



Yours very affectionately
Virginia A. Boussemant

LIVING AND LOVING.

BY

VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.

"The sweetest stars are made to pass
Over the face of the darkest night."

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UNTO

Virginia Beale,

WHO, UNDER THE SKIES OF LOUISIANA, OPENED HER EYES FIRST TO
THE LIGHT OF THIS LIFE, IN THE APRIL OF 1837,
DO I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME.

PREFACE.

"WHAT shall we call her?" asked the mother, looking down very tenderly on the new gift that God had given her.

And now another face leaned over that little one, whose life they still counted by days; and this face was very fair,—in the bloom of its early girlhood, with sweet smiles straying among its dimples, and a light that was like the light of some newly-born summer morning in its blue eyes. And the young girl's thoughts wandered off to the friend who—no matter,—only, though many weary leagues of land and wave stretched between them, she never lay down at night but the other lay down by her side; and she answered, while her voice dropped softly over the name, "We will call her Virginia!"

And so, Virginia, set apart and consecrated to me above all the little children who are in the world, because you are the first child who for love of me was ever christened with my name, I dedicate to you this, my first book.

They tell me that your soft eyes opened to the light of this world when the winds of April were chiming through the magnolia-groves of Louisiana, and flowers richer in bloom and fra-

grance than any my eyes ever rested on were crowning her forests and savannahs with their gorgeous beauty.

But the skies were cold, and the winds were storming wild and hoarse around my Northern home; and I, with the dawn of last April, was walking through a darkness great and sudden,—a darkness that will never be uplifted from my heart till the morning-light of eternity scatters it forever, and *she* comes to meet me in her singing-robcs and shining crown,—she, whose gentle life was just waking up into its womanhood,—the dearly-beloved sister, whose childhood was bound up so closely with mine that the story of the one is the story of the other,—whose blue eyes will never again wander eagerly along the pages I have written,—whose words of loving praise will nevermore be the sweet reward of my labor; for, while the angels were singing joyously over the new child born on earth, another band was singing, in louder and more triumphant strains, "*Behold, an angel is born in heaven!*"

So doubly meet it seemed, Virginia, that I should dedicate this volume to you, though there are precious names I might write here,—names that lie in characters of light on my heart's tablets, and that will only be more radiant when I read them in the *Lamb's Book of Life*, written there by a love stronger and tenderer and more enduring than mine,—mine, whose heart carries them, its priceless pearls, by day and by night.

I have christened these pages "*LIVING AND LOVING*," because the words seemed to me to embody, more fully than any other, the grand idea of the whole,—the *LIVING AND THE LOVING*, truly, earnestly, hopefully, amid all the trials and perplexities and

discords of time, to the end. Is not this, too, the sublime truth with which we will all alike have to do, which underlies and overreaches all life, and which at last must make up the radiant jewels that crown our eternity?

Of these stories that I give to you, some have been traced in the flush of newly-born summer mornings, and some, in weary hours of the night, when the stars looked down mournfully upon me,—some when my heart was very heavy with sharp sorrows for itself or others, and some when it throbbed lightly to the rhythm of youth and life and happiness!

But I hardly dare to hope your eyes will ever wander across the words I am writing; for the journey from baby to womanhood is a long one, and close by are many paths that lead off to the *Valley*.

And if our Father leads you through this while "it is yet morning," I shall love to think sometimes that there is a Virginia in heaven, and that it is a name known and beloved by the angels who walk there!

And now, if my pen were this morning a fairy's wand, I hardly know what good gifts I should summon the future years to bring you! Would it be Genius,—that prayer which so many mothers pray for their children? How should I dare crown your baby head with that bright, fearful gift? There are many times when your woman's heart would surely faint and your feet fail under the burden. Great high-tides of enjoyment and rapture it would bring you,—but hours, too, of darkness, and weariness, and keenest suffering. I will not ask for you *Genius*!

Then, there are beauty and riches. Oh, Virginia, I leave all

those things with God the Father, asking only that if your life, just springing up now, blossom into girl and womanhood, the white lilies of truth and purity may grow all around you,—that you may be a sweet, gentle, noble woman, and that your life be crowned with that radiant jewel, *Love*, without which, it seems to me, any woman's life must be incomplete,—*not perfected!*

It may be that we, who bear one name, shall never look upon each other's faces; for your home under those soft skies is very far away; and, though I have listened often to the stories of the South land,—of its warm hearts, of its princely hospitalities, and of its glowing landscapes,—I know not whether my heart shall ever respond to the one or my eyes behold the other.

But whether in life or in death, I pray for you, here, one prayer,—the most significant, the most loving, and the most comprehensive that, in their human weakness, my lips can utter or my pen can write:—

God be with you, dear Virginia! God be with you!

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Myriel.

It was an old, yellow-brown, two-story house, and there was nothing striking or original in its physiognomy or belongings, that I know of. A high picket-fence ran all around the front, and before this grew an immense locust, picturesque in itself, and making a cool, shadowy quiet about the building even in the warmest August noons.

Mrs. Ward—the *widow* Ward—lived here, who took boarders whenever the tavern gave indications of plethora, spun yarn for mothers with large families, kept a cow, sold milk; and, in short, like a thorough Yankee woman, managed to support herself independently and respectably by her own head and hands,—for which all due honor be herein awarded her. You can see her now dusting the window-panes, for she has just given the parlor its weekly sweeping. She is small, straight, wiry, with sharp, quick motions, and a *positive* sort of eye and mouth, which would be a physiognomist's best key to her character.

But, after all, it is with Mrs. Ward's lodger overhead, and

not with herself, that we have at present to do. He came in about half an hour ago from the tavern, where he takes his meals, for the large rooms there are just now all occupied.

He has thrown open the two windows in front and the one on the right, for he has a remarkable liking for sunshine and fresh air.

He is walking up and down the room now, humming snatches of song, or relapsing into reverie,—not altogether agreeable, it seems, by the occasional knitting of his forehead and the restlessness of his manner.

He is very young, slender, and of middling height, not handsome, but fine-looking,—a gentleman “by the *honor* of man as well as by the will of God.”

The lines around the mouth are strong: he has force and will: the eyes of a rich hazel-gray smile out one moment with pleasant, happy thoughts, then darken down with sad or vexatious ones: he has fine feelings and impulses. From these premises you must draw your own inferences of his character.

Suddenly he speaks out with that nervous abruptness which marks his whole manner:—

“Two weeks more in this dull, droning, disagreeable place! I declare, it is more than I can stand. I’d pack up and start off this very day, if my conscience was a little tougher than it is. But I promised that anxious mother of mine I’d stay six weeks, and so I will, if I don’t go insane before the time is up and hang myself. I’d get the promise rescinded pretty

quick if she weren’t in Alabama, and it would take a week for the letter to go and another to bring me an answer. It’s all sheer nonsense my coming up here to Meadowbrook for the bracing air, for no reason in the world saving that mother and Uncle Lawton must take it into their wise heads that I was growing thin, and might inherit consumption because my father died of it.

“Here I am, twenty years old, and as well as any fellow in my class. It’s too bad. Goodness! what’s that?”

There was a sudden swinging and dashing of boughs against the side-window, a little, half-smothered shriek, and then a small, sun-browned face peeped out from the green branches on Norman Guilds.

“Why, child alive, how did you get up here? Don’t you know you’ll fall and break your neck?” (involuntarily reaching out his arms to the child’s rescue.)

“I wanted those two peaches on that big bough, so I climbed up here to get ’em. Oh, dear! I’m going!” (for the light bough swayed to and fro under the speaker.)

“No, you’re not. Take tight hold of my hands. There, now, give one spring: I won’t let you go.”

A moment later, and, panting with fright and exertion, the little girl was safely landed in the chamber.

She was a strange-looking child, dark and thin, with no soft outlines or delicate coloring, with nothing pretty or attractive about her, unless it might be her hair and eyes. The

one lay in tangled skeins about her face, but it was a rich goldenish brown, and betwixt it looked out the wild, large, bright eyes.

An old faded calico dress, which must originally have been intended for a much larger person, and a still older and equally ill-fitting pair of shoes, completed the child's *tout ensemble*.

Norman Guilds took in all this at a glance. He was by nature and education very fastidious. If he had met the little girl under any other circumstances, or if he had not just done her a favor, which always warms one's heart toward another, he would not have spoken to her. As it was, he asked, "What is your name?"

"Muriel Heith."

"Muriel Heith." He had a great fancy for musical and peculiar names. "That sounds very sweetly. I never heard it before. Where do you live?"

"Here, with Miss Ward."

"Well, what do you do here? Haven't you any relations?"

"I weed the garden, and pick the vegetables, and wash the dishes, and milk the cow. I haven't had any relations since grandma died. That was two years ago."

A tremor crept through the child's voice, and a mist over the wild, bright eyes. It touched Norman.

"But your father and your mother? Are they dead too?"

"They died before I can remember. Papa's vessel went

down at sea, and it was that killed mamma: so I have heard grandma say."

Her loneliness appealed to his sympathies as no child's had ever done before; and as she suddenly swept back the tangles of hair and looked at him, not boldly, but curiously, earnestly, the young man noticed for the first time the strange, bright deepness of her eyes, and that there was a thought in them.

"Well, what is it?"

She comprehended at once. "I was wondering what made you ask me all these questions. It can't be because you like me."

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"Because nobody does; nobody has since grandma died."

He must have had a kind heart, this Norman Guilds, whatever his faults were, (and, I assure you, they were numerous enough,) for he passed his white hand softly over the tangled hair, and said, very tenderly, "Poor child! I am sorry for you!"

Children's intuitions are usually correct ones. Muriel Heith, the little friendless orphan-girl, *felt* this tone. She looked up with a world of grateful surprise gathering into her eyes, whose beauty grew like all truly beautiful things upon the perceptions of Norman Guilds. There was a quick, gasping sob. Then, with a wild, sudden impulse, she threw her arms around the young man's neck, and cried there as only a

little child could, who had found what its heart had so long vainly cried out for,—a friend.

Norman sat down and drew the child into his lap. He laid her head on his shoulder, tenderly as her mother could have done in the days she could not remember, and she sobbed there for a while as though her heart were breaking; but it was only *healing*.

"What is it makes you cry so? Tell me all," he asked, at last, in a low, soothing voice, when the sobs had grown fewer.

"Because you said you liked me. It seemed so good. I love you. I do, truly."

"Do you?" (checking the smile that was stealing about his lips.) "Well, then, we will be friends always, Muriel. Are you happy, living here with Mrs. Ward?"

"No!" (most emphatically.)

"Why not?"

"Because she don't *know* me. She never could. All she cares for is to have me work, work, work, from morning till night. If I could only be like other little girls, and go to school and be dressed up! Sometimes I think I'll kill myself or run away."

Every word she spoke revealed more and more of her half-stifed, ill-directed, undeveloped nature. The young man felt there were great beauty and great strength under the little brown, homely face.

"What *would* make you happy, Muriel, my child? Think well, now, before you answer me!"

She looked up in his face and smiled significantly. It was a rare smile,—a smile that can only break up from a soul that has *beauty*, no matter in what sort of a casket the gem is holden.

"I have thought about it too many times to stop now. I should be very happy if I could go to school and study. There is something away down in my heart that keeps crying and craving: I don't know what it is,—only it's like a great hunger there all the time. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, poor child. It's a shame to have you here. I begin to think you're a genius, Muriel."

Of course she did not understand his meaning; but he went on, more to himself than to her:—"Somebody besides the widow Ward ought to have the bringing up of you,—that's certain! How I wish Parson Hunter and his sister could see you! They'd be sure to find out what a little 'diamond in the rough' you were. If they only would adopt you, now. I've a good mind to ride over to Stony Creek this very afternoon and see about the matter."

"Who is Parson Hunter? Where does he live?" eagerly asked Muriel.

"He's an old friend of my uncle's. They were classmates in college. I visited them week before last, and Miss Meta

said she wished she could prevail upon her brother to adopt a child."

He was cogitating the matter in his own mind, and though Muriel Heith sat on his knee, and his hand kept up its soft caressing movement through her hair, I hardly think he knew she was listening.

"Oh, how I wish I could go there!"

"Muriel! Muriel! I say, where are you?" The loud, sharp tones wound up the stairs and broke suddenly on the young man and the little girl who sat on his lap.

"If *Miss Ward* should ketch me in here." Muriel's pantomime was a more expressive conclusion to this sentence than any words could have been. "But no matter; I'll run out this side-door, and down the back-stairs." And she was gone before Norman could interfere.

In less than two minutes she came back again with a letter for the young man, which Mrs. Ward said had been sent over from the tavern.

Norman seized it hastily and broke the seal. His face was very white when he lifted it from the few brief lines which the letter contained.

"My mother is very ill. It is doubtful whether I shall ever see her alive," he said; and then the young Southerner flung himself into a chair and burst into tears.

And Muriel Heith went up to him and drew her arms around his neck, and pushed up her little brown cheek to his,

and said, in those tender, trembling tones through which one heart *can* speak to another, "I am very sorry for you, Mr. Guilds." And he bowed his proud head on her shoulder, and the child comforted him.

Half an hour later they parted, for it was necessary he should leave immediately in order to take the noon train for the city. It was very hard for Muriel, for he was her only friend. But he took her hands in his and looked into her shining tears, and told her he would not forget her.

"Parson Hunter, of Stony Creek? Is that right?" was the little girl's last question.

"Yes. Now good-by."

She would not say it, but she answered his kiss, and they went on the different ways God had appointed them. But Muriel, the child, laid up these words in her heart:—"Parson Hunter, Stony Creek."

It was a wild, rainy, shrieking night. Parson Hunter and his sister sat together in the cozy little sitting-room of the quaint, old-fashioned parsonage. He was a tall, fine-looking man, with a mild, genial, expressive countenance, that had just reached its sixtieth year, and his sister, Mehetabel, was ten years his junior. There was a strong family resemblance between the brother and sister. Miss Hunter's face was a fair type of her character. It was gentle, beaming, placid, and must once have been very pretty. Then her smile was so

warm and bright you could not see it without loving her. Well, they sat on either side of the table; the pastor was finishing his sermon, and his sister a collar for the next Sabbath, when there was a loud, startling peal from the brass knocker at the front-door.

"Goodness, Meta! who *can* be out such a night as this?" exclaimed the parson, as he and his sister simultaneously laid down quill and needle.

Before the lady could answer the door opened, and a child walked into the room,—a dripping, draggled, miserably-dressed and miserably-worn child, with tangled hair straying about her thin, dark face.

Parson Hunter and his sister rose up dumb with astonishment.

The little girl went straight up to them, and her eyes turned eagerly, wistfully, and yet timidly, from one to the other. She might have been ten, she could not have been more than twelve, years old.

"They told me Parson Hunter lived here, and I have come a long way to find you. Please don't send me away!" She said these last words with such beseeching earnestness, there was so much trembling pathos in her voice, that Miss Hunter's womanly sympathies were aroused at once. She, whose tender heart would not have refused a dog shelter from the storm!

"No, my child, we won't send you away. But where did you come from this dreadful night? and what is it you want?"

"I want you to let me live with you. I'll be very good and work ever so hard, if you'll only let me study sometimes. I've walked all the way from Meadowbrook since yesterday morning to find you."

"From Meadowbrook? Why, that's twenty miles!" rejoined in one breath the parson and his sister.

"I know it. Last night I slept under the trees in the wood, and to-day I walked all the rest of the way."

"But haven't you any friends? What made you run away so, my child?" queried the interested minister.

"Let her sit down first, brother. Poor thing! she must be so tired." And Miss Hunter pushed a chair toward her.

So Muriel Heith—for you know it was her, reader—sat down and told her story simply, honestly, and yet with a natural pathos which went right to the hearts of her hearers.

She told them of her orphaned childhood and her dead Grandmother,—of her dull, wretched, toilsome life at the widow Ward's,—and of her climbing up the cherry-tree, and how Norman Guilds had drawn her into the window. Her hearers exchanged significant glances at the mention of this name.

She related briefly her interview with him, and how he had wished they could see her. "He would have come himself and told you about me, I am certain, if the letter had not come. But I thought about it every day, until, at last, one night when I lay all alone in my bed, a voice seemed to call

out to me, 'Why don't you go yourself and find 'em, Muriel?' And I lay awake till almost morning thinking about it. Two days after I started. Please don't send me back, will you? If you do I shall die."

"Don't think about that now, my child: we will talk it over to-morrow." And the tender-hearted old maid stroked away the tangled hair and looked on the little, dark face through her tears. As for the parson, he stood still, thinking, with an unusual moisture in his eyes.

And then Miss Mehetabel bustled off with the little girl into the kitchen and roused up Bridget, who was dozing by one corner of the immense fireplace.

A brisk flame was soon kindled, and, enveloped in an old wrapper and shawl of Miss Hunter's, Muriel took her first supper at the parsonage, pausing sometimes to ask herself whether all this were not a dream, from which she would awaken to find herself in the little attic chamber at Mrs. Ward's.

Mehetabel returned to her brother. He was walking thoughtfully up and down the room.

"Well, Ezra, what shall we do with the child?" She asked it in a plain, straightforward manner; for Miss Hunter was a practical woman, and never had any sentimentalisms with her benevolence.

Then two rose up from the dead and plead with the pastor for the little orphan. One was a gentle, fair-haired woman,

the wife of his youth, for whom he had been a life-mourner; and the other, the blue-eyed babe she took with her when she went from him. Oh, they were truly eloquent pleaders for the little worn, weary child that was sleeping soundly overhead.

"Mehetabel, it may be God has sent us the girl to be a light and comfort to our old age. We will keep her," said the pastor, tenderly and solemnly. And so it was settled.

Muriel Heith had been at the parsonage about two months, when a letter was received from Norman Guilds. The child had improved very rapidly; for another life was being developed in this new social and moral atmosphere. She had many faults, and of course there was much to eradicate, much that required judicious guidance and discipline, in her nature. But she had warm, rich affections, and a deep, conscientious love of truth, and where these two exist there is a foundation whereon to build.

Norman Guilds's letter was brief, for he was on the eve of starting for Europe with his mother, whose delicate health demanded an immediate change of climate.

After apologizing for his sudden departure from the North without seeing the pastor and his sister, he spoke of Muriel. "You will see her for my sake," he said, "and do what you can for her. I am convinced there are the elements of a great and beautiful character in this wild, neglected child. Pardon me for suggesting that, taken to your own home, sur-

rounded by its refining and elevating influences, she would develop a rare and most interesting character."

Miss Hunter read this passage to Muriel,—rather injudiciously, perhaps, but out of the goodness of her heart. Oh, if you had seen the large eyes darken and kindle with every word, and the little, thin face, over which the warm-hued hair now fell in thick curls, glow out as she listened to the words, you would have felt that on Muriel, the child Muriel's soul, God's finger had written that radiant word, GENIUS.

Ten years have passed. It is the late afternoon of an October day. Mountains of rich gold and crimson clouds are heaped in the west, and the young lady that sits by the front-chamber window of the old parsonage, where she has been assiduously writing for the last three hours, throws down her pen and gazes out on the sky.

Look at her now: her face is a study. It is not handsome,—it never will be; but it is delicate and refined, with an infinite variety of expression.

The low, intellectual forehead is swept by bands of rich, wavy hair; the eyes,—oh, were there ever eyes like unto them! so dark, yet so clear, so mysterious, yet so easily read,—in short, so wonderful and so beautiful? The face is dark, thin, irregular, and the mouth rather cold and proud, perhaps sad in repose, but tender, sweet, childlike when it nestles into a smile.

The young girl looking off so absorbed in that sunset is an authoress, and her name—but you know that already. At last, with a low sigh, she turns away, opens an elegant bound journal that lies on the table, and, taking her pen once more, writes rapidly:—

"To-day is my twenty-fourth birthday. It is two years ago this week since Uncle Ezra was laid down by the wife of his youth, and, on thinking of this, the other has slipped from Aunt Meta's memory, dear soul!

"I have been walking down the past, and hunting up old acquaintances,—the days that are departed.

"Thirteen years ago I came to them. How well I remember that night! Homeless, friendless, dirty, ragged, ignorant, wretched, I stood before them, and they took me in. 'Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these, ye did it unto me.' Oh, with what radiant gems shall the angels set these words in their crowns!

"What a bright life reaches up from that night! What patience they had with me! How gently they treated my faults and encouraged and strengthened my virtues! And then to think of the pains and money they expended on my education. Father and mother, in spirit and in truth, have they been to me!

"And to think that now that little houseless orphan-girl is famous; that great men call her gifted; that her name is a

familiar sound in the cottage-homes of the North and among the fair valleys of the South!

"Sometimes I lie awake in the night-time, just as I did in the old child-days, and it all seems like a dream.

"What visions of fame I used to have five years ago! and now they are all gone. I wish I could feel for a single hour just as I did when my first poem was published in the 'Stony Creek Excelsior.'

"I begin to find now how little fame can satisfy a life, a heart,—how small and meagre it is, after all.

"I have been asking myself to-day if I am happy; and my heart did not answer 'yes,' only my conscience and intellect said, 'You *ought* to be.'

"There is some longing within me that is not satisfied, —some capacity of intense happiness in my nature that has never been called out. What is it? Dumb silences of my heart, answer ye me: what is it?

"And now, Muriel Heith, what have you been writing? Something you would not for worlds that mortal eyes should see: and yet it cannot be wrong, for you would not blush to lay it before the angels which are in heaven.

"Certainly, I was never in love—There goes the supper-bell!"

No, Muriel Heith, you were never in love; but your *woman's heart* has outspoken on that last page of the journal you so carefully lock away.

And while the young authoress was writing those words a gentleman was pacing up and down the parlor of the Stony Creek hotel.

He was young,—not very, but still he could not have passed far beyond thirty,—tall and fine-looking, with a thin, spirited Saxon face, and large piercing eyes. Twelve years ago you listened to a soliloquy of his in Mrs. Ward's front-chamber. The student-boy has not forgotten his old habit in his riper manhood:—

"It's lucky I got rid of that picnic this afternoon: what a namby-pamby affair it would have been! How many hours of a man's natural life he has to be bored for courtesy's sake! It really is too much for the very small stock of patience with which nature endowed me.

"It's the last journey I'll ever take with my cousin, John Lawton, that's certain. Poor Uncle Tom! it would have almost broken his heart had he known how his son and heir would squander his time and his money.

"To-morrow I think I'll meet mother in New York. Oh, there's that call on that authoress. I'm sorry I promised John to go, for I hate the whole fraternity; but then I must keep my word. A woman authoress!—an abominable creation! —a being with brains and no heart! No doubt we shall be entertained with a lecture on the intellectual superiority of woman to man, and her manifest political destiny.

"Literary women always have so many hobbies to ride. I

wonder if this one takes snuff and drinks strong tea. I didn't ask her name, even. No great wonder that John called me a hater of the sex. And yet how much profounder is my admiration, my reverence, my ideal, for woman than his is! and it is because, individually, she falls so far below my ideal that I am thus cynical and bitter.

"I ought to get married and settle down to my profession, after rambling for ten years all over the face of the earth. Nobody knows this better than I do. But where on earth shall I find the woman to elect *my wife*? I need her to walk with me; but she must be a woman with a true, deep, loving heart and cultivated mind and tastes, else she could not be my *companion*. I want a woman who can sympathize with me in my longings to bless and to elevate humanity, who reverences the good and the true,—a woman whose love shall inspire and bless me, harmonizing and filling out my life,—a woman whom I can love with all this great capacity for loving, which proves its object *must* be somewhere,—a woman to whom my heart could bow down reverently and say, 'My queen, my conqueror!'"

Oh, Norman Guilds! while you spoke the angel passed by that way.

"This is the place," said John Lawton, as he opened the front-gate of the parsonage.

"Yes; and, if you would have stayed to hear it, I should

have told you that this lady—whom it is doing ourselves an honor to call on, spite of your reluctance—was a protégé of the parson's."

"What is her name?"

"Why, man alive! don't you know that? *Muriel Heith!*" And John lifted the handle of the brass knocker.

A light suddenly flashed through the mind of Norman Guilds. He knew who *she* was. "John, I am very glad you brought me here to-night," he said; and then the door opened.

Muriel Heith, the authoress, entered the room with that half-reserved, half-embarrassed air which always characterized her manner to strangers. She was not used to be lionized. I doubt whether she was of material ever to be.

John looked at her curiously, Norman, long and eagerly, as they presented themselves.

Muriel did not hear Norman's name, and asked him to repeat it after a few moments' desultory conversation. They had, unfortunately, left their cards at the hotel.

"Norman Guilds. It is barely possible you remember it."

One glance—eager, piercing—swept his face. Her own brightened, her lips quivered. Then, with something of the old childlike manner he remembered, she placed her hands in his, and answered, "I am *glad* to see you, Mr. Guilds."

The call, which was intended to occupy but a few moments, extended into very late evening. John was profuse

in his praises of the young authoress as they returned to the hotel, but his cousin was unusually taciturn.

However, Norman Guilds did not leave Stony Creek the next day, nor the next week, for that matter; and I know that every day he visited the old parsonage.

Miss Muloch thinks that "God made about *one* of every thousand marriages that are committed on earth." I have been inclined to this opinion sometimes myself. Be that as it may, however, I believe the angels in heaven smiled when Norman Guilds and Muriel Heith clasped hands and promised to walk thus till God called them.

Late in November the young girl wrote in her journal,—

"Norman left to-day, but he is coming back to me with the birds of April; and then we are to be together,—together till death do part us! I am very happy, even in his absence. The dumb silences of my heart are filled now with the eternal music. The old-home restless longings are all gone. God be praised that I have found thee at last, Norman Guilds, my KING!"

To Arthur, Asleep.

STILLY, oh, very stillly, with clasp'd hands,
That *would* hush down the beating of my heart,
I stand and watch thy slumbers. Round thee now,
Like silver clouds flung on a summer sky,
The snowy curtains tremble, and betwixt
Their loopings—a baptismal sent of heaven—
Plashes the sunshine on thy face and hair.
O bud of one brief summer, by that smile,
Like light on opening roses, do I know
The angels are with thee,—that those blue eyes,
Which break up to me in their sudden joy,
(As I have pray'd God's seraphs might some day,)
Still watch the radiance of those sapphire hills,
From which so late thou'st wandered.

One white hand,

Like an unfolding lily, is crush'd up
Amid the clustering curls, whose golden hues
Were caught among thy mother's.

Oh, most fair
 And heaven-like picture that the world can throw
 Along its changeful canvas,—*child asleep!*
 Through my dim tears, I stand to-day and watch
 Mournful above thy rest; I who have walk'd
 Out from the gates of childhood, and who wear
 The "burden and the weariness of life"
 On heart and forehead.

What of joy or good
 (Stringing along this hush the future's pearls)
 Shall shape my prayer for thee, that life may lay
 Her gold, her myrrh, and incense at thy feet,—
 Her jewels round thy brow?

Not these—not these—
 Be my heart's asking. May our Father lead
 Thy young feet tenderly across the hills
 To the "far country," and it shall be well,—
 Well with thee, sweetest, even if thy life
 Take but the key-note here, and sing the song
 Upon the purple mountains! So sleep on,
 Thy smile the loving chorus of my prayer:—
"In life or death may God be with the child!"

The Memory Bells.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,
 That readest this brief psalm,
 As one by one thy hopes depart,
 Be resolute and calm.—LONGFELLOW.

CHIME! chime! chime! Sending down through the silent
 corridors of many years their solemn voices, now soft and
 sweet as the cradle-song of a new mother, now surging into a
 full, rich, triumphant jubilee, and now melting down into a
 deep, slow wail, that is, a blank groan of misery, anguish,
 death.

Oh, memory bells! memory bells! your solemn voices ring
 down to me, through the long distances, the story of my life.
 To-night I will sit here very still and listen to you.

My aunt was a stern, cold woman, and I lived with her
 from infancy; for both my parents died before my recol-
 lection. She was my father's only sister, and ten years his
 senior. Her husband died in his youth and left her childless.
 I can see her now, tall, thin, angular, with her smooth black

hair and cold gray eyes. I believe she loved me better than any thing on earth; but she had little passion or emotion in her nature.

We were poor people,—not miserably so,—but my aunt kept a small toy and needle-store,—the only one in the village,—and the small sales of this supplied all our wants. We lived in a large, wide, old-fashioned house. One of the front rooms was appropriated to the store; the other was our parlor. Great locust-trees stretched their cool, green arms in front of the house; and at the back was a large, plethoric, tangled old fruit-garden. This garden was my teacher, my inspiration, my exceeding great joy. Under those gnarled old pear, and straggling apple, and bending plum-branches, what dreams have I dreamed, what visions have I seen, in the dim summer afternoons when my aunt sat knitting behind the counter in the little store!

My childhood, though stark and uneventful for one of my nature, was not really harsh or unhappy. My aunt did not understand and of course could not sympathize with my temperament; but she conscientiously tried to do her duty by me. I was brought up to a strict observance of all the outward forms and ceremonies of the religion my aunt professed. I believe she was a good woman, though a narrow-minded one, and is in heaven now.

Well, I came up in the old house to my fifteenth summer; and, as my aunt's health was not very good, she retained me

from school that season to assist her in the store. I did not fancy this at all. The confinement was irksome and interfered with my studies and my dreams, which were really my life.

One day in the early June my aunt left me in sole charge of the store, while she went to the city to replenish her stock of merchandise.

It was a very warm afternoon and there were not many customers; so I had taken an old volume of miscellaneous stories into the store, and was deeply absorbed in these when the sound of carriage-wheels drawing up under the locusts roused me. I looked out and saw a young man spring from the buggy, and then assist a young girl to alight. They entered the store together. I can remember just how they looked.

The young man was apparently about twenty. He was not handsome, but his large, deep, gray-blue eyes were very beautiful; and strength and sweetness were in the smile with which he looked down on his companion.

Oh, she was beautiful as the flowers that drink the dews of May, or the birds that flash through the sunshine! Her rich, warm, goldenish hair lay in wavy folds about her sweet face. Her eyes of deep blue looked out softly from their shining lashes; and her small mouth was like the first opening of crimson tulips to the sunshine. I did not feel then as I should now; the face had no great force or power in it. I only *felt* its rare bloom and sweetness.

The young girl had been out in the woods and torn her dress—a delicate pink lawn—in searching for wild-flowers. She was quite ashamed to return to the hotel in such a dilapidated condition; so she had come into the store to get some sewing-silk, and, with my permission, to mend the rent there.

"Perhaps I can do it for you," I ventured, blushing at the two pairs of eyes that were searching my face so curiously.

"Thank you. It will be such a favor," answered the soft, musical voice; "for, if there's any thing I despise, it's mending a rent. Oh, that shade will just match my dress!" running her snowy fingers over the skeins of silk I had brought forward.

"Will you walk into the other room?" I asked.

"No, Woolsey, you mustn't come now." And she playfully waved the young man back, as he was following us into the sitting-room.

"Yes, I must, too, Hattie. You needn't think I'm going to stay in the store here all alone for half an hour, with nothing to do but bite my thumbs."

"Perhaps you'll like to walk out in the garden, sir. It's very pleasant; and our flowers are in bloom now," I suggested.

"Thank you; I'll go out and see if they are as fair as the flowers inside."

I remember how she sat down in my aunt's great rocking-

chair that always stood in the corner, and I gave her the great palm-leaf fan which hung every summer above the mantel.

What a picture she was with her loosened bonnet-strings waving back and forth to the motion of her fan! I knelt down there at her feet, and sewed away to the low musical sound of her voice, dropping like a sweet song into my heart.

Harriet Lisle—like myself—was an orphan. But her mother's brother had adopted her. He was a widower, and his little niece was his one pet and idol.

Woolsey Dutton was the son of this uncle's wife's sister. So he was only nominally Harriet's cousin, though he was very dear to her, for they had known each other from childhood.

Her uncle—Woolsey—and herself had been travelling through the State, and were stopping for a few days at the hotel in the adjoining village.

Thus much I learned of Harriet Lisle's antecedents before I had placed the finishing stitches to the long rent in her dress; and I reciprocated her frankness by giving her a brief account of my own life. Afterwards we walked through the garden and found Woolsey among the vines, whose buds were strung like jewels amid the green leaves.

We wandered up and down the old weed-tangled, tree-shaded garden, with which Woolsey and Harriet were in perfect raptures. I remember the season was late and the apple-trees were just in blossom, and the wind shook musically through the white spray of the boughs. Woolsey plucked a

branch of these and twisted them around my forehead, then stepped back a moment and looked at me. There was something in his deep glance that brought the lids over my eyes, for I was very timid then. But Hattie drew up to me and whispered softly, "Woolsey is thinking how pretty you look."

As a child, I was painfully bashful; but, after the first ten minutes, I never dreamed of fearing Woolsey Dutton. There was something in his manner, in himself, that drew me out; his presence was a kind of inspiration; and I was astonished to find thoughts and emotions which had lain hidden in my heart for years breaking eagerly over my lips, while the echoes in the hollows caught up and tangled sweetly together our outbursts of merry laughter. We came suddenly upon a large rose-bush in one corner of the garden. It was full of white buds, but none had blossomed. "In two or three days they will be out," I said. "How I should like to have you see them!"

Woolsey leaned over to examine the bush, and on one side he found a half-opened blossom, its pure white lips lying in beautiful contrast against the dark leaves. He uttered an exclamation of delight. I plucked the flower and gave it to him.

"I shall keep it because it reminds me of the giver," he said, with a bow that would have honored a princess. "It is pure and fragrant, and hidden like her own life. I have found two flowers this afternoon."

"Now, I declare, if I'm not jealous, Woolsey!" interposed his cousin, with a most becoming pout of her crimson lip.

Her cousin patted her playfully under the chin and said she was a very sweet rose too. And so we slowly returned to the house just as the tree-tops were purpling with the rich light of the sunset.

"We sha'n't be back for tea unless we hurry, Woolsey. I wish we could stay longer."

"So do I. But we will come back some time."

"Will you? Will you, truly? Oh, I am so glad!" eagerly clapping my hands.

"Yes. And I want you to remember this, my white rosebud. It may be two, three, or even four years; for we leave here to-morrow, and my time is not now at my own disposal. But I shall surely come, if God spares my life, before the old rose-bush in the garden hangs its boughs with the white blossoms of six summers. Do you believe me, Addie?"

"I believe you."

"Well, say it again:—'I believe you, Woolsey.' Place your hands in mine and look straight in my eyes."

There was a kind of magnetic power about Woolsey Dutton, whether he was grave or gay, which usually belongs to strong characters. I did not think of refusing him. I placed my hands in his. I looked into the shining deeps of his eyes and said, "Woolsey, I believe you."

"I shall come to see you some time too," said Hattie,

leaning her bright face out of the carriage, and kissing me just as they were leaving.

Woolsey had gathered up the reins in his hand. He bent down and pressed his lips upon my forehead, then sprang lightly into his seat, and they were gone—gone; but oh, what a long break of sunshine they had left upon my life!

Five years had passed. I stood upon my twentieth birthday. I had changed not more outwardly than inwardly. The old child-dreams in the garden were frequent as ever; but now they were often incarnated in prose or poems, and my life had a new aim and purpose. Still I was only passively happy. The great social and intellectual elements of my nature were not answered, and there was little congenial society in Woodfern, little around me to evolve the æsthetic part of my being; and this was constantly vainly craving its natural element. My aunt still sat in the little store, prim and stately and trim as ever, though the five years had sprinkled much silver in her hair, and deepened the wrinkles on her forehead.

Well, it was a June afternoon again, bright and balmy as its predecessor of five years ago. I sat in my little chamber, with the peach-boughs shaking against the window; and the memory of the young man with his sweet, fair-haired cousin came drearily over me.

"Five years are gone," I murmured, "and he has not come,

and in all this time I have not heard from him. But my old faith has not gone out. This year, I am certain, will bring him."

Then I rose, went down stairs, and out into the garden, where the old rose-bush stood heavy with buds.

"Nothing but buds," I murmured, as I lifted up the heavy branches. "How I wish there was a single rose there!"

"There is," answered a low, deep voice at my side. I turned and confronted the speaker with a low shriek of surprise. That rich, varying, radiant smile struck some chord of recollection. In a moment I recognized him. He extended his hand. "Ah, you know me now, for your eyes say it!"

"But how in the world did you get here?"

"I came in through the gate that opens on the lane, intending to pay my respects to the rose-bush first, and behold! a fairer than the rose-bush is here. But you see I have kept my promise. Are you glad I have come?"

"Yes, very." I am always honest with those who are so with me. "But it is strange you knew me at the first glance."

"Hardly. Your face has that in it which will never change. Yet you are greatly altered certainly." And he swept my face with his calm, deep-set eyes, a glance that you felt took in all he wished to know. "The five years have done what they promised to, Miss Reid,—ay, and more too. The bud is in very truth a flower now."

"You are flattering me, Mr. Dutton," I said, as the warm blood flushed into my cheeks.

"Was I? I surely had no such intention. And permit me now to counteract any evil effect it may have. I do not think you are handsome, or that you ever will be."

"Thank you. You need not apprehend any very dangerous effects from your remark. Our very slight acquaintance would hardly warrant my attaching any importance to it."

"You are right. I understand your reproof. And now I will finish my remark. If you are not handsome you must be at times far more than this,—exceedingly beautiful. There, now, don't answer me. You have not said whether I have changed."

"Yes; you are taller and stouter; but your face has the same expression, though it is five years older. But how is your cousin? Will you not tell me of her?"

"Very well, thank you, and growing fairer every day. But you shall judge for yourself."

He drew from his pocket a small tortoise shell-case, and, touching the springs, handed it to me. I opened it and gazed down, half-entranced with the sweet vision of earth-loveliness before me. The full pouting lips, the blue laughing eyes, the warm golden hair rippling about the soft full cheeks, all seemed like breathing life in the rich artistic daguerreotype before me; while the soft, mellow background only added to the picturesqueness of the whole.

"How beautiful! how beautiful!" It was all I could ejaculate.

"Yes, it does Hattie justice, I think; and that is saying a great deal. She returned from the South last month, and has gone up to the White Mountains, where I am to join them."

I sighed. The contrast of this bright life with the dull gray one of my youth was very great. My being had long cried out for some broader experience, for some of the sunshine and the wine of the life of this world, and nobody had heard it,—nobody but God.

I think he noticed the sigh, though he did not speak of it. He only asked, with that natural earnestness so peculiar to him: "Have you been expecting me?"

"Hardly that. Yet I always believed you would come some time."

"Thank you for your faith. And now may I go, and will you come with me and sit under the shade of that old apple-tree? I want to hear what you have been doing for the last five years."

"Not much." I answered the first question by turning towards the tree. "Let's see: for the next two years I attended the Academy, the others I have been reading, dreaming, and—washing the breakfast and supper dishes for Aunt Martha."

"All right," with that sweet, half-triumphant smile, softening the stern mouth and brightening the deep eyes. "The

quiet life has not hurt you—the fairest flowers bloom in the hidden places.”

I wonder if this does not sound very strange, very abrupt to you, reader; it certainly does to me, as I sit here by my cottage window, this summer-night, and think it over. Yet it seemed very natural, very proper, then. It may be my ignorance of social conventionalisms placed me more at my ease; but it is my nature always to meet frankness with frankness. Then Woolsey was not like other men. There was a quiet power, a certain strength, and self-reliance in his manner, which involuntarily won another's confidence. I cannot tell how much influence all these things had over my replies. I only know that so he spoke, and so I answered him.

Afterwards, he told me of himself. He had been travelling for the last two years with his father in the southern part of Europe. Since his return, he had been ill, and so he had come among the hills to recuperate, “and to see me,” he added, with that shadow of a smile softening the stern mouth.

Woolsey Dutton had passed the day previous at the hotel where he and his cousin had stopped five years before. He had met there, Doctor Mead, our village physician. The young man and himself had mutual acquaintances in New York. He had ridden over to Woodfern, and dined with the Doctor. He was anxious to obtain lodgings in some private family. He mentioned this to the physician, who recom-

mended him to my aunt, saying her house was a large one, and she had formerly taken a lodger. Perhaps she would do so again at his request.

I mused. Perhaps my aunt might be induced to oblige Doctor Mead, for he was an old friend and especial favorite of hers. The middle chamber, that dim, pleasant, old-fashioned room, against whose windows the branches of the plum-trees swung lazily all the summer, had been empty since old Mr. Willis,—our former lodger,—had left. I explained this to the young man.

It had been arranged that Woolsey and the Doctor should call at my aunt's that evening. The former had, however, taken a stroll through the village, and coming up the lane which bounded the foot of our garden, he had recognized it, and, the gate being open, entered the garden.

Soon after this explanation Mr. Dutton left. I returned to the house. I do not know whether there was any smile playing around my lips, but I know there was one about my heart.

In the evening, the two gentlemen called. My aunt was at first quite reluctant to admit the young stranger into her household; but the urbane doctor overcome all her objections, and she consented to receive him.

The next two weeks is a long break of sunshine, and flowers, and music upon the gray monotony of my life. My whole being seemed to expand, to drink in new vitality. I

did not analyze my own feelings. I only knew and thanked God that I was happy.

Yet Woolsey Dutton and I did not see so very much of each other. My aunt, both from nature and education, had a good deal of social conservatism; and she would not have approved of long interviews between the young lodger and myself. Still we saw each other daily, and, no matter how brief was our meeting, I always came away with some new thought or idea. Woolsey Dutton's manner was always strongly marked with quiet and composure; but it was the quiet of power, the composure of self-reliance. He was,—what so few men are,—thoroughly and entirely manly. I never saw a man who cared less for the opinions of others, who practically defied them more. Yet do not think I am painting a modern hero. He was not perfect; on the contrary, he had some glaring faults. But when his great, shining virtues of heart and mind rose up to confront these, you felt there was that in him to love which few men possessed.

Once or twice we rode out together. Those rides I shall never forget. And in the evenings he would come and sit in the parlor with my aunt, and talk with us for an hour. He lent me books, and suggested my studies.

I was too absent-minded, too "dreamy," my aunt said, to be trusted to wait on the customers. She had relinquished all hope of my ever becoming her successor in the toy and needle line. Poor woman! this was very hard for her.

Woolsey Dutton and I met oftenest in the quaint, old, garden. There we used to sit in the late afternoons, with the summer-winds flapping the leaves over head, or rocking the grass beneath, and talk of poets, and books, and paintings in the Old World and the New, and of life, earnest, real, solemn life.

Well, you have forestalled it all, reader. It is the old, ever new story,—the story Adam first told to Eve in the world's fresh morning, away among the fair flowers and the sweet music-winds of Eden; the story that man has told to woman ever since; as sweet, as solemn, as all-consecrating, and all-comprehending now, as when our one father whispered it to our one mother under skies which no storm-cloud had ever darkened—"I love you!" And it came to pass that Woolsey Dutton said those words to me. I will tell you how.

The great sun was toppling over the mountains in the west, and heaps of rich, mellow clouds had tangled themselves into the sky, when I went down the garden to gather the last bowl of strawberries for supper. I worked very diligently for a while, I know not how long; but the bowl was nearly heaped with the large, red berries, when a voice, to which my heart always quickened, said, in low, quiet tones: "There, that will do; I want to talk with you awhile."

I sat down the bowl among the strawberry-vines, and he drew my arm in his, while we paced up and down the long

walk by the fence. He did not speak for several minutes. At last, he asked, "What are you going to do?"

I was used to his abrupt manner:—"Going to do? When? Where?"

"When I am gone. I have had a letter this afternoon, which summons me to join our party immediately."

Involuntarily my fingers quickened over his arms. My head swam. I realized then what light his going away would take from my life.

A deep glance stole up from under those long lashes, and partly restored my self-possession. "So soon! It cannot be possible!" I stammered.

"Yes: it *must* be. When I come back, shall I find you here?"

"No," my long-cherished purpose breaking out suddenly. "I can't stay here any longer with this dull, cold, stark life about me. I *must* leave it, or die. I shall go somewhere and teach school."

"That is right. You have been here long enough. Still, there is another position I should like better to see you occupy."

I looked up in surprise. "What is it?"

Woolsey Dutton leaned down, and whispered a few words in my ear—a few words, and yet they were life, riches, everything to me. They have followed me through all the after

years, and they will follow me until my life floats out on the eternal seas into the river of God.

"Yes." Just so briefly, just so solemnly, I answered the whisper.

He drew my head down on his shoulder; he smoothed back my curls very tenderly; and he said, in his low, solemn tones: "God make me worthy of you, my Adeline."

Oh, memory bells! memory bells! Ye float down to me now one grand, pealing, triumphant tide, the sweetest, richest, most triumphant of my life. So we were betrothed. With the going down of the sun, our two lives rose into one. This was in June. In the early September, Woolsey promised to come for me. He would then be established in his profession, which was that of the law.

Oh, how dazzling were the heights of that future to which I looked up as I stood on this great landmark of my journey! And so many a maiden has stood before, and many will stand again, looking off to the radiant land of promise. Oh, thank God that sometimes the dream is not more blessed than the reality!

The next day Woolsey left. The evening before, he had formally requested my hand of my aunt. I shall never forget that hour. She sat stiff and stately as ever in her high back rocking-chair by the side window. She was slowly rocking to the endless motion of her knitting-needles. I do not

believe she was ever voluntarily idle for a half-hour of her life.

Woolsey led me up to her. "Mrs. Fellows," he said, with a tremor of tenderness sliding through his rich tones, "I love your niece; and she says she loves me. We cannot walk apart through life. Will you not consent that we shall go together?"

Surprise startled my aunt out of her usual reticence of emotion and expression. I had never before seen her evince so much feeling, never felt how she really loved me, despite our antipathetic temperaments.

"Mr. Dutton," she said, clasping her thin hands over ours, "I will give her to you; but oh, be very tender of my child! In a little while, she would have been all alone; and now I shall go down to my rest with a quieter heart, feeling that she is sheltered in your love."

I started at those solemn tones, and looked earnestly into my aunt's face. It flashed over me then that it had grown very white and thin during the last year. And the thought of this clouded, all that evening, the great joy newly-born in my heart.

Well, as I said, the next morning Woolsey left. The parting, of course, was painful; but oh, what rich hopes shone down upon us from the bright hills of the beyond!

The summer wove out her green web, and autumn took her

place at the year's great loom, and flashed through it her gorgeous conceptions of gold, and crimson, and purple.

Every mail brought me letters from Woolsey,—very tender and loving ones that filled my heart with music, and crowned the days with light.

I did not dream so much now, but I studied more, for I was determined to be intellectually his companion. He so great, so learned, so noble, who had chosen the wild-rose to wear in his heart.

Woolsey had promised to be with me in September; but, before the summer was gone, he had written that this would be impracticable. No matter. I was content to wait patiently another month; and the disappointment was keener for him than for me.

The storm broke suddenly. There was no muttering of far-off thunder, no beating up of black cloud-billows over distant mountain-tops, but, in one moment, the rain descended, the crash came, and my heart was riven.

"Adeline, here is a letter for you," said my aunt, as she hurriedly entered my room one afternoon in September. "It was brought by a boy in a carriage; and he stands at the door waiting for a reply. I can't remain to hear it, for there are customers in the store."

I did not recognise the delicate, girlish chicography; and, with much curiosity, I broke the seal.

The letter ran thus:—

"MY DEAR ADELINE, for you are still this to me, though so many years have passed since I looked in your hazel eyes, or pushed back the brown curls from your fair cheeks.

"I would come to you, but I am too ill to do this; and I have much to say to you. I am stopping at the old Stony Creek Hotel; and I write this afternoon to implore you to return in the carriage with John. Aunt Sarah is with me. Will you come for the sake of that long-gone afternoon, and because I am Woolsey's cousin, to your friend,

HARRIET LISLE."

I went into the store, explained the message to my aunt, and said to the boy, "I will go."

It was a fair, mellow afternoon in the late September, with the sunshine flecking the tree-tops, and the wind sweet and balmy with its loitering among green hedges and fragrant hollows. Still, my heart was not in harmony with all this, as we rode on. A cold fear, the prophecy of coming evil, seemed creeping over my spirit. I tried vainly to reason myself out of this vague terror. It clung to me all the way.

Harriet's aunt met me in the hotel parlor very cordially. She was a tall, fine-looking, lady-like, and elegantly dressed woman. Still, there was something in her face that repelled me at the first glance. I am better skilled in physiognomical induction now than I was then; so I *felt*, rather than discerned, the cold, calculating expression of the handsome,

well-preserved face. The mouth and chin were large and square. They had power and will in them; but they were the least agreeable portion of her face; and her smile, though it was bright, was not warm or sweet.

"I am very glad you are come, my dear," said Mrs. Elder, clasping my hand, and scrutinizing my features with her sharp, penetrating glance. "Ah, it is the same fair, sweet face Hattie has so often painted for me! No wonder! no wonder!" she added, these last words to herself, and with a sigh which surprised and somewhat troubled me. "You will come up to our private parlor?" she said, interrogatively. "My niece has just fallen into a slight slumber; so we shall have a good opportunity for the conversation I must have with you."

I followed the lady to her room. With her own hands she removed my shawl and bonnet. Then we sat down together on the sofa. She drew her arm around my waist. She looked straight into my face with her cold, calm eyes; and there, in the dimness and quiet, she commenced her conversation. All my faculties seemed in a state of dumb bewilderment; and yet my heart and brain took in, with almost preternatural vividness, the sense of every word she spoke. She told me that she was herself a childless widow, and that Hattie's mother was her only sister, and the child was dearer to her heart than her own life, for she was all the love earth kept for it.

Woolsey Dutton and Harriet Lisle had grown up together, and had loved each other. Three years before, they had been engaged. This autumn they were to have been married. But Woolsey had seen me; and, on his return from Woodfern, had requested a dissolution of his first engagement. The tenderness of a brother was all his heart could give to Harriet Lisle. And these words had wrecked the life that was just opening into its beautiful womanhood. Her aunt saw that day by day the delicate life of her idol was drooping, drooping toward the grave. Once, stung almost to madness with the agony of this thought, Mrs. Elder had reproached Woolsey for the wrong he had done. He had scarcely attempted to defend himself, for his heart was wrung with sorrow for the young life he had wrecked. "Dearly as I love my Adeline," were his words, in that moment of self-condemnation, "had I suspected the depth of Hattie's attachment, I would never have abrogated our engagement. But it is too late now."

After many painful conflicts with herself, Mrs. Elder had resolved to write to me privately. But she had concluded an interview would be more satisfactory on both sides.

She was travelling with her niece; and, as they were within half a day's ride of Woodfern, she had resolved to see me. Harriet was, also, very desirous of doing this, and had been ever since she learned of my engagement to her cousin. She, of course, knew nothing of her aunt's design in bringing about this meeting. And then, I remember, the proud

woman sunk down at my feet, and, lifting her tearful face and clasped hands, she implored me to save her niece, and spare her own gray hairs from the grave where they soon would be laid beside her. "Have pity upon us! oh, in mercy have pity upon us!" was the burden of her sobbing prayer.

And I did. I had sat stupefied, overwhelmed, benumbed, with all these disclosures; but the spirit, which, thank God! never in my time of great need deserted me, came to my help once more. I had lost confidence in Woolsey. Oh, reader! has life taught you the bitter agony of that death-sentence over one beloved? The plighted husband of another, he had poured into *my* ear his betrothal vows. I could not trust him. My heart died out within me while I resolved it; but I did not falter. *I would not be his wife.*

"Tell me how I can help you, Mrs. Elder?" I asked, briefly; for just then it was very hard to speak.

I believe she arranged the whole matter. I do not distinctly remember, for I hardly held possession of my own faculties. But I know it was settled that I should write to Woolsey, solemnly annulling our engagement, telling him it would be useless to attempt a meeting, or to endeavor to shake my decision. Of course, he was never to know of my interview with Mrs. Elder. She would prevent her niece from alluding to it before him. If I had been older, or had had a more intimate knowledge of the world, I might possibly have suspected

some hidden motive in all this, and not yielded so readily to Mrs. Elder's wishes. As it was, however, no suspicion crossed my mind. I only desired that what I did should be done quickly; and, when Mrs. Elder suggested the propriety of writing at that time, I eagerly acceded. So, with steady fingers, but with an aching heart and burning brain, I sat down and wrote the words which were my heart's burial service.

"Aunt Sarah, how long have I been asleep?"

The voice, faint and musical, wound in through the half-open door; and Mrs. Elder sprang towards it. I heard her whisper:—"My darling, the young lady has come;" and then followed a quick exclamation of delight and surprise from her niece.

I leaned my head on my hand, and tried to concentrate my energies for the meeting.

A moment later, she stood at the door. Oh, what a fair, fragile creature she was! fairer than when, years before, I sat sewing at her feet, with that bright face shining down, like a rare old painting, upon me. It retained all its old child-softness of expression; the eyes had deepened under their shining lashes, and the same smile loitered about the crimson lips, and the same bands of warm, goldenish hair swung against the soft outline of the oval cheeks. Yet they had grown thin; and she looked ill, despite the color with which excitement was now staining her face.

The girl sprung eagerly forward. "I am so glad you are come to me," she said, parting back my curls and looking long, eagerly, wistfully at me. "I should have recognised you anywhere. No wonder *he* looked in your face and loved you."

Her voice was very mournful,—perhaps a little bitter.

I do not know what I replied, or how long I remained. I think my call must have been a brief one, for I was very anxious to be all alone, with that great aching which the broken-hearted alone can understand. My manner must have been very natural, for Harriet kissed me often; and I remember that several times we all broke into a laugh. I think it was when she alluded to Woolsey and myself. Well, I made her life happy; and now I do not repent the sacrifice.

I returned home. For several weeks after, I was very ill, with one deep, wild, constant cry breaking up forever from the desolation of my heart. Death! death! How I longed for it! But, though its dark feet came very near our door, God bade it pass by on the other side. I recovered slowly. Our Father who is in heaven led the weak feet of his child by a way she did not know. In the night of exceeding darkness the hands of love were reached down, and I clasped hold of them. The waves went ever me,—the great salt waves that drenched out all the blossoms and beauty and brightness of my life. But I did not die. And, reader, it is a great truth: take the words home to your heart; and, if the

darkness ever come, they may arise and shine upon you:—
When our earthly life is all dead it is still our duty to live for God. And I lived for him, and the reward came.

It was in the late November—a cold, bare, wind-shrieking day—when I took up a paper, and read the marriage of Woolsey Dutton and Harriet Lisle. But of that, now,—even now,—I cannot speak.

Five years had passed. For me they had brought many changes. My aunt slept under the great poplar-trees which flanked the south side of the little graveyard at Woodfern.

The store had passed into other hands,—the store and the quaint old garden where I used to dream. Oh, I had grown out of the old dreams now!

For three years I had resided in a large New England city. My aunt had left me a few thousands, and the interest on this, with my contributions to two or three first-class magazines, supported me plainly, but comfortably, genteelly. The outer life which I had so craved had become mine. I was happy, for I had striven to do my duty, and to bring myself, so far as was possible, in harmony with all my relations; but, after all, my heart was the heart of woman.

My home was in the suburbs of the city, for I loved the country too well to abjure it entirely. The summer afternoon had been very fair; and, as it was deepening toward sunset, I went out alone, as was my frequent custom, to have a short

ramble before tea. I struck off into a new direction. Broad fields or unimproved building-lots were all about me. I rambled into some of these for the mere pleasure of burying my feet among country grass and clover.

“Madam! madam! are you mad?”

A pair of strong arms were clutched eagerly about my waist, drawing me backward, while the loud, alarmed tones only added to my terror. But the next glance downward revealed all. A large, deep excavation, half filled with building-stones, lay just before me. It had been made several weeks before, and weeds had grown all around the margin. One step more and I should have been in eternity.

“Sir, you have saved my life!” The words quivered over my lips, and then I looked up in my preserver’s face. There was a little cry on both sides.

“Woolsey!”

“Adeline!”

For a while we stood white and still, looking at each other. At last I extended my hand. “You have done that for me I can never repay. Mr. Dutton, for its sake, let us be friends.”

He clasped it eagerly and lifted it to his lips. “I have never been any thing but this to you,”—then, as if a sudden memory smote him,—“except once for a few days, Mrs. —; but I do not know your name.”

“I have not changed it, Mr. Dutton.”

“What!” (with a quick start.) “Are you not married?”

"No."

He looked at me with something of the old expression shining afar down in his eyes; but there was more than this there, more than I had ever seen before,—a mingling of doubt, disappointment, grief. Then he spoke:—"Adeline, you know me. I am always abrupt: perhaps *now* I have no right to ask the question which I do not feel as if I could leave you without having answered. There is truth in your eyes, there is honor in your face: and yet why did you so wrong me? why were you false to me?"

"I was not false. I never wronged you, Woolsey Dutton. It was you who perjured yourself,—you, the betrothed husband of another."

Almost without my own volition, the words rose up from my heart and crossed my lips.

"What do you mean, Adeline, by such an accusation?"

His voice was low and his lips were white; but no man could be guilty and gaze down into a woman's soul as Woolsey Dutton then gazed down into mine.

"Were you not engaged to your cousin when you came the last time to Woodfern?"

"No."

If you had heard the tone you would not have doubted him any more than I did. Perhaps, if I had taken time to consider, if I had allowed my judgment to control my impulses, or if the meeting had not been so sudden and its revelations

so astonishing, I should not have done what, after all, I have never repented. At all events, we could not have separated without each understanding better the mystery of the past; and so, as we walked slowly along, neither minding nor caring whither our steps led, I related to Woolsey all the circumstances of my interview with Mrs. Elder, and my reasons for dissolving the engagement. Not once did he interrupt me. He listened to every word as a convict to his death-sentence, his whole face growing white and rigid, and his mouth—that strong, stern mouth—settling down into an expression of remorseless determination, such as I had never seen there, such as, I now pray God, I may never see again.

"But the postscript to your letter?—what did *that* mean?" he whispered through his shut teeth, as I finished my agitated relation.

"There was none. I remember every word I wrote. It was burned into my heart."

He grasped both my hands and looked me in the face straight as God's angel will on *that* day. "Did you not tell me it was best, after all, I should know the whole truth? that another and deeper love had wakened up in the heart you had promised to me, and for this reason, and no other, you had so written to me?"

"No." That was all my answer, looking back straight in his eyes; and it was all that was needed.

"I will confront her with her *lie* before to-morrow night," he said; and his still anger was fearful to behold.

"Don't! don't do any thing," I entreated, feeling vaguely that we both had been the victims of some terrible imposition; but, looking in his face, I saw how useless it would be to attempt to move him.

A few words explained all. Mrs. Elder had always been desirous of promoting a union between Woolsey and her niece, in order that the large property of the former might be secured to her sister's child; for Harriet was the proud woman's one idol. The young girl had loved her cousin for years; and her aunt had discovered this, for Hattie's nature was very transparent. That she would never have consciously participated in her relative's nefarious designs, we were both very certain. But, though her nature was very gentle and sweet, she had no great force of character, and would be a very ready dupe of such a woman as Mrs. Elder.

"She must have added that postscript. I remember, now, she was always good at imitating handwriting." He would have cursed her if I had not lain my hand upon his lips.

"It is sin, Woolsey."

Then we looked at each other; and the same bitter, mocking thought knocked at both our souls:—"We that should have walked together must go apart!"

"Oh, I cannot, *cannot* give you up! I will not let you go,

Adeline, my beloved." His tones were very full of tenderness,—tenderness and anguish. Would you believe it? I was stronger than he, then,—he, the stern, proud, self-reliant man. I comforted him.

"But we will not 'walk apart' gloomily, Woolsey. We will go on in the way our Father shall appoint, doing our work faithfully to the end, and thanking Him that it is not so very far off for either of us."

"But here, here, I want you *here*, my Adeline." And he almost crushed my hands in his grasp. "My heart wants you; my manhood wants you; my life needs you. You, and you alone, could be its strength, its beauty, its crown."

Alas! alas! how my heart echoed his words in that hour of great trial! I tried to look upward and to point Woolsey there too: but it was very hard; for oh, how our humanity will cry out in its weakness! how our hearts grow dumb in their agony! I forgot my own sorrow, as the true-loving always do, in pity for him; and it was this enabled me to seem stronger than I was.

At last he grew a little calmer. I learned then that he was visiting the city with his wife, but intended leaving the next day. A friend of his had induced him to purchase some lots in the suburbs of the city; and he had walked out alone to look at these this afternoon. So our singular meeting was explained.

Mrs. Dutton was still very fragile, more so than usual during

the past year, and they were travelling for her health. Mrs. Elder was residing with them; but she would do this no longer, Woolsey fiercely added. He promised, however, not to disclose any thing of the past to Harriet. She was a true and loving wife, and Woolsey Dutton would be to no living woman other than a kind and tender husband.

So we parted. He would have remained in the city longer, but I prayed him not to do this. I knew our weakness too well. It was hard—oh, so terribly hard!—to place my hands in his and say, “Good-by;” hard for the feet to turn away when the hearts clung close together. No wonder it wrung tears from those proud eyes; no wonder I tottered faintly toward my home.

Another year I walked alone. Then I read one day in the paper the death of Harriet Dutton.

Three months later *he* came to me. Oh, reader, you have guessed the rest! Did we not belong to each other? One year and one week from the time he was a widower, Woolsey Dutton was *my* husband. Every day I say the words over with tears in my eyes,—such very sweet ones.

And so, over the years that sleep sepulchred and epitaphed in that land whose gates no fingers shall ever uncloze, whose paths no traveller shall ever retread,—the *land of the Past*,—have the Memory Bells rung down to me thus the story of my life.

Mend the Breeches.

“OH, dear save me!” said poor Mrs. Brown, settling herself into her flag-bottomed rocking-chair with a terribly woe-begone, given-over expression of countenance, “if that child hasn’t gone and torn a hole in the leg of them span-new breeches I made for him last week! Well, there’s no use tryin’. The more you do the more you may, and no thanks for it either. I don’t b’lieve since the world stood, any other mother ever had such a set of careless, hollerin’, yellin’, stampin’, tearin’, destroyin’ boys as I’ve got. From this time forrard, I’m resolved to let things take their own course, and go to pell-mell as fast as they can get there.” And, having thus emphatically delivered herself, Mrs. Brown pinned her cap-strings with such an air of doleful martyrdom you would have felt that she was the victim of all kinds of social and domestic conspiracies and outrages.

“No, you won’t do any such a thing,” whispered good common sense in the ear of that most disconsolate lady. “You’ll just go and pick up those breeches of Tom’s, and darn that

rent so nicely nobody'll ever suspect there was one there, and they'll last him all summer yet. You'll do it right off, too, before it's time to shell the peas for dinner, instead of sitting there, moping and grumbling all the morning, when you are not a bit worse off than your neighbours; and if your boys are rude and harum-scarum, and make you a world of trouble, they're kind-hearted fellows, and you ought to thank God they do as well as they do."

"I s'pose I had. Sometimes I think I am a little grumblin' and fault-finding naterally," soliloquized Mrs. Brown, as she bestirred herself for the shears and the sewing-silk.

Half an hour later, she was humming a tune to the quick motion of her needle, and you would have had to look a long way before you could have found a happier-faced wife and mother than that of the little woman who sat sewing by the kitchen-window, where the wings of the honey-bees flashed in and out among the brier-roses.

Look here, reader. Have you the vapors, or the blues, or the *disconsolables* in general? Just hear what common sense says, and "*mend the breeches.*"

The Sunshine after the Rain.

It was a bright evening in the latter part of May. Somewhere in the country stood an old farm-house, large, rambling, and ill shapen; and yet there was a kind of picturesque beauty about the tall, narrow windows and high gables, which gave to the old building its quaint, almost comical, physiognomy. The large, irregular garden, too, had preserved to a wonderful degree the *expression* of the old farm-house. You felt, somehow, that *such* a garden could only belong to just *such* a building. There was the same kind of plethoric amplitude about it, the same rambling, disconnected details forming a not unpleasant whole. The shrubbery was thick and indifferently trimmed, and the many fruit-trees stood up with a kind of awkward strength, and flung out their long limbs in a bold, manly sort of way, which reminded you of the old Revolutionary pioneers, or, it may be, farther back, of the days of that priest-prince, Oliver Cromwell, and his army of solemn heroes. But, as I was saying, it was a May evening, and the sweet, serious moon-

light lay all about the garden and the farm-house in the country. It touched up the old gables, and it wandered off to the shadows that lay in dark, tangled masses under the great trees.

The moonshine looked into the house, too, and there was one chamber—a corner-one—where the soft, spiritual light seemed (but, after all, this may have been mere fancy) to drop with a clearer, sadder beauty than it did anywhere else.

The window was partially opened, and every few moments the breeze would come and fold away the dainty white curtains, so that the May moon could look into the chamber.

It was a plain, old-fashioned one, but it looked very comfortable with its striped carpet and painted wooden chairs. There was a bed, too, in one corner, with high posts and chintz curtains, such as you may have seen in your grandmother's spare chamber; and on this two children were slumbering. The heads were laid close together, and the moonlight, as it quivered over them like a faintly-spoken blessing, brought out the two profiles distinctly. They were very unlike, and yet each in its kind was very fair. The arm of one of the girls was wound about the neck of her companion, and her brown curls were tangled up with the dark locks of the other.

But the character of the two faces was a study. They were so dissimilar, as the author of Christmas Traits says, "you felt that if the life of one would be a picture that of the

other would be a poem." Neither of those faces had gone out from the sunshine of its tenth summer; and yet there was a dreamy thoughtfulness on the smooth forehead and a kind of sad sweetness about the mouth of the one sleeper which you could no more misinterpret than you could the energy and pride of the other. You could trace this latter in the casting of the whole face, in the curving of the small ripe lips that seemed hardly to *repose* even in sleep.

They were not sisters, those sleepers, but orphans, and the memory of either could hardly travel back to a time when they had been separated. For nearly five years had the echoes of the farm-house gathered up the sound of their childish glee, and Abbie Glenn and Grace Newman only knew they were orphans by name.

But we will leave them with the angels and the May moon, and go down-stairs, for a scene is transpiring at this quiet house which will color the warp of their whole future.

"Come, come, Aunt Hill, don't feel so bad about it. You've altogether too much sense to give way so. All our tears can't bring the dead back; and many times they're a great deal better off than we could make them if they were with us."

The speaker was a man somewhere on the hither side of fifty,—large, muscular, and well formed, with a clear bright eye, and a mouth which, despite the lines of strong will about it, looked kindly and good-humored. He wore his old-

fashioned coat, too, just as the house did its angles and abutments, so that you felt at once he was its proprietor.

"I know it, Uncle Nathan," said the housekeeper, trying to steady her voice and shut back the tears that would dampen her eyes; "it's all very true what you are saying; but then James was my only brother. He was younger than I, too, and I always used to think I felt more like a mother than any thing else toward him, even when we played together in the old corn-fields at home; and now to think of his dying off there in Georgia——"

A fresh spring of tears bubbled up to the poor woman's eyes and concluded the sentence. Mr. Glenn took out his handkerchief hastily, and walked to the window as though he were suddenly seized with a strong impulse to inspect the moonlight.

There was a few moments' silence in the sitting-room, and then Mr. Glenn asked, abruptly:—

"Mrs. Hill," (an adjective he never used, except when he wished to be unusually emphatic,) "didn't your brother leave a son?"

"Yes," answered the housekeeper. "Poor Marcus! he will be thirteen next August, and what will become of the poor fatherless and motherless child?"

"Precisely what I was thinking," said Mr. Glenn, turning round and confronting his housekeeper, as though it struck him as a remarkable coincidence. "Just send for your

nephew to come up here: there's room enough in the house, I reckon, and if there isn't it'll bear another addition. He'll be just the one to climb trees and hunt berries for the hair-brains up yonder. Once more, I say, send for your nephew, Mrs. Hill: he's welcome as long as he wishes to stay."

The housekeeper did not answer with her lips. There beamed from every lineament of her kind, *motherly* face a look which epitomized whole volumes of grateful thanks.

And in the chamber above the children slept on in the white arms of the May moonlight.

"Uncle Nathan's going to send for him next week; and now, girls, you'll have a first-rate playmate."

It was morning, some two weeks after the decision respecting the future home of Mrs. Hill's nephew had been made, that she announced this to Abbie and Grace while they sat at breakfast.

Mrs. Hill had talked a long time, dwelling, with pardonable vanity, on the virtues, moral and mental, of her nephew, and amplified considerably upon the advantages which would be mutually derived from such an association.

The half-despatched muffins had been laid down, and the steam from the china tea-pot rolling off soft gray clouds for the last half-hour, when Mrs. Hill paused.

Abbie took up the subject.

"Oh, it will be so, so delightful, Gracie!" said the restless

child, with ecstatic springs on her seat. "We can have somebody now to help hold our ropes, and put up our swings, and pull down the plum-branches, without going to Uncle Nathan and having him say, as he always does, 'Tut, tut! what Tom-boys!'"

Grace laughed a clear, rich laugh, that, no matter how weary and jaded and anxious your heart might have been, would have fallen upon it like sweet music.

"Yes, it will be delightful, Abbie," she said; "and then, when the summer-days are so long and hot, and we cannot go out, we will all three sit in the house and play fairy-land, or building great castles among the beautiful clouds of sunset,—you and Marcus and I, Abbie. Does Marcus know any stories, Aunty Hill?"

"Well, I expect he does, dear heart," said the good old lady, with one of her most genial smiles. "It's true he was only six months old when I saw him last, but the doctor said he was a remarkable baby, and would, no doubt, make a wonderful child. But, dear me, children, the breakfast has all grown cold while we've been talking." And the house-keeper broke with her silver ladle the yellow stratum which had gathered over the toast.

So they sat long at the breakfast-table that fair June morning, and talked of the time when Marcus should be with them, and painted bright pictures and framed them with the golden light of the future.

For the next two weeks little was talked of at the farm-house but the coming of Marcus; and, if Uncle Nathan did say "pish" and "tush," everybody knew he had been down to the stage office twice to see if the boy had arrived.

Oh, there was a great, warm heart throbbing beneath the brown coat of the old bachelor! Abbie's father knew this when he said, with his dying breath, "Take my motherless girl to Nathan and tell him to be a father to her for Ben's sake;" and his gentle sister knew it, too, when she twined the bright curls of Grace round her cold fingers and whispered, "Give her to Nathan and tell him it was his 'little Mary' sent her to him."

It is true he had a little outside roughness about him, and I couldn't begin to enumerate the man's eccentricities, the most prominent of which was his dogged obstinacy when once his opinion was settled, as he had it.

But just find the way to Uncle Nathan's heart and all was right then; and here again it was like the old house,—full of mysterious entries and dark corners, and suspicious-looking closets, but all well enough when you got into them.

At last Marcus came, very unexpectedly, as long-expected guests are so apt to do.

For five consecutive nights had Mrs. Hill worn her gray silk and best muslin cap to receive him, and that morning she was overlaying a plate of freshly-pared apples with a most delicious pie-crust, while Abbie and Grace, on either side of her,

were taking their first lesson in this culinary mystery, when Farmer Glenn entered suddenly and said, in his *provokingly* cool way, "Aunty Hill, here's your nephew."

The words were like an electric shock to the whole trio; but Uncle Nathan had a bachelor's horror of a scene, so he did not stay to witness this one, and you, reader, can imagine it.

"Isn't he a fine boy? Didn't I tell you so, darlings?" queried Mrs. Hill, after the excitement was somewhat abated and the boy had been duly presented to his new playmates.

The housekeeper's pride in her nephew was justified by his appearance. He was not handsome, but his broad forehead, his bright, dark eyes, and mouth about which the sprightly joyousness of his nature was ever effervescing in smiles, would have won you at once to the boy.

Abbie was, of course, the first to answer. She came forward with a rare grace and self-possession for so young a child, and said, with one of her bright smiles,—

"You are welcome to our home, Marcus."

But Grace stood on one side of Mrs. Hill and only said this with her eyes; and so Marcus thought, "I shall like Abbie, I know I shall, the best."

But an hour later, when the children had grown somewhat better acquainted, and Abbie, with her usual vivacity, had been laying out a world of play-work for the future, a little dimpled hand was laid timidly upon the boy's shoulder, and,

looking round, he saw Grace Newman holding up a small bouquet of exquisite moss-rose-buds and geranium-leaves.

"It's for you, Marcus," said the child, in a whisper: "I made it for you last Monday, and I've kept it ever since, so the leaves have not withered at all."

"Thank you, Gracie," answered the boy, as he took the flowers, with that natural grace which no courtly breeding can confer. "Then you thought of me sometimes, did you?"

Gracie's blue eyes grew dark as she answered, eagerly, "Oh, yes, to-be-sure I did; and every night before I went to sleep I used to pray that God would bring Marcus to us safely."

The boy threw his arm around her neck. "Gracie," he said, "I shall always love you very dearly."

And in after-years Grace Newman sometimes looked back on her first meeting with Marcus Holmes, and from the sweet memory-bells of the past would ring down to her heart those words:—"I shall always love you very dearly."

That day of Marcus's coming was marked with light in the calendar of the farm-house; but, after all, it was only a type of many of its successors, over which we may not linger. The child-lives were very bright ones which lay within the shadows of the old country home.

Ten years had passed. May, that beautiful proof-sheet of summer, had brightened the hills and the valleys once more.

It was evening, and the moon was coming over the distant mountain, and the light lay soft and serious, just as it had done ten years before, on the old farm-house and the fields around it. Nothing was changed. The trees stood just as solemn and broad and green; and, if the building had grown older, you could never detect it in that twilight made by the moonbeams.

The soft, spiritual light crept into the corner chamber just as they had done in the aforetime, and the same breeze came up from the meadows and folded away the curtain, so that you could see into the room almost as if it were day. It had undergone many changes. There were traces everywhere of the softening, harmonizing touches of woman,—if we except the high-post bed. That stood in the corner, with the dark chintz curtains, just as it had always done.

There was but one occupant of the room, and she sat by the window. What a glorious vision she would have been to an artist, in that attitude of unstudied grace, with one cheek pillowed on her hand! The small, finely-shaped head, the dark hair, gathered into a rich roll at its back, and then the clear regular profile, with the brown eyes and the red lips, made Abbie Glenn a very beautiful girl-woman.

But, despite the graceful *abandon* of her person, the young girl was not at ease. You could have divined this by the restless movement of her fingers among the tassels of her dressing-gown, by the nervous tapping of her small foot on

the carpet, even if you had not been near enough to hear the words she murmured to herself:—

“It is strange Marcus has not returned this evening. Grace would certainly have come up and told me, had he come. To-morrow, I suppose I *must* answer that letter of Mr. Seward’s and decide my future. What a brilliant one it would be, as the wife of the millionaire, and the mistress of one of those palaces on Fifth Avenue! How every one would envy me, and what a simpleton Cousin Martha will think me to refuse so magnificent an offer, even if Mr. Seward does wear a wig and is almost fifty. For whom, too, am I doing this? For a man without family or riches, the nephew of our house-keeper!” And, as the young girl said this, you might have seen, in the moonlight, the sudden curling of her rosy lips and the bridling of her small head.

“And yet—and yet—I *love* him.” And now a tender softness stole over the proud face and made it very beautiful. “I may struggle against, but my heart cannot conquer its weakness. Oh, Marcus Holmes, the ‘bright head’ which Lord Duncourt said, last winter, would do honor to a coronet, will be happiest laid against your heart, and the fingers that lay calm and cold in the pressure of the millionaire will throb and quiver at your lightest touch! How my heart, too, is always going back to the old days, when Marcus and I and Grace wandered together through the wood-shadows,—those days that are the great jewels of my memory.

"He is gifted, and he will be great, too, some day, and then I shall be proud of him, *my* Marcus.

"He has never called me *his* Abbie; but then has he not said that it was a luxury to look on such beauty as mine, and do not his dark eyes follow me about the room with a world of admiration, and is not beauty to him an intense, exceeding joy? and mine, surely, must win him. Sometimes (as the moonlight can't tell secrets, I will admit it) I have been a little jealous of Grace, sometimes thought his eyes and voice had a tenderer meaning when they addressed her; but, then, gentle and lovely though she may be, I know he thinks of her only as a sister. Pretty she certainly is, but then am not I——" The sound of light feet on the staircase broke suddenly upon Abbie Glenn's reverie, and a moment later a light figure bounded into the room.

"Abbie, Abbie!" called an eager voice. "Oh, there you are by the window. I thought you must still be asleep. Is your head better?" And the speaker came up to Abbie and looked fondly into her face.

"Yes, Grace, thank you, it is quite well; and so, when I woke, not finding you here, I came to the window and fell to dreaming in the moonlight. But what has kept you up so late, dear?"

"Because—you will be so surprised—Marcus has come."

Abbie Glenn almost sprang from her seat.

"Marcus come! and you have not let me know it till this time, Grace?" She spoke reproachfully, almost sternly.

"Yes, I did, darling; I came up in five minutes after his arrival. But you were sleeping so nicely I could not bear to waken you and so bring on that terrible headache again."

"But I have been awake nearly two hours, during which time it seems you and Marcus have not thought of me."

"Yes, we have, and talked about you, too; and oh, Abbie, I have a secret to tell you right here in the midnight moonshine! Let me lay my head in your lap. Oh, Abbie, I am very happy, and these tears are blissful ones."

It was a sweet face, with its dark-blue eyes and fair oval features, that nestled in the lap of Abbie Glenn; and maybe you would have preferred its serener beauty to the brilliant one above it.

A sharp, sudden fear sprang to the heart of Abbie Glenn, but she proudly put it back; and then, smoothing down the bright curls that fell over her lap, she said, softly,—

"Tell me all, Gracie, sweet cousin."

And Grace drew her head close to Abbie's heart; and, sitting there, folded about with the white moonlight, she told all, while her cheeks grew bright with blushes or damp with tears. How that evening Marcus Holmes had taken her out among the deep shadows of the garden and told her, in his sweet, poet-words, that he loved her, even her, better than fame or riches,—better than his aims of the present or his

hopes of the future; and he had asked her to become his wife.

How bewildered and astonished she was at first, and yet, withal, how exceedingly happy! Then, after she had tremblingly faltered the promise that he asked, and he had called her his Grace, they had had a long, long talk of the past and the future.

And Grace had told Marcus she wondered that he and Abbie had not loved each other instead,—that the queenly grace and beauty of her cousin had not won his artist taste and heart; and he had smiled and answered,—

"They have won me, Grace, to glory, to luxuriate, in beholding her exceeding beauty, as I would that of some rare old statue or master-painting. My eyes never grow tired of gazing at her. I love her, too, very tenderly, as the sister of my boyhood; but I have never gathered her into the innermost folds of my heart.

"There is too great pride in Abbie's nature for me ever to find *repose* in her affection. She loves the world, its clamor, its applause, too well ever to make my affection the *Ultima Thule* of her life. Our souls were not made for each other."

Abbie sat very still and heard all this, but her face had a kind of hard, frozen look about it when Grace paused, and involuntarily she clenched her hand, while, for a moment, a strong impulse rushed over her to fell that sweet face to the

floor and stamp all the beauty out of it; but with a strong effort she restrained herself.

"Gracie," said the girl, putting her cheek down close to her cousin's, "your offence in not calling me was a very pardonable one. And so you will be Marcus's wife, and Mrs. Holmes! Ha, ha, little coz! doesn't the name sound strangely!"

And Grace thought her cousin's laugh was a very gleeful one, when it was only wild, and hoarse, and almost *mad*.

Three hours later, when the night was waning, though the moon still kept her silver watches over the farm-house and the green garden thereof, a white, resolute face was lifted from the bed in the corner chamber, and it bent over another by its side, where sweet dream-smiles were hovering, and whispered, with fearful emphasis, "Never, never, Grace Newman, shall you be the wife of Marcus Holmes, while I have power to prevent it."

Oh, Abbie Glenn! was your good angel far off that you spoke these words in that evil hour?

And yet, reader, I am almost sorry that I have written them, for I would have your heart deal very charitably with Abbie Glenn. I know, in the time of temptation, she was found wanting; but, for all this, there was much that was noble and generous in the girl's proud nature; and, after all, her beauty, (now mark this,) her glorious beauty was her greatest misfortune.

Her early training, too, had not been in all respects of a judicious character. Mrs. Hill was often yielding and indulgent when circumstances required stern reprimand or unflinching decision. Then Uncle Nathan had made a grand mistake, when he listened to the representations of his fashionable cousin and confided the orphan to a school of her selection. And last, and worst of all, those two winters of fashion and flattery, amid all the excitements of metropolitan gayety,—oh, Uncle Nathan, it was, as I said, a grand mistake, and you learned it *too late!*

“But, Marcus, why have you not told your aunt and Uncle Nathan of your engagement to my cousin? It is surely time they should know and rejoice with you; and it’s quite too bad of you to be selfish and keep all your happiness to yourself.”

Marcus Holmes and Abbie Glenn stood in a retired part of the garden, where the path was flanked on either side by a large growth of fennel, and the June sunset lay in bright ripples along the western sky, when the young girl spoke these words in a half-rallying, half-earnest tone. The gentleman pulled several of the half-ripened fennel-heads, and scattered the seeds on the ground as he answered:—

“I know it, Abbie, and I should have done this before, but——” There was a little embarrassment in his manner, and an eager glance stole up from under the thick lashes of his

companion. “In short, you know, dear Abbie, I am poor;” (he said these words very proudly;) “that my aunt’s carefully-hoarded earnings sent me to the University, where I only graduated last year. I have no fortune, and can offer Grace but a very humble home. I fear her uncle may think I am rash in this matter?”

The last sentence was rather a question than an opinion. Abbie drew nearer to him, and her voice was very low and steady, and the young man did not know that the fingers which twisted the silken tassel of her apron trembled like the leaves around them.

“No, Marcus, you can trust the words of your boyhood’s sister. My uncle is too generous and noble to allow your want of wealth to influence him in the least. But if I might say a word for Grace——” She paused.

Marcus started slightly, and his dark eyes were filled with surprise as he fastened them on his companion.

“I do not understand you, Abbie,” he said, inquiringly.

“Well, then, forgive me, Marcus, my brother, for I see I must speak plainly. You know our darling is the wealthiest of us three, for my parents left their child no fortune but their own good name.

“The farm-house, even, was my cousin’s mother’s; and though, in accordance with the will, Uncle Nathan is to possess it during his lifetime, the whole will be Grace’s at his death.

"Now, you see, I want you and my sweet cousin to find no shadows drifting along your sunny future; and so, Marcus, you will forgive me for advising you to place all Grace's fortune at her own disposal, so that none—not even yourself—can reach it."

"Abbie," said Marcus, with stern brevity, "answer me one question, and answer me honestly: is it with Grace's consent you have said this to me?"

Abbie could not meet Marcus's look, and she covered her face with her hands; and it was her outraged conscience which sent that tone of sharp agony to her voice, but not so her companion understood it.

"Do not ask me, Marcus; do not ask me."

"It is well: I am answered."

His companion did not hear the groan with which he left her, for the one that was in her own darkened soul at the moment.

"I have commenced, and, whether I repent or not, it is too late to retract. The game must be played out now, and what I do must be done quickly."

Abbie Glenn said these words as she sat in her own room, an hour later, and then she rose up and went down-stairs.

Oh, these links in the great chain of evil, winding farther and farther on, through the snares and the pit-falls! How

constantly should the prayer go up from all our hearts, "Lead us not into temptation."

Abbie found her cousin in the sitting-room alone, for Mrs. Hill was preparing supper.

Grace was reading. Her cousin stole up to her, and, drawing one arm around her neck, laid the other playfully on the page.

Grace looked up with a quick smile, and drew down Abbie's face to her lips.

"What is Marcus doing that he should leave his fair lady alone so long?" asked Abbie, lightly.

"He went to the village, dearie, some three hours ago, and has not yet returned."

"Yes, he has; for I met him, less than an hour ago, in the garden: but he has probably gone out again. Gracie, I have something to say to you."

There was a strange significance in her cousin's tone, and Grace looked up in surprise.

"You know, dear, that you are rich: now, don't shake your head so; at least, you are this in comparison with Marcus and me. Now, what I want you to promise is this: that you will make over all your fortune to Marcus."

"Of course, it is all his, Abbie. You did not suppose I would retain any of it for myself, when I only value it for his sake. I care not for wealth, for, oh! I have the great riches of his love."

And the deep heart of the girl made her face seem like an angel, as she spoke these words.

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said Abbie, turning away her eyes, for she could not meet those of Grace. "And now, little cousin, I have an inkling that Marcus will say something to you on this matter when next you meet; and if his manner should seem a little eager, or impatient, or singular, be sure and tell him that *all* shall be his, without reserve: let him fully *understand* this."

She had forestalled well the effect of these words. The brightness went out from Grace's face, for a sudden suspicion crept coldly to her heart.

"Abbie, has Marcus been speaking to you on this matter?" She asked it as though every word cost her a pang.

"Well, yes, Gracie dear; he *did* just now allude to the matter, when we were in the garden: and so, forgive me I have spoken as I have."

Grace drew herself up proudly, but her face was white as the dead.

"What did he say, Abbie? Tell me, oh! tell me, if you would not kill me!"

That cry smote fearfully along the heart of Abbie Glenn, but a fiend had possession of it, or she would not have answered,—

"I cannot tell you, my sweet cousin, how it pains me to do this; but Marcus *did* mention, or, at least, gave me to under-

stand, that, much as he thought of you, there were others—I cannot speak it. He is poor, you know, and no worse than other men, darling, if your wealth influenced somewhat his choice."

"Oh, Abbie, would that I had died before I had known it!"

Grace Newman's light figure rocked back and forth, as one's will under a great burden, while she cried out the words. But at that moment a quick, well-known footfall reached both girls.

"He is coming. I will leave you now. Remember, Grace." And Abbie was gone.

The interview between Marcus Holmes and Grace Newman was a brief but very decisive one. The character of each, and the misapprehension which existed on both sides, was enough to insure this. If Marcus was rash and proud, if his whole high-souled nature recoiled from the faintest imputation of wedding Grace for her wealth, the woman's heart of his betrothed, with its outraged pride and affections, repelled as scornfully the baseness that had won her for her fortune. Marcus's solitary walk had not tended to soothe his indignation; and, with his ardent temperament, he did not wait till time should afford him calm reflection, but at once asked Grace, with considerable bitterness in his tone, if it was her wish to have her property immediately secured to her.

Misapprehending altogether the motives which prompted the question, she replied, with womanly dignity, that she

wished nothing about the matter; but, as it seemed one of paramount importance with him, she would promise the whole should be placed at his immediate disposal, whether her hand accompanied it or not.

Of course this was enough for Marcus, for in his soul he now believed Grace's fears for her fortune were greater than her love for him, and that she only made him this offer because she knew it was one he could not accept. He— But, reader, you can guess the rest. Suffice it, a few moments later, a wild, white face rushed into the chamber which Abbie Glenn had been pacing to and fro in a torture of fearful suspense, and then it stood still and rigid before her and whispered, hoarsely,—

"Lost! lost to me forever, Abbie!"

A look of joyful triumph flashed up the darkness of Abbie's eyes; but it was only momentary, for she turned and looked on her companion, and the heart that was not all evil was touched.

"Come to me, Gracie; I am very sorry for you," she cried, in tones whose tender pity was genuine.

And Abbie sat down on the low stool, and her cousin sank down at her feet and said,—

"Abbie, let me lay my head on your true heart, as I long to lay it this minute on the cold, damp *under-ground*. Oh, Abbie, you are the only one that guesses my misery; for the sake of the days that we played together, and the nights that

we slept in each other's arms, pity me, my cousin, pity me!"

Tears of sorrow and self-reproach bubbled up to the eyes of Abbie Glenn, and she answered, solemnly,—

"Grace, I would part with my right hand this hour to recall what has happened;" and for the moment she *felt* it.

And Grace only drew her head down closer to her cousin's heart, and lay there white and shivering.

Two days had passed. During that time Marcus and Grace had met with cool courtesy, which elicited no attention from either Farmer Glenn or Mrs. Hill. Both suffered equally; both considered themselves deceived and wronged, and yet, in the silent depths of their hearts, both still loved, deeming it weakness and madness.

And, though her dark purposes had been fully achieved, each was happier than Abbie Glenn, haunted, stung as her soul was, by night and by day, with remorse.

At the end of those two days, Marcus and Abbie stood together again among the thick currant-bushes in the old garden, and Marcus said to his companion,—

"It is useless for me to think of staying here longer, Abbie; Grace's presence is a constant torture to me,"—his proud lip quivered,—*"and I cannot endure it. I shall leave to-morrow."*

"Oh, Marcus, do not say this. Remember, there are those

to whom your presence is very dear, whose lives will be very sad when *you* are away."

The speaker's hand was laid fondly on his arm, and Marcus looked on that beautiful upturned face. A sudden impulse came over him, and he did what men usually do under such circumstances.

"Abbie," he said, drawing his arm round her waist, "I have loved you as few brothers love their sisters, and, next to Grace, you have been the dearest to me on earth. You know all my past. Abbie, will you take the heart and broken hopes I have to offer you, and braid them up into the future years with what brightness you can? Abbie, will you be my wife?"

And Abbie's graceful head drooped to hide the joy that was in her face, as she answered,—

"I will devote my whole life to your happiness, *my* Marcus." And she meant it.

An hour later the newly-betrothed of Marcus Holmes might have been seen slowly wending her way up through the garden-shadows to the farm-house.

"How shall I tell Grace," she murmured, "and how will she bear it? Poor Grace! But it is no time to *think* now. It will be the closing scene, and one more falsehood cannot lie much heavier *here*;" she laid her hand on her heart and her face worked fearfully. But she went in and up to the chamber where she knew Grace was. She found her at the window, looking mournfully out on the fading sunset.

Then it was Abbie's turn to sit down at Grace's feet and tell her of her betrothal. She did this, turning her eyes away, for again she could not meet those of her cousin.

Grace sat very quiet during the whole recital, and Abbie would not have known that she listened, had it not been for the quick throbbing of her heart.

"Gracie," she concluded, "are you not willing I should be his wife? Oh, you cannot tell what a shadow the memory of the past will throw over my union with him! But you will try and forgive and forget it, won't you, darling?"

And Abbie did not see the heart-broken smile with which Grace answered,—

"It is evident he *loved* you, and I was blind not to have guessed it. May you be very happy with him, cousin. There; leave me a little while."

And, when Abbie was gone, poor Grace Newman threw herself on her knees by the bedside, and, while quick sobs shivered through her whole frame, she prayed:—"O God! O God! give me strength to bear this new misery!"

That night Marcus led Abbie before Farmer Glenn and Mrs. Hill, and said, briefly,—

"In three months she has promised to be my wife."

It was a sultry afternoon in the early September. Farmer Glenn and Mrs. Hill sat together in one of the front rooms of the old farm-house. The hot sunshine could not make way

through the thick shrubbery round the windows, and the cool shadows lay on the carpet.

Marcus and Abbie were both absent. The former had left immediately after his engagement; and Abbie had gone to the city, ostensibly to prepare for her wedding, but really because she was restless and wretched, and the quiet of the old farm-house almost maddened her.

"To think, Uncle Nathan," said Mrs. Hill, laying down her sewing and glancing toward the paper the farmer was reading, "we are really to have a wedding here next week! Marcus and Abbie will be back by Monday, I suppose. But, Uncle Nathan, between ourselves, I have not quite liked Grace's appearance of late. She certainly does not seem to feel well, and——"

Mrs. Hill caught her breath, for at that moment the sweet face of Grace Newman stood in the door. She moved across the room to the farmer, and her cheek had certainly lost somewhat of its bloom, and he noticed it for the first time as she seated herself on the arm of his chair.

"Uncle," she said, "it is my birthday next week, and I shall be twenty-one, you know."

"Well, child, try and muster up some brighter cheeks for it,—that's all."

"No, it isn't, uncle. You know my property will then be entirely at my disposal. Well, what I want to say is this:—I wish to make Abbie a present on her wedding-day,—a hand-

some one. You know Marcus and she are not wealthy, and I want to make over to her the farm-house and the land adjoining it."

As Grace said these last words, a shadow fell across the hall, close by the sitting-room door. It started suddenly and then stood very still. Mrs. Hill was the only one who occupied a position to see this, and she was now too absorbed to notice it. So the owner of the shadow must necessarily have heard all which transpired in the sitting-room.

"Make over the farm-house to Abbie!" repeated Farmer Glenn, as though he doubted whether his niece was in her right senses. "Why, Grace, are you insane? It's more than half your property."

"No matter for that, uncle. It will never do me any good; and so I can make Marcus and my cousin happy, it is all I care. There will be enough left to last me quite as long as I shall want it."

She said it very sadly, as her little fingers smoothed down the gray hairs of Uncle Nathan. Before the old man could answer, the shadow fell across the open door, and a deep, rich voice, yet tremulous with emotion, cried out,—

"Grace, Grace, have I heard aright?"

The whole three sprang to their feet as though suddenly electrified. Grace tottered forward a few steps and then sank senseless into the arms of Marcus.

She awoke in the delirium of a brain-fever; and that

night, watching by her bedside, Marcus learned all, with astonishment that was only equalled by horror and indignation.

It was terrible to hear Grace call after him in those long mournful tones, and to shriek in her ear that his arms were about her, and yet know that she could not understand him. It was terrible to hear her moan out,—

"Marcus, Marcus! did you think I cared for the money? Did you not know that I would have rejoiced to have placed it all in your hands and say, 'Do with it as you-will, my beloved'? But, oh, it was cruel to deceive me thus! Cruel, with your vows to me hardly cold on your lips, to turn away and tell Abbie that the love I *only* prized was hers, and that you wooed me for my money. Oh, Marcus, you will think of the wrong you did me sometimes, when I lie under the grass by my mother."

No wonder the young man bowed his proud head on her pillow and sobbed like a very child!

When the morning dawned, he whispered to his aunt and Farmer Glenn, who were nearly stupefied with this revelation of Abbie's perfidy,—

"I shall write to her before the mail goes out, and tell all. I cannot bear that she should return, for, with my present feelings, I might say that which I should afterward repent."

And he wrote very briefly, stating the occurrence which

had called him home, when least expected; and *he related all that had transpired since his coming.*

What Abbie's feelings were on receiving *that* letter, Marcus never knew.

For two weeks Grace Newman lay in the shadow of death, and the friends who hung over her bedside watched lest every breath should terminate her young life.

But she was given back to their prayers. She awoke at twilight to find her head resting on Marcus's bosom, and his lips dropped the baptismal of a new betrothal on her forehead, as he whispered, softly,—

"All is well with us now, my beloved."

The mellow October day was waning toward night. Grace Newman sat by the window in her sitting-room, gazing out on the rich web of crimson and gold which Autumn was winding among the trees.

She was pale, and seemed somewhat weary, as she leaned back her head on the cushions; but the light of a heart at peace was in her face.

"Are you tired, darling?"

A figure that had stolen surreptitiously into the room asked the question, as it leaned tenderly over the girl.

"Not very, Marcus: at least I shall forget it, now you are come."

The sudden brightening of her face would have said this, if her lips had not.

"Come, children; supper is all ready, and Uncle Nathan's coming," said Mrs. Hill, as she came into the room.

Farmer Glenn entered while Marcus was assisting Grace to rise.

"Wait a moment," he said: "I have some news for you. It is not bad, but it will surprise you all. Can you bear it, Grace?"

She bowed her head.

Then Farmer Glenn lifted the paper in his hand, and read an account of the marriage which had taken place that week, between the millionaire, John Seward, Esq., and the beautiful Abbie Glenn. There was a brief history, also, of the magnificent wedding and fête at Cousin Martha's.

There was silence for several moments after Farmer Glenn concluded, and then Grace said,—

"Poor Abbie! I hope she may yet repent and be happy; for, though she wronged me so deeply, I cannot forget, Marcus, it was all done for love of you."

"And I will try to forget it in remembering that you will be mine next week,—all my own, Grace," responded the young man.

His betrothed did not answer. Her eyes closed, and a prayer of exceeding gratitude went up to the God who had sent her the *sunshine after the rain*.

My Picture.

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO MRS. ELLEN LOUISE
MOULTON.

I GIVE it thee, beloved; and thou wilt lean,
With gaze grown dim for very tenderness,
Above these eyes, that may not answer thee
By sign or token!

Oh, no chisell'd brow,
Gleaming out from its coronal of bays
In rare old sculpture,—and no cheeks whose bloom
Outshine the roses on Lake Nemi's shore,—
No lips with blushes caught of buds that hold
Banquets in Rhenish dews,—shall ever wear
Such grace and beauty as this face made fair
To thee by love's illusion;—this that grew,
In its first girlhood, pale with wistful dreams,
And nights of weariness, and days of pain.

And so, beloved, by times thy lips have laid
 Their soft baptismals on this aching brow,—
 By all the pearls with which thy hands have strung
 The sweet hours of the past,—by all the prayers
 These lips have breathed o'er thee, and which, perchance,
 Thou'lt read on shining parchment by some lake
 Beneath the crystal hills,—by all of these
 Solemn and tender, dedicate I thee,
 The face this hour made brighter for thy love.

Little Mercy is Dead!

"LITTLE MERCY is dead!" These were almost the first words the children said the other night, as they met us at the door on our return home from a visit, and their welcoming kisses dropped like sweet dew on our forehead.

"Mercy" was a little blind girl. What a mournful condensation of a child's history are in those six words! We had never seen her, but a pang shot through our heart at the memory of the widowed mother whose one jewel above all price was that "little Mercy" who now walks with the angels.

Poor woman! She was in humble life; but sometimes, as we looked on her bright face, we used to wonder if the riches of a happy, contented spirit were not more than broad lands and heaps of gold.

Little Mercy was an inmate of the "Blind-Asylum," and one day she unconsciously groped her way to a pair of backstairs, and fell from these. She was taken up senseless, and a brain-fever placed a sudden period to the life that had reached up but a few years from its birth-hour. She was a

sweet, gentle, loving child, and she will be greatly missed and mourned in that little sisterhood whose eyes shall only be unsealed in the white morning of eternity.

Mercy's father died when she was an infant; but as she lay on her death-bed, with the cold chill settling over her face, a new light broke into it. "Papa! papa! I am coming!" she cried out, suddenly and eagerly, lifting up the little arms over which the May grass would soon wave its green tresses. And, with these last words on her lips, Mercy went home to "our Father which is in heaven!" Who shall speak of that brightness on which the eyes of the little blind girl have opened?

Where the trees drop down their fragrant dews to the grand rhythm of that "Glory to God in the highest,"—whose notes were struck before the morning stars sang together for joy,—crowned and recreated, sits Mercy, the little blind girl!

The Old Letters.

There was not a sigh of the evening wind among the leaves,—not a sound upon the earth nor in the air; and yet that night a star fell from Heaven.—HYPERION.

"CAN it be possible?" The words were spoken in an under-tone, with a quick gasp for breath, and then the lady stood very still, looking down on the disordered drawer and the letters that lay on the top. Little bundles of muslin and dimity, alternating with knots of faded ribbon and old lace, were scattered all around, for their owner had been searching among them for an old embroidery-pattern; and so she had come suddenly upon the packet of old letters she had stowed there more than two years before.

They were written by Mrs. Fleming's old schoolmate, Amy Norris, and the soft girlish handwriting spoke to her heart a whisper faint and tender from the olden time.

Dear Amy! She had been married three years before, and her station in life was far below that of Mrs. Fleming's; but the lady's eyes grew dim, as she unfastened the ribbon which,

for two years, had holden together those half-dozen epistles. Amy's sweet face seemed leaning up close to hers once more,—and she saw the old red houses, with their sloping roofs, where they had lived in the days that would never come back again. But, as the packet fell from the loosened ribbon, it disclosed two other letters, bearing an entirely different chirography, and these called forth the exclamation, and brought the sudden paleness to Mrs. Fleming's face.

She thought *those* letters were all turned to ashes long ago,—that she had burned them on that terrible night when she buried away all the past. But now she saw how it was: in her haste and anguish she had mistaken the letters and burned two of Amy's instead.

There was no one of all Mrs. Fleming's admirers to see her as she stood by the open drawer, her little fingers moving caressingly over those two letters; and it seemed almost a pity, for hardly ever had she looked more beautiful. There was so much unstudied grace in her attitude, so much mournful pathos in her young face; and yet it was not best the world should read the story that until that hour had been written and rolled up and laid away in her own heart.

She had not seen *his* handwriting for two years; and yet how natural it looked! The bold, graceful capitals, the free, running hand, all had a language for *her*! She knew, too, by the mailing, *which* the letters were, and when they were written,—the first, so tender and loving, before he learned,—

the last, wild and reproachful, *afterward*! How she had loved that man!—how the past came back to tell her of it! The old red farm-house,—how it loomed up in the distant perspective, amid the cool summer nights, when she sat under the old portico all grown over with sweet-brier, and he sat there too!

But clearest and brightest and dearest of all stood up in that world of old memories the new home which they were to have. It was to be a little white cottage with green window-blinds and a small yard in front. How she had dreamed about it,—and of the flower-border, flanked with white shells, running up to the steps! What a happy, loving wife she expected to be in that dear little cottage home,—going every morning through a round of delicious household duties; for Harry could not afford to keep but one domestic. And then in the late afternoons, when the table was all laid, with its snowy cloth, and the napkins covered the biscuit her own hands had kneaded, and the fruit they had gathered in the little garden back of the house,—then she would put on a white muslin dress, (Harry liked white muslin,) and a few rose-buds in her curls, and she would go out and wait for him at the garden-gate.

How his handsome face would light up as he came round the corner and caught a glimpse of her! and a moment later his strong arm would be around her waist, and his low, deep, "My precious Laura!" would be the sweetest sound earth

held for her. And, as that quiet domestic picture came up to confront her, the proud, elegant Mrs. Fleming bowed her head on her hands and sobbed like a child.

Then she laid her fingers on the letters with a nervous, timid glance around the room, for the lady's heart whispered she was doing wrong,—that *now* she had no right to read them; and it was better to lay them in the grate yonder, where the fire was leaping up to fold them in its long red arms.

"There can't be any harm in reading them over," she whispered, for her conscience needed a narcotic; "it is so long ago, and we shall never meet again."

So Mrs. Fleming opened the letters and read them. I cannot tell how they wrung her heart, particularly the last one, with its wild, frantic reproaches, and the love and the suffering so apparent through all.

"I was not to blame so much as you thought me, Harry," she murmured, as she laid the letter in her lap. "Our property was all melting away, and they told me you had grown cold and worldly, and I thought I must, too. If the letter had only come the week before, I should not have been—what I am now." And then she looked around that elegant chamber and thought *what* she was now. A wife, bought and sold and paid for, in gold and lands and earthly grandeur. How the thought burned and festered in her proud soul, as she sat there!

A wife! loved by her husband as he loved his horses, his dogs, and his houses; loved, but only because her beauty and her grace were the crowning glory, the chiefest ornament, of that magnificent home which was his soul's delight.

The lady looked around her luxuriant chamber that morning with a sinking heart. The marble wash-stands, the damask curtains, the Parisian carpets, looking like a world of Damascus roses scattered over a bed of snow, were worthy the wife of a millionaire. Below her stood her elegant parlors; and the looms, the skill, and the artist-fancies of the Old World had all contributed a share to their splendor. And yet the mistress of all this wealth, sitting in her chamber, murmured to herself,—

"I wish he had never found me in the old red farm-house where I was so happy! I wish I stood this very morning in the kitchen of the little cottage we were to have, and that, in a blue calico dress, I was making the cakes for your supper, *my Harry!*"

"Please, ma'am,"—and the entrance of her maid was a harsh interruption to the lady's monologue,—"*Mr. Fleming has just sent home the new drab-and-pink satin for the party next Tuesday night.*"

Ah me! those old letters!—if she had never read them! That party!—if she had never gone to it!

"You have not forgotten me, Laura! I read it in your

blue eyes to-night." And Harry Atwood's voice had lost none of its old depth, as he leaned down his handsome head to Mrs. Fleming's as they stood together in an alcove of the conservatory.

Most of the company had left, for it was late, and they were quite secure from observation. Mr. Fleming was not a jealous husband, and he was quite content others should admire his wife, so he *owned* her. It was understood that Mr. Atwood and Mrs. Fleming were old friends, so they had nothing to fear from a prolonged *tête-à-tête*. They had, suddenly, unexpectedly met at the major's party, and the heart of either was not changed.

Harry Atwood had become a talented lawyer now, and the world honored him. He had forgiven Laura long ago, for he had heard she was more "sinned against than sinning."

"Har—Mr. Atwood, I am very glad to meet you and find you looking so well." The lady's voice was courteous and calm; but her fingers trembled as they played with the carved points of her ivory fan.

"Call me Harry, Laura, for the sake of old times, and look up to me once and say you have not forgotten them. Oh, Laura, I have thought how the bright star of this evening's festival once rose over my heart, and then went down forever. We cannot stay here much longer. Will you not grant me an interview to-morrow night—a private one—in your own house?"

"I cannot, Harry; do not ask me. I am the wife of another now."

"And what harm could there be in our walking together for a half-hour in your garden? Your husband would not object to this, for I have watched the man narrowly to-night, and know him well. You could not refuse so simple a request to the veriest acquaintance. We have had many walks together, Laura, down by the old mill and past the meadow-pond. Will you refuse me one now?"

He looked down on the fair face, and he saw that tears were staining it, and he knew what the answer would be, before it was given.

"You may come, Harry."

That walk in the dim moonlight upon Mr. Fleming's beautiful grounds was followed by many another, for the first steps in the forbidden way are usually pleasant ones. Poor Mrs. Fleming! she *meant* no wrong, and then she loved Harry, although she tried to conceal this from him; but when he talked of the past, in those low, tender tones of his, her tears *would* come: she could not help it.

One evening, it must have been more than a week after their first meeting, Harry told Mrs. Fleming that his heart was unchanged; that the old love still lived there,—a sweet but mournful memory.

"Oh, Harry! don't, don't! You forget; I am *his* wife!"

murmured the young creature, as she bowed her pale face on her hands.

And then the lawyer drew his arm around her waist, just as he had done in the days that were gone, and said,—

“You *belonged* to me first, Laura! Our souls were married before you ever took that false oath at the altar!”

And he whispered to her of a flight to softer skies,—of a home fairer than the one they had dreamed of in their youth,—of a life that should be one long poem of love!

She fled from him that time, with a wild shriek of fear and horror.

They did not meet again for many nights. If during that time she had only remembered the prayer of her childhood, “Deliver us from temptation!” But she was so young; and then that affection was the one blossom her life had cherished in the midst of its sterile grandeur. I do not exonerate her from blame; only I would have you “*pitiful*” to her great need.

One night she was standing on the marble steps of her mansion, for she had just taken leave of some guests, when Harry Atwood suddenly sprang before her.

I do not know what was said by either party, but there were frantic gestures and wild appeals on one side, and a little later Mrs. Fleming was walking among her garden shadows with Harry Atwood.

This was repeated for several evenings, until, one midnight,

a closed carriage might have been seen to roll hastily away from the private entrance of Mr. Fleming’s grounds. The next day his wife was gone!

What an electrical thrill it sent through the fashionable New York world! For her beauty and her rank had made Mrs. Fleming its especial idol. She knew little of the censure and scorn that was heaped on her head in the quiet of that Italian home to which she was borne by the man who loved her only too well.

The world said Mrs. Fleming was happy there, but it was false. *No woman ever can be who makes memory a remorse and love a crime.*

But—dear me!—how I used to smile when everybody made a parenthesis of pity in their anathemas on Mrs. Fleming:—“Her poor husband and parents! My heart aches for them.” And, sitting very quiet and listening, I thought, always, “Well, the one bought and the others sold her; and so they had their reward.”

The Fountain Very Far Down.

"I DON'T believe it," cried my cousin Ned, who was passing his college vacation at our house; and there was a world of contempt and skepticism in the air with which he dashed down the paper over whose damp columns his eyes had been traveling for the previous half-hour.

"You see, Cousin Nelly," continued Ned, getting up and pacing the long old-fashioned parlor with quick, nervous strides, "it's all sheer nonsense to talk about these 'doors in every human heart.' It sounds very pretty and pathetic in a story, I'll admit; but so do a great many other things which reason and actual experience entirely repudiate. There are hearts—alas that their name should be legion!—where 'far away up' there is no door to be opened, and 'far away down' are no deeps to be fathomed. Now, don't, Cousin Nelly, level another such glance at me from those brown eyes, for I have just thought of a case illustrative of my theory. Don't you remember Miss Stebbins, the old maid who lived at the foot

of the hill, and how I picked a rose for you one morning which had climbed over her fence into the road and so, of course, become 'public property?' Faugh! I shall never forget the tones of the virago's voice, or the scowl on her forehead, as she sallied out of the front door and shook her hand at me. A woman who could refuse a half-withered flower to a little child!—I wonder that roses could blossom on her soil! At the 'smiting of the rod,' no waters could flow out of such a granite heart. In the moral desert of such a character, no fertilizing stream could make its way."

I did not answer Cousin Ned's rather grandiloquent speech, for just then there was the low rap of visitors at the parlor-door; but I have always thought there was a good angel in the room while he was speaking, and that it flew straight to Miss Stebbins, and, looking down, down, very far down, in her heart, he saw a fountain there: rank weeds grew all around it, the seal of years was on its lip, and the dust of time deep on the seal; but the angel smiled, as it floated upward, and murmured, "I shall return and remove the seal, and the waters will flow."

Stern and grim sat Miss Stebbins at her work, one summer afternoon. The golden sunshine winked and danced in its play-place in the corner, and broke into a broad laugh along the ceiling; and a single beam, bolder than the rest, crept to the hem of Miss Stebbins's gown, and looked up with a timid,

loving smile in her face, such as no human being ever wore when looking there.

Poor Miss Stebbins! those stern, harsh features only daguerreotyped too faithfully the desolate, arid heart beneath them; and that heart, with its dry fountain, was a true type of her life, with the one flower of human affection which had blossomed many years before along its bleak, barren highway.

She never seemed to love anybody, unless it was her brother William, who was a favorite with everybody; but he went to sea, and had never been heard of since. Sally had always been a stray sheep among the family; but dark hours, and at last *death*, came upon all the rest, and so the homestead fell into her hands. Such was the brief verbal history of Miss Stebbins's life, which I received from Aunt Mary, who closed it there, in rigid adherence to the one maxim, which always governs her conversation,—never to speak evil of her neighbors.

But that summer afternoon there came the patter of children's feet along the gravel-walk which led to Miss Stebbins's front door; and at the same moment the angel with golden-edged wings came down from its blue-sky home into Miss Stebbins's parlor.

She raised her head and saw them,—two weary-looking little children, with golden hair and blue eyes, standing hand in hand under the little portico; and then that old termagant-scowl darkened her forehead, and she asked, with a sharp,

disagreeable note in her voice, like the raw breath in the northeast wind,—

"Wa-all, I should like to know what you want, standing there?"

"Please, ma'am," said the boy, in a timid, entreating voice, which ought to have found its way straight into any heart, "little sister and I feel very tired, for we have walked a long way. Will you let us sit down on the step and rest a little while?"

"No; I can't have children loafing round on my premises," said Miss Stebbins, with the same vinegar sharpness of tone which had characterized her preceding reply. Moreover, the sight of the younger members of the human family seemed always to arouse her belligerent propensities. "So just take yourselves off; and the quicker the better 'twill be for you."

"Don't stay any longer, Willy; I am afraid," whispered the little girl, with a tremor rippling through her voice, as she pulled significantly at her brother's coat-sleeve.

"Willy! Willy! That was your brother's name; don't you remember?" the angel bent down and whispered very softly in the harsh woman's ear; and all the time his hand was gliding down, down in her heart, searching for that hidden fountain. "You must have been just about that little girl's age when you and he used to go trudging down into the meadows together to find sweet flag-root. And you used to

keep tight hold of his hand, just as she does. Oh, how tired you used to get! Don't you remember that old brown house, where nobody lived but starved rats and a swarm of wasps, who made their nest there in the summer-time? And you used to sit down on the old step, which the worms had eaten in so many places, and rest there. How he loved you! and how careful he was always to give you the best seat! and then he never spoke one cross word to you, if everybody else did. Now, if you should let those children sit down and rest, just as you and Willy did on the old brown step, you could keep a sharp eye on them, to see they didn't get into any mischief."

The angel must have said all this in a very little time, for the children had only reached the gravel-walk again, when Miss Stebbins called out to them; and this time that spiteful little note in her voice was not quite so prominent:—

"Here! you may sit right down on that corner a little while: but, mind you, don't stir; for if you do you'll have to budge."

"Little sister," said the boy, in a low tone, after they were seated, "lay your head here and try to go to sleep."

The little girl laid her head, with its shower of golden bright curls, on her brother's breast; but the next moment she raised it, saying,—

"I can't sleep, brother, I'm so thirsty."

"Don't you remember that day you and Willy went into the woods after blackberries, and how you lost your way

groping among the shadows of the forest?" again whispered the angel, with his hand feeling all the time for the fountain. "You found an old lightning-blasted tree, and you sat down on it, and he put his arm round you just so, and said, 'Try and go to sleep, little sister.' But you couldn't, you were so thirsty; for you had walked full three miles. Who knows but what those children have too?"

There was a little pause after the angel had said this, and then Miss Stebbins rose up and went into her pantry, where the shelves were all of immaculate whiteness and she could see her face in the brightly-scoured tin. She brought out a white pitcher, and, going into the garden, filled it at the spring. When she returned, she poured some of the cool contents into a cup which stood on the table, and carried it to the children; and she really held it to the little girl's lips all the time she was drinking.

Farther and farther down in the heart of the woman crept the hand of the angel; nearer and nearer to the fountain it drew.

Miss Stebbins went back to her sewing, but, somehow, her fingers did not fly as nimbly as usual. The memories of by-gone years were rising out of their mouldy sepulchres; and fair and fresh they came before her, with none of the grave's rust and dampness upon them.

"That little boy's eyes, when he thanked you for the water, looked just as Willy's used to," once more whispered

the angel, bending down close to Miss Stebbins's ear. "And his hair looks like Willy's, too, as he sits there with that sun-beam brightening its gold and his arm thrown so lovingly around his sister's waist. There! did you see how wistfully he looked up at the grapes whose purple sides are turned towards him as they hang over the portico? How Willy used to love grapes! And how sweet your bowls of bread and milk used to taste after one of your rambles into the woods! If those children have walked as far as you did (and don't you see the little boy's coat and the little girl's faded dress are all covered with dust?) they must be very hungry, as well as tired and thirsty. Don't you remember that apple-pie you baked this morning? I never saw a pie done to a finer brown in my life. How sweet it would taste to those little tired things, if they could only eat a piece here in the parlor, where the flies and the sun wouldn't keep tormenting them all the time!"

A moment after, Miss Stebbins had stolen with noiseless step to her pantry, and, cutting out two generous slices from her apple-pie, she placed them in saucers, returned to the front door, and said to the children,—

"You may come in here and sit down on the stools by the fireplace and eat some pie; but you must mind and not drop any crumbs on the floor."

It was very strange, but that old harsh tone had almost left her voice. The large tempting slices were placed in the little

hands eagerly lifted up to receive them; and, at that moment, out from the lip of the fountain, out from the dust which lay heavy upon its seal, there came a single drop, and it fell down upon Miss Stebbins's heart. It was the first which had fallen there for years. Ah, the angel had found the fountain then!

The softened woman went back to her seat, and the angel did not bend down and whisper in her ear again; but all the time his hand was busy—very busy—at its work.

"Where is your home, children?" inquired Miss Stebbins, after she had watched for a while, with a new, pleasant enjoyment, the children, as they dispatched with hungry avidity their pie.

"Mary and I haven't any home now. We had one once, before papa died, a great way over the sea," answered the boy.

"And where are you going now? and what brought you and your little sister over the sea?" still further questioned the now interested woman.

"Why, you see, ma'am, just before papa died he called old Tony to him,—now, Tony was black, and always lived with us:—'Tony,' said he, 'I am going to die, and you know I have lost every thing, and the children will be all alone in the world. But, Tony, I had a sister once that I loved, and she loved me; and, though I haven't seen her for a great many years, still, I know she loves me, if she's living, just as well as she did when she and I used to go hand in hand through

the apple-orchard to school; and, Tony, when I'm dead and buried, I want you to sell the furniture and take the money it brings you and carry the children back to New England. You'll find her name and the place she used to live in a paper—which anybody'll read for you—in the drawer there. And, Tony, when you find her, just take Willy and Mary to her, and tell her I was their father, and that I sent them to her on my death-bed and asked her to be a mother to them for my sake. It'll be enough, Tony, to tell her that.' And Tony cried real loud, and he said, 'Massa, if I forget one word of what you've said, may God forget me!'

"Well, papa died, and, after he was buried, Tony brought little sister and me over the waters. But before we got here Tony was taken sick with the fever, and he died a little while after the ship reached the land and they had carried him on shore. But just before he died he called me to him and put a piece of paper in my hand. 'Don't lose it, Willy,' he said, 'for poor Tony's going, and you'll have to find the way to your aunt's all alone. The money's all spent, too, and they say it's a good hundred miles to the place where she lived. But keep up a good heart, and ask the folks the way, and for something to eat when you're hungry; and don't walk too many miles a day, 'cause little sister ain't strong. Perhaps somebody'll help you on with a ride, or let you sleep in their house nights. Now, don't forget, Willy; and shake hands the last time with poor Tony.'

"After that, we stayed at the inn till the next day, when they buried Tony; and, when they asked us what we were going to do, we told them we were going to our aunt's, for papa had sent us to her, and then they let us go. When we asked folks the way they told us, though they always stared, and sometimes shook their heads. We got two rides, and always a good place to sleep. They said our aunt lived round here; but we got so tired walking we had to stop."

"And what was your father's name?" asked Miss Stebbins; and, somehow, there was a choking in her throat, and the hand of the angel was placed on the fountain as she spoke.

"William Stebbins; and our aunt's name was Sally Stebbins. Please, ma'am, do you know her?"

Off at that moment came the seal, and out leaped a fresh, blessed tide of human affection and fell down upon the barren heart-soil that grew fertile in a moment.

"William! my brother William!" cried Miss Stebbins, as she sprang towards the children with outstretched arms and tears raining fast down her cheeks. "Oh, for your sake I will be a mother to them!"

A year had passed away; college vacation had come again, and once more Cousin Ned was at our house. In the summer-gloaming we went to walk, and our way lay past Miss Stebbins's cottage. As we drew near the wicket, the sound of merry child-laughter rippled gleefully to our ears, and a mo-

ment after, from behind that very rose-tree so disagreeably associated with its owner in Cousin Ned's mind, bounded two golden-haired children:—

"Come, Willy! Mary! you have made wreaths of my roses until they are wellnigh gone. You must gather the pinks after this."

"*Mirabile dictu!*" ejaculated Cousin Ned. "Is *that* the woman who gave me such a blessing a long time ago for plucking a half-withered rose from that very tree?"

"The very same, Cousin Ned," I answered; and then I told him of the change which had come over the harsh woman,—of her love, her gentleness, and patience for the orphan-children of her brother; and that, after all, there was a fountain very far down in her heart,—as there surely was in everybody's, if we could only find it.

"Well, Cousin Nelly," said Ned, "I'll agree to become a convert to your theory without further demurring, if you'll promise to tell me where to find a hidden fountain that lies very far down in a dear little somebody's heart, and whose precious waters are gushing only for me."

There was a glance, half arch, half loving, from those dark, handsome eyes, which made me think Cousin Ned knew he would not have to go very far to find it.

The Rain in the Afternoon.

"Ah, well! for us all some sweet hope lies
Deeply buried from human eyes,
And in the 'hereafter' angels may
Roll the stone from its grave away."

How the wind blows, and the rain beats, and the clouds of a dull, blue gray fold themselves low and heavy over the skies! I do not usually love rain,—at least, not those long, gray, hopeless November rains that weave themselves up into the shroud of December. But this afternoon the rain chimes in strangely with my mood, seeming to say outside, "The beauty is all gone!" And something away down in my heart seems to echo, mournfully, "The beauty is all gone!"

What ails me, I wonder? And why do the tears come crowding heavily over my eyelashes? I ought to be very thankful, and very happy too. Have I not one of the most elegant houses on Chestnut Street, filled with every luxury which wealth can purchase, furnished with all that exquisite

taste which my sensuous, æsthetic temperament so luxuriates in?

Sitting here in this little alcove, I look up the vistas of my long, magnificent parlors. Soft velvet carpets make the summers of tropical climes on their floors; delicate lace curtains roll out like folds of silver clouds from gilded cornices; the walls are flushed with paintings that have kindled the eyes of many an artist; graceful statues occupy the niches, filling the spirit with old poetic visions of Grecian mythology: and yet I, Alice James, with all this beauty and luxury about me, the wife of a proud, indulgent husband, the mother of two fair children, am not this afternoon a happy woman.

My thoughts are going off into the past, and I am so glad the rain will save me from any visitors this afternoon, that from now until nightfall I can talk to myself.

It was such a strange coincidence that we should have met together yesterday afternoon in the old museum. It was such a beautiful day,—fragrant, tender, loving, the last of the Indian summer; and it woke up in my heart its old loving for the woods and the birds. I always had such a passion for these latter: I wonder if he thought of it too; and if it was not some half-unacknowledged memory of this kind which drew him there also. I love to go through that long gallery, with its cases of stuffed birds, and fancy myself in a Tropical forest, with golden orioles and crimson-breasted birds of Paradise flashing all about me. The old heart of my childhood comes

back, and I quite forget myself. I did yesterday, and called out to my little girl, who enjoys the birds almost as much as her mamma, "Isn't it enchanting, Rena, my darling?"

"Mamma, the gentleman behind is looking straight at you," she whispered, pressing her fair little face against my side. I turned round and confronted him.—Leonard Stone! for seven years we had not looked in each other's faces.

He was courteous and self-possessed; so was I, I believe; but his hand trembled as it touched mine, and there was something of curiosity and sadness in the eyes that searched with their old earnest gaze my face,—the face that he said yesterday was so little changed, that he said seven years ago was the fairest among women.

He talked a little on ordinary subjects in an ordinary tone,—of the weather, the birds, &c. Then he said, "This is your little daughter, I conclude, Mrs. James? She is very like you. Won't you come and kiss me, darling?"

And Rena went to him at once, my sweet child, and put up her little arms around his neck, and said, "I like you," with that pretty grace of hers, at once so childlike and so charming.

He dropped his proud head down to her face; his chestnut curls mingled with her golden locks, but his lip quivered as he kissed her. Oh, how the sight struck through my heart!

Just then, however, a party of my acquaintances came along; and in a moment Leonard left. I invited him to call

on us, but he said he had only been in the city a few hours, and he had given all his leisure moments to the museum. He must leave that night. So we parted,—we who expected to be through life together.

How noble he looked! what an air of strength, refinement, and manliness there is about him! And he was once a poor farm-boy! He is thoroughly a self-made man,—the only true men, I sometimes think.

I see the old, yellow-brown house now, with the moss growing thick along the damp eaves, where my life rounded into its womanhood.

My uncle, Timothy Leeds, was an old bachelor. I was the daughter of his only sister, and after my father died, and his young girl-wife followed him, he took me to the old homestead, and it was not his fault if the loss of both parents was not made up to me. He was dogmatic, irritable, eccentric; but a heart warm and tender as a woman's beat under the old-fashioned snuff-colored broadcloth that for ten consecutive years he wore to the brick meeting-house on the Green.

He was not a rich man. I do not believe that during his life he ever owned more than five thousand dollars. But his farm yielded an income sufficient for all the comforts of life. We kept only one domestic; but our family was very small, never comprising more than four or five permanent members.

I was a wild, romping, light-hearted and half-spoiled school-girl of just fourteen, when Leonard Stone came to the house

to help my uncle in harvest-time. How well I remember that first supper we took together in the great, old-fashioned kitchen!

Leonard was an orphan, three years my senior. He was very bashful, and colored like a girl every time my uncle spoke to him, or, looking up, he caught my eyes, as we sat directly opposite each other.

He came, expecting to remain with us about two months, instead of which he stayed five years. He attended school during the winters, and in the summers he assisted my uncle on the farm, who, I believe, loved him as dearly as if he had been his own son.

Leonard Stone's nature is not an accessible one. You would know that by the whole physiognomy of his face,—by the clear, searching eyes, by the thin, strong, not handsome, but fine features, by the firm, self-reliant mouth.

It was a long time before we two grew thoroughly acquainted, for he was very shy; and I, who was accustomed to having every one bend to my will, stood strangely in awe of the boy, though I liked him from the first.

But when the evenings began to grow long, and we gathered about the birch-fire in the old sitting-room, our reserve somehow gradually disappeared.

Then our studies formed a strong bond of sympathy between us, for Leonard had resolved to go to the academy in the adjoining village, and, shutting my eyes on all the splendor

around me, my heart warms to the twin piles of old school-books I see on the little pine table under the mirror.

Before the earth throbbed again with the pulses of spring, I believe that Leonard and I loved each other better than we did any thing on earth. He understood me; he sympathized with the new æsthetic life that was beginning to waken within me, and even then I felt what I did not understand,—that the chords of our natures were strong in harmony.

I must hurry over the record of these years, though their fragrant gales blow softly over my memory now. The long winters that we studied together, the springs that we planted flowers, the summer twilights, when we rode in the old wagon around the meadows, and the autumns that we gathered nuts, dwell brightly in that country through which, this afternoon, I am travelling.

The last day that Leonard was to be with us—the closing up of those four years—was a bright one in the early May. He was to enter college.

During those four years I had grown from a child almost to a woman, and I had begun to know, what it is so dangerous for any woman to learn, that God had made me beautiful! We, Leonard and I, went into the front yard after supper. It was greatly changed since he came to us. Deep hedges of buckthorn ran along the low fence, and graceful larches and clumps of dark cedars, and mounds blushing over every June with red roses, made a picture of what before had only been

a green sheet of grass, with a great apple-tree sweeping heavy shadows all over it. My heart was full of that night, and full of something else deeper than tears.

"Oh, Leonard,"—the cry broke up suddenly, for I had not learned to control my feelings,—“if you weren't going away! It will be such a lonely summer without you.” We stood by the old garden-gate, and I leaned my head down on the railing, not much caring if he saw the tears that were raining down my cheeks.

I felt his hand softly on my hair. “Look up in my eyes, Alice,” he whispered, very tenderly. And I looked up. I knew then what he would say before his lips asked it.

And so, when we walked again through the amber twilight to the gray old house, Leonard and I had spoken those solemn words which, alas! alas! how often and how lightly men and women speak to each other!

Five years had passed before Leonard and I looked again into each other's faces. During all this time we had been very true to each other.

But my life was greatly changed from the old way. Uncle Timothy slept with his father and his mother under the green old ash-trees of the country burying-ground; and the old farm house had taken into its ample breast a great family of strangers. My home had been for nearly two years in the heart of a great city, with a distant cousin of my uncle's,—a

wealthy, fashionable woman, who visited us about a year before his death, and who took at that time a great fancy to me.

She was a widow and childless, and loved me as well as it was possible for one of her half-selfish, half-superficial and thoroughly worldly nature to do.

Of course I enjoyed, with the relish of youth and health and high spirits, the luxurious, elegant life to which I was suddenly introduced.

My aunt was very anxious I should create a sensation in the fashionable circles where she moved; and it was not her fault certainly if I did not learn the full extent and power of the beauty which I honestly believe I valued then, mostly, as a true woman should, for the sake of the man before whose very memory all other men were to me of little worth.

Leonard had, by dint of teaching, and the practice of stringent economy, paid his own expenses through college. I had acquainted my cousin with our engagement. Of course it met with her entire disapproval, for she had very ambitious views of my future, and Leonard had two unpardonable defects in her eyes:—he was poor and without social position.

But, as I said, five years had elapsed, and then,—well, the story shall tell itself.

“Alice, my love, won’t you look out and see if there’s any prospect of the rain’s ever closing?” and Aunt Myra, as I usually called her, because she was some thirty years my

senior, looked up from the novel which had kept her rather restless self quiet for a half-hour.

I swept aside the crimson curtains and looked out on the sky. The thick clouds were breaking up all around the horizon, and through their silver edges looked the soft blue sky of the late summer, doubly welcome because of the twenty-four hours’ rain that had shut it from us.

“Isn’t it delicious, Aunt Myra? How I do wish we could have a ride this afternoon!” At that moment there was a loud ring of the bell, and a few moments later a domestic brought me a message that Mr. James’s horses were at the door and himself in the parlor.

My aunt sprang up with alacrity. “Run for her new riding-dress, Jane,” to the servant. “How very fortunate it is, my dear, that poor Tim made such a fine equestrienne of you!”

“You will go round the Park, and be quite the envy of all the city. Mr. James, too, the son of an English colonel, handsome, wealthy, and from such a family——”

“Aunt Myra,” I interrupted, “you forget that now I can have no possible interest in his adjuncts or antecedents. Please don’t talk to me after this fashion, or I shall feel that I have no right to accept the invitation.”

She had a woman’s tact, and a much better knowledge of the world than I had. “You surely would not be guilty of so great a rudeness, Alice, with the horses at the door?”

Come, loop up your curls: what a beauty of a riding-cap that is!"

I remember the ride that afternoon as though it happened but yesterday. The fresh, fragrant beauty of the earth, the thick shadows of the elms and maples under which we paced our coal-black steeds, and the admiring glances of my chivalric companion, as he talked to me of his English home, and the fair meadow-lands over which he had dashed with his golden-haired sisters in the days of his boyhood.

I was very happy, or rather in one of my wild, mirthful moods. Ah me! if just then I could have turned over the pages and read the handwriting of the "Beyond"!

It was deepening into sunset when we drew up again before my home. My aunt came to her door, and by her side stood a young gentleman, tall, slender, looking eagerly into my face.

One glance, long, eager, breathless, and I knew him. What a tide of warmth and gladness broke over my heart! It was a terrible breach of etiquette, and I knew my aunt would never forgive me for it, but my city transplantation had not been a long one, and I forgot every thing but Leonard as I bounded from my horse, just as I had done many a time from the back of Uncle Tim's old "Dobbin," not waiting for Mr. James to assist me to alight, and I sprang up the marble steps with a mist in my eyes, and a cry on my lips,—“Leonard, I am so glad to see you!"

A week had passed. It had been a very bright one to me, for the "beloved" was there.

Leonard's early manhood was fulfilling all the promise of his youth. He had chosen the law for his profession. "In two years," he said, "my studies will be completed, and then——" I looked up into those clear, loving eyes, and read all the rest,—the little cottage set down like a cup among vines and trees and mosses; and, thinking of this, I never, for a moment, envied my haughty relative her stately home, her servants, or her carriage. Was I not the richer of the two with Leonard's love?

Aunt Myra treated Leonard with the courtesy which his manner compelled from others; yet I am almost certain he felt she disapproved of his attentions.

He met Mr. James one evening at our house. I thought he was strangely cold and taciturn that night; but I understood it all. When he asked abruptly, just as he was leaving, "Alice, I have one promise to ask of you. Will you give it me?"

"Of course, Leonard."

"That you will never ride out with Mr. James again. Certainly, as your affianced husband, I have a right to ask this."

"I do not dispute it, Leonard," smiling away the sudden sternness of his face, for with a woman's insight I looked

down into his soul, and saw the small cloud rising above it. "I will never ride with him again."

He drew me to his strong heart after the old, tender fashion. "My bird," he murmured, tenderly, "I shall not be quite contented until I have you safe in my own nest."

I was not wise with that wisdom of experience which only life gives, or these things would have been a key to certain traits of Leonard's character.

Like most fine, sensitive natures, he was exclusive and exacting, demanding an almost entire monopoly of the thought and affections of those he loved. It is true, the measure he asked he meted out in return; but he was proud, hasty, and could be unjust.

And, dearly as I loved him, I was a petted, wilful, half-spoiled child. If we had only understood each other better! It was such a very little matter, too. And, after all, these little things are the Alphas and Omegas of this life. But it so happened that after the sunshine the cloud came.

Leonard was intending to leave the city for a few days on business, and he passed the last evening before his departure with me. Mr. James called at the same time. He was expecting his only sister by the next steamer from England, and its arrival was somewhat anticipated the next day.

"I wonder if she will be in to-morrow, Miss Weston?" He turned to me, "You Yankees have always a peculiar gift

at guessing. What do you think of the chances of my seeing Nellie's blue eyes to-morrow?"

"Well, I guess that you will see her before to-morrow night," I thoughtlessly answered, knowing how anxious he was to do this.

"What if we should make a small bet on the matter, with your aunt and Mr. Stone for witnesses?"

They both bowed assent.

"Well, Mr. James, if the steamer isn't in before seven to-morrow evening, I'll make you a new crimson velvet smoking-cap,—just the prettiest bit of needlework-inspiration in the world."

"And if the steamer does arrive before day after to-morrow, I will give you—no matter. Will you promise to wear it at the soiree my uncle gives a night or two after Nellie's coming?"

"Of course I will," I answered, regarding the whole thing as little more than a jest. Mr. James had been informed of my engagement to Leonard by my aunt, and, knowing this, I felt under less social restraint with him.

At this juncture a message came for Leonard. I have since thought there was a little shade of coolness in his leave-taking, but, if I observed this at the time, I attributed it to the presence of strangers.

Two days had passed. Aunt Myra was despatching the interval between breakfast and "calling-hours" in chatting

through the gilded bars of their cages to her canaries, or admiring a pair of most exquisite Sèvres china vases, which she had received from a friend recently returned from Europe.

For me, I was placing the finishing-touches of a painting of a little country cottage closeted among shrubberies, with a small river in the distance, winding like a tangled ribbon among hills and meadows; and there was a thought in my heart which gave a flutter to my fingers as I bent lovingly over my work.

Just then a small white package was brought me. Aunt Myra left her canaries and her vases, and leaned curiously over my chair as I unrolled the paper to find a delicate little jewel-case, and a note with these words:—

“MY DEAR MISS WESTON:—You were right in the guessing, thus sustaining your Yankee prerogative and winning the bet. The steamer arrived last evening; and, in accordance with your promise, I trust you will accept and wear the enclosed this evening, when you welcome my sister to her adopted home, and oblige your friend,

HOWARD JAMES.”

I touched the spring of the case: it flew back, and there, lying on its cushion of snowy velvet, was a ring, whose cluster of diamonds seemed to leap up suddenly and catch down the morning sunlight into their clear hearts, as bewildered I gazed upon them.

Aunt Myra clapped her hands in admiration and delight. “What a magnificent gift, Alice! Mr. James has really outdone himself.”

“But, aunt, I cannot, I ought not to accept this. I am sure Leonard would disapprove of it.”

“What an absurd child you are! It would be so impolite, too, after you promised to accept and wear it. What would Mr. James think of you?”

“But the wishes of the man I am to marry are to me a mightier law than any conventional ones, Aunt Myra.”

“What a pity Cousin Tim had the bringing up of you!” pettishly ejaculated my aunt. “These squeamish notions of yours positively mortify me very much, Alice. For my sake, if not for your own, I hope you’ll not be so rude as to break your promise of wearing the ring to-night. I’m happy to say you’re the first woman I ever knew who was content to be a slave to any man.”

My pride was roused at this. “I assure you, Aunt Myra, it is from no fear of Leonard that I refuse to wear the gift: but under the circumstances I have no right to accept it.”

“But you have done so already, and can only make yourself very absurd now by refusing it.”

This was true; and, influenced by her arguments and her greater knowledge of social rules, I reflected somewhat after this fashion:—“It might be—it really did seem—impolite, unkind, to return the ring at once. I had viewed the matter as

a jest, but Mr. James, it appeared, had not. Would it not be best to save any unpleasant feeling on his part, by wearing the ring that evening, and returning it at the same time, candidly telling him my reasons for doing so?" At last I resolved upon this plan.

"Did you think I would never come, aunt? Jane has been so long arranging my hair. But I am quite ready now, and—why, Leonard Stone! is it possible?"

It was evening, and, just dressed for the *soirée*, I hurried into the parlor, where Aunt Myra had been awaiting me several minutes. I had caught up my gloves and my shawl, as it was growing late, and the carriage was at the door: so with these in my hands I confronted Leonard, whom I did not expect until the next day.

He did not come forward and reach out his hands to welcome me. He stood there by the mantel, white and still and stern, his lips pressed together with that expression of indomitable pride and will, which struck out all the tenderness from his face and left nothing but the hard sternness there.

My aunt was nervously pacing up and down the room, evidently excited and angry. "Alice," said the low, firm voice of Leonard, "I have heard from your aunt the history of that diamond ring on your finger. It is my wish that you should remove it this instant."

The tone itself, to say nothing of the words, was a command. If it had been more a request or an entreaty,

I should probably have complied with it. But Leonard's manner was certainly irritating, and my education and my natural temperament had never taught me submission. It was the first time the pride of both our natures had been brought into collision.

"I should like to know first your reasons for such a mandate as this, Leonard?" I answered, haughtily, almost defiantly, while my aunt interposed,—

"I hope you won't be such a simpleton, Alice."

"My reasons for asking this you know already; so there is no necessity for repeating them. The woman who is to be my wife shall never receive such a gift as that from any man. I would not have believed it of you, Alice."

"And I would not have believed what I have just witnessed of you, Leonard." (Oh, it is a terrible thing when pride gets the mastery of two loving hearts!)

"Alice, we will not waste words. Once for all, will you remove that ring from your finger, and in my presence enclose it to the gentleman who had the audacity to send it to you?"

If he had known I intended to give it to Mr. James that very evening, it would have softened his words; but I had concluded to do this before informing my aunt, as I dreaded her expostulations. I was too proud to disclose my intention now, and in her presence. "And what if I should prefer to choose my own time and manner for doing this, Leonard?" was my not very compromising response.

"That is, you may not do it at all! I shall make no further requests; but, if you do not comply with this one on the spot, you dissolve our engagement."

He meant it, then; I saw it in the flashing of his eyes, in the still, settled purpose written on his lips.

And I—God forgive me! for have I not repented in sorrow of years and bitterness of heart for those words?—but youth and spirit and anger at his injustice were high within me as I answered, "Very well! Be it so, then, Leonard!"

He turned and walked with his firm, slow tread into the hall, stopping only once to say "good-night" to my aunt and me. Then, when I saw his white face, I believe I should have called him back if it had not been for my aunt's presence. But he went out and returned no more.

Well, I was the gayest of the company who welcomed the fair-haired English girl to our shores that night. They told me afterward that my laugh broke out the merriest and my songs rang forth the loudest. But, oh, if they could have looked down into my heart,—if they could have looked there!

The next day Leonard left the city. His pride and his will, those great defects of his noble nature, prevented his making any overtures toward a reconciliation. We were both to blame, with the blame of rashness and misapprehension and youth.

It is woman's duty to submit, and here I failed. I pray

God "forgive us both." I was ill all that autumn. Oh, the sickness of the heart is very hard to bear!

Mr. James continued to visit at our house. My aunt encouraged him in doing this: indeed, I learned afterward she had told him that the engagement was a mere childish affair, entered into thoughtlessly on my part, and one which met with no approval from my friends.

I could not help seeing his many good qualities of character. He was much attached to me, and he was a man of whose personal appearance any woman might be proud.

Well, there is no use talking of the courtship. In the next spring we were married. Oh, how the words of that song of Alice Cary's, which I used to read under the apple-trees at home, have been fluttering all day like sweet, mournful echoes up and down my soul!—

"But when my cheek beneath his lip
Blush'd not, nor turn'd aside,
I thought how once a lighter kiss
Had left it crimson-dyed."

He is a kind husband, and very proud of the wife to whom he never spoke a cross word, and of the two fair children she has brought him; and there is no luxury, no happiness, which his wealth can procure, that is not ours.

But he is not a tender, demonstrative man; there is not a single golden thread of romance in his being. He does not

dream how my woman's nature thirsts and pants for the deep waters of love, and aches for the sweet balm of sympathy. And yet he gives me all he has : why should I ask more ?

Last week, when he brought me home that beautiful gold watch for a birthday present, my heart sprang out to him very eagerly, and, looking up through my tears, I said, "Oh, Howard, you do love me, don't you? Put your arms around me now and say so."

He smiled very much as one would do at the vagaries of a little child. "Of course I love you, dear. But I think you're growing rather nervous,—aren't you, Alice? You must ride out to-day, and I'll call at the doctor's and see if he hasn't something for general debility: that's sure to bring on low spirits."

Seven years since Leonard and I parted! Our meeting at the old museum has opened a gate which I have long kept locked, and I have gone down, this wild, November afternoon, into the romance of my youth. Leonard is married now. They say his wife is a young, gentle, girlish creature, who makes bright the home to which he has taken her. But I know his heart by my own, and that is an instrument half broken. It would have been better if we had not met yesterday; for the key has turned in the rusted lock, the door in my heart has opened again, and I have gone into that solitary room which I had no right to enter,—I, the wife of Howard James!

Does the rain thicken, or is it the tears in my eyes that blur the window-panes? Oh, it is a terrible thing for a woman to take upon herself the vows of wifedom without her heart seals them,—a terrible thing for her to carry all through the days of her life the loneliness and heart-ache! Oh, Leonard! Leonard! if I could only lay my head on your shoulder and weep one hour! Hark! how sweetly that sounded! Rena and Harry are having a high frolic up in the nursery, and their outbreaks of merry laughter tangle themselves up together and roll down the stairs, and stir up my heart as the birds' songs never did in the days it may be sin to dwell on. My precious children! What a joy and a comfort they are to me! There again those ringing shouts. How happy the darlings are!

And God speaks to my heart through them, and I grow stronger again. Oh, I shall not be alone with them to walk by me through life! I will do my duty. "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be."

The cloud is lifting up from my soul. Not here, but hereafter, shall we see clearly, and, taking up the broken threads of my life, I will weave them into what brightness I may.

I will, God helping me, be a true and faithful wife, a loving, tender, prayerful mother, and when the night comes, be it sooner or later, perchance the angels leaning over my death-bed will murmur, softly, "She hath done what she could."

There! that is Howard's ring at the door, and the children

are bounding out to meet him. How they shout and clap their hands! and he is kissing them. Our children! how mighty is this bond between us!

So, Leonard Stone, the sweet song of our youth can never be taken up by our hearts again, but there are other harmonies left for both of us, and life is very short. Oh, in the still watches of the night I will pray the Father that both the "far-apart" roads we walk may lead up to the meadow-lands whose dews are the sweet balsams of eternity!

The Blossom in the Wilderness.

Do you ever form an estimate of the character of people from the physiognomy of their houses? I do. And so, when the stage swept round the corner, I looked out eagerly, for, as the driver had told me, about "ten rod up the road" stood the house of Philander White. His wife was my mother's own cousin, and I was just thirteen years old when I went there to make my first visit. There had been some quarrel between the families a score of years anterior to my visit; and, though my mother and Mrs. White had never participated in the feud of their relatives, it had doubtless evolved something of coldness between them.

But, to "cut short a long story,"—for pen-and-paper gossip may be more dignified, but not a whit *better*, than tea-party scandal,—I had been an invalid all the previous winter.

When the soft April days, to which my mother looked forward so eagerly, came, they brought no bloom to my cheek, no vigor to my step. My constitution seemed to have lost all its recuperative power, and the doctor said, "Send her into

the country, Mrs. May. If that doesn't help her, she is lost to you."

Just before this Mrs. White had heard, through a mutual friend, of my illness, and, the very day of the blunt physician's ultimatum, brought a letter to my mother. "For the sake of our old love, Jane," it read, "let all that may have come between you and me at an earlier time be forgotten. The grass is springing green on the hills of Meadowbrook, and now—in this late May—is the time for Jennie to come to us. There is a prophecy of *health* for her in the soft wind that is lifting the edges of my paper as I write. We know she is your all, and we will be very tender of your darling. Will you not trust her with us for a single summer?"

And before another week had passed my trunk was packed for "*Philander White's, Esq., Meadowbrook.*"

I looked out, as I said, and there sat the pleasant white house, with its green window-blinds, between the shrubbery in front and the cherry-trees behind. My heart went out to it at once, as it did a moment later to the gentle-voiced woman and the fair, dark-haired girl who rushed out on the broad front steps, and, kissing my cheeks, said, "Cousin Jennie, you are very welcome."

But it is not to tell you of that summer, though I look across the gray years to its green picture in the May-land of my memory, that I have taken up my pen this morning.

Suffice it, the mountain-breezes of Meadowbrook did their

work well; and when, in the early autumn, my mother came for her child, she could hardly identify the rosy-cheeked girl that rushed in, with her curls tangling about her face, and put up her rosy lips for a kiss.

I think it must have been nearly two months after my domestication at Aunt Myra's—for so I called my mother's cousin—before Uncle Charles Brace, her husband's brother, visited us. He was a minister, and Cora and I anticipated the gentleman's advent with any thing but pleasurable emotions.

Our preconceived notions of the gentleman's elongated visage and solemn, Puritanical manner, which we regarded as necessary concomitants of the profession, soon vanished before the beautiful kindling of his smile and the winning gentleness of his manner. He was Uncle Phil's youngest brother,—not more than twenty-eight at that time; and his religion had deepened and harmonized his fine poetic temperament without checking the outflow of that undercurrent of humor which sparkled through his character. "Uncle Charlie" was soon our companion in our rides and rambles, and our confidant in all our girlish plans.

"You don't really mean so, Uncle Charlie?" and Cora's bright face was lifted from the roses and geraniums we were weaving into a bouquet for the parlor-mantel. "You don't really *think* what you just said,—that in every heart there is

some fountain, some blossom in the human wilderness of every soul?"

He put down his paper and came toward us. "I haven't a doubt of it, my little girl. The story I was just reading of the hardened old man who cried because the child gave him a 'bunch of marigolds' corroborates my remark. The light that is in us can not quite become darkness; the heart that might bring forth 'fruit a hundred-fold' for the harvest of heaven will never become such a desert but some good seed might take root therein."

"I don't believe 'twould, though, in Farmer Keep. You don't know him as well as I do, Uncle Charlie. He's one of the richest men in all Meadowbrook, worth thousands and thousands. He's an old bachelor, you know, and lives in that great red house on the road to Woodbury, you remember? Well, he never goes to church; he never gives a cent to the poor; he never loved a human being or did a kind thing in all his life. Now, don't you think Farmer Keep—— Why, Grandma Deane, how do you do?"

The old lady, whose entrance put this sudden period to my cousin's earnest peroration, came slowly toward the rocking-chair Cora drew out for her. She was the oldest person in the village. The hair under her cap, white as hill-side snow, had imprisoned the sunshine of fourscore and ten summers. But she still retained much of the physical and mental stamina

which, with her active temperament, had made her so vigorous a woman for many years.

"What's that you're saying, child, about Farmer Keep?" said the old lady, with a pleasant smile, as she pinned her knitting-sheath to her waist.

"Why, I was telling Uncle Charlie what a cold, hard kind of a man he is. You've always known him, Grandma Deane. Now, did he ever do a good thing, or ever love anybody, in his life?"

"Yes; he loved once a young girl, I remember."

"*Farmer Keep loved a girl once!*" repeated Cora, with a half-contemptuous and wholly skeptical curl of her berry-red lip. "She's forgotten," she added, in an under-tone to her uncle and me. Grandma Deane was slightly deaf.

"No; I haven't forgotten, either," placing her hand on Cora's hair. "I have held Lucy Reid on my lap too often and rocked her cradle—poor, little motherless thing!—too many times to forget."

Cora's look of incredulity had given way to one of curiosity. "Grandma Deane, won't you tell us all about it? Jennie and I will sit down on this big stool, and I know by that look in Uncle Charlie's eyes he wants to hear, too. Come, Jennie, let the flowers go;" and my vivacious cousin established herself on the stool at the old lady's feet.

Grandma Deane slipped the yarn round her little finger and commenced:—"Let me see: it can't be more than forty-two

or three years this summer since Justin Keep came up to Farmer Reid's to let himself out for hired boy through harvesting.

"The Reids' house stood a little this side of Stony Creek. There's nothing left of it now except the chimney that looks out, gray and cold, from the green grass all about it; but fifty years ago it was a fine old place, with the lilacs in front and the hop-vines running all round the back. Lucy was hardly three weeks old when she lost her mother. Her father never married again, and the child grew up there in the old home as fair and sweet as the flowers about it.

"She was turning into fifteen when Justin came there that summer. He was a shy, strange, awkward sort of a lad, and the neighbors all said, 'Farmer Reid never'd get the salt for his porridge out of him.'

"He'd been bound out till he was eighteen to some man down in Maine, and he hadn't a relation in the world that he knew on, nor a suit of decent clothes, when he came to Farmer Reid's.

"But, for all this, Justin proved himself a smart, likely boy, and the farmer, who somehow never was very forehanded, —I always thought his wife's sudden death hurt him,—found that Justin was a real prize.

"At first he was gloomy and silent, doing his work, and taking little notice of anybody; but he couldn't stand it long

before Lucy. I'd like to have seen the heart that girl's smile wouldn't have thawed out.

"She was just like a bird round the old place, singing from morning till night; and her blue eyes, that were like her mother's, seemed always letting out one laugh as her red lips did another. I never wondered her father doted on her as he did; and, of course, Justin wasn't long in the house before she tried to make friends with him.

"Poor fellow! it must have seemed very strange at first; for I don't think anybody had ever given him a kind word till he came to Meadowbrook.

"But he made ladders for her flower-vines to run on, and got shells for the borders, and propped up the dahlias, and did a thousand other things, which took them out into the garden after supper, and made them the best of friends.

"Lucy had a playful, childish way about her, that made her seem much younger than she was; then she was small of her age; so at fifteen she didn't seem a day older than you, Cora.

"Well, she rode on top of Justin's hay-cart, and helped him husk the corn in the barn, and pretty soon the neighbors noticed a great change in Justin.

"He got him a new suit of clothes, and his face lost its old *down* look; and after harvesting Farmer Reid made him an offer to stay all winter.

"So Justin stayed, and, taking Lucy's advice, went to the

district school; and, though he hadn't had any education before, he went ahead of many an old scholar that winter.

"Well, Justin stayed with the farmer four years. Then he had a good offer somewhere in York State, and he concluded to accept it for the winter only.

"Lucy Reid was grown into a young woman by this time; and a handsomer one, children, these dim eyes never looked on.

"I don't know how it happened, for Lucy might have had her pick of the boys for miles around, but somehow she took to Justin, and when he left they were engaged to be married one year from that time."

"Why, Grandma Deane, you aren't going to stop now?" cried Cora, in alarm, for the old lady had laid down her knitting.

"No, my child," and she removed her spectacles and wiped her eyes. "But the rest is a sad story, and I must hurry over it.

"I don't know exactly how it happened, but that winter Lucy's father got into a terrible lawsuit with Squire Wheeler. There was some flaw in the title, and people said it was plain the old man must let the homestead go.

"They said, too, he'd never survive it; and better, perhaps, he never had, than kept it as he did. But one day Squire Wheeler, to all the neighborhood's astonishment, rode over to the farm.

"What he did there was never exactly known, but in a little while it was rumored that the suit was withdrawn, and, come spring, Lucy Reid was to be married to Stillman Wheeler. And so it was. One bright March day she went into the old church yonder and gave herself to him.

"He was a good-looking man, but not over-smart, the neighbors whispered; and I always thought it was his money more than any thing else that kept him up."

"But Justin, Grandma Deane: what became of Justin?"

"There is a dark look about the whole matter. Lucy was made the victim of some terrible falsehood. I never blamed her father, for the thought of losing the old homestead seemed completely to shatter him.

"I only know that Squire Wheeler and his son were at the bottom of it, and that Lucy Reid went to the altar believing that Justin Keep had been false to her."

"Dear me! How dreadful! Did he ever come back?"

"Yes; the next May. Lucy had been a wife two months. Justin had not heard of her marriage. She was at home, visiting her father. When she met him at the door, she fell down like one sudden stricken with a fit.

"But he carried her into the house, and there they learned all. Both had been deceived!

"It was a terrible scene that old front room witnessed. Justin swore a terrible oath of vengeance; and it was not till, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, the young wife kneeled

to the only man she had ever loved, and pleaded for the life of her husband, that he promised for her sake to spare him.

"But from the day of Justin's visit Lucy Wheeler was a changed woman. All the light and gladness of her being seemed dead in her, and she moved about her house, pale and quiet, with a look of patient suffering in her once sunny eyes, that it made my heart ache to behold."

"And her husband! Did she ever tell him what she had learned?"

"I think not. His father and Lucy's died in less than two years after the marriage. The Squire was much less wealthy than people supposed. The next spring Lucy and her husband removed west, and somehow people lost sight of them."

"And Justin?"

"You know the rest, my child. He became a moody, unhappy man, asking no sympathy and giving none. But he was always smart at a bargain, and in a few years he laid up enough to buy out Deacon Platt's farm when his son moved to the South.

"Ever since he has added acres to his lands and thousands to his coffers; but, for all that, he's a man soured toward all his race,—a man who was never known to give a little child a smile or a beggar a crust of bread. I have sometimes thought his heart was like a great desert, without a tree to shade or a stream to gladden it. And yet it bore a bright blossom once; and believe me, children, for it is the word of

an old woman, who has seen and known much of the ways of man, it is so always. The heart may be a great wilderness, *but in some of its by-ways there has grown a flower.*"

Cora and I looked at each other and at Uncle Charlie. Just then Aunt Myra came in. She had been out, and had not heard of Grandma Deane's visit.

But Cora stole up to her uncle, and, winding her arms about his neck, whispered, "I shall believe it always, Uncle Charlie, now I have heard that story about Farmer Keep, *that there is a blossom in the wilderness of every heart.*"

It was a sultry August day in the summer I passed at Meadowbrook. The wind, low and slumberous as the hush of a mother's voice at nightfall, crept up through the corn, and down among the rye and wheat fields, that lay like broad, green folds about the dwelling of Farmer Keep. There was no poem of flowers written about the front yard; no graceful touches of creeping vines or waving curtains about the old red homestead; and yet it had a quiet, substantial, matter-of-fact physiognomy, that somehow made a *home* feeling about your heart.

I think it must have been this unconscious feeling which decided the course of the girl, who stood at the point where the two roads diverged, and gazed wistfully about her that afternoon.

She seemed very tired, and her coarse straw-bonnet and

calico dress were covered with dust. If you had looked in her face you would not have forgotten it. It could not have seen more than fifteen summers. It was very pale; and its sweet, sad beauty made you think of nothing but forest-flowers drenched with summer rains. Her eyes were of that deep moist blue that rolls out from under the edge of April clouds, and her lips, ripe and full as meadow strawberries, had that touching sorrowfulness about them which tells you always the heart beneath is full of tears.

The girl's hand clasped tightly the little boy's by her side. The resemblance between them would have told you at once they were brother and sister, but his life could not have covered more than a third of hers. The little fellow's large eyes were full of tears, and the bright curls that crept out from his hat were damp with moisture. He was hungry, and tired, and motherless. What sadder history can one tell of a little child?

"There, Benny, cheer up. We'll go to that old red house there and see what we can do. Don't it look *nice* with the great trees in front?" said the girl, in a tone of assumed cheerfulness, as she quickened her steps.

"Yes; but I'm so tired, Lucy. If I only had a big piece of bread and butter!"

"Well, dear, I'll try and get you some there. It don't seem like *begging* to ask for it in the country."

A few moments later she opened the broad back gate and

went up to the kitchen-door. Farmer Keep's housekeeper—an old woman, with a yellow-white cap, and check apron tied over her linsey-woolsey skirt—answered her knock.

"Do you want any help, or do you know of anybody round here that does?" timidly asked the girl.

The old lady peered at her with her dim eyes.

"No," she said. "There ain't but four on us,—Farmer Keep and the two hired men, and me. It's harvest-time just now, though, and I reckon you'll find a place up in the village."

"Thank you. Benny here, my little brother, 's very tired, for we've walked from the depôt since ten o'clock. Can you let us come in and rest a while?"

"Sartin you can." The sight of the little child touched the heart of the old woman, and they went into the large, old-fashioned kitchen and sat down in the flag-bottomed chairs, while, with a glowing cheek, the girl cast about in her mind for the best manner in which to present her petition for food.

Before she had decided the master of the house suddenly entered the kitchen, for it was nearly dinner-time. He was a large, muscular, broad-chested, sunburnt man, with a hard, gloomy expression on the face where sixty years were beginning to write their history. He stood still with surprise, gazing on the new occupants of the kitchen; and the boy drew close to his sister, and the girl threw up a timid, frightened glance into the gloomy face.

"You don't know of nobody round here that wants a little help, do ye, farmer?" asked the old woman. "Here's a girl wants a place; and, as she's walked from the depôt, I told her she might come in and rest a bit afore she went up into the village to try her luck."

"No," shortly answered the farmer. "Dinner ready?" And the rich man turned away, without one gentle word or kindly look for the homeless children whom God had brought to his door.

"Lucy, Lucy! don't stay here; I'm afraid!" And the little boy's lips curled and quivered as he turned his face from the farmer's.

"*Lucy! Lucy!*" How those little, trembling tones went down, down, into the man's hard heart! How the dead days of his youth burst out of their graves and rushed through his memory at that low, broken "*Lucy! Lucy!*"

He turned and looked at the girl, not sourly as before, but with a kind of eager, questioning interest.

"What is your name?"

"Lucy Wheeler, sir."

He staggered back and caught hold of the nearest chair.

"And what was your mother's?"

"Lucy Reid. She used to live in Meadowbrook, and so I came here to get work, for she told me to before she died."

At that moment the angels looked down and saw the seed

that had lain for twoscore years in the heart of Justin Keep spring up, and the *flower blossomed in the wilderness!*

He strode across the kitchen to the bewildered girl. He brushed back her bonnet and turned her face to the light. He could not be mistaken. It was the one framed and hung up in the darkened room of his soul. The blue eyes of *his* Lucy looked once more in his own. At that moment the little boy pushed up between them and gazed wistfully into the man's face. Farmer Keep sat down and took the child on his knee. He tried to speak, but in stead great sobs came up and heaved his strong chest. The trio in the kitchen gazed on him in mute astonishment.

"Lucy's children! Lucy's children!" he murmured at last, in a voice whose tenderness was like that of a mother. "God has sent you to me. For her sake this shall be your home; for her sake I will be a father to you."

Five years afterward Cora wrote to me:—"We are having fine times now, dear Cousin Jennie, and mamma wants to know if you do not need to renew your rosy cheeks among the dews of Meadowbrook. Uncle Charlie is with us this summer, and if you were here also my happiness would be complete."

"Lucy Wheeler—you remember her?—has the place in my heart next to yours. Her disposition is as lovely as her face, and that is saying a great deal, for its rare sweet beauty does

one good to behold it. Farmer Keep seems to *worship* her and Benny. He is a changed man now, and goes to church regular as the Sabbath. He has spared no pains or expense in Lucy's education, and she will be a most accomplished woman. She is here very often, and I have my suspicions that Uncle Charlie——*n'importe*; I will not trust this to pen and paper.

"But, oh, Jennie! what a lesson has all this taught me! How it has deepened my faith in God and in humanity!

"Now, when my heart yearns over the wretched, the sinning, the outcast, I remember always THERE IS A FLOWER IN THE WILDERNESS."

FEBRUARY,—month least sung of the poet,—cold and chill, makes her advent. She wraps a thicker mantle around the earth; she locks the streams in the valleys more tightly, and she hangs her crystal tendrils on the creaking boughs, and when the sun strikes them they become jewels of opal, and amethyst, and emerald.

Then she brings longer days to us, and this is a prophecy. Oh! of what that neither lip nor pen can translate is it not a prophecy?

February is the month that puts a new song in our mouths, —a song half of sadness and half of triumph:—"THE WINTER IS ENDED!"

The Mistake.

"I'LL never do it!—never, so long as I live!" And the boy clenched his hands together, and strode up and down the room, his fine features flushed, and his forehead darkened with anger and shame. "I'd ask the minister's pardon, in father's presence,—of course I would; but to go before the whole Academy,—boys and girls,—and do this!" His whole frame fairly writhed at the thought. "Ellsworth Grant, you'll brand yourself as a coward and a fool all the days of your life.

"But father never retracts, and he said I must do this, or leave school and go out on the farm to work; and the whole village will know the reason, and I shall be ashamed to look anybody in the face. I've a good mind to run away." The boy's voice grew lower, and a troubled, bewildered expression gathered on his flushed features.

"It would be very hard to leave all the old places. And then never to see Nellie again! it would almost break her heart,—I know it would." And his face worked convulsively a moment, but it settled down into a look of dogged resolution

the next. "I mustn't think of that now,—though it's only ten miles to the seaport, and I could walk that in an hour and get a place on some ship about to sail before father was any wiser. Some time I'd come back, of course, but not until I was old enough to be my own master." The boy sat down by the table and buried this face in his hands, and the sunset of the summer's day poured its currents of crimson and amber into the chamber and over the bowed figure of the boy.

At last he lifted his head: there was a look of quiet resolve in the dark hazel eyes and about the usually smiling mouth, which in youth is so painful, because it always indicates mental suffering.

Ellsworth Grant was at this time just fifteen; he was his father's only son, and he was motherless.

The deacon was a stern, severe man; while Ellsworth inherited his mother's warm, sunny temperament. His father was a man of unswerving integrity and rectitude,—a man who would have parted with his right hand sooner than have committed a dishonest act,—but one who had few sympathies with faults indigenous to peculiar temperaments and character, a man whose heart had never learned the height and depth, the all-embracing beauty, of that mightiest text which is the one diamond among all the pearls and precious stones of the Bible:—"Be ye charitable."

He was a hard, exacting parent, and Ellsworth was a fun-loving, mischief-brewing boy, that everybody loved despite

his faults and the scrapes he was always getting his neck into. There is no doubt that Deacon Grant loved his son, but he was not a demonstrative man; and then—it is the sad, sad story that may be written of many a parent—"he didn't understand his child," and there was no mother, with her soft voice and loving words, to come between them.

Ellsworth's last offence can be told in a few words. The grape-vine which, heavy with purple clusters, trailed over the kitchen-windows of the school-teacher's residence, had been robbed of more than half its fruit one Sunday afternoon, when the inmates were absent.

The perpetrators of this deed were, however, discovered to be a party of the school-boys, among whom was Ellsworth.

The rest of the scholars privately solicited and obtained the school-teacher's pardon; but the deacon, who was terribly shocked at this evidence of his son's want of principle, insisted that he should make a public confession of his fault before the assembled school.

In vain Ellsworth explained and entreated. His father was invulnerable, and the boy's haughty spirit entirely mutinied.

"Ellsworth, Ellsworth, where are you going?" There came down the garden-walk an eager, quivering voice that made the boy start and turn round eagerly as he stood at the garden-gate, while the light of the rising day was flush-

ing the gray mountains in the east with rose-colored hues. A moment later, a small light figure, crowned with golden hair, and a large shawl thrown over her night-dress, stood by the boy's side.

"Why, Nellie, how *could* you? you'll take cold in your bare feet, among these dews."

"I can't help it, Ellsworth." It was a tear-swollen face that looked up wistfully to the boy's. "You see, I haven't slept any, hardly, all night, thinking about you, and so I was up, looking out of the window, and saw you going down the walk."

"Well, Nellie," (pushing back the yellow, tangled hair and looking at her fondly,) "you see I can't do what father says I must to-day, and so I'm going off."

"Oh, Ellsworth, what will uncle say?" cried the child, betwixt her shivering and weeping; "what will uncle say? How long shall you be gone?"

"I don't know," (evasively;) "I sha'n't be back to-day, though. But you mustn't stand here talking any longer. Father'll be up soon, you know. Now good-by, Nellie."

There was a sob in his throat as he leaned down and kissed the sweet face that had only seen a dozen summers, and then he was gone.

"Go and call Ellsworth to breakfast, will you, Ellen?" said the deacon, two hours later.

"He isn't up-stairs, uncle." And then, as the two sat down to theirs, Ellen briefly related what had transpired.

The deacon's face grew dark as she proceeded.

"He thinks to elude the confession and frighten me by running off for a day or two," he said: "he will find he is mistaken."

So that day and the next passed, and the deacon said nothing more: but Ellen, who was his adopted child and the orphan-daughter of his wife's most intimate friend, noticed that he began to look restless, and to start anxiously at the sound of a footfall; but still Ellsworth came not.

At last a strict search was instituted, and it was discovered that Ellsworth had gone to sea in a ship bound for some part of the eastern coast of Asia, on a three years' voyage.

"I hope he will come back a better boy than he left," was the deacon's solitary comment; but in the long nights Ellen used to hear him walking restlessly up and down his room, and his black hair began to be thickly scattered with gray.

But the worst was not come yet. One November night, when the winds clamored and stormed fiercely among the old apple-trees in the garden, Deacon Grant and Ellen sat by the fire in the old kitchen, when the former removed the wrapper from his weekly newspaper; and the first passage that met his eye was one that told him how the ship *Arago*, the one in

which Ellsworth had sailed, had been wrecked off the coast, and every soul on board had perished.

Then the voice of the father woke up in the heart of Deacon Grant. He staggered toward Ellen with a white, haggard face and a wild, fearful cry:—"My boy! my boy!" It was more than his proud spirit could bear. "Oh, Ellsworth! Ellsworth!" And he sank down senseless, and his head fell into the lap of the frightened child.

After this Deacon Grant was a changed man. I do not know which was the more to blame, the father or the son, in the sight of the God who judgeth righteously.

But equally to the heart of many a parent and many a child the story had its message and its warning.

Eight years had passed. It was summer-time again, and the hills were green and the fields were yellow with her glory. It was in the morning, and Deacon Grant sat under the porch of the great, old, rambling cottage; for the day was very warm, and the top was wound round thickly with a hop-vine.

These eight years had greatly changed the deacon. He seemed to have stepped very suddenly into old age, and the light wind that stirred the green leaves shook the gray hairs over his wrinkled forehead, as he sat there reading the village newspaper with eyes that had begun to grow dim.

And every little while fragments of some old-fashioned tune

floated out to the old man,—soft, sweet, stray fragments; and flitting back and forth from the pantry to the breakfast-table was a young girl, not handsome, but with a sweet, frank, rosy countenance, where smiles seemed to hover naturally as sunshine over June skies.

She wore a pink calico dress, the sleeves tucked above her elbows, and a "checked apron." Altogether, she was a fair, sweet, laughing-eyed country-girl.

And while the old man read the paper under the hop-vine and the young girl hummed and fluttered between the pantry and the kitchen-table, a young man opened the small front gate and went up the narrow path to the house.

He went up very slowly, staring all about him with an eager, wistful look; and sometimes the muscles of his mouth worked and quivered as one's will when strong emotions are shaking the heart.

He had a firm, sinewy frame, of middle height: he was not handsome, but there was something in his face you would have liked; perhaps it was the light away down in the dark eyes,—perhaps it was the strength and character foreshadowed in the lines about the mouth. I cannot tell: it was as intangible as it was certain that you would have liked that face.

The door was open, and the young man walked into the wide hall. He stood still a moment, staring around the low wall and on the palm-leaved paper that covered the side. Then a thick mist broke into his eyes, and he walked on like

one in a dream, apparently quite forgetful that this was not his own home.

I think those low, sweet fragments of song unconsciously drew his steps to the kitchen, for a few moments later he stood in the doorway, watching that fair girl as she removed the small rolls of yellow butter from a wooden box to an earthen plate. I can hardly transcribe the expression of the man's face. It was one of mingled doubt, surprise, eagerness, that at last all converged into joyful certainty.

"Merciful man!" The words broke from the girl's lips, and the last roll of butter fell from the little hands, as, looking up, she saw the stranger standing in the doorway; and her rosy cheeks actually turned pale with the start of surprise.

The exclamation seemed to recall the young man to himself. He removed his hat. "Excuse me," he said, with a bow of instinctive grace; "but can you tell me, ma'am, if Deacon Grant resides here?"

"Oh, yes, sir: will you walk into the parlor and take a seat? Uncle, here is a gentleman who wishes to see you." And in a flutter of embarrassment she hurried toward the door.

The gentleman did not stir, and, removing his silver spectacles, the deacon came in; and the two men looked at each other,—the elder with some surprise and a good deal of curiosity in his face, the younger with a strange, longing eagerness in his dark eyes that seemed wholly unaccountable.

"Do you know me, sir?" he asked, after a moment's silence; and there was a shaking in his voice.

"I do not know that I ever had the pleasure of meeting you before, sir," said the deacon.

But here a change came over the face of the girl, who had been watching the stranger intently all the time. A light—the light of a long-buried recollection—seemed to break up from her heart into her face. Her breath came gaspingly from between her parted lips; her dilated eyes were fastened on the stranger: then, with a quick cry, she sprang forward:—

"Uncle, it is Ellsworth! it is surely Ellsworth!"

Oh, if you had seen that old man then! His cheeks turned ashen pale, his frame shivered, he tottered a few steps forward, and then the great, wild cry of his heart broke out:—"Is it you, my boy, Ellsworth?"

"It is I, father: are you glad to see me?" And that strong man asked the question with a sob, and a timid voice like that of a little child.

"Come to me! come to me, my boy that I thought was dead! that I have seen every night for the last eight years lying with the dark eyes of his mother under the white waves! Oh, Ellsworth! God has sent you from the dead! Come to me, my boy!"

And the old man drew his arms around his son's neck and leaned his gray head on his strong breast, and for a while there was no word spoken between them.

"You have forgiven me, father?" asked the young man, at last.

"Do not ask me that, my boy. How many times I would have given every thing I possessed on earth to ask, 'Forgive me, Ellsworth,' and to hear you answer, 'Yes, father.'"

So there was peace between those two,—such peace as the angels love who walk up and down the hills golden with the blossoms and glorious with the flashing fountains of eternity.

"And this—this is Nellie? How she has altered! But I knew the voice," said Ellsworth, at last, as he took the girl's hands in his own and kissed her wet cheeks very tenderly. And at last they all went out under the cool shade of the hop-vine, and there Ellsworth told his story.

The merchantman in which he had sailed from home was wrecked, and many on board perished; but some of the sailors constructed a raft, on which the boy was saved with several others. They were afterward rescued by a vessel bound for South America. Here Ellsworth had obtained a situation in a large mercantile establishment, first as a clerk, afterward as junior partner.

He had written home twice, but the letters had been lost or miscarried. As he had received no answer, he supposed his father had never forgiven him for "running away," and tried to reconcile himself to the estrangement.

But he had of late found it very difficult to do this, and at last he had resolved to return to his home, have an interview

with his parent, and try whether the sight of his long-absent son would not soften his heart.

Oh, it was a happy trio that sat under the green leaves of the hop-vine that summer morning. It was a happy trio that sat down, in that low, old-fashioned kitchen, to the delicious dinner of chicken and fresh peas that Nelly had been so long in preparing.

And that night three very happy people knelt in the old sitting-room, while the trembling voice of the deacon thanked God for him that was dead and "alive again."

Another year went by; and one bright summer morning the old gray church on the green was opened and crowded with curious, smiling faces.

Suddenly there came a hush over all the rustle of eagerness and expectancy, for Ellsworth Grant and Ellen passed up the aisle,—he looking very manly and happy, and she very shy and fair in her white bridal-robes.

So they stood together at the altar, and said to each other those most solemn, most beautiful words that man or woman ever have said or ever will say to each other,—"Till death us do part."

And behind them stood an old man with gray hairs and wrinkled face, about whom the people gathered with congratulations as soon as the newly-married pair had left the church. And the old man rubbed his hands, and a smile—very beam-

ing, very full of "perfect peace"—went over his face as he said,—

"God has dealt very kindly with me. He sent my boy home to me, and now he has given me two children."

OCTOBER, the great prophet, is walking among us, writing his crimson ordinances on the forest-trees and hedges, spelling out the year's destiny in morning frosts, and sighing it in evening winds. Alas, for the glory that shall depart, for the earth must put off the garments of Life for the winding-sheet of Death! But she is decked with beauty and flushed with blushes now, as a maiden for her bridal. The tree-boughs dip downward with their fruitage of gold and purple. Thy hands break to us the great feast of the year. All hail to thee, October!

Twice Loving.

"WILTON, don't you ever intend to get married? I declare I'm quite in despair about you. Here you are, thirty-six years old next February, and a confirmed old bachelor! Why, you ought to have a wife and two or three fine second editions by this time. Just think of all the trouble I've had about you, too! Rides in the country and promenades in the city; visits at home and parties abroad,—all to no purpose. It provokes me to think of it. Once for all, Wilton Hughes, do you intend to live and die an old bachelor?" And the lady, still young and blooming, put down, with an air of desperation, the jewel-case with which her fingers had been playing, and confronted the gentleman who sat opposite her.

He too laid down his paper, but with an air of languid *sang-froid* which was particularly irritating, for dinner was just over, and Wilton Hughes always devoted the next half-hour to politics and bank-stocks.

"Really, Sara," he replied,—and his coolness was in strange contrast with his sister's vehemence,—“I cannot answer you,

for whether I shall depart from this life in a state of *single* or *double* blessedness is still an unsettled matter with myself. You shall be apprized of my decision when I make it. Meanwhile, my dear sister, I recommend that you give yourself no further disturbance on the subject."

"You are the most provoking being alive, Wilton," ejaculated the offended lady, as she rose up. "I believe you are as heartless as you are sarcastic, and I shall never put another woman in danger of breaking her heart for you." And the rustle of Mrs. Hills's brown silk was an emphatic peroration of her anger as she swept indignantly from the apartment.

Wilton Hughes leaned back in his chair and half-closed his eyes. Now, as he sits there all alone, his face brought into fine relief by the dark velvet cushioning, we will look at it; for his countenance is something more than "a book with a date."

It is not a handsome face; and yet it will win upon you strangely. The features are too long and thin for masculine beauty; the forehead is broad and high, with thick masses of hair about it; the lips are in repose stern and grave; but you should see them when they are in the light of one of *his* smiles. "Thirty-six next February!" his sister said. You would never believe he was more than twenty-eight, looking into his face.

But as the man sits there, his thoughts wander off on a

long journey. It may be his sister's words—it may be the dim quiet of the room—have started them on a path which reaches, away over the graveyards of many dead and buried years, to a far country,—the land of his youth.

It is an old red farm-house that he sees now: the sloping roof is covered with moss, and in the spring the weeds take root among the eaves and make a long green fringe on the edge of the house. He has not seen the old home since that night when he learned—— Look! how the cold, proud man's mouth quivers, and his fingers clutch the paper, for *that* night has come out to meet him. It was "laid away and locked up," he thought, where it would never find a path into the present; but now, as some old friend, over whose death we have wept and prayed, comes back and takes our hand and the seat by our side, and looks into our eyes with the old smile, and whispers, "It was all false! I was not dead!" so this night comes back like a living presence and takes its seat by Wilton Hughes.

He saw her again, the only woman who had ever troubled the deeps of his soul, as he saw her then, with her shining golden hair, and her hazel eyes,—as sweet a picture as ever the heart of man framed and housed up in the past. They had just returned from a long ride in the country, and they stood by the gate. He had assisted her to alight, and he still retained her little fingers in his own.

A young moon was mounting over the forest, and the light lay soft and sad in the hollows and along the road-side.

He was only nineteen then, and it was the tenth of July! His heart would keep those two dates till it took up the last one,—*Eternity!*

He remembered how, standing there, he leaned down to her, and, putting away the cluster of curls under her bonnet, said, "I shall not be here again till the hollows are as full of snow as they are now of moonlight. May God take care of my darling, and oh! you will be true to me, *my Mary!*"

She looked up to him, her clear eyes shining fondly through her tears. "Wilton,"—how the memory of her voice thrilled his heart still!—"Wilton, you may trust me!" and it was not the words so much as the look which filled his soul with such trust, that, if an angel had spoken from heaven, he would have believed no more fully. He remembered the last kiss, and that his eyes were dim as he sprang into the carriage. It was the last time he ever saw Mary, or the red house with the weeds growing on its edge.

He had never blamed her—not even when the blind darkness of that great sorrow settled upon the morning of his life—when he learned that she was another's, and his heart grew dead within him.

He knew *she* was true, and that was a great blessing: her friends had deceived her, and she had gone to the altar believing that Wilton was false to her.

Mary's family was a poor and a proud one; so was Wilton's.

When the rich man came and laid his wealth and social elevation at the feet of the country-girl, her parents looked off on the little yellow cottage which was Wilton's home, and said, "Our child shall be the wife of the rich man!" But Mary was true, God bless her! and there was a long web of deceit and falsehood woven about her life before she yielded to their entreaties. He learned it all too late!

And then Wilton Hughes went out into the world and did good battle with it. He educated himself; he elevated his family; and at thirty-five he was a rich man.

He had but two sisters, and when his parents died they came to the city and married rich men. Proud, fashionable, elegant women they were, admiring their brother because the world did so, and yet dreaming little of the spring of poetry whose clear waters gushed through and kept green the heart so hidden from them. They called him odd, notional, fastidious, and could not understand why he was so indifferent to women, with whom his graceful, half-indolent manners made him an especial favorite.

Wilton Hughes lived with his sister, Mrs. Hills. She was the younger, and perhaps he loved her the better, of the two. But there was no sympathy between them. He was a mystery, and a very provoking one sometimes, to her, and she was to him like a book which one admires for the elaborate

binding and gilded edges, but knows there is little inside, after all.

And so Wilton Hughes sat there alone, in his sister's drawing-room, that winter afternoon, and the old years came up softly, and sang a sweet song to him,—a song of youth, and love, and hope,—and he found, after all, that the past still kept some pearls with which to dower the present.

It was quite late when he came back again to the paper and the arm-chair, and he smiled a sweet, half-mournful smile to himself as he looked at his watch and murmured,—

“What a time-stealer these reveries are! I guess I'll finish up those letters, and not go out until after supper.”

It was a raw winter night. Wilton Hughes stepped back for his umbrella, for he knew, as the wind met his face, it was “getting ready to snow.”

When he returned, he found a young girl trying to close the door in the teeth of the wind, and looking ruefully out into the thick darkness. She was slender, and had pale, delicate features: that was all he could make out by the gaslight opposite; but her youth and timidity appealed to his heart at once. Besides, it was not a night on which a young and unprotected girl should be out alone.

“Mrs. Hills is not in this evening,” he said to the girl, supposing she had come there on some errand to his sister. “Have

you seen the housekeeper? She should not allow you to return alone.”

“I have been sewing for Mrs. Hills to-day, sir,” answered the girl; and somehow her soft sweet voice thrilled the heart that was yet quivering to the old memory-tune. “It took me longer to finish the work than I thought it would; but I had no idea it was so dark.” And she shuddered as she looked down the street.

“Perhaps our paths lie in the same direction: it is not safe for you to go alone. I am Mrs. Hills's brother. Will you allow me to accompany you?” asked the gentleman.

She turned, and looked earnestly at him for a moment. It was a very fair—almost childish—face that beamed out of that plain straw bonnet.

“Yes, sir,” answered the girl, eagerly. “I shall be very grateful for your company, for I am a sad coward.”

They had proceeded but a short distance, when the wind sprang up fiercer and stronger than ever, whirling up the yesterday's snow and shouting along the street.

Wilton's companion stopped suddenly, and gasped, “Oh, I cannot go any farther. The wind takes away my breath. It always does.”

“Don't be afraid, my child; I shall take care of you. Hold your shawl before your face, and keep fast to me. There! it's going down. We will proceed now.”

“What should I have done if it had not been for you? I

should never have reached my home,—never in the world.” And, as the girl spoke, the gentleman heard the throbbing of the little coward heart against his arm.

“You should never venture out alone again on such a night,” replied Wilton. “Have you no friend to come for you?”

“No, sir,” she answered, mournfully; “my mother died two years ago. She was the only relation I had on earth.”

“Poor child!” Involuntarily the gentleman’s hand closed over that which lay on his arm, for the girl’s helplessness and orphanage moved him much.

“And with whom do you live now?”

“With a Mrs. Mason, who was a friend of my mother’s, after we came from England. We went there when I was a little girl, and papa lost his property and died there. I was only twelve when we came back. It is four years ago. Mamma lived two of these, and I was taking drawing-lessons, and expecting to teach, when she was taken ill. After she died, I lived a year with Mrs. Mason, and then the money we brought from England was all gone. I learned to do plain sewing of Mrs. Mason’s niece. I am hoping some time to lay by money enough to take drawing-lessons again.”

This simple epitome of the past was murmured among the wind-pauses, in a low, sweet voice, that seemed to Wilton Hughes like music he had heard long ago.

“May I inquire your mother’s name?”

“Mary Willis Arnold.”

Wilton stood still. It was the one name burned into his soul. Just then the wind beat up hoarser, madder than ever. He did not hear it for the louder wind that was driving through his heart.

The girl clung to him and shivered. It was the first thing that aroused him.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said, soothingly: “we are almost home. I think, from your description, your mother and I were old acquaintances.”

They were walking on again. She looked up in unspeakable surprise. “If you tell me your name?”

“Wilton Hughes! Did your mother ever speak of it?”

“Oh, yes! I am so glad! How very strange! She left a letter for you the very day she died, and told me to be sure and keep it till I found you. Here we are at home. You will come in, Mr. Hughes, and get the letter?”

He did not answer her, but he followed the light footsteps into the small brown house.

The girl entered the parlor. It was plainly but decently furnished. An old but very pleasant-looking woman sat by the small cylinder stove, and a lamp was burning on the table.

“Lena, I have been so worried about you,” said the old woman, and then stopped suddenly on seeing a stranger.

“It is mother’s old friend, Mr. Hughes. You remember, Mrs. Mason?” said Lena, as she ushered the gentleman into the parlor.

Mrs. Mason received him with rapturous expressions of delight; but, as Lena threw off her bonnet and came into the light, he could only think of her. The large hazel-brown eyes, the fair, pure features, were so like those his early manhood had loved, that he longed to draw the sewing girl to his heart and rain down kisses upon them. Lena's father had bequeathed her hair and lashes their thick darkness, and given the proud curve to her lips in their repose; but in all else she was like her mother.

Wilton's eyes followed the girl as she left the room, and he vainly tried to answer Mrs. Mason's inquiries with any thing but monosyllables.

In a moment Lena returned and laid the letter in his hand. How it shook as he opened it! There were but few words, traced, evidently, by a faltering hand. So ran the letter:—

“MY BELOVED WILTON:—I am dying to-day, and few must be the words I can say to you. Ten years ago, holding my dying father's hand in mine, I learned all. We are both the victims. Thank God, your heart was as true as my own. Wilton, my child is fatherless and motherless, and I have none with whom to leave her. I give her to you, though I know not where you are, whether married or single, for I have never heard of you since——

“I can hardly see the lines, and I know the darkness that is coming over them is *death*. To-morrow I shall be at home,

and, when this comes to you, you will take care of Lena, for the sake of
MARY.”

Wilton read this letter through, and then the proud man leaned his arms on the table, and, burying his head there, sobbed like a very child, unmindful of his listeners.

I cannot tell all which took place that evening in Mrs. Mason's little parlor; but when Wilton Hughes had risen to leave, he put aside Lena's thick curls, and, looking in her face, said, very tenderly,—

“My child, never go out to another day's sewing. Your mother has given you to me. I will take care of you.”

A month had passed.

“What *is* the reason that Wilton never stays at home nowadays?” said Mrs. Hills to her dull but very stately husband, on one of those infrequent evenings which they were passing alone together. “He used to be away quite too much, I thought, but now we never get a glimpse of him till eleven. Do, Charles, hand me that magazine.”

“Perhaps he's out courting? eh, Sara?” suggested the gentleman, as he passed the pamphlet to his wife.

“Nonsense! it's nothing of that kind,” replied the lady, half contemptuously, for she had no great confidence in her husband's acuteness. “I'd give him a lecture for leaving me so: but, then, what good would it do?”

If Mrs Hills could have known the new life which the

heart of her brother had been living for the last month, and if she could have looked into Mrs. Mason's little parlor that evening,—if she could have looked there!

Wilton Hughes had passed his evenings with Lena Arnold, and his soul had drunken again of the golden goblet of its youth.

Lena was so childlike, so unaffected, that it was a joy to the world-weary man to be with her.

He might have married years before; but his sisters' finesse and frivolity had sickened his heart of their sex; and then they would never leave him alone, but were always trying to palm off some woman upon him as false and vain as themselves.

But Lena! Lena! She had taken him back to the golden dream of his youth, and he sat watching her to-night, as she stood by the table, her graceful head leaning over the drawing he had brought her, her dark eyes beaming bright through their long, heavy lashes.

"Lena," he said, at last, "will you come and sit down by me? for I have something to say to you."

She came, with a smile half curious, half confiding; for Lena had learned to know Wilton very well during that month.

"Lena," he said, stroking the little hand he had taken in his, and looking into her clear eyes, "do you love me any?"

"Love you any?" answered the girl, with that frankness which contact with the world had never taught her to conceal:

"to-be-sure I do! Were you not my mother's best friend, and are you not my own now? Oh, I love you better than any one in the world, Mr. Hughes!"

"Well enough to be my wife, Lena?"

She sprang up in her wild astonishment, and her cheeks were incarnadined with blushes.

"I your wife! You do not mean it, Mr. Hughes!"

He put his arms around her.

"Yes, Lena; I should not jest on such a subject. Twenty years lie between us, and my hairs may be growing gray while your cheek still keeps the bloom of its youth. Shall you love me less because I loved your mother first,—because I shall be old before you, Lena?"

She drew up close to him. "No, no. I was not thinking of that: only I am so different; I know so little, and I am so unfitted to be *your* wife."

"I am in no hurry, Lena. You *are* right in thinking yourself too young to marry now. I will wait for you three years. I will not trammel your girlhood with any engagement which gratitude might induce you to make me. You shall be free, and you shall pass the intervening three years at one of the best schools in the Union."

The pride of Lena's father and the delicacy of her mother rose in her answer. "But to be so dependent before I am married! Forgive me! but I cannot bear the thought of it, Mr. Hughes."

"I have looked out for all that, my Lena. The gentleman at whose school I would place you desires an assistant in drawing. In two months you can be this, and yourself defray your expenses."

"How can I thank you?" said Lena, with a burst of happy tears. "How I will study so you shall not be ashamed of me when I am——"

She did not finish the sentence; but, before she buried her burning face on his shoulder, there had beamed a glance through her swimming eyes which told Wilton Hughes that she loved him.

Three years had passed. Wilton had just returned with Mr. and Mrs. Hills from their annual visit to Saratoga. Martha, his elder sister, rode up the next day to welcome them home again.

"I hear you've had an unusually gay season at the Springs," said the lady. "Was Wilton as indifferent as ever to the beauties he found there, Sara?"

"Yes, *just*, Martha. I've given him up now. He's a confirmed old bachelor."

"No, he isn't, either," said the gentleman in question, as he entered from the next room, where he had overheard these remarks; "and, to prove this to you, I expect to be married, Providence permitting, four weeks from this day."

"To whom? To whom?" cried both the ladies, as they sat down, pale with astonishment.

"Do you remember, Sara, a young girl, a Miss Arnold, who, some three years ago, did plain sewing for you a few days? She is to be my wife."

"Wilton Hughes!" shrieked both the horrified ladies; "will you so disgrace yourself and your family? We will never, never receive her,—never speak to her!"

"Martha! Sara! Be still!" The tones were so stern and commanding that even the proud women yielded to them. "Listen to me." And Wilton sat down, and told the sisters the story of his youth,—of his love for Mary Willis, and of the lie that had made her another's, and how his heart had holden that one memory in silence and tenderness for so many years.

Then he told them of the winter night, and his meeting with *her* child, and thus he concluded:—

"Whether you receive or reject my wife is a matter perfectly optional with yourselves; but, remember, she is never to be insulted in my presence." And he left them.

Wilton's words had reached the women's hearts of his sisters. There was something of beauty in this deep, long-enduring love which spoke to their souls through all the pride and false shame which had overgrown them.

Mary Willis had been their playmate in days they had since

blushed to remember, and her sweet face came back to them once more, and in that better moment they said,—

“There is no use in finding fault with him; and, after all, his love has been very beautiful. She will be his wife, and we will receive her as such.”

And they did not alter their determination when Wilton brought Lena to them, and they looked upon her, blushing and graceful in her bridal loveliness; for she was happy as few wives are in the husband who had first loved her mother.

The Old Mirror.

THERE it hangs, that old mirror, just as it hung long years before I can remember. There is nothing costly or striking about it, with its simple mahogany frame, which has grown almost black with time; and yet it is very full of voices and memories to me.

I suppose there is nothing artistic or beautiful in the painting which occupies nearly as large a space as the glass beneath it, and yet I have gazed upon landscapes, flushing the walls with their rich tropical sunsets,—upon glorious visions of turreted castle and rolling river and cloud-wrapped mountain; and my eyes were not dim with such tears as fill them now, while I look on that picture framed in the top of the old mirror.

There is the yellow, two-story house, set down on that strip of land that reaches out bravely into the sea; there is the little boat, with its white sails spread to the wind, coming close to the shore; and there are the deep blue waters, reaching off to the pink, sunset clouds that lie low in the distance.

How many hours in "the long ago," when I was too ill to read or play, have I sat in the old arm-chair, where so much of my childhood was passed, and dreamed dreams of that "house by the sea" shore! There is no sign of life about it, except the cloud of birds that are sweeping off to the horizon; and I used to wonder how the people looked who lived there close to the water, and how terrible it must have been in a storm, when the great waves beat and thundered against the shore, and fringed it with long lines of foam, and the wind shrieked and panted through the poplars that stood close to the front door. How I wondered if there were any little children in that house,—boys and girls, who "went sailing" in the little boat on pleasant afternoons, and gathered up pink and yellow shells on the sands when the tide was out!

I wondered, too, if the father and mother did not lead a life of much foreboding and anxiety lest some of their children should fall into the water and get drowned, and whether they ever allowed them to walk down that narrow strip of land that seemed to step right into the sea.

How I used to long to see a little curly head suddenly brighten one of those small window-panes, or thrust itself through the half-open door! but it was no great matter, after all; my child-imagination peopled that old house with visions fairer than any its artist ever dreamed of.

Then the "old mirror" brings me back memories of other and brighter days; when I used to stand before it, weaving

my hair into all sorts of fantastic braids, and dreaming other dreams, in which I—not the people in the old house—was to be the chief actor. O land of the Future, with thy fair gardens, thy sweet flowers, and thy singing waters, who hath ever found thee?

Sometimes *she* would come and stand by my side, putting her little rosy cheeks against mine, and looking in the glass together. What a contrast there was! "One shall be taken, and the other left." Who looking at us both as we stood there together, then, would have prophesied *she* should be the taken? And yet six times has the moon risen and set over her new-made grave, and the cheeks whose bloom mocked the summer roses lie cold and white under the shroud-folds, with the springing grass and the singing birds her only companions!

The "old mirror," like most antiquated household-furniture, is a history, a biography, a poem, in itself; but much of this is too sacred to translate. Sometimes, looking up to it, I sigh for the old days, and say, "If I could only go back to *that* time again!" And yet, if an angel stood here while I write, and promised to lead me very tenderly down through the pathway of the years that lie between, I should shiver and shrink back. How few of us would be ready to live over *all* our lives again!

The Country Graveyard.

It was the noon of a summer Sabbath. The day had been dim, quiet, hazy, with great woolly clouds piled all over the sky, and occasional outbreakings and quiverings of sunshine, like beautiful thoughts in a story, or sweet notes swelling upward through a low song.

It was a picturesque little spot, that old country graveyard, shut off from the highway and the green fields by its plain white railing; and there the fathers and mothers had laid down to sleep in the hope of a "resurrection unto life immortal." There were only two persons, a gentleman and a lady, making their way slowly among the tall grass and the old, brown, moss-covered tombstones, that leaned against each other, and still told, with feeble voices, of all that lay beneath them.

The old burying-ground was half choked up with blackberry-vines. They climbed over the sunken graves, and wound their green arms about the headstones, and, on the Sabbath of which I write, the berries hung thick and tempting on the low vines. And there they would hang on till the

wind shook them down or they dropped away of their own ripeness; for nobody ever thought of picking the berries that grew in the graveyard. The little children passed by every day with their baskets and kettles; but no tiny hands were thrust through the railing; no childish feet ever pattered through the tall, old gate, though they knew well that out among the wood-hollows and field-hedges no berries grew larger or fairer than these,—*these that were the price of the dead!*

The lady had never been here before, and she looked around with curious, half awe-filled eyes, as she followed the gentleman. Oh, he was thinking of the time, many, many years gone by, when they led him through that long, tangled grass to the burial of his mother.

"It was here," almost whispered the gentleman, as one does in the presence of the dead; and then both stood still before the tall gray column which told how many summers before, in the morning of her womanhood, the "mother" had lain down to the sleep which no child-voice had ever awakened.

"Eighteen hundred and twenty-eight," murmured the young lady, as she leaned over the headstone. "How long ago that was! Can you remember it?"

"Yes, very dimly,—just as you do some of the old night-dreams of your childhood."

"Then tell me about that time, won't you, please? It is

such a fitting place, close by where *she* was, with the Sabbath quiet and beauty all around, and the wind bringing up to us the sweet hymns of the worshippers from the old stone church."

"Do you see the great white house beyond the bridge, with its steep, old-fashioned roof, and the vine mounting all around the piazza, and the tall maple-tree in front, where the young birds of thirty summers ago sang just as sweetly as they are singing this Sabbath morning?"

"It was night-time then, though, and *she* lay in that lower room on the right, and I was sleeping in the chamber overhead, with the newly-risen stars looking in the window on the little boy whom the next hour was to write *motherless*. I remember a light shining suddenly through the room, and some one saying, softly, 'Come, my child, get up quick. Your mother wants to see you once more.'

"I did not comprehend what this meant, but a chill struck through my heart as they carried me down-stairs and into the room where she lay, where she had lain many days, her face growing whiter and her sweet voice lower all the time.

"Well, they lifted me up to the bedside. She placed her thin arms about my neck, and kissed my forehead with lips as cold as the winter snow. Then she whispered so low that no ear but mine heard,—mine that has kept the words through all the long upward years, and that hears them now faintly

and sweetly as on that night:—'My little boy, God will take care of you.' Her eyes closed, and, when they lifted me away, the life of my mother had gone down into the valley of death!"

And the lady who, leaning against the old tombstone, had listened that Sabbath morning to this story, thought, amid the tears she sent back to her heart, that the mother had bequeathed a beautiful legacy to her son. Mighty name, and broad lands, and royal sceptre, many a one has left to her child, but that dying prophecy, "My little boy, God will take care of you," in its beautiful, touching faith and consecration following him up into manhood, and down, it may be, among the shadows of old age, was worth more than all these: fitting words to carry out from this world, and to keep sacred even among the angels who are in heaven, till the mother, meeting her child again, shall say triumphantly on the Eternal Hills, as she did faintly in the Earthly Valleys,—“God HAS taken care of you, my boy!"

Now!

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

"Oh, stop a moment, please, papa! I had wellnigh forgotten: I want some money,—five dollars, I guess."

It would have been a hard matter for a heart less loving than that of the father to have refused her, she looked so charming, with her sweet, uplifted face set in a cloud of golden hair, and the heart-light shining out of her May-blue eyes and playing "hide-and-seek" among the dimples round her small red mouth. She was his only daughter, reader, and he was a widower.

"Five dollars, eh, Gracie? You're a monstrously expensive little bit of humanity," said the merchant, as he patted the dimpled cheek of his daughter, and then unbuttoned his warm overcoat. "What's wanting now? a new bonnet or an embroidered pocket-handkerchief?"

"Neither, papa: it is not for myself that I want the money

this time. It is for a poor family who live right across the street from Mrs. Howard's. She stopped here yesterday to tell me about them; for you know she was called out of town suddenly to see her mother, who is dangerously ill. The family, it seems, have resided there but a little while, and Mrs. Howard was confident they had seen better days, although she had never visited them. Last November, she said, when the sunshine used to make an hour of the afternoon seem like a smile from the summer, two or three beautiful children would come out and play on the porch. She used to watch them through her blinds with so much interest.

"But for the last month she has hardly seen one of them, unless it was the oldest boy, who came down to draw water in the yard; and he was dressed so thin and looked so mournful it always troubled her.

"Well, yesterday morning the family haunted her thoughts and dreams so much she resolved to see them; and, when the little boy came down as usual to the well, she called him across the street. Oh, papa! I cannot help the tears coming when I think about it;" and the young girl dashed aside the large drops which were climbing over her brown lashes. "Mrs. Howard said the boy was very bashful and non-communicative at first; but at last she succeeded, by dint of coaxing and questioning, in obtaining some knowledge of his circumstances. His mother and the children were both very ill; they were very poor, and, the boy said, had only managed to

live for the last three weeks by selling their furniture, which was now nearly all gone. They had not been used to begging, he said, with a mournful pride, which brought the tears into Mrs. Howard's eyes. He noticed this, and it seemed to unlock his heart at once. 'Oh, ma'am, you will come over and help us, won't you? We are poorer than you think,' he exclaimed, seizing her hand, with his dark pathetic eyes fastened on her face. At that moment the news of her mother's illness was brought. She was so alarmed she hardly knew what she was doing, but she remembered saying to the child, 'Run home now; I will do something for you very soon.' She forgot this, however, in the hurry of starting away, and did not remember till her carriage turned into our street. She stopped here, told me the story in a great hurry, slipped five dollars into my hand, and made me give my promise to go over there this morning."

"Well, here's a ten instead of the five you asked for, my little girl: it's such a pleasure to know when we do a generous deed we're not encouraging all sorts of vice. Now, good-by, Gracie."

"Good-by, and a thousand thanks, papa." The little rosy fingers closed over the note, and the bright face was uplifted to the father's lips.

"Dear me! I believe it's going to storm. How black the clouds look! I wish now I had started before practising.

Oh, it's such a *terrible* morning to go out!" soliloquized Grace Sewall, as she stood by the bay-window and looked out on the black threatening clouds which skirted the horizon

It was one of the dreariest of December mornings,—one of those which render it an act of such emphatic self-abnegation to exchange the glow of an anthracite fire and the luxury of a cushioned arm-chair for the gloom and damp and cold outside. The wind went up and down the great thoroughfare, sometimes with a wild, defiant howl, sometimes with a low, deep sob, like that wrung from a strong man in his agony, and then settled down into a soft moan, like a weary child's in his slumber.

But, while Grace Sewall stood tapping the glass with her fingers and looking ruefully at the clouds, the storm suddenly descended. Whirling, waltzing, gyrating, the white flakes came down, and soon the great woolly shroud of winter was rolled over the tall roofs and the barren trees of the great city. "It's useless to fret about it, I s'pose," sighed pretty Grace Sewall, as she sank into the crimson cushions of her arm-chair: "I must wait till the storm is over."

"What, all cloaked and hooded, ready to jump in! I've caught you just in the nick of time, Cousin Gracie. I've come to take you out sleigh-riding,—horses at the door, and every prospect for a first-rate time."

"It's too bad, Cousin Will, after all your trouble; but I can't go, possibly. You see, I made an engagement yesterday

to visit a family who are in great need to-day. I've been waiting all the morning for the clouds to break away, and now I am just ready to start. You'll excuse me this time, won't you?"

"No, Gracie, I can do no such thing: you can defer your engagement until we return. I'll get back in time for you to go, if it's possible; if not, you can wait till to-morrow. This is the first snow-fall we've had this season, and you know we sha'n't get such a capital one again very soon. I've engaged to meet a party at West Falls, and we shall be so disappointed if you're not there. Come, you'll go just to oblige me this once, Gracie."

Poor Grace! it would have been very hard for any girl of seventeen to have resisted that plea, accompanied as it was with a glance from the fine eyes of the speaker which brought a deeper carnation glow into her cheek. "If I thought we should get back in time to go there to-night, I'm sure two or three hours couldn't make any great difference." This last remark was made rather more to her conscience than her cousin; for a still small voice was whispering in Grace Sewall's heart that she should fulfil her promise to Mrs. Howard.

"Of course, it can't make the shadow of any difference," was the reply of the young man. "I'll promise to accompany you myself to see these poor people, if you'll be a good girl and go with me now. Come; time's precious, Gracie."

There was another moment of irresolution, and the pen of

Grace Sewall's life-angel trembled between the dark and bright hues of that parchment whose record she must meet in eternity.

"I'll make him return in time to accompany me there I will, *positively*," whispered Grace Sewall to that inner voice, and she gave her hand to her cousin.

The noon-sunshine broke through the wintry clouds and struck right down with a bright cheery laugh into a back chamber of the old building opposite Mrs. Howard's elegant residence. Ah me! the sunshine has no aristocratic predilections, or I am very certain it would have disappeared at first sight of the misery and destitution in that apartment.

It had three occupants,—a woman who lay on a hard mattress in one corner, and two children on a crib a short distance from this. The fire on the hearth was slowly dying out among the ashes for want of fuel to maintain its existence. Two old chairs, and a table whose rheumatic extremities hardly sustained its equilibrium, completed the furniture of the chamber.

"Mamma," moaned the younger of the two children, lifting its head from the hard pillow and brushing back the bright tangled curls from its face, "Sissy's head aches so. Sissy so hungry, too. Mamma, please take and give her something to eat. Sissy, she so cold,—she so hungry, too." The small, blue arms were uplifted appealingly to the mother;

the little lip curled and quivered, and then the hot tears, born of hunger and cold and suffering, came dashing down the cheeks of the infantile speaker.

"O God! is there no help for all this?" murmured the sick woman, as she lifted her head slowly from the pillow and looked on her child. What a look it was! What a world of mingled tenderness and suffering and despair looked out of the large, mournful eyes that rested on the child!

"Baby must try and lie down a little longer: mother hopes she'll get something for it to eat. But, oh, where is it to come from?" she cried out, in a voice sharp with exceeding agony, as her head sank back on the pillow again. "O God! have pity upon me! I am willing to lie here and starve and die without a murmur; but my children! my children!"—Those words unlocked the sealed fountain in the mother's heart. She covered her white face with her attenuated hands, while deep sobs shook her whole frame, and the tears broke fast through her fingers.

"Mamma, please don't cry. I a'n't a bit hungry. I wouldn't eat now if I had ever so much nice cake, and it's as hot here as summer," now spoke a feeble voice from the crib; while the younger child, frightened by its mother's sobs, and thinking that its petition for something to eat had occasioned them, drew up close to her sister, and, wrapping one little arm round its neck, whispered, "Baby didn't mean to be wicked and plague mamma; but she so hungry,—she

so sick!" And again the hot tears poured down the little one's face; but she wept very stilly this time.

But now a child's feet were heard hurrying along the passage, and a moment later a boy, apparently some eight years old, entered the room, bearing with him a plate of gingerbread in one hand and a mug of water in the other.

"Mamma, Mary, Sissy," he said, eagerly, as he placed them on the rickety table, "don't cry any more. I've got something to eat. I've been over to the big house to find the lady there, but she's gone away and won't be home till night; but, when I told the servant I was hungry, she gave me this. I didn't tell her *you* was, mamma, or sisters either," added the boy, half apologetically, as though the disgrace of begging would not devolve on the others.

"Charley, give me some! give me some quick!" How eagerly were the little hands uplifted! and there was such a *craving* light in the blue eyes of the child, that it would have melted any heart not exactly *stone*, as the boy placed one of the largest rolls in the baby's hands.

"Charley, you may have my piece," said the older girl, "if you'll let me have some water. I'm so thirsty I could drink every drop;" and Charley put down the plate, and lifted the mug of cold water to the hot lips of his sister. It seemed to him she never would have done drinking. She held on the cool sides of the pitcher with her two fever-

parched hands till he almost forcibly removed it; but she would not taste the cake he urged her to eat.

The mother lay on her pillow wellnigh fainting with exhaustion, but she knew that God had heard her cry, that He had sent her children food; and her heart was breathing such thanks over it as seldom rise round daintily-loaded tables.

"Mamma!"—Charley's soft hand was passed lovingly over her cold forehead,—*"Mamma! don't cry any more. Eat some of this cake with me. You'll get well, and so'll Mary; and I'm going to watch for the carriage all the afternoon, and when the lady comes I'm going straight over there to bring her back with me. You'll love her, mamma,—I know you will. She put back the hair so softly from my forehead, and said, in such a soft, pitying voice, 'Poor boy!' and the tears came in her eyes. Don't feel bad, mamma. Eat some of the cake. You can't think how good it is: just see, Sissy's eaten all hers and is going to sleep."*

"Charley, my boy, God bless you! you are my only comfort," said the poor mother, putting one arm around the boy's neck and drawing his cheek down to her cold lips. "No, I can't eat the cake, dear. I'm growing very tired. Put Sissy in bed with me: she won't trouble me now, and Mary's very sick. Charley, if I'm not here when the lady comes back, remember and tell her I said God would reward her for all she would do to you."

"If you're not here! What do you mean, mamma?" And Charley looked at her as though he feared she was demented.

"Nothing now, dear: bring the baby here before I go to sleep. Remember and take good care of Mary."

Poor Charley! he little thought, as he watched the lids droop over his mother's eyes after he had carefully laid the slumbering baby by her side, that the dew on her forehead was the damp of death. Hour after hour the faithful child kept his watch for the carriage at the chamber-window. Hour after hour! The sunshine crept from the old bedstead and the rickety table to the floor; and still he stood there, with his eyes roaming eagerly up and down the thoroughfare for the carriage that came not. Hour after hour,—with none but God and the angels to wot of it!

"Charley, please to come here." The voice sounded very clear in the chamber's silence, although it was scarcely raised above a whisper. He was at the speaker's side in a moment.

"What is it, Mary? Don't you feel better now?"

"I don't ache any more; but I want to put your arms around me and let me cry so hard."

"Don't cry, sister. Eat some of the cake. I've saved two big pieces for you."

"No, no," said the sick child, with a motion of the head, as though the sight of food nauseated her. "Make haste, Charley, for my heart's full of tears; and when they're gone I want to talk." And the boy seated himself on the side of

the crib, and raised his sister very tenderly; and then, with his arms wrapped round her, and her head resting on his bosom, she cried a long time, and Charley's tears were mingled with hers. "There, the ache's all gone now, brother;" and she looked up in his face with a smile that made the stout heart of the little boy sadder than before. "I've had a dream—oh, such a beautiful one!—of our old home. I saw it all, Charley,—the two great plum-trees that grew by our chamber-window, and the vine that wound all over the front. I could see, too, the pond and the white lilies all over it, which you and I used to gather, Charley. Well, I thought I was sitting there, just as I did long ago, when somebody called me very soft and sweetly. I turned round, and there stood papa, with the old smile on his face, and such a light all over it. I put my arms right out, and he lifted me up and kissed me. 'Oh, papa!' I said, 'I'm so glad we are come back again; but I don't know how I got here. We've had so much trouble, and been cold, and hungry, and sick, since I saw you. But we've got back now, and we'll live in our old home just as ever, won't we, and be happy? You'll send for mamma, and Charley, and the baby, won't you?' But papa shook his head, and then he smiled and said, 'No, Mary: we shall not come back here to live; but I shall take you and mamma to the home where I am. It cannot be compared with this one, it is so much fairer and pleasanter; and there is no hunger, nor cold, nor sorrow there; and the name of

this beautiful land is *heaven*. *Remember, I shall come for you and mamma to-night.*' And the next moment he was gone, and I woke up, and there was nobody here but mamma, and baby, and you standing by the window. And it was this made me cry, to find it was all a dream, for I wanted to go with papa."

"No, no, Mary! you don't want to leave me," cried the boy, hugging the girl closely, for a sharp, terrible fear seemed clutching at his heart-strings. But she did not answer him: the lids drooped heavily over the eyes, just as the mother's had done, and there were the same large damp drops on her forehead. "She has gone to sleep again," said Charley, tenderly, as he laid the small head on the pillow and parted away the curls from the sweet face.

The sun had gone down over the high roofs of the neighboring houses, and the bright December stars were coming slowly into the rifts of blue sky, when the boy resumed his watch by the window.

It was very cold, for the fire had long ago died out on the hearth, and the boy was weary with his long watch; so, wrapping himself in an old coverlet, he drew a chair to the window, and, sinking down on this, buried his face in his hands. And the loving eyes of the angels looked down through the darkness into that old chamber, and saw that all its inmates had gone to sleep; and they knew that two would wake up in this world, and two would wake in heaven. The hours were wear-

ing into midnight when a carriage rolled up hastily to Mrs. Howard's dwelling; and if Charley had been awake he might have seen, by the dim gaslight, the lady who hastily descended. But he did not see this, the little, tired, slumbering boy, who had gone a great way from that dark, miserable chamber in his dreams; neither did he know that it was at the same hour that another chariot came to his home,—a chariot whose glory was greater than that of the noonday sun,—a chariot around which angels gathered with their gleaming hair and golden harps, and in this *were borne away his mother and his sister Mary.*

"They are all sleeping so soundly," murmured Charley to himself, as the dim light of the early dawn crept into the chamber and lifted up the boy's sleeping lids. "I wonder if the carriage hasn't come yet? I'll sit here and watch till the sun comes over the housetops, and then I'll go across and see." So for two hours longer the boy sat there, with his eyes fastened on the opposite side of the street.

"Charley," lisped a soft voice from the bed where the mother lay, "Sissy's waked up."

"Well, lie still a little while, dear," said the boy, in a low tone, "'cause mamma and Mary haven't waked up yet." But the little one grew uneasy, and soon the sweet face, with its frame of tangled, shining hair, was lifted from the pillow.

"Mamma," and one little arm was thrown around her neck, while the red lips were brought to the strangely white

ones of the woman,—*"mamma, wake up and smile on your baby. Mamma, please wake up, and see how light it is, and say, 'My little Sissy,' just as softly."* But the white lids did not uncloze, and the blue-veined lips were closed together as they had never been before.

"Charley, mamma feels so cold," said the little one, with a shudder, as she drew away the fingers from the icy forehead. "Please to make a fire, Charley, for she won't wake up or speak to Sissy;" and the blue eyes filled with tears.

Charley now came toward the bed, looking intently at his mother's face; for the sun had just risen over the house-tops, and the light lay like a golden flood all about her, and there was something in the ghastly features that terrified the child.

"Mamma, wake up! wake up quick!" he said, in an eager, troubled voice. There was no answer. He bent down, looked at her wildly for a moment, while his whole frame trembled like a leaf; then came a shriek of such wild, bitter, terrible agony, that it would have awakened any *but the dead.*

"Why, Grace, good-morning. I did not expect to find you here so early. Did you see *them* yesterday? They've haunted me ever since I've been gone." And Mrs. Howard paused a moment in the hall of the old building where she and Grace Sewall had so unexpectedly come upon each other.

"I regret to say, Mrs. Howard, that the storm prevented

my coming yesterday morning, and in the afternoon I rode to West Falls with a distant cousin. He promised to return in time to accompany me here; but we didn't reach home till long after nightfall."

What a shriek that was!—a child's shriek, too! No wonder the words died on the lips of Grace Sewall and the blood forsook the cheeks of both ladies. A moment later a child's face, wild and white, rushed out of the house. In a breath it was by the side of Mrs. Howard.

"You will come up here?—you will come up now?" pleaded the white lips; "for mamma is dead!"

Hardly less agitated than the boy, they followed him upstairs. What a scene presented itself there! That fair dead face in the laughing sunlight, bearing such a legible chirography of sharp and terrible suffering, and the baby-one that bent over it, wellnigh broken-hearted with grief because mamma would not wake up and say, "Little Sissy." It was a long time before the two weeping visitors turned to the crib, where another sweet pale-faced child was lying, with a smile—that, alas! was the "sunset of smiles"—hovering round its lips. Mrs. Howard stepped forward first, and something dried the tears in her eyes as they fastened on the sleeper. She bent down a moment: when she lifted her face the one beneath it was hardly whiter. "*She is dead too!*" broke slowly from her lips.

"Papa said he should come for her and mamma! Oh, if

he'd come for us too!" moaned Charley, as he sank fainting on the crib beside his dead sister.

"O God, have mercy upon me, for my punishment is greater than I can bear," murmured poor, conscience-stricken Grace Sewall, as she kneeled down in that death-chamber. But the youngest child, all unconscious of the loss it had sustained, and pitying her manifest suffering, crept off from the bed, and, tottering up to Grace, wound her arms around her neck and told her not to cry, for mamma had only gone home to heaven, where the flowers grew so bright and the angels were so beautiful, and she would not be hungry, or cold, or sick, any more.

"And neither shall you be, darling, if I can help it," murmured the young girl amid her sobs. "I will take you to my home, and my care and love for you shall make some reparation for the wrong I have done."

She was true to her promise. The dead mother and her child were carefully interred in a pleasant part of the city cemetery; and the little one became as a younger sister to Grace, as another daughter to her father, while Mrs. Howard adopted Charley as her own son. But the fearful lesson which Grace Sewall was taught in her youth was never forgotten; and, years later, when she became the wife of her cousin, William Edwards, and her scrupulous adherence to her promises sometimes brought a smile to his lips, it was checked by the memory of a certain sleigh-ride.

"*Now!*" it was Grace's motto through life. Let it be yours, reader; for the *present* is all we can claim, and we have no surety for the future. We only know that the night—the *death-night*—cometh, and its shadows are growing longer every hour.

The Door in the Heart.

"She was a stern, hard woman. But far away up a great many pairs of winding stairs in her heart was a door easily passed by, and on that door was written—*WOMAN*."—DICKENS.

"And so it is with the drunkard. Far away up a great many pairs of winding stairs in his heart is a door, and on that door is written *MAN*, and we must knock at it once, twice, seven times; yea, seventy times seven, that it may open unto us."—JOHN B. GOUGH.

HE was an old man,—not so old, either, for the years of his life could not have thus wrinkled his forehead and whitened his hair, and the hands locked together on the low pine table did not tremble so with the weakness of age; yet very old and very miserable looked the solitary occupant of that narrow room or entry, with its faded red curtains, and its atmosphere rendered almost intolerable by the bar-room into which it opened. A hat bearing unmistakable evidence of long intimacy with "brickbats and the gutter" maintained an unsafe position on one side of the owner's head; and a pair of elbows thrust themselves through his coat-sleeves, in rejoicing con-

sciousness that they could "afford to be out." Add to this, reader, a pair of pants whose original color it would have been a matter of time and study to determine, and you have the *toute ensemble* of the wretched being who now occupied the back room of the only grog-shop which he was allowed to frequent in all the village of Greenfield.

And yet that miserable, solitary, friendless creature, sitting there half stupefied with the effects of last night's revel, and utterly unconscious that outside the May morning has been born of God, with its glorious birthright of sunshine and dews and bird-songs, has a heart; and "far away up a great many pairs of winding stairs in his heart is a door easily passed by," and on that door, covered with cobwebs and dust, is a word written, which Time and sin have never been able to efface; and that word is *Man*.

But nobody ever dreamed of this, and people shook their heads and said old Billy Strong's case was a hopeless one. Had not many kind-hearted persons reasoned with him earnestly on the evil of his ways? Had not the "Temperance men" gone to him with the pledge, and promised him employment if he would sign it? And all this had been utterly in vain.

Ah, none of these had groped their way up the winding stairs and read the name on the hidden door there!

But, while the unhappy man sat by the pine table that morning, the bar-keeper suddenly entered, followed by a lady

with soft hazel eyes, and a face that a little child would have gone to in any trouble.

The old man looked up with a vacant gaze of wonder as the bar-keeper offered the lady a chair and pointed to the occupant of the other, saying,—

"That's Billy Strong, ma'am,"—and, with a lingering stare of surprise and curiosity, left that gentle woman alone with the astonished and now thoroughly-sobered man.

The soft eyes of the lady wandered, with a sad, pitying expression, over Old Bill's features, and then, in a low, sweet voice, she asked,—

"Am I rightly informed? Do I address Mr. William Strong?"

Ah! with those words the lady had gotten farther up the winding stairs, nearer the hidden door, than all who had gone before her.

"Yes, that is my name, ma'am," said Old Bill; and he glanced down at his shabby attire, and actually tried to hide the elbow which was peeping out farthest; for it was a long time since he had been addressed by that name, and, somehow, it sounded very pleasant to him.

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Strong," said the lady. "I have heard my father speak of you so often, and of the days when you and he were boys together, that I almost feel as if we were old acquaintances. You surely cannot have forgotten Charles Morrison?"

"No! no! Charlie and I used to be old cronies," said Old Bill, with sudden animation, and a light in his eyes such as had not been there for many a day, except when *rum* lent it a fitful brilliancy.

Ah! the lady did not know, as perhaps the angels did, that she had mounted the stairs, and was softly feeling for that unseen door. So she went on:—

"I almost feel as though I could see the old spot upon which your homestead stood, Mr. Strong, I have heard my father describe it so often. The hill, with its crown of old oaks at the back of your house, and the field of golden harvest-grain that waved in front. Then there was the green grass-plat before the front door, and the huge old apple-tree that threw its shadows across it, and the great old-fashioned portico, and the grape-vine that crept round the pillars, and the rose-bush that looked in at the bedroom-window, and the spring that went flashing and singing through the bed of mint at the side of the house."

Old Bill moved uneasily in his chair, and the muscles around his mouth twitched occasionally; but, unmindful of this, in the same low, sweet tones, the lady kept on:—"Many and many were the hours,—so father would say,—Willie and I used to pass under the shadow of that old apple-tree, playing at hide-and-seek, or lolling on the grass, telling each other the great things we would certainly do when we became men; and, when the sunset set its cup of gold on the top of the oaks, I

can see Willie's mother standing in the front door, with her white cap and check apron, and the pleasant smile that always hovered round her lips, and hear her cheerful voice calling, 'Come, boys! come to supper.'"

One after another the big, warm, blessed tears came rolling down Old Bill's pale cheeks. Ah! the lady had found the door then.

"'I was always at home at Willie's,' father would say, 'and used to have my bowl of fresh milk and bread, too; and, when these had disappeared, Willie would draw his stool to his mother's feet, lay his head on her lap, and she would tell us some pleasant story,—it might be of Joseph or David, or of some good child who afterward became a great man; and then she would part Willie's brown curls from his forehead, and, in a voice I can never forget, say, "Promise me, Willie, when you go out from your home into the world and its temptations, and your mother has laid down to sleep in the churchyard yonder,—promise, my child, that her prayers and her memory shall keep you from all evil ways."'

"'And Willie would lift his laughing blue eyes to her face, and say, "I'll make a first-rate man: don't you be afraid, mother."'

"'And then, after we had said our prayers, we would go to bed happy as the birds that went to their nests in the old apple-branches by the window; and, just as we were sinking to sleep, we would hear a soft footfall on the stairs, and a loving

face would bend over us to see if we were nicely tucked up. It is a long time,' father would say, after a pause, 'since I heard from Willie, but sure I am that he has never fallen into any evil ways. The memory of his mother would keep him from that.'"

Rap, rap, rap! went the words of the lady at the door in that old man's heart. Creak, creak, creak! went the door on its rusty hinges; while far above them both, the angels of God held their breaths and listened. But the lady could only see the subdued man bury his face in his hands, and, while his whole frame shook like an aspen-leaf, she heard him murmur, amid childlike sobs,—

"My mother! Oh, my mother!"

And she knew the tears that were washing those wrinkled cheeks were washing out also many a dark page in the record of Old Bill's past life: so, with a silent prayer of thankfulness, she resumed:—

"But there was one scene my father loved to talk of better than all the rest. It was of the morning you were married, Mr. Strong. 'It was enough to do one's eyes good,' he would say, 'to look at them as they walked up the old church-aisle,—he with his proud, manly tread, and she a delicate, fragile creature, fair as the orange-blossoms that trembled in her hair. I remember how clear and firm his voice sounded through the old church, as he promised to love, protect, and cherish the fair girl at his side; and I know he thought, as he looked

down fondly upon her, that the very winds of heaven should not visit her face too roughly.' And then my father would tell us of a home made very bright by watchful affection, and of the dark-eyed boy and of the fair-haired girl who came after a while to gladden it; and then, you know, he removed to the West and lost sight of you, Mr. Strong."

Once again the lady paused, for the agony of the man before her was fearful to behold, and when she spoke again it was in a lower and more mournful tone:—

"I promised my father, previous to his death, that if ever I visited his native State I would seek out his old friend. But, when I inquired for you, they unfolded a terrible story to me, Mr. Strong: they told me of a broken and desolate household; of the dark-eyed boy who left his home in disgust and despair for one on the homeless seas; of the gentle, uncomplaining wife, who went down, with a prayer on her lips for her erring husband, broken-hearted to the grave; and of the fair-haired girl they placed in a little while by her side. Oh, it is a sad, sad story I have heard of my father's old friend!"

"It was I! It was I that did it all! I killed them!" said Old Bill, in a voice hoarse with emotion, as he lifted his head from his clasped hands and looked upon the lady, every feature wearing such a look of agony and remorse that she shuddered to behold it. Wide, wide open stood the door then, and the lady hastened to pass in. A small hand was

laid gently upon Old Bill's arm, and a sweet voice murmured,—

"Even for all this there is redemption. In the name of the mother that loved you, in the name of your dying wife, and of the child that sleeps beside her, I ask you, will you sign the pledge?"

"I will," said Old Bill; and he brought down his hand with such force on the pine table that its rheumatic limbs hardly regained their equilibrium, and he eagerly seized the pen and pledge the lady placed before him, and, when he returned them to her, the name of *William Strong* lay in broad, legible characters upon the paper.

There was an expression, ludicrous from its extreme curiosity, on the bar-keeper's face, as the lady passed quietly through the "shop," after her long interview with Old Bill; and the expression was in no degree lessened when, a few moments after, Old Bill followed her without stopping, as usual, to take "his first glass." And *he never passed over the threshold again.*

And now, reader, you whose heart throbs with tenderness and reverence for humanity, fallen, despised, miserable though it may be, remember that somewhere in the heart of your fellow-man is a door which, though closed for many years, will surely open to the hand that knocks in kindness and the voice that calls in love.

My Step-Mother.

"SHE's an old maid, isn't she, papa?"

"I s'pose so, Eva: she was just your mother's age. It is twelve years since I saw her."

How well I remember that night! There was no light in the broad, old-fashioned kitchen, but the great pine logs Tom had heaped on the andirons filled it with a deep, ruddy glow, such as an October sunset sometimes weaves over the forehead of a mountain.

It was November now. Out-doors the wind had struck the key-note of the year's Doxology. The dead leaves were piled thick about the roots of the trees; the grass was beaten and tangled by the rains, and lay in gray locks along the edges of the road. And the darkness outside was like the darkness within our hearts—my father's and mine—as we sat by the kitchen-fire that evening.

Four weeks ago, that day, a coffin had been carried out of the front door, and across the bend of the river, to the little graveyard whose green feet laved themselves in its waters.

And the neighbors looked sorrowfully at my father and me, and whispered, "To be left a widower with that motherless child!"

After this, every day walked heavier over our hearts, every night gathered about them a new fold of that darkness which was the shadow of death; and at last my father said to me, abruptly, "I can't endure the old house any longer, Eva: it stifles me. I shall travel this winter."

"And you will take me with you, papa?"

"No, my poor child. Your mother lifts her dead face from the grave every time you look on me. Next spring, when I come back to you, my heart will be stronger, and I shall bless God that He has set your mother's image in your face."

"But where shall I go, then?" What a chill and blank of desolation lay behind the words!

"You shall go to your Uncle David's, my child. You will be well cared for in the old home that was your mother's."

I was a quiet, undemonstrative child, though my life had climbed up to its thirteenth year; so I did not demur at all this. But every day I used to go to the south window, and, looking through the yellow maple-leaves toward the little graveyard, wish that, instead of taking me to Uncle David's, they would bear me in a coffin, just like my mother's, only smaller, through the front door, and across the bend of the river, and lay me down close—very close—to her side.

My father was a quiet, grave man, but his heart was a very

deep one, and his love for my mother had been the one tenderness, the one passion, of his life.

He was still a young-looking man, who, though ostensibly a farmer, passed most of his time among his books and drawings, leaving the supervision of the farm to Cousin Reuben Steele, who had lived with him since his marriage.

I loved my father with a kind of silent idolatry, of which he little dreamed, and this separation from him was the second great trial of my life. But he knew little of this, and the interrogation respecting my future home, with which I have opened my story, was almost the first one I had ventured to make my father.

"How does she look, papa?" I continued, gazing into the blaze, out of which my imagination was shaping a thin, sharp face, with long, wiry, yellow curls, and lips whose very smile had something sharp and chilly in it.

"She was not handsome, Eva; but the more you looked in her face the better you loved it. Her hair and eyes were brown, and her smile,—it was not so beaming, but almost as sweet, as your mother's."

"But why didn't she ever get married?"

"I don't know: it is very strange," answered father, with his deep eyes fastened on the curl of the blaze. "Mary has had many good offers, I know, and she was especially fitted, with her deep, loving nature, to bless the life of some man. I have often thought she might have formed some unrecipro-

cated attachment. But it is hardly probable. The deep currents of her woman's being have never been stirred, or they have flowed out in a thousand gentle streams, refreshing many hearts, if they have never *filled* one."

I did not clearly understand this, but it slightly modified my previous conceptions of my mother's cousin.

"And next week we are going, papa?"

His hand sought my curls, and it was gentle as my mother's.

"Yes, darling, you will be very happy in your new home. Aunt Mary will be to you a second mother, and, though Uncle David is a kind of rheumatic, splenetic old gentleman, you must not mind his humors, for his heart is in the right place."

"Edward, Deacon Mix has been over here, looking at the brown steers. What do you say to letting him take 'em at a round price?" said Cousin Reuben, as he came in from the barn, shaking the drops of rain from his gray coat, and settling his large, brawny figure into a chair on one side of the fireplace.

"I wish you wouldn't talk about steers now," I poutingly interposed. "Papa's telling me about my new home."

"Is he, puss?" A pair of strong hands were laid on my shoulders, and the next moment I was seated on Cousin Reuben's knee.

"Well, I can tell him 'twill be much more to his interest

to talk about his own a little while: so be a good girl, if you want to see the barberry-bushes to-morrow."

This ultimatum was successful, and, when papa and his cousin were thoroughly engrossed in a discussion of the comparative merits of sandy and dry soils, I slid quietly from Cousin Reuben's knee.

It was a broad, pear-shaped valley, dipping among great hills; and we entered it—my father and I—just at nightfall. The day had been warm and pleasant, as though it had wandered out from the opening of October, and set its golden feet on the barren earth-way up which its white sisterhood were soon to pass.

Purplish-crimson clouds were folded heavily about the sun as we drove into the village and up to the old homestead where my mother passed her early life. It was a large, yellow-gray house, with quaint wings and gables, and a deep front yard, filled with fruit and shade trees.

"Edward, is that you?" A small, slender figure, with a handkerchief wound carelessly over the head, came bounding down to the gate, and clasped my father's hands before he had time to alight.

The face, so full of welcome, as it turned up to him, was a pale and by no means pretty one, but my heart went out to it at once.

"I have brought you my motherless Eva, Mary. You will

take good care of her," said my father, in a hoarse voice, as he lifted me from the buggy.

Aunt Mary did not answer him: I knew *why* by the quivering of her lips as they bent down to my forehead.

"Now, good-by, Eva; God bless you, my child;" and papa strained me a moment to his heart, and then gave his hands to Aunt Mary. I had given her this title, though she was, in reality, my cousin.

"Why, Edward, you are coming in?"

"No, no, Mary; do not urge me. I cannot yet look on the old places. I cannot yet bear the sight of the rooms where I won and wedded her. You will understand and forgive me."

His horse turned, and we stood looking at him till he wound beyond the bend of the road. Once only he looked back and flung us a double kiss.

When I again looked at my aunt, her hands were clasped over her heart, her face was very white, and her eyes were strained off on the road where my father had disappeared.

There was something in her face that made me forget my own sorrow, and I stood looking into it with a kind of blank wonder, during the several moments in which she did not heed me.

At last she turned round, with a little start. "Poor child! those eyes are Cousin Annie's." And she led me over the blue flagstones into the great house.

I see that old parlor now, with its carpet of broad, green palm-leaves, linking themselves through the brown ground-work, the huge, old-fashioned chairs, with buttons on the back, and the high mantel, with the faded roses and tulips in the large glass vases.

Uncle David stood at the window, leaning on his crutches. He was a very, very old man, with gray hairs struggling over his forehead.

Of his five children, Mary, the youngest, was the only one that remained to his old age.

"Why didn't Edward come in, child?" he asked, querulously, as we entered.

"He's gone on, father. He couldn't bear the sight of the old place," she answered, unfastening my bonnet-strings. "This is Annie's child."

"Bring her here, so my old eyes can see her," he cried, hastily settling his heavy silver glasses on his nose.

I remember standing close to him while he pushed away the yellow curls from my forehead and peered with his dim eyes into my face.

"She is her mother," he murmured, "every inch of her. Annie was a sweet child: it seemed, somehow, as if a great light went out of the old house, and never got back to it, when Edward took her away."

I looked up into my uncle's face, and I knew he was gazing

through the years when I was not, and that my mother—not I—was standing by his side.

The winter at Uncle David's dropped pleasantly and swiftly into spring. Aunt Mary, as I soon learned to call her, was indeed "a mother to me," and the love that had been hers who slept in the little graveyard that sloped down to the river now felt its deep current setting toward her cousin.

I soon grew used to Uncle David's whims and querulousness, and in his more genial moments I would draw the stool to his feet and listen to the stories he would tell me of my mother.

She had lived with him from her early childhood, for both her parents died before she knew them, and so she and Mary grew up as sisters in the gray old homestead.

With the opening of spring, a contagious fever visited the village, and I was among the first who succumbed to it. For three days they despaired of my life, but on the fourth my constitution rallied.

"Darling, can I do any thing for you?"

It was an April morning, bright and balmy, and I had lain for two hours watching the shadows of the plum-tree beating over the chamber-wall, when Aunt Mary came softly into the room and leaned over my pillow with those loving brown eyes which were the glory of her face. I was a convalescent, and a very peevish one too.

"It seems as if you'd been gone an age," I remarked, without heeding her question.

"I know it must, Eva, but I couldn't help it. Your uncle's last attack makes him terribly nervous, and he won't allow anybody to even pour out his tea but myself. I've been busy every moment."

Her cool fingers on my forehead, and a fresh draught of tamarind-water, dissipated my ill humor.

"Aunt Mary, won't you tell me a story,—something about your childhood?"

She stood there a few moments in perplexed thought, and then, turning to her bureau, opened the top drawer, which she always kept locked.

She returned to the bedside, bringing with her a journal, over which her eyes ran a moment hastily.

"Oh! I have brought the wrong one, and——"

"Miss Mary," interrupted the housekeeper, putting her pale face inside the door, "won't you come down-stairs quick? Your father's fell and hurt himself."

With a low cry, my aunt flung the book on the foot of the bed and rushed out of the room.

So I was left again, with nothing to do but watch the plum-tree shadows rush over the wall.

This soon grew very irksome, and I began to cast longing glances toward the book which lay at the foot of the bed.

The doctor had interdicted my reading, but I forgot this,

and the impropriety of examining my aunt's private records, in the morbid craving of my mind for some occupation.

Carefully balancing my dizzy head on one hand, I rose slowly, and, leaning forward, grasped the book with the other

I accidentally opened to the latter part of this, and the first lines entirely absorbed my attention.

Monday Evening.—It is strange, very strange, that Edward and Annie do not come. I wish I were not so restless to-night, and that this autumn wind, as it tramps through the dry corn-fields, did not have such a sigh, like that of a wounded heart.

What a chill and darkness there is upon mine to-night, as though the future were calling down to the present some prophecy of evil, and my spirit heard and *understood* it!

Nonsense! how terribly sentimental that does sound! I must be laboring under a visitation of the "blues," and I'm just going to be ridden of them.

It is a year since Edward came to us. I told him this to-day as we sat eating apples after dinner.

"So it is, isn't it, Mary?" fastening his dark, dreamy, *beautiful* eyes on my face; "and it has been the happiest of my life, too. Do you remember how feebly I came through the door yonder, expecting that in a few weeks another door would be open for me,—the door of the grave, Mary?"

"I remember, Edward: do not talk about it now."

"You are a tender-hearted little girl," he said, stroking my curls, for the tears had fallen on them.

"I remember just how you and Annie looked, and where you sat on the lounge, yonder,—she was reading and you were netting a purse."

"And you thought Annie a great deal the prettier? Now confess it, Edward." It was the half-unconscious utterance of a foolish feeling that of late had been haunting me. I was very sorry I had asked him.

He looked at me a moment, half earnest, half quizzically.

"What my first impressions were is of no consequence. There is a great charm about your face, Mary. The more one looks in it, the better do they love it."

"Thank you. So silly a question did not deserve so complimentary a reply. If I had thought twice, I should not have asked it."

"Then never think but once, my little sister. Will you be this to me always, Mary?"

Somehow the name did not sound sweetly as it used to. Was it because I had noticed he had not, of late, called Annie this? I was spared the necessity of replying by father's entrance.

"Edward," he said, "it's full five miles to the Fort, and the clouds in the west look like foul weather; and it'll take Annie at least two hours to say good-by to all the folks there, so I advise you to be off before long."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir."

But he sat still, looking dreamily into the fire, and smiling to himself. I knew his thoughts were pleasant ones. Papa rattled his paper uneasily. At last I ventured a remonstrance:—

"You know, Edward, Annie isn't very strong, and a ride in the rain might give her a cold."

He was up in an instant.

"What a lazy scoundrel I am,—or, rather, a forgetful one. And yet if you knew my thoughts, Mary, you would forgive me."

"Tell me, then, and I will."

"Not now: some other time, perhaps;" and he kissed his hand to me as he went through the door.

They ought to have been home an hour ago. Papa has gone to the window twenty times at least, looking at the gray-black clouds, and muttering to himself,—

"Careless children! Why don't they hurry along, when it's likely to pour any minute?"

Darling Annie! I am longing now for the kiss of her ripe, dewy lips upon my cheek. Hark, hark! I hear the rumble of distant wheels through the bend of the hollow. They draw nearer: they stop! Oh, that is Annie's footstep!

Tuesday Night.—Only twenty-four hours, and what an age I have lived in them! Oh, Edward! Edward! the wild cry

of my heart *must* be stifled, the moan of my great agony *must* be dumb!

I listened to her calmly. Her head—that beautiful Grecian head, with its curls of autumn-brown—was laid on my lap, and she told me of Edward's love.

No wonder the purple night-shadows hung over the mountains before they reached home.

"Oh, Mary! I am so happy I can only cry," she said, laying my hands over her wet eyes.

And I kissed and soothed her with loving words! I who had not a hope, or a joy, or a wish, left in the world!

It was well the truth came suddenly. Had it not struck out at once all the life within me, I must have betrayed myself.

"To think, Mary, I never dreamed of his entertaining for me any thing but a quiet sort of brotherly affection; and yesterday, if any one had asked me if I loved Edward well enough to marry him, I could not have answered it."

"But you could now, Annie?"

She lifted her head, and the light in her eyes was like beams shining far, far across fathomless waters, as she answered me,—

"Yes, yes, from the innermost deeps of my woman's nature, I can say now, *I love him!*"

And that look and those words silenced me forever.

They shall never dream that my heart is only a grave where the winds blow up mournful memories from the past.

And yet how I loved him! Oh, if it were not for these gushes of tenderness coming over and weakening my resolves!

I am only twenty years old, too, and God may give me a long life. Ah, me! how barren and cold and dark it reaches up the future! No wonder, though, he loved Annie better,—my sweet cousin, with her wondrous eyes, and her lips like the breaking open of crimson dahlia-buds.

I hope they will be very happy together. God, who looks down into my heart this moment, knows I do; and for me—well, He will give me strength in my weakness, and I shall go on calmly in the way He hath made for me; and my face shall wear its old light, and my voice its old gayety.

"Have you told Mary, Annie?"

Edward asked this question as he met us at the parlor-door.

"Yes, every thing."

He took my hand. "You know now, dear, of what I was thinking as we sat by the fire after dinner——"

There was a hurried foot-fall on the stairs. I knew it, and tossed the book to the foot of the bed before Aunt Mary reached the landing. I was lying back on my pillow intently studying the flowers on the paper hangings when she came in.

She glanced eagerly toward the book, but it lay in its old position, and she thought it had not been removed.

I saw her lip quiver as she returned it to the drawer and gazed down with affectionate sadness on the brown covers.

"Is Uncle David hurt?"

"No, Eva. His fall was only a slight one, though Mrs. Martin was terribly frightened."

When April lifted her sweet face over the mountains, my father returned. His winter's travel had greatly benefited him, physically and mentally.

A few days later he had a severe attack of his old headache.

Aunt Mary was suddenly called to one of the neighbors, who was ill, and he lay on the lounge, while I combed away the rich brown hair from his temples, and thought——

No matter, only a little later I went up stairs, and, taking a key from Aunt Mary's *escrioir*, unlocked the private drawer, and returned with the book which had been such a revelation to me.

"Papa, I want you to read two pages of this."

He glanced at it carelessly. "I can't, my dear. My head aches too violently now."

"But it is only two pages, and won't take ten minutes. I'll come back in that time." And, slipping the book into his hands, I left him.

When I returned he was sitting up, looking very thoughtful.

"Eva, where did you find this?"

I explained briefly.

"It was not right to avail yourself of your aunt's absence to do this. Take it away, my child."

He laid his head back on the lounge and shaded his eyes with his hands, but I saw their dark brightness was now misty with tears.

Aunt Mary returned about an hour later. She looked pale and tired. My father sprang up and removed her bonnet, smoothing her rumpled hair, and telling her that she was sacrificing her life for others.

I saw her mouth tremble as she sank into the rocking-chair: that was all. Eighteen years had the sweet face been learning the lesson of calmness.

"Mary, come and sit down here on the sofa; I want to have a long talk with you. Why, what in the world is this?" said my father, one evening, as he came into the parlor and laid his hand on the head I lifted from the sofa-back; for twilight was growing into night.

"It's only I, papa. I'm going straight out;" for I had an intuitive conviction that my presence would not then be desirable.

"Good-night, papa. Good-night, Aunt Mary." Three

hours later, when I went to the parlor and said this, I found them seated in the old place.

"Eva, dear child, how would you like to say 'MOTHER' instead of Aunt Mary?"

"Much, oh, so very much, papa!" And then I understood all about the conversation.

Five years *she* has been the happy wife of her first, last love! My step-mother! Beautiful, gentle, loving incarnation of all that is deepest and noblest and purest in woman, accept the homage of love and admiration I bring thee! And thou, O sainted mother, whose feet walk through the white radiance of the eternal meadow-lands, on whose crowned forehead now drop down the fragrant dews from mountains whose sapphire foundations tremble only to the hosannas of eternity,—thou angel-mother, look down for a moment and bless her who hath taken *thy* place unto me!

The Broken Threat.

"WHAT had we better do for the children on New Year's, Ralph? Of course they'll be expecting something in the way of enjoyment, and I don't know what in the world it shall be." And the fair young mother laid down for a moment the child's dress she was embroidering, and looked up anxiously in the face of the gentleman who sat on the opposite side of the table, deeply immersed in politics and prices.

He laid down his paper a moment. "Well, really, I don't know what to say, Jane. It's easy enough to *fudge* up something that will please them, I suppose. What did you do last year?"

"Oh, I gave them a party. But that's so much trouble; and then some of the children are sure to get sick with eating cakes and confectionary. No; another child's party is out of the question."

"Well, then, what do you think of a ride?—most likely a sleigh-ride; for the clouds were gathering heavy and fast when I came home from the office."

"That's just the thing, Ralph dear. Howard and Effie will enjoy it so much." And Mrs. Young clasped her hands with that girlish sort of grace and animation, which even maternity had not entirely banished from her manners.

"We can go down to the shore and see the skating, and they'll be as happy (precious little dears!) as birds among apple-buds all the morning. Oh, I do *hope* it will snow."

"Well, I think, my dear, your hopes will be realized before morning." And the gentleman resumed his paper and the lady her sewing, while the wind rose and clamored without, as though it was shrieking out a wild defiance to the year that was coming! coming!

"A sleigh-ride, mamma! Oh, goody! goody!" What a clapping of hands, and dancing of feet, and shouting of glad child-voices followed the announcement!

They were very pretty children, but delicate, and with rather a hothouse-plant look. Howard, a boy of seven, was two years older than his sister, and his dark eyes and curly chestnut hair were like his father's; but Effie's sunny face, with its rosy cheeks and rosier lips, was all her mother's.

"Yes, dear children, we will all go away down to the shore and round by the Park, this afternoon: the day is so very beautiful, and the snow-fall of last night has made the travelling delightful. Now, you will be very good, won't you, in view of the afternoon's enjoyment?"

"To be sure I will," stoutly affirmed Howard. "What must I do to be good?"

"You mustn't play with the fire any more, my boy; you will remember, now? I must leave you and little sister here for half an hour. Promise me, Howard, that you will not go too near the grate, nor attempt to light any papers there."

"I promise you, mother." And the boy meant it, as he put up his mouth for his mother's kiss.

Mrs. Young's "half-hour" of absence doubled and trebled itself; for she was supervising the dinner-pastry, which on this occasion was, of course, an extra matter.

Now, Howard was a restless, daring sort of a boy, delighting greatly in dangerous hap-hazard adventures, and certain to place his neck in imminent peril several times each day of his life.

He, however, behaved remarkably well this New Year's morning. He told Effie the last story he had read in the "Child's Cabinet," and then he played "*come to see you*," with commendable patience, for half an hour, seeing it was a "girls' play," and Howard had an instinctive feeling that it derogated somewhat from his dignity to join in these.

But at last the boy grew very tired; and then, while Effie sang "lullaby," he went and stood near the grate, watching the amber flames coil around the black heaps of coal.

At last he took an old paper that lay on the floor. "I'm not going to light it," he whispered, while every movement of

his restless fingers indicated plainly how they fairly *ached* to do this.

Closer and closer he drew to the flames, holding the paper nearer to the little red skeins of flame that tangled along the edge of the grate, and at last a corner of the paper caught one of these. Howard bent forward with a low, exulting cry. He had lighted the paper; he had disobeyed his mother.

Then, with his usual recklessness, he ran all about the room, laughing at his little sister, who cried out in terror, and the flame broadened and brightened along the paper, and almost scorched his hand, when he rushed with it to the grate, and a moment later there was nothing left of this to tell the story of his disobedience.

A few minutes, after Mrs. Young entered the room hastily. "Oh, you're doing nicely, children. Have you been a good boy, and not played with the fire, Howard?"

How he wished he had not done this!—as every one *must* wish, sooner or later, for the wrong-doing. But it was too late now. So all the moral cowardice rose up in Howard Young's heart. He blushed and hesitated.

"My son," said his mother, gravely, "you know what I said about the ride. Have you played with the fire?"

"No, mamma." It seemed as if a shiver had crept down into Howard's heart as his lips uttered this falsehood.

"Why, Howard, what a big story! I saw you run all

around the room with the paper burning," spoke up the soft voice of Effie.

"Howard, my child, have you told me a falsehood?" said the mother, grieved and shocked at this double disobedience of her son. His burning cheek, his drooping eyes, answered her.

Then she called him to her side, and talked to him a long time of the sin he had committed against God and his own soul. Howard was melted to tears of penitence and shame, and when his mother, rising up, said, earnestly, "You remember, Howard, that I told you you could not go with us this afternoon if you disobeyed me," he felt in his soul that, hard as was the punishment, he deserved it.

"It's too bad, after all, to disappoint the child so severely," murmured Mrs. Young, as she arranged her hair before the mirror. "I sha'n't enjoy myself one bit, thinking of the poor little fellow left here all alone. It's so natural for him to be in mischief, and maybe he didn't think when he told the story. His father knows nothing of it, and I've a good mind to run down to the nursery and tell Howard he may go."

Just then the merry "jangling" of the bells broke up into her chamber. It was more than the weak heart of the mother could bear; and so, forgetting her son's future welfare in the present good, Mrs. Young hurried down-stairs, and broke into the nursery with these words:—"There! make haste, Howard, and get your cap and shawl: I've concluded to let you go

this time, after all." She thought (the fond mother) that she was repaid, as she saw the little wistful face pressed against the window-pane brighten, and bound forward with a "hurra!"

But it was a pity the mother did not hear Howard's undertone to his sister, as they stood on the door-steps, five minutes later:—"I don't believe, after all, Effie, there's any great harm in playing with fire or telling stories either; for you see, if there had been, mamma wouldn't have said I might go in the end. Then I should like to know if she hasn't told as big a story as I have, because she said at first I should certainly stay at home!"

Oh, Howard Young, mounting with your bright face and boyish glee into the sleigh, how great a wound has the loving mother that awaits you there left upon your soul!

And now, loving, tender-hearted, self-sacrificing mother who shall read this tale, has it no lesson for you?

Remember, your daily life is writing its inerasable inscriptions upon the hearts of your children, and that you are responsible for that weak tenderness which regards more their present enjoyment than their future good,—which does not discipline and prepare them for the work and the storms that *must* come!

"Verily I say unto you, you shall not lose your reward!"

Glimpses Inside the Cars.

It was a raw, gusty November morning, with clouds of a dull, bluish-gray folded heavily over the sky, and the earth wore that sombre, dismal aspect which told, as plainly as words could have done, that her glory had departed, that the old age of another year had fallen upon her, and that nothing remained to her now but a struggling through winds and storms into December, and then a *shroud*.

An old woman and a young girl entered the cars which were plunging on to New York. They were neatly but very plainly dressed, and looked about them with that half shy, half curious manner which indicated at once they were not accustomed to travel: moreover, there was a slightly foreign air about them, and, if you are a student of national physiognomy, you would have soon settled it in your mind that they were English people.

The old woman was very pale and delicate, evidently in ill health, and there was something touching in the silvery braids of hair that were combed so smoothly over her wrinkled fore-

head, and in the mild, faded, half-sorrowful eyes that told you at once her passage through life had not been a smooth one.

But the younger woman or girl,—oh! it would have done your heart good to look on her! There was such a rich, healthful bloom on her cheeks, there was so much hope and brightness in her blue eyes, so much innocence and sweetness in the quiet smile which her lips fell into so naturally, that, gazing on her, a *good* heart could hardly help praying that the young English girl might find a very happy life in the new land to which she had come.

A few sentences must tell the history of these people. The young girl was betrothed to the old woman's only son. He had been in America for more than a year; and, as soon as the industrious young carpenter had earned money sufficient to see his way clear to provide them an humble but comfortable home, he had written over the seas:—

“MOTHER AND MARY:—

“Sell off all the old furniture, and come straight to me.”

And they had come,—those two tender, loving, trusting women, the old and the young; for Mary was an orphan, and there were no strong ties to bind her to the Fatherland.

The steamer had reached Boston three days before. They had written to Charles, informing him of their arrival, and expected that he would meet them. But he did not; and so, fearing the letter had been delayed, they started for New York.

The cars were not filled this morning, for the travelling season was over. The young girl took up a paper which some passenger had thrown down on the seat before her.

She ran her eyes carelessly over the columns. Suddenly they paused a moment: a dark terror seemed to creep into their brightness; her face settled down into a white, deathly rigidity; a cry, not loud or sharp, but deep,—oh, so very deep!—with a broken heart's agony, wavered over her lips, and she sank back, not unconscious, but stunned, paralyzed with the awful darkness those three newspaper-lines had brought down upon her life.

"What is it? what is it, Mary?" eagerly cried out the old woman, as the girl turned her dumb, stony face toward her. She did not speak; she only pointed to the paper. The old woman grasped it eagerly with her shaking hands. In a moment she too had read the lines which told how a young carpenter—Charles Davis—had fallen accidentally from the roof of a high building in New York, and was taken up *dead! dead! dead!*

It is a mercy that the mind cannot at once grasp a sudden evil,—that great shocks are usually bewildering. In this case it was so. The mother did not shriek or faint, but, with a low, shivering "God help us!" she sank back, and the cars plunged on, on, with those two white, stony faces.

Only once either spoke. A gleam of hope shot up suddenly into the mother's eyes: she seized hold of Mary's hand,

and whispered, "Perhaps it was somebody else, Mary." And Mary looked up a moment, as the drowning look up when eager hands are reached out to their rescue: then the blank despair darkened her face again, her head dropped, but it may be that for those long two hours this thought warmed away down in her heart, as it did in the mother's, and kept them both from breaking.

At last the train glided into the depôt: the passengers bustled about for their travelling-bags and bundles; but the two sat there still and motionless, as though death had suddenly stricken them.

A moment later a young man sprang hastily into the cars, and gazed, with an intense, breathless sort of eagerness on his fine, honest face, up and down the cars.

Then he bounded forward with his whole heart in his face. "Mother! Mary!" He couldn't have said another word just then. But those two! those two! If you could have seen them! "My boy! my boy! are you really alive?" ejaculated the old woman, clinging to him with her shaking hands; while Mary, forgetting all her maiden shyness in her woman's loving, murmured up, amid the happiest sobs and the sweetest tears, "Oh, Charlie! I thought you were dead!—I did!"

"No. I'm alive and kicking, you better believe," responded the hearty tones of the young carpenter, "and, oh, so glad to see you. The letter was miscarried, and I didn't get it until last night; and, as you said you should start the

third day if I didn't come on, I thought maybe I'd find you here with the morning train. I've got just the nicest kind of a home for you,—four of the snuggest little rooms,—and a new silk dress for Mary, which I'll engage she'll wear to the parson's next Saturday." And there was a significant laugh in his eyes that set Mary's pretty face all in a glow.

"But come! we won't stay here any longer. I've a whole year's talking on hand for you. Mary, you've certainly grown handsomer than ever. I'll get a carriage directly." And proudly, very proudly, he offered them each an arm, and escorted his mother and his betrothed from the cars.

"Well, I must say, it did me good to see him," said a gentleman passenger who had witnessed this scene; "but I couldn't help thinking, with a pang of pity, after all, somebody's poor 'Charlie Davis' is dead."

The Old Stove.

I CAME across it suddenly the other day, in a corner of the garret,—the old garret that I had not visited for so many years! That old stove! It was the first we ever had at our house; and what a sea of old memories surged and sparkled around that scarred, rusted, old-fashioned visage, more eloquent to me at that moment than the fairest face that ever rippled over with sparkling smiles.

How well I remember the night that it was "put up," and how we children stood at a respectful distance, almost expecting the grim, black ogre would spring after us, it looked so large, stern, and defiant; yet, after all, it's the simplest, homeliest little cylinder that ever was fashioned: but, as I sat down on the old garret-floor, and looked on it through my tears, I wished I could see with the "child-eyes" again.

What an event in our domestic annals it was, when we had a fire kindled there the first time! Our respect for the endowments and capacities of that remarkable stove was wonderfully enhanced when Cousin Charlie discovered what a capital place the top was for roasting chestnuts!

Then, in the long winter evenings, what charming stories we used to listen to as our chairs formed a semicircle about the old stove!

What an unlucky time that was, when, in the midst of my thoughtless play, I laid the back of my hand suddenly against its heated side! Oh, it was not until the dandelions began to unveil their yellow fringes among the meadow-grass, and after much of suffering, that the burn was healed. There is the long scar on my left hand still; it will be there when they lay me away in my grave. Oh, old stove! old stove! there are larger, and deeper, and sadder scars than that on my hand, that I shall carry there,—scars that are only of the heart!

And, sitting there, with the old memories surging by me, I wished I could walk back, over the years that are gone, to the time when I stood first by that old stove. How many words and deeds I could recall! What a different life the "living over" would be! And yet—can the angels answer me?—would it be *better*?

Oh, the faces of "long ago" that start out from the shadow of that old stove! Where are they now? The earth is very wide, and the grave very deep.

But I cannot turn over the great folio of memories now: only, reader, if in some hidden nook of your garret, some "mythic corner" of your cellar, there is an "old stove," go hunt it up and look at it.

The Old Rug.

"It's too bad them pine-logs should have snapped out and burned a hole in my new carpet just as I'm going to have the doctor's wife here to tea." And Aunt Rachel gazed ruefully at the large aperture in her parlour-carpet which Uncle Robert had bought for her only the previous spring, when he went to the city.

It was one of those golden, hazy, loving autumn days that are the great prizes of the year, and I had been sitting out under the apple-trees reading Charles Kingsley's poems a little, but the blue, dreamy sky, the crimson trees, and the green earth a great deal more.

I had entered the hall softly, and so heard Aunt Rachel's soliloquy, which I knew very well was not intended for my hearing, as two nights before she had kindled that unlucky fire in the parlour for my especial benefit, although I had stoutly maintained I should enjoy myself just as well sitting down with her by the great hickory-wood fire, in the large, old-fashioned kitchen. But Aunt Rachel had her own views

of the hospitality she owed to her guests, and it was of no use to oppose them.

"Can't you cover it over somehow, aunty?" The old lady started at my unsuspected proximity to the parlour, but the next moment her face brightened up wonderfully. "I never thought of that, child. There's that old rug in the closet of the spare chamber,—I was looking at it the other day. I believe it was one of Robert's mother's, he sets so much store by it, and always keeps it so carefully folded up there, though he's had it forty years. I'll just go straight up-stairs and see about it." And the notable housekeeper hurried out of the room.

In a few minutes she returned, bringing with her the large rug and panting under its weight. She spread it down before the fireplace: it was a very ingenious piece of feminine handicraft, and I examined it with a good deal of curiosity.

A large, flaming, yellow sunflower, somewhat dimmed by age, occupied each corner, while the centre was appropriated by a fierce-looking lion, of a dark gray-brown colour and remarkably lifelike expression, considering the materials with which the fair originator executed her *needle-painting*.

"How very curious, Aunt Rachel!" (turning it over and marking the infinitude of stitches which must have occupied one pair of hands for many a weary day.) "Well, certainly, our grandmothers had a gift of converting worn-out jackets

and dilapidated stockings into uses and ornaments which has never been conferred upon their descendants."

"Come, mother, where's that apple-pie? Don't you know it's lunch-time?" broke in the loud voice of Uncle Robert from the kitchen.

"Oh, come in here, please," I called out, eagerly, "and tell me who made this rug, Uncle Robert."

He strode up to the parlour-door, wiping his sunburnt face with his cotton handkerchief. But the moment his eyes rested on the rug I noticed a quick spasm contract his features: his great chin quivered a moment, and when he spoke again his voice was stern, hoarse, and low as a man's is when his whole being is shaken by some powerful emotion. "Rachel, fold up that rug and carry it back up-stairs. You can do what you like with every thing else in the house, only leave that alone."

And every tone was that of a man who *must* be obeyed.

"It's very funny," muttered Aunt Rachel, as her husband returned to the kitchen, and she proceeded in no very amiable frame of mind to fulfil his command. "I don't think it would get hurt much lyin' before the fireplace one afternoon. I rather 'spect there's more about the thing than I know; but there's no use trying to get a word out of Robert."

I quite agreed with Aunt Rachel; and yet, after Uncle Robert had finished his lunch, I followed him out to the barn. I was a great favourite with him, and, being fully aware of

this, my curiosity got the better of my politeness. "Uncle Robert," I said, coaxingly slipping my hand into his large, brawny one, "there's a secret history about that old rug, I know: won't you please tell it to me?"

He sat down on the barn-door step, and drew me into his lap: his hard, rugged features softened into something very like tenderness, and the old farmer's voice quivered with a sort of deep, sad pathos, as he said, "Charity made it,—little Charity."

"Who was Charity, Uncle Robert?"

"She was Widow Blake's daughter, my child, and we were to have been married the next spring. She made that rug—every stitch of it—with her own hands, for the home that was *never* to be ours; and afterward her mother gave it to me."

"But why weren't you married, Uncle Robert?"

"Because God called her, child. It's forty years ago since she went to her sleep under the maples; but I can see her blue eyes, and the bands of soft yellow hair round her sweet face, just as I used to see it smiling and blushing at the door on the Wednesday evenings when I went to see her."

"And you never told Aunt Rachel any thing of all this?"

"No, child, no. What would be the use? Rachel's been a good wife to me, a tender, loving mother to my children. Thirty-six years we've gone hand in hand the way of our lives together; and, though my heart's held all along the memory of her who is in heaven, I hope it hasn't wronged the living."

"Well, Uncle Robert," (dropping my head on his shoulder to hide my tears,) "I wouldn't have believed you had so much romance in you."

"Wouldn't you? Do you wonder I keep the rug so carefully now? Charity! little Charity." His voice wavered slow and tenderly over the last words.

"But nobody shall ever use that—her last work—so long as I live, so long as I live," he added, a moment later, in a low, determined voice.

"There now! get up, child; I must be off to that 'ere rye again."

And I thought, as I went up slowly, slowly to the house, how many natures, which seem to us coarse and rough, hold, after all, the "sweet music" in some solitary room of their souls, and how the white lilies of truth and love blossom fragrantly along the dark rivers of human life.

The "Making Up."

"I WISH I hadn't said it! Dear me! what would I give if I could only recall it!" murmured Mrs. Leeds, as she leaned her face down on the arm she had rested on the breakfast-table, while the thick tears sobbed up into her blue eyes.

She was a pretty little woman,—this wife of a year,—though the tears dimmed her face, and the trouble at her heart shut off the roses from her cheeks, that cheerless November morning, with the dull brownish clouds piled low about the sky, and the hoarse wind crackling and crumpling through the trees outside.

"To think, too," continued the lady, raising her head once more, and abstractedly lifting the cover off the china tea-pot "he should have spoken so crossly and sharply to me, just because I said I should like that new velvet carpet at Myers's. 'Well, I don't believe, for my part, there ever was such a thing as a woman satisfied with what she had got.' I think it was real unkind of him, anyway; and nothing in the world could have made me believe, before I married Henry Leeds,

that he would have used that tone or those words in speaking to me. But I guess I was more to blame than he, after all, for I said a good many satirical things. I almost wish my tongue had been cut off before they passed my lips; but, somehow, my temper got the better of me, and he went off without speaking one kind word, or even kissing me!" Here there was another outbreak of tears.

"He won't be home till night; and how can I ever get through this long, dreary, dismal day, knowing all the time Hal's angry with me,—he who has been such a true, generous, loving husband? How I wish I could see him just a minute, and, forgetting all my pride, wind my arms about his neck and say, 'Hal, I'm real sorry: won't you forgive me this once?'—and I *will*, too."

The pretty lady sprang up from the table, a new determination heightening the faint colour in her cheeks and bringing back the sparkle to her blue eyes.

"I'll take the omnibus and go right down to the office and make up with him. That'll be just the thing!"

The young merchant was leaning, with a weary, dejected sort of air, over his desk, about which were scattered notes, drafts, letters, in endless confusion. Something had gone wrong. His clerks knew this when he came into his store that morning, so gloomy and reticent, so thoroughly unlike his usual brisk, energetic, jovial self, that always carried sunshine into the dark warerooms. Even the porter

felt something of this, for he stood at a respectful distance from his employer, and did not indulge in any of his old, stale jokes.

Suddenly the merchant looked up, and saw his wife making her way through the store, straight to his desk. How pretty she looked that morning, in the little, tasteful velvet hat, with its crimson trimmings about her soft cheeks, that were so charmingly becoming, and that half-smile dimpling the rosy, small mouth, that he could hardly believe had said such *very* unkind things to him only two hours before!

Now, Harry Leeds was very proud of his wife, and of the evident admiration which her occasional advent at the store always excited. He rose up to meet her, the surprise in his face half chasing the cloud therefrom. She came close to him.

"Harry," whispered the soft, eager, timid voice, "I'm so very sorry I said those cross things to you this morning. I was greatly to blame, and they've made me unhappy ever since: so I've come clear down here to make up, and hear you say once more that you love me."

The cloud was all gone. There was a world of fond tenderness that looked down from those dark eyes on the lady.

"Why, bless your little heart, Adeline, you haven't come clear off here for that? I was more to blame than you,—a great deal; but some business matters were troubling me; and then I'm a touchy fellow, I guess, anyhow."

"No, you're not; but I shouldn't have lived through the day, if I had felt all the time that you were displeased with me. But *do* you love me as well as ever?"

That smile, that glance, would have satisfied any wife.

"That wife of mine's a perfect angel, anyhow," murmured Harry Leeds to himself, as he arranged his disordered desk, with a face as changed and bright as the sky outside, for the sun had suddenly plunged through the clouds. "If we have pretty good sales this week, I'll just get her that carpet for a Christmas present: see if I don't."

Next To Me.

I WENT by it the other day—the old school-house: how natural it looked! The red-brown front, with the two square windows, and here and there a broken pane of glass. Then, the two great butternut-trees that grew across the road, and the cross-old maid that always came out with her broom when we boys went over with our green wooden pails to draw water. I can see her now, thin and angular, with those pale, wintry sort of lips that no smiles could make sweet and lovable, standing in the front-door of the small yellow house. Poor soul! we boys were each, in her estimation, an incarnation of all sorts of evil; and I am sure we cordially reciprocated her good opinion by the pranks we used to play her dog and two cats, (the sole members of her household;) and yet, stern, harsh woman that she was, far away up a great many pairs of winding stairs in her heart was a door, and on that door was written “*woman.*”

There was the play-ground, too, with the white rails running all round it and the grass worn short by the children's feet. Ah me! how the old pictures shine away off there in that

far land, that strange, wondrous land of which we catch blessed gleams and glimpses through all the after-life,—the land of boyhood!

The old school-house! The outside is unchanged, but what is *in* there? The same line of brown and black and golden heads running parallel with the desks ranged round the walls. Who has the one in the corner now, I wonder? *It was *my* desk, and hers was next *then*! It is mine now, and hers is next still, in that back-country to which my thoughts have taken passage. I see her there now, the curls rolling in shining billows to her waist, and the face that looks out from them,—oh, it is fair as the sweetest dream of Raphael that I ever looked on. The dimples float round the small, moist lips, that look like nothing in the world but a half-open rose-bud with the dew fresh upon it, and the eyes,—sometimes, between the crimson ravelling of two sunset clouds, I catch fragments of blue heaven that are like unto them.

Ah me! to think how the sunshine used to “come to school,” as we called it, every afternoon, and lie down on the bare boards, and laugh up in our faces, and set us to thinking about the trees and the springs in the cool woods till we forgot all about our lessons.

Oh, the thousand and one times she has whispered the right letter in some long word, and saved my hands from an intimate acquaintance with the ferule,—that redoubtable object that always lay in such a prominent position on the teacher's

desk. "*Next to me!*" How I used to think sometimes, very dim and vaguely as boy's thoughts always are when they look away off into the great future of *mandom*—that she might be next to me through life. What nice times we used to have when we had obtained permission to study our Geography together, and what a subject of internal congratulation it was with me that there was but one map between us. The nuts I used to slip into her apron pocket, and the apples that went into the north-east corner of her desk, and secured "private lodgings" between Murray and Mitchell, would take long to tell of. What hair-breadth escapes we used to have, too, between the sharp eyes of the teacher, and the "tell-tales" on either side, and that great threatening ferule laid—like a mighty man asleep—on the desk.

"*Next to me!*" A score and a half of times have the June suns risen and set since she was there, and I wonder if the little girl who occupies her seat now has golden hair and blue eyes, and if she—no matter, my eyes are growing moist while I think about it, for a little green hillock in the sunniest corner of the country churchyard has risen before me. There is a slab at its head, and it simply says,

"NELLIE! AGED 12."

That tells the whole story. To think of the blue eyes, the dimpling cheeks, the laughing month, being *grave dust*.

But while these have been growing into this, it may be that

a bright spirit has been wandering among the golden lilies which I always dream are plaiting the shores of the "*River of Life*." She may have been to school *there* too, but her teachers have been the angels, and her blue eyes have never grown weary of those lessons.

I was so far "above her" in the old school-house, and now she is so far beyond me in that "unknown lore," but I love to think that some time I too shall enter that great class of "the just made perfect," and study the new pages of the Great Author. Then it may be, sitting in some green valley, whose blossoms deepened to their eternal beauty before the trees of Eden first bowed themselves to the breezes of earth, I shall find her as of old, "*Next to me.*"

Only a Dollar.

"ONLY a dollar, Charlie."

"Only a dollar, eh?" said the young husband, with a smile, as he placed one foot on the rung of his wife's chair, while she leaned her elbow on his knee, and watched him open the steel clasps of his pocket-book. A solitary note and a few loose pieces of silver were all that presented themselves.

"Lucky enough, Adeline, that your demands are so small, this noon," said Mr. Huntley, as he unrolled the crumpled paper, "for I settled a debt of fifty dollars before I came home in a hurry to see you."

"Say rather to see your dinner," answered the pretty wife, as she put up a mouth like a rose-bud for a kiss.

"Well, pussy, I guess 'twas a little of both, for you better believe I was hungry. Here, take this too;" and he emptied the silver into the rosy palm. "Won't this do till supper time?"

"Oh, yes! You see I've nothing in the world to purchase, but I owe a dollar to that poor woman who brought home my

muslin wrapper, and I told her she should have the money to-day for sure and certain, as Bridget says."

She was a charming little wife, and the young merchant thought so, or he would not have lingered another half-hour by her side when he knew so well he ought to be at his store. But there was a strange magnetism in the pretty face—in the dainty movements of the restless, graceful head—in the light talk, that reminded one of a humming-bird, as it fluttered over the sweet lips. And all these things held the husband like so many chains until, at last, with a desperate effort he seized his hat, pressed his lips upon the fair forehead, and hurried away.

"Och, sure, ma'am, they're the most beautiful strawberries, as big as my thumb and as red as a rose in June; and, sure, the man's at the door with his basket piled full of the same."

"Strawberries, Bridget! I had no idea they were ripe so early;" and Mrs. Huntley hurried to the door.

It was enough to make anybody's mouth water to look at them; and Mrs. Huntley's certainly did, as the man lifted a basket of the ripe, delicious fruit, saying,—

"Seventy-five cents, ma'am, and the first of the season."

"It's a *dreadful* price," murmured the young wife, "and then I owe the only dollar I have by me to that poor woman. How provoking! Charlie's so fond of strawberry cake, and I could make such a beautiful one out of two of those baskets; and what a delightful surprise it would be at supper! But

that woman; no matter, I'll give her something for having to wait. Bridget, here, run up-stairs and get my purse on the table."

A moment later, and the bill and the silver were poured into the hard palm of the strawberry man.

"You're not going away, mamma. Please do not go away and leave Willie alone;" and the sick boy lifted his arms appealingly from the hard pallet on which he lay, while the fever flush deepened in his hollow cheeks, and the fever light brightened in his dark eyes.

"It is only a little while, Willie, and mamma will buy some bread and make you a nice piece of toast when she comes back; and my boy shall sit up by the fire, and have a cup of warm tea too, and some medicine to make him well again, Mamma's going to get a whole dollar, and she'll spend it every bit for her darling," said the mother, as she leaned fondly over her child, and drew the folds of the old quilt tighter around him.

One kiss, full, oh! so very full of motherly tenderness, and the sick boy lay all alone in that dark, destitute room, where the pale spring sunshine looked in coldly on the ashes that were smouldering on the hearth.

"Please, ma'am, there's a woman at the door as has come for the dollar she says yourself promised her to-day."

"Goodness, Bridget!" A little shadow of a cloud came over the bright forehead of the lady—"I spent the last cent in the house for these strawberries, and I can't leave this cake to see her now, either. Tell her to call again to-morrow; she shall certainly have it, and more too."

"Och, Mrs. Huntley, but you ought to have seen the look on her face, when I told her you'd not the money to-day! Surely, that puir thing's in throuble of some kind, it's plain enough to be seen," said the rather loquacious Bridget to her mistress when she returned to the kitchen.

"Oh, dear! if I had known; but the strawberries are bought, and it can't be helped now. I'll make it all right with her to-morrow, Bridget." And Mrs. Huntley showered the berries on the daintily-fashioned cake, and hummed a sweet tune to the swift motion of her hands, and the little shadow of a cloud went out from her brow.

Three days had passed.

"What can be the reason," murmured Mrs. Huntley to herself, as she sat in her dressing-room, "that Mrs. Gray has not called for the dollar I promised her the next day! I have laid by two for her, as Mrs. Macy told me they were very poor; and as I am intending to call on the lady this afternoon, I will learn the residence of Mrs. Gray, and take this myself; for somehow that woman's non-appearance troubles me."

"Goodness, what a place! I had no idea she was so wretchedly poor," murmured to herself the lady with gracefully plumed hat, and shawl of strange, gorgeous devices, wrought in the looms of the Indies, as she carefully picked her way up the rickety, dilapidated stairs wherein dwelt Mrs. Gray.

She reached the door to which she had been directed, and, having knocked several times without receiving any answer, she gently lifted the latch and looked in. The bloom went out from the lady's cheek at the scene which that half-open door revealed.

In the centre of the wretched apartment stood a small deal table, on which was placed a coffin, and bending over this, every feature of her haggard face written with a history of terrible suffering, was Mrs. Gray. A moment later, she raised her eyes and confronted those of her appalled visitor.

A startling change came over the woman's face. She stepped swiftly, quietly from the coffin to the side of Mrs. Huntley, and laying her hand on the lady's arm, said, in a low, hoarse voice,—

"Come with me."

The two stood together before the coffin, and then removing the white cloth from the face of the boy that was hers no longer, Mrs. Gray pointed to him, and said slowly, sternly,—

"Mrs. Huntley, he was all I had, and he is dead, and God will hold you responsible, for you have killed him. The

dollar that you promised me, and then withheld, would have saved his life; and when other help came, it was too late."

"Oh! forgive me! forgive me! Mrs. Gray. If I had only known," ejaculated the lady in broken tones, while the tears poured down her cheeks.

And Mrs. Gray looked on her visitor, and the sternness went out from her features, and the muscles round her compressed mouth relaxed; she turned to the dead child, and put away tenderly the rich brown curls that lay in thick clusters on his marble forehead.

"Ay, they can all weep for you now, my boy," she said—"all but your mother, who has not shed a tear since they took away your little arms from her neck. Oh! Mrs. Huntley," she continued, and the pathos of a breaking heart was in every word, "he was my child, my Willie, my treasure, and I loved him just as well as you could love yours, though you decked him with jewels and nursed him in luxury, while I had not a crust to give him when he cried to me for food. Oh! Willy! my beautiful, my darling, you are gone, you are gone, and I would have died to save you!"

"Yes, Henry, I have left nothing undone for that poor woman's comfort, and she seems calm and more resigned now; but oh! I would give all I possess to bring back that dead boy;" and with a fresh burst of remorseful tears, Mrs. Huntley laid her head on her husband's shoulder.

He put his arm around her.

"Don't cry, darling," he said, "you meant no harm. besides, it was all done for love of me, and though the matter has ended so unhappily, we have, I trust, both learned a lesson for the future."

"Yes, and one I shall never forget," said the young wife, lifting her dark, tear-filled eyes to her husband. "It is never to say, 'Go, and come again,' to those whom I employ. Oh, I never knew before the worth of 'Only a dollar.'"

The Temptation and the Triumph.

"TO-MORROW! to-morrow, Bertha! I can't realize it. I wish I could."

I said it probably more to myself than to her, as we stood together that night by the low stone wall that bounded the great wheat-fields on the south of us. Rosy clouds filled the west—soft blushes of the June day, as she went down to meet the night; and the wind crumpled through the long wheat grass, and tangled up the soft hair of Bertha Clarke, as she stood by my side. I see her now, just as, lifting my eyes, I saw then her face half turned toward me, her blue eyes seeming to look off into the future rather than at the distant hills. She was not beautiful, but her pale, pure profile shaded by the rich hair, the full, dimpling, expressive mouth, all make a very fair picture in my memory, as they would in yours, if you had seen her standing there swinging her straw hat, or unconsciously winding the blue ribbons round her fingers.

"It is very hard, too, for me to understand it, Mercy. It is the last night I shall be Bertha Clarke!" Her eyes were serene, but her voice was mournfully soft as she said it.

"And you are happy, Bertha? Let me go back to my home with your solemn assurance of this, holden close to the heart that has so loved you."

She turned her pale, sweet face towards me, its earnestness striking out the half-dreamy smile of her lips and eyes. "Yes, Mercy, I am happy—quietly, contentedly so. Mr. Abbott will be to me the kindest of friends, the tenderest of husbands, and his heart will only be the stronger for me to lean on because of the years that have gone over his head."

"And he has promised to bring you back to us every summer?"

"To be sure he has, my darling. When the trees are white with apple-blossoms, I shall come to Meadowbrook. Oh, you do not know how good, how noble, Mr. Abbott is! His wealth will make mother and the children very happy; and every night, when I lie down in the palace home he has promised me, I shall look off to the little gray cottage, and bless God that the hearts within it know neither care nor sorrow!"

"And it is for them, you noble-hearted girl, you are sacrificing yourself, though you know it not," I mentally soliloquized, as I drew my arms around her.

"I shall miss you very much, my Bertha." The words

may not express a great deal, but the sobs that broke through them did.

"Now, Mercy, dear heart, you will quite unnerve me, you know you will; and I've so much to go through with to-morrow. I'm saving all my tears for that long ride to the depot." But they dashed down fast into my hair, even while she was speaking.

We both grew quiet again in a little while, for the lengthening of the shadows warned us it was time to separate,—not for a night or day, as in the heretofore, but for weeks or months—it might be for a year!

"Bertha," I said, breaking at last into the silence which had come over both of us, "now that we are about to part, I *must* speak the thought that lies so deep in my heart, though you solemnly interdicted all mention of it. Alison will come back some day—I know he will; and, for the sake of the old times, will you not leave me some message for him?—some message of remembrance or good-will, sanctified by this, the last night of your maidenhood?"

My arm was around her, and I felt the sudden shiver that struck through her frame. I looked up in her face; it had grown very white; and the proud, beautiful mouth was quivering with the outbreak of the old memory voices in her heart. That shiver and that look were to me a sufficient revelation.

"Mercy"—oh, how mournful was the voice of the bride

elect!—"tell Alison that I left him a host of good wishes for his future," (here the pride that was a part of her being bridled her graceful head, and gathered strength into her tones,) "and that Bertha Clarke prays he may find a bride as fair and loving as her husband is noble and tender. Hark, Mercy! those are carriage-wheels, and they are taking the road to our house! It must be Mr. Abbott. He wrote he would be here in the night train, if possible; and how it will look if I am not there to receive him! Good-by, my dearly beloved."

There were hurried kisses, alternating with half-sobbed prayers and blessings, and so we parted.

Alison Hunt was my own cousin; but brothers and sisters seldom love each other with more tenderness than did we. He was an orphan four years my senior, and we had grown into our youth together, for my parents took their nephew to our home when his own were laid under the autumn grass; and, as I was all God had given them, he was like another child to their hearts.

Alison was ardent, proud, impulsive, a favorite with all who knew him. He had many virtues and some faults, but his heart was a true, a great, a noble one. He was not handsome, but his eyes were beautiful, and so were the warm, tinted curls that clustered over his brow, and so was the smile whose tender beauty he caught from the lips of the mother he could not remember.

Bertha Clarke and I were playmates in our childhood, and friends in our youth. I do not know where Alison and herself first learned the great solemn lesson of their mutual love; but I know one April evening, when the sweet faces of the stars were half smothered in clouds, they said, standing in the wide, old hall of Bertha's home, "We will walk together until death put us two asunder."

Ah me! while the angel wrote those words in the everlasting records, the shadow of death was drawing nearer to the gray old homestead, and, in less than two weeks, its darkness was over it! Bertha Clarke's father was stricken with a fever in the noon of his life, and his wife was a widow, and his children orphans.

Bertha was the oldest of the family; and, in less than a month after his death, it was discovered that Farmer Clarke had left his family only the gray stone cottage that sheltered them.

He had been a kind, indulgent husband and father, with no great amount of energy, loving his library better than his farm, caring rather for the present than the future.

Mrs. Clarke was an invalid, with a gentle, vine-like nature that could never meet or brave out the adverse storms of life; and the care of the whole family seemed to devolve upon the young girl whose life was coming into its twentieth summer.

Mr. Clarke's youngest sister had also resided with him since the date of her widowhood. She had been very beautiful in

her youth, but her naturally fine disposition had been nearly ruined by over-indulgence and ill-judged tenderness.

At nineteen, Rowena Clarke eloped with a young physician, whose handsome person and outward showy accomplishments were his only recommendation. A few years of mutual disappointment and unhappiness followed. The young husband died suddenly, and Rowena Heaton, a mere wreck of her former loveliness, returned to her brother; for, in less than a year after her ill-starred marriage, both her parents slept in the village churchyard.

The watchful tenderness of her brother brought back some of the old bloom to the widow's cheeks, some of the old sparkle to her smiles, but her spirits seemed never to entirely recover their tone, and she was at times restless, querulous, dissatisfied.

Of course, Bertha found no strength or help in her aunt, and she was obliged to depend wholly upon her own energies in this emergency. They did not fail her. She procured a tolerably remunerative situation as teacher in the academy where she had been educated, and her mother made a few spasmodic attempts at needle-work. But it was Bertha alone who kept the family from actual want.

I always believed that Alison suffered more than his betrothed did at this juncture. His proud spirit could not brook the thought that Bertha was thus wearing away the best, brightest years of her life. But these trials seemed to

evolve the young girl's true character; and never before had I understood its depth, its earnestness, its self-abnegation. Alison was completing his professional studies, and the marriage was postponed for two years. Oh, for those two years was written in time *forever!*

It was in the early summer that Mr. Abbott came to Meadowbrook for the benefit of its mountain breezes. He was a distant cousin of Dr. Blakeslee, a retired merchant and a millionaire. He was a tall, fine-looking, well-preserved gentleman, not much beyond fifty; and I believe he was enamored of Bertha on their first meeting. He was a frequent and always a welcome guest at the gray stone cottage, for he was an intelligent and agreeable companion. Mr. Abbott was older than Bertha's mother, too; no wonder the young girl received his chivalric attentions with the deference and gratitude of a child.

It was in the summer vacation that she went to pay a visit to some distant relatives of her mother twenty miles from Meadowbrook. The stage route communication with Stanton was a circuitous and very tiresome one.

"It would afford me unspeakable pleasure to carry your daughter over in my buggy, with your permission, my dear madam," very diplomatically concluded the urbane gentleman.

"Thank you, Mr. Abbott," was the flattered mother's response: "I shall be very happy to place Bertha in your care;

and she will enjoy the ride so much better than in that lumbering old stage,—poor child!"

And Bertha went; and that visit wrought her destiny.

"Why, Al, what is the matter? You are white as a ghost!"

"Nothing; nothing at least that I can tell you, Mercy." And he drew me back from the parlor door where I had gone to meet him, and half pushed me into the large easy-chair which always stood in the darkest corner of the old parlor. How he looked at me that moment, as he sank down with a groan, the fullest of agony I ever heard, and laid his head in my lap! The warm, bright curls were crushed over his throbbing temples; the muscles of his proud mouth trembled with the unspoken emotions that stormed through his heart; and so he lay there for a whole hour, sometimes pressing my hand as I wound it through his hair, and only once whispering, "Do not speak to me now, Mercy, darling sister: I am very weak. By and by I shall be stronger."

At last he rose and went up to his own room. He was gone about an hour; and I sat at the window, my heart aching for his sorrow, while the sunset purpled the great crumpled clouds in the west.

"Mercy"—I started quickly, for my cousin had returned so softly I had not heard him—"I must leave you now. Do not question me. I shall walk to the depot. Here is a letter

for Bertha Clarke. Give it to her for my sake when she returns. Mercy, sweet, loving sister of my boyhood, farewell!" A kiss quivered down upon my forehead with the last words, and Alison was gone.

I should scarcely have realized that I had seen him at all but for the letter I held in my hand. He came to us on the morning of that day, learned through me of Bertha's absence, had paid a visit to the gray stone cottage, and this was all I knew.

His wild white face came back to my dreams that night, but no angel leaned over the radiant hills and whispered that secret in my ear which might have made the happiness of two hearts.

I called at Bertha's home the next day, and left the letter with her Aunt Rowena. I did not observe how eagerly she grasped it, but I remembered it afterwards.

The next day I learned the young teacher had returned home and was ill. Of course I lost no time in hurrying to her. She sat by the chamber-window in her large easy-chair, with the great peach-tree shadows sweeping heavily over her. I had stolen up very softly, and my footfalls on the oaken staircase had sent up no prophecy of my coming.

Her head leaned against the back of her chair, her eyes were closed, and the long, rich, loosened hair brushed and fluttered against her cheeks. She seemed changed,—I could not tell how; but I know now there was a great light struck

out of her heart and her face. She was the old Bertha, though, when I went in and laid my head in her lap. Once I spoke of Alison. I felt rather than saw the change that came suddenly over her.

"Mercy," she said, low and hoarsely, "from this time henceforward his name must not be spoken by either of us. Our engagement is broken. The past is a book closed up and locked away, and no fingers, however loving, must open it."

The mournful pride of her voice—oh, you cannot guess it, for *you* did not hear the soft lips of Bertha Clarke pronounce her doom!

Two years later, by the stone wall of the broad wheat-fields, we parted.

The next morning, before the winds had shaken the dew from the meadow-grass, they bound up in her hair, with fragrant orange-blossoms, the rich bridal veil; and, in the old church where five generations of her fathers had worshipped, Bertha Clarke became the bride of the millionaire. She did not stain her heart with a lie when she vowed to love unto death the man who might have been her father, for she did with the tenderness of a child; and she was true to her marriage covenant.

Four years had passed. It was in the early autumn, and the long, yellow corn-blades were sweeping the ground: the

white harvests had been gathered into the barns; and every night the west was embossed with crimson and golden clouds. Alison and I sat by the window in the sitting-room where we parted. His smile had the old, bright tenderness, but his face had taken a darker shade from the suns of California.

For three years we had quite lost sight of him. Then came a letter for me, followed by several others, the last announcing his speedy return.

So we sat at the window on the third day of his arrival, and talked of the past, while he plucked the red buds from the sweet-brier vine, or laid the dark, fragrant leaves against my curls.

"But it all happened last winter in New York while I was visiting Mrs. Abbott."

It was the first time I had alluded to Bertha since his return; and I remember how my heart beat as I purposely concluded some little gossip with this sentence.

"Ah, do you visit *her*, Mercy? Does she seem happy?" How much constrained eagerness there was in this question!

"Yes; quietly so. Once every year she comes to Meadowbrook; and every year I go to her. She is greatly admired; and her husband is very proud and tender of her, surrounding her outward life with every grace and luxury. By-the-by, I ought to have sent down to Mrs. Clarke's to-day. Her sister-in-law has been very ill: they thought her dangerously so yesterday."

I heard the garden-gate open sharply, and, looking out, saw Bertha's youngest brother hurrying up the walk. I met him at the door.

"Is Mr. Hunt here?" he asked, eager and breathless.

"Yes. But, Charlie, what's the matter? How white you look! Come in, and tell us how your aunt is."

"She's dying, Mercy: the doctor says so! and she's sent for Mr. Hunt in a great hurry. We learned last night he'd returned. She says she can't die till she's had a long talk with him. Please find him and tell him to make haste, or he'll be too late." And quick tears hurried out of the boy's bright eyes.

Half an hour later, Alison Hunt stood by the dying bed of Rowena Heaton. She and the autumn day were leaving the world together.

"Alison," gasped the lips growing white with the death-chill, "I cannot take to the judgment the sin that lies so black and hard on my soul. Bertha Clarke never wrote that letter which I told you she did, saying that she wished her engagement broken because you were poor; and that her heart asked rather for Mr. Abbott's wealth than your love. *I forged it* while she was in Stanton, and told you she wrote it to me."

The young man seized hold of the bedpost with his shaking hands, weak as a little child.

"It was not all selfishness," moaned the dying woman. "I

thought the end almost sanctified the means. We were very poor, and Bertha was wearing away her life in her school. I knew Mr. Abbott's wealth would bring us all quiet and happiness. Oh! it was more for the wife and the children of the brother, who had cared for me so tenderly, that I thought, than for myself. Forgive me, Alison Hunt, as you will one day ask God to forgive you."

"Yes, forgive her as I do," murmured a low, sweet voice at the door. And the dying woman and the stricken man looked up and saw Bertha Abbott as she came through the open door. And her white face shone on them like an angel's. They had telegraphed to her of her aunt's illness, and the private carriage which brought her had outstripped the stage. She came softly up the back-stairs, without announcing her arrival; and she had heard the dying confession of her aunt.

Alison Hunt and Bertha Abbott, the wronged, clasped hands over the wronger, and, as the daylight went over the hills, and the life-light out of the dying woman's eyes, their voices followed her spirit out into the dark valley,—*"We forgive you."*

Two years more had gone. In one of the dimly-lighted alcoves, curtained off from her magnificent parlor, sat Mrs. Abbott, and by her side was Alison Hunt. I had been ill all day, and was in my own chamber; for at this time I was visit-

ing Bertha. I remember I was strangely restless and uneasy, changing my position constantly, though I occupied Bertha's favorite easy-chair, which Mr. Abbott, who was quite a connoisseur in upholstery, pronounced unrivalled. The growing intimacy between my cousin and Bertha greatly troubled me. Mr. Abbott was not a jealous husband, and his perfect confidence in his wife prevented his being an exacting one. Alison was a favorite with him; and he countenanced the intimacy which had begun the year before, when the young lawyer came to New York. But I knew, as he did not, all the past, and felt this friendship must only result in unhappiness to both.

"Mr. Abbott is gone to Boston, and they are quite alone," I murmured to myself, "and it is but natural their thoughts should together go back to the days it is but a mockery to remember. I will speak to Bertha to-morrow on this subject, and, in the name of our long love, bid her look into her own heart, and see if her feet be not wandering near a precipice." They were indeed nearer than I had dreamed; for that night, as I said, sitting under the gilded branches of the chandelier, clasping the little hands that lay on Bertha's lap, Alison talked of the past; and his companion listened, crushing down the tears into her aching heart.

"I never think of you as *his* wife," murmured the deep tones of the young man; "though I know you are legally his.

We belong to each other. We have kept our heart-pledge, my Bertha, have we not?"

"Hush! Alison! it is wrong. I must not listen to such words." But the chiding was very gentle, very mournful.

He leaned down, and looked through the tears into her blue eyes. He drew her head on his shoulder. "You will not reprove me for this when our hearts are married to each other, my beloved? It was a lie that separated us. I wrote you that letter dissolving our engagement, believing you false to me; and you went to the altar equally deceived. Oh, Bertha, Bertha, this moment you are more *my* wife than that of Harvard Abbott!"

She lifted up her white hands deprecatingly. "Don't, don't, Alison!" But the words broke into a sob, and the tears fell through her fingers. And then, forgetting the teachings of his youth, forgetting the honor of his manhood, in that hour of sore temptation, Alison Hunt wrapped his arms about Bertha's waist, and besought her to fly with him. Very fair was the home that he painted in his low, eloquent tones for his only love; very beautiful the poem to which their lives should be set in that far, sunny land whither he would take her. There no reproaches should meet her; new, loving, and sympathetic friends should gather about her, and the past should be a memory laid away, as the earth lays off the white folds of winter for the green christening of summer.

And Bertha's heart drank in each loving word. The

reasoning seemed very plausible; and in his shining garments the tempter stood very near the soul of Bertha Abbott. Her head leaned a little closer to the young man's breast, and her lips had almost echoed the thought of her heart,—“I will go with you unto death, my beloved.” Then, over the wild storm in Bertha's soul, came the memory of the sweet night-prayer of her childhood,—“Lead us not into temptation.”

The bright robes of the tempter drooped slowly before these words; and the SIN with which she was about to stain her life stood in its darkness and deformity before her.

There was a short but fierce struggle between the good and the evil in the soul of Bertha Abbott. The voices of her heart pleaded loud and lovingly. The life Alison painted beckoned radiantly up the future. But the right—oh, I love to write it!—*the right triumphed!*

She gently put away those loving arms, rose up, and answered calmly, with her white lips, “I cannot go with you, Alison, for it would be sin,—sin written and read against us at the judgment. We will walk on in the way God has appointed, though it be in tears, in weakness, and in suffering, till He takes us home, my beloved.”

Her quivering lips pressed their last kiss on his forehead, and she was gone.

“Mercy! Mercy! pity me!” The voice was very full of wild, touching, helpless pathos as it broke into my room; and a moment later Bertha Abbott's white face was laid in my lap.

She told me all then,—her weakness and her strength, her temptations and triumph; and together at the end we knelt down and thanked God who giveth us the victory.

Two years later, she went home, dying, not of a broken heart, but stricken suddenly by a fever. I stood, with the husband that idolized and the friends that loved her, by her deathbed.

“I am very willing to go. I shall place my hands in Death's quietly as I would in yours,” she said, looking round on us, while a smile, sweet as a seraph's, beamed over her dying face. Then she bowed her bright head on her husband's bosom; and the long, rich hair that swept against his shoulder was all they gave back to him of Bertha Abbott.

The next year Alison returned from Europe, whither he had gone immediately after his last interview with Bertha. He brought with him his fair-haired English bride, her sweet face hardly yet putting on the bloom of womanhood. He loves her very tenderly, and he is as happy a husband and father as I am wife and mother now. But sometimes, when we sit by the old window, and he plucks the sweet-brier buds from the vine, as he did long ago, he says, “Bertha waits for me in the beyond, Mercy; and, through the discipline, the darkness, and the trials of life, I am walking unto her.”

And, oh, do you think that Bertha, angel-crowned, has repented of her struggle and her sacrifice here? She has

walked the still road that leads from the sepulchre to the seraphim. She dwells now under the shadow of the great mountains whose heights shall never put off the crimson glories of eternity.

And for you, the tempted and tried of her sisterhood, has she left the shining text of her earth-life,—“Go thou and do likewise.”

Extracts from a Valedictory Poem.

THEY wait for thee : through many a home
Ripples the gladsome sound :—“they come !”
And go—the rich pearls of the past
Have dower’d the present : hold them fast.
Fill up with kindly word and deed
The lives that from our gaze recede ;
And when the day is sloping down
To the night-shadows, dim and brown,
May all our pathways meet the one
Which reaches toward that upper home,
Where the sweet May-wind ever flows
Like a low ballad, through the snows
Of the white blossoms, as they lie
Round the fair meadow-lands on high.
There may we meet :—Go forth to take
Whate’er the future brings, and wait
Calmly, and patiently, and well,
Till the last summons come,—farewell!

December.

THE white Omega of the year! Bare and cold it comes to walk the earth, lifting up its awful voice in that "Lamentation" with which the year goes down to the dead.

It is a very, very sad thought that all the sweet songs of spring, the beauty of summer, and the poetry of the autumn, must end in a wail and a dirge, just as all the youth and beauty and poetry of life must end in death! Yet the "life" is beyond, just as the morning follows the night and the new year follows the old.

The golden threads wind and brighten through all the dark woof of our humanity. Christmas, the great Birthday, the "good-will to man," sheds its warmth and glory over the cold and gloom of December.

So our hearts can sing hopefully, through the storms that are coming,—

"Oh, the sweetest stars are made to pass
Over the face of the darkest night."

THE END.