of welcome, but stopped before he had finished his sentence and eyed each passenger narrowly as the crowd surged out of the cars. Then he looked at Ben very soberly.

"Did you come alone?" he asked.

"Yes, all alone, Harry, I am sorry to say, but cheer up, my lad. The women who loiter and hold back are often truer than those who are always at one's beck and call."

Harry was silent.

"And when a young lady gives up the pleasure of a young man's society, if he be her respected friend and adopted brother, you may know that she believed it to be her duty."

"Yes," replied Harry, a little dubiously, "I presume she did."

"I must say, you look as dejected as a disap-

pointed politician. You must learn when you cherish hopes that they are perishable things. You must be prepared to see them fade sometimes. But it's nonsense for me to talk to you like this. I know it's hard for you to appear cheerful when you don't feel so. Bertha looked, when I came away, as if I were setting forth to attend a massacre, and I told her so. And now I feel myself as if I had arrived at one. Shoot me at once, Harry, if you want to, but don't look so thoroughly disconsolate, or I will refuse to explain a thing to you."

They were getting into an omnibus by that time, and were obliged to pause for a moment. When they were comfortably seated, Ben leaned over and said, "Steele is sick."

"Who?" asked Harry, hearing only the last word, on account of the noise made by carriages and hackmen around them.

"Theophilus Steele; and Bertha staid at home to help take care of him."

"Oh," said Harry, immensely relieved, and perhaps looking more pleased than Theophilus would have been flattered to see. Since it was not Bertha herself, it did not, from the very course of things, concern him so intimately. Harry was dis-

appointed in not seeing her, but he knew, after the first few moments, how to make the best of it.

"And so you are going to be a preacher after all, are you?" said Ben, as they alighted from the vehicle, and walked arm in arm up the hill leading to the college, and to Harry's room in one of the college dormitories.

"Yes; it took a great many struggles, and no small amount of thinking, but I have plodded on and on, and, thank God, I can see my way clear now. I may not be able to rank with eloquent essayists or graceful declaimers, but I am in earnest in the work that I have chosen, and for the next few years, I mean to prosecute my inquiries with intenseness. I will not be confined to beaten paths. I will hear all sides of the questions that perplexed me, that so I may be better able to expound the doctrines of Christianity. I have studied and investigated already, but I mean to do it yet, more freely and thoroughly. I want to get into the very heart of Christ's teachings, before I begin to labor for Him. He has become a blessed reality, a living presence with me, and I shall aim to so arm myself with knowledge of his works, that I can make Him so to others."

"I am glad," said Ben, with a joyous, hearty

ring in his voice, "truly glad that you have decided as you have. Theophilus Steele never said a wiser thing than when he stated that the ministry needed just such young champions as yourself. I don't believe, Harry, that your mental proclivity is such that you will ever resort to terrifying weak people into professing what they do not feel nor understand. I've seen and known enough of you, my lad—you are a man grown, yet I cling to old associations, and call you what I always have—to feel sure that you will never assail your congregations as if each and every one was a stray lamb to be whipped into the fold. It seems to me that ministers should look upon human souls as having heavenly germs, that can be nurtured into angels by the comforting, inviting, healing Water of Life, instead of hurling fiery sentences of obscure phraseology at them, and checking their growth. These may arrest attention, but do not touch the inner nature."

"I agree with you," said Harry. "It is not the constant reiteration of warnings and penalties of sin, that are going to make them better. It is well enough for them to examine into these things, but what they need to win them into holiness and love for God is, His divine invitation: 'Come unto me

and I will give you rest;' 'Lo, I am with you alway,' and 'My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth.' I would not trust long to the loyalty of a person who was frightened into religion, but I would prize a disciple of mine whom I had been the means of gradually winning into the church. I would have God's gospel not full of grand awe, but gloriously, irresistibly attractive."

"If you will preach like that, Harry, you will arouse the consciousness of sin sooner than by battling with it. Picture holiness and purity in such beautiful colors, that men and women will climb up to reach them, almost without being aware, and when their sin comes again, they can but view it with horror themselves, from the force of contrast. Show men the beauty of something that they have not, and their nature is to grasp for it. Show them hideous vices in their own possession, and they are quite as apt to cling to them. You cannot frighten men out of intemperance by holding up its evils. They are oftenest reformed by seeing the blessings of temperate people which they themselves do not possess. But I am digressing. Make religion enjoyable, if you would have men enjoy it."

"Do you know," asked Harry, a flush mounting

to his face, for fear that he might appear too presuming, "that since I have been a church member, and realized the force of their examples, I have wished a great many times that the best and truest friend I have — Bachelor Ben — had not always withheld himself from the ranks that he would help to fill so nobly?"

"Have you, my lad? Have you, indeed?" said Ben. "I will not talk to you now about myself. There are some things that prejudice men against churches, and keep them out. It has been so with me. But God is my witness. I believe in Him, and try to do His will."

"And if I ever enter the gates of heaven, I shall look for you there before I do for any church member whom I have known, or any person who has ever befriended me. And yet," said Harry, half apologetically, "I cannot help believing that you have made a mistake. You may not have needed the influence of the church, but it has needed your help. I know you have always aided it by your good deeds. Give it the benefit of your strong, inspiring words also. Do a double duty."

Ben was silent a long time after this. It was not an unusual thing for him to be urged to unite with a church. In fact, it was a plea that had long

been sounded in his ears. But it was something new to be talked to like this by a boy preacher, who had never yet stepped his foot inside of a pulpit, and the rarity and freshness and exhilaration were wonderful. The result was that the dent worked its way into Ben's forehead, and did not find its way out for several hours.

It was not until evening that Ben and Harry were alone together again, and then the former gradually brought the conversation around to the subject that he knew was in those days most deeply engrossing Harry's mind. Bachelor Ben was not the man to disparage the beginning of a good and useful life, and if it was in his power to sow the seeds of truth, that he had gleaned through long years of observation, in the student's heart, he was ready and thirsting to do it. A few days afterwards, Harry delivered his oration, and received all the honors that were due him. Then he bade his school-fellows and his Alma Mater a fond adieu, and returned to the city with the man to whom he owed so great a debt of gratitude. Had it not been for him, the "odd jobs" that he hoped to perform in the future might have been for a far more exacting and less merciful personage than the Master whom he was now bound to serve.

CHAPTER XX.

You have too much respect upon the world;
They lose it that do buy it with much care.

—MER. OF VENICE—ACT 1, SCENE 1.

On the day that Bachelor Ben was expected to return, Theophilus, though still very weak and feeble, was able to partially sit up. He was bolstered by pillows and blankets and reclined in an easy chair in Bertha's sitting room. She had placed him near an open window, that the fresh, soft breeze of spring might invigorate and strengthen him. He was not always patient under his suffering; not always easy to please; but Bertha tried her best, and he was not so ungrateful as to evince no appreciation of her untiring efforts to make him comfortable. His eyes followed her longingly, as she moved about the room, brightening it into cheerfulness and order by feminine touches of her own, here moving a chair from its angular position against the wall, changing books upon the table, and placing the prettiest covered ones uppermost, as all women have a knack of doing; dusting the rose-wood piano in the corner, and smoothing a rug upon the floor. It would seem from the expression of Theophilus Steele's sunken eyes that

not a turn of the lithe, graceful figure escaped his notice, and that not a tone from her humming lips sounded like anything but melody. There might have been times when this close observation would have annoyed her, but her mind was bent on other things. She was thinking of Ben's return, with an added thrill of expectation, because he would bring some one with him. Her labors ended, she turned to administer a spoonful of liquid from a glass upon the mantel to Theophilus. He swallowed it and thanked her silently.

"Do you find the air from this window too cool?" she asked, as she saw him shiver slightly.

"No, Bertha, I am very comfortable, as much so as you can make me. What a fine spring morning this is."

"It is indeed beautiful," said Bertha, leaning from the casement, and drinking in the welcome sights and sounds. "I feel like vieing with those birds myself in their glad songs, though I don't think they need any assistance."

"Bertha," said Theophilus, "you have done so much for me that I am almost ashamed to ask more of you, but I wish you would draw that ottoman up here and sit near me a little while, as a daughter would do to a sick father. I wish you

would read to me, with your soothing voice, and make me forget myself, I am so restless and I feel so lonely."

"I will do so gladly. What shall I read?" asked Bertha, willing to humor the invalid. "Anything, anything you choose," said Theophilus, closing his eyes.

She seated herself as he had desired, and read quietly for half an hour from a poem that she found lying upon a stand near her. When she finished the last line, she looked up and saw him gazing fixedly at her.

"Thank you Bertha; you have made me feel as if I were having a beautiful dream. It is not your fault that the reality is so dreadful. It is not your fault, child, that I wronged another."

"And why should it be so dreadful? Can you not make atonement for anything that you regret in your past?" said Bertha, laying her fair hand upon his wrinkled one from the force of sympathy.

"Do you think I can, Bertha? Do you think I can?" he asked, eagerly.

"Is there not a chance for the restoration of the most distant wanderer? I know that repentance has come to you for whatever it was that you referred to one night as your sin, but is there not

some way in which you can expiate your fault, and put your repentance to a practical test? If you have wronged another, can you not retract now in some way, and obtain not only pardon but peace?"

"I've been thinking of it, Bertha, thinking, since I saw you sitting here by my side, that through you, I might find a means of grace. But I am too selfish for that; too proud, after all," said Theophilus, with a bitter smile.

"Too proud to let me aid you?"

No; but too proud to have the world witness my downfall. It would be like publishing my error for them to gloat over. I've been called rich and generous, and I've pampered to my pride by giving only where it could be seen of men, and loudly applauded. I did something years ago, trying to make myself believe that it was right, and ever since I did it, Bertha, I have seemed to feel the truth of that verse in Proverbs: 'There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ways thereof are the ways of death.'"

"I am sorry for you, and I wish that I could do something—anything to help you."

"If I confided my secret to any one, it would be to you," said Theophilus, feelingly.

"I do not wish to urge it upon you, but if it would relieve your mind, if I could do anything to assist you, I should be only too willing to listen. So far as keeping it securely locked in my own mind is concerned, I would promise to do that without hesitation."

"I believe you, child, and for my own relief, I am tempted, sorely tempted, to tell you a story that is full of haunting memories. Perhaps you will not believe it, for it is the height of inconsistency, that I, claiming to be above the desires that pertain to this world, should have done this thing."

Bertha was still sitting on the ottoman at his feet. She was always sympathetic, and words like these coming from the man who had slighted her, and for whom she had ever entertained far from friendly feelings, if anything, gave her more pain than they would, if he had been dearer to her, for she had not always pitied him like this; there had been many a time when she felt hard and resentful. The sorrows of others throw as deep a shadow over some compassionate natures as the griefs of self, and Bertha was one of these. The man who had always seemed so cold and stern towards her, inspired her with the most profound pity, now that she could look a little more keenly into his heart,

and see the impress of guilt regretted. She did not believe that he had long to live, and this thought helped greatly to soften her feelings towards him. She was pondering upon this latter fact, when Theophilus put it in words.

"I believe, Bertha, that my days are numbered. Did I not, I would never have the courage to talk to you as I do. I have not long to discuss those questions that pertain to my own vain glory, as was my wont. I sincerely believe that if I could live my life once more, after the lessons learned, I would have the heart to do less talking about religion, and perform more deeds worthy of the name. I have not been preparing to die, but I have hoarded up my riches as if I could always possess them; I was reminded that I could not, when this hacking cough seized me, and so, Bertha, I made a will, but it was not a just one; no, it was not a just one."

"Then can you not alter it before it is too late?" asked Bertha, as he paused. "Can you not now bestow your property upon the rightful inheritors?"

"Alas, there is but one, and I am not sure if even she be living. I will tell you the story, Bertha, even if I regret it. I cannot live to do so, many months. You are young, and in the long

years of the future, perhaps you can gain a clue that will help me to partly redeem my past. Are you willing to do this for a man who has never shown you a kindness in his life? Are you willing to undertake a search that will be full of discouragements at every step, in order that a wronged soul may be at last fairly dealt by, so much as lies in your power?"

For many moments, Bertha was thoughtful and silent. In her day-dreams for being of use in the world, and making her life valuable to others, she had not traced out a course anything like this.

"It will do no good for me to tell you my secret, unless you are willing to promise this. It is a great deal to ask of you, for you may seek and never find, and learn in the end that efforts are vain and fruitless. The person may be dead or living. Yes, and living a life that is not so true as yours. It is that which made me dislike you once. It is that, I think, which has made me turn to you now."

"Mr. Steele," said Bertha, standing erect, her blue eyes never flinching, "I have offered to help you if it was in my power; I offer still. I do not clearly understand yet what you wish, but if some one has been wronged, and I can make it right,

whether she be true or untrue, believe me, I will leave no stone unturned to find her. My search may be vain, as you say, but since there is no sea without a shore, I still shall have the reward of feeling that I did all I could, and my conscience will repay me. -- There is no heaven to be sought for hereafter, if we do not seek the heaven of the soul here, and I should not have it, if I refused to undertake what you ask."

"Sit down again, Bertha, I trust you fully. Now turn away your face, while I tell you the story that has haunted me whenever I have witnessed the growth of your nature, under the influences with which Benjamin Grant has surrounded you. He has done more for you, Bertha, than I did for my own child," said Theophilus, clutching at the shawl that had been thrown across his lap. "Before I say more, close the window, that no one may listen, and that the sun may not mock me with its cheerful rays. Turn the key in the door, for no one must know of this but you."

Bertha did as he bade her, and went back to him quietly.

"Years ago, I was father of a child, and after its mother's death I placed it with a nurse. I should have loved it had my heart not been so selfish that

another love took possession of me, and excluded all else. I was fascinated by a young woman with a doll face and a heartless nature; and she had promised to marry me, but when she found that I had a little daughter, she turned me off, saying that she could not do her duty to a step-child. All my pleadings were in vain. I knew afterwards that this was a feigned excuse. She had trifled all the time. She did not care how shallow were her reasons for rejecting me. But I was blind. I persevered. She continued to remonstrate and, for a time, I was almost discouraged. I wanted her, Bertha; but I was mercenary; I wanted her money more. She was worth millions; so was I, and it made me the more greedy. I was obliged to renounce her, and it made me wild. It seems, when I look back, as if I must have been insane to do what I finally did. I plotted and planned. I was humiliated, and I was bound to conquer. I heard of a talented actress who wanted to adopt a little girl. She was wealthy, and had the reputation of being a very kind woman. She had been in the city but a few months, and was going to leave it immediately. I met her at the Foundlings Home, looking at the children there, but she found none that suited her. I did not tell her that I had

a babe of my own, but I told her that I knew of a beautiful child, a few miles out of the city, that I was sure she could but be satisfied with. I need not enter into details, Bertha, but suffice it to say, that I forged names and papers, and made it appear to her that the little one had been given away, and that if she adopted it as her own, no one could ever claim it. I promised to procure it for her, and one day went with her into the country, arriving at the house of the nurse just at dusk. I was not bold or courageous enough to enter it with such a purpose in my mind by daylight. The child had been made ready and was immediately handed to her in the carriage. She desired full control of the adopted little girl, and for that reason was anxious that I should lose all trace of her, fearing that questions might be asked with regard to her in the future, and wishing me to be unable to answer them. This plan was eminently satisfactory to me; in fact, it was as I had intended. She left the city that night, Bertha, and I never saw my baby again. I lost all trace of the actress, notwithstanding the publicity of her profession. Whether she or the child be living or dead, I do not know."

Theophilus bowed his head upon his hands, and

Bertha watched him with mingled feelings of surprise and contempt. If he had not looked so frail and feeble, so utterly worn and broken down, she would have had it in her heart to stand up then and there and denounce him for his heartlessness and cowardice. As it was, she looked up with a rigid line about her lips, that it was as well he did not see, and asked—"And the woman; she for whom you perjured your soul? I have heard some faint rumors about her; that you built this magnificent house for her, but that she refused to enter it. What became of her?"

"She married an insignificant fellow, with neither brains nor money, who made way with her fortune in less than ten years, but for whom she seemed to entertain great affection. I neither know nor care what has become of her now," said Theophilus clenching his teeth in spite of himself. "I did not have the slightest shadow of a doubt but that she would marry me, after I told her of the loss of my child. She and all my friends believed it to be dead. I had been too sure of success, miserable, blind fool that I was, and when she refused me again, I saw it all. I had been the dupe of a coquette. But I did not mourn for that then, as I might once. I mourned because I had

given away my child and sacrificed my peace forever."

"But was it too late to find the actress, by diligent searching? Would not inquiries and advertisements have found her, if you had prosecuted them?"

"Ah, Bertha, you forget that I had declared my child dead, and that to recall her, was to proclaim my perfidy. I sent the nurse to England, so that she could not betray me in any way. There was not a flaw in the accomplishment of my purpose. I mourned over the death of my little one in public and private. I could not bring her back without proclaiming myself a hypocrite. But, Bertha, God only knows how I have longed, in my later years, to look upon the face of my child. God only knows how bitterly I have repented the part that I played. I have watched until my eyes have ached, and until my heart has seemed ready to sink under its weight of suspense and woe, for the name of the actress who had adopted my child, but I have gained no clue to her whereabouts. If I had found her, I should not have dared to ask for or claim my child as mine before the world. But I have longed, Bertha, just to know if she is a good woman; just to look upon her face. If she is liv-

ing now, good or bad, I would leave her my fortune. I would make what atonement I could, even though I should bring condemnation on my own dead name. You know now, Bertha, why I have disliked you so. It was because you reminded me of my great loss; because all these years, your grace of form, and your truth of heart have been like a perpetual thorn in my flesh."

"Oh, Mr. Steele, how I pity you," said Bertha, the tears welling up in her eyes and overflowing. "How I pity you for the life you have lived. How I long to lift the burden from your aged shoulders. Let me be to you as a daughter while you live, and when you die, let me search until I find her and tell her how you mourned for her, and repented your unfatherly and inhuman act. It was a cruel thing to do, aye, more than cruel, it was villainous for you to leave her with an actress, perhaps to finally follow the calling that is so fraught with temptations and allurements; but there is a God, a merciful God, who looks down forgivingly, even when human friends are hard-hearted. He can comfort you and take you back to Him in His own mysterious way. He will put it in your power to work out your own salvation, yet."

"I am not ready to die, Bertha. I have never

known how to live until now. I have never been in earnest in the best cause that man can have at heart. My sins have found me out. I cannot hope to be forgiven. There is the blackest of darkness about my feet, and I fall at every step. It is a sad thing for a man to totter to the grave, as I am going to, without hope, without a single ray of light to cheer him."

"It would be a sad thing," answered Bertha, "if there had not been a messenger sent from heaven to prepare a way for all the bruised and mangled souls of earth; even our Savior. You are tired; you must not talk any more now, Mr. Steele. Try to sleep and rest. Remember that God is merciful to His erring servants, and remember, too, that Bertha Grant will keep her promise. We will talk about it again, soon."

Bertha pulled the covering closer about him, shook the pillows and arranged them under his head. Then she left him alone, glancing back as she stood in the doorway, with her blue eyes full of sympathy.

CHAPTER XXI.

God is Love, saith the Evangel; and our world of woe and sin
Is made light and happy only, when a Love is shining in.

— WHITTIER.

The expected travelers did not arrive until evening. Theophilus had become weary, and retired for the night. Mrs. Sharp and Bertha were sitting together in the apartment of the latter. One was nodding in her chair; the other trying to read, but jumping up nervously every few minutes, and peering out of the window, down the long avenue. She could not see anything distinctly, for the moon had not risen, and it was very dark, excepting the brilliant row of gas lamps, stationed like so many sentinels now and then, glaring down to warn offenders that, despite the blackness of the sky, their deeds, good or evil, could not be hid.

It was no wonder that Bertha was nervous and ill at ease, after her experience of the morning. She could not, for a moment, banish from her mind thoughts of the deserted daughter, whose home ought rightfully to have been in this great, beautiful house. She pressed her hands upon her forehead, as she looked about her, and felt that she was almost a usurper here. It seemed to her as if

Bachelor Ben would never come and make her feel like herself again. She did not wonder now that the sick man in the house had felt towards her as he had. She began to realize the force of his own words. She had always been to him like a thorn in the flesh. She would try to atone for it now, though she had been innocent of all blame in the matter, and she waited anxiously and impatiently for Ben to come and sustain her by his cheering presence. Long before train time, she found herself listening for footsteps. Even the sound of her own step upon the soft, velvet carpet startled her. The whole house was wrapped in the mantle of absolute, unbroken quiet. The stillness oppressed her.

Mrs. Sharp's nods took a more tangible form. The progress of one was impeded. It struggled a moment against an unseen obstacle, then stopped suddenly, unable to overcome it.

Bertha found it impossible to read, so she closed her book, and throwing a light scarf about her shoulders, she went out of the house, and paced back and forth upon the walk leading from the gate. Theophilus Steele's story had shaken her faith in mankind, and the false position that he had assumed before his friends and his fellows filled her with a terrible dread. Although she had

not liked him, it had never entered her mind that he could be so base as he had proven. The promise that she had made to search her lifetime through, for the girl whose parent had alienated her from her inheritance, gave Bertha a sad feeling, not full of regret, but of pathos. She pitied the girl who had been banished from her father's roof, but more than all, she pitied the father who had banished her, and as she walked upon the lawn, the night air fanning her cheek, and the darkness increasing still more her excitement, she murmured a prayer that the invalid might be pardoned, and that peace might be restored to his erring, but repentant soul. Her mind was full of apprehensions, and this was not at all strange. The disappointment of her cherished hope, the fatiguing care of the sick man for a number of days, the expectation of soon greeting her friends, one of whom she had not seen for many months, and the tale of selfishness and guilt that had been poured into her ears that day, all conspired to make her timid, restless and nervous. She paused by the gate a moment, and was startled by the figure of a man standing near her. He leaned over the fence and peered into her face, as well as the dense blackness of the evening would allow.

"How you does?" he asked, in a gruff, hearty voice.

Bertha would have fled, but he caught her sleeve and held it tightly, to detain her.

"You must not be 'fraid of me. I does you no harms. Is you Bertha?" he asked, pleasantly.

Bertha's heart throbbed with fear, in spite of her efforts to be brave, but she managed to answer him, though there was a choking sensation in her throat, and her voice was scarcely audible.

"Yes, I am Bertha. What do you want of me?" She was half way to the house as soon as the words escaped her lips, for she found her courage unequal to the task of waiting for his reply. The man followed her, and by the time she stood in the hall, he was by her side.

"Does you know me?" He asked the question so good-naturedly that she felt her fear all dissipate in a smile.

"No," she answered, "I do not know you."

"I be's Fritz, and I comes here to see mein Harry poy. Was he yet come?"

"Oh," replied Bertha, pleasantly, "I know you now. You are Harry's kind, German friend. No, he has not come, but I am expecting him — or rather, I am expecting Uncle Ben. I am not sure

that Harry will be here to-night, after all. He may have made other plans." She commenced quite joyously, but the sudden doubt that crept in changed her tone.

"Oh, yes, he be's here. That was what he told old Fritz. He would see Bertha first. Then he would come and brighten mein little cottage mit his handsome face. That was all right. Don't let any fears get hold mit your love."

"You can leave a message for him, if you wish," said Bertha, blushing, "and I will deliver it." She felt surprisingly reassured by his statement, it seems.

"Fritz don't got any message — only one. You may tells him this. I goes home. Mein Harry poy comes to me to-morrow for to get someting what has been kep this many, many year."

"Yes, I will tell him," she answered, with a smile. "Never fear. If he has promised to come to you, I believe he will do so."

"Aha! So I tink, too. You and I both be's his friends, and we can trusts him. Perhaps you tink me bold. What you call it? Not polite. But before I goes, I asks you one question, and when you answers, Fritz will not tell. Does you love mein Harry poy?"

Bertha looked down and hung her head, but her voice was silent.

"Old Fritz can keep a secret. He can keep two secrets mit honesty and quiet."

Still she did not answer.

"He never lies; oh no, he never lies. Does you then hate mein Harry poy?"

"Hate him; ah no," said Bertha, looking up quickly and shaking her head jauntily.

"That is goot. Then you loves him, does you not, when he is so honest and so true mit all his friends? Answer old Fritz before he goes away and sees not any more your pretty hair and your sweet face," and he looked so wishful as he stepped nearer, that he won his answer.

Bertha looked straight into the friendly eyes that she had almost known before, and answered steadily: "Yes, Fritz, I love him, and I am not ashamed to tell you, for he is honest and true, as you say."

"I knows now that Bertha is goot, and I says farewell to her mitout any fear for mein Harry poy. Fritz never lies, and he keeps two secrets."

He lifted her fair hand to his lips with the deference and grace that even uneducated foreigners are often found to possess, and disappeared. Bertha

had heard Harry tell many jokes about the oddities of Fritz. She understood them better now, and was glad, very glad, to have seen him. She was not sorry either to have told him what she had never spoken aloud to any one before, for she believed that he would most sacredly keep the "two secrets."

The brief incident recorded created a diversion for her mind, and the next few moments of waiting, she was more at ease. When she returned to her sitting room, she found Mrs. Sharp still in an uncomfortable position, asleep in her chair.

"Come, Aunt,," she said, raising the old lady's chin, and trying gently to waken her, "you will have a stiff neck to-morrow. I think you had better retire, and I will see that the travelers are provided for when they come."

"I've no idea of retiring for an hour yet," she replied crisply. "But it's no sign I shouldn't be allowed to close my eyes a minute, if I want to."

"I thought you looked uncomfortable, or I should not have disturbed your nap."

"Nap! I would like to know what right you have to apply that word to me. It hasn't been two minutes since I closed my eyes to rest 'em! I think you've been dreaming yourself, Bertha."

The young lady was not inclined to deny it, when she thought of her interview with Fritz, and her walk in the garden. Besides, she was not of the disputing kind, and if it pleased Mrs. Sharp to think that she had withheld herself from the influence of Somnius, perhaps it was as conducive to harmony not to contradict her. Bertha humored her increasing childishness, whenever such a course could prudently be followed.

Mrs. Sharp arose and said that she would go and look in upon Theophilus, and learn if he wanted anything. Bertha remembered that it was time to administer some medicine and followed her. While she was performing this act, Ben and Harry entered the house. The former found his way directly towards Theophilus' bedroom.

"Well, Doctor Bertha, how is your patient?" he said, after having greeted them all.

"Her patient is as well now as he will ever be, Ben, but it is not for lack of care that he has not improved," said Theophilus, looking up into Ben's face with a strangely wan expression.

"Cheer up, Steele. We are not going to let you remain in the valley of Despondency like this. You've overdone in some way, and now you are paying the penalty, but you'll be as bright as any

of us, after you've been nursed awhile longer by this eminent physician, won't he, dearie," said Ben, turning to Bertha.

"I hope so," she replied, evasively.

"There; do you hear her?" said Ben, heartily. "We don't intend to have you lying here any longer. We hope to have you well, and when we hope, we trust; when we trust, we pray, and when we pray, we receive what we ask for. Isn't that logic? Now you must let me stay here awhile with him, Bertha, while you go and entertain our guest. Theophilus is low-spirited, one could tell just to look at him. We must raise him up. 'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.' I believe in that old prescription."

Bertha was aware of Bachelor Ben's enlivening influence in a sick room, but feared that it might be misdirected in this one. She turned to him before she went out, and whispered: "Don't talk to him too much to-night. He is very weak and tired."

She feared there might be some words spoken that would be like daggers, and she would ward off their blows. Ever thoughtful, ever kind and ever considerate Bertha Grant!

"Yes," said Mrs. Sharp, after hearing Ben, "go

in and greet your David Copperfield, who stands there waiting for you. You may not be Agnes, but it's no sign that you are not somebody's guardian angel."

There was no brief, formal touch of finger-tips between them. There was a sound, hearty, hand shake, that was full of magnetic welcome and right good will.

"You have not changed, Bertha. You look the same as when I saw you last," remarked Harry, feeling that it was a very common-place thing to say, but it was incumbent upon him to give utterance to something.

"I don't know why I shouldn't, Harry, since I am neither Redriding-hood's grandmother, Undine, nor any of those beings who were transformed so suddenly. Did you expect a metamorphosis?" said Bertha, with a laugh that sounded like a morning thrush.

"Not quite that. But we are talking mere nonsense, Bertha. I am glad to see you again. I have wanted to see you for a long time, more than I can express. Do you mind my being so frank?"

If she had been like some girls, she would have felt inclined to play awhile with the prey that seemed so easy to capture, before giving a truthful

answer to his question. It was not this that made her hesitate a moment. It was the fibres of maidenly pride and reserve that sealed her lips.

"If people the world over, men to men, and women to women, and each to the other, were less chary of cordial sentences, greetings long-thought-of and wished-for would not be so unsatisfactory in the end," said Bertha, half evasively.

"And when one loves one's friends, Bertha, let them say so," replied Harry, a little mischievously. "Let them prove it by plain, straight forward acts of kindness. What say you, Bertha?"

"That of all true things, there is nothing surer than that love and kindness never kill," and she did not ask him to wait this time before bestowing them.

Something came to pass that evening between Harry and Bertha that has come to pass since the days of Adam and Eve, as old as the mountains and as new as the morn; something that the world is happier and better for having.

Like thousands who had lived before them and many who came after, they let the question of ideals and aims go to the winds, and concluded that poverty, shared together, was more to be desired than fame and honors and riches would be,

apart. They concluded to take advantage of all the opportunities God gave them for helping each other. Harry's college course was done. Two years more of study, and his life-work would lie before him — the work of a minister, for whom showers of pennies were not any too abundant in the prospective; but the first thing he would do would be to choose what God himself had called a help-meet, and the lack of pence did not intimidate the woman of his choice.

Bachelor Ben came into the room after awhile. There was not much of the old merriment in his eyes. He was looking very sober for him, and was so absent-minded that he failed to observe the new dignity of an earnest betrothal that sat enthroned upon Bertha's brow.

"What troubles you, Uncle Ben," said Harry, with the assurance of a plighted lover.

"It's Uncle now, is it, eh? Well, I thought it would be that sometime, my children. I will not turn to you and say: may every moment of your lives together be full of happiness and joy unspeakable; but I will say: may the troubles that come upon you but make you the dearer to each other, and may the Father give to every cloud that hovers over you, the beauty of a silver, aye, a golden lining."

"Not long ago," said Harry, "I heard a pastor speak from the pulpit about minister's wives, and he called them their 'superintendents.' I am a man and Bertha is a woman, yet so powerful is her influence over me for good, that I consider it no slur upon my manliness to say that I shall be proud to make her that."

"And I have read," said Bertha, in the soft voice that is so winning in women, "that an obedient wife commands her husband. I would marry no man in whom I had not faith enough to say: he is the head, and shall be master in his own house."

"It is worth something to be trusted like that, Harry. I believe she will superintend you, in spite of herself."

Ben felt alarmed about Theophilus, and would have spoken his fears aloud after Harry's question, but he had too much forethought and delicacy to express a gloomy thought in such an atmosphere of cheerfulness. He quite relinquished the idea of brightening his spirits, when he realized how much Theophilus had failed during his absence. He left the young people alone and went to his own room. He had not been there long, when he heard Harry ascending the stairs, and as he listened to his quick footsteps, he murmured: "Well, I'm glad it's set-

tled between them. I'll do what I can for them, by-and-by. Harry is as poor as a church mouse, but he is vigorous and strong, and Bertha is prudent. They are quite as apt to prosper as couples who start with their bread all earned or owned. I rather like the idea of their being willing to struggle along together in poverty. It shows that there is genuine love for a foundation, and marriage is a farce without it."

His cogitations were interrupted then by Bertha's plea for admittance. "Come in, dearie, I always know your rap."

"I came to bid you good night," and she paused before him. "I thought we would have a little visit, but it is late. Perhaps we had better postpone it until morning."

"Late hours are said to dim such diamond eyes as yours. Draw a chair near me, for a few moments, while I tell you how I have spent my time since I left you."

"That is right," said Bertha, getting very near him, and forming a picture, representing the beauty of spring in contrast with the brightness of mellow autumn. "Tell me all about Harry's oration. He acquitted himself well, did he not?"

"You first make a statement, and then ask a

question," said Ben, laughing. "Yes, Bertha, he did himself great credit, and this old man—for I begin to feel old, dearie—felt justly proud of him. Is it any wonder that I blessed the day when you called back the boy at the gate and told him that I would help him? You were the instrument that was chosen for the uplifting of the ragged urchin."

"And you, Uncle Ben," she answered, running her fingers through his gray beard caressingly, "were the instrument chosen for the uplifting of Bertha, the waif. Since you are going back to first causes, I can be even with you. Never in all my life have I felt so thankful for what you have done for me, as I do to-night." Bertha had not been free, during the whole evening, from an undercurrent of sadness occasioned by Theophilus Steele's story, but it softened the joyousness of her heart, and made her appear even more attractive and womanly than usual. She had repeated to Harry the message from Fritz, and given him a glowing synopsis of the interview. She now repeated it to Ben, and it made him look very mischievous and slightly puzzled.

"Perhaps when he gets possession of his mother's bequest, he will find that he has a fortune left him," said Ben.

"It is not at all probable, for he says that his mother died very poor. He thinks it is the history of her life, or a letter of good advice. But it will be explained to-morrow."

"I will see that Theophilus is cared for during the night," said Ben, as she turned to leave the room. "I was almost frightened when I came to look at him more closely. I don't believe he is going to get well right off. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if he dropped away suddenly, any time."

"I had not thought of that," said Bertha, knitting her brows. "I have not believed that he would live long. He has seemed so very weak, the past few days. But, as you say, he might drop away suddenly. I will step in and see him before I retire."

"It isn't necessary. I will sleep on the sofa, and I can hear him if he wants anything. Never mind about going to him now. He is asleep, I think."

But Bertha—who always had opinions of her own, despite her gentle manner—thought differently. She knew that it was necessary for her to see him soon, and procure the name of the actress of whom he had told her, or her promise need never have been made; for it was only by means of

the lady's name that she could hope to ever gain a clue to Theophilus Steele's child. She proceeded towards the sick man's room, and would have asked him for the desired information, but found him sleeping so peacefully that she had not the heart to disturb him. She paused a moment, in doubt and indecision, and that moment was one too many. Bachelor Ben had followed her, and was soon by her side.

"I think he will have an easy night, don't you?"

"I hope so," replied Bertha, thinking that it was more than she could expect for herself, with this burden on her mind.

"Good night, dearie, and pleasant dreams of the lover, who will, in some mysterious way, come into possession of a fortune to-morrow, I hope."

"Ah, 'tis like you to look on the side where the sun shines brightest in all things, where it concerns not only yourself, but others. I will try to avoid the shadowy paths, too, and trust that all will yet be well for every one," said Bertha, glancing upon the sleeping sufferer, and then cheerfully into Bachelor Ben's face. "Good night."

CHAPTER XXII.

"Very singular things occurs in our profession, I can assure you, sir," said Hopkins.

"So I should be supposed to imagine," replied Mr. Pickwick.
— DICKENS.

Harry went out immediately after breakfast the next morning, and proceeded towards the humble cottage occupied by Fritz, in a remote part of the city. No little time was consumed by the journey, and that, together with a delay occasioned by the hospitable invitation of his friend to dine with him, which, despite his curiosity and anxiety, he had not the heart to refuse for fear of hurting the pride of Mrs. Fritz, made the day pass swiftly. He obtained possession of the package and hastened back to Theophilus Steele's mansion, to familiarize himself with the contents.

It was nearly dark when he ascended the steps, upon which he found Bertha waiting to meet him. He held out his hand and displayed his trophy with the expression of a man in doubt as to whether it was going to make him glad or sad.

"I have not read them yet, Bertha. They are letters."

She opened the sitting-room door, and bade him

enter. "You can be alone in there, and I will see that no one interrupts you." Harry insisted upon her remaining with him, and they finally entered together.

"I will be sewing on this bit of embroidery then," she said, going to her work-basket on the table, "and you will not feel that I am watching you while you read."

Harry unbound the package and opened a letter addressed to himself, that laid on top. The paper was yellowed by time, and the ink had grown dim. The first few lines were in a mother's fond language, exhorting him to lead an honorable life wherever he might be, and telling him that a mother's blessing was all she had to leave him on her death-bed. There was nothing, for several pages, that would be of any particular interest to the reader, until he came to some fragments of her own personal history, and this is what he read:

"You are now old enough, my boy, if your life has been spared until the year 18—, to have amassed or to be able to amass money for yourself. I do not ask you to carry out any plan of mine, to the damage or exclusion of your own, but I will pen a few incidents from my experience, and you can be governed by them, or not, as you choose. I

was left a widow when you, my son, were very young. A daughter had once been given me, but the Lord saw fit to take her away, and I mourned for her so deeply, that I thought to fill her place, and procure a young companion for you by adopting another. I was passionately fond of children, and, as I had wealth at my command sufficient to educate another child, and ample means to pay servants for the care of her, I felt it to be not only a pleasure but a duty. In the great universe, there were so many little ones without homes, or, if with them, possessing so few of the advantages that riches could bring. I searched diligently for a baby that suited me. A real mother can see signs of promise without great discernment, but when I looked upon numerous forms and thought of taking them to myself as my very own, I found it difficult to be satisfied with any. One day, in the year 18—, as I was looking around in the Foundlings' Home, in the city of New York, I was introduced to a gentleman, named Theophilus Steele. After telling him my wants, he kindly offered to assist me. Not long after this, he told me of a beautiful child, a few miles out of the city, that he could obtain for me. When all the arrangements had been completed, and the papers made out that

were necessary, in order that I should have full control of it, I went with Mr. Steele in a carriage and procured it. We desired to lose all trace of one another, and I left that night. He had never given me his address, and seemed anxious to lose me. I did not give him mine when I went away, and we lost each other effectually. I believe that I could have found him had I tried, but I did not wish him to be able to find me. I did not want to become attached to the baby and ever meet with others who could claim it, even remotely, or declare relationship. Had I followed my profession long after this, Mr. Steele could but have known my whereabouts. I need not pause to tell you how I learned to love the little one; but you may know that I prized her or I would not be writing of her now. Fortune smiled upon me when I took her. I kept her scarce a year, before those smiles had turned to frowns. The agent who had managed my financial affairs proved dishonest, and I lost heavily. I could have borne that; but disasters do not come singly, and a fire swept away the remainder of my property in less than a week after my first misfortune. It is a common tale—that of sudden gain and sudden loss, but it was a great blow to me when I had deemed myself so prosper-

ous. I think that I could have borne even this, however, and toiled for the children under my care, but my health failed me. I was obliged to relinquish my position on the stage, and the friends who had smiled upon me in prosperity did not offer to aid me in adversity. When I feigned sorrow, I could melt an audience to tears, but when my grief was real, I had not the power to act. Consumption claimed me, and I felt that I must soon be its victim. There was only one thing that would prolong my life, and that was change of climate. I was ordered by physicians to come to Germany. I saved from the wreck of my fortune barely enough to defray the expenses of such a journey. I could have appealed to some of my former friends and relatives for aid, but when I chose the profession of an actress, honorable enough in itself, but not approved of and considered the right course for me to pursue by them, I forfeited their friendship. I was too proud to appeal to them in my distress. I must give up the little one whom I had adopted. I will not dwell upon my grief at parting with it. I was not sure at first what course it was best to pursue, but I finally returned to the city from which I had taken it, on business, and left it with a man who

was famous for his acts of charity and benevolence. I had not time nor strength to search for the man named Steele, so one cold night, I borrowed some ragged clothes and went out into the street like a beggar, and watched for the form of the gentleman whose name I had heard spoken in terms of praise. I had thought of telling him my story and appealing to his sympathies, but for fear that I might fail in holding his attention, I wrote upon a slip of paper and carried it with me. I handed it to him hastily, after he had given me a bit of money. I asked him, in the note, to open his door to a stranger at the hour of midnight, and save a life. I felt then, that to get this little one under the care of a good man like him, was to virtually save its life. My heart misgave me afterwards, for it did not seem to be the best way that I could have chosen. But I finally persevered and left the baby at his door. I needed only to see his face, to know that a helpless child, placed in his charge, would not be allowed to suffer. I waited only long enough to see him lift it and bear it into the house. What he did with my dear, adopted baby, I had no means of knowing, for I sailed that night for this country, bringing you with me. I have been unfortunate from first to last. My health has not im-

proved, and my purse is empty. There is a German man here, named Fritz, whose mother has nursed me for many weeks, without expectation of reward. They have both been very kind to me during my sickness. He is going to America within a few months. He has promised to take my little boy with him, and never to lose sight of him, unless necessity compels it, until he is a young man grown. There is no one in America, among my friends, to whom I would trust him sooner than to this rough, honest German. To him, I shall deliver this letter, and he has promised to keep it a stated time. I am so weak and sick that I cannot think what it is best to do. But this plan for my son seems right, and, rather than procrastinate too long by devising another, I have chosen it. I am sure that the German will do his duty by you, as well as he knows how. I am not sure that the friends far across the sea could do any more for you than he, after all. I will trust what I believe to be a certainty with Fritz, rather than risk an uncertainty with others. When health departs, and the body breaks down, it is hard to think. My mind has become weak, and seems almost to have lost its powers of reasoning. I am a stranger in a strange land, yet I believe that God watches over

me and mine, and when I go to Him, will still let me look down and protect the life of my child, who will so soon be motherless. I have done all that I could for you, Harry, in my weak, feeble, helpless state, and now I leave you in the care of Fritz. If, in the years of the future, you read these lines, may you take the interest in the fate of your adopted sister, whom I loved so fondly, that I would have you. If I had been stronger, perhaps I might have done better by her. I am sorry now, that I did not really convince myself that she was well cared for before I left her. Her sweet, little face haunts me. I am weak and tired. I cannot write longer. Holding the pen fatigues me. But, Harry, if you are ever in the city of New York, and I trust you will be, I pray you to search, long and diligently, for a man named Benjamin Grant (he will be quite an elderly gentleman by the time you read this), and if you find him, make inquiries for the child that was left at his door. She had a fair complexion, blue eyes and clustering curls of brown hair then. If you can find her, do not hesitate to befriend her for your mother's sake, and make amends for anything that she, in her weakness and distress, may have done amiss. You may be poor, or you may be rich, but, Harry, my boy,

the poor can be friendly and the rich can be generous. Do what you can to find your adopted sister, whose life I tried to bless, but may have blighted, and may your life be worthy of your mother's last, loving blessing.

"The statements in this letter seem broken and incoherent, but I hope that you can read and understand them. You will find in the package I leave you, pictures of your father, myself and the little girl whom I adopted. You will find, also, the papers that were made out when I received the latter. Lovingly and tenderly, your mother,

JOSEPHINE DUMONDE."

Harry read the letter through, without once pausing to say a word. Bertha saw him start up several times in astonishment, but she refrained from questioning or intruding. She saw him gazing at pictures, and noted the reverence with which he laid them down upon the table. She could not understand the deep, thrilling gladness that shone out from his dark eyes, as he handed her the letter.

"Read it, Bertha, and tell me what you think," he said, briefly.

He watched her attentively, as her eyes traced the lines he had just finished, nor did his glance

once wander from the downcast lids, with their heavy, silken lashes sweeping the round, fair cheek. He saw her flush and tremble; then he saw the color pale and die away, leaving her cheeks like the snow. He went forward just in time to catch her form as it swayed to one side, or she would have fallen.

She clasped his hand and held it firmly. He looked down into her face, which was so like marble that it frightened him.

"Do not call any one. Let me think," she said.

"I thought it would make you happy and joyful," he answered, smoothing her hair gently. "We have been brought together through mysterious paths, Bertha. Why do you not speak?"

Her form shook with sobs, but she did not answer.

"Why, dear, you must not feel like this. It is as my mother would have it. I am going to befriend you always," said Harry, soothingly.

"It is not that, Harry; it is not that. Oh, leave me; leave me alone in my misery."

"Why, I do not understand you," said her lover, looking into the tearful, blue eyes.

"Ah, Harry, you do not know."

"Do not know what, Bertha?" he asked.

"You do not, you cannot know how I suffer," said Bertha, pressing her hands upon her white forehead. "Let me go away and think; yes, and think. Let me be alone, Harry, until I know myself. What! I the neglected, forsaken child? No, I will not, I cannot believe it. Oh, it was so cruel, so wicked."

She darted away from him, through the doorway and up the stairs, before he knew it, with the letter in her hand. It had not taken many seconds for the fact to dawn upon Bertha's mind, that she must be the daughter whom Theophilus Steele had abandoned. She would not allow herself to be convinced, however, until she had one more proof, and that was, the name, from his own lips, of the woman with whom he left her. She felt certain already, yet she looked forward to that proof with a dread which was supreme. And in her troubled mind, she sought eagerly for something that could make her doubt.

The time that she spent in her chamber was full of sharp, bitter struggles. She had been so cruelly banished by a heartless, mercenary father once, that it cut her to the heart to think of proclaiming herself before him now, and it hurt her to think of herself as the daughter of this selfish, narrow-

mindful man, whom she had ever looked upon with intense dislike. When the knowledge came upon her, it was pride that revolted the most strongly within her. Pride bade her close her lips and never acknowledge her true position to Theophilus Steele. She felt herself to be an outcast, an alien, and it galled her to think that this cold-hearted man could claim her for his own at last, if she but said the word. She felt as if she would like to creep away in the night, with Bachelor Ben and Harry, and never again look upon the face of him who had put her away in infancy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I held it truth with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

—TENNISON.

There was no alternative, but for Harry to wait, and he tried to do so patiently, but the moments lengthened into an hour, and Bertha did not return. He heard Ben enter the house and go to his room. Then he heard Mrs. Sharp pass through the hall and ascend to the chamber above. Try as he would, he could not understand Bertha's strange demeanor.

Finally, he could wait no longer. He feared she might be ill, from the fact that she staid away so long. He was wondering what it was best for him to do, when she came down again. Her face was still pale, and there were heavy circles about her eyes that denoted intense suffering. She passed by Harry as if she did not see him, so intent was she upon some problem in her own mind. She was holding the crumpled letter tightly in her hand.

Harry looked at her departing figure, as she went through the long hall, and saw her go

towards Theophilus' bedroom. But, before she entered, she looked back and seemed to see Harry for the first time. She motioned him to approach.

"Harry," she said, when he was near enough to hear her, "do not wait any longer for me. In the morning, I will try to tell you all. Believe me, I would do so now, if it were in my power."

"You are in trouble, and I cannot understand why. But you have my sympathy, and I wish that I could see you smile again. Well; tell me when you are ready."

They kissed each other good night, not only because they were lovers, but because they had once been like brother and sister.

She listened until the sound of his footsteps died away, then she entered Theophilus' room, where the gas was burning dimly, turned it on a little higher, and looked down upon the wan, troubled countenance of the sleeper. There was no tide of affection sweeping over her, but as she remembered his story of repentance and remorse, she was filled with an overwhelming sense of pity. She dreaded the proof, yet she was strong, and she nerved herself to gain it ere it was too late. Theophilus moaned in his slumber, and she touched his forehead lightly to awaken him. He looked up into

her face in a dazed, bewildered way, and stretched forth his wasted hand towards her. Had she not promised to be a friend to him in his loneliness until the very last?

Bertha sat down beside him, but it was several moments before she could summon the courage to ask him what would have been an easy task until the experience of this evening. She knew that she did not need this proof, and yet she clung persistently to the one faint doubt.

"What was the name, Mr. Steele — the name of the actress you told me of? I must know that, or I cannot search, as I promised you," said Bertha, softly.

"Her name? It was Dumonde — Josephine Dumonde," whispered Theophilus.

Bertha slid away from his side and crouched at the foot of the bed. She buried her face among the clothes, and his remaining sentences fell upon her ears like a dull weight.

"To-morrow, Bertha, I want you to tell my story to Ben and Mother Sharp. I have been lying here, thinking of it all day. I never expected to feel as I do now, but my vanity has gone. Let them see me as I am, in all my sinfulness and misery, and let them aid you if they can. If I

had long to live, perhaps I could not bear the test. But it is only for a little while, and, Bertha, it is all I can do. Confess before God and the world that my life has been a failure, and make what atonement I can for my treatment of my lost child, if she be living. Let no one say that I have not mourned and longed for her, and that I do not curse the day I parted from her. I trust you, Bertha, to do all in your power, and may you be rewarded at the last."

Bertha arose and left the room, without saying another word. The fortune that was hers by right had not been thought of, even to this time. It was only the one absorbing fact that Theophilus Steele was her father, and she was sad and heavy-hearted. If all the fortunes in the world were to be laid at her feet, she would not heed them while this strange story of an alienated inheritance of a father's care and devotion was sounding in her heart. Money had not the power to make a great wrong right, in her estimation, therefore she dwelt not upon this substitute, but rather upon the method that duty would compel her to adopt towards the wrong-doer who could be pardoned by no human being so fully as herself. It was upon a more peaceful death for Theophilus Steele that she

was pondering, as she left him; not for a moment, upon her own future happiness and prosperity in life.

She met Bachelor Ben in the hall, and threw herself into his arms, weeping violently. To him, above all earthly friends, she looked for advice in this eventful hour of her existence.

"Why, dearie, what has come over you? You haven't been quarreling with Harry, have you? Eh?" said Ben.

He heard no answer, but a sob, and so he tenderly supported the head, with its tangled masses of shining hair, and drew her gently into his own room.

"There, dearie! There! Tell your old Uncle Ben all about it, and perhaps he can help his precious Snowflake."

Bertha wept awhile, upon his broad shoulder, but by and by she overcame the struggle and looked up into his face bravely. Ben took out his handkerchief and wiped away the tear drops.

"It is a long story, but I think I can repeat it to you now, dear, good, kind friend, to whom I owe so much love and confidence and gratitude. And you will tell me truly how to bear this struggle between pride and duty, I am sure."

"Just so, dearie; just so," said Ben, seeing the eyelids tremble, and fearing another flood of tears.

Bertha recounted all the events, with only an occasional interruption from her astonished listener. She showed Ben the letter from the actress, and the accompanying papers. She dwelt long upon Theophilus Steele's agonizing regret and longing, and when she was all through, up to the time that he had bade her tell his sin and misery to Ben and Mrs. Sharp, she paused a moment, and asked, "What am I to do next, Uncle Ben?"

"What does your conscience tell you to do?" said Ben, soberly.

"Humble my pride; subdue the resentment and animosity that I have so long cherished; put self in the background, and try to make his dying pillow as soft as if he had never disowned me. Call him father," said the poor, grief-tossed girl.

"That would be right. Any other course would be wrong, dearie. Which do you choose?" asked Ben, knowing well how it would be.

"I will do as my conscience bids me. Since the life that he neglected has been so fraught with blessings, from first to last, what right have I to murmur? Since God has placed before me a

strange volume of the lessons of forgiveness, what right have I to refuse to learn them?"

"Just so, precious. I know you would do as He would have you, and this is my advice, now that you have decided for yourself: Look your sweet looks upon his pale face; go and watch with him to-night, and break it to him gently. He has not long to live. Be daughterly and fear not. He forsook you, but for all that, be watchful and womanly. Carry out your resolve, and let no waves of pride prevent you from putting your arms about his neck and forgiving him. As he starts alone to go through the dark Valley of Shadows, let your bright smile cheer and comfort him, and God will reward you."

Bertha returned slowly, but with much trepidation, to Theophilus Steele's bedside, and watched with him through the long night. He was restless, and in physical distress, until towards morning, when he fell asleep.

Bertha sat near and looked upon him silently, often bending over him to touch his forehead gently, as he started up in some troubled dream. Once she whispered, "father," but the name frightened her, and she stepped back. Theophilus opened his eyes and gazed about him wishfully. He

was failing rapidly, and his mind was not quite clear.

"Bertha, have you found her?" he asked. "Oh, no; I was dreaming, and I shall die without ever seeing my child. Come here and promise me again, that you will never falter in the search. It is all that I can do for her now."

"If I should find her before you leave the world," said Bertha, "what should I do?"

"But you cannot. There will not be time. Of the many sad words sounding in my ears, the saddest of them all to me are, 'too late.'"

"But if there were a possibility of my knowing where to find her—if Harry Dumonde's mother were the lady who took your child, and Harry were to have had a letter left him, telling him about his adopted sister—if that sister could be found, what then? Should I bring her to you?"

"Ah, Bertha, do not talk like that. You make me hopeful. Harry Dumonde! The same name! I thought of that years ago, but it is not true. It cannot be that this has happened! You are trying to cheer me with your comforting words."

"Yes, I am trying to cheer you, and if I should find that Harry's adopted sister, who is now living, is your daughter—"

"Then bring her here. Let me look into her eyes, and supplicate her forgiveness for the wrong I did her. Let me know if she is pure and good, and I can die, not peacefully, but with one doubt removed, one burden the less. Believe me, Bertha, when I say, that I do not deserve such a blessing as that would be, and so the hopes you raise must fall, and Theophilus Steele must leave the riches that he has so abused to be gathered by any but their rightful owner."

Bertha would have told him, but, for the first time, the thought of his fortune pierced her like a knife. She could not sit there and tell him that it belonged to her. With a sense of heaviness and oppression, she looked into the face of the dying man and left the room.

Bachelor Ben had been lying on the sofa in the adjoining room. She opened the door softly, expecting to find him asleep. But he was awake, pacing the floor and thinking of the trying ordeal through which he knew she must pass.

"Have you told him?" was his first question.

"No, I cannot, Uncle Ben. It seems to me like begging. I can say no more. I leave everything to you. Call me when you want me." Ben took the letter and went in.

When Bertha saw Theophilus Steele again, the morning sun was rising, and its rays fell upon the white locks of the sufferer, whose face was buried in his pillow. But when he heard her enter, he looked up, and his gray eyes were full of deep intensity and earnestness. Kinship is a tie that can be strained and weakened by hostility, but it cannot be severed. Like a coal of fire, it can slumber long under the ashes of neglect, but one breath of a fresh and friendly air can fan it into a flame. There was something in the knowledge of a blood relation, that now appealed more strongly and more powerfully to Bertha's heart than she had deemed it possible, when she saw the pathetic longing in the face of him who turned to greet her. She thought of the bitter humiliation of Theophilus, when he found that to Bachelor Ben was due a recompense that years of his own indifference and professions of piety had made it the harder to bestow. She pitied him greatly. Her compassion for him in his present anguish, that the joy of finding her could lighten, but not dispel, was akin to love. And even as a daughter, after a life of loving and tender regard from her father, would look upon him in his dying hour, so Bertha, the outcast, the neglected and the disowned, bent her beautiful,

blue eyes upon his face, and, kneeling down beside the bed, took his wasted palm between her own, and repeated her lesson of forgiveness, calmly and unfalteringly.

Never music sounded so harmonious and clear to Bachelor Ben or Theophilus Steele, as the melody of this young voice, that in the early morning banished the tones of remorse, and awoke in a troubled heart the echoes of partial peace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever,
 Do noble things, not *dream* them all day long.
 And so make life, death and that vast forever
 One grand, sweet song. — CHAS. MACKAY.

Harry and Mrs. Sharp were talking about Theophilus and the course he had pursued.

"I always believed him to be a hypocrite," said Mrs. Sharp, and then suddenly remembering that he was not only Bertha's father, but was lying at the point of death, her conscience rebuked her, and she added an amendment. "It isn't necessary that I should judge him, however. But there is One who will. I think he is finding out for himself, that detesting the world we live in doesn't help to gain a better one."

Harry was silent. He was thinking of the wretchedness of heart that Theophilus Steele was enduring, after his years of toil, and of the torture that assailed him in spite of his vast wealth. He was moralizing over the inadequacy of money to insure prosperity that would not take to itself wings and fly away, when the end of life's cares showed the dim vista of eternity.

Mrs. Sharp sat for some time with her eyes bent

upon the floor. The locks of hair protruded from behind her ears, with their olden appearance of combativeness. Her black eyes snapped when she spoke again.

"I shall not be sure about Theophilus Steele's repentance myself, until he has done something more than talk about it. He has talked and prated all his life, but what has it amounted to in the end? Just let me hear that he has changed his will. Then, and then only, will I be convinced of his sincerity. I may be called cross and crabbed, but it's no sign I should not speak my mind, when my own grandchild's being cheated out of her property at the very last."

"Just so," said Bachelor Ben, entering in time to hear the sentence. "You are right, Mrs. Sharp. His sincerity did need proof, and we have it in the fact that he has sent for his lawyers. He is worrying at a terrible rate, for fear they will not come in time for him to make another will."

"Have you seen him destroy the old one yet?" She asked the question brusquely, but there was a tremor in her voice in spite of her harshness, and she gave vent to a sound that was suspiciously like crying, a moment after, for the welfare of Bertha was the one great interesting point in this old

lady's life now, and fear that her rights might fail of being bestowed, made her quake and tremble.

"Yes," answered Ben, "the old one has been burned. Theophilus called for it and destroyed it himself. I saw it lying a crisp and blackened bit of paper, but that was not enough for me; I doomed it to utter annihilation and left it — ashes. The public institutions named therein have lost their bequests, and I am sorry for that. But it is best so, since charity, we are sure, begins at home."

"In my opinion," remarked Mrs. Sharp, "public enterprises had better flourish on ashes than be supported by the money that belongs to worthy and deserving private individuals. Well, Theophilus himself will soon be reduced to the state of the old will. Poor man! I never liked him, but it's no sign I shouldn't be sorry to have him go, after all."

The lawyers came soon after this, and Bertha Grant, now acknowledged as Bertha Steele, was made the rightful inheritor of Theophilus' millions.

A division was suggested by one of the persons present, but he would not have it so. It was the only atonement he could make to this daughter, and she should have it all.

Before he passed away, he had a word of advice to give to Bachelor Ben. Bertha was sitting beside

him, holding his hand. Harry stood near, looking down upon her dying parent. Ben stood at the foot of the bed, his merry eyes dimmed, and his jovial face sadly contorted by grief. Through long years of association, he had not dealt so gently with his partner's faults as he now wished. Is it not always thus?

Do as well as one may, there is a path shown wherein one might have culled better deeds to perform for the living, and glimpses of a "might have done," come often when the living has changed to dying or dead.

"My friend," said Theophilus, slowly, "years ago, I stood up before the world and proclaimed myself a worker in the cause of religion. But after temptations assailed me, I fell from the truth and honor that its elements alone can inspire, and shifted the burden of all but its outward semblance. Its form has had more weight with me than its principles, and my success for that reason is — a failure. Such craftiness as I have used to sustain my own reputation has resulted in folly, and now I beg that you, Ben, as old as you are, will enlist among the followers of Christ. The record of your deeds and mine is unalterable. Yours will throw glory over the cause of religion."

Mine will injure it in the eyes of all who trace the false steps of my life. I have hurt religion, by professing without practicing. It may be, Ben, that you have made a mistake, also. It may be that you could have done even more good if you had stood up before all men and before God, and professed what you have surely practiced. The example you have set, by holding yourself aloof from the church of God, may not be as wrong as mine, when I was false to it, but I cannot refrain from saying, that since you are a Christian, it is your duty to work with Christians. I see no fault in you, Benjamin Grant, but this. The power of Christianity is the perfect power that God would have all men use, and I am so grateful to you for that which has come to me in my last hours, that I long to have you succeed where I have erred. I long to have you avail yourself of the helps that I have refused, even though you do not seem to need them. Then I could almost say, in the words of the Psalmist, 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.' A few hours after this, and Theophilus Steele was no more.

These were the last words he uttered, more than to whisper a farewell to Bertha, his daughter, who

had been lost, but through the mercies of a kind Providence, was found again. She tenderly laid back the white locks from the congested brows, where no misrepresentation lurked to dispel her kindness, and, looking into Harry Dumonde's face, said, "You and I, Harry, will try to use the wealth that he has left, as he would have used it could he live his life over again, not for selfish ends, poor, dear father, but for the good of others. He has left a lesson for many to learn; the lesson of unselfish aims, but he wrote it out with a life-long struggle, and his pen was dipped in the ink of bitter experience. Help me, Harry, to make his wrongs right, so far as lies in my power."

The first thing that Bertha did, after the affairs of her father's estate were settled, was to consult Ben about a plan that she had formed in her mind.

The large house had always seemed to her to have a certain atmosphere of dreariness, and she now longed to seek a home of smaller proportions, that had for its distinguishing characteristics coziness and comfort. Ben approved of her plan, and aided her into its perfection in a comparatively short space of time.

There was a snug little Gothic cottage, a few blocks away, that was purchased without trouble

or hindrance. Harry began his theological studies, and was located in a distant part of the city, but the cottage was — according to the natural course of events — his favorite resort in hours of leisure. He would rather have earned the dower for Bertha by the sweat of his brow, if such a thing had been possible, than that she should bring it to him, if he could have had his choice, for he was not lacking in the manly independence that many another young man possesses. But he had not his choice.

Bertha was rich, yet she cared more for him than she did for the riches, and would have given them up sooner than the man she loved. Harry knew this, and love equalized all things. It mattered not to either of them what tongues might utter, so long as each was sure of the other's trust, whether in prosperity or adversity, and if Harry was galled at some moments, by the thought of accepting what he had not earned, he remembered that whatever the world of gossip might say, he knew, for his own satisfaction, that he would rather have Bertha without her fortune, than many fortunes without Bertha. And besides, he was not so greatly lacking in common sense that he could not discern how much more plenteous in generous deeds, could be the minister whose life was free from debts and

mortgages and the care of daily bread for hungry mouths, than some of the plodding, uncertain pilgrims whom he had known. He was not so deceived in his own human nature as to ignore the fact that his piety could be more vigorous, since the struggle with poverty was not going to sap away the strength that he devoted to the ministerial profession. He and Bertha talked it all over quietly, one evening, while Ben sat near and listened. He heard her cheerful laughter, and Harry's deep voice harmonizing with it like a very melodious and finely blended duet, and felt that in having good health, a willing heart and a knowledge of something laid by for the morrow, Harry could, at the end of his studies, begin his career with a wonderful supply of power, if he used it rightly.

Two years passed, and Harry's course was completed, but before beginning to preach, arrangements were made for him to travel a year in foreign lands. Bertha was to accompany him as his bride, while Ben and Mrs. Sharp remained together in the cottage. A few weeks before the eventful day on which Harry and Bertha were to sail, they were talking together of various things.

"It is delightfully pleasant and cozy here, Bertha, but the grand house, not far distant, looks de-

serted enough, and it don't seem quite right for such a handsome house to stand vacant."

"It will not do so, long, Grandma Sharp," replied Bertha, mischievously.

"I suppose you and Harry will live there by-and-by, when you come back."

"No, not Harry and I, but our little brothers and sisters in the kingdom of waifs. With a few alterations, it will make a grand house for an Orphans' Home."

CHAPTER XXV.

Every sound ends in music. The edge of every surface is tinged with prismatic rays. — EMERSON.

Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

— WM. COWPER.

The love problem that had long hovered, like a column of gracefully fashioned figures waiting to be summed up in Bertha's mind, had reached its solution. But the result, though satisfying to her soul and joyously enlivening to her hopeful vision, was not so all-absorbing as to cause forgetfulness of the pleasures and pains of those about her. Her thoughts gradually began to take the form of another puzzling, arithmetical enigma, that ran silently through her mind, as she deftly plied her needle on snowy linen and filmy laces.

She wondered if, in the years that were gone, Bachelor Ben, who was so tender and considerate towards all womankind, had lived without experiencing the hopes and the fears, the tremors and the thrills of that love, above all others, which is said to come but once in a lifetime.

She wondered if it could have been possible for a

man like him to endure, for fifty years, the storms of the tempestuous voyage of manhood's career, without having seen, through morning mists or evening gloamings, the face of a woman, shining with the guiding radiance of a beacon—for love of him.

She wondered if there had not, far back in his past, been a wondrous presence that was full of a magnetic meaning, to whose gentleness he had yielded, and to whose heart his own had fervently responded.

She looked into his face for the ravages of a disappointment, and lingered thoughtfully upon the memories of sentences his lips had framed, but her efforts were unavailing. There was no clue, and his experience in the days of "Auld Lang Syne," would not awaken to gratify her wishes. It slept continuously, as if locked within his own breast, and he did not, by any word, sign or token, put her in possession of the key.

There came a time, however, when it seemed to Bertha that she might dare to question, without presumption. Bachelor Ben, together with Mrs. Sharp and herself, had gone into the country for a few days' sojourn.

Through the place in which they were stopping,

there ran a stream that needs no praises from the hand that wields this pen, to portray the beauty of its sloping banks and the soft shimmer of its waters, as they glided on in the moonlight. No accurate description is deemed essential, in these days, when "Picturesque America" is so fully appreciated, to express to the reader the grand calm, and the delicious tranquillity that surrounded Ben and Bertha, as they passed an evening rowing—on the Hudson.

All day, the unsolved problem had haunted the mind of the maiden who sat so quietly in front of him. And when the moonlight tenderly touched his whitening locks and silver-threaded beard, as he silently plied the oars, her magic voice arose and questioned in words, whose import increased the beating of his generous heart, and recalled to him the hours of his by-gone boyhood.

"Uncle Ben, I believe you must have a love-story, and I am longing to hear it. I have often wanted to ask you to tell me all about it. Won't you do it now, before I leave you, to cross the ocean with Harry?"

Her womanly tones had a pleasant, rippling accompaniment, played by her fair hand, as she moved it to and fro in the stream. There was

silence, unbroken save by the splashing of the water, as he continued to wield the oars, rowing on and on for many moments.

After a time, they glided under the shadow of a great rock, and he ceased rowing and allowed the boat to drift. Sadly harmonious were the cadences of the tones that fell upon her ears, when he attempted to reply to her appeal.

"Yes, dearie, you are right, I am not sorry you asked me."

She made no answer, but waited for him to go on, when he chose. After awhile, he did so. But he began his history with no jests, evasions or explanatory prefaces, and commenced as though he had already been telling his story, and this was a continuation.

"We played together in childhood, and no one could have gathered the sweets that grow in the garden of infancy with friendlier or happier souls than my Mary and I. We were miniature king and queen, with the green pastures for our dominion, the fowls and the lambs for our subjects, and the flowers of the field for our boundless wealth. And so it went on, until little children changed to bashful lad and blushing lass, and we ruled over an imaginary world of our own in the school-

room. Together, we vanquished the foes of ignorance and plodded the hill of learning by ascending in unison the stepping-stones of A, B, C. Then we were parted, but we carried a memory of each other that neither time nor separation could efface. When we saw each other again, she was sixteen and I was twenty. We spent a few days together then, at the old farm. Oh, what joyous days they were, dearie, as I think back." A ray of moonlight sought its way out from behind the rocks, and danced upon the waters for a moment, as he paused.

"We were standing by the well, and I had been drawing water. My Mary held the pitcher for me to fill, and the sunshine of a summer afternoon glowed brightly about us. I called her Rebecca at the fountain, and she placed the pitcher on her head to please me. I remember so distinctly how she looked that I could almost believe it all happened yesterday. It is impressed upon my mind more vividly than any picture of my life—but one."

The rocks towered higher, and the moonlight was not hidden, but partly veiled.

"As I was saying, dearie, we were standing by the well. I never see a picture of the 'Old Oaken

Bucket,' without thinking of it. But never mind, never mind. It was a long time ago."

A moment of musing, and then the tones of the voice again. But it was growing tremulous.

"Standing by the old well, Bertha, with a true love slumbering in our hearts, full of hopes and plans and aims for the uncertain future, we plighted our troth, and I kissed her dear cheek, for I was going away."

"And then," said his listener softly.

"And then, she turned and walked up the hill, leading to her father's house, with the pitcher on her head—to please me—and I stood and looked at her until she gained the top. She looked back then and waved the gypsy hat in her hand, for she knew that down behind the trees, I must be watching, though I was sure she could not see me."

"Then I went off into the world, as many an ambitious youth, with the promise of the girl he loved the best, to encourage him, has done before me, to seek the fortune that I longed to lay at her feet. And, although miles intervened between us, we trusted to each other's faithfulness, and felt that the Lord would keep us and guide me back in His own good time. But the months seemed long

sometimes, and I often grew impatient. Letters passed between us, and it was only my Mary's inspiring words that kept my spirits from flagging, for Poverty, the grim monster that always stands with his sharp knife to cut such knots as ours, would have disheartened me if I had succumbed to his attack. Finally, there came a day, after years of toil and labor, when I could write—"I am coming for you."

He lifted the oars and plied them vigorously a moment, to disguise the pent-up feeling that seemed determined to burst its fetters. Then he laid them down and continued, in a voice which was full of the deep undercurrent of regret.

"There was never a man with a lighter heart than I had, dearie, when I bought a cozy cage to put my bird in. I filled it—not with costly furniture—but with the brightest dreams of anticipation that the daylight ever displayed the mockery of."

"And you went," said Bertha, trying to help him.

"Yes, I traveled over long miles to claim my bride. My cheeks glowed then with the flush of youth. My eyes betrayed the fullness of my happiness and content, that the end of waiting seemed

so near at hand. I thought how she would look when she came forth to meet me. I imagined that I already felt the pressure of her true palm in greeting, and saw the love-light dancing in her eyes."

"What was she like, Uncle Ben?"

"Like, dearie? To me, she was like the fresh breeze of springtime, wafted over the earth when it is carpeted with golden butter-cups and dainty violets—ever grateful and refreshing. She was the purest, sweetest, truest girl that ever breathed, and God only knows how fondly I loved her."

"But was she faithful to you? Did she keep her promise?" questioned Bertha.

He did not heed the interruption. "I thought her mild, brown eyes were the mirror in which heaven's own purity was reflected, and I know I worshipped her as some men and women worship the—Virgin. She was my mediator and intercessor. I saw God's face most clearly when I looked into her own. I best realized the grand harmony of heaven when I heard her calm voice, and I caught the echo of an angel's footsteps whenever the mail brought me a letter."

Another pause, for he was treading softly in the silent land of memories, and reverently scanning

the graves where hopes were buried. He saw that they were marked by monuments of sadness that the storms of years had not washed away.

"I suppose many men's loves are as dear to them as mine was to me, but it is hard to realize that the affection I bore her has its counterpart in other hearts, every day. The world is full of its poetry, but the half of it can never be sung, nor spoken nor written. There is a story running through Life's daily papers that a great many cynical people try to skip reading, but they cannot do it, dearie. The words are all printed in capitals, that meet their vision in spite of their efforts to the contrary. There is not one man in a hundred, that lives to a good old age, without finding the intricacies of its plot bewildering, and feeling that the Great Writer has shaped their destiny by means of its unconscious influence."

The boat drifted on, and darkness was upon them, while the light lay only far behind them and in front.

"As I was saying, dearie, I went to claim her, and she met me, just as I had believed she would. We were to be married on the morrow, and we sat together that night and talked of many things. Our topics were more gay than grave, as youthful

spirits are apt to meet them. There would be time for the realities of life in the future, I said to my Mary, when I caught her looking too earnest and thoughtful."

"But she did not marry you, Uncle Ben. Oh, do not tell me that she was unfaithful to you, who loved her so well. I hope it was anything but that which parted you."

But Bachelor Ben's thoughts were far away, and he did not seem to hear her words.

"The morrow came, as all morrows must come, whether the rising sun will find them days of sorrow or of joy. The greatest event of my early manhood brought no forebodings of ill. All seemed bright, for the time had arrived on which I was going to take my darling to my heart, to love and cherish her in weal or woe, and to be henceforth her steady friend —"

There was a long pause, and Bertha waited patiently, awed by the minor strains in the voice of her guardian and protector, whose tones had always sounded so blithesome and merry.

"Word came to me that she was ill, and bright anticipation turned to anxiety. The day that was to have seen us united, passed away in suffering and suspense. I cannot dwell upon it all; the fear,

the dread and disappointment, the long delay and solicitude."

"Do not, Uncle Ben, I am sorry I have awakened the echoes of your past, since it is the cause of so much sadness to you. But if I could, in any way, lighten your burden by sharing it, I would be so glad. Perhaps it will relieve you in the end, to have spoken to some one of these things."

"Just so," dearie. It is years since I have uttered a word upon this theme, that has ever lain nearest my heart. I want to tell you all, before I have done. Only let me take my time."

He took the oars again, and rowed a few moments. Then rested his arms upon them, as he continued.

"She lingered for many weeks, but God saw fit to take her unto Himself. With her dear hand in mine, she glided away through the Valley of Shadows into the dim unknown. Like the glistening dew-drop that disappears before the mid-day sun, she silently passed away with her youth and beauty and freshness, untouched by time or care. She was to have been mine, but another Bridegroom claimed her. He touched her gently. There was nothing stern or unkind in his aspect,

and, although I resigned her into his keeping with a long and agonizing struggle, the Father who took her from me and gave her to him did not leave me comfortless. Her last words were addressed to me. God grant that my life may have made it possible for her promise to be fulfilled. 'I will meet you at Heaven's gate.' Do you think I doubt that I will find her, if I choose the right path? Ah, she is standing there now, dearie, and her white form will be the first to welcome me when I, too, cross to the other side."

Bertha could feel the touch of tears upon her own cheek, and knew by his voice that Bachelor Ben's eyes were not undimmed.

"And you must have been so lonely, Uncle Ben, through all these years of regret and longing."

"Yes, dearie, I have been lonely; I shall always be until I find my mate."

The little skiff rocked gently, and the motion was full of tranquillity and peace.

"But my life, with all my loneliness, has not been a joyless one, since I have perfect faith in a grand and glorious beyond. You, Bertha, have helped to fill the void more than you can know, and by your side, I have ever seemed to feel the presence of my Mary. Whatever of good I may

have accomplished for you or others, I have felt rewarded by the thought not only of God's, but also of her silent approval. Her love, like a rare perfume from beyond the gates, is winning me Heavenward, and sometime, I trust, will lead me to the waiting form of my angel bride."

The boat, with its occupants of youth and age, glided swiftly out from the shadow of the rocks into a flood of moonlight, as Bachelor Ben spoke again.

"Often have I dreamed of her, and she has always seemed to look down upon me from a great height, up which I was struggling. The wreath of orange blossoms always rests upon her pretty brown hair, and the wedding veil falls softly about her face. She smiles, and seems to say, in the same tones that were so familiar, 'Come up higher,' and so I will, when I shall have culled all the fruits which God intended for me at the base of the mountain."

They had reached the shore, and the story ended with the ride. Bertha's problem was solved, and the result was long-to-be-remembered, for she had looked into the sacred depths of Bachelor Ben's heart, and felt that the bond of love between them had been strengthened by the bond of sympathy."

And as they passed along together, both were thinking —

" 'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."

CONCLUSION.

It is evening. The winter winds are blowing fiercely. Great flakes of fleecy snow are falling upon the earth and covering it softly like a mantle of ermine, while some of the white billows are borne hither and thither down the city streets.

Bachelor Ben has pushed back his chair from the grate, and is passing to and fro in the shadow beyond the glow of the fire. He has a bachelor's apartment here, as he had in another spot many years ago. Its walls are brightened by the old, home pictures, but there is no pussy to purr in his easy chair. There are no birds to warble in his windows. There is no Ponto to welcome his coming, and cheer his going. For pussy slumbered one time, and forgot to waken when her master turned his latch key. The birds left their cages and flew to the bird-heaven that must be so entrancing, with its thrilling notes from millions of resurrected, ecstatic songsters, vieing in harmony with each other. And old Ponto once gave vent to a significant, joyful bark — and laid him down to rest.

Ben's bald forehead gleams and glistens, whenever the rays from the burning grate fall upon it.

His gray locks make a silver frame for his genial, good-natured face, and his eyes, once so full of merry humor, glance up now with an expression of cheerful content, so subtle in its winning peace, that an artist might well fashion this face upon his canvas, as a representative of model old age. Time has furrowed many lines in his features, but the features themselves have been rounded and softened, until they are characteristic of their owner. There are no stiff angularities about either.

Bertha and Harry were married three years ago, and live in the Gothic Cottage. They spent a year in travel, as they intended, and upon their return, found that the project of the Orphans' Home, which Bertha entertained, had been carried out by Ben, during their absence, in the establishment of an Industrial School for Homeless Children, and the great house is filled with outcasts of the city, who, by means of Bertha's benevolence, will be fed, clothed, educated and trained to lives of usefulness and rectitude.

Mrs. Sharp is living with her grandchildren, fondled and caressed in her rapidly increasing helplessness, as Bertha believes that she deserves.

Ben's room is just across the street from the cottage where his friends reside, and each morning,

noon and night finds him sitting with the family circle, for Bertha will have him there, at all events.

He has just come in now from his supper, and is musing over the events of his life. It is not egotism that makes him realize that, in the main, it has been a valuable and well spent life. If, at some unlooked for moment, he should hear the words, "well done!" he would be ready and willing to enter into the joy that awaits all faithful servants. Whenever he has erred in deed or doctrine, it was with sincerity of purpose, shining with an effulgent light from his soul.

He still believes that worthy deeds are the steps that lead up to heaven. He still argues that there are many Christians outside of churches who would honor them more to-day, than indifferent and inactive ones who long ago declared themselves. He still insists that the life is the exponent, and that God will judge every one according to his acts, without a question as to his creed or his profession.

And the man who opened his door to a stranger at midnight, to entertain an angel, unawares, does not regret it. Neither does this man, so hospitable to all the good and truthful pleadings in his life, regret that he did not refuse to open his door again, when he heard a beautiful sentence from

gentle lips: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." For he tells me in a whisper, replete with feeling, as he pauses in his walk across the room, that the first person whom Harry Dumonde admitted to the membership of his church was — Bachelor Ben.