

WHILE IT WAS MORNING.

Wm. C. Calkins

WHILE IT WAS MORNING.

BY

VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.

19

“We say to ourselves ‘Might have been,’ as if all eternity were not ‘To Be.’”

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UNTO
EMILIE,
MY BELOVED SISTER,
WHO SANG HER FIRST SONG WITH THE ANGELS,
APRIL THIRD, EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SEVEN,
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY
THE AUTHOR.

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CHAPTER I.

"NOTHIN'."

"What now? You don't mean to say you ain't doin' nothin' at all?" And Seth Robbins laid down the sprig of willow from which he was stripping the bark, and looked up at me, with his small, sharp, blue eyes, set under his shaggy eyebrows, as though my face must corroborate my statement before he received it.

"Yes, I do, Seth, and Aunt Keziah said, 'if I would tie up all the hop vines nice this mornin', she'd let me have all the rest o' the day till milkin' time to myself.' So I'm goin' off into the woods and over to Grape Falls."

"You don't say, now? I reckon that's real nice. How old are you, though?"

"Fifteen."

"Fifteen!" Seth laid down the last twig he had peeled, and looking up once more, surveyed me leisurely from head to foot. "Well, I must say you're about the smallest chance of a fifteen year old girl I ever set my two eyes on. Why, you wouldn't pass for more than twelve, anyhow. You must pick up faster than this, for you're e'en a-most a woman."

"I know it, Seth. Aunt Keziah says she shall put me to the cheese pressin' before long."

"Not quite stout enough for that yet," said Seth, returning to his work. "Well, what sort of a woman are you goin' to make?"

I have often asked myself whether an angel leaned down, and dropped this question into Seth Robbins's mind, as he sat under the swamp willows, that afternoon! I cannot tell you; but I do know that those words, for the next five years, never ceased their deep solemn utterance through my soul. My life has since answered Seth Robbins's question—my lips could not then.

So I twirled the string of my calico sun-bonnet round my finger, and muttered, "I don't know."

"Wall, I hope you'll make a smart, thorough goin' one, like Aunt Keziah, anyhow," continued the old bachelor, as he stood up, and shook off the splinters of bark from his brown homespun trowsers. "Quite a heap of twigs there," surveying almost affectionately the peeled bundles that lay on the ground. "I must get 'em down to the basket-maker's afore night. Hope you'll have a good time off in the woods." And gathering up his twigs, he went one way, and I another, that bright June afternoon.

He was an old man, disabled by sickness and age for all hard labor. He lived with his widowed sister and her family, about half a mile from Stonecliff. He was a very good specimen of a Yankee, keen, shrewd, industrious, and with that facility for all kinds of handicraft, which especially distinguishes the people of New England from any other.

A little way from the swamp willows, which filled the hollow, the path struck up into the woods. It is nearly two miles to

Grape Falls, and the sunshine broke through the trees overhead, and scattered itself along the shadows about my feet, like beautiful deeds running through a sad life; and the wind shook playfully along the green boughs, and the deep, tender, loving heart of nature beat all around me.

But I didn't *feel* it then, as I should the day before. There was a waking up, a stirring, and a clamoring of voices within me, that drowned the outward harmony, and I could hardly believe it, when I reached the little laughing fall, whose waters sheeted over the elbow of the rock into a sort of natural vase hollowed beneath it, and rimmed round one side with wild, thick grape-vines. I sat down near the fall, under a clump of hazel bushes, threw off my bonnet, and my thoughts took a far journey down into the past, and out into the future; but, after all, they lingered longest with the Present. The Present that stood up before my soul, so strong, and vast, and terrible, and, looking down on me, said mockingly, as though it were a madness and an impossibility, "*Conquer me!*" And I answered it with a hopeless sigh; and then something rose up in my soul, and whispered "*Try.*"

"But what can I do?" speaking aloud to myself, "I am nothing but Aunt Keziah Frost's chore girl, without a friend or relation in the world; and all that lies before me is work, work, work; just as I've done ever since I was eight years old.

"Oh, dear! dear! dear! I wonder what it is in here just where my heart is, that seems sometimes like a great smotherin' weight, sometimes like a long crampin' and achin', that I don't understand. I want to know something; to be greater, and better, and higher than I am; and I shall die if I don't. I know I shall, and I wish I could!

"Oh, it would be so much sweeter to lie under the summer grass, close by mamma, with the winds hummin' like sweet, tangled-up music, through the old locusts, that stand by the graveyard wall, and the birds singin', and the sunshine dimplin' all around us—it would be so much sweeter than this dreadful drudgin', draggin', dreary life, at Aunt Keziah's! I'm tired to death of milkin', and spinnin', and churnin'; but if I should say a word, I'd catch such a scoldin', and a pair of boxed ears, that would make me see stars for an hour afterwards. Yet there's something different in me that wants to come ont. I ain't made of the same *stuff* she is, I know. Why, she'd jest as lief hear the calves bellow as the winds blow, and the old field back of the house, filled with mullen-stumps, looks jest as pretty as the meadow down in the hollow, with its red sheets of clover, and its yellow fringes of buttercups. And then there's Uncle Jed, he's worse than she is—oh!" springing up, in my excitement, and walking rapidly down the foot-path, "I hate 'em both, I jest do, as hard as I can: I can't stay with 'em; oh, if knew what to do!"

It was a hard problem, wasn't it, reader, for a little, helpless, friendless, ignorant girl, of hardly fifteen, to solve? As I look back on my childhood, this birth-day lifts itself out from the others; a grand epoch; a new landmark of my life.

I was a strange child. Ideality was one of the predominant elements of my character, and of this quality the persons with whom I lived were as ignorant as the oxen in their stalls. Of course I was dreamy, abstracted, imaginative, almost painfully alive to all the beauties and harmonies of nature; with, of late, an inward craving, and restlessness, and dissatisfaction, that this afternoon, for the first time in my life, shaped itself into words.

For the last seven years I had lived with Uncle Jedediah Frost and his wife, and natures more thoroughly antipathetic could hardly have been brought into social and domestic relation with each other.

He was a farmer, large, loose-jointed and awkward, with a coarse-grained, stolid, phlegmatic character, whose oxen had certainly evolved more of his emotional nature than anybody else had been able to do. Aunt Keziah, his wife, was a thin, wiry, angular little woman, with keen, cold, restless blue eyes, a voice that reminded one of a sharp northeast wind, and a pale, thin, pinched sort of mouth, which no smile could warm or brighten, and on which "termagant" and "ill temper" were written as plainly as the *life* can write itself on the face.

Now, I do not mean to say that these two were consciously and intentionally unkind to me. One must always take the stand-point of another's mental and moral view, before pronouncing a verdict on his actions.

Mr. and Mrs. Frost, though they were hardly ever recognized by this cognomen, had but one aim and purpose in receiving and retaining me in their family. This was, "to see that I paid my way, to get out of me all they could."

Of my intellectual and moral needs, of my peculiar temperament, they had no more knowledge or conception, than they had of the cat's, who purred in the chimney corner. The solitary motive which governed their whole lives was, to "keep what they had, and add to it all they could."

They had no children, and were considerably advanced in life; but, as usual, their acquisitiveness seemed to increase with their years.

Perhaps they lived up more nearly to the light that was in

them, in their treatment of me, than would seem at first sight possible to a finer nature, for though coarse, harsh and exacting in all that related to work, they were never cruel.

Aunt Keziah always took, as she termed it, "the heft of the work," and though my labors were constant, they were mostly of a light character. The entire intellectual and moral training I received during the seven years I was with them, consisted of two winters at the district school, and the occasional Sabbath afternoons I was allowed to attend church.

So you can see, reader, the influences and associations through which my childhood came up to its youth.

And yet, away down in the distances of my memory was a green country, bordering the long desert through which I had travelled, and within it rose dimly a little white cottage, set like an alabaster vase among grey mosses and green shrubbery. A pale, sweet, sorrowful face, used to drop down very tender kisses each night upon my forehead, and call me betwixt them, "My poor little *fatherless* darling." Alas! I had lived to learn what that word meant.

Then there came a change. We left the little white cottage with its shrubberies, and flowers, and came to Stonecliff, where we lived in part of a rambling, old brown house, which I did not like half so well. The blue eyes grew tenderer, and the sweet face of my mother grew paler every day; and I can remember sometimes that she would gather me up suddenly to her heart, and say, "Oh, if I could only take you, my child, I would go home very gladly."

And I would pass my hand over her soft cheek and ask, "Where, mamma? oh, you won't go without your little Ethel, will you?" For I had a vague idea that she was going back

to the cottage and the sweet-briers after which I was always longing.

One day—I remember it as well as I do yesterday, though my life had not covered its fifth birth-day then—my mother was sewing, and I was sitting on a stool at her feet, pinning a shawl round an old, wooden doll, that was my sole playmate, when suddenly a low groan made me look up quickly in her face. A tide of crimson blood was rolling over her white lips. My shrieks alarmed the family below stairs. They came rushing into the room. It was too late. A sudden hemorrhage of the lungs, hastened by the constant sewing to which she had applied herself for the last year, closed suddenly the life of my mother. They laid her on the bed, she opened her eyes once, and—did you ever see a dying mother look on a child she was about to leave friendless and helpless in the cold world? "Oh, God! take care of my little girl!" murmured the lips that were cold as the mountain snows; then her head fell back, and I did not know that my mother was singing on the Eternal hills, the song of the "just made perfect." After they buried her, I lived for nearly three years with the family in whose house she had died. They were coarse, careless, ignorant, but good-natured, and not unkind, inasmuch as they let me have my own way, and treated me very much as they did their own noisy, dirty-faced, obstreperous children.

My mother's furniture, and some valuable jewelry, relics of better days, fell into the hands of my nominal protectors; and these, I presume, defrayed the expenses of my board while with them.

At the end of three years, they suddenly conceived a notion of going west, and I was accordingly delivered over to the ten-

der mercies of their neighbor, Mrs. Keziah Frost, whose increasing farm labors made it necessary she should have a "chore-girl."

I think some dim perception of the incongruities in our characters made these people object to Mrs. Frost's proposition that I should be "bound out" to her. I did not clearly understand what this meant, for with a child's intuitive knowledge of character, I disliked the woman the first time I placed my eyes on her. "You may not like each other, Miss Frost, you see," responded the people, "and as the gal was sort o' left on our hands, by her mother's dyin' here, we won't see she's tied up to anybody, no how." And to their credit be it said, they maintained this position to the last.

The day before I left them, they impressed it strongly upon my mind, that if Aunt Keziah and I did not "pull well together," I had better "swing clear" and take care of myself, for I wasn't bound to stay there any longer than was agreeable to me.

I was little more than nine years old when I went to Mrs. Frost's; but my out-door life the three previous years had been just suited to my physical development, as I was naturally a very delicate child, with that susceptible nervous organization which usually accompanies imaginative temperaments.

I was by nature impulsive and demonstrative; but a want of sympathy in my companions, which I felt, rather than understood, had changed the current of my emotions and affections, and my life was as hidden as it was intense.

Nature was my mother, my companion, my teacher. The winds had their mountain melodies, and their midnight dōxologies for my ear. I loved the sunshine and singing birds—the

trees and the waters. Oh, Nature! you took me to your deep heart, and you were a tender, loving mother to me, in the long days of my orphanage!

You know, reader, what my life was at Mrs. Frost's up to that afternoon of my fifteenth birthday, when I met Seth Robbins under the swamp willows—that afternoon of my *awakening*.

Hour after hour, until the shadows made great black gulfs in the hollows, I walked up and down by the falls, trying to devise some method to improve my condition. But my child-brain struggled and toiled vainly; it fastened on no resolve—it reached no conclusion. The future stretched before me blank, and dismal, and drudging, like the past; and I had nothing to do but *submit*.

Suddenly one of the old lessons in my copy-book recurred to my mind—"Knowledge is power." I stared all around me, to see if some one had not whispered the words in my ear. I believe to this day one of God's angels *did*. I stood still on the brink of the river, for I had unconsciously wandered off some distance from the falls, where the water deepened and widened. "Ethel Lindsay," I said, or rather my soul said, for I hardly knew my own voice, it had grown so calm and determined; "that is just what you want—*knowledge!*—and you must get it, too, some way or other, that's certain." At this moment the setting sun burst with a rich purplish glow through the young oaks and maples that grew thick on the banks of the river. It kindled up the dark face of the waters, as a loving smile does a sad human face, and looking down in the river, I saw the little girl standing on its brink, just as plainly as, shutting my eyes, I see her now.

She was small and slender, with a thin, deeply-tanned, half-wistful looking face, that you would never have thought of calling *pretty*. Her forehead was low, but well developed, with a mass of tangled, wavy hair, of a bright, changeful hue, dropping about it. The features were prominent, and irregular; the eyes of a dark, deep, shifting color, sometimes luminous, but oftenest shadowy, that had nothing like them in the heavens above or on the earth beneath. The mouth was full and flexible, and the lips had a habit of holding themselves slightly apart, as one's are apt to when listening or dreaming; but when in repose, physiognomists have since said, those same lips were remarkably expressive of individuality and strength of purpose.

So the little girl down in the river looked up at me as I said, "Knowledge is power—I *will* have it." Then remembering it was almost "milkin' time," I caught up my bonnet and hurried down the path that led out of the woods.

I must have been about half a mile from home when a carriage suddenly turned a sharp angle of the road, and swept by, only a few feet from where I stood. It was a very handsome vehicle, drawn by fine horses, with costly caparisons. I had a full view of the occupants. There were four—two ladies and two gentlemen. The former were young, elegantly dressed, and beautiful; but here the analogy ceased.

One was rather tall and slender, with large, brilliant eyes, regular, finely-chiselled features, and there was unmistakable pride in the carriage of the queenly head, in the curving of the red lips, and in the graceful attitude of the whole figure, as it leaned back indolently on the carriage cushions. The other face was a sweet, girlish one, piled round with curls of sunny hair.

The eyes were blue, clear, and sparkling, harmonizing well with the little bud of a mouth, that looked as if it was made for nothing in the world but smiles and kisses.

Of the two gentlemen who occupied the seat, the elder looked as if he might be on the sunny side of sixty, for his black hair was sprinkled with grey. He was rather large and portly, with a genial, good-natured countenance, that drew your heart toward him at once.

His companion was a youth, who could hardly have seen his twentieth birthday. His face was dark, striking, handsome. His forehead was broad and high, with long almost black hair overshadowing it. The eyes, of a clear hazel brown, seemed fairly to radiate youth, and life, and fun. The mouth, finely curved as a woman's, seemed, even in repose, full of incipient laughter, and broke into a bright intelligent smile, which was almost habitual as it addressed the others. No one could have helped liking that young man's face. I think it interested me most of the four.

I stood still and looked after these people, with a vague feeling of envy and longing, as the carriage dashed out of sight.

I realized fully the immense social distance between us. I felt they were *better* than I; but not because they were richer. Thank God! not even at that time did I set an undue value on mere dollars and cents. They were *better* than I, not because they were richer, or more finely dressed, but because they were graceful, cultivated, refined; while I was coarse, ignorant, awkward. It was not probable that I could have passed a half hour in their presence without offending their sense of refinement and grace; and this, of course, made me their inferior; but something stirring within my heart made me feel the difference was one of

adjuncts rather than of qualities, and one that long effort and perseverance might overcome.

For some reason I began to associate those people who had passed me with that new life I was resolved upon, though I knew not whence they came, nor whither they were going.

And musing on these things I came within sight of my home. It was a large, dingy-brown, old-fashioned farmhouse, set in a little way from the road, and there was nothing poetical, pretty, or even picturesque about it. It was all stark bare, almost repulsive, like the lives of its owners. Not even a tree or a bush grew in the front yard, where the short, yellowish-looking grass had attained but a few inches in height.

Suddenly Aunt Keziah thrust her head out of the front door. "If you don't trot home a little faster, you'll catch it, I'm thinkin'," was her opening salutation. "I'll be older than I am to-day, afore you'll get another afternoon to go walkin' off in the woods. Here the cows have been standin' for half an hour in the shed, waitin' for your slow motions, and that new calf has been a roarin', and bawlin', and screamin', and tearin', like all murder, for some warm milk. I s'pose you thought I could tend on him with bilin' soap, and making yeast on my hands, this blessed afternoon. Here, take this, and fly round smart, if you know what's good for you." She gave me the milk-pail with one hand, and no very gentle push with the other, while I gladly made my escape from the tongue and the touch of the virago. An hour later we sat, at supper in the long, narrow kitchen, with its low ceiling only a few inches above Aunt Keziah's turban. The small pine table had no cover, and was set with coarse crockery, flaming in large red and yellow flowers, belonging to some family not specified in any Botany.

Each occupied a side of the table.—The master and mistress of the household, myself, and a green Hibernian, who assisted Uncle Jed in the hardest of the season.

Now, Aunt Keziah never lost an opportunity for talking; accordingly, as soon as she had poured out the tea, she turned to her taciturn spouse, and commenced: "Did you see that air mighty smart-lookin' carriage, that went by here jest at sun-down?" The farmer shook his head. He was just then engaged in the mastication of a rather tough bone of mutton.

"Well, I must say, it was a grand-lookin' affair, and Miss Heap, who was in here at the time, said it was Miss Kenyon's folks goin' up to visit her, at the Cedars. She says Cyrus' wife has been there all the week, helping the gals a cleanin' and airin' and bakin', and nobody knows what. Them in the carriage, Miss Heap says, was Miss Kenyon's brother, and daughter, and nephew, with a young Pennsylvania lady, that jest come on from school, too, and the gals are mighty strong friends. (Ethel, don't put such a heapin' spoonful o' sugar in your tea. It's ris a quarter of a cent on the pound, and we must be a little more scrimpin'.) Now, Jed, I've been thinkin' they'd want a good many chickens, and eggs, and butter, at the Cedars, and you might get a better price for 'em than down at the market."

"P'rhaps I might; no harm in tryin'; Miss Kenyon always was liberal in tradin'." This was an unusually long speech for Uncle Jed.

"Wall, you had, I guess, old man. Come, Ethel, you must help me clear up the table, and then take yourself off to bed, for to-morrow you'll have to spring. I've got to go into the wool-dyein', full cut. Then, ther's two bushels o' potatoes to boil

up for the chickens, and I've got to give all them hams down cellar, and them yarbs up garret, a smart overhaulin' afore another sun sets, to say nothin' of airin' them geese feathers, and cleanin' out the cheese pantry."

Aunt Keziah had laid out work enough for one day, I felt certain of that, as I went up to my bed in the attic. I did not go to sleep though. I lay awake a long time, and thought, and thought—not about the next day's work, though. At last, I started up suddenly in bed; the summer stars were looking in tenderly through the small panes upon me, and lifting my arms to them, as to solemn witnesses, I cried out: "I'll do it, I'll do it!" Then I laid down, and went to sleep sweetly, as I had done long years ago in my mother's arms.

CHAPTER II.

I HAD had a long walk, for it was nearly four miles from our residence to the Cedars, so I leaned against the front gate, and looked up at the house with a palpitating heart. It was a picturesque little cottage, with its bay windows and broad porticoes, set down there in the midst of sloping terraces, and mounds whose summits were flushed over with moss roses. Then all about were scattered clumps of dark pine, and Norway spruce, while the larches stirred gracefully to the summer winds.

It was a lovely spot. No wonder I forgot all my weariness, even the errand which had brought me there, as leaning against the gate, my eyes drank in the beauty before me.

The wind brought occasionally to me light breaks of laughter—the laughter of youth and happiness; for at this time the family were gathered in the parlor, on my right; but the shrubbery concealed me from view.

And now, while I stand there in a sort of vague, dreamy wonder and enjoyment, you shall forestall me, and go in, reader.

Mrs. Kenyon and her guests are all there. She is a pleasant, matronly, and very lady-like looking person, with a strong family resemblance to her brother, who is reading his newspaper, keeping up a sort of desultory conversation with her, and listening

occasionally to the young people, who are grouped on the opposite sofa, chatting away very animatedly. The parlor is furnished with taste and elegance, not so richly as to be oppressive, though. Rare blossoms, and half-opened buds wind through the vines and mosses of the velvet carpet; several fine pictures and portraits, in heavy oval frames, hang along the walls—all else is in harmony with these.

Now, girls, what do you say to another sail on the lake this evening? It will be perfectly charming among the Cedars in the moonlight." The speaker sits by his cousin, and he catches up the girdle which swings from her waist, and winds the heavy tassel round his fingers as he asks the question.

"I see very well what you want. Al, you rogue! I haven't forgotten how you tried to scare Irene and me out of our wits, night before last, making the boat shake and plunge, till we really believed we were going to upset, and there you sat, all the time, looking as demure as grandma, and yet you were at the bottom of the whole mischief!" And the girl shakes playfully her white hand in his face.

Alison Holmes leans back and laughs, such a loud, merry laugh, that you feel at once it brims up from a heart that has never known darkness or sorrow, that is full of youth, and health, and spirits—those great jewels of life!

"How did you find all that out, you dear little Miss Innocent?"

"Why, I just told Enos that the boat was an unsafe one, and like to have upset us all, and he must hunt up another, for our next sail; and he answered, looking as solemn as an owl: 'Miss Meltha, there isn't a safer boat in the State than the Cedar Bird. You may depend on't, 'twas all that young chap's

doin's, just to scare you.' Don't you wish he'd had a good ducking himself, Irene, darling?"

"Yes, indeed, I do," laughs the queenly lady, who has thrown herself on an ottoman at the feet of the cousins, and clasped her hand in that of Meltha's.

"You don't either. I'll bet my new watch you'd have pulled me back, if you'd seen me going under; now wouldn't you, girls? Be honest, and tell the truth."

"If you give us another chance, we may possibly rescue you by your hair, as it will afford us such a nice chance to pull it." Irene's smile materially softens her threat.

"Well, then, I should choose the ducking as the least of the two evils. Uncle Nathan, won't you trust me out on the lake with the girls, this evening?—I'll take the best care in the world of them."

"Ye-es, I guess so. Meltha, my child, you must wrap up warm, for the evenings are chilly up here in the country."

You would have known how very dear she was to the old man's heart, if you had heard those words, and seen the look that accompanied them—it was so full of watchful tenderness.

She seemed to need it, for she was fair and fragile, like her mother, who, fifteen years before, in the morning of her womanhood, had gone down to the "long sleep."

"Oh, I'll look out for myself—never you mind, papa. Irene, my pet, what are you thinking about?"

And she lifts up the graceful head that is leaning over her lap.

"That I wished Clyde was here. He is so fond of moonlight sailing, and I am sure, Alison, you and he would like each other."

"Yes, indeed, you would," chimes in the soft voice of Meltha.

"Why, because *you* do?" with an arch glance of the dark, roguish eyes.

"Be still, you, Impertinence." There is a pout on the little lady's lip; but the soft kindling of her cheek is more significant than the pout.

"Well, do tell me something about this brother of yours, Irene. Does he like fun? for if he don't, he and I could never sail in the same ship."

"Yes, he likes it. But, dear me! you are not in the least bit alike. He is quieter and graver than you are, and strangers think him cold and dignified. He's proud, though rather strangely so, exclusive and fastidious; but if you once get down into his heart—it's *such* a warm one. He's a little bit odd, too, and likes his own way remarkably well. In short, he's the only person in the world that I ever was the least bit afraid of." It was plain to be seen that Irene was very proud of her brother, very fond of him, too.

"Why didn't you bring him on with you, Irene? He'd have liked a jollification at the Cedars, I know."

"Oh, he's gone to Virginia, to visit some of our cousins, with papa. But he promised me he'd pass Christmas with us, at the Seminary, particularly when I told him that a certain pair of blue eyes, which he thinks very beautiful, were to take the part of Rowena, in our tableau."

"Now I'll tell Al, who is to be Rebecca," cries Meltha, to hide her confusion.

"I wish I could be there. Wouldn't I make a capital Ivanhoe, girls?"

"Indeed you would," they simultaneously rejoin.

"But why can't you come? It isn't a long journey from Cambridge;" eagerly questions Irene.

"Because I have promised to meet my mother in South Carolina, at the close of next term."

There was a beautiful involuntary tenderness in the tones with which he said that one word, which made you know he "reverenced his mother." The girls felt it. Even the uncle and aunt noticed this.

"He doesn't look much like Lucy, but the boy has her heart, anyhow," half whispered Mr. Herrick to his sister.

"What's that you're saying about me, Uncle Nat?"

"Nothing very bad, my boy. After all, that smile *was* a little bit like your mother's."

"Thank you, nunkey. You couldn't have paid me a greater compliment, unless you had said my heart was like hers."

"And what if I did say it, too? But here's our little girl—she's growing to look more like her aunt every day." He sighed, for Meltha's mother and Alison's had been sisters.

"So she is. Bless her dear little heart." He threw his arm round his cousin's waist, and drew her suddenly to him, with that familiarity which cousinship and their long intimacy warranted. "I always loved you a great deal better because you had *her* eyes."

"Now, don't hug me so tight; it's not proper, at all," cried Meltha, between a pout and a laugh, as she pushed back her shining curls with one hand, and pinched her cousin's cheek with the other.

"You love your mother very dearly, do you not, Alison?" asked Irene, who, slipping the rings round her fingers, had listened to the conversation with much interest.

"I think I do." It was a pity his mother did not hear those tones and see his face at that moment. "She's the best woman in the world, not even present company excepted. Now isn't she, Uncle Nathan?"

"Well, I've known her over twenty years, and I've never been able to discover but one fault in her."

"What in the world is it?"

"Why, she would persist in spoiling a certain scapegrace of a nephew of mine, in spite of all my solemn warnings and adjurations."

"I very much wonder she didn't say, 'Physician, heal thyself,' at the conclusion of all those pathetic exhortations;" looking archly at Meltha.

"Now, hear that boy, Irene. It *does* seem as if he couldn't live five minutes without some thrust at me. *Am* I a spoiled child, papa?" And she bounded up, with the prettiest childish grace imaginable, ran across the room, and sprung into her father's lap, answering her own question by her whole manner better than any words could have done.

"I rather think so, pussy. But, anyhow, we wouldn't have you *unspoiled* for all the world." And the fond parent pushed away the bright curls that were tumbling around the sunny face, as green leaves shake in summer mornings about half-opened lilies.

"Look here, Nathan. Isn't somebody standing still there at the front gate?" suddenly asked Mrs. Kenyon, as she peered through the shrubbery, for her seat was nearest the window.

"Ye-es, seems to me there is. Your eyes are younger than mine, daughter; look out."

The girl sprung to the window, and gazed down through the green vista.

"Yes, there certainly is, aunty. It's a little girl, with an awfully old-fashioned straw bonnet. Goodness! how like a statue she stands there!"

"I presume it's some beggar, but she's more modest than they usually are; Biddy"—to a domestic, who just then crossed the hall—"you see that girl standing at the gate? Go down, and ask her what she wants."

"Wa-all, what is it you'll be afther wanting here?"

I started. It was not a very pleasant awakening from my reverie, for Biddy's face and tones indicated plainly she thought I had no business there. The truth rushed back to me. It was almost overwhelming. My courage, which had been strung up to an unnatural degree, now utterly forsook me.

"How dare you think of going in there, and meeting those people?" whispered all the coward in my heart. "They'll every one stare at you, and you can't say a word. Then they will think you're crazy, or make all manner of fun of you. You never can stand it—you know you can't. Just tell the girl, now, you were only looking at the trees, and get off as fast as you can, before the matter's any worse."

I was on the very point of doing it. Something prevented me—a thought sent from heaven that it was my last chance—a look back into that miserable life, from which for the previous three days I had revolted more than ever.

It must have been a hard extremity that thus urged me on, for I was a shrinking, bashful child, and to this day I seldom enter a room full of strangers without a feeling of embarrassment. But I love to look back and dwell upon this time, with

its doubts, its agitations, its terrors—aye, I rejoice, I exult, I triumph in it, more than in any other passage of my life.

It was the trial hour of my soul. The one great conflict between it and circumstances which, perhaps, sooner or later, every strong nature must meet. If I had failed then, and gone back to the old ways, my life might have still been what I shudder to think of, what so many other lives are, dwarfed, abnormal, wretched; but, oh, thank God! thank God! I *conquered!*

“I want to see Mrs. Kenyon a minute. Won’t you show me the way to her?” I was earnest, determined now, and probably my tones indicated it, for Bidy opened the gate, and said, in a voice slightly mollified: “Come along with me, then.” A minute later she ushered me into the parlor, somewhat after this fashion: “She says she wants to spake wid you a minute, so I brought her in here, ma’am.”

I advanced one step into the room, and five wondering faces turned towards me. Then a fright, a dizziness, a bewilderment came over me. I could not move a step farther, I could not speak a single word—so I stood there, in my painful awkwardness, and my paralyzing embarrassment, for six seconds, perhaps—it seemed to me as many hours.

A low, scornful laugh was the first thing that roused me. The proud, beautiful head I had seen in the carriage leaned down to the golden one beside it, and I heard distinctly the words, “Did you ever see such a looking creature in all your life, Meltha? I wonder where she got the fashion of her bonnet.”

“Irene! Irene! the girl will hear you.” No wonder her eyes dropped before the stern, rebuking voice of Alison Holmes.

And hearing it, I grew strong again. The weakness and the terror went off from me, and when Mrs. Kenyon said kindly, but *very* patronizingly, “What is it you want of me, my child?” I forgot everything but my errand, and told my story.

What I said, or *how* I said it, I cannot remember. I only know that I felt every word of it—that sometimes my voice shook, through the tears I swallowed bravely back, as I spoke of my dead mother, and the faint memories of her love that still clung to my heart. Then I told them of my after-life, and brokenly, but very earnestly, of the miserable years I had passed with Aunt Keziah Frost, until at last the burden grew so heavy I could not bear it—and so nearly as I *can* remember, I closed something after this fashion: “I haven’t come to *beg* anything; but I thought maybe when I’d told you my story, you’d have some work you’d let me come here and do, and then I could study an hour or two every day. That’s all I want. I’ll be very quiet and good, if you’ll only let me come, and I’ll work very, very hard, if I needn’t go back there again.”

For a minute no one spoke. My auditors looked from me to each other. Surprise, curiosity, and interest, were in all their faces.

And in two of the faces were more than this—pity and sympathy in the young man’s, while soft tears trembled on the long, yellow lashes of his cousin. Mrs. Kenyon spoke first, low and lady-like, as she always did: “Well, my child, I don’t really know as we have anything for you to do; but if you’re so uncomfortable where you are, we must try and see what can be effected for you.”

“Of course we must,” eagerly interposed the young man.

"She's not going back to that old curmudgeon's, that's certain. I'll take care of her myself first."

"What a model sort of a guardian you'd make, Al," laughed his uncle. "But really we must do something for this little girl. Well, what is it, Meltha?" for she had come over to him, and he felt the soft, coaxing hand on his shoulder.

"I want to do something for her myself, papa. There are all my old school-books, you know; and then, my last year's dresses will fit her, with a little altering. Poor child! she hasn't any mother, either."

This was the plea that went down deepest in the soul of the really kind-hearted man. "You may do all you like, my daughter. Abbie, turn round here (in an undertone), you'll take the child, you see, and I'll bear part of the expense."

"No, brother, you'll do no such thing;" and then there was a low whispering, in which I caught something about dusting the parlors in the morning, and going to the Academy in the afternoon.

Here Meltha interposed. "No, no, Aunt Abbie, don't make a servant of her. Let her go to school all day. I'm sure there's a great deal in the girl, and it ought to be developed. I wouldn't wonder if she was a genius."

"Sit down, little girl; you've walked a long way, and you must be very tired standing."

The young man's tones were as gentle and courteous as they could have been to the proudest lady in the land. I sat down, and then he went over to his relatives, while the young girl by the sofa still kept up the same cold, half-disdainful stare into my face, and over my dress, and I felt certain as though she had said it, she was wondering, all the time, what in the world they

were making this fuss over such an odd, outlandishly-dressed little object as I was.

At last the consultation was over. It had been a prolonged one, and Alison and his cousin had borne the largest share of it, while Irene had tapped her small feet impatiently on the carpet, or languidly turned over a portfolio of engravings on the table beside her.

"Come here, little girl," said Mrs. Kenyon. She did not, I think, ask me more than two dozen questions, which was very moderate under the circumstances, such as my name, my age, etc., etc.

She inquired very particularly, also, about Mrs. Frost's claims on me, and Meltha actually clapped her hands when her father declared that no lawyer in all Massachusetts would pronounce them legal.

Mrs. Kenyon then told me that her brother and herself had decided it was best for me to return to Mrs. Frost's that night, as it would look much better to see her, before taking me away.

Mrs. Kenyon always had a profound respect for all the proprieties of life. The young people strongly objected to this, Alison stoutly maintaining it was no matter what such an old virago thought, anyway. But Mrs. Kenyon carried her point. "We will come for you to-morrow," she said; "it is growing almost dark, and Enos shall take you down to the crossings, which must be very near your home. It will be the last night you shall ever stay there—you may depend upon us, my child."

I tried to thank her, but I don't think I succeeded very well—it may be for the sobs in my throat—it may be for the great tides of happiness that were pouring into my heart.

At all events, Meltha came up to me and pushed back with her soft fingers the hair that had fallen over my forehead. "Don't try to thank us," she said, with a sweet smile fluttering about her lips. "We will be your friends, and we won't let you have any more trouble, if we can help it."

At that moment Enos put his head inside the door, and said the carriage was ready to take me down to the crossings.

Alison and Meltha accompanied me to the gate. They said many kind things; it is strange I have a certain consciousness of this, while I cannot remember one word of the conversation.

So we drove off. One's receptive capacity of enjoyment is limited in this life. It is a merciful provision of our Father's. The great good had come so suddenly, so overwhelmingly, that I could not understand or realize it. My soul grasped and grappled at it vainly. I, Ethel Lindsay, Keziah Frost's "chore girl," was now—a misty radiance wrapped round that future, that was coming with outstretched arms to meet me. It was almost a comfort to think then, "Perhaps it is all a dream."

Then I remembered I had been absent more than two hours beyond the time which Aunt Keziah had given me to go to the doctor's, for her husband had sprained his arm, and she had dispatched me to the village for some liniment.

I had, accordingly, availed myself of this excuse to wear the best dress and bonnet my wardrobe afforded, and in pursuance of my resolution of three nights previous, had visited the Cedars.

Perhaps it was as well that the prospect of the scolding which I knew awaited me on my return, was the only tangible point on which my mind would then fasten itself.

CHAPTER III

"WELL, now, Meltha, what is it you want to tell me?"

And the youth broke off, with his ever-restless hands, a sprig of the young white birch, under which he stood with his cousin. They were close by the shores of the little river that wound, like a tangled blue ribbon, through the green fields, with the slender white bridges stretching picturesquely across it. And Meltha had detained her cousin a moment, while the rest of the party went up to the house, for they had just returned from a long sail on the river.

"Well," rather hesitatingly, "I wanted to speak to you, Al, a moment, about that girl, Ethel Lindsay. Do you know I've been thinking, this morning, that Aunt Abbie's is not quite the place for her?"

"Why not, pray?" He had not her acute womanly intuitions and sympathies.

"Because," twisting the ribbons of the gipsy hat that became her so charmingly, round her fingers; "Aunt Abbie is a good woman, a most excellent woman, you see, coz, but she hasn't a spark of romance, or poetry, or imagination in her. She's perfectly and entirely *practical*. Now, I believe this little girl is a genius"——

"So do I," interrupted Alison, heartily. "It required a world of courage and spirit, I tell you, Meltha, to come in, and

brave us all as she did—poor child! I know it, and then despite her unbecoming dress, she really had an interesting face, with those great, strange, haunting eyes, that grew so soft and beautiful when she spoke of her mother.”

“Did you observe them?”

“To be sure I did;” splashing the end of the birch rod in the water.

“Well, as I was saying, Aunt Abbie will never lose sight of the fact that she *was* a servant girl. She’ll be very kind, no doubt, but *so* patronizing; and she’ll always regard the girl as a sort of object of charity, and expect she’ll be very grateful for the position to which she is exalted. Don’t you *see*, Alison?”

“Yes, dear, I see it all now;” looking down admiringly on the sweet face uplifted to him, flushed with earnestness and perplexity.

He was an impulsive boy, this Alison Holmes, and it was hardly strange if that face, so fair, and pure, and girlish, stirred his susceptible nature. He drew his arm softly but tightly round his cousin’s neck, and kissed her warmly on either cheek. The blush and the slight struggle only made her look prettier than ever.

“Now, Alison Holmes, aren’t you ashamed of yourself? It’s really *very* improper of you to do this.”

“No it isn’t, either; I guess, I’m your own cousin!”

“Well, that’s no reason you should be so—so *bold*.”

“You’ve no business to look so pretty, then, that a fellow can’t help kissing you. But I’m willing to pay almost any penance.” The half-roguish, half-penitent glance which accompanied this speech would have obtained immunity from almost

any maiden, for a good many of those little social derelictions of which the young man was often guilty.

“Then behave yourself, Al, and listen soberly to me, for once in your life: Can’t you help me devise some plan by which the girl needn’t remain with Aunt Abbie? It troubles me to think of her staying there, and there’s nobody to consult but you; for papa wouldn’t understand it at all—and Irene—I know she thinks it’s quite absurd for us to take such an interest in her.”

“She’s rather too aristocratic, I imagine, for any such condescension.”

“Hush, Alison. You must not speak so of Irene; I love her very dearly. But about Ethel Lindsay. How I wished she could go to your mother.”

“Don’t I, though! It would be just the place. But it’s quite impossible, you see. With her feeble health, and away off in South Carolina, she couldn’t undertake the care of this child.”

“Of course not. I only *wished* it might be so. But can’t you think of somebody else, Alison?”

“No, I’m sure I can’t. If mother were only here, she might suggest somebody among her friends. Oh, stop, Meltha, there’s Miss Ruth Maltby. You know she’s her warmest friend, and a most lovely woman, for all she’s an old maid. You saw her when she came to New York, to bid mamma good bye. What did you think of her?”

“Think of her! I fell perfectly in love with her. There was something so very sweet in her *smile*, and yet I was sure she had seen a great deal of trouble some time. I told Aunt Lucy so, and she said: ‘My child, you have guessed right.

I have known Ruth ever since we were school-girls together."

"Oh, won't you please tell me, Aunt Lucy, all about it?" I asked.

"Sometime, dear, maybe. It is a sad story of youth, and love, and terrible mistakes. But don't ask me more now.' Of course, I was still farther interested after this, though I did not see her more than two hours. If she only could be persuaded to take Ethel."

"Perhaps she can. You know her brother is a widower, with only one child. I will visit her on my way to Cambridge, and see if my eloquence will avail anything in this matter. But what will Aunt Abbie say?"

"Nothing. In my opinion she'll be rather glad to get rid of the trouble just now, for she expects to go west in the fall, and perhaps not return till spring."

"Oh, Alison, you are so good! How shall I thank you?"

An arch, significant smile answered her. She did not pout this time; but with a pretty, half-bashful grace, she clasped her hands, kissed and touched them to her cousin's lips.

"That will do, won't it?" she laughed. "What will Irene think?—I am gone so long!" and she ran up to the house, and he stood and watched her, as her light feet fluttered along the grass; thinking what a very sweet girl his little cousin Meltha Herrick was.

Perhaps I may as well tell you here, reader, something more of the character and antecedents of Alison Holmes, as I learned them afterward.

His mother was a widow, and he was her only son, and heir to a very large estate. As Mrs. Holmes's brother-in-law said,

her greatest fault had been the idolatry she had lavished on her child, and yet it was hardly strange, for he was a son that any mother might well be proud of. His fine, sinewy figure, his handsome face, and that natural, easy grace of manner and movement, which is in itself an attribute of no little social value, marked the young student wherever he made his appearance.

He had a great many faults, but his fine qualities seemed almost to absorb or overshadow them; indeed it was difficult to see him half an hour without loving him.

Stamina of character and strength of purpose he certainly wanted; any physiognomist could have told that, with a single glance at the finely moulded, susceptible, but firmness-lacking mouth. Irritable, and exacting—the natural result of his petted, undisciplined youth—he often was, but underlying all this were the fine, generous impulses of a character that, though far from perfect, had much, oh! so very much in it that was true, and good, and beautiful. I do not believe it would have been possible for him to have committed a mean, or a premeditatedly selfish act. Then he had that warm, social, half-poetic temperament, with those mirthful spirits that were always effervescing in fun and frolic, and an instinctive respect and tenderness for woman, which is so beautiful in a man, and that always makes him a favorite with women.

Alison Holmes had been this from a boy. Of course the life of such a character must be too much on the surface, must want depth, pertinacity, earnestness; and it was his misfortune that his education had not corrected these tendencies; but it is very high praise to say of any man or woman, as could be said of him, that those who knew him best loved him most.

Meltha Herrick, his cousin, was an only child, too, and an

equally indulged one, only a man's tenderness is not so dangerous, because not so fond and demonstrative, as a woman's.

She was a sweet girl, half child, and half woman, "nothing more, nothing less."

She had no great force of character, she could never have battled long or bravely with adverse circumstances; but she was gentle, clinging, amiable, just the one to wrap herself round a strong, self-reliant nature. She was like her mother, after whom she was named, though her friends had converted the old-fashioned Melissa into the softer *Meltha*. She had a great deal of womanly tact and sympathy, with some romance and poetic appreciation, as was evinced in her conversation with her cousin respecting myself.

But, she was neither great nor original, only what I said at the beginning, a *sweet girl*, and she promised to make a very lovely woman.

The friendship that existed between her and Irene Woolsey seemed to a stranger quite unaccountable, for their natures appeared perfectly antipodal; but friendship is usually founded on opposite characteristics, and I really believe Irene Woolsey loved Meltha Herrick as well as she could any one not belonging to her own family.

She was the daughter of a wealthy southerner, who, for the sake of his wife's health, had removed to Pennsylvania.

For reasons which will be hereafter apparent, I choose to speak of her character as little and as gently as I can.

She was proud, imperious, brilliant, capable of making herself very attractive or repellant, as the mood might suit her; but in society her beauty, her wit, and her conversational talents, made her a great favorite. It was a pity that her early

education had not developed or strengthened her principles, or her boarding-school life fostered the best part of her character.

It was early in the afternoon of the next day, and I had gone off on the hill to gather some green apples, which Aunt Keziah had concluded to "stew" for supper, when I saw a carriage winding up the road which led to our house.

How my heart beat! I had waited and watched patiently all day. I sat down on the grass, not minding that the pan was only half-filled with apples, for I knew the next hour was to decide my destiny.

I saw Mrs. Kenyon and her brother alight and enter the house. I think it must have been at least three-quarters of an hour before Aunt Keziah put her head out of the kitchen door, for the hill was only a few rods from it.

It seemed to me I had grown very old during that time. My excitable nervous organization had undergone an intensity of suffering, which one, to look on me, would hardly have believed possible.

I remember throwing myself on the grass, clenching my hands tightly together, and burying my face in my lap, one moment; the next, springing up, hurrying wildly down the lot, wringing my hands apart, and gasping for breath.

No wonder they started and said, "Why, child, what makes you look so pale?" as I entered the front room.

Aunt Keziah sat on the corner of a chair, looking very much excited, though she was evidently considerably awed by her guests. They were in great haste, and Mrs. Kenyon, addressing me kindly, told her story in a few words.

Her brother had received letters which made it necessary he should leave the Cedars next day, for New York. The young people would all accompany him, and they were now busily preparing for their departure. It had been decided that I should come to the Cedars that day, and they would send a carriage for me at sunset.

The lady added, further, that perhaps another home than her own would be provided for me, but that, at all events, I should have kind friends, who would see I was made comfortable and happy. I believe her interview with Mrs. Frost had inclined her still more to pity my condition.

At this point Mr. Herrick interposed. "Come here, my child, a moment." He took my hand kindly as I approached him.

"I wish you to understand clearly, that as you were never bound to this good woman here, by your parents or protectors, she has no legal claims over you; and though under age, you are at perfect liberty to choose your own home. Now, I want you to answer me in her presence, do you prefer to go with us?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. You hear her reply, Mrs. Frost. And now," rising up, "we will not make you any trouble in this matter, if you choose to be quiet about it, but we shall certainly insist upon her leaving you. The law, if necessary, will sustain us in this matter; we trust, however, there will be no necessity of appealing to it. May we depend upon seeing her at the Cedars this evening?"

"If she's a mind to go, I shan't prevent her. She's an ungrateful hussy, anyway," was the spiteful rejoinder.

"We will not waste words on that topic. Good afternoon, ma'am." And the gentleman and his sister left the lady in towering wrath, which broke forth the moment they were out of the house.

What a coarse, vulgar torrent of vituperation it was! They were no better than thieves, stealin' away other people's girls, and I—oh! there was nothing too bad for Mrs. Frost to call me, particularly when she came to understand fully how I had gone over to the Cedars the day before, and informed them of my desire to leave her.

Her rage expended itself, at last, in this verbal storm. Then, growing calmer, she tried to prevail upon me to remain with her. "If you'll stay till you're eighteen, I'll give you a nice bed, stuffed with the best of geese feathers, and that chest of pine drawers, which was my grandmother's; and, varnished up, it'll look almost as good as new. Then there's the cherry bedstead in the south chamber. It was Jed's mother's, and I'm sure you'll have a grand settin' out. Them folks, with all their grand airs, won't do half as well by you."

"But Aunt Keziah, they'll send me to school, and perhaps make a teacher of me some day. I'd rather go with them."

"Nonsense; that's all fol-de-rol, gettin' your head full of them notions. I'd like to know if you ain't been to the district school two winters, and gone through with the spellin' book and English reader, to say nothin' of jography and writin'. You've got larnin' enough now, for any gal in the land—a heap more than I ever had."

"Well, Aunt Keziah," and I probably addressed her with more dignity than I had ever done before; "I have made up my mind to go, and it's no use to ask me to stay. Are you willing

I should take my clothes? for the carriage will come before a great while." There was something very agreeable in the thought that I was to take my departure in so much state.

"Yes, you can carry 'em off if you're a mind to," breaking out again. "I shall be glad to get rid of such an ungrateful minx, the land knows; but if you don't wish yourself back agin many a time, I miss my guess;" and she flounced out of the room.

My services were of considerable value to the woman, and it is possible she felt a slight attachment to me, I had lived with her so long. At all events, she was very reluctant to have me leave her, but she saw it was of no use to try to prevent it.

Just at sunset the carriage came for me. I had rolled up my small wardrobe in a bundle, and was quite ready. Aunt Keziah said the most uncompromising of good byes to me, and uncle Jed, who had just come in from the barn, stood at the door, leaning on his rake, with an expression of amazement on his stolid face, of which I had deemed it in nowise capable.

The driver lifted me into the carriage, and looking out a moment later, I saw the sunlight pouring its amber tides along the eaves of the red-brown house I had left forever.

It was all hurry, bustle, and confusion, the morning after my arrival at the Cedars, for the company were to leave before noon. They had had a large party the night before, and I had been consigned by Mrs. Kenyon to Bidy's keeping, who had been too much occupied to talk with me; so I went up to the pleasant little back chamber, that had been appropriated to me, and sitting down by the window, looked out on the stars,

while my thoughts wandered off and lost themselves in golden mists of reverie.

The calm, after the excitement, was just what I needed. Faintly from the distant parlors wandered up to me outbursts of merry laughter, and warbles of sweet music; but I wonder if any one of that joyous company below was happier than the little solitary orphan girl, who sat with her hands folded by the open window, looking at the stars that glorified the night.

But, as I said, the next morning the house was one scene of bustle and confusion. Mrs. Kenyon sent up a message that I could go where I liked, as she should not be able to see me till noon, and I had just concluded to visit a small, but very picturesque grove of cedars which had christened the cottage, when Meltha Herrick burst into the room, followed by a domestic.

"How do you do, you poor child, this morning?" she said, catching hold of my hands in the most lively, cordial manner conceivable. "I thought you'd be horribly lonely last night, but, dear me! I couldn't catch a moment of time to come to you.

"Jane here, though, has been making over one of my dresses for you (you're to have all my last summer's wardrobe), and I want to see how you look in pink muslin before I go. Now, Jane, do dress her, just as quick as you can. Her hair is so long and wavy, I know 'twill curl, and you'll find all my clothes in the front chamber closet; come, do your very best, won't you? There's Irene calling me. I'll be back in half an hour;" and she fluttered out of the room, like a sunbeam, or a song-bird—anything that has sweetness, melody, or beauty, and is pure and beautiful.

"Now, miss, just look at yourself in the glass," and with no little apparent pride in the metamorphosis her tasteful fingers had occasioned, Jane led me up to the mirror

I stood staring into it with amazement, for certainly I should never have recognized myself in the little girl who, with long clusters of half-curled hair dropping to her waist, and the delicate pink muslin, at once softening and flushing the dark brown of her complexion, answered back my gaze.

I was not a handsome child, no artistic blending of colors, no ingenuity of tasteful fingers, could have made me this; but I certainly had not until that moment conceived it possible that my appearance was susceptible of so great an improvement.

Before I had finished my survey, however, Meltha broke again into the room. "What a change! what a change!" she repeated slowly, and drawing in her breath, on seeing me. "I wouldn't have believed it possible. Why, Jane, how nice you have made her look. Goodness, now, you needn't blush so. I can't help looking at you. But see here, Alison asked me to bring you down stairs into the dining-room. Nobody's there, and he wants to see you a moment."

"I followed my young patroness down stairs, my heart beating with wonder and embarrassment.

The young gentleman was standing at the window as we entered. "Good morning, Miss Ethel," he said, springing forward, and shaking hands with me, with that nervous, graceful manner, like nobody's else in the world. "Well, I declare, I shouldn't have known you."

"Doesn't that dress become her, Al? But listen. We are to leave in an hour, and I want to see Aunt Abbie. I'll run off

and leave you here; but you must talk fast, for they'll be calling you." And Meltha was gone, and I—oh! I was blushing and twisting my fingers awkwardly, and wishing myself a thousand miles off from the bright, roguish eyes of the young man. He was very, very kind to me, though.

With a delicacy, and generosity of which a fine nature would alone have been capable, he endeavored to dispel my embarrassment, by talking in a free, old-acquaintance sort of manner.

"Isn't this scenery beautiful?" and he drew me to the window. "You'll have a delicious time wandering off among the woods, and down by the river. It's too bad we can't stay to get better acquainted with you; but uncle thinks he must be back to the city by to-morrow night. You mustn't get the blues here, though, alone, for I think we have something very nice in store for you." And then he went on to tell me, rather vaguely, of a new home, in a quaint old parsonage, where he thought I must be very happy with a friend of his mother, and at last he turned round abruptly: "Now, you see, you'll need some spending money of your own, to get you a thousand little things girls are always wanting. I dare say they'll never think of it—anyhow you'll be more independent to have it yourself. How much can you get along with for a year or two?"

Oh, Alison, how good—how generous—how thoughtful you were! No wonder I look down on that moment through mists of fast-rising tears.

But I do not think I had ever owned a sixpence in my life. Of course I had very extravagant ideas of the value of money. I mused a moment, and then ventured hesitatingly—for the

offer had almost overwhelmed me with surprise and gratitude—"Well, I think about two dollars would last me a long, long time."

"Two dollars!" He broke into a laugh that seemed fairly to shake the room. "Now if that isn't a capital joke. Two dollars! Why, you little goose, it wouldn't keep you in sugar-plums for a month. Let's see." He drew out his pocket-book; I saw it was a very plethoric one. He fumbled inside of it a moment, and then slipped some gold pieces into my hand. "That'll last you till next summer, I guess, with your economical ideas. Just say nothing about it to anybody. I must run off, and see if Aunt Abbie's packed up my dressing gowns."

I opened my hand, and looked at the money. There were *five twenty dollar gold pieces*. Thanks to my two winters at the district school, I had sufficient mathematical knowledge to achieve this example in mental addition. I was almost petrified with the result. I, Ethel Lindsay, really owned a hundred dollars! It seemed an almost fabulous sum. I rubbed my eyes to be certain I was awake. No man, suddenly finding himself the undisputed possessor of millions, could have felt richer than I did.

Then came the after-thought—"He must have given me all the money he has in the world. I can't keep it. I'll go this very minute, and find him, and tell him so."

I met him on the stairs.

"I thank you a great many times, Mr. Alison, for your money; but I can't take it, indeed I can't—it's so much." And I held it out to him.

"You'll find use enough for it, I'll warrant, before the year's

out. As for its being too much, that's my look-out, you know, not yours.

"But I don't want to take all your money. Have you got any left?" I persisted.

A comical smile wavered across the young man's mouth.

"A few cents, thank you. Don't trouble yourself on my account, Ethel. What a little bit of verdancy you are! But I like you all the better for it."

Then somebody called him, and I wandered out into the garden, thinking—"hundred dollars! hundred dollars!"

A little while later, I was summoned back to the house, to take my leave of the company. They were all assembled at the front door. Mrs. Kenyon complimented me very kindly on my improved appearance. We went down to the gate together, and there they left me, for Mrs. Kenyon was to accompany her relations to the depot.

Meltha kissed me warmly, and whispered that in a year her school-days would be over, and then she hoped we would meet again. Even Irene, looking very queenly and beautiful, in her dark travelling dress, condescended to shake hands with me.

Alison assured me I would hear from him very soon, and Mr. Herrick said something polite and encouraging, I forget what.

Then the carriage rolled away, and I stood gazing wistfully after it, and seeing, to the last, only the sweet face of Meltha Herrick, and the joyous one of Alison Holmes.

They were my friends, I *felt* it, and oh! they did not dream how the heart of the little girl who watched them wistfully from the garden gate ached at this parting. I feared Irene, I liked Mr. Herrick and his sister, but I *loved* Alison and Meltha. It

was the first time I could have said this of any human being, since they closed the blue eyes of my mother.

The long sleep, the *death in life*, was over ; for what is one's life saving his affections ? I felt the pulses of that new life, as the carriage vanished from my gaze, and I stood alone with the silence and fragrance of that fair June morning all about me ; and blessed be God ! with me, too, after the night it was morning !

I passed the summer at the Cedars, reader, but I can only touch lightly upon that time, for it was outwardly very quiet, very uneventful.

In less than two weeks after Alison's departure, Mrs. Kenyon received a letter from him, stating that his application to his mother's friend had been successful. She was, however, about to take a journey with her brother, who was not in very good health, and would not return until autumn. It was settled that I should join her in early October.

I was left very much to my own pleasure, for Mrs. Kenyon decided I had best not attend school for so short a time, especially as the long summer vacation at the academy commenced soon after I came to the Cedars. But I had plenty of books, and I devoured promiscuous reading with a new, intense delight.

Then there were the woods, the hills, and the river-shores, about which I used to wander every day, taking their sweet lessons into my heart, and growing strong.

There was but little company at the Cedars, for Mrs. Kenyon was absent most of the time. The only work she allotted me was to dust the parlors, while Jane, who took a great fancy

to me, made over all Meltha's last year's wardrobe, with a taste and skill which elicited the frequent admiration of her mistress.

So I was very happy, and the old life at the Frosts soon grew to me like a dark dream, which I could remember but not realize.

CHAPTER IV.

"MAYN'T I go and call papa to supper, aunty?"

The lady leaned down and stroked the golden curls of the little head that pushed itself up against her dress.

"Not quite yet, my boy; I want to wait a few moments until the stage gets in. Maybe it will bring the little girl about whom I told you yesterday."

She had a gentle, womanly face, this lady that stood by the window, with the rich sunset light framing and glorifying it. Somehow there was a strange, significant harmony between that October day and the face that looked out of the Parsonage window across to the hill where the road curved round into sight. The same adjectives would have described both, for both were bright, still, serene, with a sort of tender, consecrating repose about them, and a little, wavering shadow of sadness, which we *feel* in the perfect autumn days, as we do in human faces; for both the spring of brightness and budding—the summer of beauty and blossoming—were gone, and for both these was the full, rich, perfect culmination—the *autumn*.

"Tell me more about the little girl, please, aunty," pleaded the boy, with childish curiosity, tugging up his high chair to the window. "How does she look?"

"You must wait and see for yourself, Philip. But you must love her very much, for she is all alone in the world, without

any kind father or Aunt Ruth, to love her as Philip has—There, I declare, comes the stage!"

They stood in the front door of the Parsonage, the lady and the little boy, as I alighted and looked up curiously at them and my new home. It was a large, low building, of grey stone, and in physiognomy something like an English farm-house, with a gambrel roof, and green blinds. It was not especially striking or picturesque in any way, but it had a good, homely, substantial look about it, that would have unconsciously drawn a homeless old man, or a timid little child toward it.

There was a deep front yard, with two large willows shivering with every puff of wind, and green cedars, and those red mountain ashes, that brighten like pyres of flames the cottage yards of Massachusetts with every autumn.

I went up the narrow stone walk, while the driver unstrapped my trunk, and the lady came down the steps to meet me.

"We are very glad to see you, my child," said a voice, soft and sweet as my mother's cradle song; and she kissed my forehead, and then led me into the house, while the little one hung to her side, and peeped out at me shily and curiously from behind the folds of her dress. As we were crossing the hall, a gentleman stepped out hastily from a side door.

"Who's come—Ruth? I saw the stage stop," he asked, before he observed me.

"The child, Gerald. Here she is."

He looked like her, this tall, middle-aged gentleman, whom I felt, instinctively, was a minister, as he took my hand in his warm, kind clasp. He said something—I forget just what, but it drew my heart out toward him at once, something as his sis-

ter's kiss had toward her, and then we four went into the sitting-room.

How pleasant it looked, with the crimson glow of the sunset filling every corner. The table was spread in the centre of the room, and the soft, grey clouds of steam were pouring from the spout of the china tea-pot.

The furniture was plain, but neat and tastefully disposed; there was an ingrain carpet, with a green vine winding through a red ground; bright cane-seat, and several cushioned easy chairs; then there was a mahogany book-case in one corner, and pretty vases on the mantel.

Miss Maltby removed my bonnet and shawl. "When did you leave Mrs. Kenyon's, Ethel?" she asked; "you see we know your name, my dear, and all about you, for Alison Holmes made an especial journey here on your account, before he returned to Cambridge."

"I left Mrs. Kenyon's yesterday morning. Enos came with me on the cars as far as Springfield, where we passed the night, and he placed me under the care of the stage-driver this morning."

"Well, you must be very tired, my child, and sadly in want of supper, I'm thinking. Now, I want you to understand this is your home, that you belong to us, and we expect to love you very dearly. This gentleman is Uncle Gerald." He stood a few feet from us, observing me with a good deal of interest and kindness in his face.) "I am Aunt Ruth, and this is little Philip here, who wants to talk to you very much, but he happens, just now, to have lost his tongue. Come, Philip, tell your cousin Ethel you are glad to see her."

The boy sidled shily round to me, with his round hazel eyes

fastened on my face. I loved the little rosy-cheeked fellow with the first glance. "Do speak to me, won't you, Philip?" And I drew my arm round him.

Then the first words burst out, honest, bold, emphatic—"I like you!"

And then, too, the great sobs that had been gathering in my heart, broke out. The tears dashed over my face, and weak and ashamed, I sunk into a chair.

"I am very happy, indeed, but I don't know what makes me cry so," I sobbed.

"No matter, my dear; it's all right enough," said Aunt Ruth, and her voice was not quite steady, while Philip pressed up his little, wondering, pitying face to my shoulder, and his father said, in the pleasantest tone:

"This is the last cry we intend to let you have for a long time, Ethel."

At last, when I grew calm again, we sat down to tea. How well I remember that supper! how delicious the cake and biscuit were, and the peaches, thickly sprinkled with sugar, and swimming in cream. Then, after tea, Aunt Ruth took me up to my own room. It was the pleasantest one imaginable, opening out of a front chamber, with a large plum tree brushing against the window. It was furnished very neatly, and my knowledge and taste in these matters had greatly developed since my residence at Mrs. Kenyon's.

There was a pretty little mahogany writing-desk, with various drawers and compartments, in one corner; there was a dressing-table and mirror on one side of the room, and the high, old-fashioned bed-posts, with the snowy curtains and coverlet, and

valance, carried out the general cozy, comfortable expression of the room.

Did it ever strike you, reader, that the physiognomy of chambers is usually a good index of the character of the occupants?

"This is all yours, my dear," said Aunt Ruth, opening the drawers and the closet door; "you are to have sole possession and charge of the whole room. We had it all prepared for you. Just give me the key of your trunk, now, and I will unpack your dresses, for you must be quite too tired, with your long journey, to do this. To-morrow, you can arrange the other things, you see. Isn't that a beautiful prospect from your window? Can you still perceive the old brown church spire on your right?—that is where Uncle Gerald preaches; and the tall building with the cupola, is the Academy. I suppose you'll attend school there. The term commences next week."

And so she went on, pleasantly chatting and bustling about, drawing me out to answer her questions, and ask more. Then, as it began to grow dark, she came and sat down by me, and we talked together a long time, she mostly of the future, and I of my mother and her dying, and of that long, blank "death in life," that followed.

And Aunt Ruth, kissing me tenderly, said: "My poor child, that's all over now; you must think no more about it."

She did, too, what nobody had done since my mother left me. She knelt down by the bedside, and prayed to the "All Father" that she might be a very kind, tender, judicious aunt to the little, motherless girl who had come to them; and that in the coming days they two, who knelt together there, might look

in each other's eyes, and say, "it is good for us that we have been together."

Then she went away, after she had seen me snugly "tucked up" in bed; and very tired with my long journey, and very happy in my new home, I dropped to sleep, with these words setting themselves to a kind of rhythmic melody, that seemed to flow sweetly exultantly up and down my heart—"God has taken care of your child, mamma! God has taken care of your child!"

The Rev. Gerald Maltby was a man somewhere about forty-eight, two or three years younger than his sister. His life had had some severe trials; there were one large and three little graves under the birch trees in the country churchyard, and underneath them slept his wife and his children.

The youngest, Philip, was hardly two years old when his mother was laid there, and because he was the sole blossom left on his household tree, the boy was doubly precious to the heart of the father.

Ruth Maltby had lived with the minister since his marriage. They were much alike, this brother and sister. Ruth had the gentler, more sympathetic, perhaps the finer character of the two; but the minister was a good and a noble man, and a fervent, self-denying Christian. His congregation, which was quite a large one, well-nigh worshipped him, and though he had many calls to wealthier and more influential churches, the pastor adhered to the village of Rygate, set down between the great hills in the southwestern part of Massachusetts, where he was settled in his youth, and where his wife and his children were born and buried.

He was naturally a studious, meditative man, and passed most of his time in his library. His manner was usually reserved and distant to strangers, for he had not the large social sympathies of his sister; but he could unbend and be merry, even playful, when he was alone with Ruth and the children, as he called Philip and myself. He was the kindest of guardians, aye, of fathers, to me, for I do not believe he ever spoke a harsh word to me in his whole life.

For Aunt Ruth I can think of but one word that expresses her character, and that is, *womanly*. She was this, sweetly, purely, entirely; and though few women's lives prove to be deeply happy, or richly harmonious, till that other life is added unto and completes theirs, Aunt Ruth, an old maid, and fifty years old, was certainly a joy and a blessing to all who came within her influence.

I need not say what you, reader, have already divined; that I was very happy in my new home; and that the next half-dozen years lie back in my memory like a long, sunny road over which a traveller has passed, where birds have sung, and flowers bloomed, and where all has been lights, and joy, and beauty.

Uncle Gerald's salary was only eight hundred, though with his abilities he could easily have commanded twice that amount; but, as I said, his adhesiveness always conquered his ambition. We four managed to live very comfortably, even genteelly on this sum, for my guardians had adopted me, and positively declined Alison's and his uncle's generous offer of at least sharing with them the expenses of my education.

I cannot attempt to express all I owe the minister and his sister, and I dare not think what I might have been without them.

For I was by no means a model child, and gave their love and patience much anxiety.

I was impetuous, willful, and naturally obstinate; then, my past life and associations had not been such as to discipline my character or develop the best part of it. So the evil that is, alas! the heritage of our humanity, had taken deep root, and grown abundantly in my nature.

But I always had an innate dislike, abhorrence, of anything rude or vulgar, in speech or manner; so I was never coarse. Even Aunt Keziah had not made me this. Then, much as I liked to have my own way, my affections were the strongest part of my nature; through them I could always be influenced, controlled. "For my love's sake," was the text of my life then. I have learned since that there is a broader, grander one than this, "For the Right's sake." One thing more. I had ever a deep, earnest, ever-present reverence for the Truth. This reverence underlay my whole character. A lie was always to me something utterly hateful.

So, reader, you know something what sort of elements of character had to answer that solemn question of Seth Robbins's asking, "What sort of a woman are you going to make?"

The week after I came to the Parsonage, I entered the Academy. Of course, I was very backward at first; but if I was placed in classes with girls of eleven or twelve, it was a consolation to think I looked no older than they.

Then we had a great deal of company at the Parsonage, for the Maltbys were very hospitable, and, as their adopted child, I received considerable attention; besides, with my ardent nature, I had my full share of school friendships, and I made rapid progress in my studies.

I had been at the Parsonage nearly three years, growing much in body and in mind; though on that fair summer's afternoon when I stood by my chamber window, looking at the delicately-chased gold ring which Uncle Gerald had given me that morning at breakfast, you would hardly have thought I was meeting my eighteenth birth-day.

Suddenly Philip broke panting into the room. "Papa's got something to show you, Ethel—papa's got something to show you!" cried the child, his bright eyes sparkling with delight. Before I could answer, Uncle Gerald entered the room.

"Now, guess what I have here, Ethel. Something very flattering about your dear little self." And he held the paper above his head.

I sprang forward. "Oh, Uncle Gerald, do give it to me! What in the world can it be?"

We had a playful little contest for the paper. But he was the taller and stronger, and after a rush round the room, and a struggle in the corner, I gave up, and resorted to entreating again.

"Uncle Gerald, I'll do anything in the world for you, if you'll only let me see it!"

"I'm not so certain of that," with an arch smile in the corners of his mouth. "Will you sew the next button on my wristbands that Jane washes off?" A task which he knew full well I especially deprecated.

"Yes, or make you another study gown, just as I did last Christmas, when that's worn out."

"So you did, dear." He glanced down on the crimson delaine that had so pleased me, at that time, rather tropical fancy. "I'm never proof against this, Ethel, when I remember

how *particularly* fond of sewing you are, too. Here is the paper!" I snatched it eagerly. The first thing I saw was my own name over an article, which proved to be my prize composition; a poem that I had written at the close of the term. This was actually published in a New York literary paper, with a most flattering notice from the editors, affirming, in newspaper parlance, that the poem "gave promise of a genius of a very high order, and that the fair young authoress was probably destined to a most brilliant literary career." I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes. I read it over three times, and then turned my burning face up to Uncle Gerald's, who was smilingly watching me: "How in the world, uncle, did it get here? Did you know anything about it?"

"Nothing, Ethel. But Mr. Mason (the academy teacher), had a copy. He must have sent it to the editors."

"And I—oh, I wonder if they can really mean it?" The tumult of surprise, wonder, delight, was more than I could bear. I burst into tears.

"Well done now, Ethel. If that isn't the last way to take such a glorious prophecy of fame. Remember, my dear, dignity is very essential to a young lady on the road to becoming a brilliant authoress."

I laughed a moment, and then cried harder than ever.

"Look here! I'll go and call aunty," cried the sympathizing Philip, who, although not understanding the cause of my tears, fervently believed that his aunt had a balm for all the trouble in the world.

Uncle Gerald sat down by me, and was saying something that half amused and half piqued me, when Aunt Ruth burst into the room, looking flurried and anxious.

"What in the world is all this about?" she asked, staring from one to the other.

"Nothing bad, Ruth, only the momentous fact has just been announced to the public, that our little Ethel here is going to make a very celebrated personage." And with a good deal of comical gesture and intonation, he read the notice of my poem.

Aunt Ruth's face beamed with surprised delight. "My dear, I am *so* glad, so astonished! You know, Gerald, I always said the child would make something remarkable."

"I know you did, and here it is proven in black and white. Miss Ethel Lindsay, the authoress. Really I am quite overcome with the honor of my proximity to so distinguished a personage;" making me a low bow.

"Be still, Gerald! I haven't known you so gay for years. Never mind what he says, Ethel, my love. Do let me see the paper."

At that moment Jane put her face inside the door. "Miss Hubbard's little boy's fell down from the pear tree, and broke his left arm. They're in a dreadful panic, and want to know if you won't step right over there, Miss Maltby?"

"His poor mother! Indeed I will!" ejaculated Aunt Ruth, all visions of my future celebrity vanishing before this present trouble. "Ethel, do hand me your shawl; I'll throw it over my head, and run down there."

At that moment somebody called to see the minister, so I was left quite alone with a world of new, tumultuous, intangible, yet very happy feelings.

I presume I read that brief paragraph over for at least twenty times in the next fifteen minutes—and long after I knew every word by heart. I had felt for a long while that I

was not quite like other people—that I had visions and aspirations, with which my school-companions could not sympathize, and although I had, for two years, earned the composition prizes at the academy, still I had not dreamed before—oh! what bright, intangible pictures of fame and fortune rose and fluttered before my imagination!

And if anybody could have looked in through the dimity curtains of my chamber window that afternoon, they would have seen a little figure pacing rapidly up and down the room, her hands behind her, a variable glow flushing the usually pale cheeks, while the birds sang on sweetly in the plum-boughs, and the plum-boughs swung and swept against the window; and this was my first dream of fame. Ah, me! the first was the sweetest. It was broken, at last, by Philip's sudden entrance.

"Jane's cross, and papa's busy, and there's nobody to talk to me," pouted the child. "I want you to play with me, Ethel."

I was too much occupied with the Ethel Lindsay *to be*, to comply with the child's request. I searched with my eyes round the room, but it contained nothing to amuse him. "Philip, where's that new trumpet papa brought you last week? that's a great deal prettier than any plays I can think of."

"Aunty locked it up in her drawer, because I was naughty, and made her head ache. Please, won't you get it for me, Ethel? I won't blow loud but just once."

The blasts of a hundred "shilling trumpets" could not have disturbed me then. So I went into Aunt Ruth's room, and found the keys of her bureau in her work-basket.

"Now, Philip, which is the drawer?"

"The top one, Ethel. I saw her put it in there."

Had I not been so much absorbed in something else, I should have recollected that this drawer was one which Aunt Ruth always kept locked, and to which, it was understood, no member of the household could have access. As it was, I unlocked the drawer, unconscious of what I was doing. I do not now recall anything it contained, but a rosewood box in one corner. This was open, and in one of the compartments, on a small, crimson satin cushion, lay a large gold locket, which had evidently been laid there hastily.

There was a face in this locket—a fine, bold, manly-looking face, evidently not more than thirty years old; not handsome, but spirited and forcible, with dark blue eyes, and thick, brownish hair. I stood a minute gazing at it, quite forgetful that I had no right to do this.

Philip's voice aroused me, clambering up into the chair. "Have you found the trumpet, Ethel?"

I closed the drawer quickly, with a blush, and a strange feeling of guiltiness. "You must have made a mistake, Philip. Aunt Ruth would never have placed the trumpet here;" and I opened the next drawer, where it lay. "Now, be a good boy, and amuse yourself with this."

I went back to my own room, to weave old romances, in which that young, proud face in the locket, and Aunt Ruth's pale, serene one, were mingled together.

"Of course she must have loved him," I said, springing at once to this conclusion, for I had all the unbounded faith in first love, and woman's deathless devotion, which a romantic, imaginative girl of seventeen, who knew nothing of the world or of human nature, could be expected to have.

"What a glorious romance it would make," I mused, "with that beautiful quotation of Shakspeare at the first chapter:

'She let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek.'

Let me see, what shall I call it?—'AUNT RUTH; OR, A TALE OF LOVE AND WOMAN'S DEVOTION.' What a beautiful title? It was so strange, so romantic, too, that I should have come upon the picture in that way." But here the old, half-guilty feeling came over me again. And yet, I was not really to blame; for I am certain no curiosity, however intense, could have tempted me to glance inside that private drawer; but, having inadvertently come upon the locket, I could not help making it the nucleus of a great many dreams.

One night, not more than a week afterwards, Aunt Ruth and I sat alone together in the family room, waiting for Uncle Gerald, who had gone out to visit some sick parishioner.

It was quite late. I had learned my lessons for the next day, and she had finished her sewing, and we both sat there very silent for a while, watching the moonlight as it struck through the window, and nestled down whitely on the carpet. At last, I spoke up, eager, abrupt, as I generally did:

"Aunt Ruth, when I get to be a woman" (I felt myself, and looked hardly more than a child still), "I'm going to write a novel."

"Are you, my dear?" looking at me with her soft eyes, proudly and tenderly; "I'm afraid that won't be the best way of employing your talents. Novels are dangerous things for young people."

"Oh! but this shall be a good, pious one, you know, that can't hurt anybody. It shall be a story of love, and great troubles, and self-sacrifice—something that might have happened." A sound reached me, something like a faint, *very* faint sigh.

"Aunt Ruth, I read in a book, the other day, that all true women had loved once in their lives—do you believe it?"

"I believe it, my child."

"Did *you* ever love, Aunt Ruth? Now, do tell me all about it." And I knelt down by her side, laying my head in her lap.

"Ethel," passing her hand over my forehead, "if you were a little older, you would see that was not a proper question to ask me." There was a little perceptible quavering in her tones, and the soft, quiet hand was not just steady.

"Have I done anything wrong, Aunt Ruth?"

"No; only we will not speak of it any more. There comes Gerald."

But there was a shining moisture in her eyes as she rose up; and after that Aunt Ruth became invested, to my girlish fancy, with a new charm and sacredness.

The flower had blossomed out somewhere in the waters of her life. The stem had been broken, and the flower perished. Of how many a woman's heart is this all that need be written!

CHAPTER V.

Two years more had passed. As my memory wanders through these by-roads of the Past, I am constantly tempted to pause over some sweet home-picture, or some pleasant school experience. But, after all, those two years were only the seed-sowing, the forming-time of my life and character.

There are no great landmarks, there is nothing especially eventful to mark their passage. I attended school all this time, I studied very diligently, because I loved knowledge, and found in it sufficient reward. I wrote poems and sketches, which were published in the village weekly, with sundry flattering notices, and I was looked upon among my uncle's parishioners as quite a prodigy. Sometimes these articles were copied, but I had a higher standard of authorship now, and knew that even a newspaper puff did not always prove one a genius.

And so, not more than two months behind my twentieth birth-day, I sat with Uncle Gerald and Aunt Ruth in the sitting, or family room, as we more frequently called it, because this title seemed so fitting to express its character.

It was a wild, rain-drenched night, such as often darkens the fair face of April. The wind stormed and clamored among the boughs, or beat the thick drops madly against the window-panes, while we three sat there, Uncle Gerald with his newspaper, Aunt Ruth with her sewing, and I—I was hearkening to

the storming outside, and watching the little skeins of crimson flame as they tangled themselves around the coal in the grate, and wandering through the dim land of reverie, where, despite Uncle Gerald's warnings, and Aunt Ruth's mild reproofs, so much of my time was passed.

"Goodness! how the wind blows!" cried Uncle Gerald, laying down his paper, as a stronger blast shook the window. "Well, it's one consolation—we shan't have many callers to-night. Ethel, wake up here! what are you seeing in the fire?"

"A great many beautiful things—who can be out in this gale!" for the door-bell gave a loud, spasmodic sort of peal.

A moment later Jane came into the room with two letters. "One's for Miss Ethel, and the other for Miss Maltby. The post-boy said he was going up home, so he thought he might as well stop with 'em," was her explanation.

seized hold of mine, with a great bounding of my heart, that sent a faintness through my limbs, for on that letter seemed to hang all my destiny.

The week before I had written a short, domestic sketch, and sent it to the editor of a literary magazine of considerable reputation. It was the first time I had submitted my articles to any criticism beyond that of my friends, and some country editors. The acceptance or refusal of this one would probably be a better test of its real merit than any I had before received; but I did not understand how chance, or a large supply of matter, or twenty other circumstances might affect the publisher's verdict on my story. I tried to break the seal, but my heart was in my throat, and my hands shook so, this was quite impossible.

"Uncle Gerald, I can't. Won't you open it?" I asked.

He took it, and I buried my face in my hands, faint with that mingling of hope and fear, which you, reader, will hardly understand, unless you have had the same experience.

"How the child trembles! Don't feel so, dear. It won't make much difference any way." And Aunt Ruth drew me to her.

"Don't read it quite yet, Uncle Gerald, not until my heart stops beating! There—now."

So with my face buried in my hands, and Aunt Ruth's arm around me, I listened to Uncle Gerald:

"MISS ETHEL LINDSAY: We have received your article, and although just now we have a large supply of matter on hand, it is such a simple, natural, pathetic little story, we have concluded to accept it, and herein inclose you five dollars, our usual remuneration for articles of this length. We shall be pleased to hear from you again. In haste.

"Very respectfully yours,

"JAMES MORTON & Co."

"There, Ethel, take down your hands now," cried Aunt Ruth.

And I did, and looked at the bold, scrawling autograph of the publisher through my tears, and held the two bank-notes affectionately in my hands, and turned them upside down, and fairly gloated over them as the veriest miser over his gold. Do you know how very, very precious the first *earned* money is, coined from your own thoughts, a part of yourself? All the next day I carried those two notes in my pocket, and every little while I would put my hand inside, handling them affection-

ately, or hold them before my eyes, whispering to myself, "I earned it! I earned it!"

But that night Uncle Gerald pinched me under the chin, and after my emotion had a little subsided, he told me he had been having a long talk with the principal of the Academy, and the result was, they had both arrived at the conclusion that I knew about enough to stay at home now.

"You see, Ethel," continued my uncle, "you are thoroughly grounded in all the English branches now, and you can read history and study Latin with me, just as well as at school. Then, if you are determined to make an authoress, you'll want more time to write. How does my plan strike you?"

"It's just right—I shall enjoy so much staying at home, and reciting to you."

"I declare, if I haven't forgot all about my letter!" suddenly exclaimed Aunt Ruth, as she raised it from the floor, where my rapid movements had inadvertently lodged it. "It's from Lucy Holmes"—running her eye over the address.

I had not heard from Mrs. Kenyon or any of her relatives for a long time. Alison had written Aunt Ruth once respecting me, some three months after I had been at the Parsonage; and she in reply had assured him that they had adopted me, and I would be to her and her brother as a child of their own.

Of course the volatile, impressible youth, feeling that I was well cared for, and happy, soon forgot all about me. Had I been with, or dependent on him, his warm, generous nature would have constantly interested itself in my behalf; but full of life and joyousness as he was, the young student lived in the present, and the dead and the absent are generally forgotten by such natures.

But I remembered. The low, rebuking tones that answered Irene Woolsey's scornful laugh, when I stood, a poor, little, friendless orphan girl in Mrs. Kenyon's parlor, would never be forgotten, and my heart always grew warm with gratitude as I thought of him.

Mrs. Holmes and Aunt Ruth corresponded irregularly. Letters had probably been interchanged half a dozen times since I came to the Parsonage.

Mrs. Holmes always inquired very kindly after me in her letters—very pleasant, graceful letters these were; but always breathing a kind of idolatrous affection for her son.

Her health still continuing delicate, she had not ventured to come north for a long period.

But this last epistle of Mrs. Holmes's informed us that her physicians thought it quite safe for her to revisit home again, as she always called New England.

"I hope, dear Ruth," ran a passage in the letter, "to sit in the pleasant shadows of the Parsonage, and talk over our old school-days, by the middle of next June. Alison, my darling boy, will probably meet me there, for I shall insist upon his not coming here so late in the season to accompany me north; you are aware he is studying law with his father's cousin in New York."

"I am very glad Lucy is coming to us again," mused Aunt Ruth as she re-folded the letter.

"You were very intimate, weren't you, aunty?"

"Yes, Ethel, I loved Lucy Alison as if she were my own sister. Do you remember, Gerald, how dear mamma used to laugh at our school-girl devotion to each other?"

"Yes; and how bravely you defended her, Ruth, when

she eloped with Edward Holmes. What a time that was !”

“Well, Gerald,” said Aunt Ruth, with an energy which showed she was still quite ready to take sides with the companion of her schooldays ; “Lucy was in the right of it. Edward Holmes was a noble-hearted fellow, and Squire Alison’s only objection to him was, that he was poor.”

“Well, it proved a pretty slim one in the end.”

“Yes, they had their triumph when Edward’s old bachelor uncle died, and left him heir to half a million. Poor, poor Edward !”

“Why poor Edward, aunty ?” for I had listened to all this with the greatest interest.

“Because, he had only been married six years, when he was killed by a fall from a horse. Lucy would never have lifted up her head again, if it hadn’t been for her boy. Alison is just like his father, and if Lucy’s love is little else than idolatry, I can’t find it in my heart to blame her.”

Uncle Gerald shook his head sagely. “Spoiled child ! spoiled child, Ruth ! I don’t believe his mother ever contradicted him in her life.”

“I know it ! but, you must admit, Gerald, he’s a noble little fellow.” (Alison was a great favorite with Aunt Ruth.) “I shall be delighted to see him next summer, and then it will be so pleasant for him and the child to meet. She has grown so, I don’t think he would know her.”

My uncle and aunt could not realize that I was now a young lady. To them I was still in heart and in life “the child,” the old, tender appellation which they had given me when I first came to them.

So we sat and talked into very late night, of the past and the future ; while the rain stormed against the panes, and the wind rattled among the boughs, and I looked out with a brave, trusting heart, and smiled to the future.

It was an afternoon in the last week of May, fragrant and sunny, its pulses bounding with the birth and beauty of the spring.

Aunt Ruth had gone out, and I was preparing a surprise for her, in the shape of a large bowl of strawberries, the first of the season ; for I had been carefully searching among the beds that morning, and discovered that some of the fruit was ripe.

The bowl was about half filled, and I was lifting away the large green leaves from a cluster of berries, when a pair of hands was drawn suddenly over my eyes, and a voice laughed out, “Ah, you demure young lady—I’ve discovered your thieving propensities now.”

“Please let me go, Uncle Gerald. What a position for a parson and an authoress. It’s a scandal on both the professions.”

“I can’t help it, if it is. Parsons, so far as I know, like strawberries just as well as other people, so I shan’t let you go until you have promised me some of these—why, Lucy, is it possible !” His tone changed, his hands dropped suddenly, and looking up, I saw a lady standing before us, with Philip by her side, who cried out, half apologetically, “There wasn’t anybody in the house, so I brought the lady round here, papa.”

“Never mind, Gerald,” she laughed, as she extended both

hands with the warmth of very old friendship. "We are glad to see each other, I know."

"To be sure we are," kissing the fair ungloved hand, "and I'm not going to apologize to you, at all, for the very undignified position in which you surprised me."

"Ethel, this is Mrs. Holmes. Don't blush so, child, it was all my fault."

She was a fair, matronly-looking person, with a soft voice, and a lady-like presence and manner—this mother of Alison.

Her soft, pensive, hazel eyes, still retained something of the beauty of their youth; she wore a brown travelling-dress, and a hat whose azure linings became her delicate complexion.

Mrs. Holmes clasped my hand, and looked at me with kindly interest. "I feel already acquainted with you, Miss Lindsay, because Alison used to talk of you so much."

"Come up to the house, Lucy. We'll send a message right off for Ruth. She'll be quite beside herself. But where are your trunks?"

"In the carriage that brought me from the depot. It stands at the gate."

Uncle Gerald hurried off with Philip, and left me to conduct Mrs. Holmes to the house, who chatted pleasantly with me all the time.

I escaped up to my room, as soon as Uncle Gerald came in, for I knew they would have a great many private matters to discuss. In a little while Philip's eager voice floated up to me—"Aunt Ruth's come! Aunt Ruth's come!"

The next week was, I am certain, a very happy one for all the inmates of the grey-stone Parsonage.

I grew to love Mrs. Holmes very much. I used to sit in the

old family-room, during those long, bright days, in which the spring clasped hands with the summer, and listen to the trio, as they lived over the days of their youth.

But there was one subject dearer to Mrs. Holmes than all the rest, of which she never tired; one which warmed her cheek, and kindled her eyes into the brightness of girlhood, and this was her boy, Alison.

I was always interested in him, and my face indicated it, probably, for the mother turned sympathetically to me when she spoke of him; and in the twilight we would walk up and down the long, shaded, fruit-filled garden, and she would tell me stories of her idol, sometimes comic, sometimes pathetic, but always revealing his kind, generous nature, and his beautiful affection for his mother.

"How glad he will be to see you again; he used to call you his little protégé. But you must both have altered a great deal in the last five years. He was nothing but a boy, then, himself."

I could not help perceiving that Mrs. Holmes had taken a great fancy to me, partly, I presume, from Aunt Ruth's representations, and partly on her son's account. She read my stories, and fully believed I was a genius, a word to which very great latitude is admitted in social phraseology. I was, just at that time, much engaged in preparing a long article for the magazine, and passed much of each day in my own room.

Sometimes Mrs. Holmes and my aunt came up to the latter's chamber, and as it adjoined my own room, fragments of their conversation would float in to me as I sat by my writing at the window, with the rustling plum-boughs heaping their

shadows about me. One of these conversations particularly fastened itself upon my memory.

Mrs. Holmes must have been speaking of her husband before she and Aunt Ruth came up stairs, for as she took her seat, I heard her remark, sadly, "There is no one but you, Ruth, to whom I ever speak of that time. Nothing but Alison saved me from insanity or death;" and then came a sob for the husband, over whom twenty springs had spread the green folds.

"But your husband was true to the end. There is a grief that killeth not, and yet is heavier than death," said Aunt Ruth, solemnly.

There was a long, long pause. At last Mrs. Holmes asked timidly, as though there *was* a grief she hardly dared invade, "Ruth, will you tell me if you have ever heard from Morgan since he went to England?"

"Never; but something in my heart tells me he is yet alive."

"My poor Ruth! It was a terrible, terrible thing. I never could understand how you bore up under it so bravely."

"It was God's strength in my weakness, Lucy," said Aunt Ruth, solemnly.

And perhaps Mrs. Holmes thought, at that time, that she had leaned too much upon the human love. Perhaps, for a moment, the words of John the Apostle sounded over the dead centuries their solemn warning to her heart—"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

I rose up and softly closed the door. But when I returned to my seat, I did not resume my writing. I sat, with my head clasped in my hands, pondering long on what I had heard. I

knew then something of the miniature I had seen. His name was Morgan, and Aunt Ruth had loved him.

Three days later my story was finished. With a long sigh of relief I closed up my desk, and went down stairs. I met Philip in the hall. He was a fine, well-grown boy now, of eight years old, as rude and mischievous as boys usually are at that age, and it was more our fault than his, for we could hardly help spoiling the handsome, troublesome fellow, with the amber curls dashing over his roguish eyes, from morning until night.

"Phil, where are you going?"

"Down to the post-office, Ethel. Aunt Lucy thinks there may be a letter from Alison to-night."

"Well, I want a walk, too. Wait a moment, and I'll get my bonnet."

Philip clapped his hands as I went up stairs. We were the very best of friends. There was no letter for Mrs. Holmes, and as it was still half an hour to sunset, and Phil and I were just in the mood, we took a roundabout road, that led a short distance through the wood, on our return.

Here, scattering itself gracefully over some young birches, of only a few feet in height, we came upon a sweet-brier in full bloom.

"Oh, Philip! haven't you a knife? I must take some of them home to trim the mantel."

"Here's the knife, Ethel. But you'll only cut your fingers with the thorns, and I shan't want to carry 'em home."

I had not thought of this. But I wanted the flowers, and I was not one to yield to small obstacles.

"Never you mind, Phil. I'll cut them carefully as I can, and take them home in my apron."

It was just at sunset that we came out upon the main road, less than a quarter of a mile from the Parsonage. I was so intent upon the flowers which filled my apron, that I did not notice the sound of approaching horse-hoofs, until Philip's warning, "Look out, Ethel, the horse will run over you," caused me to glance up hastily.

I started back just as the rider drew up the reins. I knew him at the first glance; though early manhood had given something more of force and character to the whole face, it was still that of Alison Holmes. The dark eyes had all their former brightness and hidden laughter, and over the broad, finely-developed forehead, clustered the rich, wavy hair, and he sat his horse with all the old, instinctive grace; a son that any mother might have been proud of. He lifted his hat to me.

"Can you tell me, miss, whether I am on the road to the Parsonage? It is several years since I was here, and I am quite amused to find I have lost myself."

He did not recognize me. Probably the last five years had considerably changed the personal appearance of Aunt Keziah Frost's "chore girl."

"If you will proceed up this road a few rods farther, you will find one that branches off to the right. Take it, and it will bring you, in a few moments, to the Parsonage, sir."

"Thank you." He lifted his hat again, and rode on, while I followed slowly.

He was my first friend, and all the old memories of his kindness came back and crowned him, after this meeting. As for

Philip, he had rushed home, with a child's eagerness, to see the stranger. I went in by the back door, and their voices came into the kitchen.

"It's strange where Ethel's gone. She's not up stairs!" said Aunt Ruth.

Philip spoke up. "Why, she went with me down to the post-office, to see if there was a letter for Aunt Lucy."

"Was that Ethel Lindsay I met on the road, and of whom I inquired the way to the Parsonage?" asked the astonished voice of Alison Holmes.

"Yes, that was Ethel," answered Philip.

"Well, I am confounded now. How she has altered—my little protégée! Her manner struck me at once, it was so thoroughly lady-like. Aunt Ruth, she does honor to your teaching. I knew there was something in that girl, always. I see her now, standing in Mrs. Kenyon's parlor door, in that old bonnet, saying, in her pleading child-like voice, 'I don't want to beg, but I'll work very, very hard.'"

"Poor child," said Aunt Ruth, commiseratingly; "I wish she'd make haste home," and then I hurried up the stairs to my own room, where, throwing myself down on the bed, I wept for half an hour, I hardly knew why, for the darkness of the old time, and the brightness of the present.

When, at last, I went down stairs, I found supper had been waiting for me some time, and they were beginning to grow alarmed at my long absence.

"Where have you come from Ethel?" was the simultaneous inquiry that greeted my entrance.

Before I could answer, Alison sprang forward. I do not remember what his first words were; but I know there was so

much warm cordiality in his manner, in his eyes, in his very smile, that my embarrassment vanished at once.

"To think I didn't recognize you on the road! You are so altered," scrutinizing my face. "Did you know me?"

"To be sure I did, Mr. Holmes; but I thought I'd leave you to discover me yourself."

"Well, I shall remember that of you, sometime, Miss Ethel."

Then Aunt Ruth summoned us all to the table. Such a happy party as we were! We all bore our part in the pleasant, desultory conversation that flowed around the old family room that night.

For Mrs. Holmes, she hardly removed her eyes from Alison during the evening, and it was beautiful to watch the mother-love shining down in them; beautiful, too, to see how watchful and tender the young man was of his parent. They had not seen each other for five months.

"I shall never live long again away from you, my boy," said Mrs. Holmes.

He turned round quickly, for he was chatting with me, and threw himself on a low stool at her feet, laying his head in her lap, just as he must have done when he was a little child. "No, you never shall, mother. I don't take half as much comfort away from you."

"It's a great pity—a great pity," said Uncle Gerald, speaking aloud to himself. It was a habit he had.

"What's a great pity, Gerald?" asked Mrs. Holmes, as she wound the luxuriant hair round her fingers.

"What I've told you a great many times, Lucy, that your whole bringing up of the boy was one long mistake."

"I know it," answered Mrs. Holmes, a little uneasily. "You

and brother Nathan always were preaching sermons to me about 'sparing the rod, and spoiling the child.' I don't see but he's just as good now as though I'd been ever so severe with him."

"That's right mother," and Alison lifted his head quite. "The fact is, all my relations talk about your spoiling me, as though I was the greatest rascal in Christendom, and it's irrefragable proof of my good nature that I stand it so well."

"So it is, Alison. But you don't consider," Uncle Gerald went on solemnly, "for no one has ever told you, what a fearful responsibility your wealth and your position are. 'Unto whom much is given, of him shall be much required.' I know, and admire, and love the good that is in you, my boy; but if you had had more of the discipline of life, you would have made a stronger, and, therefore, a better man."

"But Alison is very, very generous, Gerald. If you only knew all the good"—

"There—there! not a catalogue of my virtues now, if you please, mother. I know what you say," he continued, speaking more seriously than I had ever heard him, "is true, every word of it, Uncle Gerald. If I had only had a few hard knocks, instead of so much kissing,

"It would have been better for me,"

he hummed in his rich tenor voice. "But there's no use crying for the whippings I didn't get. Miss Ethel, can you sing or play?"

"Very little of either, thank you. Euterpe was not very beneficent to me."

"But Erato was, so Aunt Ruth has been telling me. I always knew nature intended you for something very extraordinary.

By the by, we must have some glorious times this week, exploring my old haunts round the village." And so he went on, from one matter to another, restless, desultory, but always interesting, always magnetic.

He never alluded, in my presence, to the time when we first met; and it was this intuitive delicacy, which could only belong to a generous and sensitive nature, that touched me more than anything else.

The next morning, after breakfast, I went into the parlor, which was emphatically a "company room," for the family scarcely ever used it. On the centre table lay a "scrap-book," bound with Russian morocco, as it contained all my published poems and sketches, which I do not think numbered, at that time, more than twenty.

To my surprise, I found Alison here, who I supposed had just gone up to his room.

With an arch smile he held up the scrap-book. "See what a treasure I've found, Miss Ethel."

"Oh, Alison, you must not see that!" And forgetful of everything but the early crude productions it contained, I bounded forward, snatched the book in a very undignified manner from his hand, and ran out into the hall.

With a laughing shout he sprang after me. What a race we had through the hall, and down to the foot of the garden, the book clasped tightly in my arms, and my hair falling from its fastenings, and rushing down to my waist. Alison caught hold of my shoulder, just before I reached the fence which bounded the garden.

There was a little struggle on both sides, and then he held up the book triumphantly before my eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Holmes, please do not open it; it contains some things I would not have you see for the world!"

"There, now, just like the rest of your sex, when we think we've conquered you, you always disarm us by your entreaties! It's too bad, Miss Ethel! but I can't resist that look, so we must compromise the matter. I'll return the book, if you'll agree to read me the titles of the articles herein, and an occasional one, which I shall select."

"I promise."

He placed the book in my hand. "Let's go to that seat under the old apple-tree," pointing to a rustic one, formed of interlaced oak boughs, which Uncle Gerald had made for me. "It's just the place for listening to a poem."

"Well, excuse me a moment, till I can go into the house and wind up my hair."

"No, indeed, it's too becoming, too picturesque, in its present state, for me to allow anything of that kind. What a strange, variable, beautiful color it is!" Holding up one of the wavy skeins in the sunlight.

So we went to the old apple-tree, and, sitting there, I read him the titles, and several of the poems.

There was a short one, I recollect, that pleased him particularly, and he asked me to read it three times. It was so simple and sad, too, that I was quite surprised at his taste.

ALICE GRAY.

Out upon the west hill side,
Stand the two old pines;
And the pleasant sunlight shines
Through the branches, which the vines,
With their beryl rings have tied!

Out upon the west hill side,
 Autumn winds one day,
 Into many a golden ray,
 Shook the curls of Alice Gray,
 And her white brow glorified.

Out upon the west hill side,
 What she said that time
 May not throb adown my rhyme;
 But across my heart shall shine,
 And a song with me abide!

Out upon the west hill side,
 Stands the small head stone,
 Telling how (God's will be done!)
 Ere that autumn day was done,
 Little Alice Gray had died!

CHAPTER VI.

THOSE summer days were very bright ones. I enjoyed them as youth does enjoy the great high tides of existence, with all their glow and sparkle, and source of rushing waves. And Alison, the "heir of nearly a million," whose whole life had been one long pleasure-day, heaped with the ministrations of wealth and affection, insisted these days in the grey old Parsonage were the happiest of his life.

Of course there was no more writing or studying for me. Always restless, always effervescent, he was constantly devising some new plan for enjoyment; getting up a ride, a ramble, a sail, or something of the kind. Not that he was by any means of a morbid, dissatisfied nature, but life was a long holiday, and he gathered its honey for himself and for others.

So one day we went to the woods, and another to the river. Sometimes Mrs. Holmes and Aunt Ruth accompanied us, sometimes only Philip, and often we were quite alone. I read poems to him, of which he was very fond, and he sang to me. Then he had a passion for beautiful or striking scenery, and here our tastes harmonized perfectly.

We had, too, long delightful conversations about the writers we liked, and the world of which I know so little; and I am certain it never once entered the mind of my companion that he

was rich and I was poor, and that he would not have thought of this, had he known that all I possessed in the world was the hundred dollars he had once given me, and which Aunt Ruth had never allowed me to spend.

“Ethel, do you know how to ride horseback?” asked Alison, suddenly one morning, as we all sat at breakfast. We had by mutual consent dropped any more formal appellations.

“No, Alison, I never had any one to teach me, and then, I am a coward about riding, you know.”

“It’s a great pity. I do like to see a lady a fine *équestrienne*. Uncle Gerald, how could you neglect so important a part of your niece’s education?”

“Poor Ethel!” said the minister, setting down his cup; “I’m afraid she has had a hard time of it, with two such prosy old people. She ought to have had a brother, that’s certain.”

“Just as I ought to have had a sister, to enjoy the benefit of my instructions and example,” laughed Alison; but our eyes met, and I felt somehow that the same thought had whispered through the hearts of both.

A moment later he said, as he passed his cup to Aunt Ruth, “Look here, Ethel, I want you should take a ride with me this morning down to the lake bridge. I’ll get two of the steadiest horses in all Ryegate.”

“Oh! I can’t,” growing alarmed at the very idea. “Indeed it’s quite impossible! I couldn’t maintain my seat, or control the horse for half a minute.”

“Yes you could, too. Come, now, Ethel, if I can’t coax, let me *hire* you to go. If you’ll ride down to the bridge, and back

with me, this morning, you shall have a present that would rejoice the eyes of any young lady in Christendom.”

“Thank you, Alison. I’m afraid I should have no eyes with which to look at it, if I attempted to accomplish this feat.”

“What a little coward you are! Now I appeal to the wisest heads of this household to sustain my assertion, that Miss Ethel Lindsay’s cheeks stand greatly in need of a rouging this morning. Moreover, I’ll promise to lead the horse all the way, so her precious neck will not incur the slightest danger of dislocation.”

“I guess you’d better go, Ethel. It may do you good,” was Uncle Gerald’s decision.

“But where is the riding-dress to come from?” asked Aunt Ruth, behind the old-fashioned coffee urn, which had been her mother’s.

“She may wear mine, Ruth, and I think my new riding-cap will just fit her,” answered Mrs. Holmes, always ready to promote her son’s wishes.

So two hours later the horses were at the gate; and I, feeling very awkwardly in my long habit of black velvet, and the pretty beaver hat, with its heavy ostrich plumes, of whose remarkable becomingness to the wearer they all bore exclamatory witness, was duly mounted by Alison, in presence of the whole family.

My hands shook so, I could scarcely hold the bridle, and there was a forestalling of fun in the dark eyes of Alison Holmes, as he sprang lightly into the saddle, which did not lessen my uneasiness.

“You will take good care of the child, Alison?” said my aunt anxiously.

"There's no kind of danger ; don't be the least afraid," interposed Mrs. Holmes, soothingly.

"Never fear, good people ; I'll bring her back safe and sound." He lifted his hat to them, kissed his hand to his mother, and so we rode slowly down the road, brushing the dew from the grass beneath our feet, and the birds making sweet music in the thick boughs overhead.

Every one knows the enjoyment and exhilaration of a horse-back ride. My fears gradually vanished as I became accustomed to the motion of the animal, and I was really quite proud when Alison removed his hand from the bridle, and I found I could manage my horse alone.

We reached the river at last, a long reach of deep smooth water, lapped in between wooded hills, forming a picture of singular interest and beauty.

The day was growing warm when we turned our horses' heads homeward. Alison began gradually to urge his along, and I endeavored to keep pace with him, so our horses were soon spurred into a canter.

But, in turning a sharp angle in the road, my horse started, not enough to have disturbed a practised rider, of course ; but my head swam, my hands dropped the bridle, and—the next thing I recollect, Alison was raising me from the ground, quite pale himself, as he asked eagerly, "Are you hurt—are you hurt, Ethel?"

"No, I guess not, Alison ; but how did I come here?"

"Why, your horse sprang forward a little and dislodged you. You better believe I was frightened when I saw you going off. But there is no harm done, if you are not injured. Try, and see how you can walk a few paces?"

"As well as I ever walked. Oh ! what is that?" for with the second step, a sharp pain caught my ankle.

The look of alarm returned to his face again, but, after all, it was nothing very serious. I had only slightly sprained my ankle.

The horses stood very quietly on the road, and Alison soon reseated me, and we went on again, slow enough this time, for my fall had effectually banished any malicious intentions of amusement at my expense, from that young gentleman's mind.

"Does your ankle pain you now, Ethel?"

"Not very much, thank you." I believe he asked, and I answered the question some twenty times, in the next half hour.

I insisted upon his not relating my misadventure to the family, and he was nothing loth to comply, because he feared they might object to a second expedition. So I reached home in more pain than he suspected. They all came to the gate to see us dismount, and I managed to walk up to the house, without betraying the accident. I acquainted Jane with it, however, for I knew I could rely upon her silence, and after her careful hands had bathed and bound up my ankle, the pain was greatly relieved.

Three mornings later, as I sprang out of bed, I descried on my dressing-table an elaborately carved pearl watch-stand ; and on one cushion of crimson velvet rested a delicately chased ladies' hunting-watch, with its chatelaine and pin, the latter a lily, opening up from two large uncurling leaves, a beautiful device ; all executed in gold.

I half believed I was dreaming. As I touched the spring the case flew open, and on its interior was simply engraved, "Ethel."

Then the truth flashed across me. It was Alison's gift—the one he had promised me, if I would take the horseback ride!

They were just seating themselves at the breakfast-table, when I entered the room. I knew by the significant glances that met me on every side, that the family knew all about my gift, and I could only murmur as I held it up, "Oh! Alison! Alison! how can I thank you?"

CHAPTER VII.

"GERALD, may I come in?" Somewhere in the early days of July, Mrs. Holmes tapped softly at the door of Uncle Gerald's library. It was not often any of the family disturbed the student minister in his sanctum.

"Certainly, come in, Lucy." He opened the door. She entered and told her errand, without taking the seat he offered her.

"I have had a letter from brother Nathan, this morning. He has not been very well, and starts next week for Medford, a pleasant, quiet sort of place on the sea-shore, where he is very anxious I should join him. He, and even Meltha are quite tired of the fashion and bustle at Newport and Saratoga, and want for once to try a watering-place which combines quiet and comfort.

"Now, you see, Gerald, the summer is wearing away, and I've seen none of my relatives. But you've made Alison and me so very happy, that I've put off the thought of leaving as long as possible. The last of next week we *must* get away. Don't shake your head, it's hard enough to leave without that; and I want to take Ethel with us. Nothing would please Alison more, I am certain; then, I have grown strangely attached to the child. Come, now, say you will consent. She ought to go out into the world a little by this time."

Uncle Gerald walked up and down his library with a troubled

countenance, one hand clasped behind him, while the other fingered the buttons of his dressing-gown. Mrs. Holmes watched anxiously the tall, thin figure, as it moved back and forth.

"Yes, you are right, Lucy," talking really to himself; "it would certainly be for the child's benefit, to see something more of the world, and of mankind in general. It would help her writings, too, vastly, I'm thinking. But it will be hard to let her go, though we mustn't be selfish about the matter. She was an odd, sometimes a terribly willful little piece, when she came to us; but her heart was always in the right place, and she's wound herself very closely around ours. Where's Ruth? She must decide the matter."

So Miss Maltby was called to the consultation, and after the matter was fully discussed, it was decided that I should accompany Mrs. Holmes to Medford, "though it will seem as if all the house was gone without the child," added Aunt Ruth, with a sigh.

Alison and I were taking our morning ride. I had become quite an equestrienne by this time. As soon as we returned, the decision was laid before us. Alison tossed his cap in the air with a boyish shout of delight, and I clapped my hands for joy.

But the sadness in Aunt Ruth's smile, and the memories of the two last weeks at the Parsonage struck my heart remorsefully the next moment.

These weeks had been such happy, happy ones. The very rhythm and poetry of life. Such as cannot break up long through all its discords of sin, and suffering and death.

Alison and I were scarcely apart during this time; riding,

reading, romping through the garden, like two careless, joyous-hearted children. Our friends, his mother, and all, watched us with a quiet, complaisant smile. If a thought crossed their minds that this brother and sister affection, about which we talked so openly, might one day ripen into something greater and deeper, it surely never did mine.

At twenty I was very girlish in appearance, very childlike at heart. There were few young gentlemen in our village, and I was scarcely acquainted with any of these. Of course, I had a profound faith in men's chivalry and women's devotion, and a romantic admiration for beauty and manliness, and all the concomitants of love stories. But it never entered my head that Alison's brotherly fondness for me was more than sisters often receive, and I would have repudiated with contempt, almost horror, the idea of attempting to secure the heir of Geoffrey Holmes. So I was perfectly natural, perfectly my freest, happiest, brightest self before him.

Perhaps it was this which drew him most toward me, for although a remarkably analytic student of human nature, he had quick penetration, and knew something of the ways of the world, and the arts of women.

"Meltha will be so delighted to see you! I will write her this very day that you are coming," said Alison, as we sat in the great old grape arbor, which was our favorite resort.

"I wish you would tell me all about your cousin, Alison. You know I never grow tired of hearing of her."

"Well, she's a little darling, that's just it, with one of those sweet, pure, innocent faces that remind you of old English paintings—Ethel, I'd give five hundred dollars this moment to find out the color of *your* eyes. They darken, and brighten,

and vary so in five minutes, that it must form the study of a life-time to make out their original shade."

"Well, I'd greatly prefer you should talk about your cousin's."

"I've told you at least a dozen times. Hers are blue, and beautiful as summer skies, but they haven't half the depth and variety of the dear little sister's who sits on the right side of me."

Here Philip interposes: "Cousin Alison, there are six real ripe grapes on that high bunch over-head. Won't you get 'em for me?"

"Yes; if Ethel will only let me stand on her head."

"Thank you. I value it too much to have it made a stepping-stone for no more important achievement. Besides that, Phil, you would not eat the grapes if Alison plucked them, because your father said last night he wished you to let them quite alone."

"Let me get those for him, Ethel," whispered Alison, "and say nothing about it."

"But that would be wrong, though."

"There! I proposed it on purpose to see the solemn look that would come over your face. What a conscientious little girl you are, Ethel!"

"Oh! not more so than other people, I guess, Alison."

"My dear Miss Simplicity, I think I can number several among my acquaintances who are less so. Now, mayn't I, Ethel?"

"No, indeed," springing back; "I'll not have my hair shaken down thus, even to suit your original notions of becomingness. Now, please read me that poem of Longfel-

low's, *The Goblet of Life*. I always feel so much greater and stronger to hear it."

But just then Aunt Ruth called to me from the kitchen-door, for, in view of my going to the watering-place, that good lady wished to consult me about the rejuvenation of my wardrobe; and, meanwhile, Alison sauntered off to write to his cousin.

The days vanished quickly, as bright ones always do, and with many blessings and tender adieux, I went out from the grey old Parsonage, out, out from the little secluded village, cradled among its New England hills.

And my heart was radiant with faith and hope in the world and the future. Ah me! if I could have looked into the beyond, and seen the darkness and the storms! But God's hand closed the gates of the "To-come," and I went on, trusting, rejoicing!

We three reached Medford late in the afternoon, after a day's hard, but pleasant travel. The hotel here was a long, rambling house, with endless rows of window blinds, and numerous abutments and additions, so as to accommodate the hundred boarders who filled it all the summer. Here, from the parlor windows which Alison threw open, I had my first view of the sea, vast, strong, eternal, with the grand ceremonial of sunset going on above it, and heard the waves beating up to the sandy shore, with a moan which reminded one of a strong, chained, tortured soul. I stood still, and looked with my eyes and my soul; it is one of those grand, emotional epochs in a lifetime, of which no tongue hath spoken, no pen written, only hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of. I was

aroused by an outbreak of voices close to me, and, starting round, I met Meltha Herrick.

She had been walking on the shore with her father, and ran in hastily on learning of our arrival. Her straw hat was falling on one side of her head. She wore a simple white dress, without ribbon or ornament, and so she stood before us, in her young, sweet girlish beauty. Her eyes were of that peculiar tint of azure which belongs to May noons without cloud or shadow, her hair was the rich yellow of opening tulips, her cheeks were flushed with excitement and her recent walk—and there was something very delicate and spirituelle about her—altogether, she was a woman beautiful, and to be loved.

“Ethel Lindsay! is it possible?” Her eyes said the rest.

“Oh! Meltha, believe me, it is good to see you.”

Then her father came in, portly, and a little patronizing, like his old self, with a few more wrinkles and grey hairs. I cannot begin to tell the half that we saw, or said, or did that night. It was all so new, so exciting to me—there was the settling of our little boxes of rooms, the walk down to the shore, through the clear, fresh, *vital* air, the renewing of the old acquaintance with Meltha, assisted by Alison, for his mother and uncle remained in the hotel parlor to talk over family matters together.

Every one knows what life at watering-places is. I will not linger over mine, with its pleasant, exciting memories of sea-baths, and morning rides, and evening sails. In those four weeks Meltha Herrick and I contracted a friendship which lasted until death wrote its earthly *Omega*.

We were very unlike; perhaps for this very reason we liked each other better. Her disposition was as sweet as her face, as

frank and sunny, too. She was quieter, less impulsive, less emotional than I, and therefore the fitter companion for me.

Here, too, I began to have the first taste of that goblet whose waters never yet satisfied the heart of a woman. It was very flattering, though, to hear people whisper, occasionally, at the table, or out on the shore—

“There goes the authoress, Miss Lindsay. Have you read any of her stories?”

Then what a bright, congratulating glance would beam up from Meltha's blue eyes, as she said:

“I knew you were a genius, Ethel, the first time I saw you.”

As for Alison, he was, of course, at all times indispensable, the life and mirth of the whole party, provoking Meltha and myself at least twenty times a day, and making us love him better in the end.

Mr. Herrick read the papers, and talked politics with the gentlemen, while his nephew declared, with a most lugubrious countenance, that a man could only tell from experience what it was to have a mother, cousin, and sister on his hands at the same time.

I always observed a quiet, significant smile on the lips of his cousin when Alison applied this appellation to me. I could not fathom it. Meltha was two years my senior, and knew a great deal more of the world.

Just four weeks had we been at Medford, when, one day, Meltha broke into her aunt's room, where she was reading, while I was in the midst of a story for the magazine.

“I've just received a letter from Irene Woolsey,” she rapidly

cried. "Only to think I haven't seen her for a year and a half. She writes me she is coming to New York with her father, the first of September, which, you know, aunty, is next week. She will pass a month with us, and then Clyde will come for her—why! what is the matter?"

Mrs. Holmes' face, struck with a death-like pallor, had sunken back on the arm of her chair, the breath came gaspingly to her lips—Meltha and I rushed to her.

The noise aroused some one in the next room. Help was soon summoned, and the unconscious woman carried to her bed. Her brother and son were both absent on a sailing excursion, and no messages could be conveyed to them. But we sent for a physician, and he said Mrs. Holmes was threatened with brain fever, and prescribed perfect quiet.

She lay in a kind of stupor after this. Meltha and I shut out the bright sunlight, and watched and waited through the long, weary day, bathing Mrs. Holmes' head, or looking far over the blue, shining waves for the white sails that had swept beyond the horizon that morning.

In the coming on of sunset, Meltha caught the first glimpse of the boat. "Oh, if papa and Alison were only here!" had been the burden of her cry all day. She was young, and so little used to care or suffering; but for her cousin's sake, I almost dreaded their return.

He sprang into the room, and with the first glance into his face I knew Alison had heard of his mother's illness. She opened her eyes when he went up to the bedside, and called to her in his eager voice; but they wandered strangely over his face—his mother did not know him! and he leaned down his head on the pillow, and sobbed like a woman.

That night Mrs. Holmes' fever increased, and the next day the physician said, nothing but the tenderest care could restore her. Mr. Herrick was imperatively summoned home, and Meltha, who between grief and fear was making herself quite ill, accompanied him at Alison's urgent solicitation.

Of course, I would not think of leaving the invalid to the care of hired nurses, though Alison, at first, insisted upon it, alleging that I was unable to bear the fatigue of attendance on his mother. But I knew my presence was a comfort to him, and this was enough.

For the next ten days I scarcely left his mother's bedside, unless it might be for a short evening walk along the sea-shore with Alison—Alison who watched with me by that bedside of sickness almost to death, by day and by night. This was the first sorrow he had ever known, and his love for his mother was the strongest feeling of his life. It was pitiful to see him—it was pitiful to hear the mother cry out wildly in the madness of delirium for her boy, and when he leaned down his lips close to her ear, with his earnest, faltering, "I am here, mother. Don't you see me?" to feel that she did not know him.

Well, the tenth day came at last—the one that was to give back the invalid to the love on earth, or the love in heaven; and Alison had passed through none of "life's Gethsemanes" to teach him the sweet balm there is in that prayer, "Thy will be done!"

Life, the life that is of this world, was all his heart could pray for his mother.

Toward evening Mrs. Holmes' fever reached its crisis. Human aid could, of course, now be of no avail; all that remained to us was, to "be still and wait."

Alison and I were quite worn out with watching and anxiety, and the physician really *commanded* us to walk down on the sea-shore, promising to remain with the sick woman, who had sunken into a heavy slumber.

It is ten years since Alison and I took that walk on the sea-sands, but it seems to me now much more as if it were last evening. It was one of those perfect nights that belong to the culmination of the summer. The great heart of the ocean throbbed gently as the breath of a sleeping child, and the full moon smiled over it, still and saintlike. We wandered off from the company, in whose high spirits we felt no sympathy, and walked up and down the sandy-shore. The quiet and holiness of the evening, stole like the droppings of healing balm into our hearts.

Like most effervescing, undisciplined natures, Alison Holmes could not bear sorrow. His spirits sank at once, under any burden.

"Ethel!" he said, at last abruptly breaking the long silence, for I dared not intrude on his grief, "if my mother should die it would kill me, I am certain it would. You can't imagine *how* I love her."

"Oh, she will recover, Alison. Let us have faith in God. I believe it, from my heart I believe it." He looked down in my face a moment, as if to read, as he must have done, the truth of my words there, then leading me down to a long, low bench, which some fishermen had left standing on the shore, he wound his arms around my neck, and leaned his head down on my shoulder, with a kind of weary helplessness, so touching in a proud man. "Ethel, my comforter!" he whispered, and my heart has never forgotten that low whisper

in the solemn moon-light, on the sandy shore, that summer evening.

An hour after we went in, and the physician met us at the door with a lightened face. "She has wakened," he said, "she is saved!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Oh—if this isn't delightful!" and Meltha Herrick caught up eagerly the magazine, over whose "table of contents" her eyes had been wandering, and sank down on a low ottoman by the side of her friend.)

A hand, not very small, but white and exquisitely shapen, was lain on the young girl's bright hair.

"What is delightful, Meltha?"

"Why, Irene, that a story of Ethel Lindsay's is in this number," eagerly turning the leaves.

"It doesn't seem possible, that *she* can have become, and done so much," says the young lady, leaning her head back among the crimson cushions of her chair. "I can see her now, so plainly in that old leghorn bonnet, which ought to have been her grandmother's, and that faded calico dress. I can never think of her except in this light. What a pity first impressions are so strong."

"But Irene," answers Meltha, in an eager, half-reproving tone, "I am sure they will quite vanish when you come to see Ethel now. She is a lady in looks and manner, though rather quiet and timid, until she becomes interested in conversation."

"Why, what happens to her then?"

"Oh, her face undergoes such a change, warming, flushing, brightening, until she is positively beautiful."

There were rich, gorgeous pictures, brightening the walls of the parlor beyond; but amid all these inspirations of genius, there was none so fair as the living, breathing one, which those two girls made as they sat together in the little, graceful alcove that October morning.

The contrast was so forcible between them, for Irene Woolsey's beauty was of that regnant queenly type, which startles and overwhelms. She was hardly above medium height; but the Grecian head, the white neck, and graceful shoulders, gave to the full, rounded figure an appearance of greater stature than it really possessed. In the shaping and coloring of her face Nature had done all she could, and Irene was beautiful, with that outward sensuous beauty, which is not of the soul. Her hair, of a lustrous brownish black, was folded plain and heavy above the white forehead; her features had a statuesque regularity, and her eyes were like her hair, lustrous, almost black, sparkling, glittering, but with few varieties of expression. Half the beauty of her mouth was lost in its expression of pride; cold, haughty, indomitable, indeed, this was the character of the whole face.

And the warm, tender October light, scattered from the high roofs of the houses, and lay like a misty golden frame, about the two girls as they sat there that morning, the one in her sweet, simple loveliness, the other in her graceful, regnant beauty.

"But you told me, Meltha," continued Irene, "that this Ethel Lindsay was not handsome."

"Neither is she; beautiful one might call her at times, but never handsome, never pretty. Her eyes—but there's no use trying to describe them—you'll see her very soon now. I hope they'll be here to attend my birthnight party."

"And you are quite sure your cousin, Alison, will accompany her?"

"Without a doubt. I haven't told you half how much he thinks of Ethel."

"That's because she was his protégée, I presume!" but there was a slight bitterness in the words.

Meltha rose up, and drew the proud head caressingly toward her. "Irene, for my sake, for our sakes, you will treat Ethel kindly when she comes here, and make no allusions to the past!"

"Of course, as your guest, I shall treat her politely."

"But she is my friend, and I love her, very dearly." There is a shade of disappointment on the gentle face, but it vanishes as a servant throws open the door, saying:

"Your aunt, and cousin, and Miss Lindsay are just come."

"Oh, I am so glad!" Meltha springs up, and claps her hands in the old child way.

"Come right down with me, Rena darling," and she bounds out of the room.

But Irene does not follow. She sits still in her chair, studying with a slightly discomposed brow, the flowers on the hearth-rug.

It was the afternoon of Meltha's birthday. The four that preceded it had been crowded with bustle, excitement and sight-seeing, with all the stir and novelty which accompanies one's first advent in New York. Those four days seemed much more like three months to me.

I doubt, though, whether I was really happy, even in the princely mansion of a retired merchant on Fifth Avenue;

but bewildered, overwhelmed I certainly was, as any one else would have been, who had never seen a city before.

I had accepted the invitation, almost the command, of Mr. Herrick and his daughter, with considerable reluctance; for, though I had all the curiosity, all the thirst for change and excitement which belongs to youth, I had a morbid dread of meeting Irene Woolsey.

My nature is not a forgetful or forgiving one, and I never heard her name mentioned without the haughty stare, and the contemptuous smile parting the curled lip, rose distinct before me.

But Alison and his mother had detailed so glowingly, in their letters to the Parsonage, the advantages which would accrue to me from a visit to New York, that consent for my prolonged absence was readily obtained; and it was of no use for me to demur.

Mrs. Holmes seemed doubly attached to me after her illness, and Alison—his kindness and tenderness were unremitting. So, half-reluctantly, I had accompanied them to New York, as soon as Mrs. Holmes' convalescence had rendered it safe for her to travel.

Irene Woolsey had met and treated me with conventional politeness. But I *felt* intuitively that there was something anti-pathetic between us; when we first met, a kind of prophetic chill and shadow seemed to settle over my heart; a wind, blowing down, it may be, from that long winter, when the snows were to cover my heart; a looking off, it may be, into the blackness of that night, through which, without lamp or staff my feet were to pass to the morning!

Irene and I were thrown together a good deal each day, of

course ; for there was something to see or to hear, some ride or walk constantly on hand. We did not converse a great deal with each other, and I *felt*, rather than perceived, something of the old haughtiness in her manner toward me. She could never quite forgive me, for placing myself in a social position equal to her own—never cease to remember what I had been.

But she had a great deal of social tact and diplomacy, could make herself perfectly bewitching when she chose, and was witty and brilliant, without any great depth of mind or heart, but was full of life and vitality.

As for Alison, he resumed his old playful badinage with her at once. I was always greatly amused at their little verbal skirmishes, in which sometimes one, sometimes the other came off victor.

But, as I said it was Meltha's twenty-second birthday, and the house was in a bewilderment of hurry, bustle and confusion, preparing for the large party, which was to celebrate it that evening.

So, to avoid this, we all went after the late dinner into Mrs. Holmes' room, as it was the quietest in the house.

"Oh, girls, shan't we have a delectable time to-night?" cried Meltha, throwing herself down on the rug, while her beautiful, falling hair, strayed in a yellow shower over her shoulders. "I'm so tired, though, making that pyramid of roses for the centre of the table. Did you see it, Al? It's perfectly beautiful!"

"No," seating himself on the arm of his mother's chair. "My time has alternated this morning between the confectioner's for *you*, and the tailor's for myself. Miss Irene, what are you in such a brown study for?"

"I was wondering whether that woman would have my dress done in time to-night. You see I employed her to make it out of charity, or at least, Madame Campana was full of work, and said this person was in great need of employment, and would do it as well as the first dress-makers. I'll never forgive her, though, if it's not here by six o'clock."

"I guess it will be," answered Meltha encouragingly. "Papa," turning up her bright face suddenly to him, "you promised me a birthday present, and I've forgotten all about it; you know you did."

We were all in that best of after-dinner humors, easy, effervescent, conversational, when one is looking forward to an evening full of excitement and pleasure.

"Well, I cannot afford to buy birthday presents for an extravagant little girl, who takes five hundred dollars straight out of my pockets, to buy knick-knacks for her parties."

"A—h," springing up, "I know now, by that look in your eyes, that you've gotten something for me. Don't keep me in suspense! Alison, do you know anything about it?"

"Now, Al, keep still for once in your life," laughed his uncle.

"Of course," answered the young gentleman, "I know nothing about it;" an assertion which his eyes flatly contradicted. "But I would humbly suggest an investigation into the northeast corner of Uncle Nat's vest pocket, if it could be accomplished without personal injury to that portly gentleman."

With a little shriek of triumph, Meltha sprang forward. Her father held her off, crying out to Alison, "My boy, you see, I'll pay you for this."

"Aunt Lucy, shan't pa give it to me?" playfully struggling to reach his vest pocket. "Ethel, do come and help me."

"*She!*" cried Alison, turning round sharply to a window where I had ensconced myself, "she's no more understanding sense of what's going on here at this present moment than the Emperor of Morocco has—not a whit. I do wish you'd lock up every book in this house from that blue-stocking young lady. If you don't, I'll burn them."

"It's a malicious slander," I laughed, flinging down the book. "I'm not a blue stocking, and I have just now a very acute perception of what is going on in this room. Yes, Meltha, I will help you."

"Hold papa's hands, then, until I can get mine into his vest pocket."

There was a playful struggle between us. Mr. Herrick made a feint of resistance, but in reality deferred to the weaker party, so, in a few moments, Meltha drew out a morocco jewel-case from his pocket. Touching the spring, it flew open, and there, on its cushion of crimson velvet, was a pin, formed of a cluster of diamonds, most exquisitely set in gold.

"Oh, papa! how beautiful! how beautiful!" turning it round, while the diamonds caught up the sun-rays into their glowing hearts, and flashed them back in currents of crimson and gold, and sapphire. It was eagerly examined and admired by us all.

"If the right of possession entitles you to it, I think Miss Ethel is quite as much its owner as you are," said her father.

"Thank you, Mr. Herrick. I shouldn't know what to do with it if I had it, for I never have, and I never expect to wear diamonds."

"Why not?" questioned Alison. "They'd be quite as

becoming, quite as appropriate to you as anybody I know, Miss Modesty."

"Well, there's no probability of my having the chance very soon; so diamonds are my 'sour grapes' at present."

"Ethel has a jewel more radiant, more enduring than diamonds," said Mrs. Holmes, smiling affectionately on me; "and that is Genius."

"Encore! encore! mother." Her son clapped his hands. "Now, there's not the slightest use of blushing so."

Some feeling I never analyzed instigated me to turn and look at Irene. I saw a shade of annoyance, almost bitterness, darken her brow. She ran her paper-folder through fingers, white as the ivory handle, then turned to Meltha.

"I can think of nothing but the possibility of Clyde's coming to-night. What time does the southern train get in, Mr. Holmes?"

"About eight, I believe. I concur most heartily in your wish, Miss Irene, for I've always had a great curiosity to see this remarkable brother of yours."

"But I thought you told me that he wasn't fond of, or didn't approve of parties?" said Meltha, with the slightest conscious blush.

"Well, he doesn't, exactly. That is, he has some odd notions, and doesn't enjoy attending them himself so much as I wish he did."

"But you think he'll enjoy this one?" quite eagerly.

"I am sure he will. And then, he never objects to other people doing as they like. I remember the first party we ever had. It was before we left Virginia; he was thirteen, and I was ten. What a capital time that was!"

"And I remember mine," chorused in Meltha and Alison.

"And you yours too, Miss Ethel?" questioned Irene, with a soft voice and a bright smile.

I saw, as no one else did, the intentional malice which they covered. But it did not wound where she expected. My pride was not touched, but that bare, hard, child-life, rose up before me, a living reality again, as I answered,

"I never had any parties or pleasures *then*, you know, Miss Irene."

"Well, you shall have enough now to pay for it," answered Alison, with an almost *angry* glance at Irene, while Meltha's look said as plainly, "How *could* you, Rena?" as her aunt's did "Never mind it, my dear," though none of them suspected the secret malice that had prompted this, or supposed it anything but a mal-à-propos speech.

"Well, come! I mustn't waste any more time here," said Mr. Herrick, laying down the newspaper that had engrossed him for the last fifteen minutes. "Al, won't you ride down town with me?"

"Thank you, uncle, I guess I will. I don't fancy the thought of having three such obstreperous young feminines on my hands all the afternoon. Adieu, ladies; I presume you will be radiant in silks and jewels when next we meet."

In less than a minute he returned. "I didn't hear you say how you were feeling this noon, mother, and just as I was getting into the carriage, it struck me you were looking a little pale."

"Only a fancy of yours, I guess, for I'm feeling very well. You will be home early, my son?"

"Quite as soon as I'm wanted, I imagine." And he closed the door.

"My boy is very thoughtful of his mother," said Mrs. Holmes, turning to me, as she always did when she spoke of Alison.

CHAPTER IX.

It was early evening, and I was crossing the front hall towards the dining-room, to see the tables, whose arrangements had just been completed, when I came suddenly upon a pale young woman, carrying a large bundle in her arms, and with such an expression of hopeless suffering in her face, that my sympathies were enlisted at once.

She was dressed very, very poorly, too; and I saw that she was keeping up an unequal strife with that most pitiless foe of humanity, Poverty.

"Can you tell me the way to Miss Woolsey's room?" she asked, in a gentle, lady-like voice. "The servant did not explain its location very clearly."

"It is at the head of the stairs;" and while I was settling it in my own mind that she was the seamstress of whom Irene had spoken, the woman passed up-stairs.

Some twenty minutes later I was returning, and we met each other again. She looked up at me—such a wild, haggard, despairing look, stamping the delicate features; such a cold, stony blankness was in the dim eyes, that involuntarily I stood still.

A moment more, and I should have spoken to her, but Alison called out to me from his mother's room, "Make haste up here, Ethel; I have something pretty for you;" and it seemed

to me as if the woman gave a low groan, and almost *fled* past me out of the house. I entered Mrs. Holmes's apartment, haunted by that wild, white face.

"Ethel, this is Alison's selection for your hair," said the lady, holding up before me a half wreath of snowy camelia and moss buds, tastefully twined in with green leaves. Altogether, it was exquisite.

"I chose only white, because these seemed the most fitting type of the wearer's character," he said, taking them from his mother, and laying them against my hair. "Don't they contrast finely, mother?"

"Yes; I shall place them in your hair myself, after it is dressed, dear."

"You ought to prize them, Ethel, for I've been to half the florists in the city, I believe."

"I do, Alison; but I never can be eloquent in thanks."

"And I don't want you to be. Go, now, and let them make you look as pretty as you can."

So his graceful gift—more than all, the words that accompanied it—struck out that wan, white face from my thoughts.

The guests were mostly assembled, for it was quite late when I entered the parlor with Mrs. Holmes. It was a dazzling spectacle, with the smiling, murmuring groups of lovely women and proud men scattered all over the great rooms, with the chandeliers pouring their silver currents of light over the pictures that flushed the walls with visions of Arcadia; over the lace curtains that rolled down like folds of radiant mist from the heavy cornices; over the rich carpet, where roses seemed

opening their crimson lips, heavy with morning dew, under our feet; over vases of veined agate, and statues of marble; and, more than all, over the living, sparkling, beautiful life that filled those great rooms.

But there were two who attracted my attention strongest. This was the young hostess, in her rich simple dress of white brocade, with the yellow hair shining round a face sweet and pure as a young child's, while she fluttered and sparkled everywhere like a sunbeam.

The other was Irene. Her beauty shone out regnantly that night. A few pearls were twined among the darkness of her hair, reminding one of occasional snow-flakes falling into the heart of a very black night: her dress, of amber-colored satin, harmonized with the clear, warm glow of her complexion, and as she stood by the table, fluttering her ivory fan, and chatting with a group of gentlemen, she looked the queen of the company.

For myself, I wore a dress of simple white muslin, with the rose-buds twined among my hair, and certainly felt very much like "a shy lay figure," among all that gay assemblage of dress and beauty.

Well, this was a party on Fifth Avenue, differing in no wise from its class, I suppose. There was a vast amount of graceful pantomime and pretty conversation, sometimes sparkling, but mostly silly; there was Italian music, and American dancing; there were pyramids of cream, and piles of confectionery, and mountains of cake; and looking on all this, I, Ethel Lindsay, made my first acquaintance with fashionable life.

I was introduced to a large number of people, for Meltha

and Alison took care that I should want no attention they could bestow, but as most of these persons talked about the last opera, and quoted long Italian names, or criticised the new theatre, and the star actresses, or indulged in little side eddies of gossip, I was not greatly edified, and enjoyed watching the others, or chatting with Mrs. Holmes and Alison, the latter of whom came to us whenever his engagements permitted.

"My dear little Presbyterian, what a pity it is you can't dance—you seem to enjoy looking on so much," he said, on one of these brief visits to me.

I laughed out at this new cognomen, louder, probably, than etiquette permitted, for a lady, perfectly magnificent in Valenciennes and jewels, surveyed me from head to foot, and then whispered significantly to her neighbor.

"I have no aspirations beyond the 'looking on,' Alison. I don't know, though" (struck with a sudden thought), "as Uncle Gerald would think this was quite right. He says we ought never to encourage, by our presence or passive approval, what may be wrong."

"Why don't you close your eyes, then? It would be so emphatic a protestation against our indulging in such sinful gaiety. Now, Ethel, you're a sensible girl—you don't think there's any harm in dancing?"

"Well, I don't know." At this time I had not formed any independently religious opinions and convictions; and my views would only have been a reflex of those in which I had been educated; but here my own judgment spoke out: "There may be no real *sin* in it, and yet, I can hardly conceive how an earnest, broad-minded, deep-hearted Christian, would like to pass much time in public dancing."

"Well, Miss Orthodoxy, we haven't time to enter into a moral disquisition now, for I see," looking off to the piano, where there was a little bustle, "Irene's going to play. Let us get a little nearer; it is a perfect musical banquet to hear her."

The piece was a composition of Beethoven's—massive, brilliant, elaborate; but Irene did it justice, for it was just suited to her style, and although she wanted soul to make a musical *genius*, she certainly possessed musical talent to a rare degree. The strains throbbed out from those delicate fingers, and swayed, and swelled, and exulted through the great rooms, while the listeners held their breaths.

Suddenly, in one of the most effective passages of the music, there was a little stir at the door, on one side of Irene. She glanced toward it, her fingers paused, a quick light came over her face, and, with a cry, "Clyde, my brother!" she sprang toward the door.

I had a full view of the gentleman, as he turned toward her. He looked about twenty-five, and was hardly above medium height; but he had one of those figures, which, like Ninian's Graeme's, combined "strength, dignity, and grace" at once. He was like, and yet unlike his sister. There was a very traceable family resemblance; there was as much pride, but no hauteur in the lines of the face and the erect carriage of the head.

He was not a handsome man, but his features were bold, clear, thin, and that expressive phrase, "fine-looking," might be appropriately applied to them.

His abundant hair, several shades lighter than his sister's, lay above a forehead of the finest intellectual development, and

the eyes beneath were of a dark, clear brown, not gleaming, but steady in light.

Then, inter-penetrating every line and lineament of the face, was an expression of power, self-reliance, condensation, which culminated about the mouth, and made it stern, almost repellent, when at rest.

But it was a face that inspired you with confidence. You felt instinctively it was that of a man, *who, under all circumstances, would be true to himself!*

There was a soft, variable flush on Meltha's cheek, as she came forward to receive her guest; but at that moment, supper was announced.

Some two hours later, when the dancing had reached its height, and Mrs. Holmes, fatigued with the evening's exertion, had retired to her room, I was standing by the table, absorbed in an exquisite little painting, of "Echo Lake," in New Hampshire, its blue waters lapped in the green bowl of the hills, and the light of the newly-risen day flushing over the forest trees in the distance.

Suddenly Meltha approached me, with Irene's brother. She presented us to each other, adding, with a laugh, "I am engaged for the next set, and as you are the two most interesting people who do not dance, I shall leave you to entertain each other."

I was very much afraid, at first, of the stately, elegant-looking gentleman, and only answered his questions in monosyllables. He drew up a chair to the table, and commenced talking about the pictures.

Now, I was by no means a connoisseur in these, and though

I had a taste of my own, did not venture to express it, for fear it would expose my ignorance of artistic excellency. So he could hardly have chosen a less inspiring theme.

He tried music ; here I was worse off than ever ; for, though I had considerable receptive enjoyment of melody, I had little natural, and no cultivated musical talent.

I felt, rather than saw, those deep, coruscant eyes sweep my face with a quick, searching glance ; but I hardly think he found much there, except a painful embarrassment."

"May I inquire what you enjoy most, or what you are most fond of doing, Miss Lindsay, and we will see how nearly our tastes harmonize."

The question roused me a little, for I felt it was asked merely to investigate me, to see whether I did not prefer making worsted specimens of zoölogy, or trimming doll's bonnets, to any other employment in the world.

"I think I enjoy reading the authors I like, better than anything else, unless it is *dreaming*," was my answer.

"And will you tell me some of these favorite authors?"

I named several. He must have thought them an unusual selection for a girl of twenty ; but under Uncle Gerald's supervision, my reading had been rather masculine. Among the poets, I closed with our own Longfellow.

He had read, too, this Clyde Woolsey, a great deal more than I had, and after this there was no more embarrassment. He talked, and so did I ; and it seemed to me, if all that had been spoken, by all the people around us, could have been written down, there would have been more thought, more fibre, more originality, in every ten words of Clyde Woolsey's speaking, than in all the rest put together.

I seemed to receive some new idea every moment, and was surprised into finding thoughts I had only *half* felt before, now assuming definite expression for the first time.

At last, there was a momentary pause in the dance, to form some new figure, and Mr. Woolsey asked me, on what grounds I opposed dancing.

"Oh ! I do not oppose it. But my education interdicted anything of the kind, and then I am not in my own mind certain that one does not resign a great deal of intellectual, and other enjoyment, for what, at best, should be only an occasional relaxation and amusement. But your reasons for not dancing are, doubtless, better defined than mine."

He smiled a smile that permeated every line of his face, and softened the stern mouth. "My friends would hardly agree with you there. As a social relaxation, I see no especial harm in dancing, but abstinence is often easier for the young than temperance ; and there are many things of whose moral quality we must judge rather from their practical influence than from themselves.

"Now, I do know, from observation, that the effect of dancing-schools and balls on young, plastic minds and natures, is not a healthful one. It seems to lower and enfeeble the tone of thought and feeling. It tends to make one frivolous, superficial, outward ; a character and a result most of all others to be deprecated."

I had no opportunity to reply, for, at that moment, the dancing closed.

"Where in the world can Ethel be?" said Meltha, as she

came into the dining-room with Irene and her brother, after all the guests had departed.

I was about to answer her question, for I stood by the window, completely hidden by the heavy damask curtains, where I had gone to catch a glimpse of the midnight moon as it silvered the tops of the tall houses.

But Meltha's next words held me back unconsciously. "You didn't know that we had an authoress amongst us, Mr. Woolsey?"

"An authoress who has written five whole articles for the magazines!" echoed Irene, satirically, as the three seated themselves on a lounge.

"An authoress, Miss Meltha! They're my especial aversion ever since I've known something of them." And a shade of disgust crossed the young man's features. "They are always everlasting talkers, drinking strong tea, taking snuff, and riding hobbies—in short, I believe the whole race are deficient in woman's most beautiful attribute, her one gem of nameless price—*womanliness*! If there is," he continued, laughing, "a man upon earth who enjoys my especial sympathy, it's the poor, deluded individual who has had the honor of marrying an authoress."

"But, dear me," said Meltha, quite disconcerted at what Irene evidently enjoyed; "Ethel is not such a person as you describe, at all. Why, she's as bashful as a child, and blushes if she's only spoken to. I should hardly have ventured to introduce you had I known your—your—opinions."

"Introduce me! I do not understand you, Miss Meltha."

"Why, that was Ethel Lindsay you were talking with by the table."

"That little girl in white, do you mean? Well, really now, I ask your pardon. She is a friend of yours, too, and I was much interested in her. I thought her smile and her eyes a revelation in themselves, and"—

"Well, Pussy, what kind of a time have you had of it?" interrupted Mr. Herrick, as he came into the room.

"Oh! most delightful, papa. I've been just as happy as I could possibly be."

"I judged so by your looks. But they won't be so bright to-morrow, or Irene's either, if you don't go to bed right off. There, it is two o'clock," looking at his watch. "Mr. Woolsey, won't you excuse me if I send these young ladies up stairs immediately?"

"To be sure, sir."

But Meltha's pleading voice interrupted here—"Oh! papa, let us sit up just half an hour, and talk about the party, and all that happened."

"Not a second! Kiss me good night, and budge this instant."

Mr. Herrick never made a show of parental authority, except when the health of his darling was involved. Meltha saw he was in earnest, and left at once with Irene.

Then the gentlemen went into the parlor, and I beat a hasty retreat up stairs, feeling half provoked at Mr. Woolsey's remarks on authoresses, and yet liking him, notwithstanding.

CHAPTER X.

"WELL, what's the order of to-day's exercises?" asked Alison, as, two days after the party, we all sat at our late breakfast, dispatching our chocolate and muffins, amid little rivulets of pleasant, desultory conversation.

"Yes; you ought to improve every day of this fine weather, young people," answered Mr. Herrick. "What do you say to Greenwood, this morning, my child?"

"Oh, a capital idea, papa!" with that pretty, wavering motion of her head which reminded one of birds among summer boughs. "It will be all new, too, to Meltha and Irene."

Here Alison broke into one of those hearty laughs, that I should have recognized in Japan.

"My son, don't be quite so boisterous," gently reproved his mother.

"I can't help it, indeed. It just struck me how comical little Miss Country Importation stared around her last night at the Opera. It was all so new and overcoming to her, you see."

I appealed to the rest of the company to defend me from this vilification, and to decide whether my conduct was not perfectly proper and city-bred, if I *was* a "country importation."

"I will answer, for one, that you set a most commendable example to the rest of us, Miss Lindsay," replied Clyde Wool-

sey, who, notwithstanding his animadversions against all authoresses, had treated me with most courteous attention, though we had little opportunity for conversation.

"Miss Irene," said a domestic, suddenly opening the door, "that Miss Walters that made your dress was here last evening for the money. She says as how she needs it very much. I told her I'd tell you the first thing this morning. She lives right round here in the alley, in the big, brown house."

Irene's face flushed a little with annoyance, as she answered: "Well, Bridget, you should have taken a more proper time than the present one to acquaint me with her demands."

"But, Irene, you should never allow a woman who sews for you to go a day without her wages. It is doing her a great wrong." Clyde's voice was almost stern.

"Then, if the truth must come out, Clyde, and the beautiful speaker played impatiently with her napkin ring, "I spent the last dollar papa gave me day before yesterday; so there were but two alternatives, the woman must wait, or I must pawn my jewelry," laughing up in his face.

"Oh, Irene! now, as if you couldn't have asked *me*!" interposed Meltha.

"Yes, and in consequence that solemn brother of mine would have read me an awful lecture on the manifold evils of borrowing money."

"The practice of a little self-denial in your expenses would have done you no harm, Irene. But how much was the debt?"

"Only five dollars."

"You shall have that, and some spending money in addition, my dear."

"Well, I shall have to be inhospitable enough to hurry you

through your breakfast, good folks," spoke up Mr. Herrick ; "for you must get to Greenwood by eleven, if you want to see anything of it in one day."

"You shall have the set at forty dollars, and they are a great bargain at that," said the jeweller, as he held up the elaborate cameo pin and ear-rings before Irene.

It was on our return from Greenwood, and Meltha had broken her watch chain, so the gentlemen had deposited us at the jeweller's, as they wished to go down town, and it was but a short walk home.

"They are charming, and just what I want," admiringly turning around the set. "Aren't they beautiful, Miss Ethel?" Meltha was in another part of the store.

"Very."

"It'll take all the money Clyde gave me this morning," speaking to herself, and not mindful of my presence. "But papa will send me on some in a few days, and I want them, and I'll have them, too. Clyde will think I purchased them before, if he thinks about it at all ; and what nonsense to suppose that woman can't wait a few days longer. You may do them up for me" (to the jeweller).

I was quite alone, for my hostess and her friend had gone out to call on a schoolmate, and Mrs. Holmes had lain down. I could not read, or even *dream* ; somehow, the white, haggard face of the seamstress had haunted me for the five hours which had elapsed since we left the jeweller's.

"I wonder if she is really in need ! If Irene only *had* paid her," I mused, walking up and down the room. "I've half a mind to go out and find her myself ; but then, I've only five dollars in the world (one wants so many things in New York), and I shan't get any more till the publisher sends me some, or I hear from Uncle Gerald."

But wherever I turned, looking up from the pages of my book, staring out on me from the embroidered curtains, shining in the crimson glow of the grate fire, were the wild, mournful eyes of the woman I had met on the stairs.

At last I could endure it no longer. I threw on my shawl and bonnet, caught up my purse, and hurried out. I discovered the house after considerable searching, for I recognized it from Biddy's description. It was an old, dilapidated wooden building, in the midst of a row of miscellaneous, tumble-down habitations which flanked both sides of the narrow alley.

"Does a Mrs. Walters live here?" I inquired of a tall, coarse-featured, belligerent-looking Irish woman, who presented herself at the door.

"Yes, ma'am. She lives up in the back chamber on the fourth story," and she pointed to a rheumatic pair of stairs, up which, with considerable difficulty, and no little anxiety for my neck, I made my way.

I reached the room at last, after inquiring of several persons whom I met on the passage, for the house was a very plethoric one. The door was slightly ajar, and I looked in. What a scene of utter, utter destitution and misery was revealed to me ! There were a few old chairs in the room, and a bed in one corner. This is all the furniture I remember. There were three persons in the room, two very little girls, the younger

not more than three ; and the mother lay on the bed, her face thin and white as those we lay away very tenderly, with many tears, under coffin lids.

One of the little girls stood by the open fireplace. There was no fire, though the wind had blown up very cold, and the sunshine, in the brightest days, broke only with a wan, weary sort of smile into this narrow back room. She was a pretty child, with hazel-colored eyes, and hair—you could see that, even in her miserable, faded dress—and there was a look of patient mournfulness in the little, pinched features, which went straight to my heart. The other child stood by the bed, its golden, curly head scarcely reaching up to the pillow.

“Mamma, mamma,” moaned the little creature, lifting up its thin, blue arms, “please to give Nettie a piece of bread, just a little, *teenty* piece, *cos* she’s so hungry.”

“There, Nettie,” said the other little girl, in a coaxing voice, but you felt there were broken sobs behind it, “don’t trouble mamma, because she’s very sick, and *must* go to sleep. Come and talk to Mary, little sister, and if mamma’s able to get up, she’ll go to the lady’s for the money, and then Nettie shall have something nice to eat.”

“But I can’t wait, Mary, any longer,” pleaded the little one. “I didn’t have any breakfast, nor any dinner,” and the great tears bubbled out of the blue eyes, and tumbled down the small face. “I keep growin’ hungrier all the time. Mamma, mamma, please to give your little Nettie somethin’ to eat !”

Oh, reader ! do you know what it is to have a little child, your own little child, lift up its hands and cry to you for bread, when you have none to give it ?

The woman opened her eyes—they had been closed until

now—and a cry of sharp, terrible agony broke up from her mother’s heart : “Oh, God ! they will starve ! My children ! my children !”

I could bear no more, for I had stood transfixed, by the scene before me. But now I turned, and bounded down the rickety stairs, fast as my feet and heart could carry me.

I burst into the first confectionery I could find. “Give me a dollar’s worth of cake, food, anything, only for mercy’s sake be quick !” and I fairly wrung my hands while they stared at me. I did not know what they thought. I am certain I did not care.

But real earnestness is usually contagious, and in a few moments my arms were filled with a bundle of cakes which would have tempted an epicure.

I entered, without knocking, into that dark, narrow chamber : “Here children, here ; I’ve brought you something good to eat !” was my first salutation, and with a cry, such a cry that it rings down over all the years, and stirs my heart now, the children bounded forward to me. I tore open the papers, and filled the eager, upstretched little hands full of food, and then I hurried to the bedside of Mrs. Walters.

She had risen up, and was looking at me with a blank, wondering sort of stare, while her white face shocked me more than ever.

“You remember me, don’t you, Mrs. Walters ? I met you on the stairs when you brought home Miss Irene Woolsey’s dress.”

She put her hand to her head. The suffering of the last hour, and the surprise of my coming, had fairly shaken the woman’s intellect.

"You are faint and exhausted, my dear madam, for want of food. If you will try and eat some of these cakes, you will feel better, and then we can talk, for you must understand at once that I am your friend."

She tried to speak, but a sob swelled through the woman's lips; then the warm blessed tears rained over the thin face. I would scarcely allow her to speak to me, until she had partaken of some food—indeed, it was want of nourishment more than anything else which had brought on her present illness. I explained to her the circumstances which had occasioned my visit to her, and—but I cannot write her thanks, her gratitude, only the outlines of her story, as, sitting on her bed in the sunset of that October afternoon, I listened to it. She was the daughter of a wealthy farmer in New York State, whom she had mortally offended by marrying a sailor.

"My father was very proud of me, and perhaps I did wrong," she said; "but I loved Harry," and something of the old wife-tenderness beamed through her dim eyes—"and he was a true, tender, loving husband to me. In a little while he became captain, and we should have been very happy if my father's displeasure had abated.

"Two years ago, when Nettie was hardly a year old, my husband left me for the last time. The vessel was wrecked, and all on board perished. His entire property was, of course, lost, too.

"We were living in the country, and almost among strangers at this time. I had never been used to taking care of myself, and the two children were a heavy burden upon me. But I came to New York, hoping to procure employment in needle-work, and for the last two years I have lived mostly on the

disposal of my furniture and clothes, until I hired this room, was taken ill, and we have been brought where you found us." All this was told in a voice broken by many sobs.

"But your father, Mrs. Walters; surely no anger could withstand such an appeal"—glancing at the little ones, who, seated on the floor, were enjoying their cake, whispering together, and looking at me with eyes full of wonder and awe.

"I have written him several times, but the letters have been returned unanswered. I do not think he knows of Harry's death, even. But if I could only go to him, and putting my arms around his neck, say, 'Father, it's your Ellen come back to you, the little Ellen that used to sit on your knees every night and sing to you. She is come back now with her children. She is a widow, and they are fatherless. Don't send her away, for the sake of her mother, who, maybe, is looking down on you from Heaven! I know his heart well—underlying all its pride and obstinacy is the old fountain of tenderness. I know, too, he'd reach out his arms, then, and say, 'Ellen, my child, you are welcome back to the old house, you and your children.'"

"But why haven't you gone to him, Mrs. Walters?"

She smiled sadly. "I was his child, and I had a large share of his pride. But this last sickness has broken it all down. You see, I was only recovered from my fever, when Miss Woolsey sent round her dress to me. I had applied for work at a dress-making establishment, as it was in the hurry of the season."

"And you would go to him if you could?"

"To-morrow. The thought would give me new strength, new life to endure the journey."

"How far is it?"

"She sighed. "Nearly three hundred miles. It would cost twenty-five dollars to take me and the children."

Just at that moment the younger child, who had dispatched all her cake, sidled up shily to me, and looking in my face with her blue, wondering eyes, lisped :

"Be you an angel, and did you come straight down from Heaven to-day? Mary says you did."

I caught the sweet little questioner in my arms, and covered her face with kisses, while Mary, emboldened by the reception of her sister, crept close to me, too, although she looked as if she stood in momentary expectation of seeing me vanish into mid-air, with wings bursting out from my shoulders.

"No, little children, I am not an angel, only somebody who wants to be a very good friend to you, and mamma, if you will let me." And then I rose up to go, for the shadows were thickening in the corners of the room, and I knew they would be alarmed, if they discovered my absence at home.

I slipped my purse into little Mary's hand, and whispered some words of encouragement to Mrs. Walters. I saw the light kindle into her pale face, and my heart was very full of quiet peace as I went down the rickety stairs, whispering, "It is better to give than to receive."

I found Meltha and Irene just returned. Neither knew I had been out. On my table lay a letter containing twenty-five dollars, for an article I had sent the previous month to the publishers. They had doubled my remuneration this time. Flattering as the knowledge was, I rejoiced in it now, more for the sake of others than for my own. "I know very well how I shall dispose of you," I soliloquized, rumpling the notes

through my fingers. "As for a new silk dress, that, of course, mustn't be taken into account for the next six months. My black one looks very well, after all."

"Oh, those are beautiful cameos. Why, you never showed them to me before," said Meltha to Irene, as she came down dressed for the evening.

"I've had them only a short time, dear. How do you like them, Clyde?" and she went up to the window, where he was reading the evening paper.

"Very much. They are certainly in excellent taste. Oh!" as if a thought had struck him suddenly, "have you paid your dressmaker, Irene? Of course you haven't forgotten that."

"No—no! of course not." There was a little, nervous flutter in the voice that uttered the falsehood, and a little tinge of shame crept into the soft cheek, and then she who had stained her life with that foulest thing—a *lie*, turned round with some light badinage to Alison, who just then came in.

But for me, I almost waited to hear the rustling of leaves, and the soft dropping of tears, as the angel wrote down those words in the life-book of Irene Woolsey!

The next day, Mrs. Walters and her children started for her father's home. I was quite fearful she would not endure the fatigue of the journey; but the thought of seeing her parent seemed to infuse new vitality into her weak frame, so I did not oppose her. No one knew of Mrs. Walters's departure but myself. That night, however, Irene had a letter from her father. "Now I can pay that Mrs. Walters, and have the

matter off my mind," she murmured, as she sat all alone in her own room, unfolding the bank notes. "It's too bad I had to tell Clyde that story about it; but he's so horribly particular, and then, there's no use denying it, I'm afraid of him, or of his opinions. But I'll send Biddy off this minute with the money," and she rang the bell. In a little while Biddy returned with the information that the room was empty, and the Irish woman below said "the family was all gone."

CHAPTER XI.

THE evening was stormy with wind and rain, closing up two weeks of that balmy, delicious autumn weather, in which the year, with its solemn, peaceful smile, seems to say to our hearts, "It is finished."

None of us thought of leaving the house to-night, and it was very chilly in the parlor, so after supper we all gathered into the little alcove beyond it, where a bright grate fire wound its skeins of ruddy flame through heaps of anthracite.

"Alison, won't you hand me my shawl?" said Mrs. Holmes, as she drew up shivering to the fire. "This weather reminds me very forcibly I ought to be on my way home."

"You're not strong enough to stand the journey yet, Lucy," said her brother-in-law. "We shall still have fine days away in November."

"And cold ones, too, I imagine, brother; I never expect to see another November north of the Susquehanna. Next week I must start for home."

There was a chorus of regretful ejaculations and entreaties, but Mrs. Holmes only smiled and shook her head.

"How would you like sister and me for travelling companions as far as Pennsylvania, Mrs. Holmes?" asked Clyde Woolsey. "We, too, must see our homes before Saturday night of next week."

"Oh, Clyde!"

"Oh, Mr. Woolsey!" simultaneously ejaculated Irene and Meltha.

He smiled down on them both; but the very smile prohibited farther discussion of the subject, or at least indicated that it would be quite useless. "It is an unpleasant necessity, my dear young ladies; but I am imperatively summoned back, and Irene must not disappoint our father and mother."

"And Alison is going, too, with aunty! How we shall miss you all, how lonely the house will be!" said Meltha, the tears coming into her blue eyes.

"But you'll have Miss Lindsay, my dear," said her father.

She brightened up again, and ran round to me. "Yes, Ethel, we'll have such nice times together. You'll stay with me all winter, won't you?"

"Thank you, my dear; but what would the people at home say to it? Uncle Gerald's last letter tells me 'they count the days to my return,' and I may look out for one of his kisses by week after next. So you see I shall be the latest departure."

"How lonely I shall be! I don't believe anybody in the world ever had so much trouble as I," throwing herself down on an ottoman, and laying her face on her father's knee, like an inconsolable child.

We all laughed outright at this.

"Well, it is too bad, daughter," said her father, stroking the bright hair of his pet. "Never mind, if our friends all desert us, we'll have something to console us for it."

"Come," spoke out Alison, "I move that we don't pass the last days we're to be together in tears and lamentations. We ought to be as merry as we can to the end of the chapter.

That's my philosophy, and there are more summers to come, because I saw next year's almanac in a book-store down town. By the by, Ethel, I met your admirer in there, inquiring for albums with two gilded birds on the cover."

"My admirer! What do you mean, Alison?"

"As if you didn't understand me perfectly, for all you look so demure and amazed. I'd like to know who it was that talked with you an hour at Miss Wilson's party—waited upon you to supper, and"—

"Oh! he means papa's friend, Mr. Grandon, that old gentleman!" interrupted Meltha, with a deprecating pantomime. "Why, he's at least fifty, and a widower. You wouldn't have a widower, would you, Ethel?"

"No, indeed, not if he were the best man in the world," and here all the romance of girlhood out-broke. "I wouldn't marry a man who had nothing but the ashes of his heart to give me, whose love, and life, and poetry, were all buried with the wife of his first election, whose great jewels were the past, whose joys were only memories—no, indeed, I wouldn't marry a widower," I concluded, with a blush, for I met the half-curious, half-amused glance of Clyde Woolsey.

They all laughed at my earnestness. Mr. Herrick patted me on the shoulder, saying, "It's well, my dear, I happen to be the only widower present, for I'm sure no other would be able to stand such an eloquent interdict as that. Perhaps you'll change your mind some day, though, about widowers."

"No, she won't," answered Alison, coming round to us, and I felt somehow my cheek glow beneath his glance. "Ethel never shall marry a widower. I'll forbid the bans myself.

"You're my protégée, you know, and I've a perfect right to do it," he added, in an undertone.

"Lucy," Mr. Herrick spoke up suddenly, as though something in the conversation had recalled the fact to his mind, "I was running my eyes over a London paper yesterday, which somebody had sent me, when I saw a notice of the death of a Mrs. Morgan Steele, wife of a physician. Wasn't that the name of the gentleman who was engaged to Ruth Maltby?"

"Yes—why, Nathan Herrick, can it be possible!" said Mrs. Holmes, raising both hands. "My poor Ruth! What if he should come to America, and they should meet?"

"I knew there was a romance somewhere in Aunt Ruth's life. Oh, Mrs. Holmes, if you would only tell us about it!" and I threw myself down on a corner of the stool where her feet were resting. "It's just the night for a story, too—weird, and wild, and stormy."

"Yes, do, aunty," chimed in Meltha. "You promised a long, long while ago, you'd tell me this story, and now's the time to redeem yourself. All in favor of hearing Aunt Lucy please signify it by raising their right hand." Six right hands were simultaneously uplifted, and Mrs. Holmes smiled her acquiescence. So we all drew our chairs close around the great fire, and while the wind battled along the streets, and the thick rain beat against the blinds, Mrs. Holmes drew her shawl around her with a little shiver, and commenced:

"Squire Maltby was a good man, but a very *set* one. You see we were neighbors in Millstone, and I remember the old, rambling yellow house, with its gambrel roof, and pea-green blinds, just as well as I do the little brown cottage, a quarter of a mile beyond it, which a certain young gentleman, seeing

for the first time last summer, said, with a very perceptible curl of the upper lip, 'Mother, can it be possible you were born and brought up there?'"

Here we all turned and smiled significantly at Alison, but were too much interested to interrupt the story.

"Ruth and I were inseparable companions, when we were children, and as we grew up into maidenhood, our affection for each other underwent no change.

"Ruth Maltby at twenty was a lovely girl; and the old squire, her father, whose health and vigor were now quite on the decline, almost worshipped his daughter. In the early summer of this year, Mr. Steele, an English gentleman, with his son Morgan, came to Millstone to pass the summer months, ostensibly for the health of the elder gentleman; but it was rumored throughout the village that some heavy debts which he had contracted in gambling made it necessary he should leave his native country. Although these reports were well authenticated, Mr. Steele had the air and appearance of a thorough-bred gentleman, and he soon gained admittance to the best society of the village.

"His son, Morgan Steele, upon whom, whatsoever might be said of his father, no shadow of reproach had ever fallen, was a great social acquisition to any circle. How distinctly I can see him. Tall, graceful, fine-looking, with intellectual endowments, and conversational powers of a high order—it was no wonder that he won the general admiration of the village girls, that summer.

"I believe he first met Ruth Maltby at a pic-nic, and the squire's daughter and the young Englishman were, from the first, interested in each other.

"I was visiting an aunt of my mother's, at this time, and

did not see Mr. Steele until I returned, when Ruth came round to our house to pass the day, and in the evening he called to accompany her home.

"I was pleased with him on our first interview; but Ruth had many admirers, and, although for the next month the young foreigner's attentions to her were the subject of much village gossip, I paid little attention to it, perhaps, because I was in a good deal of anxiety and doubt about my own personal matters at that time.

"One summer afternoon, however, I was sitting with her in the front chamber of the yellow farmhouse. We were both sewing a little, and talking a great deal. My seat was close by the window, and looked off on the road, upon which I suddenly descried a gentleman on horseback. As he came opposite the house, he drew up his reins, looked eagerly at the windows, and on seeing me, bowed almost to his saddle, flung me two or three swift kisses, and rode hastily away.

"'Why, if that wasn't Mr. Steele,' I ejaculated, in surprise. 'I didn't know as he was so audacious, though.'

"'Where! where! Lucy?' and Ruth sprang to the window with the blood brightening over her face.

"But she was too late. He had just turned the angle of the road. 'He tossed me several kisses as he rode by. Don't you think it was really impertinent, Ruth? We are so little acquainted.'

"'He probably mistook you for me,' she replied, stitching away very diligently.

"Something in her manner, I cannot tell what, aroused my suspicions, and the reports I had vaguely listened to now came back to my mind.

"I went up to her, drew the work from her hands, and

looking straight in her eyes, said, 'Now, tell me, Ruth, darling, just how much you think of Morgan Steele?'

"'Well, turn your head away, and I will try to.'

"I laid my head in her lap, she leaned down to me, and in a soft, quivering whisper came the answer: 'I love him better, Lucy, than any one in the world.'

"I sprang to my feet in astonishment. 'And he, Ruth, does he know this?'

"There was a smile of womanly pride on the gentle lips. 'Of course he does, Lucy, or you would not.'

"Then, after my first exclamations of wonderment were over, she told me all about her engagement with the young Englishman. How we sat there and talked while the great beech tree in the front yard cast its long shadows on the carpet.

"Ruth was very happy in this new love, reciprocated with so much ardor and devotedness; but I felt there was, after all, a something of shadow and trembling through all the brightness that filled her heart.

"'You know, Lucy,' she said, half to me, half to herself, as though she were answering the doubts of her own heart, 'dear papa is growing old, and, like all aged people, he has opinions and prejudices, which it is almost impossible to overcome. Then, too, Englishmen were always his especial aversion, and though he cannot help admiring Morgan, the old dislike will revive, and it is very hard for him to consent to my marrying a foreigner. Some reports, too, that he has heard of Morgan's father, give him a good deal of uneasiness. Of course, I don't believe a word of these, and if they were true, the son is surely not to blame for the sins of the father; but papa does not think so.'

"I forget what reply I made to all this ; it was half congratulatory, half consoling, probably, for Ruth and I loved as women do not often love each other.

"And now, I am coming to a very painful part of my story, a part which has made Ruth Maltby, instead of a happy, wedded wife, an old maid all the days of her life. Even now, I cannot bear to think of this time. I must hurry briefly over it.

"The elder Mr. Steele went to New York, and, removed from his son's influence, and surrounded with the temptations of the city, his old habits of gambling returned ; he lost large sums of money. Pressed by his creditors, he at last committed forgery. This was discovered, but he managed to make his escape as far as Maryland. Here, while he was stopping at a country tavern, somewhere in the interior of the State, his son went to visit him, with the intention of assisting his father to leave the country.

"The unhappy man heard his name called, and supposing that the officers of justice had discovered his retreat—I cannot tell the rest, children," said Aunt Lucy, speaking in a quick, pained voice—"when Morgan Steele sprang into the chamber, he found his father lying on the floor, the fresh blood weltering from his heart—he had shot himself.

"The night before the young man had left Millstone in search of his father, he had a long interview with Ruth, and acquainted her with his parent's crime. It was a terrible disclosure for the proud, high-born man, one that lowered his head with shame, and stained his cheek with terrible tears, but the heart of his listener was the heart of a woman.

"Under the old beech tree in the summer night, Ruth

Maltby looked up into the face of her betrothed, and answered him : "Through good and through evil report, I will go with you to the end."

"In less than two weeks later, Squire Maltby learned of the Englishman's crime and suicide.

"The name of Maltby was an honest name always,' he said, drawing up his tall frame, and shaking his fine, old, grey head, 'It shall not be disgraced now. No daughter of mine shall ever marry the son of a criminal.'

"But Morgan is not to blame for the sins of his father, and no matter whose son he is, I am proud of him. I glory in his love more than in anything else in the world,' pleaded his daughter.

"But the old squire was inflexible. Night after night the lamps burned late in the yellow house, while Ruth prayed and pleaded with her father ; and at midnight a pallid, trembling girl stole up stairs, with these last words of the squire ringing in her ears : 'Remember, Ruth, if you go to the altar with that man, the blessing of your old father will not go with you.'

"At last Morgan returned. His first meeting with his betrothed was, of course, a very painful one, but there was comfort for him in the truth that looked up to him from her soft eyes.

"He was anxious to leave a country where he had suffered so much, and to return to his native land, so he urged their immediate union. In this trying emergency, when Ruth felt her lover needed her tenderness more than anything on earth, one thing only made her hesitate—it was the thought of her father.

“Morgan Steele observed it, and, of course, he was now in that morbid state of sensitiveness which makes one unjust and suspicious towards everybody. Poor man! he had cause enough, though.

“‘Ruth,’ he said, drawing himself up haughtily, with a quiver of wounded pride in his tones, ‘I can only give you two days to consider this matter—to decide between your father and me, between remaining the daughter of an honest man, or becoming the wife of one who has nothing but his stained name to offer you.’

“‘And I should be prouder of that name than of the title of empress—but my father, Morgan, it would break his heart if I should leave him.’

“At another time, Morgan Steele might have felt the harrowing position of his betrothed; but he did not now; his father’s disgrace was uppermost in his own mind, and this blinded and warped all his other perceptions. He would not retract what he had spoken; he left Ruth bowed down, almost distracted by the great rush of conflicting feelings and duties.

“The next day she told her father all. It was a fearful scene the old sitting-room witnessed. ‘I have sounded my own heart; I cannot give up Morgan. Let me go with your blessing, father,’ pleaded the poor girl.

“And then the old man pushed back the grey hairs from his forehead, and bade his daughter look in his face. ‘It will only be a little while,’ he said, ‘before the sods are piled thick above it. Oh, Ruth! when your old father comes to die, shall he look around for your face, his youngest born, his best-beloved, to smile once more upon him? Don’t leave me,

Ruth. I repeat, it won’t be long I shall ask you to stay, anyhow, and when I go home to your mother in Heaven, and she asks me about our little girl, let me say, ‘I died with her arms about me,’ and not, ‘she left me all alone, and went with a stranger to a strange country.’ And Ruth listened to these words, and looked on her father’s shaking head, and wished that she, too, might die.

“I do not know (none but God ever did), how much of struggle and suffering poor Ruth Maltby went through with, during the long, sleepless hours of the night that followed. Much prayer must have brought her something of strength and peace, for the next morning a pale face and a shivering figure crept up to her father’s side, and whispered solemnly.

“‘Father, I will not go with Morgan. God helping me, I will stay with you as long as you live.’ And the old man put his arms round her and blessed her.

“That night Morgan Steele came and heard the resolution of his betrothed. I do not know what occurred in this interview, but I do know that the young man left his betrothed with so much tenderness and anger at strife in his heart, that I believe the former *must* have triumphed, had he not met Squire Maltby in the hall.

“The old man, whom age and infirmities had reduced to his second childhood, regarded the younger with prejudices that almost amounted to hatred, and his undeserved reproaches stung the proud spirit of Morgan Steele beyond endurance. Ruth had gone into the back garden, and knew nothing of this, or she would have prevented it; but some allusion that the squire made to the life of Morgan’s father finished the work.

" 'I will never see your daughter again, sir,' said the young Englishman, tossing down Ruth's miniature on the table. 'Please to give her this, and tell her I start day after to-morrow for England;' and he was gone. Late, very late that night, just as I was retiring, there was a low knock at my chamber-door, and Ruth Maltby crept into my room. Her face was white as the dead, and there was a strange, wild glitter in her eyes, that terrified me.

" 'What is the matter, Ruth?' I cried, springing toward her.

" She grasped both my hands in hers, and wrung them hard, as she whispered hoarsely, 'Morgan's gone, he's gone forever! Oh, Lucy, how my heart aches!'"

Here Mrs. Holmes completely broke down again, and cried still for two or three minutes, as did several of her auditors. At last she resumed her story again.

" We passed the night together. I need hardly say it was a sleepless one to both of us. I tried to comfort her. I hardly know whether I succeeded.

" Well, things went on as usual, and the summer glowed into autumn, and the autumn paled into winter. I saw Ruth almost every day. She went about the house pale and quiet, and there was a look of quiet, learned through the 'long anguish of patience,' which pained me much more than any words could have done.

" She did not often speak of Morgan, only once in a while she would press her hand tightly to her side, and say: 'Oh, Lucy, my heart aches! my heart aches!' and there would be such a look in her face—it makes me shudder now, to think of it.

" The squire's health grew feebler with the waning of the year, and the neighbors knew, long before Ruth did, that he would never see another spring. He could not bear to have his child out of his sight a moment. All his old pride and sternness seemed to have vanished, and his dim eyes watched her with exceeding fondness, as she moved about the room.

" At last death came for him. When the winter snows were piled thick over the earth, the old squire went up to the banks that are green with the eternal summer, with his head lying on the heart that had sacrificed so much for his sake.

" After the squire's death, Gerald and his wife remained several months at the old homestead. It was necessary the estate should be settled, and Ruth could not be persuaded to go to the Parsonage before the next summer.

" During this time she had never received a message from Morgan Steele; but whenever she heard the post-boy's horn, there would be a sudden, eager lifting of her head; and I knew what thought warmed and brightened, away down in her heart.

" I, too, was very hopeful for her. I did not doubt but Morgan would return some time, and that all would be well in the end with the friend of my youth.

" One day—it was when the spring had brightened into May, and the fruit trees around our house shook down flakes of white and crimson with every puff of wind, I went over to the squire's house. Ruth was out in the garden, tying up a rose-bush round the kitchen window, and the soft influences of the day must have crept into her heart, for she was looking happier than I had seen her for a long time.

" As we stood there, Gerald came along with a packet of

papers, he had just brought from the post-office. Ruth took one of these, and ran her eyes over the columns, while Gerald and I chatted together.

"Suddenly there was a shriek breaking out, sharp and wild, upon the hush of that May air—the cry of a heart wounded unto death; and when we turned round, Ruth Maltby's head was lying on the short spring grass, and she did not know us.

"We carried her into the house, our lips dumb with wonder and fear. The paper was clutched tightly in her hands. I drew it away, and the first paragraph my eyes rested on informed me of the marriage of Morgan Steele with an English lady. I showed it to Gerald, and then, as I looked through my tears on the white young face beneath me, I almost prayed that God would take Ruth Maltby to her father and mother in Heaven.

"But my prayer was not granted. Ruth woke up at last, but afterwards she was ill for a long time. I feared her mind and spirits would never regain their tone.

"Early in June Gerald returned with her to the Parsonage. After this I did not see her for three years; I was a wife and a mother, then, myself. The great sorrow of her life had written itself on her face; it was full of peace and content, but the old sunshine and laughter never shone in the eyes of Ruth Maltby again.

"'Perfect through much suffering;' these words seemed always sounding through my heart when I looked at her. She had found the true balm, my children; the balm gathered from flowers that blossom neither on the mountains nor in the valleys, nor among the meadows of this world."

"But was nothing ever heard of Morgan Steele, Mrs.

Holmes?" I asked, having listened with breathless interest to every word.

"Yes, Ethel. About five years after his marriage he came to America, bringing his wife with him. She was a fair young English girl, with blue eyes and golden hair, looking, I imagine, very much as Meltha does.

"A friend of mine met him at a watering-place, where he stopped for a short time. Some allusion that was inadvertently made by Morgan to our village, opened the way to further conversation, and Morgan made many inquiries respecting the old squire and Ruth. He was greatly surprised to find the former was dead, and some expression in his face when he spoke of Ruth awakened the curiosity of my friend, who knew nothing of his previous history. We learned afterwards, however, that his chief object in visiting America was to defray all the debts which his father had contracted; for Morgan Steele had become a successful physician in London."

"And did Aunt Ruth know of this?"

"Yes. I told her. 'He was an honorable man, I knew it, Lucy,' she said, with such a glow of pride and tenderness sparkling through her tears, that my heart ached again, perhaps worse than hers did, for Ruth had learned that best, grandest lesson of life—'PEACE.'"

For a little while no one broke the silence. The story had spoken to all our hearts, and we sat still, looking into the flames, and listening to the storm and the rain as they struggled against the windows.

"Come, let's have some lively music," spoke out Irene, after a long yawn. "Alison, do come into the parlor, and sing with us."

So all the young people went into the parlor, and the four voices blended with the rich-toned piano, and swelled out into the little alcove, in strains of sad, or sweet, or joyous melody, that shut out all sounds of the storm outside. They sang and played for an hour or two, and then, somewhat to my surprise, Clyde Woolsey came and took a seat in the corner close by me.

"There is room enough; don't make yourself uneasy," he said, with a half smile, as I drew my chair a little closer to the grate.

We chatted together on different subjects a little while. Then there came a pause, and I sat still, and he looked into the grate. There was little expression, then, on that strong, pale, clearly-cut profile, and I had no key to interpret the character beneath it.

But he surprised and puzzled me, this strange Clyde Woolsey, with his quiet, self-constrained manner, his independent opinions, and his strong will, that made even his proud sister bend to it.

Suddenly he turned his face towards me. "Well, on the whole, what do you think of me?"

I stammered—"I was not thinking of you, Mr. Woolsey."

He looked at me a moment with those calm, deep eyes steadily. I had inadvertently told an untruth; but I should have retracted it in a moment without that gaze.

"Yes, I was thinking of you" (stimulated into unusual boldness), "and that you are a very singular person. I do not understand you."

"And you do not like me, either, and that is the reason you are so shy of me."

"No," I answered, my thoughts recurring to the conversation on the evening of the party. "It is not that I dislike you, but"——

"What are you talking about?" interrupted Alison, as he came behind my chair. "I don't think you are very polite to stay here, and not even compliment our music by listening to it."

I looked up; there was certainly a cloud on the brow of the spoiled child.

"Oh, I have been listening, Alison, I assure you, and enjoying the music, as I have only a few times in my life."

"I imagined so, when I came out, and you were so engrossed in your conversation, you did not even hear my approach." There was undisguised petulance in his tones.

I could not understand it, and looking up I met the eyes of Clyde Woolsey. There was the shadow of a smile on his lips. I felt rather than perceived it; and then, as the two young men stood there together, the great antithesis in their natures struck me for the first time.

They were about the same height, of the same age, and of equal social position; but the character of one was outward, magnetic, effervescent: that of the other, strong, individual, massive, and each was rendered doubly interesting by the contrast it presented to his companions.

While these thoughts were flashing across my mind, Irene and Meltha bounded up to us.

"I think you are chivalric gentlemen, both of you," pouted the beauty, "to go off in this way, and leave Meltha and me to entertain ourselves."

"I assure you, my sole object in doing so was to bring back

these delinquents, fair Queen of Melody," answered Alison, with one of his inimitable bows.

This gallant speech, somehow, failed to propitiate the lady. She glanced half-angrily toward me, as though I was in some wise responsible for Alison's inattentions. "You need not have troubled yourself on my account," she answered, ironically. "I never seek any but willing and appreciative subjects—come," her brow brightened, "let's have a game of chess."

"But what will *you* do, Ethel?" asked Alison, for I could not play.

"Oh, I'll finish this story I began yesterday," taking up a book that lay on the quartette. "Do go now."

But I did not read much that evening. A new light began slowly to dawn into my mind. Could it be possible that Irene Woolsey was jealous of me? I glanced across at the graceful head that leaned over the chess-board, at the bewitching face that looked smilingly up to Alison Holmes, and a thousand circumstances arose to confirm my suspicions.

"She's in love with him. I see it all, now; and she thinks that I"—I would not allow even my thoughts to give definiteness to this feeling, that, nevertheless, sent a warm glow to my cheek, and a light about my heart. So I sat and dreamed by the dancing fire, dim, happy, impalpable dreams, that I could not have embodied in words; and just beyond me the two games progressed slowly intermingled with playful sallies, and snatches of song, and bursts of light laughter.

CHAPTER XII.

"Next Wednesday."

"So soon as that, Alison?" and the book I held dropped from my hands.

It was just at sunset, and we stood together in his uncle's library, for I had come here in quest of a book, and he had followed me, knowing it was my habit to visit it every day about this time.

There was something strangely fascinating to me in that great, dark room, when the sunset poured over the rich oaken panelling, and the dark-green furniture. The picturesqueness, the sentiment of the whole room was alike a stimulant and a repose to my imagination, as I walked up and down the floor, reading fragments of poetry, or some of the old, gorgeous romances, with which the library was stored.

"You look disappointed, Ethel," answered Alison, lifting the book. "Are you really sorry that we must part so soon?"

"How can you ask me? I have been very, very happy this summer and autumn."

"Have you, dear?" He laid his hand with a new caressing fondness on my hair; then he said abruptly, "Sit down here, Ethel; I want to talk to you."

And I sat down in his uncle's great chair, and he seated him-

self on the arm, and turned round so that he could look right in my face—my face that was flushing, as my heart was fluttering uneasily—I could not for the world have told why.

“Ethel,” commenced the young man, with a little visible embarrassment, “I want to make a confession to you ; but now, the time’s come, it’s harder than I supposed. However, I’ll out with it at once : *I’m in love, Ethel.* The fact has been growing upon me for the last week.”

“With whom, Alison?” almost certain he would answer, “Irene Woolsey.”

“With somebody you’d never suspect, I see, by the startled, wondering look in your wonderful eyes, you precious morsel of verdancy. With somebody, I shan’t even say now whether you ever heard of ; and taking it altogether, it’s a very incomprehensible affair. I don’t half understand it myself.”

“But is she worthy of you, Alison? I should feel so badly to have you marry a woman that wasn’t this. Do tell me something about her.”

“Yes, she’s worthy of me,” his face glowing with something that was not the sunlight. “She’s not handsome, or socially accomplished, but to me she’s beautiful above all other women. She’s as shy and timid as you are, Ethel, and, perhaps, there’s nothing strikingly graceful or elegant about her. But I know this : she has more influence, more *power* over me, than any other woman ever can have. I shall make a better, stronger, truer man, with the light of her clear soul-full eyes, forever upon me ; the best part of me lives and grows in her presence. My views, aims and purposes, uncertain and intangible before, seem to intensify and expand in her presence—in short, I want her life taken into my life.”

“And does she know all this, Alison?”

“No, indeed ; I am not certain she loves me, though she’s a child, simple, fresh, transparent, and I suspect this is, after all, the secret of her influence. She’s so unlike any other character I ever had to deal with. I, who’ve been petted and flattered all my life. Do you suppose if I should ask her, she’d say she loved me, Ethel?” There was so much eager uncertainty in the words, that, as I glanced over his handsome face and person, I could hardly help smiling at the thought.

“Of course, she’ll love *you*, Alison.”

“Do you think so?” brightening all over his face. “And now shall I tell you who she is?”

“Yes, do, do, Alison.”

He looked at me and smiled a half-comical, half-amused smile at my curiosity. I almost believed he blushed a little. “I’ve half a mind to,” he said, patting my cheek. “I guess I won’t quite yet, though.” He drew a plain, heavy gold ring from his pocket. “Look at this, Ethel. I’ll invite her here this evening, at eight o’clock, to meet you, whom she has expressed a strong desire to know. You shall come into the conservatory. No one will be there, at this time, but ourselves ; and when you see this ring on the third finger of her left hand, you will know who is the lady of my love.”

“How romantic, Alison. To be sure, I’ll come there. But you’ll promise me, whoever you marry, that I may be your sister, always?”

A shadow came over his face. “Wait until you see her, Ethel, before you ask any such promises. There, now, you are looking hurt, but you would not, if you understood me. I’ll promise to love you, whatever may happen, as fondly and ten-

derly as ever a brother loved his sister, all the days of my life." He said this with a solemnity that greatly moved me. I only answered: "Thank you, Alison," for this confession of his attachment had cast a shadow over my heart, a shadow that was deepening all the while.

"You don't seem very happy, Ethel?" he asked, as if he hoped I were not.

Before I could answer, voices rushed up to us from the front hall. Irene and Meltha had returned from their walk. Alison went out to meet them, and I sat alone in the heavy arm-chair, till the night darkened about the corners of the room, thinking on all Alison had said, with that strange sadness creeping heavier and heavier over my heart.

"Well, what do you want here, little boy?" While Alison and I sat together in the library, Clyde Woolsey had asked this question, of a ragged little Irish boy, whom the gentleman met staring bewildered about the front hall as he came in.

"Please, sir, I want to see Miss Irene Woolsey," removing his rimless hat from a mass of dirty, yellow hair. "She owed Miss Walters—the woman who lived in the back-chamber of our house—five dollars, for some dress-makin' she did; and when she went off, she told my mother, as how she might have the money, *cos* she was kind to her; but she must tell Miss Woolsey that the want of it, came near bringin' her and her children to starvation. Night before last they sent the money; but Miss Clerkin, who lives in the back part of the house, didn't know nothin' about it, and said the woman up stairs was gone. So I've come after the money now. Mother sent me."

The young man did not speak a word. He simply took out his purse, and paid the boy, stopping his Hibernian volubility of thanks with a wave of the hand and brief, "There that will do."

"When Miss Woolsey returns, will you ask her to come to my room immediately?" he said to a domestic.

"What is it you want of me, Clyde?"

She burst into his room, with the heavy folds of her India shawl gathered up daintily in her white hands; the long ostrich plumes swept down gracefully to her shoulders, and her face was flushed into more than its usual proud beauty, with her long walk. And Clyde Woolsey looked at his sister with a sad sternness, as she sprang toward him.

"Don't kiss me, Irene," he said, waving her off, "I can't bear it now, after what I have learned."

"What have you learned, Clyde?" standing still with amazement.

"That you have told me a falsehood." She would have contradicted it vehemently, but again that simple, powerful wave of the hand silenced her.

"Don't add to your wrong-doing, Irene. Sit down here, and listen to me."

She sat down, and in a few words he told her all of his meeting the Irish boy in the hall, and what he had said to him.

"To think that my sister would have stained her life with two such sins. Oh, Irene, I could not have believed it of you!"

And then, in the midst of the girl's fear and mortification, for both were very galling to her proud spirit, there came a soft suggestion, then a terrible temptation, to her heart. Perhaps

she battled a moment with it strongly. Perhaps the angels watched breathlessly the conflict between Good and Evil, that went on briefly in the young girl's soul; briefly, for the Evil triumphed.

"I didn't tell you a falsehood, Clyde," speaking very rapidly, and with a flush on her cheek hidden by the gathering darkness. "If I must tell you, it was all somebody else's doings."

"Somebody's else?"

"Yes—promise me you won't breathe a word of it, if I tell you, for I don't want to expose her."

"I promise."

"Well, then, Ethel Lindsay employed this Mrs. Walters to do some work for her, too. It all, however, was done in my own name, at her request. Of course, I paid my share of the expenses when you gave me the means; but Ethel was quite out of money, and knowing it when you spoke to me so sharply at the table the other morning, I preferred the blame should rest on me."

"And she never said a word to exculpate you from her share of the debt?"

"No. I suppose she hadn't the moral courage after your remarks."

"But, Irene, I accidentally heard her mention having received some money from home day before yesterday."

"And she sent it round in the evening to Mrs. Walters, but she was gone."

"Can it be possible! I thought her so open, so transparent. I have been singularly deceived. But you have been true to yourself. Forgive me, darling sister, for my harshness. You have lifted a great weight from my heart."

And here the beautiful tenderness that lay far down in the deep valleys of his heart, so that very few dreamed of it, rushed up to his sister. He put his arms around her neck, and kissed the beautiful forehead, and called her again and again, his precious, his beautiful, his *true* sister!

They were the children of one father and mother; they had grown up cherished household buds by one hearthstone; the bright head had slept on his heart many times, when it had grown tired with its play under the elm trees of their father's southern home, and how could the proud, loving brother believe that his sister could do this great evil! He, who, with his strong, stern love of truth and right, would rather have lain her fair head under the autumn grass, than had this great sin taken upon it.

But Irene felt like a guilty thing as she received her brother's caresses. "Don't say anything about it. I presume Ethel didn't mean to do wrong. There goes the supper-bell, and my shawl and hat are not removed. I declare, Clyde, I believe you'll drive me crazy sometime," and she hurried out of the room.

I stood in the conservatory, and looked round with a palpitating heart. Rare exotics, fragrant geraniums, snowy camelias, and red-hearted roses, opened their dewy lips all about me; but, Alison stood quite alone by a large orange tree, its ripening fruit hanging in bright contrast among the dark leaves.

"Alison, where is the lady?" as he came toward me.

"You'll find her round here by the window," and he led

me toward it, with a smile on his lip. Yet I felt his hand tremble.

I looked round in surprise, for there was no one in the deep, bay window. Suddenly his fingers seized mine. The next he lifted my hand—he did not speak a word, *but on the third finger rested the ring he had shown me.*

I glanced into his face, there was no need he should have spoken then.

“Oh, Alison!” the words were breathed rather than spoken, as a new tide of light rushed over me. I buried my face in my hands. He was a man, and capable of greater self-control than I was, and yet it was a trying moment to both of us. At last, *he* broke the silence. “Ethel, will you not look up? Will you not wear the ring?” His voice shook through the words as I had never heard it before, and—I don’t know how it happened, but my heart went straight back to that summer afternoon we first met in Mrs. Kenyon’s parlor.

The “Then” and the “Now” stood face to face. And he loved me, he, rich, elegant, fastidious, had pronounced me the “woman elect” of his soul. I thought of Irene Woolsey, with her brilliant beauty, her rare accomplishments, her very apparent regard for him, and I could hardly believe it.

There was no triumph in my heart then. I was humbled, overwhelmed at this great new gift, and I lifted up my head at last, and whispered, “I will wear it, Alison,” and so the tears gathered, and the great sobs came.

He drew me to his heart, that heart where it was such a new, strange happiness for my head to rest. “What makes you cry, Ethel, *my* Ethel?” he said, softly smoothing my hair. “Are you happy?”

“Very, Alison;” smiling upon him through my tears.

“My fragrant little wild flower, how I thank God to-night that he ever led me to you!”

So we sat there for an hour, or, it may be, for two, in the dim light of the conservatory, with the flowers breathing out their fragrant lives all about us, and talked, as the young and the loving always have talked since Adam first walked with Eve under the rustling leaves of the Garden of Eden, and said those words which have lost none of their old beauty and sweetness, though they have rolled down through the discords of six thousand years, “*I love you.*”

Alison Holmes would have been a fascinating lover to any woman, and this new demonstrative tenderness, making the old home-love seem so tame and common-place, was—how can I tell what it was to me!

Then the home he pictured for our future! It was to be a cottage (he knew that was one of my pet fancies), all wrapped round with shrubbery, and the whole an inspiration of terraces, and fountains, of statues, and pictures!

“But, Alison, what sort of a queen shall I be for such a fairy spot? You see I am entirely unfitted to be your—your—companion. I’m neither accomplished, nor anything, but just Ethel Lindsay.”

“And that’s the incarnation of everything that’s sweet, and pure, and good. I wouldn’t change you one atom for all the charms of all the women in the world, *my* Ethel.”

“What would Uncle Gerald and Aunt Ruth say if they knew of all this, Alison? And to think you meant me all the time you were talking in the library, and I never dreamed of it.”

"And I loved you all the better for your innocence. Oh! Ethel"—dropping down his head in my lap—"we will be very happy together."

And, at last, fearing our long absence might be observed, we went out, and I thought my heart, out of its great happiness, answered to this life, "It is enough."

And yet, looking back now on that hour, I know the angels had sung no song over our betrothal, for unto Alison Holmes had never been given the "line and the plummet" to sound the great deeps of my heart, and our names were not among the few blessed marriages "written in heaven."

"Why, Ethel, where in the world did you get that ring?" suddenly asked Meltha, the next morning, as I gave her a pair of embroidery scissors which lay on the table by which we sat, for she and Irene were sewing, or, rather, playing with some dainty bits of embroidery while I was reading.

"I—I—why, a friend gave it to me," blushing, stammering, and drawing away my head.

"Now, look here, my dear young lady, this will never do. That's an engagement ring, as true as I'm alive. I bet I can guess who placed it there, too," laughing, and clapping her hands. "It was Al, you can't deny it, Ethel. Just see her blush now, Irene." The lady looked up with a smile, half derisive, half incredulous, but its character changed as she gazed in my face.

"Come, now, Ethel, do make a clean breast of it, and tell us the whole. I guessed it would come to this long ago," continued Meltha. "And you'll be my cousin some day. Oh! if I don't plague Al, when he comes home."

Irene's beautiful head bent lower over her sewing, but I saw her lips quiver, and her brow darken fearfully, and struck with a momentary pity for her, I scarcely heeded Meltha's sallies.

These were soon interrupted by the coachman, who came in to see if the young ladies would ride out that morning.

"We'll go down Broadway, it's such a delightful morning, girls," said Meltha, gathering up her work.

But I declined. My heart was so full of inward harmonies that day, that no outward pleasure could keep time with it; so Meltha coaxed and pleaded in vain.

"You're real provoking, Ethel," she said at last, quite chagrined, as she gave up the idea of my accompanying her. "No matter, I'll go down to the office and find Al, and if I don't torment that young gentleman my name isn't Meltha Herrick! Come, Irene—you'll go?"

She hesitated a moment, and then acquiesced. But as she swept by me, I caught a glimpse of her face in the oval mirror opposite. It was but a single glance that darkened down and sent a shiver through every pulse of my being. I cannot describe that look, but it was such a one as I pray God my eyes may never rest on again, in time, or in eternity.

And late that night Irene Woolsey paced with locked hands and white lips up and down the room; the wild fierceness on her face struck out half its beauty, and her long, dark hair was tossed heavily about her white cheeks.

Sometimes she paused, and stamped her feet madly, and wrung her locked hands frenziedly. "Oh! how I have loved him!" she cried out at last, and there was a throb of tender-

ness through all the sharpness of her tones. "And to think this girl, this low-born beggar, that I would not have touched with the hem of my garment, should have thus outdone me! Oh! how I hate her! How, indeed, I have hated her from the very first!" and a fearful spasm crossed her features. "She shall not triumph, though, I say she shall not. I might have forgiven her all the rest, but not this, not the robbing me of his love, whose depth and strength I never learned until this day. Ethel Lindsay shall never go from the altar the wife of Alison Holmes," her voice settling down into a low, sharp, defiant whisper. "I'll circumvent her somehow. Have I not beauty, and wit, and art, those things which soonest bring men to the feet of women?" and she paused before the great mirror, and shook back her long hair, and surveyed her fair person triumphantly. "Ethel Lindsay has none of these; and yet it is strange what a power this girl, with her shy, quiet ways, and her ignorance of the world, gets over others—strange how she has come between me and those I love. But our paths separate next week, and then"—oh! what a smile crept across the proud mouth—"there will be time for me to work. Of course, I can do nothing now but make my plans;" and then she went to the window, and putting aside the damask curtains, looked out upon the night, the still, solemn night, in the which God walks in the gardens of men's hearts.

Oh, Irene Woolsey! so blinded, so mad, as to believe that the wrong-doing shall triumph, that a *sin* shall not work out its own inevitable curse, that the thunders of Sinai, and the cross of Calvary have not borne their solemn witness to this grand truth—"The wicked shall not go unpunished."

"Ethel, Alison has told me all. My love, I congratulate you," said Mrs. Holmes to me the next morning, as I went into her room, and she looked at me with a new love in her eyes, as on something that belonged to her.

I buried my face in her lap. "Are you really glad?" I faltered. "I was so surprised, and then, I am so unworthy of him."

"There is nobody on earth I would give him to as soon, Ethel, my child;" her lips lingered lovingly over the words; "I have a daughter now."

"And I a mother." Just then Alison entered. He understood all at a glance. He came up to me. His mother clasped our hands together, and faltered, "Alison and Ethel—my children."

Of course, our engagement soon became whispered throughout the house, and we were made the target for all sorts of verbal shafts from Meltha and her father. It was a new, and very trying ordeal for me, but I suppose I bore it very much as other young ladies, engaged for the first time, do, trying to look very unconcerned, and carrying a quick heart and burning cheeks all the while. But my position was less trying, because we were to leave so soon, and every one's attention was much occupied with the packing preliminaries.

Irene's manner toward me underwent a great change. She was always polite, now she was attentive and cordial when we met, which was only in the presence of the family. I believe Meltha no longer thought she disliked me, and certainly no one else ever dreamed of it.

But the memory of that passing glance I had caught from the mirror never left me. I felt she would under no circum-

stances be my friend ; but then, knowing that she loved Alison, I could not help pitying her.

As for Clyde, he had grown very distant towards me, and we only exchanged a few conventional phrases every day ; but I remember one evening a remark of his struck me as being very singular. Mrs. Holmes had been purchasing some agate vases for a southern friend, and as we sat in the parlor, she turned to Alison, saying,

"I was not in when they arrived, and did not pay for them, and I shall not be able to get so far down town again. Don't forget, Alison, to settle with the man before I go."

"Of course not, and I shall be happy to discharge any other favor of the same kind for any of you here. It's not very pleasant to be haunted by the ghost of one's creditors, I assure you. Ethel, have you settled all your bills?"

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness on that account, sir. I never owed anybody a sixpence in my life for five hours."

"Well, I declare ! what an honest little body you are ! That's what very few persons could say, Mr. Woolsey ?" He sat near us.

"Then you don't even owe your dressmaker any unpaid bills, Miss Lindsay ?" asked the gentleman, turning round suddenly to me.

"Not one," a little surprised. "My wardrobe is not very extensive, and I've managed to pay my seamstress for the two dresses she's made me since I came to New York. It was not a very heavy sum."

I could not divine the expression which passed at that moment over the face of Clyde Woolsey ; it was a mixture of surprise and contempt, for which I could in no wise account. Just

then Irene called him to look at a steel engraving in a new magazine. I had not observed that she was listening with great interest to the conversation—she who alone had the key to her brother's opinion of my answers.

A little while afterwards some one asked, "What do you consider the finest attribute in a character, or at least, Mr. Woolsey, what would be the essential one in your selection of a friend?"

He turned round, looked directly in my face, and answered simply, "Truth."

"What can he mean?" for the significant look and tone were anything but flattering. "Does he intend to imply that I am deficient in this quality?" I mused, and I returned his glance proudly, perhaps defiantly, for here I knew his suspicion was unjust.

Then Alison called me, and I went to him, thinking about this strange Clyde Woolsey. I remembered, perhaps for the first time, that he had been very cold to me for several days past. "He dislikes me because I am an authoress—that *must* be the reason," was my mental conclusion. And then Alison's voice broke the thread of my thoughts, and sitting down on the sofa by the side of him and his mother, I forgot all about Clyde Woolsey. He was chatting opposite with Meltha, to whom, for the last week, he had been paying marked attention.

"Miss Lindsay, there's a gentleman wants to see you in the parlor," and I hurried down, wondering greatly who it could be.

"Why, Uncle Gerald !" and I was in his arms, gathered up

close to his heart, and for awhile there were no words spoken between us.

Business, he said, brought him to New York a few days earlier than he anticipated. Aunt Ruth was not quite well, and the house seemed lonely without their child; would she be ready to go back with him to-morrow? and I assented, half-reluctant, for was I not to leave Alison!

I do not think he was very glad to see the minister at first, for he knew his arrival forestalled my departure; but that afternoon the two gentlemen had a long conversation in the library. At last they sent for me, and I went down with my beating heart and burning cheeks, and Uncle Gerald said, as he drew me up to him,

"I know all, my little girl; may God keep and bless you both."

I thought there was a little shade of sadness in his voice, and as Alison was just then summoned away, I whispered very eagerly, as I buried my head on his shoulder, "Are you *quite* satisfied, are you pleased, Uncle Gerald?"

"I ought to be, I suppose, Ethel. The world will think you are making a 'splendid match,' I know, and you will have a kind and tender husband and a luxurious home. But, notwithstanding his beautiful qualities of heart and mind, Alison Holmes is a spoiled boy, and he'll be, at times, a petulant, exacting husband; then my little girl, with her highly-wrought, nervous organization, needs somebody very strong to lean upon in her journey through life, and you and Alison will be a couple of children together, always."

"I can manage him, though," I said, smiling to myself, with a little feminine vanity.

"And you love him, Ethel; with your whole heart you love him?"

"I guess I do." And I looked up in my uncle's face as I answered him.

And he saw something there that made him answer, "I'm satisfied."

The next day we left, amid the regrets of every member of the household, except the Woolseys. Alison's parting and mine was just what might have been expected from two young lovers, who felt their lives were absorbed in each other.

They all accompanied us to the depot. Irene kissed me affectionately, and entreated me to write to her; but as she stepped back to the carriage, after the cars had rolled away, no one saw the look of triumph that overswept the girl's face, or heard her low, muttered, "Now, now it's time for me to commence the game!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A WEEK had passed. I was at home again, and the old places had begun to look as they did before I left; and the restlessness which usually follows long excitement, and which made life seem so tame and insipid at the Parsonage, to die slowly away.

"You are changed, Ethel, my child. You do not seem quite happy since your return!" Aunt Ruth said these words a dozen times a day, looking at me with her anxious eyes.

And I could not tell her it was only the longing for one who was not there, that made all else so dull and vapid, so I always answered evasively, "One of these days you shall know about it, aunty."

We were alone in the old sitting-room. It was a still, frosty autumn night, with a faint wind rustling like the sigh of a human heart through the leaves, colored and crumpled with the coming on of November.

"No, no, don't read to-night, Ethel," said Miss Maltby, as I took up a book from the table. "Gerald will not be back until to-morrow, and you can tell me now all about this secret you've been promising me so long. You've quite stimulated my curiosity."

I laid my head back in the chair, and summoned up my courage, for it certainly required considerable to acquaint Aunt

Ruth with my engagement. "But you must do it, some time, and it may as well be now as ever," whispered common sense. So, at last, I rose up, drew the sewing from her hand, and sitting down at her feet, I told her the great story of my life.

On the morning of that autumn day when I sat at Aunt Ruth's feet in the grey stone Parsonage in the evening, Alison Holmes walked up and down the great parlor of a large, old-fashioned, but very pleasant family mansion a few miles from Philadelphia. It was the home of Irene Woolsey. They had left New York together two days before, and as the weather continued warm and delightful, the young girl had persuaded Mrs. Holmes and her son to pass a few days at her residence.

Irene was quite a favorite with Mrs. Holmes, for she always took especial pains to make herself agreeable to that lady; then, of course, they all liked Clyde, who had warmly echoed the invitation of his sister.

The young man walked meditatively up and down the long, old-fashioned room, for the house had belonged to Mr. Woolsey's second wife. The dark oak wainscoting which reached half way to the ceiling, the Brussels carpet with its quaint tracery of arabesque figures, and the high-backed chairs thickly studded with shining nails, were in themselves a biography of three quarters of a century gone, and perhaps Alison felt this as he paced up and down the quaint old parlor, for his brow wore a more serious look than it often did. But he paused at last before the portrait of a lady, in an old-fashioned brown satin, and elaborate head-dress, which set off to peculiar advantage the stately character of her beauty—for beautiful she was

still, though the freshness of youth had mellowed down into the matronly dignity of middle age—and as he stood looking at this, the door opened softly, and slowly and gracefully came the queenly figure of Irene Woolsey toward him.

“You are looking at my mother, Mr. Holmes!” said the soft, sweet voice.

“I supposed so. How much you resemble her!” glancing from the fresh, living beauty beneath, to the still matronly beauty overhead.

“Yes; I am like mamma, while Clyde is like papa. Her name was Irene Clyndham, and our parents managed, you see, to perpetuate both these names in their children, but we soon softened the latter into Clyde.”

“And she died when you were very young?”

“When I was hardly six. It is very hard for a little child to be left without its mother,” and tears of genuine feeling dimmed the dazzling eyes of Irene Woolsey.

“But you soon had another, in name, at least.”

“Oh, yes! Papa’s second wife was a distant cousin of my mother’s. She was a belle and a beauty in her youth, and wrote sentimental sonnets to the moon, and thought herself a great genius, which has given Clyde such a shocking distaste to all literary women. Now she’s a languishing bundle of nerves, and notions, of sentiment and absurdity; and divides her time between her dresses and the doctor—between her poetry and her complaints.”

“What a delightful step-mother,” laughing heartily at this graphic description. “But was she kind to you?”

“Ye-es, tolerably so. She had ‘spasms of devotion,’ as Clyde used to call them, in which she lavished all sorts of

extravagant praises and caresses on us. And she never interfered or crossed us much any way; so we always got along quietly with her, which is saying considerable under the circumstances.”

And here lay the key to much that was wrong in Irene’s conduct, for her description of her step-mother was a strictly just one; but her life and character had been so undisciplined from its childhood, that the evil had grown rank in a nature which had originally many fine qualities.

“What are you thinking of?” asked the young lady in some pause of the conversation, as she watched the young man from under her thick lashes.

“That I wondered what Ethel was doing to-night.”

“I shall not allow you to be disconsolate on account of her absence. As your hostess, it’s my duty to make myself as agreeable to you as possible, and I presume I can best do this by talking of your lady-love.”

“That is almost too severe a reflection on my gallantry, Miss Irene; still I admit the subject will be to me a very interesting one.”

“As she remarked to me one day, when we were speaking of yourself”——

“Tell me all she said, Miss Irene,” leading her to a sofa. The lady played a moment with her richly-embroidered under-sleeves, and then leaning her head heavily back against the heavy carving of the sofa, she said with apparent indifference, “Well, let me see—we were talking about rich husbands, and Ethel said”——

“Well, what did she say about rich husbands?” very impatiently.

"You must first promise me on your honor, you will never tell her of this conversation."

"I promise on my honor."

"It was nothing, only that, no matter how dearly she might love a man, she would never marry him if he were poor; she had, in her early life, experienced so much of the misery of poverty, that she shrank with instinctive horror from the thought of ever braving it again. The chains of her love must be golden ones."

"Did Ethel Lindsay say that?" in a tone of surprise and disapproval.

"To be sure she did. Don't you think her ingenuousness is charming? and then she hasn't a touch of false pride. She never ignores the circumstances of her early life!"

"Of course, she knows they can in no wise harm her in the estimation of any one worthy her regard," answered Alison; but his face did not brighten at this praise of his betrothed, and Irene saw exultingly that the words were rankling in his heart.

"And then," continued Irene, "she said something it would have done you a great deal of good to hear—that the man who would be her husband had not only this great desideratum, wealth, but every quality of heart and mind to win the love of any woman."

He rose and walked up and down the room, whistling a tune; but there was a thoughtful shadow on his brow, and Irene knew very well what was in his heart—that he was asking himself if it could be possible Ethel Lindsay would marry him for his riches! and the heir of Geoffrey Holmes felt, for the moment, his money was almost a curse to him.

But, just then, Irene's father and brother entered the room. They were much alike—the old and the young gentleman. The step and air of the former had lost none of their stateliness and dignity, under the burden of the sixty-five years that had wrinkled his cheeks, and bleached his hair so white. He bowed with a good deal of old-school courtesy to his guest. "The guns are in prime order," he said, "and it's a glorious day for the woods."

"Oh, papa, Clyde," pouted Irene, "haven't you given up that sporting? I do think it's too bad for you all to go off, and leave us poor women to mope here through the day alone."

"But, my daughter," laughed the old gentleman, "I've promised your mother some rabbits for her supper, and I imagine she'd 'mope' worse if I didn't produce them. You can take Mrs. Holmes to ride while we are gone."

"And it's high time we were starting. I'll run down and get Molly to put us up a lunch," and Clyde hurried out of the room, while Alison made his apologies and adieux to Irene.

"Won't you tell me how many times you have read that letter over, Mr. Holmes?" and the girl leaned her fair head over his shoulder.

"Not more than six, I presume. I see by that laugh in your eyes, you have divined who was its writer," and Alison refolded the letter.

"And you are not going to let me see, or even read me a passage of it? please, now,"—and the little dainty fingers nestled down on the envelope.

Alison gently drew it away. "It would not be quite fair," he said, half apologetically, "to show Ethel's letter."

"Yes, it would, too, to me, when you have promised I shall be your sister. I have so much curiosity to see one of Ethel's letters, because they must be so beautiful, so unlike other people's." He smiled—she knew that the remark would please Alison's vanity, so with a little more pretty frowning and coaxing, she drew away the precious epistle, which had for the time obliterated all memory of my remarks about his money, from his mind, and carried it off triumphantly to her own room. And for two hours she sat before her rose-wood writing-desk, with the letter lying open beside her. Irene Woolsey worked very cautiously, very diligently, pausing at every letter she fashioned, and when, at last, her work was completed, and she held up the two letters in the burst of setting sunlight, I, Ethel Lindsay, could not have told which was my own hand-writing.

"It's perfect! nobody would detect the difference," she soliloquized, "and there's no harm, I'm sure, in copying her hand-writing, for I like to execute a variety of styles." The girl had not the moral courage to face the vague thought, the half-divined purpose, that had furnished the real motive to her two hours' employment; but Irene Woolsey would have shuddered and drawn back, had she looked down into the darkness of her own heart, while she refolded my letter.

CHAPTER XIV.

"GRANT—Grant, oh! God help me?"

And quivering in every limb with her sudden surprise and terror, Irene Woolsey fell back a moment against the entrance of the old arbor. The next she sprang wildly forward, and with one blow of her small white hand, she struck down the heavy pistol from the young man's grasp to the ground.

Then the two stood still and confronted each other. I cannot tell which face was the whiter, as the restless shadows of the leaves quivered across it.

It was an old dilapidated grape arbor in which the two cousins stood; branches of trees and running vines had wrapped and tangled themselves in with the original growth, and though the framework had given way in many places, still the strong boughs and vines wound themselves tightly together, forming a cool, delightful retreat in one corner of the garden.

And to this Irene had sauntered one sunny afternoon, a few days after the departure of her guests for the South, and it was no wonder the sight that met the girl's gaze on her entrance, had called up that cry of wild horror to her white lips.

For a moment, the young man's eyes glared fiercely upon his cousin. "How dared you do this, Irene? In another second I should have been out of all my misery."

"Grant Mulford, are you mad? Do you think I would stand by, and see you shoot yourself? Oh, thank God, I was not too late!" And, completely overcome with the shock her feelings had undergone, Irene sank down on the low, wooden seat which flanked one side of the arbor, and sobbed piteously. The sight of her tears softened the man: Grant was young, too, just past his twenty-sixth summer, and though he had little moral force of character, was not accustomed to words and deeds like these.

He sank down at the girl's feet, and buried his face in his folded arms. "Irene," he said, feebly, as though every word were a pang, "it would have been better for you if you had let me die—I shall only live to disgrace you."

"What have you done—oh, Grant, do confide in me; tell me what you have done?" cried the trembling girl.

At last, Irene succeeded in drawing the truth from her cousin. With his face buried away from her in his arms, for very shame, he told his story, while every puff of the soft autumn wind sprinkled the leaves of crimson and gold about them, and the faint sunshine looked in with a mournful smile on the bowed figure, and the listening girl.

Grant Mulford was the son of Irene's mother's sister. His parents had both died when he was quite young, and the boy's childhood and youth had been passed with his relations, mostly in Irene's family.

His parents were not wealthy, still they had left him considerable property, which his guardian (Irene's father) had taken every means to increase. But Grant was reckless, indolent, and extravagant, while his impulsive generosity, and fine social qualities, obscured the glaring defects of his character, for he

was very easily influenced, and wanted both principle and strength of purpose.

When he reached manhood, and his property came into his own hands, he squandered it, in all kinds of social pleasure, without being actually dissipated.

At last, he entered into some fruitless speculations which swallowed up the remnant of his fortune, and then, as I said, too indolent to enter into any business, he had finally resorted to gambling as the easiest method of retrieving his fortunes. A few words will tell the rest. He had become deeply involved in debt, from which his uncle had twice extricated him. The last time, however, Mr. Woolsey said to his nephew: "Grant, you know I never threaten what I do not perform. I am not a very rich man, and my first obligations are owed to my own children. This is the last time I shall ever aid you, let come what may. If you persist in this course, you do it at your own risk, and must abide the consequences."

And Grant had resolved to reform, and many a man stronger than he has resolved and failed. He went to the "gambling-table," determining it should be for the last time—he drank deep—he staked, and he lost all.

His creditors gave him no peace by day or by night. It is the old story of weakness and desperation; he had finally forged a note for six thousand dollars, hoping to win back the money, and cancel the debt before he was discovered.

But he met with ill-success again, and as he could not hope to escape detection for more than two days longer, he had concluded in his wretchedness and despair to put an end to his existence, which Irene alone had prevented.

The cousins had well-nigh grown up together, and the girl's

heart was full of pity, as she listened to this story of misery and desperation.

"Don't despair, Grant," laying her hand soothingly on the bowed head, "I'm very sorry for you, but it was terrible to think of such a remedy. Something must be done for you."

The young man looked up with new, eager hope shining in his eyes. "How—what, Irene? Is there help anywhere?"

"Of course there must be; I will go to papa this very night, and beg, and entreat him, on my knees, if need be, to take pity on you."

Grant's brow darkened again. "There is no use," he said; "uncle will do nothing more to save me from the gallows; and in forty-eight hours more I must be in prison, or"—his glance spoke the rest.

"Oh, if Clyde were only here!" and Irene wrung her hands; "but he is gone to lecture somewhere in Maryland, and there is too little time to communicate with him. But, Grant, I will devise some plan to rescue you from this. I don't know what it will be yet, for I must collect my thoughts first; but you shall be saved from disgrace."

And Grant Mulford looked in the beautiful face, and at that moment his cousin seemed an angel sent from heaven to save him.

"You will trust me, Grant; you will not so much as think of any desperate deed again? to-morrow morning we shall meet here in the arbor."

He bowed his head, and so they parted. Irene went slowly, very slowly, through the garden-path, that wound up to the stately, old-fashioned white house. Sometimes she paused unwittingly, and gathered a handful of withered rose leaves

from a stalk, and crumpled them in her fair hands, and then tossed them on the ground, and slowly, slowly came from afar off the whisper of a great sin to her soul.

At first, it was vague and indefinite, and she shrunk from it; but it drew closer, and closer, and the whole dark plan at last unveiled itself. How the first steps in evil wind farther and farther on through the blackness, and the pitfalls! There were many struggles; there was no sleep for Irene Woolsey that night.

"Well, Irene?"

The wind was shrieking, and pallid clouds were hurrying all over the sky, when the cousins met next morning in the arbor; and under his breath Grant Mulford asked the question which was to decide his destiny. Irene sat down by her cousin, and briefly told her plan—for time was precious to the man then—pausing only when the wind shook the old arbor to its foundation, and drowned her voice.

Irene had some property in her own right, which she had inherited from her mother. It was not large, not at the most covering more than twelve thousand, but it was accessible to her, for she was of age.

"Neither my father or brother need know anything of this, Grant, at least at present; and if you will promise never, never to gamble again, and at once to enter into some honorable business, half my fortune is at your disposal. Perhaps you can refund it to me, at some future time."

And how solemnly Grant swore to do all this, with his hands tightly clasped in his cousin's, calling her his benefactress, his good angel, the woman who had saved him from a prisoner's

cell, or a suicide's death ! Irene was impulsively generous, and I do not doubt she would, in this emergency, have given her cousin half her fortune to have saved him from disgrace ; but, of course, it placed him under great obligations to herself, and during that long, sleepless night, she had seen clearly how she might avail herself of these, to attain an object that had grown to be a part of her life.

"And now, Irene, is there not some way in which I can serve you, some good that I, in turn, can do you?" asked the young man, almost overcome with gratitude.

And, as he asked the question, the wind struck up such an anathema through the thick trees, that Irene turned pale, and shuddered.

But at last it sobbed itself sullenly away, and then she leaned forward, and whispered in her cousin's ear : "Yes, Grant, there is a way that you can serve me, as no other human being can, if you only will."

"If I will, Irene ! as though I would not go to the ends of the earth to do anything for you."

I do not know how much of the plan, that time and circumstances afterward matured, was concocted by the cousins that morning ; neither do I suppose, that to Grant Mulford there seemed any great or startling evil in its communication. He was morally weak, rather than positively malicious, and would not, without some strong propelling motive, have designedly wronged any one.

He, probably, inferred from his cousin's remarks, that her affections were bestowed upon a young gentleman who was engaged to an artful, designing, and low-born person, very far beneath him in social position, and that it was Irene's wish, by some means, to annul this engagement.

And probably with his moral obliquity of vision, and his feelings of gratitude towards his cousin, a refusal to espouse her cause would have seemed much more dastardly to him than almost any act of intrigue or subterfuge.

At last, the rain beat down from the pallid sky, and closed the interview—that interview that was the seed-sowing of a fearful harvest, a harvest of remorse and suffering, from which either would have shrunk back appalled and terrified.

Oh, how, up into middle life, and down among the shadows of old age, should we carry daily the prayer our mothers taught us in our infancy : "Lead us not into temptation."

CHAPTER XV.

"WHAT in the world is the matter, Ethel?" And Aunt Ruth paused a moment in her work, for she stood by the table arranging the cake in the heavy, old-fashioned fruit-basket, and looked steadily at me.

"Nothing, I guess," lifting my head up from the mantel, against which I had rested it; "I was only thinking."

"About anything in Alison's letter, dear?" I smiled at her womanly acuteness, but the truth came out at once.

"Yes. I may as well confess it. Speaking of the country-seat we are to have, Alison adds: 'You know, Ethel, we need spare neither taste nor expense in its arrangements; for, be it remembered, you are to marry a *rich man*, and I suppose this is as important a desideratum with you (your poetry and romance notwithstanding), as it is with most women.' This remark sounds very unlike him. It haunts, it pains me. I wish he had not made it. As if it were possible for me to think of his money!" pacing up and down the rug, with kindling cheeks. "As if he would not be just as dear to me without a dollar in the world, as he is with his million."

"He didn't consider what he was saying, my dear," responded Aunt Ruth's soothing voice. "Men have much less tact than women; and are not so happy, usually, in expressing themselves."

"But it was harsh, unjust to me," my pent-up feelings breaking out, despite myself. "Now Aunt Ruth," coming to her and looking her in the face, "if you were engaged to a rich man, just as I am, and he should write those words to you, should you like it?"

"No, I can't say as I should, exactly," bending down very intently over the cake; "but then, my dear, I should remember that men are by no means perfect, any more than we are, and you must remember that a person of Alison's temperament and education must be easily irritated, and say one hour what he would not mean the next. My little girl must have 'patience.' It is the great lesson of woman's life, after all."

But it was, unfortunately, an attribute of character in which I was sadly deficient.

"Well," I said, swallowing down something very large in my throat, "I shall just write to Alison Holmes, and tell him that he greatly misapprehends my character, if he supposes that wealth would be with me an important 'desideratum' in a husband; and that all the kingdoms of the world could never have bought one hour of the love of Ethel Lindsay. But after all it seems to me a kind of moral descent for a woman to make such an assertion. Her life, not her lips, ought to say it."

Just then the door-bell rang, and Aunt Ruth was summoned to the parlor. I went to the window, and looked out on the grey, murky sky. It was December, and the sun had set an hour before, and great flakes of snow were shivering lazily downward, and slowly whitening the earth.

I had said, as impulsive people usually do, more than I intended, and now I tried to reason myself into the belief that Alison's remark was a mere inadvertency, anyway.

I had not the key to all this, nor the key to the character of my betrothed either. With his evanescent feelings he had quite forgotten the conversation respecting me, which had taken place in Irene Woolsey's parlor, until some circumstances had recalled it to his mind, and then the bitterness returned, and barbed the arrow which had entered my heart.

Alison could have forgiven, or overlooked a great many faults in those he loved, simply because he had not a very high ideal of character, and a wrong coming from such a source would have provoked more than it pained him.

For myself, I had really less respect for money than most persons who had felt so keenly the want of it; yet for this very reason I was doubly sensitive to Alison's allusion.

"I've good news for you, Ethel." I turned from the window to meet Aunt Ruth's beaming face. "There's a gentleman in the parlor, a Mr. Mulford, who was in South Carolina week before last. He saw Alison and Mrs. Holmes, and is a friend of the former, from whom he brings letters of introduction. I know you will be glad to see him."

"To be sure I shall," forgetting everything else as I sprang toward the door.

But just as I reached it I experienced a strange repulsion, something intangible seemed to wave me back, and I stopped short, and looked inquiringly at Aunt Ruth.

"I will go in, and introduce you, my dear," she said, misinterpreting my expression; and conquering this momentary aversion, I silently followed her.

There was nothing, I think, peculiarly striking in the physiognomy or manner of Grant Mulford. He was, I believe, termed "good-looking" by most ladies; was gentlemanly in

person, and manner, highly social, and a great favorite with our sex.

Alison's letter introduced him as a cousin of Irene Woolsey's, and a friend of his own, whom he had recently met at the South, and who was expecting soon to travel through New England. "He seems really, for so short an acquaintance, greatly attached to me," ran Alison's letter, "and I cordially like the fellow myself. He is very anxious to see a certain little incarnation of romance and sweetness, that somehow has managed to steal into the warmest corner of my heart; so for my sake she will receive and treat him very cordially."

Of course I did this. The stranger's visit was more acceptable than most persons' would have been. He brought me messages and some beautiful gifts from Mrs. Holmes and her son. Then he had a variety of pleasant gossip anecdotes to relate of both, and we had no other company at the time; besides my country life had, if the truth must be told, been rather tame, after my return from New York.

Grant Mulford was a man of the world, and the change of his society was very pleasant. So the second day after his arrival, when he talked of leaving, I urged him to stay, and he consented. We soon grew very well acquainted, and I liked him, notwithstanding he was quite a flatterer; but the young man exerted himself to the utmost to render himself agreeable, and he succeeded.

Sometimes his attentions struck me as being rather marked, but I always silenced my suspicions with thinking, "It is his manner, doubtless, with all ladies, and he knows of the engagement between me and Alison, so I need not be disturbed."

Then came a fall of snow, and we had several exhilarating

sleigh-rides together, and went to a real Yankee quilting frolic, at one of the parishioners: in short, Grant Mulford expressed himself captivated with New England domestic and social life, and especially with his friends at the Parsonage. It was all so new, so delightful to him, that he could not tear himself away, and he remained a week. And at the close he wrote to Irene: "There is no use, dear coz, in trying to get up a flirtation with this Ethel Lindsay. She's unlike any other young lady I ever met. I've exhausted every stratagem of which I'm master, in the vain effort to make some impression. She's very social, and accessible, and all that; but she lifts up those great honest eyes of hers with such a startled, amazed kind of look when I venture on anything the least affectionate, in voice, or manner, that I can do nothing with the girl.

"There is no question about it, she is deeply in love with Mr. Holmes, and the best thing you can do (if you will listen to a word of advice from such a scapegrace, who, notwithstanding, knows something of the hearts of men, and the ways of the world), is to get this young gentleman to your home, and set off your attractions against those of his betrothed. With your beauty and your tact, it will be no very difficult matter to win the game; and you know, my darling coz, I am yours in such bonds, to serve and to obey, as none reckon of."

And in her pride and disappointment Irene tore the letter into shreds, and stamped on it. It was a galling thought to her haughty spirit, that her cousin should know of her attachment to Alison, "but after all"—she mused—"he is in my power, my tool, and I will make him serve me. Oh! if Ethel Lindsay only would fall in love with him, how easily all the rest might be accomplished. I am certain Alison likes me, and

that she only stands in my way," and now a soft flush stole into the fair cheek, pillowed in the palm of her hand; for a selfish woman, and a misguided one, may love as Irene, deeply, absorbingly. "If Grant could only devise some way to arouse Alison's suspicions of Ethel's truth to him, if he could only get her miniature, or a lock of her hair, under any pretence; for some lady, for instance.

"Let me think, there's that pretty Baltimorean, Cora Wise, whom Grant met on his return, and with whom, I am certain, he is two-thirds in love; Ethel Lindsay is very romantic, and if he could only awaken her interest, and enlist her sympathies—oh, I have it, I have it!" and springing up, she clapped her hands exultantly, and then sat down, and leaning her forehead on her hands, thought very busily for two hours. That night she wrote a long letter to Grant Mulford.

"Now, Mr. Mulford, haven't I caught you?" He sat alone in the sitting-room, in my uncle's arm-chair, for he and his sister were gone out. I supposed our guest was absent, too; but on entering the room suddenly, I found him here, with a small gold miniature in his hand.

He looked up with well-dissembled confusion. "Ah, Miss Ethel! you've stolen upon me unawares, and discovered my one secret."

"I didn't 'steal upon you unawares,' begging your pardon. I came in boldly at the door, and, of course, my eyes are not responsible for what they saw. But now, really, they are aching for a peep inside that locket, I assure you."

He looked at me with considerable apparent hesitancy, as

though he were deciding some doubtful question in his own mind. At last he said :

"There is a story connected with the locket, and if you see the one, I shall be obliged to tell the other."

My woman's curiosity was stimulated at once. "Do tell me all about it! It's a romance, I suppose, and there's not a soul to interrupt us, for uncle and aunt won't be home these two hours."

He touched the spring, and placed the miniature in my hands. I looked eagerly down on a very fair, girlish face, with a world of spirit and fun dimpling the corners of the mouth, and lightening through the large black eyes.

"Oh, what a sweet face! She is a brunette."

"Yes; and a Southerner. Do you like it?"

"To be sure," surveying it very closely. "The face is so full of spirit, too; so open and bright. Now what is her name?"

"Cora Wise."

"It is a pretty name, and seems just to suit the owner. Now *do* tell me all about her," throwing myself into Aunt Ruth's chair, opposite the gentleman.

"Well, promise me solemnly, Miss Ethel, that what I now reveal to you shall never, without my permission, under any circumstances, be disclosed to a human being."

"I promise." Oh, white wings of my good angel, where were you, that you did not sweep by and break the words on my lips!

Then Grant Mulford told his story, to which, of course, I listened with eager interest. A few words will repeat the disclosure that occupied him two hours :

Cora Wise and he had been betrothed for some time to each other; but her father was a haughty and wealthy Baltimorean, who entertained very ambitious projects for his daughter.

He had treated with the utmost contempt the bare idea of her marrying "a poor rascal of a Northerner," and had even forbidden Grant's entering the house; and his daughter had been subjected to a great deal of harsh treatment from her inflexible parent on account of her attachment to Grant.

Of late the matter had assumed a still darker aspect, for an old friend of Mr. Wise, a wealthy planter from Louisiana, had recently visited Baltimore, and been completely taken captive by the charms of Cora.

Her father favored his suit, for, in point of wealth and social position, it was one that would reflect great honor upon his child; and he was determined to sacrifice her to a man nearly three times her own age, and one whom she utterly abhorred.

"But he cannot do it—she will not consent—she will be true to you?" I breathlessly questioned.

"To the end," answered the young man, pushing back with one hand the curls that many a woman had praised from his forehead. "But this system of espionage and unkindness is killing my Cora. Her father has sworn that in less than six months she shall marry this old man, and nurtured in a home of tenderness and luxury, as she has been all her life, how can I transplant my fragile flower—how ask her to share the poor home that is all I have to offer her?"

"But, Mr. Mulford, believe me, a woman will do or brave anything for the man she loves," I said, leaning with dim eyes over the miniature.

There was just truth enough in all this, as I learned long

afterwards, to furnish him the outlines for the pretty, pathetic story which enlisted my sympathies so strongly. Mr. Mulford and Cora Wise probably loved each other, for they are now husband and wife. The young lady's father was, for very good reasons, quite opposed to their union, and was inclined to favor the suit of a southern friend of his, much older than his daughter; but it would have been no easy matter for the indulgent parent to have subjected his pretty, high-spirited child to any serious persecutions on account of different matrimonial opinions.

However, that night, Grant Mulford wrote briefly to his cousin: "The bait has taken," and so the meshes thickened around me.

The next day our guest left, being imperatively summoned away by some commercial business into which he had entered, for he had been true to his promise to Irene, and abjured the gambling-table.

"How I shall long to know how you and Cora are getting on!" I said to him, the morning he was to leave us.

"Shall you? well, I'll write, with your permission, and tell you all that transpires, only you must not breathe a word to any human being."

I eagerly accepted the one proposition, and promised obedience to the other.

Then, just as the gentleman was leaving, he leaned down, and said in an undertone, so that Aunt Ruth, who was in an adjoining apartment, should not hear him: "I shall tell my Cora all about you, Miss Ethel, and your sympathy for her; and I am very anxious you should be friends, the best and truest."

"Thank you, Mr. Mulford, and when do you say we shall see you at the Parsonage again?"

"Before the winter has passed, probably, for my business will bring me this way."

And so we parted; but for many days my thoughts turned sympathizingly toward the fair young southerner, Cora Wise.

Spring dawned, and the March winds roared over the mountains and valleys of New England their hoarse jubilees of triumph, for the "winter was ended," when Grant Mulford stopped at the Parsonage again.

The three months which had intervened had been very quiet, very happy ones to me. No note of the discords which my life was soon to take up, had rolled out from the future, to drown the harmonies of the present. I had written, and dreamed, and loved. Every week had brought me letters from Alison—letters very full of affection and tenderness, filling my heart with light and aroma. Late in April he had promised to be with me. How I counted the days that intervened.

But, as I said, in March, Grant Mulford was with us. He had corresponded occasionally with Alison, and knew at what time he was coming north. Then, he had been with his cousin, Irene, the week previous to his advent at the Parsonage.

"And how are you and Cora progressing?" I asked the first moment I was alone with the gentleman.

"I have seen her several times. We met at the house of a mutual friend. Her father is inflexible as ever, 'and if it were not for you, Grant,' she said to me, many times with the tears pouring down her pale cheeks, 'I should pray God that I might lie down by my mother in the churchyard!'"

"I think it's outrageous. You ought to rescue her from such persecutions at all hazards!" I said, vehemently.

"And so I will, Miss Ethel! Her old lover is coming north in May to receive her hand, as her father and he fully intend. But if they persist in their determination, Cora has promised—no matter, the bird may have flown before the May roses have bloomed again round her cage."

"What a poetical thought, Mr. Mulford! I hope I shall see the 'flown bird,' too, sometime."

"In which hope she most emphatically concurs. We have talked a great deal of you, Miss Ethel, and my Cora has read your stories—has conceived a very ardent desire to see you. You see she has written you," and the young man drew a daintily perfumed note from his vest pocket. "You will not refuse to comply with the request which it contains."

It was a very graceful epistle, commencing and ending with a most urgent request for my daguerreotype, which the fair writer affirmed would give her more pleasure than almost anything else in this world.

And here I must pause a moment, to render full justice to Cora Wise. Looking back on this time, through half a score of years, and with the light, which their succeeding revelations threw on the scheme which, for a time, robbed me of every hope and joy of this world, I am convinced that she was in no wise a sharer in these machinations, and only the instrument of others.

Impulsive and warm-hearted, her lover's representations had deeply interested her in me, as it was for his interest and the success of his plot, to do this; and if he at first suggested she should make this request for my miniature, her own wishes

ardently indorsed it. "You will not refuse Cora? It will be such a disappointment," said the young man, as I refolded the letter.

"I should be very happy to gratify her, you know. But there is no artist in the village, and then the miniature must be taken without my friends' knowledge; and that is a serious objection with me."

"It need not be, I am certain, as you are to give it to a lady. I shall be here two days, and we can easily make an excuse to ride out to-morrow, and go over to Woodfern, and have the thing accomplished in ten minutes. Don't refuse me now, I pray, in Cora's name."

"Well, I'll think of it."

Somebody came in at that moment and terminated the interview.

Grant Mulford, however, found an opportunity to renew his petition in the evening. He was to remain but two days, and if the next one was pleasant, there was no earthly reason why I should not confer this great favor upon Cora and himself.

In short, his pleading overcame or silenced all my objections; indeed, as I said from the first, I had none, except a dislike to sending away my miniature without the knowledge of my aunt and uncle; but as Grant's engagement was a profound secret, of course they could know nothing of this.

Well, the next day was a boisterous, but a bright one, and Grant Mulford and I rode out in the afternoon to Woodfern, and when we returned, he brought my daguerreotype with him.

He remained two days after this, and Uncle Gerald and

Aunt Ruth used often laughingly to tell me that if Alison were there to see "the attentions his friend paid me, he certainly would be jealous;" but I paid little attention to this, knowing that each of us understood the position of the other.

"Cora shall be your sister, and I will be your brother, now, Miss Ethel," said the young man, as we stood watching the stormy sun-set from the kitchen windows.

"Thank you, Mr. Mulford. How anxious I shall be to know about you and her," for an elopement had all the romance and fascination to me, that it has to all romantic young ladies; and I invested Grant Mulford with all the qualities of a novel hero, and sympathized with his troubles from the bottom of my heart.

"I will write and tell you about the progress of our affairs; Cora will write to you also, and you can answer her, through me. It is singular neither of my letters reached you." I promised again, and the next day he left.

I stood in the door, that March morning, and waved my hand to the young man, as he rode off to the depot with Uncle Gerald. Since that hour we have never looked upon each other's faces.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was drawing towards the last of April. The month had been shivering with winds, and drenched with heavy rains, but this Saturday morning was bright and balmy, and on the sky overhead, and the earth beneath, was the promise of the "Great Miracle" written.

Jane had had an attack of ague, the night before. Saturday was our "baking-day"—one of those invaluable domestic laws which descended from our great-grandmothers and which is faithfully preserved in the culinary creed of New England farm-houses; so the day's labor devolved entirely upon Aunt Ruth and myself.

"You'll have to put aside your pen, for pie-crust, to-day, my dear," said Uncle Gerald, as he rose up from the table, evidently enjoying my rueful glance at the pile of dishes which *wouldn't* wash themselves without hands.

"And you your Theology, for tacking carpets," I rejoined, "for Jane only had time to lay ours down in the parlor last night, and we may possibly have company to-day."

"I understand, but I'll lay a heavy wager the ordinary perceptions of the solitary individual who may represent our 'company' to-day, will be so obscured by the presence of one individual, that he cannot tell whether there is a carpet on the floor or not."

"Come, come—Gerald, Ethel," interrupted Aunt Ruth, as she stirred about with the air of a notable housekeeper, "there's too much to be done to waste any time in talking."

"Well, I wish you much joy, Ruth, of your most efficient officer of the pantry," laughed Uncle Gerald, as he walked off to the library; but half an hour later, he put his head inside the door to ask, "Ethel, where are the hammer and tacks?"

"Oh, Ethel, there are the beans! We can't get along without those, anyhow; I had quite forgotten them," suddenly exclaimed Aunt Ruth, as she was scolloping the margins of her pie-crusts, while I was filling the interior with pumpkin from a large earthen bowl.

Now "baked beans" are as indispensable a concomitant of Saturday night suppers, in New England, as chicken pies are of Thanksgiving dinners, it being a domestic "article of belief" that beans baked in an earthen pot, in a brick oven, possess at that time a peculiar flavor and deliciousness, which they do not at any other.

Miss Maltby was, considering her education, both socially and religiously a liberal-minded woman, but she could not so far violate the domestic observances of her forefathers as to dispense with the baked beans; I felt this, and so, dropping the ladle into the rich, yellow liquid, I volunteered at once, to "pick over" the beans, if she would finish up the pies.

"And look here, my dear, you mustn't waste a moment, for it'll be too late for the second heating," glancing at the old-fashioned clock in the corner.

"Oh, dear! I wish Phil was here, to run up stairs for my gingham apron," bringing out from the pantry a pan of beans in one hand, and a dish in the other.

"Why, just put on Jane's old check apron, if you want to keep your dress from soiling. It hangs right behind the chest of drawers," advised Aunt Ruth.

The apron was a sort of nondescript article, something in the shape of a farmer's blouse without sleeves, and covered me from head to foot. The material was of very coarse gingham, in small blue and white checks, and the article was conceived and executed by Bettie's fertile, rather than tasteful ingenuity, in order to "keep clean" her best dresses, when she washed the tea-dishes.

"Did you ever see such a comical object? Just look at me, aunty," I laughed, as I surveyed myself in the small mirror hung over the mantel.

"No matter, my dear, how you look, so the beans are ready. I'm getting nervous about them." So I sat down assiduously to work, and had probably gotten half through my task, when there was a loud knock at the front door.

"Oh! who has come now?" cried Aunt Ruth, in lugubrious tones, for she was at that moment intent on removing the hot coals from the oven with a long shovel, the easy command of which had only been attained after long practice.

"It's only that old tin peddler. I know by his knock. If he only had sense enough to come round to the back door!" I answered, in no very amiable tones.

"Well, who'll go to the door—that's the question? The oven's getting too cool already. There's another knock."

"I'll go," putting the plate off my lap, and not stopping even to remove my apron. If my face was a true index of my feelings, it could not have been a very agreeable one that hurried out to present itself to the peddler that morning.

Then—for troubles and annoyances never come singly—my hair somehow fell from its fastenings, and half of it rushed down to my waist. I did not even stop to replace it, but opened the door.

There was a quick start; a beating up of hot blood into my cheeks; a glance down at my apron. "Alison Holmes! my goodness!" and I turned to run, perfectly overwhelmed with surprise and mortification.

There was a laugh, round and full, and triumphant, that thrilled along my rapid pulses, and with the third step, a pair of strong arms had gathered round me.

"Don't look, Alison! Shut your eyes!" I cried, and then, a rain of sweet, warm kisses shut the words on my lips.

"What's the matter?" cried Uncle Gerald, coming into the hall, hammer in hand.

"Oh! Uncle Gerald, why didn't you go to the door?" I cried, although knowing very well the possibility of doing this would never have suggested itself to the meditative parson.

"I'm very glad he didn't. Why, Ethel, my darling, I can't be gallant enough to say your dress is becoming, but your blushes are charmingly so," laughed Alison.

Aunt Ruth had recognized the voice, and at the risk of spoiling her pies and cakes, she ran in to see Alison.

"I always enjoy surprises, but this has been peculiarly delectable;" and Alison glanced with the old roguish look at me.

I thought it was very hard, but nobody seemed to sympathize with me in the least; on the contrary, I believe they all heartily enjoyed my discomfiture.

I managed, however, to make my escape to the kitchen,

where I divested myself of Jane's apron, in an unusually short time, solemnly resolving never to put on that article of dress again, under any conceivable contingencies.

I retwisted my hair, and returned to the parlor in less than three minutes. Aunt Ruth finished the baking preparations alone; but there were no beans that Saturday night for supper. It was an unprecedented event in the annals of the Parsonage.

Lovers' meetings, although very interesting experiences, are not particularly so in recital. Perhaps ours did not differ widely from many others; but my memory leans back fondly to this time, for it was the happiest, as it was the last week of my whole girlhood. Those that followed made a woman of me.

Alison was in his highest spirits, and a great deal of the enjoyment of himself and others depended upon this, as is the case with all impulsive people.

Then the weather was delightful, and I am always very susceptible to elemental influences.

It seemed as if April had reserved all her sunshine and soft airs for this, the last week of her life. The young grass began to spring up by the stone fences—the buds swelled on the boughs, and at noon when we went and stood in the great front porch, the winds that brushed across our cheeks were like the winds of June.

I remember every trivial occurrence of this week, better, probably, than I should if it had happened yesterday, and yet, hardly anything seems to have transpired worthy of record in this radiant passage of my life.

Alison was very tender, very devoted, and for me—my heart had not a conscious hope or aspiration that did not centre in him. I loved him supremely, entirely; but then my heart was the heart of a girl, not of a woman.

Oh! how many a one has learned too late the difference!

Well, we rode out every day—long and delightful those rides were, our souls taking up the melody of the new world-birth, and looking off to the future, as to a land radiant, glorious, without cloud or shadow, such as no man, and no woman ever found, since God's voice broke the stillness of Eden, "In sorrow shalt thou eat of it, all the days of thy life."

But we never thought of this, and returned in the soft April twilights to linger over our cosy family suppers, and to make plans for the future, away down into the heart of the night. I left everything with Alison, satisfied in his love, and he said the next September must perfect his happiness. I had a will, and a very strong one of my own, but Alison Holmes never dreamed of it then, for the weakest little child could not be led more easily, than I, through my affections.

Alison was to select the site for our cottage immediately—it was to be somewhere on the banks of the Hudson; and during the year and a half to be occupied in its building, we (his mother, himself, and I), were to travel in Europe. How my pulses sprang at the thought of seeing Rome, and the Rhine, and the Pyrenees—Oh, *Chateaux d'Espagne! Chateaux d'Espagne!* One day, though, it was the third or fourth of Alison's stay at the Parsonage, there came a little shadow between us.

Uncle Gerald came in from the post-office, and tossed into my lap several papers and a single letter.

"Oh, it's from Grant Mulford!" I exclaimed, eagerly. "Excuse me, Alison;" and I broke the seal, before it occurred to me that our correspondence was a secret.

The epistle inclosed one from Cora, full of warm thanks for my gift, and expressions of affection. Her lover's letter was kind, almost brotherly. He stated that his betrothed was in a state of most unhappy excitement, because her southern suitor was expected daily, and her father gave his child no peace, having sworn to disinherit her, if she did not marry in accordance with his wishes.

The only course open to them seemed to be an elopement, and yet Cora hesitated for her father's sake, hoping he might relent; but of this the young man entertained no hope.

I closed the letter with a sigh, contrasting Cora Wise's position with my own, and then, looking up, I saw Alison watching me intently, it seemed to me with a little displeasure in his face.

He laid his hand on the letter. "You will let me read it, Ethel?"

"Oh no, Alison, indeed I cannot!" drawing it quickly away. "It contains a secret."

"A secret that I may not see?" his forehead darkened. "I would not have believed this of you, Ethel!"

"Indeed, indeed, Alison," greatly distressed, "if you knew what it was, you would not in the least blame me; but it involves others! For myself, I am perfectly willing you should read this, but I cannot break a promise."

"And I am unable to see what right any man has to exact of you promises of this nature. And then, to boldly con-

pond with you, and not let me see the letters! It pains, it offends me!"

"Alison, don't speak to—don't look at me in that manner. I solemnly assure you there is nothing in this letter which concerns me in the least. Grant Mulford has only written of a private personal matter, which he confided to me while he was here."

"Let me see it, then, and I will be satisfied."

"If *you* doubt my word, Alison, I, at least respect it too highly to break it."

"Very well, do as you like; I shall not urge you farther." He rose up and left the room. Quick as lightning, the question flashed through my mind, whether my promise was binding in a case like this; whether, under the circumstances, it would not be better to show Alison the letter. I might do this, and acquaint Mr. Mulford with it afterwards. But then my promise, my promise! My conscience did not sustain me (as, perhaps, it would many others in this instance) in breaking my word, but the next morning I almost involuntarily rushed out of the room, and intercepted Alison on the first stair.

He put his arm out to wave me back, but I would not be silenced so. "No, Alison Holmes," I cried, "you *shall* hear me speak this once, whether you wish to or not," and still, and white, and resolute, I stood before him. "Now, look me straight in the eyes, as I look at you." And he did look at me, almost against his will, I believe, for when people are really in earnest, they generally *compel* others to be so.

"God, who hears me speak to you now, is my witness, this letter does not contain a single word that, for my own sake, I would not be willing you or all the world should see—

God is my witness that I never thought a thought of Grant Mulford, that being your wife, I should blush to meet at the Judgment before the angels, who are in heaven."

And looking at me, while I spoke these words, his face lightened, the shadows wavered over his face.

"Ethel, I believe you—I believe you." The tones came up from his heart then, and, hearing them, my unnatural calmness all forsook me. I should have fallen, if he had not caught me, and carried me into the parlor. It was very well the family were all in another part of the house, at that time, or they must have heard my sobs.

"Ethel! Ethel! do forgive me;" in real distress and remorse, now that he saw how acutely I suffered. And, for awhile, I could only answer by passing my hand through the dark hair, that bowed itself so humbly on my shoulder.

At last, when I grew calmer, Alison said to me: "I suppose I should not have behaved so shamefully, if that remark of Irene Woolsey's had not recurred to me."

"Irene Woolsey's. When—what do you mean?"

"Why I forgot to tell you, that I called there coming north, last week, and Irene misinformed me respecting the time the train left, so I was obliged to stop over night. She spoke of her cousin's visit to you, and said that he would be very glad to have some claim on a little bit of most precious property that belongs solely to me."

"Well, he never will have," I answered very positively, and then "he is engaged," came up to my lips, but a thought of my promise held this back.

"I will answer the letter, Alison, and obtain Mr. Mulford's permission to show you all he has ever written me," I said, not

doubting but it would be perfectly easy to do this, and believing he had spoken so highly of me to his cousin, only because I had warmly sympathized with his troubles, and that Irene Woolsey had accidentally observed and alluded to this.

"Very well, my darling, do as you like; I have no curiosity now, for I have perfect confidence in you."

"But you hadn't then. Oh, Alison, it almost killed me!" drawing close to him, and shuddering.

Very tender were the arms that drew me to his heart, very loving the words that again and again entreated my pardon, for all the pain of the past hour. And I gave it, fully and freely. So the cloud passed, and the sun shone again.

"We will never speak of this—we will never think of it, even," said Alison.

"Never," I answered, and then, hearing the front gate open, I glanced out of the window. "Goodness! there's Squire Hunt and his wife, coming to make one of their endless calls, and they'll be asked in here, and see at once I've been crying!"

And to avoid this, I made a hurried retreat up stairs, while Alison went out into the garden, to see Uncle Gerald.

The week that Alison was to be with me wore away, as the brightest and the saddest weeks always do.

The last night but one of his visit, I had one of those severe headaches, to which I have been accustomed from childhood.

My uncle and aunt had gone to the weekly prayer-meeting, for they understood very well that the best of physicians and nurses was with me; so I lay on the lounge in the sitting-room, my head propped up with pillows, and Alison sat by me.

The large stars looked in tenderly through the window, the soft wind shook the shadows across the panes, but a softer hand passed over my hair, as Alison said: "Something must be done for these headaches; when I have undisturbed possession of you, I shall go to every physician in the country to see if they can't be relieved."

"It will be quite useless, Alison. They are the unfortunate concomitants of my nervous organization, and there is no help for them. I can only lie quiet, and endure."

"But it is very hard to sit here, and see you do this, *my Ethel*."

I looked up and smiled on him for the sweet words, but even this slight movement sent a sharp pain across my forehead. When it was abated, I asked: "Where shall you be a week from to-night, Alison? How lonely it will seem without you!"

"And how lonely with me, too, darling; but never mind. We shan't have many more of these partings; a week from to-night—let's see! I think Irene Woolsey told me she would be in Brooklyn a day or two the last of next week; probably I shall go over, and see her."

"You admire Irene Woolsey very much, don't you, Alison?"

"Yes, and I wish you did, for she really loves you, Ethel; and it will be very pleasant to have her an occasional guest at *our cottage*."

"You are mistaken, Alison. Irene Woolsey does not love me—she never can, she never will."

"Why, Ethel, I think you must be prejudiced in some way against her!"

"Not in the least, Alison. Remember, I do not say she is

my enemy, only not my friend. Beside" (remembering the falsehood she had told to her brother), "I know she is not sincere, truthful."

"My dear, aren't you a little severe?" with some surprise.

"No; because I speak only of what I have heard. (Oh, that pain in my head!) As you are so soon to see her, Alison, and it is best you should treat her cordially, I will not now relate the circumstance to which I allude; but it is one which in your mind, as well as my own, will preclude the possibility of our ever being intimate friends."

"I am sorry, Ethel, because she is certainly a very charming person; but it strikes me now, that she may have been a little jealous of you," a fault that a man could very readily forgive in any woman.

"Why, what makes you think so, Alison?"

"Oh, several things;" her remarks about my marrying a rich man recurring to his mind, and which he certainly would have revealed to me, had not the thought of his pledged honor prevented. I should certainly have insisted more strongly upon knowing, but my distracting headache dissipated my curiosity.

"Can't I do something for it, darling?" passing his hands tenderly across my throbbing temples.

"Perhaps I had better try the cologne again," more for his sake than for mine, as I knew from experience nothing but a night's sleep would relieve me.

And he bathed my forehead, and we talked desultorily in the pauses of the pain; and many times afterward, I looked back on this night with a pain that was sharper than the headache, and remembered how tender, and how loving he was to me that night.

The morning came at last that Alison was to leave me. He was to finish his professional studies in June, and then he was coming to me again.

But my heart was very heavy that morning. Did the bells of the future ring down to the present their prophecy of evil, that all the light, and joy, and poetry of the past week, seemed to go out in darkness—darkness that gathered and thickened about my soul?

The time had come for Alison to leave, and yet I clung to him in the hall, before my uncle and aunt, forgetting my maiden's pride in my woman's weakness, and sobbed and shivered, as I pleaded: "I can't let you go, Alison. Don't leave me—don't leave me to-day!"

"But I must go, darling. I have made engagements which imperatively demand I should be in New York this evening," he answered, astonished and pained at my distress.

Then, uncle and aunt tried to reason with, and to laugh at me, but it did no good; I only pleaded: "Don't leave me—don't leave me, Alison."

"Ethel, you quite unman me," he said at last, drawing me into the parlor, with a quiver crossing his lip. "You see, darling, we shall not be separated for two months again, during our whole lives, and it will not be *right* that I should remain, when by so doing I shall break my promise. Now look up, dear, and say 'go,' with one of your old smiles, I can't leave until you do."

And I tried to be strong and looked up. My voice could not break through the sobs that lay in my throat, but I pointed to the door, and smiled a smile that was born and died among many tears.

He leaned down and kissed me, not once or twice ; then he rushed out at the door, for the driver was shouting lustily that he would be too late at the depot.

I stood at the window, and watched him as the carriage rolled away. Ah me ! If I had recked of all that should transpire before my eyes looked upon him again—if I had heard the thunder of the storm that was gathering—and yet God's angels sang sweetly beyond it !

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE evening, just a week after Alison had left the Parsonage, he and Grant Mulford sat together in one of the most fashionable hotels in New York ; and the luxurious appointments of his chamber would have twice bought out all the furniture of the Parsonage.

"So it was this evening your cousin desired to see me, Mulford?" asked Alison, musingly. "I was going to the opera, but I'll break my engagement for her sake."

"And disappoint some other fair damsel, Holmes?" asked the other, looking up with a little curiosity.

"No, indeed ; my engagement was with some old college cronies ; as my cousin has left the city. I don't make many with the ladies, now-a-days."

"For a reason I wot very well of." The speaker smiled significantly. "By the by, my dear fellow, how flourishes

"That flower most fair, most fragrant, hid among the hills?"

"Very well, thank you." The tones were as cold as the answer was laconic, for Alison had not forgotten the letter Grant Mulford had written me.

"That painting forcibly reminds me of Ethel Lindsay about the mouth," said Grant Mulford, getting up suddenly and going across the room to a small engraving, in a frame of dark wood,

which hung on the opposite wall. "You see I have detected the resemblance at once. But," perusing it attentively, "though the features are more regular, the eyes are not so fine as Ethel Lindsay's, because they lack her expression. Get this, and she makes a glorious daguerreotype."

Alison started quickly. "What do you mean about Ethel Lindsay's daguerreotype?"

"Excuse me, I should have said she *would* make a glorious one."

"But how do you know this, Mulford?" sharply searching his companion's face with his eyes. "Ethel Lindsay never had a daguerreotype taken in her life."

"She didn't?" There was a shade, the very finest shade of incredulity in the speaker's voice; a stranger would never have observed it, but it said as significantly to Alison as the speaker meant it should, "Are you quite sure of that?" "Well," he continued, watching the effects of his words, "one who has seen and translated so many varieties of expression in Ethel Lindsay's face as your humble servant, would not find it very difficult to conceive what it would be in daguerreotype. But, my dear fellow, I promised to be at the club by seven, and here it is half-past. You'll be sure to see my fair cousin, for she'll mope terribly with that old aunt of hers, in Brooklyn. If I could only be with you, but regrets are useless. Adieu, until to-morrow."

As soon as he was gone, Alison rose, with a perplexed face, and paced up and down the room for the next half hour.

"It can't be possible," he muttered, at last, bringing down his clenched hand upon the table, "Ethel Lindsay's as true as the stars in heaven, and I won't wrong her by such a thought ;

but, hang the fellow ! I didn't like his tone, and that letter, too ! I do wish Ethel had permitted me to see it. It's quite time, however, I should be in Brooklyn, if I see Irene Woolsey to-night," glancing at the small gilded clock on the mantel. "There's something mysterious about this matter of Ethel and Mulford, and I'd like to sift the matter to the bottom. I wonder if Irene could enlighten me, at all."

"Well, I've done my part well, cousin mine," said Grant Mulford, as they sat together in her aunt's somewhat stiff and precise, but handsome parlor, in Brooklyn. "If his suspicions are not exactly awakened, he is sufficiently disturbed in mind for your purpose ; and yet, and yet"—he did not finish the sentence, but tapped his foot uneasily on the carpet.

"Well, what, Grant?" leaning forward her beautiful head, and gazing intently into her cousin's face.

"Why, to speak the plain, honest truth, I wish this game was over. Ethel Lindsay's an innocent little girl, anyhow, and I don't like to harm her. Then she and Holmes are so much in love with each other, that, although my conscience isn't the tenderest in the world, it gives me some very unpleasant qualms occasionally on this very subject."

For a moment Irene did not answer. For a moment the white wings of the angels hovered over the two sitting there, with no witnesses save those who walk silently, by night and by day, through all the dark alleys and hidden rooms of the heart, searching with eyes that never slumber, writing with hands that are never weary—the solemn witnesses we shall know first, "even as we are known," at the Judgment.

The wrong she had done, the wrong she was about to do, came out and stood before the soul of Irene Woolsey, in its darkness, and shame, and deformity; and catching a glimpse of it, she sank back and shuddered.

And then, the reward almost within her grasp, beckoning, and exceedingly beautiful, as the rewards of wrong-doing always seem, before one has grasped them, came and stood in the place of the evil, and—

"Grant, there is little more for you to do," said Irene, in a half cold, half reproachful tone. "The prize is more precious to me than it is to Ethel Lindsay, and I did not think you would regret serving me when I asked you to do this."

It was a very gentle reminder of all she had done for him, and Grant Mulford felt more compunctions for what seemed his ingratitude to his beautiful cousin, than for anything else.

"Forgive me, Irene," and the bell rang.

"There—that's he!" exclaimed the lady, with a flush of excitement and pleasure throbbing over her cheeks. "Do hurry off, Grant; you know he must not find you here."

"What in the world ails you, Mr. Holmes? You seem quite changed, you have lost so much of your old spirits and vivacity!" asked the young girl, half an hour later, as Alison sat with her on the sofa, in the very place where Grant sat when they—; but walls never tell stories. He smiled, not his old smile.

"I have an unpleasant consciousness that I must be a most disagreeable guest to-night. Forgive me, Miss Irene, but I am not in a happy mood.

"Something is troubling you?" She asked it with a soft, kindly interest, looking into his face with those dazzling eyes.

"You have guessed right, as women usually do. Something is troubling, perplexing me. If women's perceptions are quicker than men's, so is their skill at unravelling mysteries."

"Suppose you let me try to do this for you, Mr. Holmes?"

Alison was naturally unsuspecting and confiding; then it was his misfortune that a present joy or sorrow usually obliterated everything else from his thoughts.

"I've half a mind to tell you, Miss Irene," speaking as much to himself as to her. "You've seen a good deal more of your cousin than I have of late; does he speak often of Ethel?" Her eyes turned from his face to the floor.

"Well, ye-es; you know I told you he admired her greatly."

"I remember; but what does he say of her? It is my right to know, and if you are my friend you will tell me."

"Do you think so?" The evening was damp and chilly, and the lady drew her opera cloak of white cashmere a little closer round her, and played with the silken tassels that confined it at her white neck, meditatively. "I must know what has awakened your suspicions, Mr. Holmes, for really they distress me."

"Do they? Well, as you are so kind you shall hear them." And he related the conversation that had transpired between him and Grant Mulford that evening. When he spoke of that daguerreotype, Irene started, and looked up in his face with a quick, half terrified glance, and then her eyes dropped confusedly to the crimson flowers on the rug.

Alison stopped short. "Irene Woolsey," he said, sternly. "do you know anything about this?"

"About what?" reluctantly and evasively.

"About any daguerreotype of Ethel's? She never had one taken to my knowledge. Has she to yours?"

"I wish you would not ask me such—such close questions."

"But I *must* know; you *must* answer!" laying his hand tightly on her arm.

"Well, then, *yes!* How imperative you are!"

The face of the questioner was very white, and his voice very stern, as he leaned it down to Irene Woolsey. "And is this daguerreotype in the possession of Grant Mulford?"

"No—not now; that is, not exactly."

"Was it ever?"

"I wish you would not compel me to answer such questions, Mr. Holmes."

"Don't keep me on the rack, if you have the heart of a woman," grasping, almost grinding, her fingers in his own. "I must know the worst!"

"Then, yes. Poor Ethel! I suppose he teased it out of her—Grant has such a *way* with him."

The girl actually shuddered at the glance that flamed down on her. "Where is this daguerreotype now?"

"Please don't question me any farther?" She was answered by another look. "It's here with me."

"Let me see it!"

"I have no right to. It's Grant's, you know."

"It isn't his. I'll blow his brains out before another day's gone over them!"

"Mr. Holmes!" grasping his arm in undisguised terror, "promise me that you will not harm—you will not see Grant for the next twenty-four hours, and I will show you Ethel's miniature; otherwise, I cannot."

"For the next twenty-four hours? I promise."

And Irene went to the table and opened a marble casket, and Alison followed her with his white face and burning eyes. She gave it into his hands. The case was a simple black one, of papier maché. Alison looked at it a moment, as if half bewildered, then almost tore it open. The face he had last seen drenched in such bitter tears for his parting, looked up at him with a smile hovering about the lips and in the eyes.

The proof of the perfidy of his betrothed was written in every line and feature.

He dashed down the picture on the table, and sank into a chair. "Ethel! Ethel!" it was all he said.

"Don't feel so, Mr. Holmes," whispered the soft, pitying voice of Irene Woolsey at his side. "If I had not been so unfortunately compelled to reveal this to you. I wish—I wish I could comfort you!"

"Comfort me!" He lifted up his face, and looked at her, and her heart ached, half with pity, half with jealousy at the anguish she saw there.

"I tell you, Irene Woolsey, I had more faith in Ethel Lindsay than I had in the angels of heaven; and she has deceived me. I left her a few days ago with her kisses and her tears warm upon my lips—my betrothed wife, and there—there," pointing to the daguerreotype, "lies her *lie!* I would sooner have believed that my own mother would have turned round and cursed me."

"Don't say so; you frighten me, my dear sir. Believe me, all women are not false."

He rose, and walked wildly up and down the room; while

Irene shuddered at the work she had done, and wished she could live over the last hour; but it was "too late" now.

"Women!" he repeated her word with bitter scorn. "Do you think I shall ever have faith in another? I thought I looked down in Ethel's soul, and read it, as I looked up to-night and read the stars in heaven. So pure, so earnest, so childlike, she seemed hardly 'of the earth, earthy.' The one flower growing consecrated and holy to me among the valleys of life, and behold, another has plucked it!"

And each word that he spoke was sharp torture to her who listened.

Oh, no one could have doubted, who had seen Alison Holmes in that hour, that he loved me, any more than I, who sit here writing of it, doubt, at this moment, that I was his first love, and his deepest.

But Irene felt that she had commenced the game, and it must be played now, at all hazards.

"Perhaps, if you knew all, there is really some excuse for Ethel," she faltered.

Alison stopped short before her. "Don't name excuses," he said bitterly. "But I want to know the extent of her perfidy—tell me the whole, Irene."

"I cannot now—indeed, I cannot; don't ask me," and she wrung her hands.

And Alison grew a little calmer, and sat down by her. "You know all my weakness, all my love," he said. "I have unmanned myself before you this night, and for the sake of all this let there be confidence between us, Irene. I read pity in your eyes, almost as plainly as I once thought I read truth in Ethel's. Will you not let me know all the rest?"

"I cannot now, and never, unless you pledge me solemnly your honor as a man, not to reveal, so long as you live, one word of what I shall disclose to you. Oh, are you not satisfied with what you have seen already?"

"No, not till I know the whole. Irene, look at me. I promise you—I promise you on my honor, never to reveal what you shall disclose to me."

And then Irene told him that the communication could only take place in her own home, because the proofs of what she should state were only there. "At noon to-morrow I return," she concluded; "will you go with me?"

"Yes, to the end of the earth, to learn this."

"And meanwhile you will do nothing—remember your promise binds you here."

"It shall hold me even from seeing your cousin, Irene. And now I must leave you. I want air for my burning heart and brain. Poor dupe! poor fool!" he struck his clenched hand to his forehead madly, and, rushed out into the hall, not even waiting to say good-night to his hostess.

But she followed him quickly. "Oh, Alison, don't, for mercy's sake, don't go off in this state of mind! I fear you will harm yourself." There was no affectation of terror in her voice now.

He looked on her and smiled a fearful smile. "Don't be alarmed, Irene; I'll live long enough to learn how much an angel a woman may *seem*, and how much a fiend she may *be*. But you have been my friend; some other time I will tell you how I thank you. Good night," and he was gone.

And Irene went in, and closed the door, and sat down. She had triumphed! Was she happy? There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

The night was cold with winds, and dark with wrappings of thick cloud ; but Alison paced the streets of the great city, until the dawn opened damp and grey upon it ; for the night was darker within him than the night outside, and no stars arose and shone upon either.

And while he paced the streets that night, I lay in my little chamber in the Parsonage, and dreamed that we sat together under the portico, and the birds sang, and the flowers bloomed, and very soft winds blew around our cottage by the Hudson !

It was very late evening of the next day, and Alison and Irene were once more alone together, in the little back sitting-room, at the home of the latter. They had reached here several hours before, but these were devoted to the family, who were somewhat surprised at seeing Alison, although Irene accounted very plausibly for his arrival.

Alison had exerted himself to appear before Irene's relatives as though nothing had occurred, and was easier as Clyde was absent at the time, and her mother somewhat more indisposed than usual.

"Now, Irene, I have endured this suspense as long as I can. Let me hear the worst," said Alison abruptly to his companion, just after her father had bidden him good night, leaving them, as I said, alone together.

"Well, then, much as it pains me to do so, I must inform you that some letters are in my possession"—

"Letters to whom ?" with his burning eyes fastened on her face.

"To a Miss Cora Wise, of Baltimore, of whom you may have heard Ethel speak."

"No ; I never heard her name."

"Is it possible ! Well (half to herself), I can understand Ethel's motive for not speaking of her to you. Suffice it, she is a very intimate friend of Grant's—indeed, they are quite like brother and sister. Now, you see, Grant was quite anxious Ethel and Cora should know each other, so, by his descriptions, he managed to stimulate the curiosity of both, and a frequent correspondence took place between them. Cora is very warm-hearted, and a great admirer of genius, and she regards Ethel as something half mortal and half angel.

"Poor Grant, as you have guessed, and I must acknowledge, even if he is my cousin, fell desperately in love with Ethel, and Cora discovered this a short time since, when he was in Baltimore. Of course, her sympathies were warmly enlisted in his behalf, and the poor child tried to plead his cause eloquently with Ethel.

"To make a most disagreeable story a short one, I saw when Grant returned from New England that he was greatly changed, and in answer to my inquiries, I finally drew from him the cause. I was much shocked, and told him so. Ethel Lindsay was the betrothed wife of his friend ; it was treason to you to think of her in any other light. I presume my reproaches stung him, for they were very severe ; and at last, half in anger, half in self-defence, he informed me that he knew quite as much of Ethel Lindsay's heart as I did. I maintained that it was perfectly loyal to you, whereupon he drew forth two letters from his pocket, which Cora Wise (the foolish little puss) had received from Ethel, and sent to him ; thinking, I suppose, she was doing just what friendship demanded of her, as, perhaps, I am only doing it now, and yet—and yet, I would about

as soon have plunged my right hand in the fire." And, for the moment, Irene felt she was speaking truth—that all this sin was paying dearly, even for the love of Alison Holmes.

"And these letters you have now?"

"Yes. Grant did not wish them destroyed, and as he was travelling about, allowed me to keep them."

The young man's lips did not move, but they could not have asked, as his eyes did, "Show them to me!"

And Irene took a lamp from the table and went up stairs, and returned (I must write all this briefly, for my fingers shake, and my pen quivers over it), and gave the letters into Alison's hands. He tore them open, he tore out, too, their meaning from the hand-writing, whose very curves, lines and angles he would have sworn to in any court on earth.

I do not know how long those letters were. I do not know even to this day much of what they contained; but I know it was enough to brand my soul forever in the eyes of Alison Holmes.

One passage alone, years after, scorched itself into my memory: "And I do love Grant Mulford, my Cora; but of what use is it for me to say this now, with aching heart and streaming eyes; I am the betrothed wife of a man, honorable and good, and I am bought and sold to him. If Grant only had a tenth part of his riches, I would not hesitate one moment to annul our engagement; but he is very poor, and so am I, and the battle of my early life has left me very weak—I can never struggle with poverty more. Pity me, Cora, though you blame and scorn me, for before the autumn has brushed with its 'dyed fingers' these green trees under which I write, I shall go from the altar a loved, but an unloving wife, bought and paid for with lands and gold."

Alison Holmes put down the letter, and they who draw the shroud-folds over his face will not see it whiter.

"Can there be truth in heaven above, or on earth beneath, that Ethel Lindsay should write that lie?" he asked.

And Irene tried to answer him, but the words died away in her throat—in her heart rather.

"She seemed so spotless, so pure, so true," he said, sitting down, half bewildered, for, though in years a man, he was half a boy still, and the blow had fallen sudden and terrible on his soul. "She looked at me out of her great, clear eyes, with so much truth; she seemed so afraid of soiling her lips with the semblance of a lie; she was tender even to the ants and the worms, when we walked together in the garden. Oh, Ethel! Ethel!" And here all his pride gave way in the rush of tenderness and agony that came over him; and Alison Holmes leaned down his head on the arm of the old-fashioned lounge, and cried like a girl.

And Irene pitied him, as a woman, be she bad or good, will pity the suffering of the man she loves, and threw herself down on a stool at his feet, and said, while her voice shook: "Don't, Alison—I pray you don't! She is unworthy of you; forget her. There are so many others who love you."

And her words were like sweet balm to his heart, and he lifted up his head and looked at her.

Oh, she was very beautiful then, with her lustrous eyes, shining through their heavy tears, as rare gems shine up from their beds in clear rivers, with her flushed cheeks and her quivering lips; doubly beautiful she looked to the young man at that moment—for was she not his friend, his comforter? he leaned forward and took her soft hands in his, and asked: "Do you really pity me, Irene?"

And her heart leaped as she answered : " Pity you ! I would die to save you from this suffering, Alison ! "

And what words followed after I do not know ; but I do know that Alison Holmes did that night what many a man has done before—what many will do after him.

He was impulsive and headlong, as ill-disciplined natures usually are, and he had enough that night to make a strong man desperate ; and the woman who sat at his feet was fascinating and beautiful. He wanted somebody, too, to strengthen and console him in his great loss, and when the thought struck across his heart that she loved him, he leaned down his head—that proud, graceful head—on her shoulder, and he whispered : " Oh, Irene, if you would take Ethel's place, I might learn to forget her ! "

And Irene wound her soft arms about his neck, and the words palpitated through her tremulous lips : " *Alison, I will take her place !* " The victory was won.

Three days had gone by. Alison and Irene had been constantly together ; and he believed himself, as she did herself, happy. I think he loved Irene, not certainly as he had loved me, and I know his heart ached sometimes ; but he loved her as nine-tenths of the men do the women they walk with through life unto death.

She was very bewitching, and, of course, she exerted her charms to the utmost, at this time.

Then, Alison Holmes was certainly not a man to die for the love of any woman—not a man to make a single affection the

one aloe of his life ; the one flower that gathered up into its blossoming all the fragrance, all the aroma of his heart. If I had died, he would have planted flowers, and wept many tears over my grave ; and at the end of two years, at the farthest, married some other woman who chanced across his path the prettiest, or liveliest, or, at least, the one that happened to strike his fancy most ; and if she, too, had left him, it would have been the same thing over again ; and he would have been a true, tender, loving husband to each. All honor to such men ! They are a blessing to their day and generation !

Still there are a few other men and women—very few they are, as the strong, the persistent, the great, are the few—who live true to this one love, whose " heart's scripture " is alike in its " Genesis and its Revelation. "

Three days, as I said, had passed, and sitting at one of the front windows, the newly betrothed pair watched the May sun as it went over the hills, where the west was covered in thick " swaddling bands " of gold and purple. Oh, just so, one of them had watched the sun go down over other hills ; and the lady who sat by his side then was not half so fair as the one who sat there now !

It had been mutually agreed that the past should, as far as possible, be an interdicted subject ; but standing in the deep bay window, Alison says abruptly, winding one of Irene's heavy curls round his fingers : " After all, I ought to have seen that Ethel Lindsay could not have loved me very deeply, after that remark she made to you about my money. You remember it, Irene ? "

She smooths down the little plait that has gathered into her brow, on finding to whom his thoughts wander, and looks

up with bewitching smile: "Yes, I remember, Alison. Did you never think of it afterwards?"

"Yes, some 'money-match' that I heard of one day, reminded me of it so forcibly, that I alluded to the fact of her marrying a rich man, and of its being as important a desideratum with her as with most people."

"And what did she say?" eagerly interrogated the lady.

"Why, she wrote in answer one of the most touching, beautiful protestations, against such a thought or feeling in herself, in any other true woman—so full of pride and wounded feeling withal, that I took to myself all manner of blame for my allusion; and supposed you must have misapprehended her meaning.

"A letter for you, Mr. Holmes!" said Irene's father, as he entered the room with one of his stately, old-school bows.

The young man seized it eagerly. "It's from mother, and re-mailed from New York, as I left orders. Excuse me, Irene, dear, a little while"—and he went up to his room.

An hour later he came down. "This letter has greatly excited me!" he said abruptly. "Mother has had an attack of hemorrhage at the lungs, and her physician recommends her going to Europe, for the next year. He and his family start for Liverpool in three weeks, and mother has resolved to accompany them. She says Ethel and I can join her in October, making a journey to the old world our wedding tour. Oh! what will she say when she learns that another than Ethel is to be my wife?"

Irene winced at this, for, although Mrs. Holmes certainly liked her, and she had exerted herself to be especially agreeable to that lady, yet she knew very well who had the first place in her heart.

"I have been thinking this matter over Irene, and it seems to me the best thing I can do is to accompany my mother."

"Oh, Alison!" she grew very white, and clung to him.

"You see, dear Irene, I shall return in the fall; and then, while I am away, I can reconcile mother so much more easily to the breaking of my engagement with Ethel. She will take it very hard, I know, because she is so fond of her, and would surely write to Aunt Ruth, and have the matter thoroughly investigated, no matter what proofs I might produce of Ethel's perfidy. Then, you see, our engagement is to be kept a secret until next autumn, and, indeed, it is for the best that I should go. Don't you see it, Irene?"

"I don't see much—I only hear the voice of my heart, and that cries 'Stay, stay, Alison!'"

But when they came to consider the matter farther, Irene felt that her betrothed's arguments were right. In her mad love for him, she would gladly have eloped—been married privately, and accompanied him to Europe, but she felt that this would lower her forever in the estimation of all her friends, and more than anything else, the thought of Clyde's indignation restrained her from so imprudent a step. Then, his marriage following so closely on the dissolution of his engagement with me, would surely converge every one's suspicions to herself; and disclosures might subsequently take place, which would involve her in disgrace even in the eyes of her husband. Irene shuddered at this thought, and her judgment at last overruled her affections. "It is best you should go, Alison, but oh, what shall I do without you!" and her face, drenched with tears, dropped down on the shoulder where two weeks before Ethel Lindsay's had rested.

"There—the letter's finished. I have written just as you suggested, Irene," and Alison tossed the sheet into Irene's lap, half bitterly, as though he were very glad to get rid of it.

She seized and read it with breathless eagerness, for her own destiny hung upon every line.

"Will it do?" asked Alison, as she closed and carefully re-folded the sheet.

Her triumphant smile answered him; there was not a word in the letter to expunge; not a thought she had not suggested or dictated; with so much tact, however, that Alison was hardly conscious of it.

"And you will have this letter mailed from New York, where she will suppose it was written?"

"Yes, you know I must have a private interview with your father to-night, Irene, for to-morrow evening I must be in the city." She blushed, and sighed, and just then, looking out of the window, she and Alison caught sight of her father coming into the garden gate. "I will go out and see him now," said the latter, rising up, and caressing the beautiful head that bowed itself down on the window-ledge.

"Well?" It was all her lips asked the young man, as he returned to her, half an hour later.

"He has just given to me his most precious treasure on earth."

"And he promised not to reveal a word of it to a human being for the present?"

"Not even to Clyde; Irene, how beautiful you are; how proud I shall be of you as my wife," gazing down admiringly on the uplifted face, that blushed for joy at his gazing.

"Wasn't papa surprised, Alison?"

"Yes, and he gave his consent to our union so solemnly, and spoke of his daughter so tenderly, that it greatly touched me. I wish you could have heard him, dear."

"Dear papa! Clyde is so much like him. Oh, I forgot to tell you, I had a letter from him, while you were writing, and he is coming home day after to-morrow."

"It is too bad, I shall not be here to see him?"

"And you *must* leave me day after to-morrow."

"I *must*, Irene."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I wonder if anybody up-stairs wants a letter to-night!"

With a bound and a shriek I was out of my chair, and down the stairs. "Oh, Uncle Gerald, give it to me, please, please!"

How well I remember that time. The May day was settling into a sullen, damp, forbidding night. The three weeks that followed Alison's departure had been full of cloud and gloom, of wind and rain, following hard on those days of soft breezes and sunshine, just as the sorrows of life follow hard after its pleasures, just as the darkness had come to my heart after the light.

For a great darkness had fallen there, and for the last two weeks, during which I had received no letters from Alison, I had suffered more than at any former period of my life. I could not divine what ailed me, but I was restless and wretched. I could not write, or even read. I sat for hours before the window, with my pen clasped in my listless fingers, gazing at the old plum tree, as the wet, black boughs struck themselves all day, with a kind of obstinate sullenness, in the face of the wind and rain. Sometimes looking down on my paper, I would find it as wet as the young grass under the plum tree, and then I would get up, and pace the room, starting with a strange, indefinable terror, at every ring of the bell, or every sound outside.

"What can be the matter, child?" questioned Aunt Ruth's anxious voice a dozen times a day. "You don't eat enough to keep a mouse alive—you're pale as a ghost all the time, and it would seem as strange to see you smile, as it would to see the sunshine."

"It's the weather, I guess, aunty. You know these damp spring days always raised the mischief with me, body and mind," and I escaped to my own room quick as I could.

The suspense I endured on account of Alison's long silence came very near throwing me into a fever. I never for a moment doubted his truth to me, but I feared he was ill. I wrote to him twice in New York; but though the letters were forwarded to him, they passed through Irene's hands, and he never saw them.

Uncle Gerald and Aunt Ruth sympathized with me very warmly, and talked about miscarried letters, the unreliableness of mails in general; but I saw they, too, began to feel uneasy at Alison's long silence.

My uncle took out the letter from his deep overcoat pocket; held it a moment above my head with a lurking love of mischief; then suddenly relenting, placed it in my hands. "It's too bad, Ethel—I won't torment you this time."

I went up stairs—it was growing dark, but I could still read by the window. My heart sprang, and my fingers shook as I tore open the envelope——

"Why, child, we've rung the bell three times for supper—what's the matter—what's the matter, Ethel?" and Aunt Ruth set down the teapot, and sprang towards me.

"Nothing is the matter. Something up stairs struck me, I believe."

She threw a frightened glance towards Gerald. "Come and sit down here by the fire, child."

They led me up to the fire; for, though it was May time, the birch boughs still blazed on the hearth. I remember just how the crossed sticks lay, and how the flames curled over them.

"What makes you shiver so, Ethel?" and my uncle drew down his face close to mine—he was rather short-sighted.

I put my hand to my forehead. "Something ails me, I believe. Oh, I remember now. It was the letter."

"The letter—whose letter? Where is it?"

"I don't know—I couldn't understand it, and at last all the letters ran into one, and it dropped on the floor. What does he mean, aunty?"

"Gerald, go up and get the letter. I'll stay with her," whispered Aunt Ruth.

He was gone but a moment, and he returned with the letter in his hands. "Shall I read it, Ruth?"

"Yes."

My faculties, mental and physical, were half paralyzed, and yet I watched him narrowly, as he unfolded the sheet. I saw every change that came over his face. At first there was a look of profound astonishment—then his face grew very white, and at last settled into a stern rigidness of muscle and lineament, such as had never before darkened the face of Gerald Maltby.

"Curse him! he is a liar—a villain!" he muttered, as he finished the letter. It was the first time, and the last, such words ever crossed the lips of the minister.

"Why, Gerald—brother!" cried his appalled sister.

"Well, read that letter, and then see if you can blame me!" striking his clenched hand down hard upon it.

She seized and read it. Her face was whiter than his when she finished. "My poor, poor Ethel!" was all she said; then she burst into tears.

I looked at her with a vague comprehension that she was weeping for me, and that some great, terrible evil had happened. I could not perceive what, but a dull, heavy pain began to creep about my heart.

There was a large, mahogany-framed mirror on the opposite side of the room, and I can still see the strange group it reflected, as I glanced across at it. The minister and his sister stood close together, both very pale, speaking no word, only looking at me, with a combination of grief, tenderness and horror.

"What makes you stare at me so?" I asked.

"Don't, Ethel, don't! I could bear anything better than this. Oh, Alison, if you could see her now!" sobbed Miss Maltby.

Then the truth leaped like lightning up through my heart and brain. I sprang from my chair, with a cry sharp and loud: "He has left me, he has left me forever!" and I remembered nothing more.

I have an impression that it had worn late into the night when I opened my eyes again. Uncle Gerald was holding me in his arms, and his sister was leaning over the chair, watching me with a sorrowful tenderness I had never seen in her eyes before.

"How do you feel now, darling?"

"I'm very tired," slowly lifting my head from the minister's shoulder. "I've been sick, haven't I?" striving to collect my thoughts. "Let me go to bed, aunty."

"Yes, my dear little girl. Brother'll carry you up at once. It is best you should go to sleep."

So they carried me up to my own room, and, after I was in bed, Aunt Ruth sat down by me, and I held her hand in mine, and whispered: "It will all be right in the morning, won't it?"

"I hope so, my child." And I went to sleep.

I never saw Alison's letter after that night, but portions of it seared themselves forever into my memory. There was a refinement of cruelty about it, of which, even now, writing these words, and forgiving him fully and freely, as I pray God may at His judgment, he should, as a man, speaking to me, a woman, have been incapable.

There was no possible opportunity for me to defend myself; every avenue of communication was closed to me. "*I have ceased to love—I shall never marry you,*" was the verdict against which my woman's pride could offer no petition; the great gulf between us over which I might never pass.

"Ethel Lindsay," so the letter concluded, "I shall be far out on the Atlantic, hastening—it matters not now to what port, or even to what country. Henceforth let us be as the dead to each other. I have sounded my heart, I have awakened from my dream, and not in scorn or in anger, but with simple indifference, I put you away from my life. If ever, in the years to come, I shall look upon your face, it will only be as the husband of another woman; as you will probably be the wife of another man.

"I see now how very true was your remark to me on a night you will be apt to remember: 'I am in no wise fitted to be your wife, Alison.' Your woman's penetration discovered at

once what I was slower to learn; but having learned, I shall abide by it, believing it now more honorable to dissolve than to fulfill our engagement.

"And wishing for your future, Ethel Lindsay, all the happiness of which I know you are so capable, and a union at no distant time with some man you shall love fervently and *disinterestedly*, I am
ALISON HOLMES."

The morning came—for mornings and nights will come to the weariest and the most wretched of us—and I opened my eyes.

The clouds were all gone, and the sunshine was dashing in through the curtains, and the birds (earth's "first poets") were singing in the plum-boughs the songs they sang in the garden of Eden, when God listened and said, "It is good." The suffering only know what this is—the slow waking up from sleep into a life of renewed misery. I shut my eyes, and buried my face in my pillow, and moaned: "Oh, God! can't I die—can't I die just now?" And praying this prayer, I never dreamed that life could hold any more happiness or good for me, or that God could have any work here that I must do.

In a little while Aunt Ruth came into the room. "How do you feel, dear?"

"My heart aches! my heart aches!"

She sat down by the bedside, and cried stilly a long time, caressing the hand that lay on the outside of the coverlet. I watched her half curiously, and half wishing that I could cry too; but there were no tears in my heart, only a scorching and a pain. Do you know what it is, reader? for, only feeling, shall you understand!

Aunt Ruth tried to comfort me, "Gerald and I sat up all last night talking it over," she said. "It is the most unaccountable thing I ever heard of. Alison must have been prejudiced against you by some person; there's no doubt of it; but, at all events, he was not worthy of you. You are young, Ethel, and life has a great deal in store for you. Try and forget him, my child."

I only shook my head, but I did not tell her what was in my thoughts, that before long I *should* forget him *in my grave!*

But I did not arise from off my bed that bright May morning, nor for many that followed it. I was very ill with a nervous fever, which just escaped settling on my brain. Much of the time I was unconscious, and this was the great mercy of my illness.

But there were intervals of sanity, when the darkness on my brain settled down in my heart, when I stood all alone in that "great desert" of my life, very thirsty, and there was no water; very hungry and there was no manna; weary, lost, with no cloud by day, no pillar of fire by night, to guide me; and yet, blessed be God! far, far beyond, lay the green meadows and the cool fountains of the "promised land."

But my heart grows weak even now, with the memory of that terrible suffering; every anchor gone, every light vanished, and I drifting on through the night, over the waters. But youth and an elastic constitution triumphed at last, and I slowly grew better.

It was in the dawn of June that I began to sit up again. How sick I was of the sunshine, how the beauty and glory of the summer mocked the winter of my soul!

Then, every room and corner had its associations and memo-

ries, all of which were as barbed arrows piercing my heart, for it was my curse, that, notwithstanding his faithlessness and cruelty, *I loved Alison Holmes still.* By night and by day my heart called out for him, over all the waters that rushed deep and cold between us! Even Aunt Ruth's voice grew stern when she spoke of him, which was not often. I did not attempt to defend him, but I passed whole days in trying to devise some cause for his conduct, and, oftentimes, Irene Woolsey would flash across my mind, as somehow connected with it; but I had no data, no premises from which to draw any conclusions, and not one of the many reasons for his desertion which my mind conjured up, satisfied me for an hour.

One day, while I was convalescing, I had a letter from Meltha Herrick, loving, humorous, and a little gossipy, like herself.

"I wonder how you are getting along, now Al's gone to Europe," ran one passage in the letter. "I was completely taken aback, when the news came to papa, written just on the eve of his sailing. He does not know when they will return, or where they will go, as his mother's health will determine both these important items. Were I you, Ethel, I would never forgive him, for running away like this, and thus depriving me of so delightful a bridal tour. I sympathize with you, my dear, very warmly in this matter, but I don't believe Al will be gone more than three or four months, at the farthest; for among the fair homes of England, or under the blue skies of Italy, wherever he may wander, there will bloom no flower so fair for him as one that hides its beauties and its fragrance among the green hills of Massachusetts."

Oh, Meltha Herrick! when your soft fingers trailed along

these words, you little dreamed what a sharp pang every letter would be to me. The next day I overheard Aunt Ruth say to her brother, "I think, Gerald, I would write to Lucy, if I could only discover her address. It is possible she might throw some light on this mystery, though she could do nothing to excuse her son's baseness."

The woman's pride underlying my love, and stronger even than this, outbroke here. I rushed into the room, for I was now able to go about the house. "Aunt Ruth, don't do it—don't do it!" I cried. "Alison has deserted me, and though he has broken the heart, he shall never bend the pride of Ethel Lindsay."

"But, my dear"—

"No, no, not a word," I interrupted. "Both Alison and his mother would suppose I had instigated you to do this; and after *that* letter, it would be weakness and shame in any woman to even remotely suggest an explanation. You will not so far degrade me?"

"No, my poor child, I won't. I hope Alison Holmes will be made to repent of this before he dies," she added, indignantly.

I recovered slowly. Everything reminded me of him; the books on the table, that we had read together, with his pencil marks straying down the margin; the rocking-chair in the corner; this was the place where he sang, and there he told that comical story, and somewhere else I had sat with his arms about me, while he had called me so tenderly *his* Ethel.

As for the garden, I eschewed this entirely, for every tree, and flower, and walk, had its story of the past. Oh, what days to me were those bright June ones, the ones in which he had promised to be with me, and I sat all alone in my darkened

chamber, thinking of the home that was to have been ours; on the long dreary future, that I was to walk all alone. As soon as I was able, I gathered up all his gifts. The watch, the ring, a beautiful pearl writing-desk, inlaid, with rare tropical flowers; some costly annuals, and a rare inkstand of veined agate; and inclosing them all in a box, gave them to Aunt Ruth. "Lock them away," I said, "for I shall never look at them again, and if I am among the dead, when next you see Alison Holmes, tell him simply that Ethel Lindsay left him *these*."

One morning, a few days afterward, Uncle Gerald came into my room. "Come, daughter," he said, in a tone whose cheerfulness was assumed for my sake, "we're not going to let you sit her, moping away all the summer after this fashion. Just hurry on your bonnet, and take a ride with me."

I shrank from the thought. "Oh, uncle, don't ask me; I wouldn't go out for all the world."

"But you *must*, child. Why, the very day is like a sweet Scripture to the soul, a Good Will of God unto man. Just come out and see it, and talk with it a while; maybe you can extract some balm from it, my poor wounded dove." And his voice, always kind, had, of late, grown tender to me as a mother's.

I rose up, and moved half-way to the closet for my bonnet; then I turned back and buried my face on my uncle's shoulder. "Uncle Gerald, do not ask me; I cannot go!"

"Well, I won't urge you, Ethel," he answered, sadly and solemnly. "The healing balm for you can come only from the hands of the 'Great Physician,'" and he left me.

"Why, isn't she going, brother?" Aunt Ruth's disappointed tones wound up to me from the front hall.

"No—I hadn't the heart to insist when I looked into her face. Alison Holmes has wrecked our child's happiness for life. When I think of his baseness, I almost forget I am a minister of the Gospel, and long to take the vengeance which belongs unto God into my own hands."

A little later, Aunt Ruth came up to me. "I wish you had gone out with Gerald to-day, Ethel."

"But I couldn't, Aunt Ruth. I never want to go out again."

"Hush, my child; it may not be *right* to say so."

"Not *right*!" I roused sufficiently from my long torpor of feeling, to think her words almost unkind. "The world hasn't any enjoyment for me now, and never will have again. Oh, Aunt Ruth, my heart is dead within me—why do I live, when I have nothing to live for?"

"Because God wills it, Ethel, and he never places us where we have nothing to do, where we can fold our hands and sit still. If my words seem cold and unsympathetic, my poor child, it is not because my heart is so, for I, too," her voice shook almost into silence, but in a moment she kept on, "have drunken to the dregs that cup the bitterest life ever places to the lips of woman."

"And speaking now from my own experience, I solemnly assure you, Ethel, that even for this there is comfort and calm. Our lives are not ours; we owe duties to others, and work to God, and it is selfish to indulge a solitary grief to the exclusion of everything else in life."

"But there is no life in me to arouse. You would not say to the dead, 'Get up and walk,' Aunt Ruth;" bursting into a rain of passionate tears, the first I had shed since that night.

"Do you remember how gentle and tender he always was to me—how careful of my happiness. Oh, if he would only come in here, and put his arms around me, and let my head lie still upon his heart for five minutes, it would be very sweet to die."

"I know it, Ethel," was Aunt Ruth's tearful answer; "but when God says 'live,' it is not for us to choose."

She talked to me a long, long time that morning, opening the doors of her heart, and leading me into "secret chambers," which no eye had ever beholden. And looking at her, I saw then how beautiful a life might be, even after its "crown had fallen."

"God's strength! oh, Ethel," she said, looking upward, with a light irradiating her face, which made it fairer than even the lost light of her youth had done, "we never know what this is, until we lean our weakness upon it."

And after she had left me, I turned to the little Bible that lay on my table, and opening the leaves, I came upon that old passage that we read over in our morning lessons, and murmur in our evening prayers; but whose power, and beauty, and significance, we can only understand when all that is of this world fails us, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

This was just what I wanted—*Rest, Rest*; and tears that the angels rejoiced over dropped thick on that blessed promise. Oh, the old Judean harmonies, rolling down to us through the "sepulchred centuries," are the only "Peace" that can reach our hearts in the night of their agony and desolation!

That day I kneeled down by my bedside and prayed, as I had never prayed before, and God strengthened me.

After this I began slowly to go about the house; to comb

Uncle Gerald's hair in the evenings; to assist Aunt Ruth in arranging *bouquets* for the mantel; and sometimes to see a neighbor or two, when they came in to inquire after me.

This was very hard at first. Doing one's duty is sometimes the heaviest work in life; and then I shrank from the curious eyes of strangers, and the pitying "Dear me, how like a ghost she looks!" Fortunately, my engagement had never been made public, so I was saved all annoyance from the inquisitive and gossiping, my illness being attributed solely to physical causes.

We look out some December day, and see the snows covering the earth, and the black sky overhead, and we say mournfully, "The glory has all departed," and forget that seed, and root, and bulb, lie warm underneath the snow, and that they will spring up in the April of Resurrection. And so it is with our hearts; when the winter comes and the snow falls, we say, "The life is all gone. Our hearts are dead within us."

But it is not so. Far down in the warm soil lie the seeds of a harvest more bountiful, more glorious, and the spring will come in God's good time, and the rains will fall, and after that the sunshine, and then, too, the Resurrection!

So, very slowly, I tried to take up the broken threads of my life again, and braid them up into what of brightness I could.

Many times my strength failed me, though, for the dying out of a first love in a woman's heart is a slow and terrible thing. Sometimes I rose up in the morning and said, "I am stronger," and the night taught me my weakness. By the times that all hope and faith in God, or man, seemed to have failed me; by the tears that have drenched my pillow at night; by the slow heart-aches; by the long struggles, I repeat it—*the dying out of a first love in a woman's heart is a terrible thing!*

But through much prayer and many conflicts, the light from heaven began to dawn upon me, and God's arm held my feet from falling as the summer wore on.

One day, early in August, I was sitting under the hop-vine, which covered the trellis just outside the kitchen-door, and absently watching the leaves as they flashed in the wind, when the minister came suddenly into the kitchen, where his sister was preparing some custards for dinner. Neither guessed my proximity to the open door.

"Ruth, I've been thinking a great deal about our Ethel this morning. It won't do for her to go on so any longer. She needs something to arouse and stimulate her. We must get her away from here, at once; the place is too full of associations with all it is best she should forget."

"I have thought of this often, Gerald. But there are so few places where I should be willing to trust her, just now," said Miss Maltby, energetically beating her eggs.

"Well, what do you say to a watering-place? She wants social life and amusement, at this crisis."

"No she don't, either," walking into the kitchen, while Aunt Ruth in her surprise came near upsetting the bowl of eggs. "I am not equal to the exertion, or the social demand that would be made upon me. I wouldn't go to a watering-place for all the world now."

"But you mustn't go on after this fashion," answered the minister, drawing me into his lap. "You want something to interest you, to draw you away from your own thoughts. I tell you what, Ethel, if I were in your place, I'd write a book."

"Oh, Gerald, what an adviser *you* are. She's only twenty-one," exclaimed his sister.

"I don't care if she isn't. It would be the best thing for her in the world, just now. Let her only get absorbed in it, and I'll answer for its success."

"I haven't written twenty lines since spring, uncle. My mind's in a most auspicious state for such an undertaking."

"Try it," he said, putting me down, for just then one of the deacons opened the front gate.

The words haunted me all day, and for many that followed; and slowly walking up and down my chamber—in dreams of the day, and in waking hours of the night—the plan of my book dawned upon me.

In the early September I commenced my book. I was a year writing it; and though I have since blushed over much that was crude and unartistic in its conception, and execution, still my own heart and my own experiences were incarnated, more or less, in every page. Doubtless to this one cause was owing the favor with which it was received by the public, and which surpassed the most sanguine expectations of my friends. Nothing very eventful happened to me during this year. "Faith and work," those blessed balms God has appointed for our healing, did for me what they have done for so many before. I grew stronger, happier, learning at last to say: "Thy will be done," even to the giving up of *him*.

"Two letters for you, my children," said Mr. Woolsey, as he came into the sitting-room, where his son and daughter were reading, one afternoon late in September.

Irene bounded forward with her characteristic impulsiveness. "Oh, papa, give it to me, quick!"

"Thank you, sir," quietly answered Clyde, and yet those deep eyes of his warmed and brightened as he received the letter.

"Well, what are you thinking of, Clyde?" It might have been an hour later that Irene asked this question, as she looked up from her letter suddenly, and found Clyde gazing curiously at her.

"About the changes that have come over your face. I have been watching it intently for the last ten minutes. That letter must interest you very much, Irene?"

"It does," blushing and smiling; "but you have one, too, Clyde?"

"Yes," answering her smile, with his own rare, beautiful one. "Supposing we each turn confessor to the other. I'll set the example. My letter is from your friend, Meltha Herrick."

"My 'friend;' and what is she to you?"

"My betrothed wife."

Irene's letter dropped from her hands.

"Clyde Woolsey, are you in earnest?"

"To be sure I am; don't you congratulate me?"

"With all my heart, Clyde!" seizing and wringing both his hands. "Oh, I am so glad, so glad. To think the little puss never told me a syllable about it! When did it happen?"

"Last month, you know, I was in New York a short time. But I shall make no further disclosures until you have told me who was the writer of that long letter on the floor."

She picked it up, and then sat down at her brother's feet, and laid her head against his knee.

"Clyde," said the young girl, with a timidity very unusual to

her, "what should you say to know I, too, belonged to another?"

"It would depend altogether upon the individual to whom you belonged, my dear sister," placing his hand on her hair.

"His name is Alison Holmes."

"Alison Holmes! I thought—I thought."—

"You thought he was engaged to Ethel Lindsay when we were in New York a year ago," speaking very hurriedly.

"But there was no truth in this report. She was Alison's protégée, and he, of course, showed her a great deal of attention. Then, Ethel is naturally fond of flirtations. This was all. His manner at least was very love-like. But his long intimacy with Ethel explains this. Clyde, you do not congratulate me."

"Yes, I do. Alison Holmes was always a favorite of mine. To tell you the honest truth, however, he is *not* just the man I would have selected for you, Irene. I think he lacks somewhat stamina of character and moral force. But no man is perfect. If you love Alison Holmes, I am satisfied."

"I do love him, Clyde, with my whole heart," springing to her feet.

"Well, sit down here, then, and let us talk awhile, darling sister." And they did talk until the sun went down, of the present and the future. Clyde told Irene how Meltha's father had said he was the only man under heaven to whom he would give his 'pearl,' and how before another year had gone by, he hoped that Meltha and Irene would be sisters, in something more than in name. And Irene in turn spoke of Alison. His mother's health was still very delicate, and they were now travelling through the southern part of Germany. He could not

return at the earliest before spring. He wrote very fondly, very hopefully, and for good and sufficient reasons, Irene had until this time only revealed her engagement to her father.

Then, they both sat still, busy with their thoughts.

At last Clyde said: "I was thinking of the time, dear, when I used to carry you across the stones of the little brook that pattered

"Down the meadows, across the road,"

in dear, old Virginia. How proud I was then! It does not seem so very long time since, and, pet, here we are to-day, promised husband and wife."

"Oh, don't speak of it, Clyde," cried the girl sharply, with a deprecating motion of her hand. "I would give everything I possess on earth to go back to those times, and stand on those old brook stones, the pure innocent hearted child I was then!—I wish," she added, bursting into passionate tears, "they had laid me down by the side of my mother under those old locust trees, before we ever left our home. Oh, Clyde, I am not good—I am not happy."

The young man was greatly touched, and he put his arms about his sister very tenderly. "There is no man that doeth good, and sinneth not, Irene," he answered solemnly, little suspecting the truth. "You could not have pleased me better, darling, than by thus evincing you are not satisfied with yourself. It is the first step towards advancement, and God's arm is always strong. His grace always sufficient for us."

Every word he spoke was a pang to Irene. And the better impulses of her heart arose and whispered: "Confess now all you have done, Irene Woolsey, though it cost you everything on earth."

"Even the love of Alison Holmes?" Irene's heart failed her, with this after-thought.

"Go away! go away!" she cried out fearfully, in the silence of her own room that night, staring wildly at some object she seemed to behold in the air. "Oh, those great reproachful eyes of Ethel Lindsay's. If they would not follow me so, by night and by day." Poor girl! her heart was not all evil, and she was very young to prove the truth of that solemn utterance of the royal Judean: "The way of transgressors is hard."

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER year had passed. It was the last day of the summer, and the sun was setting royally, canopied with heaps of crimson and gold, and the hill tops were fired with purple, and long lines of golden light struck across the corn-fields.

And at this hour, sitting in my old place, by my writing-desk, before the window, among the plum-tree shadows, I wrote the last line of my book, and then turned over the pages with a half sad, half joyful exultation.

As I said, my own life had entered into every page, but the book, though full of signs and tokens to me, was to others a simple autobiography of a life that had little of startling outward event and *dénoûment*, but very full of inward struggle, and emotion, and suffering, and at last of growth and triumph.

And looking on those pages, I thought of the thick darkness under which they were commenced, and how the light had grown, and the peace come in slowly, until I began to feel that this "great grief taken into my heart" had made it strong, and to see how "God's glory" overreached man's happiness.

I had not outgrown my love for Alison Holmes. There were times when the old pangs would strike sharply across my heart, but I had duties and interests and enjoyments beyond him. The winter had broken, the early spring had come, and the seeds were stirring in the soil, while I recked not of it.

There was a light knock at the door, and Philip came in with some papers he had brought from the office.

"Is the book done, Ethel?" whispered the boy, putting on one of his indescribably comical expressions, as he leaned over me.

"Yes, Philip, but I want to draw a few long breaths over it, before I announce the fact down stairs."

"Well, I shan't forestall you," and he went out of the room humming,

"And we'll leave her alone in her glory."

After awhile I tore away the envelope from one of the papers, more to relieve my feelings from their painful tension, than anything else. It proved to be a New York weekly, sent to me by some Editor. My eyes dropped by chance upon the list of marriages, and there I read the names of Alison Holmes and Irene Woolsey; of Clyde Woolsey and Meltha Herrick. I did not faint, or shriek, only the paper dropped from my fingers, and I sat very still. Once my lips gasped out a prayer—that one which so often struggles up from our humanity in its weakness and its suffering—"God help me!"

And God heard me.

Two hours later, I went down stairs. That day at dinner I had said to my uncle and aunt, "I don't intend to come down again, or even to look on your faces, until I can hold up my book before you and say, It is finished."

Supper had been waiting a long time, and I knew why Aunt Ruth had taken unusual pains with this to-night. The brother and the sister looked up with faces full of sympathetic eagerness

as I entered, but there was no triumph, only a solemn wail through the voice that cried, "The book is finished, and oh! another book is finished, too!"

"Nonsense, Phil; I can't come. It's only the shadow of the butternut tree, across the road."

"But, I say it isn't, either, Ethel. Do you think I'm such a numskull as not to know a man from a tree, or an old woman to be scared at the sight of one? There he stands, just on the edge of the shadow and moonlight, looking at the house; and just so he has been standing for the last half hour."

It was evening in the following October. I was just finishing a tidy for the parlor rocking-chair, and Phil was studying his algebra, on the other side of the room. All women know how annoying it is to be interrupted just in the finale of some dainty bit of fancy-work, and it was in no very amiable frame of mind I laid down my work and proceeded to the window, wishing Phil had kept his eyes on his algebra. It was a clear, still, autumn evening; baptized with a moonlight that made it seem like a softer day and beautiful, with ornaments of scarlet and gold, for the frosts had been with us many nights.

Phil was right. A man, tall and thin, was standing like a statue, a few rods from the house, just outside the shadow of a large butternut tree, while one arm rested wearily on the highest bar of the fence that inclosed the great wheat-field, opposite the Parsonage.

"What in the world can he be doing there, Phil?" I asked after watching this unusual spectacle a few moments.

"There? you're satisfied now it's a live man instead of a

tree-shadow. I can't guess what he wants ; but I'll go out and ask him, any way." Philip, like most boys of his age, was very fond of mysteries and adventures.

"Wait until you've asked Aunt Ruth, Phil," I suggested.

"I shan't, either ; girls are always cowards," and he was out doors before I could expostulate. In a few moments he returned with the stranger, and I went, out of curiosity, into the hall to meet them.

"This gentleman says he is an old friend of aunty's, Ethel, and he walked from the hotel to see her this evening ; but he is not in good health, and was too much exhausted to meet her, when he reached here."

"Walk into the parlor, sir, and take the rocking-chair. Aunty's in her room. Phil, go and call her." I threw open the doors, and the soft light from the solar-lamp fell full upon the gentleman's face, as he walked in. He had a countenance you would have liked at once. It was pale and thin, but striking and manly, and there was something in his whole bearing and manner which would have indicated the cultivated gentleman, though he did not utter a syllable.

His hair was quite grey, his forehead considerably wrinkled, and yet he did not look like a man that had passed much beyond his fiftieth summer.

He walked toward the chair, but did not sit down, only turned his face expectantly toward the door. Aunt Ruth's light step brushed the stairs, and the next moment she was in the room. She advanced toward the stranger, with a good deal of surprise and curiosity in her face. The gentleman reached out his hands. "Ruth, Ruth, don't you know me !" he cried, in a voice that I seem to hear this moment.

"Morgan Steele, is it you !" burst, in a long, low quiver, rather from Aunt Ruth's heart than from her lips ; and then I sprang out of the room, nearly upsetting Philip, who stood gaping with boyish wonder in the passage, and shut the door. It was fitting that they, so long apart, should be "together" alone now.

"Who is he ? what does it all mean, Ethel ?" repeated Philip, as, half beside myself with excitement at the thought of this meeting, I paced up and down the room.

"Nothing I can tell you, Phil, only this gentleman is an old and very dear friend of aunty's, and she cannot help feeling very deeply on seeing him to-night."

"I wouldn't wonder if he was an old lover of hers, any way," sagely concluded the boy, as he returned to his algebra.

Uncle Gerald was away that night, and after Philip had retired, I sat up, and waited alone to see Aunt Ruth.

It was near twelve before she came into the sitting-room. Her face looked as I had never seen it before. There was a new warmth, and light, and beauty about it, that seemed to set it back in its early maidenhood again.

"Oh, Aunt Ruth, I am so glad for you," I whispered.

She came close to me, and drew her arm around my waist. "It is twenty years," she said, speaking more to herself than to me, "since we parted, and yet it doesn't seem but a little while now. I feel just as if I was a young girl, standing in the summer evenings, under the beech tree with Morgan, just as we used to."

"How long is it since he left England, Aunt Ruth ?"

"Only three weeks" (rousing herself). "His wife has been dead more than two years." She did not suspect I had known

this so long, for I had always felt it was Doctor Steele's place rather than my own to acquaint her with the decease of his wife.

"Morgan has been detained in London, settling up her estate. She owned considerable property, and as both their children died in infancy, Morgan settled the whole of this on her nephews and nieces."

"And he was happy with her?"

"Very—she was a true, loving wife to him, but his heart could never forget."

I knew then that they had talked over the past, that all was forgotten and forgiven on both sides.

"Morgan will follow his wife very soon," Aunt Ruth said, with much solemnity. "He has a disease of the heart, which excitement greatly stimulates, and this has completely prostrated him. Come, it is very late, you must go to bed, my little Ethel."

"Well, I spoke to Jane, and the front chamber is all in readiness for him; I'll wait until you go, aunty."

She smiled on me, a tender, solemn smile. "I shall not go to bed to-night, Ethel. I shall watch by Morgan."

I started. "Why, you don't think he is so ill as that, aunty!"

"One cannot tell what *may* happen at any moment, with such a disease as this. He seems to be impressed with the conviction that his time here is very brief."

I saw she did not feel like conversing much, so I kissed and left her; and my heart was very full as I went up stairs, thinking of the life romance, whose closing chapters were being written in the Parsonage.

The next day Doctor Steele was unable to leave his bed. Before noon Uncle Gerald returned. I did not witness their meeting, but Aunt Ruth told me afterwards the two proud men wept together like children.

For herself, she scarcely left the doctor's bed-side, by day or by night; and there was a serene happiness shining away down in her eyes, which even the death-shadow we all felt was drawing nearer could not extinguish.

She would sit for hours by the side of the man she had loved so long and truly, her hand clasped in his, his dark eyes fastened tenderly on her face—the face that was still very fair in its matronly grace and serenity; and so they would walk through the fair country of their youth together.

Sometimes my uncle and I joined them. I liked Doctor Steele exceedingly. He had lost none of the fine social attributes which Mrs. Holmes had praised so warmly, and he was as cultivated a scholar as he was naturally a gentleman.

Uncle Gerald was very desirous that he should consult a physician, alleging that the excitement of his return had thus prostrated him, and that medical aid might yet restore him to comparative health.

But the doctor was inflexible. "I know my own case better than he could, Gerald. One hope has sustained me until this time, and now it is realized, I am willing my life should pay for it."

Late one afternoon (Doctor Steele had been with us four days then), I was mounted on a desk in Uncle Gerald's study, searching for an old volume of the Iliad, when Aunt Ruth

came hurriedly into the study; her face was very white and solemn :

"Come up stairs, quick, Gerald!" she said. "A change seems to have taken place in Morgan; his mind is wandering."

They went out, and I followed them. With the first glance at Doctor Steele's face, I knew it was struck with death. His eyes wandered vacantly over us, and his thoughts were with the days and the love of his youth. "Ruth, Ruth," he murmured, "do you hear the cool spring bubbling up through the wet grass on the left side of your house? How full the apple tree is of blossoms, and how the boughs shake like white plumes in the wind. We will have a long walk together to-night. There stands the old squire, shaking his grey head, and looking very stern and harsh. He is taking you away from me. Come back to me! oh, come back, Ruth—Ruth, my darling!"

"Here I am, Morgan," answered a voice choked with sobs, and Aunt Ruth leaned over the dying man.

He stroked the soft hair that shaded her cheek, tenderly. "How beautiful it is!" he said, running his fingers up through it. "Ruth always had beautiful hair."

His head sank back, his eyes closed, and for a moment we who stood by feared that Morgan Steele would never look on us again. But he did, and then he knew us all. He drew his arms round Aunt Ruth's neck, and laid his head on her shoulder. "Don't cry for me now, darling!" he said faintly, as her tears dropped thick on his forehead. "It is very pleasant to die thus, and I am only going home a very little while before you. God has brought us together, and now he is taking us apart. Good bye, good bye, Ruth!" With a last

effort he drew down her face to his lips, and strained a kiss upon it. Then there was a long silence in the room, and when Aunt Ruth lifted up her head again, Morgan Steele was not among us.

He was buried in the village graveyard, among the willows, where some day, God willing, she will sleep by his side. She bore his death as one of those "whom God comforteth." It was a blessing unspeakable that he had come to her at last, that he had loved her to the end; and this made the parting very much easier. "In a little while, in a little while, Ethel?" she said. "Oh, our Father in heaven only knows what those words are to me;" and looking at her, at that moment, I wondered whether Aunt Ruth's face would look fairer when she walked among the crystal fountains of the land that to her did not seem "very far off."

Aunt Ruth might have been a rich old lady, had she chosen, for Doctor Steele had no very near relations, and he wished to leave her all his property; but she would by no means consent to this, and only after the most urgent solicitations on his part, did she promise to receive a legacy of ten thousand dollars. "I hardly expect ever to use it myself," she said to me, "but it will be something for you and Philip."

Late in the autumn my book was published. Through the kindness of some influential editors in New York, I had secured one of the largest firms to undertake my first volume, and it met with a success which was certainly very flattering; and, if I had not learned it before, my pride and delight in my success taught me that my life had not died out, after all.

There is no question that the first draughts of fame are the most intoxicating, and flattering notices from newspapers and periodicals, and compliments from strangers, which almost every mail brought me, were all a new, delicious draught, on which I feasted for a season. My work, entitled "The Hills and the Valleys," was issued under the *nom de plume* of *Eloise Lynn*, but the name of the real authoress was largely circulated among my friends, and home praise and local notoriety are perhaps more intoxicating than any other. Of course I had my full share of these, for I was quite the lion of the village, and received my due amount of blank stares at the church and at the sewing society. And yet I had not forgotten Alison. The thought of him always sent a quiver of pain across my heart, but all the joy and interests of my life no longer converged to him. I did not know it, but I was slowly out-growing my love, as a woman always can any love but the "elect," which so few understand or realize in *this life*. The great ocean of my heart had never been fathomed, how much soever the fountains of its tenderness had been stirred; but of all this I never dreamed then.

There were times when the thought of the beautiful head that now lay on the heart of Alison Holmes, would fill my soul with bitterness and anguish—times still when I turned away from all these sweet draughts of fame and flattery with a loathing and a heart-sickness, crying, "Oh, what are they all worth, since *he* is not here!"

But there were other times when my spirits seemed to have regained all their old elasticity, and I would find the echoes chasing my laughter round the house, and my frolics with Philip and his father were gleeful as ever.

Then, too, at this time I had a good deal of social stimulus, which is very beneficial in certain phases of experience. Occasionally people stopped at the Parsonage to see the "authoress," and found only a shy, timid little girl, who wore her laurels not gracefully, but blushing, and went away greatly disappointed.

Then there were stories to write, correspondents to answer, and so between all these things I was kept pretty constantly at work, which is the best panacea for suffering the world can give us.

One morning early in the following spring, a handsome carriage, with richly caparisoned horses, drew up before our front door. I saw a gentleman and two ladies, very elegant in waving plumes and India shawls, come up the front walk.

In a few moments Jane brought me up a card on which was written "*Mr., Mrs. and Miss Lindsay.*"

With what a rush of emotion I read the lines! The love of kindred was something I could scarcely remember; and I did not possess the slightest clue to any of mine; but this name on the card—oh, to what might it not be the introduction! I smoothed my hair hurriedly, and went down into the parlor, with rapid pulses, to confront the people who bore my name.

"Have I the honor of addressing Miss Ethel Lindsay, the authoress of 'The Hills and the Valleys?'" asked the gentleman who bore my name, as he rose up.

He was a tall, good-looking man, with rather elaborate manners, and attired in the finest of broadcloth.

"I am she, sir."

"And you are the daughter of Edward and Ellen Lindsay, who must have died almost before your remembrance?"

"Yes, I am their daughter. Oh, sir! can you tell me anything of my parents?"

"I can have that pleasure, my dear niece, as I am your uncle, Alfred Lindsay, the half-brother of your father; and this is your Aunt Sara, and your cousin Anna," waving his hand toward the fashionably-dressed ladies, who both rose, shook hands with and kissed me, protesting they were overjoyed to make my acquaintance. Then I sat down, and listened breathlessly to all my newly-discovered relatives had to tell me of my parents.

Alfred Lindsay was some five years my father's senior. As they were the children of different mothers, and as their father died when Edward was quite young, the brothers had been together very little. My father had engaged in commercial pursuits, in which he had been very successful for awhile, but some sudden reverses in trade had, a few years after his marriage, involved him very deeply. He went to the south, in order, if possible, to extricate himself from these embarrassments, and, on his return voyage, the vessel in which he sailed was shipwrecked, and every passenger on board was lost. Soon after this, his brother went to Europe, and did not return for several years, during which time he heard nothing of my father's family. When he reached home a letter was given him, written by my mother, requesting him to take charge of her only daughter, for she felt that her days on earth were numbered. A year had intervened betwixt the writing of the letter and its reception. Mrs. Lindsay was at that time in feeble health, and her husband much absorbed in business; and

he regretted to state that he had on this account taken no notice of the letter, presuming his sister-in-law was dead, and her child provided for.

His wife and daughter had, however, read my book the last month, and they were speaking of it at a party one evening, when a stranger present remarked: "And the authoress bears your name, Mr. Lindsay."

This quite electrified him. He took the gentleman aside, who proved to be a resident of the village, and a neighbor of ours, and learned from him sufficient of my history to induce my uncle to make me a visit, in the belief that I was the child of his brother.

"And you never saw my mother, then, sir?"

"Yes, once they were in New York, soon after their marriage, and called at our house."

"Oh, tell me about her; do-I look like her?" I eagerly questioned.

"Yes, something; you have her eyes and smile, but the rest of your face is your father's."

"And have you preserved the letter she wrote? I would give everything I possess on earth to see my mother's handwriting?"

"Yes, here it is," answered the gentleman, producing the sheet with a little evident reluctance. "It is not in a very good condition, and we had a long search after it, in a trunk of old letters, among which we at last came upon it."

With a cry of joy I seized the stained, rumpled sheet, and hurried to the window, where, wholly forgetful of the eyes that were staring curiously at me, I tore open the letter, and read as well as I could through my tears, the words that, nearly a

score of years before, my mother's hand had traced there. The chirography was small and delicate, and I knew even before I read the letter, that my mother's heart had throbbed through every line :

"MY DEAR BROTHER : I have seated myself this evening with feelings of painful reluctance to address you, strangers almost as we are to each other ; but the dead know little of earthly pride, and I shall soon be among these. I am a widow, friendless, and almost penniless, but I do not wish to solicit any aid for myself. I can die as I have lived, silently; but my child—my Ethel !

"These words have spoken all. I cannot leave her to the cold charities, the neglect—it may be the cruelty of the people here ; and so, almost from out the grave, I call to you to take pity upon her. I have no friends of my own with whom to leave her. Perhaps you do not know I was left fatherless and motherless very early, and brought up by my Aunt Ethel, who died only a year before my marriage ; so my child, my precious child, who lies now slumbering peacefully in her bed beside which I am writing, will be quite alone.

"Brother Alfred, will you take her for the sake of the father over whose heart for more than four years the cold waves have rolled ?

"At the farthest, only a few weeks more of this life can remain to me. My strength is gradually declining, and these slight hemorrhages of my lungs growing more frequent, will soon terminate my life. I have no legacy to leave to my child, but my prayers and the spotless name of her parents. Edward's creditors were very rapacious, taking away from the

widow and the fatherless even the house that sheltered them. For the last six months I have lived in this secluded New England village, with very coarse but good-natured people, and supported myself and child partly by the sale of my furniture, partly by my needlework.

"But this writing exhausts me too much. Brother, because that you and my Edward were the children of one father, will you not come to me before I die, and let me place my Ethel in your arms ? and be certain there will come a day and an hour to you, when, more than in all your wealth, you will rejoice that you listened to the prayer of her dying mother.

"ELLEN LINDSAY."

"Oh, mother ! mother !" I cried, pressing the letter to my lips, and drenching it with tears, "did you so love me—did your heart bleed so to leave your child ! God has answered your prayers."

"My dear"—Uncle Alfred's calm, politely modulated tones, aroused me to a sense of their presence—"do not allow yourself to be thus overcome. We are here now to answer your mother's wishes, and we hope it is not too late to do this. My dear wife, daughter and myself, are very proud to discover we have a relative who will do us so much honor.

"We have come here to-day (speaking very slow and impressively, as though he wished me to comprehend fully the magnitude of his generosity), to offer you a home in our own family, where, I am happy to say, you will enjoy every social and literary advantage which the city affords. I have but one child, and of course, we shall regard you as our own daughter. Our residence is in New York, on Fifth Avenue, and we have

wealth to gather around it all the luxuries and elegances which you doubtless know how to prize. But I will not enlarge on this subject. Suffice it, you shall want nothing to complete your happiness, which it is in our power to bestow upon you. My wife and daughter join in this offer. Do you not, my dears?"

"Most cordially," answered the elder lady, who was very fleshy, and whose rather insipid face was completely surrounded by flowers and ribbons, and all sorts of devices in French millinery.

"Entirely," lisped the younger one, who had a pretty doll face, with lips and eyes just after the pattern of those you see in toy-store windows, on Broadway, about Christmas time.

"And now, my dear niece, you have heard our offer," continued my uncle, with a lofty wave of his hand, as though he were a prince conferring title and estate on one of his subjects, "will you accept it?"

I sat still for perhaps half a minute, thinking very earnestly, with something of the old spirit that had awakened years ago in Mrs. Kenyon's parlor, stirring within me. Then I rose up, and answered my relatives: "I thank you all, but I cannot accept your offer now, uncle.

"Years ago you left me a lonely, friendless orphan, with none to do a kind deed for or say a loving word to me—you, my father's brother—you to whom my dying mother had solemnly bequeathed me! And for long years afterwards I lived and suffered among cold, rude, heartless people, what must this day be written against you in the Kingdom of Heaven, while you neither inquired nor cared whether I was living or dead.

"Afterwards strangers took me to their home and hearts,

and through their care, and what was in me, I am this day something, you say, you are proud to own as your relative.

"No, I repeat it, uncle, aunt and cousin, I thank you for your offer, *but it has come too late. I do not need it.*"

The faces of my audience had been growing very red, while I, hurried away by my feelings, had perhaps said more than I otherwise should.

At last my uncle spoke, clearing his throat, and with a visible abatement of his loftiness: "I am very sorry, my dear, that you should take my silence so hard. You know I was in Europe at the time of your mother's death, and afterward much engrossed in business. However, as I see it will be useless to urge my offer upon you, if you will in its stead, accept a small gift!" and he drew out a plethoric wallet from his pocket.

My cheeks tingled. "I thank you, uncle, but I have no need of your generosity. All my wants are supplied."

"But a note for a thousand dollars; you will do me the honor to accept this."

"I am not insensible to the value of your gift, but I should pain the feelings of my foster parents too much by accepting it."

My manner told him it would be useless to urge the matter further. I think he was much disappointed and chagrined, for he had come intending to patronize and overwhelm me. My relatives did not remain more than half an hour longer. I was very anxious to obtain all the information I could of my parents, but Mr. Lindsay knew less of my mother than I did, and my father and he were in fact only nominal brothers.

His wife and daughters inquired if I had ever been in New York, if I attended the Opera, and knew many distinguished people there. They evidently thought an authoress a kind of moral anomaly, and that my relationship and residence with them, would give a sort of prestige to their house. I saw at once there were very few points in which we could harmonize.

They entreated me to visit them in New York, and when they rose to go, I could not help remembering they were my father's relatives, the only known kindred I had on earth, and I urged them to remain to dinner. But they declined my invitation. And so my fashionable relations swept down the walk, and rolled off in their elegant carriage, and I went up stairs, with the one precious legacy they had left me—*my mother's letter!*

"After all," I murmured, "I believe it was better that I was left awhile with the Frosts, and had all that hard experience, than to have been brought up by these people, who at the best could only have made me a soulless, silly, fashionable woman."

Then I went in search of Aunt Ruth, and related all that transpired, to which she listened with great surprise and interest.

"Now, didn't I do just right, aunty? You know I don't belong to anybody in the world but you," I concluded.

"Perfectly, perfectly right, my dear, dear child!" drawing me to her.

But I passed many solitary hours, afterward, dreaming of my mother and Aunt Ethel, and at last they grew more distinct to me than the memory of most faces that I had seen. I wondered if this Aunt Ethel was beautiful, and fancied she

was a serene, gentle, low-voiced woman, very much like Aunt Ruth. My mother too had left most touching proof of her affection for her relative, in giving me her name. How I longed to know more about her, especially whether she was married or single, and I used to imagine a little graceful head, with blue eyes and *very* brown hair fluttering about her, while she sewed or read, and then I would wake up, and smile, to remember all of this must have happened *forty years ago*.

Well, the dead keep their secrets. Perhaps some day I shall know all about them, walking along the green lanes, and among the cool shadows of trees, whose branches bear the golden fruit of eternity.

CHAPTER XX.

Two more years passed away ; there was little of prominent event in them. I believe this was a time of quiet growth and advancement—a time when my life was beginning to answer that great question Seth Robbins had asked long ago, under the swamp willows, “What sort of a woman are you going to make?”

I was happy in the midst of my social, literary, and home enjoyments. I wrote a good deal, chiefly periodical stories, and a couple of children's books. My first one had been written from my heart, and I did not venture to make another great effort in the field of romance. The intellect matures slower than the heart, and mine did not develop early.

I had passed part of both these winters in New York, with the families of my publishers, and a day in each visit with my relatives, who overwhelmed me with attentions ; my uncle was a retired merchant, and they lived in magnificent style, but I did not envy them their “residence on Fifth Avenue.”

Of Alison Holmes I knew nothing, except that he was in Europe with his wife ; as were also Clyde and Meltha, and the latter was in feeble health.

I had not forgotten him, neither had he grown to me like the dead—nay, I still believed that I had loved him too well ever

to marry again—that “That pleasant song, hushed in the garden of my heart, would be heard no more.”

But it was not a heart where the snows lay, and the winds stormed any more. The spring had come, and flowers had bloomed, and sunshine lay warm all over it.

Soon after my return from my second visit in New York, I received a letter from a wealthy old bachelor, who visited my friends, and whom I had met at several parties there, with a formal offer of his hand and heart.

“Stiff, stately, and sixty ! that describes him exactly. Was the man so absurd as to suppose I'd have him !” I laughed after reading the letter to my uncle and aunt.

“Probably he thinks his dollars will cover all his deficiencies in your estimation,” answered the minister. “But see here, Ethel, don't you expect ever to be married ?”

“Never—of course not,” wondering he could ask *me* such a question ; and I went up stairs to answer the letter.

But going up, I unconsciously stopped a moment, for I heard the minister ask : “What are you smiling at, Ruth ?”

“At Ethel's answer.”

“Why—don't you believe it ?”

“I believe she *thinks* so. But a woman of my age, and my experience, sees deep into a young girl's heart. Hers has awakened from its first love ; Alison Holmes is not, as I once thought, the elect, the husband of her soul. She may never find him, for very few women do, but if she does she will marry him.”

“I believe you are right, Ruth,” answered her brother thoughtfully.

“No she isn't, either,” I whispered to myself, as I went up

stairs ; but I was a long time answering the bachelor's letter, wondering if what Aunt Ruth said *could* be true.

Late in that spring, the minister and his sister received an urgent invitation from their mother's sister to visit her once again. The old lady wrote she was in feeble health, and had a presentiment she would not live long. She wished to consult her niece and nephew before she made her will.

"It is necessary we should go at once, or we can't get away until Fall, as she resides in the western part of New York State; and I have engaged to supply Brother Heming's pulpit in Springfield, during his absence," said Uncle Gerald.

"How unfortunate!" subjoined his sister. "Jane's gone, for the first time in ten years, to see her sick niece, and Bridget seems to labor under an unusual share of Hibernian verdancy."

"Look here," I interrupted, "you and uncle *shall* go. I'll keep house during your absence."

Philip put down his teacup and gave a most significant whistle.

"Phil, you just keep still, if you know what's for your good." The ambiguous shake of my head in no wise alarmed the young gentleman.

"Yes," continuing energetically, "you shall go, and I'll be housekeeper. It'll be so novel and funny ; and then, in the spring, there's always a season when I can't write a line, and it's coming on now. I'll manage Bridget, and keep the domestic machinery in prime-order."

"And I s'pose I'll have to be chief engineer," said Phil, with a comically rueful visage.

"You'll have to behave yourself, if you're one of the officers on board my ship, that's certain, young man."

The subject was discussed vehemently for an hour or two. Aunt Ruth demurred from the beginning, as she entertained no exalted opinion of my domestic gifts and capabilities ; but at last Uncle Gerald settled the matter by saying : "Well, I guess we'll go, Ruth. It will be an entirely new experience for Ethel, and can do her no harm, any way."

I little thought that fair May morning—when, standing in the hall, Aunt Ruth slipped the black ribbon, which always held her keys, around my belt—of all I was to pass through before I looked in her face again.

"God be with you!" said Uncle Gerald, as he went down the steps. Oh, I had need enough of that prayer!

It was late on the fourth afternoon of my installation in my new office, where I flattered myself I had achieved remarkable success, when Bridget came up to my room, with a very mysterious expression elongating her rubicund visage, and informed me that there was a man down stairs, who said he was in a great hurry, and must see me all alone. I hurried down, laughing at Biddy's obscure perceptions, as I supposed she had delivered the message wrongly, and confronted a tall, gaunt, awkward-looking individual, who rose on my entrance, and eagerly inquired if I was Miss Ethel Lindsay.

"Yes ; that is my name."

"I have a letter of great importance for you, ma'am," he said, in a low, mysterious voice. "It will explain what has brought me here ;" and he produced it from his deep coat pocket.

Greatly wondering what it could mean, I tore it open. A few lines were traced inside with an unsteady hand :

"MISS ETHEL LINDSAY: *I am dying*—the doctor says I cannot live, at the farthest, but a few days; and I cannot leave this world in peace without making a confession which intimately concerns yourself. Come to me, I pray you, come to me without a moment's delay! for what I have to say must be said quickly. I am at the —— hotel. The bearer of this is the husband of my nurse, and a perfectly reliable person. He will accompany you here. Oh, Ethel Lindsay, as one day you must lie where now I am lying, heed the prayer of a dying woman, and before death darkens it, may God bring you to the gaze of

"IRENE WOOLSEY."

I staggered against the window, struck blind and dumb for a moment. Ever since Alison's marriage, I had been convinced, in my own mind, that his wife was at the bottom of our separation. The minister and his sister were, I saw, of the same opinion. I never supposed that the means by which Mrs. Holmes accomplished her purpose would be revealed to me in this world; but, God forgive me! for more than two years I had hated her, with all that intensity and loathing which a nature peculiarly strong in its loves and dislikes, feels for an enemy who has basely robbed it of its one great life-treasure.

Now, however, my feelings underwent a great change. *My enemy was dying*. This thought was enough to banish all hatred from my soul.

"What ails Mrs. Holmes? Who is with her?" I asked of her messenger, as soon as the great shock I had received allowed me to speak.

"She took cold at a ball, week before last; it settled into lung and bilious fever, and now the doctor says there is no help

for the poor lady. She came on with her brother, Mr. Clyde Woolsey, who is off on some business in New York State, and does not know of his sister's illness, though they have sent messengers in all directions to learn his whereabouts."

"And her husband?" I gasped.

"He is in Europe, with his mother, who was taken so ill just before they sailed, that her son would not leave her; though he promised to be here in a few weeks. Mrs. Holmes's father had a paralytic shock, and they feared he would die, and it was this that brought the children on so suddenly, but the old gentleman is better now, and with his daughter

"The lady says she cannot die in peace unless she sees you. She made me promise to bring you back without fail, and we must be in a hurry if you'll see her alive. You will not refuse the prayer of a dying woman? You will go with me, ma'am," asked the man, very earnestly. I hesitated but a moment, before I answered, "I will go."

And then the man proceeded to inform me that we must be at the depot in an hour and a half, to reach Springfield at eight o'clock that evening. We could then take the cars for New Haven, which we should reach before the boat left, at eleven, and arrive at New York next morning.

"You can be ready in an hour and a half?" he anxiously interrogated.

"Yes;" and then, as one in a dream, I called Bidy, told her to offer the man some refreshment, and went up stairs.

There was little preparation to be made. Mechanically, I took out my bonnet and shawl, placed a dress in my carpet-bag, and, catching a glimpse of my face in the mirror, I began to realize what I had undergone, it looked so shocked and

ghastly. Then I heard Philip bounding noisily into the house, and humming a tune.

I called him up stairs, and completely electrified him with the announcement that I was going to New York.

"I say, Ethel, are you turned crazy, that you're going to start off with this strange man? I declare you shan't do it."

"But you don't understand, Phil. Mrs. Holmes is dying, and she has a revelation to make which very deeply concerns me. You would not have me refuse the prayer of a dying woman? The thought would lie on my conscience all the days of my life."

"Well, then, if you must go, I shall accompany you as far as New Haven, and place you, myself, under the care of the captain. Now there's no use in opposing me, Ethel. I will never let you go off with this stranger until I see you have other protection. I know papa will say I was in the right when he returns."

Philip was now nearly fifteen, and had a will and opinion of his own, which it was no easy matter to oppose. I saw it was useless to attempt to dissuade him from accompanying me.

At eleven that night we were on board the steamer. Our ride had been a silent, rapid one, for I was wrapped too deeply in my own meditations to converse, and Philip was mostly engrossed in watching our companion, whom he evidently regarded with suspicion, although that individual had a very honest physiognomy, and, exhausted with his journey, slept most of the time.

The steamer started out a few moments after we reached her, so Philip had time for only a brief interview with the

captain, who was very courteous, and to whose care the boy reluctantly consigned me.

"Now don't be troubled about anything, Ethel," he said, kissing my forehead with a tenderness that even then struck me, for Philip, like most boys, disliked demonstrative affection. "Go to bed, and to sleep, at once, and take good care of yourself; how pale you are looking!" Then the bell rang, and he hurried off.

I obeyed him, retired, and slept a sound, heavy sleep, without interruption, for my strong emotions had completely exhausted me. When I awaked the next morning, we were in New York.

"Has she come? Oh, has she come?"

A criminal, mounting the scaffold, might have asked in just such tones if the pardon he still looked for had arrived.

"Yes, my child; she is here. Now, do try and not agitate yourself." And the old gentleman put down his grey head, and kissed his daughter, as we kiss those whom "Death hath spoken."

I came forward, and stood before her. Oh, there was only pity in my heart then for Irene Woolsey. Her head, that proud, beautiful head, was propped up on the pillows; her long, rich, purplish hair, flowing over them; and the face, with all its rare beauty of outline, was fearfully sunken and ghastly.

But her eyes—they were larger and darker than ever, and burning with a preternatural brightness, as they fastened themselves on me. "Ethel Lindsay," gasped the sick woman, "come close to me. Your face has haunted me for the last

two years, by night and by day, sometimes fiercely, always reproachfully, and yet, now there is nothing but sorrow in it."

"And I am very sorry for you, Irene—Mrs. Holmes. Try not to disturb yourself any more than is possible; I have come to you, you see, at once."

"Yes, it was good—oh, so very good in you! I have a great deal to say to you," in a quick, gasping tone. "Nurse, I want you and papa to leave me all alone with her now, for what I do must be done quickly."

They hesitated, but the sick woman was inexorable, and at last they left us together; her father entreating me, as he shook my hands, not to allow her to become excited; and the nurse whispered in my ear: "There is a little bell on the table—just ring it if anything happens."

We were alone—the dying woman and I. "Draw your chair close to me, Ethel," she said. "Oh! God knows how I have hoped and prayed for this hour, and, now it has come, my heart fails me—how can I tell you!" And she looked up with such agony and remorse into my face, that I could not bear it.

"You are distressing yourself too much, Irene," I answered, stroking away the unbound hair from the white forehead. "If this disclosure is so painful to you, perhaps it is best not to make it."

"I must! I must!" she almost shrieked. "I cannot die in peace—I cannot meet my God until I do it. Oh! how it has taught me that 'the wages of sin is death.'"

"God is merciful; he will forgive you, Irene."

"But you will not say this, and look at me so, when you learn all that I have done—how I have been your base, relent-

less enemy, and darkened your youth and blighted your whole life!"

I shivered in every limb, and for the moment my heart rose up bitterly against her; but she continued: "Turn your face away, for I cannot have you look at me while I speak."

I buried my face in my hands, and she turned hers away on the pillow; my heart grows sick with the thought of that terrible hour.

Enough, that dumb, shivering, paralyzed, I listened to Irene's disclosures. She held nothing back—just as God's right-hand angel would have opened the books and read it at the judgment, did she read it to me, all her duplicity, all her sin.

Once only I interrupted her. When she came to the letter she had written to Grant Mulford, and shown to Alison Holmes as my own, I sprang to my feet, impelled by a horror I could not control.

"God have mercy upon you, Irene Woolsey!" I cried, wringing my hands, pacing up and down the room, and feeling that I never could.

But I looked at her; what I saw in her face no pen can write; but it calmed me, and I went back to the bedside, and dropped my shaking limbs in the chair, and buried my face in my hands, and gasped, "Go on."

And she went on to the end, and I knew all—why Alison Holmes had deserted me, and why he had written that letter, which came near costing me my reason or my life.

I sat very still. I did not speak a word, or lift up my head, or move a muscle.

And then, Irene's faint, gasping voice crept in upon the silence again: "Wicked as I was, Ethel, I have been fearfully

punished ; for even as Alison's wife I was not happy. At our bridal altar *your* face, white and reproachful, stood before me, and it has followed me ever since, and dearly as I have loved him, when my head was laid close upon his heart, I have often wished it lay deep under the grave-sods, and that yours rested there instead. Oh ! there is no reward in sin, only remorse, agony, death !”

If you could have heard *how* she spoke these words ! I drew my hands from my face and looked at her. A death-bed in which there is no hope is a terrible thing ! There was a fearful struggle in my own heart. All the suffering and desolation I had passed through, and of which she had been the cause, rose up before me at that moment. It did not seem as if I could speak to her.

“Ethel,” moaned the dying woman, “I do not dare to ask *you* to forgive me. I know you never can—but oh ! I am so afraid to die—do you think God will ? Remember, you sometime must lie just where I am, and you will not be sorry then that you answered me !”

Could it be the gay, haughty, brilliant Irene Woolsey, that lay there, and lifted up her piteous face to me, with these words ? I bowed my own, and prayed as I had never prayed before, while the tears shook through my fingers.

At last I looked up, and, taking both hands in mine, I said solemnly : “Irene Holmes, I forgive you all—freely, entirely, as I hope God may forgive me at the judgment.”

She looked up at me with a doubtful, troubled joy, lightening into her white face. “Oh, Ethel, I shall carry those words down into the grave with me, and they'll make my rest lighter there.”

“And God will forgive you, Irene ; try to trust him ; try to look to him now.”

“I am afraid, Ethel, I have been so wicked all my life ;” and again she moaned out those piteous words, “I am afraid to die.”

“But God is more merciful than man, Irene, and if I forgive you, shall not he who is love ?”

“If you would only ask him, Ethel ; I *cannot*.”

And kneeling down there by that death-bed, I prayed for the soul of Irene Woolsey, it seemed as I would have prayed for my own.

When I rose up, I saw a change had come over her face. “I am very faint,” she gasped. “If you would only raise up my head, Ethel.”

I lifted up her head, and she laid it on my shoulder. “I will call some one, Irene !”

“No ; I would rather rest so. Say those blessed words again, Ethel, ‘I forgive you !’”

“I forgive you, and so will God, through Christ, our blessed Redeemer. Oh ! Irene, believe him, trust him, love him.”

“I believe him, Ethel. He will ! he will ! I feel it in my heart now.” She lifted up her head, a new light overswept her whole face, then it dropped down slowly on my shoulder ; and it rested there very quietly, and neither of us spoke. For the first time I looked around the chamber. Its rich curtains of crimson and lace shut out the sunlight. The silken canopy and hangings of the carved bedstead struck their heavy shadows around us. There were marble tables, and oval mirrors, and velvet lounges—little worth then to her who, in the morning of her womanhood, and the bloom of her dazzling beauty, was sailing out on the great ocean of death !

The long silence troubled me, and at last I whispered softly, "Irene ! Irene !"

There was no answer, and I loosed my arms gently, and looked in her face. "Oh God ! she is dead !" struck out sharply from my lips, and then I sank down on the floor, just as, looking up, I saw Clyde Woolsey entering the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WEEK before the death of his sister, Clyde Woolsey, in travelling through the interior of New York State, stopped one afternoon at a pleasant village, set in picturesquely between high hills and long sloping meadows. The gentleman was not feeling quite well, and concluded to remain at the hotel until the next day.

Having no acquaintances, and being quite charmed with the scenery, he walked out in the afternoon, and strolled down to the river, which ran for several miles betwixt a steep wooded hill and broad pasture-fields. In one or two places carriage or foot-paths had been cut down from the summit of the hill to the river, with a narrow walk cleared at the foot, which commanded a very fine view of the village and its suburbs.

Clyde Woolsey crossed over from the pasture to this walk by a foot-bridge which overhung the river, and was absorbed in admiration of the country picture before him, when he was startled by a loud, sharp shriek, a shriek of terrible fright and helplessness.

Looking up, he saw a horse plunging wildly down the hill, every muscle instinct with terror, as, with flaming eyes and foaming mouth the noble animal rushed to the river.

A little girl, not more than twelve years old, was clinging to the horse's mane ; her bonnet had fallen off, her dark curls were

tossing wildly about her pale face ; and shriek after shriek broke from the lips of the frightened child, as the horse plunged on toward the river's brink, where he paused a moment, and then dashed in with his burden !

Both rose in a moment ; Clyde saw the girl fall from the animal, which swam toward the opposite side, and then he sprang into the river, for he was an expert swimmer. When the girl next rose he grasped her by her hair, and with some difficulty—for the river was deep and the current dangerous here—he succeeded in gaining the shore with his burden. The girl was soon restored to consciousness, and overwhelmed her preserver with thanks, while she hung to him, shivering and drenched.

“Don't trouble yourself to thank me now, my dear miss; only tell me your name and where you reside, so you can remove those wet garments.”

Her name was Mary Walters, and her home was only a quarter of a mile from the river. Clyde carried her up the hill, and she managed to walk the remainder of the distance, by leaning on his arm, and pausing frequently to rest herself.

The girl's home proved to be a fine old white farm-house, with fruit trees in front, and thick hedges of buckthorn all around it. The domestic gave an exclamation of surprise and alarm, when Mary and her preserver appeared at the door—Mary being thoroughly drenched by her submersion—which brought Mrs. Walters down stairs at a bound.

“My child ! my child ! what *has* happened ?” cried the frightened mother, staring first at her daughter, then at the gentleman. In a few words Mary explained how the horse had taken fright, and plunged with her into the river, and how she must inevitably have perished, had not the gentleman rescued

and brought her home. If the daughter's thanks had oppressed Clyde, much more so did the mother's, who, with pale face and streaming eyes, blessed him, over and over again, as the preserver of her darling child.

She insisted that his trunk should be brought from the hotel, as with his saturated garments he was in no condition to return to it. He at last yielded to Mrs. Walter's earnest solicitations, and passed the night at her residence. In the morning he awoke with a severe cold, contracted by his sudden plunge into the river, and this settled into a fever, more prostrating than dangerous, but one requiring constant and judicious nursing, which he received from his hostess, who could not be grateful enough to him who had saved the life of her child.

Clyde grew much interested in Mrs. Walters and her two charming daughters, of which Mary was the elder. She was a widow, and resided with her father, a grey-haired, fine looking old man, who seemed almost to worship his grandchildren; and who, on learning of Mary's narrow escape, would at once have dismissed his man-servant for allowing her to ride the new animal he had just purchased of a friend, had it not been for Mrs. Walters' urgent solicitations in his behalf, as John was an old servant of the family.

Mrs. Walters was still young and pretty; but the shadow of past sorrows looked out of her gentle eyes, and gave a touching sadness to her smile.

Clyde passed several very happy days in the farm-house. He chatted about crops, the French Revolution, and Jefferson's administration, with the old man, and frolicked, when he was able, with the children; and in the evening entertained them all with descriptions and anecdotes of his travels in Europe.

A week expired, and Clyde was almost recovered. He was sitting in the parlor one evening, reading some poems to his hostess, while Nettie (her youngest daughter) was combing his hair, when Mary bounded in suddenly, her large, hazel eyes kindled up with some joyful excitement.

"Oh, mother! I have such news to tell you!" she cried, breathlessly. "You will be so astonished!"

"But, my dear, you have interrupted Mr. Woolsey," gently chided the mother.

"You will excuse me, won't you?" She went up to him, in her pretty, childish way, and placed her hand in his.

"Certainly, my child. Come round here, Nettie, please, and comb the front side of my hair," drawing the little girl into his lap, and looking down admiringly on the vivacious face that was always dimpling and sparkling between its golden curls, for Nettie was a wild, lively little creature.

"You remember that novel we read last summer, and cried over so much, mamma?"

"Yes, daughter."

"Well, I have found out the name of the authoress. You would never guess who it is, but it's somebody we all know."

"Well, you're not going to keep us in suspense, then?" Mrs. Walters put down her work.

"It's Ethel Lindsay, mamma!" An exclamation broke simultaneously from Mrs. Walters and Nettie, while Clyde started, and looked up.

"Yes, it is certainly; for you remember, mamma, you lent the book, a few weeks ago, to Mrs. Hope. Well, I went home this afternoon with Mary, from my drawing teacher's; they had company from New York, and the book lay on the table.

One of the gentlemen, a Mr. Miles, took it up and said, 'I have the pleasure of knowing the authoress, and her real name is Ethel Lindsay. I met her several times at her relatives' last winter.'

"Oh, won't you please describe her to me, sir?" I spoke up suddenly, though I had not been introduced to the gentleman. 'I knew an Ethel Lindsay once.'

"They all smiled at my earnestness, but the gentleman was very kind, and said—

"Well, let me see. She is a little below medium height, and is neither a blonde nor a brunette, with a pale, rather thin face, and irregular features. I remember her eyes struck me most forcibly, as they did all others who observed her attentively. They were large, and a sort of dark brown, I think, not dazzling or perhaps beautiful, unless she is excited, when it is a pleasure to sit still and watch them; that is all that is striking about her, I believe! Now, mother, wasn't this Ethel Lindsay to perfection?"

"Yes, it must be *she*, I think. Oh, if I could only see her face!"

"He said, too, that she was an orphan, and resided somewhere in New England with a minister, Mr. Gerald Maltby, and his sister who had adopted her."

"That is the very name she herself gave me!" said Mrs. Walters, rising up. "I will write to her this very night; and if you will excuse me, Mr. Woolsey, go over and see this Mr. Miles at once, and obtain her address."

"It will be useless, mamma," spoke up Mary. "I asked him myself, and he said he was unacquainted with the friends Miss Lindsay remained with while in New York. He thought, how-

ever, he could obtain her address by writing, and promised to do so. Besides, they are all gone out now."

Mrs. Walters sat down. "I would give more to see her than any other human being," she murmured.

Here Clyde spoke, for the gentleman had listened with much interest to this conversation. "I, too, formerly knew this young lady. She was visiting a friend of mine in New York; I have not seen her book, but I knew she was an authoress."

"You *did*!—you knew Ethel Lindsay!" cried his surprised auditors, in one breath.

"Yes; will you tell me first, Mrs. Walters, something of your acquaintance with her?" asked Clyde, his curiosity quite stimulated.

There was evident embarrassment and hesitation in the lady's manner. "Do tell him, do tell him now, mamma," whispered Mary. "It is such a beautiful story—he knows her, too."

Clyde Woolsey was a man that one intuitively trusted. Mrs. Walters related that sad story of her life, with which the reader is acquainted of her early marriage—of her father's anger, of her husband's death, of the poverty and wretchedness to which she and her children were reduced, and of her brief acquaintance with me.

"I fully believe she saved my own life and my children's," said the lady; "for I should never have arisen from that bed, if she had not come to me, an angel of pity and charity."

"I can see her now, can't you, Mary?" chimed in Nettie, "as she burst into that dark old chamber, where we were so cold and hungry, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, while she tossed the cakes into our hands, crying, 'There, eat, eat quick, little children!'"

"But you say," and they who heard did not imagine how deeply the brother's heart palpitated with this question, "you say, Mrs. Walters, that you had finished some work for a young lady who was residing at the time with Miss Lindsay, and she never paid you; do you recollect her name?"

"No—stop, I think it was Irene, Irene something, I forget what. She was a tall, very beautiful girl, with dazzling eyes, and long, black curls; but her cold, haughty manner half neutralized the effect of her beauty."

"And you never did any sewing for Miss Lindsay?"

"Not a stitch. I left a message for the young lady for whom I worked. Whether she ever received it I cannot say, but if she did, and had a heart, it must have startled her."

"And no one was aware of Ethel's generosity?"

"No one; she was very much afraid her friends would be alarmed at her absence that morning on which she accompanied us to the cars. We were so unfortunate losing her address, but in the great excitement of our journey, and the joy of being reconciled, I lost sight of everything else for a few days."

Before the gentleman could reply, there was a peremptory summons of the door bell, and a moment after the errand-boy at the hotel stood in the parlor, informing Clyde Woolsey that a message had just been received there for him. His sister, Mrs. Holmes, was very ill, and if he wished to see her alive, it would be necessary that he should start at once for New York. For a moment the news quite overcame him; and he sat pale and speechless, amid the pitying exclamations of Mrs. Walters and her children. But his strong heart rallied in a little time.

"I shall start for New York to-night," he said, with that tone and manner which always prohibited discussion.

For a few moments Clyde Woolsey and I looked at each other. I hardly think the dead face was whiter than the living ones. At last I pointed to the pillows, and tried to speak, but the words died on my lips. Just then the nurse came in. I do not remember anything that occurred for the next two hours.

In the afternoon, I found myself lying on a bed, in one of the chambers of the hotel, with strangers all around me. It was some time before I could recollect what had brought me there, and what I had undergone.

As soon as I could sit up, the nurse and a lady friend of Irene's came in, and wished to know all the particulars of her last moments; informing me that her father had had frequent spasms since her death, and that he was now insensible. I told them all I could, without in any wise betraying the story of the dead woman.

Then I said, "I can be of no further service here. I must return home to-night.

"Home!" the half dozen people in the room simultaneously exclaimed, "You look like one risen from the dead now."

"I can't help it. I shall be no better while I am here," I said, positively, and looking off with a great longing to the quiet of the Parsonage; for my nervous system had undergone a terrible shock.

I am certain they all thought I was demented when I insisted upon going at once, and entreated some one to call a

carriage. At last the nurse said: "I will call Mr. Woolsey to see the lady. He has inquired about her a number of times; but poor man! he has trouble on his heart this day, the land knows, with his sister dead, and his father in fits."

In a few moments she returned with Mr. Woolsey, and they left us alone together. There was a strange, unfathomable expression in his eyes, as he took my hand, and looked in my face; this struck me even then, and I was not in a condition to observe very acutely; it was a startled, half-horrified, half-pitying expression, as if some sudden appalling evil had chanced to him or me.

"How do you feel now?" he asked (the nurse's statement had probably alarmed him).

"Better, thank you. Your sister, Mr. Woolsey, had some private communications to make to me, which rendered it necessary that we should be quite alone. After these were over, I should have summoned some one, but she forbade it, and so I was alone with her when she died." I gave him an account of her last moments, withholding all expressions which would have excited any suspicions of the truth; and looking up to him, as I concluded, I said from my heart: "Mr. Woolsey, I believe your sister is in heaven." He looked at me with a strained, solemn gaze—he covered his face with his hands; I could see his whole frame shiver, but he did not speak. And then the great breathless longing to get out from the hotel—to be at home again—came over me, and I broke the silence:

"Mr. Woolsey, I can be of no further use here; the boat leaves at three for New Haven, and I *must* be there in time for it," rising up with considerable difficulty.

He urged my remaining—almost insisted on it, until I said:

"I am ill in body and in mind. I shall not grow any better while I am here."

He gazed at me doubtfully. "Perhaps you are right. The nurse's husband shall accompany you home," and he left me.

A little later he returned. "The carriage is at the door," he said. "John will meet you at the boat, and I will accompany you there."

I simply wanted to be alone. Perhaps the presence of those I best loved on earth would have been oppressive just then; for I had not yet recovered from the great shock of Irene's disclosures and death.

Unconsciously I waved him off. "No, thank you, Mr. Woolsey, I would rather go alone."

He stepped back as though it were a sharp repulse, but he did not speak, though he accompanied me to the carriage. After I was seated there, I offered him my hand: "Mr. Woolsey, believe me, I sympathize with you deeply."

The pale, stern mouth quivered like a child's. He bowed his head over my hand. "Ethel Lindsay, may God reward you!" he whispered huskily, and then he closed the carriage door.

I reached home the evening of the next day, for we were obliged to pass the night in New Haven, where I paced the room until morning, too much excited to get a moment's sleep.

"Oh! I am so glad to get you back again!" cried Philip, as he met me at the door. "I've been so troubled about you, I haven't had a moment's peace since you left. Why, Ethel, what *has* happened to you? Your face is as white as a spirit, and you've grown two years older."

"Very likely, Philip; I've undergone a great deal since we parted; and I held Mrs. Holmes in my arms, all alone, when she died."

Then I went up stairs to my bed, which I did not leave for three days.

A week later the minister and his sister returned. I was better then, but not strong. They exclaimed at once on my changed appearance. I did not tell them until the next day what had occasioned it; but I felt that justice to Alison and myself demanded they should know it all.

They were greatly shocked. As for me, it was a lesson I took to my heart, and it made it humbler. God had spoken to me. I saw how in the end "the wicked did not triumph!" I had beholden what a terrible thing death-bed remorse is, and shudderingly every night I prayed "God save me from it!"

About three months after Mrs. Holmes' death, I received a letter from Mrs. Walters. It was one of those letters that speak from one heart to another. She told me of her return, and of her first meeting with her old father, in words that drew tears from my eyes, and how at present she was very happy with him and her children.

She acquainted me, also, with her meeting with Mr. Woolsey, and how a recent letter from him had furnished her with my address. She congratulated me much on my literary success, and closed with expressions of the warmest gratitude, and urgent invitations for me to visit her.

"Well, I haven't lived for nothing," I remarked to Aunt Ruth, as I refolded the letter.

CHAPTER XXII.

"ALISON HOLMES! Thank God this is you!"

"Why, Clyde Woolsey, my old fellow, I'm glad to see you—glad from the bottom of my heart!" and the two men stood still a moment, and looked into each other's faces.

Two years had elapsed since Irene's death, and the young men met for the first time since that event.

They were both strolling along the *Rue de Rivoli*, gazing at the Tuileries, whose every window was flashing a tide of light on those massive grey stone walls, or watching the tide of gay, effervescent French life, that rolled under the graceful arcades.

"Where did you come from?" Each asked the question simultaneously, as they stood gazing at each other.

Clyde answered first. "From the Hôtel Maurice, where Mrs. Woolsey and I have been stopping for the last month."

"And I," returned Alison, "have been here for a week visiting some old friends—Americans."

"This is a real God-send, Alison," answered Clyde, as he drew his arm into that of his friend, and they walked slowly on together. "Do you know I have been on the constant search for you, this last year and more?"

"You have, my dear fellow? Well, it's too bad, and I must fling myself on your charity, for behaving as I have done. But the truth is, I enjoyed the new life I've been leading so

intensely, that I determined to throw up for a little while all old friends and associations, until I grew tired of it."

"You are a very strange man, Alison Holmes. Where have you been, and what do you mean by this 'new life' you've been leading?"

"One question at a time, my dear Yankee. I've been in Germany half of the time, the rest in Spain, Switzerland, and half a dozen weeks I gave to Italy. I've been leading a kind of wandering, anomalous sort of existence; throwing aside, as I said, all social ligatures and restraints, living my own honest, untrammelled life. I've studied the arts some, but human nature a great deal more. In short, I've been to school among these foreign people—not in courts, but in cottages; not among princes, but among peasants, and they've taught me a good many lessons I should never have learned elsewhere."

Clyde smiled. "Well, I always thought you had a gipsy vein in you somewhere. But why in the world didn't you wait when you came home, a year and a half ago, until I could see you?"

"Because you were ill at the time, and they told me it would be a month before you could prudently leave the South. Then everything reminded me so forcibly of one whose name is very dear to both of us. You know it was only my mother's delicate health which prevented my sailing at once for home, when I received the sad intelligence."

"I know—I know, Alison. It could have done no good then." Clyde spoke very sadly, and then he grew abstracted, only answering Alison's questions in monosyllables, and leaving him to sustain the whole conversation.

At last, however, he broke into the midst of his friend's

remarks abruptly, and rapidly, as though it cost him a strong effort. "See here, Alison, I have a disclosure to make to you, which I would rather give my right hand than do, but the duty I owe to another most deeply wronged, imperatively demands that I make the confession, and the sooner it is over the better. For the last two years it has not given me one day of perfect peace, or one night of quiet slumber."

He spoke with a solemnity that at once awed Alison and stimulated his curiosity.

They had now reached the corner of the *Rue de la paix*, opposite the *Jardin des Tuileries*, and it struck Clyde that he could make this revelation better among the quiet shadows of those grand old chestnut trees, with the stars looking down steadfastly through the thick boughs, and strengthening his heart with thoughts of God, than he could in his rooms at the hotel, as he had previously determined.

"Come in here," he said. "The story is for your ears alone, unless the dead can hear, and we will find some obscure corner where we can talk undisturbed."

And Alison consented at once, more impressed with his companion's manner than he was himself aware of; and they descended together the broad stone staircase which leads into the garden.

Passing hurriedly along the brilliantly illuminated avenues, filled with life, and mirth, and beauty, they came at last to the terrace which borders the Seine. Here all was remote and quiet. The river rolled dark and solemn beneath them. The soft winds of the newly-born summer palpitated among the thick boughs, like the dying notes of the *Miserere*. The stars looked down serene and steadfast through the branches, as

God's eyes look down upon the hearts of the children of men.

"We will sit here," said Clyde, offering his companion a chair, and taking another.

Alison waited for Clyde to speak, so there was a silence for several minutes, and when the latter broke it—it was more to himself than to his brother-in-law that he spoke.

"She was my sister—my own sister," he murmured, with a mixture of tenderness and reproach, "and even now, though I heard her own lips speak it, it doesn't seem possible she could have done this great sin."

"What do you mean—what do you mean?" cried Alison, grasping his friend's arm, and gazing at him with a mixture of surprise and alarm. "Do talk so one can understand you, Clyde."

"Well, I will," with what seemed a very painful effort, even for his strong will. "Alison, my sister was your wife, and I know you loved her, at least enough to be a kind and tender husband to her. Now, if she had done a great wrong to another, and done this for love of you, could you forgive her—at least, could you keep from hating her memory?"

"I could forgive her!" said Alison, solemnly, as the question was asked, and yet with a half-shocked, half-bewildered look in his face.

"And if, by a series of falsehoods, and a long course of deception, she rifled another of the affection that rightly belonged to her, and perjured herself at the altar, when she took her vows of wifhood, and laid her head on your breast, where she knew that, in the sight of God, it had no right or title to lie, could you, knowing all this was done for love of you, still say, 'I do not hate her?'"

"I hope I could, Clyde. But you astound, you bewilder me. Either you or I, man, must be going mad. I believe this is all a horrible dream!" and he drew his hand across his forehead.

And then Clyde drew a little closer to Alison, and spoke in a lower tone, as though he feared the winds might carry up his words to the birds that slept among the chestnut boughs.

He talked rapidly, though, commencing with his visit in the country, two years before, and his hasty summons therefrom, on account of his sister's illness, and told how, almost frantic with anxiety, when he reached the hotel, he inquired of the first waiter he met if Mrs. Holmes was yet living, and learning to his unspeakable joy she was, he hastened up to her apartments, trusting more to his own sagacity to find these than to the waiter's obscure directions.

Clyde, however, mistook the way, and somehow groped into a narrow passage, which communicated directly with his sister's chamber. The door was ajar, and he was about bursting through this, when a cry, sharp and full of agony, arrested his steps.

"God have mercy upon you, Irene Woolsey!" and looking almost involuntarily through the door, he saw Ethel Lindsay pacing the room, with her hands locked together, and her face white as the dead.

Here Alison interrupted the speaker, sharply, desperately, as he grasped his arm. "Ethel Lindsay!" he cried, "Irene Holmes never *dared* to wrong her."

"Deeply, pitilessly, as one woman *can* wrong another." And then Clyde Woolsey went on repeating to his almost paralyzed hearer all he had heard in that death-chamber. Word for word he repeated it, holding nothing back; he did not pause

until Alison knew all his wife's duplicity, knew that Ethel Lindsay had been *true, in heart and in deed, to him*. Alison did not interrupt him by a word or sign, except by an occasional low groan.

"And so she loved me, she loved me all this time—my little Ethel!" he said, and the strong man's voice was shaken with the sobs behind it, and the white face he lifted to Clyde Woolsey worked convulsively as a woman's.

"And I loved her, too, God knows I did, better than any other woman that ever walked this earth. Oh! what must she have endured and suffered, Ethel, my little Ethel!"

"She is an angel among women, Alison, and (it was to right her, so terribly wronged, that for the last year I have sought you everywhere. I should have made all this known to you in America, but you left before I was sufficiently recovered from that long fever into which all these things threw me, to come to you.

"I saw my duty, and to-night I have done it, though I would sooner have sacrificed my own life than thus have blackened my sister's memory forever, in the eyes of the man for whose sake she did all these things. But, as I said, Ethel Lindsay's reproachful eyes have been before me, by night and by day, ever since that terrible death-hour. But I have done her justice now. *She is righted at last.*"

"It is too late. She cannot be righted now," said Alison, sinking back into his seat with a gesture of despair.

"No, no." Clyde spoke vehemently. "You are the *one* only man she ever loved, and you have no reason to doubt her heart is still yours. Take the first steamer you can, and return to her. Tell her all you have learned to-night, and

what woman would not, under these circumstances, forgive the man of her loving?

"You are both young, and the future lies bright before you. Sitting under your own 'vine and fig tree,' you shall live over the dreams of five years ago, and as Ethel, far more deeply wronged than you, forgave her who is dead, so speak softly of her sometimes, remembering that she loved you."

"You torture, you torture me, Clyde Woolsey!" cried the young man, springing wildly to his feet, and looking at his friend with a kind of stony desperation.

"Have I not said it was too late for Ethel Lindsay to be righted? *Four weeks ago this night, I was married!*"

The hearer of these words gave a low groan, and sank back feebly in his chair. It was indeed "too late," and Ethel Lindsay must still suffer and walk alone. If the sacrifice of his own life could have made it otherwise, Clyde Woolsey would have freely made it. For a moment, in the overwhelming darkness of that hour, he wondered whether there was a God who ruled in the counsels of men!

The gentlemen did not meet but once more in Paris, and this was two days later at the Hôtel Maurice, where Alison called on his friend. Both were calmer than when they separated. Alison was soon to return to America, with his bride and her family, but he had come to a fixed resolution not to visit New England, or seek an interview with me.

"I dare not trust myself to this awakening of old memories," he said to Clyde, "and if Ethel's heart has been learning anything of peace, during these years, it would be sin to disturb it now. But it will cost me a great deal to keep this resolution."

"Duty often costs us a great effort," answered Clyde, with a faint smile.

"Clyde, you are a noble fellow—a real moral hero!" cried Alison impetuously, seizing hold of his friend's hand, while genuine admiration kindled up his fine eyes. "I declare there isn't one man in a million who would have done what you did night before last."

"There! don't speak of it Al," with that old powerful wave of the hand, that had so often silenced others. "I could not have died in peace, had I let this matter pass. My conscience, at least, is at rest now."

"But you are all packed up," looking at the trunks. "You're not going to start off before we have seen anything of you?"

"I am compelled to—Mrs. Woolsey is seriously ill again, so her father writes me. I believe I told you they were at Lyons, and that I had promised to join them there this week."

"It is too bad!" answered Alison, with a lowering brow. "I told Mrs. Holmes I should certainly bring you back to dine with us."

"She will excuse me, doubtless, when you give her my reasons for not accepting your invitation. By the by, Al, you have not told me what sort of a lady she is, or where you found her."

"I found her at Rome. She was travelling with her parents, and is a South Carolinian—as young and artless as she is bewitching and beautiful. She's a perfect child, petted and spoiled all her life—a real Dora Copperfield, with a warm little heart which belongs entirely to your humble servant."

"You must be a very fascinating man to charm women so?" answered Clyde, looking at his companion, and remembering how well three women had loved him.

Alison had his share of natural vanity, and he smiled complacently, as he tapped his boot with his cane; and somehow the smile pained Clyde; but a moment later they both sighed—sighed for the thought of Ethel Lindsay!

A little later than this they parted, with sincere regret on both sides, for the young men were much attached to each other. Clyde had intended to return home next month, but the news of Mrs. Woolsey's illness would, he said, probably detain him in France. Alison had, on the whole, borne the shock which accompanied the knowledge of Irene's baseness, better than her brother had feared; and he saw that he was too much attached to his wife ever to occasion her any unhappiness on this account. He would be sad at times, probably, but then his spirits were elastic, his temperament was joyous; and Clyde did not sorrow much for the future of Alison Holmes.

The young husband found his wife much feebler than he anticipated. Everything that the most watchful attention, or the skill of the best physicians could devise for recovery was done; but the seeds of consumption were indigenous to her constitution; and Meltha Woolsey was one of those fair, fragile plants, that could not bear long even the softest airs of this world. It soon became apparent to all who saw her that the end of her life must be drawing nigh. She herself was the last to suspect this, and she had frequent intervals of apparent convalescence, as is usual in her disease. But every month found her with less strength, and though she did not suffer much, the short journeys which she took, from time to time, with her husband and father, who vainly hoped to find some invigorating air, or some healing waters, exhausted her more and more.

Finally the gentle invalid began to realize her own situation.

There are some lives that remind one of quiet lakes shut in among green hills, with sunshine and summer flowers their only companions. Meltha Woolsey's was one of these. Great tenderness had been about her from her birth-hour, and it seemed as if her life had been singularly free from all the sorrows and discords which are the heritage of humanity.

At first it was very hard for the young wife to feel that she must die, but she knew she would go from the love of this world to the love that is in heaven; and at last she sat in the golden twilights with her thin fingers clasped round her husband's, and talked peacefully, smilingly, of going home first.

"I shall only hear the angels sing a little before you, Clyde, my Clyde, that I have loved from my early girlhood," she said, with her blue eyes, filled with their last smiles, wandering very tenderly over his face.

"But I am not afraid, not sorry even to die; for God who has given me your love on earth will give me his in heaven.

"You will not forget me—you will be very kind to poor papa, for Meltha's sake, my husband?" And Clyde promised as well as his aching heart would let him; for the wife of his youth was most tenderly beloved, and the future looked to him so cold and desolate without her, that he almost wished he could lie down at once by her side, and so they should sleep peacefully together till the morning of the Resurrection.

Thus, one summer afternoon, when the sunset was flushing with its ripe glory the vintages on the Rhine, Meltha Herrick bowed down her bright head, like a broken lily, on her husband's breast, and died.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was Thanksgiving at the Parsonage. That day which is always memorable for the short, but triumphant reign of turkeys and turnip sauce, of pumpkin pies and plum preserves.

We had had a descent of country cousins from the first to the fifth generation, and Jane, with some trepidation, had gone into the pantry, where she was abundantly reassured by a survey of her shelves, covered with rows of mince, and cranberry, and pumpkin pies, to say nothing of her recollections of two fat turkeys, and several fine chickens, whose complexions were at that moment undergoing a transformation to the orthodox brown, in the kitchen oven; besides this, she had a comfortable consciousness of possessing various concomitants in the shape of sauces and salads, puddings and preserves.

"Well, if they can eat all that at one dinner, they'll never eat another, that's sartin," was the triumphant conclusion of Jane's survey, as she hastened off to see if Miss Ethel had "beat them are eggs enough," it being understood that once in the year I must, *no lens volens*, put aside my pen, and be pressed into culinary service.

But this Thanksgiving day dawned amid very agreeable auspices over the plethoric Parsonage. The elder Maltbys sat round the fire, and told anecdotes, and talked of old friends, the living and the dead; for, alas! Thanksgivings have many guests that are not counted with the seats at the table, and the

fireside! The younger ones romped and shouted in obstreperous freedom through the house, as it was understood the day granted them immunity for any amount of noise and mischief.

After we returned from church, where, it was generally conceded, Uncle Gerald had given us a remarkably fine discourse, Aunt Ruth and Jane went about setting the table, which was no small task, while I withdrew with the younger portion of our guests to the parlor, and we soon became absorbed in "Hunt the Slipper," "Puss in the Corner," "Blind Man's Buff," etc.

I was very happy this Thanksgiving, and entered into the children's enjoyment with a heartiness that surprised even myself.

The last two years had not been outwardly *very* eventful to me. The journey which I had made with Philip the previous spring, to Ohio, and from which I had not returned until autumn, forms the most prominent feature in the time, as I look back on it. Philip was still absent; he had had a serious fall while skating on the river with some of his classmates the winter before. Confinement to the house had been almost intolerable to one of his active temperament; and as he was hardly able to return to his studies in the spring, his physician strongly recommended a journey for him.

"It will do both the children good," said the parson to his sister, "and then, Ethel will be obliged to put aside that endless writing for awhile. I think I'll post them off to Uncle John, in Ohio."

Philip was quite beside himself with delight at the idea of going, and I was scarcely less pleased with the thought of being holding the prairies.

Uncle John was a wealthy farmer, who resided near Cincinnati, in a spacious, old-fashioned homestead. His children were all married, and Philip and I met with the most cordial reception from him and his wife. To be brief, we had a delightful visit, and learned much in experience and observation, as one can, if he have the will, from almost all circumstances in life.

I returned home, with some friends in Cincinnati, leaving Phil behind, who was so enamored of the West that he persuaded his father to allow him to remain until winter.

There was a great shouting and scampering, for we were in the midst of "blind man's buff," and with a handkerchief drawn tightly across my eyes, I was groping about the room, endeavoring to grasp some one of the little heads that managed to elude me so dexterously.

Suddenly I heard the door open, and a deep hush followed the noise and laughter, broken only by an occasional titter.

"Who's there?" I demanded. There was no answer for a moment, and then a pair of arms were drawn suddenly around my waist, and a voice I recognized in a moment, said, "Catch me, Ethel."

I tossed off my handkerchief, and looked up in the laughing face of Philip Maltby.

"Why, Phil, you darling fellow, how glad I am to see you!" I cried, giving him a true sisterly hug.

"That's right, Ethel," he said, warmly returning it. "The fact is, I believe my olfactories got a sniff of aunty's chicken-pie, away off in Ohio, for when you wrote me Thanksgiving was appointed for the twenty-eighth, I couldn't stand it any longer. So, last Friday I just packed up, and hurried off; and here I stand, at your service, with a sound body, and an alarming ap-

petite for roast turkey and mince pies, at this present speaking."

Philip's return made our happiness complete. It seemed as if all the hearts that gathered around that Thanksgiving dinner might say, "It is enough;" Uncle Gerald's did, certainly, in the blessing he asked there, so eloquent and tender that it drew tears to all our eyes.

Thanksgiving dinners are the only fashionably late ones in which the country people of New England indulge, and it grew dark while we sat and chatted about the table. Just as Jane brought in the lights (it is strange I remember it so vividly), Philip turned around and said to me, abruptly, "Oh, Ethel, I must tell you; I travelled nearly two-thirds of the way home in company with a young South Carolinian, a first-rate fellow, with whom I became well acquainted in a short time. He was a student returning to Yale, late in the term, because he had been home to visit a cousin of his, who was married last spring, in Italy, to Alison Holmes."

My heart gave a sudden bound, and Aunt Ruth a little shriek of surprise and a glance of alarm at me. I motioned to Philip to proceed, certain that neither he nor our guests had observed my emotion.

"Well, it must be the one that visited here so long ago, for, on inquiring, I learned that he was a widower, and his first wife's name was Irene Woolsey. By the by, too, her brother's wife, that I've heard you talk so much about, is dead,"

"Meltha Herrick! *she* isn't dead!" springing to my feet.

"Yes, she is, too; she died of consumption, last summer, in Germany. Dear me, Ethel, how white you look!"

No wonder I did, when I could scarcely get up to my own

room. Meltna and I had not corresponded for several years, but the fault was entirely on my side. After my engagement with Alison was broken, it was necessary I should, as far as possible, ignore all old associations, and I could not inflict upon myself the torture of reviving them by writing her. Then, her marriage had prolonged my silence, because I was confident, from her husband's manner when I was at Mr. Herrick's, that he disliked me, and although I now comprehended his reasons for this, still I could do nothing to neutralize his prejudices.

But I had always loved sweet Meltha Herrick, and the shock of her death was a severe one; so, certainly, was the news of Alison's second marriage. It cost me many a pang, not like the old ones, but then, pangs that were hard to conquer. I did not so much love Alison himself, as I felt my woman's need of loving somebody, and he stood, for a sign and token in my soul. I had outgrown him, but my heart had learned no new song; so its memories clung to him. He was simply the incarnation of my first love-dream, and perhaps no woman is ever altogether indifferent to him who is this.

"The children have sent up by me a most urgent petition that you will come down and have one more game with them, before they go to bed," said Aunt Ruth, as she came into the room softly.

She did not speak of Alison, but the way in which she stroked my hair, said very plainly, "I am sorry for you, my child."

I was very much disinclined to return to the noisy mirth down stairs, but knew Philip and the company would be pained at my absence, so with a great effort I answered her, "I will go down, aunty." And the sacrifice brought its own reward.

It was the last day of summer again, and sitting where I sat five years before, I wrote the last word of my second book.

It was very unlike my first one, both in plan and detail, and I had devoted twice as much time and study to it.

I looked off at the flush of clouds lying low in the west, and sighed, and wondered afterwards why I sighed.

"I'm sure I have everything I want," I mused. "The sun won't go down to-night upon a human being who has greater cause for gratitude than you, Ethel Lindsay. All the dreams of your girlhood are realized; laurels have crowned, and loving friends been given to you, and now you ought to lift up your hands and say reverently to your God, from the depths of your soul, 'I am satisfied.'"

And then I rose up, and walked across the room, thoughtfully. "I can't say this, God forgive me, my heart doesn't say it," I mused. "There's a want, a dull aching here, that all these things *cannot* satisfy. I wonder what it is! I think sometimes it is a great longing to love somebody, as I *might* love, and to be so loved in return.

"But the men I see do not approach my ideal standard; pleasant acquaintances, dear friends, even—some of them are, but there are none to whom the inner doors of my heart ever swing open.

"Some time, I suppose, people will call me an 'old maid'; I don't mind this, but I dread the walking alone through life, the bearing down to the grave this great ocean of tenderness unfathomed, unappropriated!

"And yet I know that now yonder sun is setting upon the man before whom my soul would rise up, and say, 'My lord and my king,' and God help us both if we must go groping on

through our separate life-paths, never looking upon each other, unless it may be beside the cock flowing of our Father's fountains in heaven. Fame, and fortune, and friends, never satisfied the heart of a woman. I see it all now; and love is the one great solemn reality of life, and woe be to that woman whose heart says to all men, sadly and forever, 'Not you! not you!'

And then I sat down again, and the tears ran through my fingers, ran down and plashed on the pages I had just finished with so much care, and blurred the writing. I did not mind then; I should hardly have cared if one had taken that work of many wearisome days and nights, and thrust it into the flames.

And while I sat there weeping, God's angel passed that way.

The door-bell rang suddenly. I scarcely noticed this the first time nor the second, but when I heard the third summons, I recollected that Aunt Ruth had spoken at dinner about some calls she must make that afternoon, and Jane had said she must run down to the milliner's for her new bonnet. Probably I was now quite alone in the house.

All this flashed through my mind in a moment. I sprang up, bathed my flushed face, and hurried down stairs.

"Miss Lindsay."

"Mr. Woolsey."

I believe we spoke the names simultaneously, and then we both stood still, looking at each other, I in dumb surprise, and he from a variety of feelings I did not comprehend. I spoke first:

"Will you walk in, Mr. Woolsey?" extending my hand.

He took it, and it struck me that an expression of pain passed over his face.

"Thank you, with your permission, I will intrude upon your time half an hour, as I have some important messages for you."

We went into the parlor together, I in a flutter of surprise and curiosity.

"You recognized me, then, at once?" I said, for want of something better to say, as we seated ourselves. His deep, strong, steady eyes—eyes before which, it seemed to me, from the first hour I saw them, anything mean or false must shrink away, self-accused and convicted—searched every lineament of my face.

"Yes, you are not altered in the very least, that I can see; certainly you do not look a day older than when we parted."

"Uncle Gerald says I have found the fountain of perpetual youth," I gaily resumed; and then I thought, and added, "but I haven't, not even that of perpetual peace," and sighed.

The same expression I had observed in the hall crossed his face again, and the manner of each towards the other was cold, and constrained, for I *felt* that his estimate of me must be a very low one, and that it must always remain so. At last he spoke rapidly:

"You have heard of—that Mrs. Woolsey has left us?"

"Yes," glancing at his mourning, "I learned it about six months after her death, and I was greatly pained, for I always loved Mrs. Woolsey as I have very few on earth."

The still face warmed and brightened with a smile to which, oh, Clyde Woolsey! all things beautiful were cold and tame.

"Did you, indeed! I cannot tell you how grateful, how *glad*," correcting himself, "I am to hear it! And you will know now that this affection was warmly reciprocated, for she spoke of you very often during the last day of her life."

"Of me! of me!" with tears starting into my eyes.

"Yes, and it is to fulfill one of her dying requests that I am here to-day, Miss Lindsay. My Meltha retained her consciousness to the last, and she said to me, not more than three hours before all was over, that your face had been haunting her the night before, looking down on her, to use her own expression, with the clear, far-off light in your eyes, and the old drooping forward of your neck, so like the lilies in the brook under the great mountain at Pine Wood. 'How I wish I could see her!' she murmured many times. Then, not more than half an hour before she ceased speaking, she drew off a ring from her finger: 'Clyde, my husband, when I am gone, and you return to America, promise me that you will see Ethel Lindsay, and give this to her, and tell her to wear it for *my* sake, for I loved her always?' And I promised her," and the gentleman drew a small, daintily-carved pearl box from his pocket, and gave it to me.

I opened it; there was a plain, but heavy gold ring inside, and seeing this, I buried my face in my hands, and, forgetful of the man before me, sobbed very bitterly for the memory of Meltha Herrick.

"She is in heaven, Miss Lindsay, she was very glad to go, even though the world was so bright to her," said at last, deep and solemn, the voice of Clyde Woolsey.

Then he gave me the details of her last hours, and I knew he had spoken truth when he said "Meltha was in heaven."

I still felt that lingering interest for Alison Holmes that we always take in those who have at one time been all he had been to me, and I wished especially to learn something of his wife; so I asked, with a little hesitancy—

"I suppose you see your brother-in-law, Mr. Alison Holmes, occasionally. Is he in America now?"

My guest started and winced as a man does when suddenly stung; then he looked at me a moment, with something of pity, and sorrow, and self-abasement in his eyes, that I could not at all comprehend.

"I saw him last spring in South Carolina."

I wanted to inquire about Alison's wife, but remembering *who* her predecessor had been, a feeling of delicacy restrained me. This question, after a pause, opened the way.

"Have *you* heard anything of him since his return from France?"

"Only that he was married again."

His brow lightened.

"Ah, you knew this, then?"

"Yes, have you seen the lady, and whom is she like?"

"Like a great many other women, pretty, and petted, and spoiled, with no great depth of character, and yet warm-hearted and impulsive; altogether a very graceful, charming little body."

"Alison always was very fond of beauty," I said, and then I sighed, hardly knowing *why*, and then I looked up, and met those penetrating eyes fastened on my face. It flushed a little, for I remembered Clyde was with us at Mr. Herrick's, and probably knew of my engagement. So I went on to speak of other matters, about the beauty of the season, etc.

"But won't you remain to tea, Mr. Woolsey? I am expecting uncle and aunt in every moment, and they will be most happy to see you."

"Thank you, I cannot think of it. I leave to-morrow morn-

ing in the first train, and join some friends at noon for a tour to the White Mountains."

I accompanied him to the door, wishing, I could not tell why, that I could say something to prevail upon him to stay; but my wits were never very fertile in devising expedients to meet contingencies of this kind.

Mr. Woolsey gave me his hand at parting, with a deference which I had never seen him manifest towards any human being, and which greatly puzzled me. Then he looked a moment, earnestly and mournfully, into my face.

"Good bye, Miss Lindsay. May God bless you with his *best* gifts!"

And he went on. Ah, if we two, so misapprehending each other, could have put aside the veil, but the *dead* had drawn it between our hearts! I stood in the door looking after him as he closed the gate, wishing and half believing he would turn back. Then something entered my heart, I cannot tell to this day what it was, or whether I was really conscious of my own actions, but I hurried down to the gate, and called out, or rather a voice in my heart called out "Clyde Woolsey, come back to me."

The words reached him, for he was but a few rods from the gate. He turned and walked back quickly, with a great deal of surprise in his face. I was overwhelmed with confusion, not knowing what to say, or what reason to assign for calling him. I remember the temptation came over me very strongly to run away, but this would have been giving him ocular demonstration of my insanity, so I stood still a moment, and then—

"Mr. Woolsey, excuse me, but can't we be friends, for Meltha's sake?"

His face glowed with surprise and pleasure.

"Do you really wish this, Ethel Lindsay?"

"To be sure I do," almost as much surprised at myself as I was at him.

The thin features worked a moment as he looked down on me. "I had not expected this request from *you*," he said, "and happy and honored as I feel on receiving it, there is an element in true friendship, which I fear can never enter into ours."

"What is it, Mr. Woolsey?"

"Perfect confidence."

"He means that he can never trust me, and I can do nothing to alter his opinion of me," flashed instantly through my mind.

"True, very true," I answered, more to myself than to him. "There cannot be perfect confidence between us."

"Yes, there *can* be—there shall be," he said suddenly. "It is a duty I owe to you, Miss Lindsay, after what you have said; with your permission I will return into the house a little while."

There was something in his manner that strongly impressed me, as I accompanied him up to the house. The sun had set, but the golden twilight lay all about us; the last smile of that dead day, whose life had been like the lives of some women, serene, and holy, and beautiful. At the door I met Jane. "I've got back at last, Miss Ethel," she said apologetically; "but they were so hurried I had to wait for my bonnet at the milliner's; and your aunt has just sent Deacon Merwin's boy to have you come over there and take tea with her. He's at the back door now."

"Well, Jane, tell the boy to ask aunt and Mrs. Merwin to excuse me this evening, I have company, you see;" for Mr. Woolsey had gone into the parlor, apparently much agitated. When I entered he was walking up and down the room. It was several moments before he seemed able to command himself sufficiently to speak. At last he came up to the chair where I sat, and leaning over me, whispered: "*Ethel Lindsay, you remember my sister's death-bed!*"

I started, and a suspicion which robbed me of all power to speak, began to dawn on my mind. So I sat there staring helplessly at him.

"*I stood in the hall adjoining her room, and heard her confession to you!*"

"Oh God, have mercy upon us both!" I gasped, shivering in every limb, and yet my prayer, just then, was more for him than for myself.

What happened next I do not clearly remember, only some time afterward we sat together on the sofa by the window with the night deepening about us, while Clyde Woolsey talked to me.

"What I suffered then, what I have endured since, God, who reads all hearts, can alone know. There has not been a day or an hour since that time, that I would not gladly have yielded up my own life, to have righted the foul wrong that had been done you!"

"And then, when after searching for Alison Holmes a year, I met him under the chestnut trees by the Seine, and told him all (feeling that at last justice would be done you), to learn that he was the husband of another, my faith in God for a time almost deserted me. The bitterness of a thousand deaths could not have been like the first hour of that knowledge.

"And from this meeting, I need not say how I shrank—how the very thought made a coward of me, even as guilt makes cowards of us all; for though the wrong doing was not mine, was it not my sister's?"

"I dreaded to look in your face, to read in the sadness of your very smile, how your life had been maimed and blasted, and to know that I could make no reparation.

"But my promise to the dead could not be violated."

I felt then how keenly he must have suffered with his high, almost morbid veneration for truth and honesty of heart and life, with that abhorrence of wrong or falsehood ingrained in his very being, and I looked at him with mingled pity and admiration.

"Well, I am glad you have come, Mr. Woolsey," I answered, "and thus afforded me an opportunity of telling you that my life has not been all maimed and blasted, and that most likely it needed this discipline; you know the day is often fairer, and more fragrant, because of the showers in the morning."

Again *that* smile, brightening down suddenly upon me, and warming my heart like sunlight. "Your words will be a great comfort to me. Do you know I almost feel now, as if I could say, what you said at her death-bed, what my heart certainly never has said, 'Irene, I forgive you.'"

"Oh, you *must* do it," I cried. "Do we not hope that God will say this to us for far more than we ever can say it to mortal?"

"Ethel Lindsay, are you a woman or an angel?"

"Well I imagine you'd think I was a woman, and a pretty splenetic one, too, when I don't have my own way," I answered, with a laugh flashing up through my tears.

But Clyde Woolsey's face was very solemn, as, taking my hands, he said, "Well, for your sake, I will forgive her."

"And now we can be friends."

"The best and truest."

Afterward we talked of other matters. Jane had brought in lights an hour before, and came to inform us the fifth time, with a somewhat injured air, that supper was waiting. At last I prevailed upon Mr. Woolsey to go out and take a cup of tea, which he did for politeness' sake, but neither he nor his hostess felt much inclination to eat that night.

After we returned to the parlor, he remarked, "I have read your books, and various other miscellany of yours, during the last two years," and he added other words, which, coming from such a man as Clyde Woolsey, any woman would have remembered and said over afterwards, many times, with pardonable pride and delight.

"What are you writing now?" he asked. And I told him of the book I had finished that day.

"If you were only going to remain longer, I should like, with your permission, Mr. Woolsey, to read some portions of it to you; your critiques will be so valuable."

"Thank you; when does it go to the publishers?"

"Not until late in October. It will be issued about Christmas, I suppose."

"And early in the same month I shall be in Springfield; and your home is not very far off."

"I shall be very happy to see you here, then."

Mr. Woolsey did not remain late, for he had made an appointment to meet an acquaintance at the hotel, and the

stage which was to bring the gentleman came in at nine o'clock. And so Clyde Woolsey and I parted, as dear friends do who hope before many moons have waned to meet again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was October again ; and that day was one of the fairest and goldenest that ever crowned the month. The rich, hazy mists lay low on the hills, the golden rod shook its yellow tassels by the stone hedges, and the barberries, those jewels of autumn, were strung thick on the bushes.

"What's ailed you all day, Ethel?" asked Aunt Ruth, with a smile, as she met me pacing up and down the front hall after dinner.

"Why the day's perfectly enamored me of its beauty, and I'm a little restless, and absent-minded, like all persons in love."

"Well, you know what Gerald says, that you don't have half enough out-of-door exercise. Supposing now you take down that basket of barberries that Jane gathered this morning, to old Aunt Betty?"

"I guess I will, for I can't see enough of the face of this day, or take its beauty too closely into my heart."

Two hours later I was walking slowly up the long, shady road, that led past the old mill, which presented that strange combination of gloom and picturesqueness which all old mills do.

"I wish all days were like these," I murmured to myself, as I listened to the soft wind panting among the corn fields on one side of me, while beyond them stood the forest, among

whose elms, and oaks, and maples, fluttered a few yellow and crimson parentheses, and these were set for a sign that all might read.

"But we shouldn't appreciate its beauty at all, then," answered a voice at my shoulder, and turning round sharply, I looked upon Clyde Woolsey.

"Why, where in the world did you come from?" I questioned in my surprise.

"From the Parsonage half an hour ago, where I have been having a long and very agreeable interview with your aunt. Instead of following her directions, however, I came across the fields, and so overtook you here. You remember I said I would return to hear your book."

"Yes, and I am very glad to find you remembered it," and then we talked of a variety of matters which the day or the circumstances suggested ; of his visit to the White Mountains, of the pale green moss round the roots of the trees by the way-side ; of the color of the Autumn skies, of mankind, and metaphysics, and lastly of God, in whom dwelleth all these. It was near sundown when we reached home ; my heart had been happier during this walk, than it had been for a long time. I said to myself, "It is because of the day."

"We shall have a glorious sunset." We halted at our gate, and I pointed to the bright masses of purple and gold, with cordages of deep red, run up in the western sky.

"Yes, but I expect to see grander sunsets than that before the autumn is over."

"You do ! where?"

"On the ocean, and in Europe. I hope to leave America next week."

Did my heart bound and sink at those words, or was I only slightly dizzy? "I thought you intended remaining in America for some time."

"So I did; but recent circumstances have changed my plans, and one purpose of my visit here is to inform you what these are. But as you promised me, I wish very much to hear the opening chapters of your book; and we shall have but little time for this, as I must leave to-morrow."

I had entered the gate with a very light heart: it was but a few yards to the front door, and yet, when I reached it, my heart was no longer a light one.

Clyde Woolsey took tea at the Parsonage that evening. The minister and his sister very cordially welcomed their guest; for they recognized in him now, a noble, high-souled gentleman; though the fact of his relationship to Irene, had at one time prejudiced even their charitable hearts against him.

After tea, I read to them all for an hour—no matter now what he said of my book. Then aunt and uncle had some calls which took them from the room, and Clyde and I were left alone.

"Will you come and sit by me, Ethel? I want to talk with you," asked our guest, with that sort of abruptness so characteristic of him, and so unlike other men.

I went at once.

"It is the last evening we shall probably ever pass together this side the grave; I want to make one confession to you to-night, which seems something like a reparation; no, not that, but after all, it is something, for I am a proud man, Ethel Lindsay, and you can never know what it costs such a one to say to a woman, 'I love you,' when he is as certain of a re-

jection as he is of his own life at the moment. Yet, now, God, and the angels be my witness I *do* say these words to you, Ethel Lindsay; I *love you*—I love you, as I never before loved any woman, as I never can love another. And looking back, I believe that I loved you from the beginning, for I know you interested me more than any other person had ever done, on that evening when I first beheld you. But from the hour that, transfixed and overwhelmed, I listened to Irene's dying confession, and heard you forgive her, you stood alone in my soul, transfigured, glorified, above all women, still it was not until my visit here that I learned all my weakness and your power. I know that the husband of your heart, as he should be of your life, too, Ethel Lindsay, is Alison Holmes, and that, with such a woman as you, to love once, is to love forever. Next week I shall leave America, and you can easily divine the reason of this. But sometimes, Ethel, when the Atlantic plunges wild and wide between us, will you not think kindly of the man who loves you with all the depth, and strength, and tenderness of his manhood, and yet so hopelessly?"

I did not answer Clyde Woolsey, simply because I could not. I rose, and walked across the room—it may be twice—it may be half a dozen times. My brain was in a vague whirl of doubt and bewilderment, through which the light was slowly breaking—had been breaking with every word he uttered. At last I saw clearly, and then I went back.

"I see, now," looking up in his face, "God has just told me, through you, that my love for Alison Holmes was not the love of my life, only that of my girlhood. It is past now; it has gone out of my heart. This also is vanity."

One glance he flashed into my face—a glance that swept my

soul, and then, with a low, deep, "Thank God," that proud man sank down at my feet; he laid his head in my lap, just as a little tired child might have lain it in his mother's; his whole frame shook—oh, none but his mother had ever seen such tears as I saw gush from the eyes of Clyde Woolsey!

I did not speak all this time—I only passed my fingers over the crisp dark hair that lay on my lap, and wished I could comfort him.

At last he drew away both hands and held them fast, and some time afterwards he looked up and said, "Now, Ethel, I can go—oh, I can *die* in peace. This has been the canker and the bitterness in my heart; the feeling that your life had been so blasted, and, that after all, you must carry to your grave a broken heart. I thank God again, it is not so!"

And while Clyde Woolsey thus spoke, another truth, mightier still, had been rising in my soul, and pouring its light, like new wine, into my heart.

I leaned down and whispered, "Clyde Woolsey, is it because of me, you will go to Europe?"

"Yes."

"Then stay for my sake."

He looked up, and whatever of confirmation the words needed, he found it in my face. Then he rose up slowly, and drew me to his heart. "Ethel, my Ethel!" he spoke the name so low, that if you had stood in the other corner of the room you could not have heard him; but those words married our souls forever and ever.

Of that time, perhaps the least that I say the better. And sitting there then, and looking back on my first one, I felt all the infinite difference between the love of a girl and the

love of a woman, and understood Clyde when he said, "Meltha was my first love, the wife of my youth tenderly cared for, and cherished to the end, but *you*, Ethel, are the wife of my manhood, my crown and my glory." So, in both our hearts the great ocean was sounded at last.

Finally Jane put her head inside the door. "Miss Ethel," she said, "they've been waiting a whole hour for prayers."

We went out together; Uncle Gerald and Aunt Ruth sat in their accustomed places—he, with the old family Bible on the stand before him; they both looked up as we entered the sitting-room. Clyde led me to the minister, and simply said, "We love each other; will you give her to me?"

And when he had recovered from his first great surprise, Uncle Gerald laid his hand on ours, and said "The Lord be with you, my children."

"Oh, I am so glad you are come," I cried, as Aunt Ruth's soft footfalls came into my chamber, where I had been sitting on the bedside, it seems to me an hour, it might have been five minutes. She came up to me with a loving smile in her moist eyes, and I buried my head on her shoulder.

"Were you surprised, aunty?"

"Yes, my child, though we had felt for a long time that your heart would yet take up a new song; but I did not think Clyde Woolsey would be the one to teach it to you."

"Yet you are satisfied, you and Uncle Gerald?"

"Perfectly, my dear. He is better suited to you—he is more of a man than Alison Holmes, brother says."

"To be sure he is; and you need not feel a shadow of anxiety when I go away from you."

"How soon will this be, Ethel?" and there was something in her tones, that made me hasten to reply,

"Oh, not until next spring, aunty. We have settled it to-night. Clyde is to go West, to see about the disposal of some lands which belong to his father, and he will probably not be back before the middle of the winter, and you know this could not take place until the birds and flowers come. So, aunty, I am going to learn how to make pies and puddings, cakes and custards, and do all sorts of domestic wonders before next May comes."

She smiled that sweet indulgent smile that had always answered my childish follies. "Well, my dear, we'll talk about these things in the morning. It's so late, you'd better get to bed now."

"No, no," holding her back, "it is not late, aunty." She held up her watch; it was almost two! Of course, I had no more to say. But though I obeyed her injunction, and went to bed at once, I did not fall asleep until the "grey light" looked in faintly through my window, and I knew that another day had been born.

Clyde Woolsey did not leave until he had heard all my book, and somehow it took a long time to finish it—nearly a week—such a week as men and women do not often find in this world.

There is no single word in our English vocabulary that expresses so much of the character of Clyde Woolsey as this one, *power*; power of will, of purpose, and of life. It is this, I believe, that magnetized me to him more than anything else. A woman never loves a man less because she feels she *might*, under some circumstances, fear him. Her womanhood demands his manhood—her weakness his strength.

I said this to Uncle Gerald one day, when we were alone in the library together.

"Tell that to the Secretary of some Woman's Rights Society," he said, snapping his fingers in my face.

"Nonsense on these woman's rights pleaders. Get them out of the rostrum and pulpit, and half of them are the gentlest, most loving, submissive wives and pattern mothers in Christendom—practically refuting their own theories. I tell you, Uncle Gerald, when a woman marries a man, she wants somebody to *look up to*—somebody greater and higher than herself; but heaven knows there's precious few that find it."

"You think, then, this is a woman's ideal, and that you've found it."

"Yes, I *know* I have, thank God!"

"I am afraid, Ethel, you expect too much. Clyde Woolsey is but a man, after all."

"I know it, uncle, and has his faults, just as I have mine. But Clyde's faults are the faults of the strong—of those who govern. He has no pettiness—and here how forcible is the contrast between him and Alison Holmes. I should always have had my own way with him—I shall not with Clyde."

"Alison had his faults, with most people, certainly."

"Yes, and I might have yielded very often to avoid his ebullitions of irritable temper, but never because I feared him. At the worst, he would only have scolded me, but Clyde would never do this; only his silent contempt would"—a pantomime, sufficiently intelligible to the minister, concluded the sentence.

He laughed. "Well, Ethel, I guess you'll manage him after all."

"No, I should have *managed* Alison. I shall *influence* Clyde."

And that very day a circumstance occurred which proved that I was not wrong in my estimation of certain qualities of Clyde's character. He and I were starting out for a walk, after tea, when I ran up stairs with some message for Miss Maltby, leaving Clyde at the front door.

"You'd better put on your bonnet, child," she said, as I left the room. "The dews are heavy, and I fear you'll take cold."

"Oh, no, I shan't; it's as warm as summer, aunty," and I bounded down stairs.

"Ethel, go back and put on your bonnet, please."

Clyde smiled, but his tone was certainly a command.

"I like to walk without it, and I shan't take cold." He did not answer—he only stood still, looking at me, with that shadow of a smile about his mouth.

"Well, I'll go and get it, Clyde."

CHAPTER XXV.

"HURRAH! HURRAH!"

"Oh, my goodness!" In my sudden fright I upset two of my biscuit pans on the floor, while Clyde's handsome head thrust itself through the kitchen window.

"There now, sir, see what you have done. Upset my pans and given my nerves a start they won't recover from in the next twenty-four hours."

"Well it was too bad, but the temptation was too great to be resisted; forgive me this time, Ethel."

"No I shan't, nor kiss you either," returning to my work of moulding biscuit. "You must learn how to enter the house as an honest man should, instead of breaking through the windows like a robber, and scaring a poor lone woman out of her senses."

"I did enter the house like an honest man, and searched all round for your missing self, madam. But I say, Ethel, what's this arrangement? Haven't you domestics enough, that you must turn cook yourself?"

"Well, you see, Kitty received a message this noon, that her brother had fallen from a load of hay and broken his left arm; so I let her go home at once."

"Why didn't you set Molly at work, then?"

"Oh, I knew she'd only spoil the biscuit if I did. I meant to

get through before you came. It's strange I didn't hear the car whistle. Now please don't look cross at me, Clyde, because I tried to get you a nice supper."

"I wasn't looking cross at you, dear, but you might have bought a loaf of bread at the baker's, and not given yourself this trouble."

"But the baker's loaf wouldn't be *my* biscuit, you ungrateful boy! Now be honest, Clyde, and confess they wouldn't taste quite so sweet if any other hands in the world but these had moulded them."

"I plead guilty, Ethel, my wife (oh, the sweet words had grown very natural now!) only I do not wish you to give yourself unnecessary trouble. What have you been doing to-day?"

"Let me see. This morning I read 'Carlyle's Hero Worship,' Oh, Clyde, that is one of the books *that will never grow old to me*; that always has new and grander meanings and significations to my spirit. I may not agree with all he writes; but that book is the voice of a great prophet, a prophet whose heart throbs with pity and reverence for humanity, for good!"

"There, now, Mrs. Woolsey! For that burst of eloquence you've just spoiled the physiognomy of that biscuit. But what did you do after your dose of Carlyle?"

"Oh, Mrs. Jacobs and her daughter called here, and took me to ride. We went over to the Pines, and into Grandpa Watson's barn, and saw them thrash the rye. And standing there, and watching the men at their work, with the sunshine trickling through the crevices, and over the rafters of the old barn, I dreamed out a story, which I intend to write to-morrow."

"What was it?"

"Oh, I can only give you the barest outlines as they drifted through my imagination. It is to be a real country story, of honest, simple-hearted, hard-working people. There is to be a young man in the family, with hard hands, and handsome sun-burnt face, and one of those strong, lithe figures which out-door labor confers on youth and energy.

"Then there is to be a girl, who after a great deal of suffering and endurance in her young life, at last gets into the farmhouse to help the good old mother in harvest time. The girl is not handsome, but she has soft brown hair, and eyes that, though they have held so many tears, can laugh out like sunbeams. Well you can guess the rest, but the youth is very shy, and the girl is as timid as a mimosa plant and guards her secret with a true woman's care.

"One day, however the old mother sends the girl into the barn with a lunch for Abel. He is gathering up the rye seed to screen it for the mill, when *she* come in with her soft step, and sweet voice, and the shy blushes in her pale cheeks. He takes the lunch from her hands, and then a mighty something he can neither understand nor resist, comes over him. Involuntarily he draws the girl towards him, with his strong arm, and the words leap up from his heart, 'Mary you know——'

"And Mary looks up in a great fright, and then tries to speak, and breaks down in a flood of tears. So it's all settled, and two more hearts take up that sweet song.

"I shall name my story THE OLD BARN. How do you like it, Clyde?"

"I like it, only you will not write it to-morrow."

"Why not!"

"Because I have some news for you."

"Good news?"

"That depends upon the manner you receive it. Is your work done?"

"Yes, I will wash my hands, and call Molly to put these in the oven, then I'll come to you in the sitting-room."

"Does it seem as if we'd been married more than a year, Clyde?" I said a few minutes later, as I seated myself on the arm of his chair.

"No, my Ethel, pleasant time generally passes swiftly."

"And I have been thinking all day how this year stands out from all the others that reach back through my life, a year crowned, complete. Oh, Clyde, my husband, we have been so happy," and I wound my fingers through his soft, rich hair.

"So happy," he murmured, dropping his head on my shoulder, and both were silent for awhile.

At last I asked, "But what news, Clyde, you haven't told me?"

"Oh, yes; whom do you think I saw in Boston to day?"

"I'm sure I can't tell; anybody from home?"

"No, try again."

"Oh, do tell me—please, Clyde."

"I saw *Alison Holmes, his wife and baby, this morning.*"

I was on my feet in an instant; "Clyde Woolsey, you are joking."

"Indeed I am not. Try and take it cool," pulling me down to the chair. "He and his family are coming out here to make us a visit, day after to-morrow."

My heart shrank at these words, for the memory of that last meeting, and the long slow torture that followed, rushed over

me. "I don't want to see him; I wish he were not coming here," I cried out sharply.

My face was turned from my husband, and I did not see his brow darken, or dream that a cloud was slowly rising in his heart; a cloud which should yet make a night there wild and terrible, for Clyde has all that monopoly and exclusiveness in matters of affection which is the weakness of such natures.

He answered, however, so quietly, that even I detected no change in the tones: "I'm sorry that it disturbs you, Ethel, but Alison himself proposed coming, and I could not be so discourteous as to refuse him."

"Of course not; only I wish he was a thousand miles away. But how did he look? what did he say?"

"He looks as he used to, and talks very much the same, constantly effervescing in jokes and hilarity. He asked numberless questions about you, and congratulated me very handsomely on the possession of so valuable a piece of domestic property."

"And his wife! you saw her?"

"Yes, I came across him on the Common, and he insisted on my going up to the hotel and being presented to her. That wife of his is like nothing in the world but a rose-bud; as sweet and tender, and helpless as her babe."

"To think Alison Holmes is a father! How funny it sounds!"

"And a very fond, fidgety father too I judged from the thousand and one orders he gave the nurse while I was there. If he and his wife don't have some domestic squabbles in the bringing up of their heir, I'm no prophet; but he is a fine little fellow of a year and a half old, with the roguish eyes of his father and the curly head of his mother. But there goes the

tea-bell and it's a starving man that'll have the honor of waiting on you to supper this evening."

It was not surprising that I was unusually reticent at tea, for memory was unlocking doors in my heart that had been long closed and barred. Clyde watched me with a kind of proud gloom on his face, that at any other time I should have observed, but his manner did not abate one jot of its usual tenderness.

Two days later our expected guests made their advent. The bright May morning was wearing into noon, when they came.

Clyde was away. I regretted this, and was vexed at the nervous tremor that shook me a moment, as I stood under our cottage porch, while up the garden path, bordered with flowering shrubs, came Alison Holmes with his wife.

And I remembered our parting, eight Mays before, under the Parsonage portico, and my quick thoughts linked that morning and this together, and I said to myself, "It has been well with me;" and then I stood there, very calm and happy, to receive the man for whose sake the day of my girlhood had gone out in darkness.

"Mrs. Woolsey, I am glad to see you;" he grasped both my hands in his, with all his old eager cordiality. He was little changed; travel had somewhat bronzed his complexion, and time had added something of manliness to the handsome face, but the eyes and the smile had all the roguishness of old; and my heart, as well as my lips answered: "And I am very glad to welcome you here, Mr. Holmes."

He presented me to his wife; a little dainty fairy, with the sunniest curls straying over the sweetest face, with the bluest

eyes, shaded by golden lashes, and a mouth like one of those half-opened rose-buds, filled with morning dew, we come across sometimes among meadow grasses; altogether the prettiest, shiest, most helpless little creature in the world, with about as much sense and comprehension of a wife and mother's responsibilities, as her baby had; who, wrapped in embroidered flannels and muslin, was holden up to me for a kiss, by the nurse.

We went into the parlor, chatting together with a familiarity which entirely precluded anything like embarrassment on either side.

"You haven't changed in the least, Mrs. Woolsey; positively, looking at you now, it seems as if we had parted yesterday. Nellie, here," looking down on the pretty, blushing creature, "was quite excited, in view of meeting an authoress; but I guess she'll regain her equanimity after a while."

"Oh, I don't think I shall be one bit afraid of you, Mrs. Woolsey," lisped the little lady, in her artless, child-like way, "if you'll promise not to put me in your next book."

Alison laughed, and pinched her cheek. "What a glorious heroine you would make, Dobbin;" and then we all laughed too, and were quite at home with each other.

There was not the slightest use in attempting any matronly dignity with Alison; he called me "Ethel" before the first ten minutes were over, talked with his hands sometimes on my shoulder, and sometimes on his wife's, and I caught myself saying "Alison" half a dozen times that morning.

Presently Clyde returned. A warm friendship had existed between the two men, since their first marriage, and my husband welcomed his guests very cordially. As Mrs. Holmes

went up stairs to remove her hat and shawl, her husband called after her, "See here, my dear, tell Nan to keep the boy tightly covered up when he goes through the passage."

"Take cold, Al! how absurd, this warm day! You're always fussing;" and, with a laugh that ran like a child's, in little musical eddies, up the stairs, the girl-wife tripped through the hall.

"Nellie's no more idea of bringing up a child than your canary out there!" said Alison, with an unusual degree of solemnity. "You see she always had a score of slaves to run if she raised her eyebrows, and though there never was a more affectionate mother, that little fellow wouldn't have seen this day, if I hadn't looked out sharply for him."

I watched Alison and his wife with much interest, for I had a natural curiosity to know how his character had matured; in short, what sort of man he had made. He was a very easy person to analyze, never having learned to control the expression of his feelings, and being by nature impulsive and demonstrative.

That evening, the first of his visit, we sat together on the divan, chatting about his mother and a variety of matters, when, looking up, I encountered Clyde's eyes fastened on me, and something I read there of weariness and uneasiness made me say to myself: "No wonder he is tired of Mrs. Holmes, she is not a woman after his heart, and I know he is wishing to get off into his library for an hour or two. I'll manage it."

A little later, Alison proposed: "Clyde, suppose we take the ladies out, and have a stroll down by the river; this moonlight is perfectly enchanting."

I spoke up hastily. "I am not going to allow my husband's

gallantry to infringe upon his duties. I know he has a score of letters to write between this and bed-time; so Mrs. Holmes and I must content ourselves with one beau."

It was all settled, and I imagined Clyde was very grateful for my interference on his behalf; but I did not dream how the cloud was rising and blackening over his heart; or see him in his library, with his face crushed down on the table, and one thought stalking madly through his soul. "She wanted to be with *him*; and this was the reason she excused me from accompanying them."

Alison was very fond of his pretty wife, though he evidently regarded her as a child, or a toy, and the boy, whom both parents idolized, was a bone of constant, but rather good-humored contention between them; I was greatly amused at their verbal skirmishes each day.

"Nellie, what in the world makes Eddy sleep so this morning? It's quite unusual for him."

"Why, the truth is, my dear," in a deprecating voice, "he was restless during the fore part of the night, and towards morning I gave him a few, only a *very* few drops of paregoric."

"Nellie, you will certainly be the death of that child. Haven't I told you a thousand times that anodynes are downright poison? If you only *would* read that volume on the '*Physical Education of Children*,' you'd as soon dose him with arsenic, as laudanum."

"Now, see here, Alison, don't be such a bear this morning. Mamma takes it whenever her head aches, and I guess *she* knows."

"Begging your pardon, my dear, your mother knows no more about the matter than her enlightened daughter. I protest it's gotten to such a pass, I can't leave that child five minutes out of my sight," walking up and down the room, and getting more excited every moment.

"Alison, I don't like you to speak so ironically of mamma, and if I am not as enlightened as some ladies, I am sure it is very unbecoming in a husband to ridicule his wife's ignorance."

She looked so pretty, with the corners of her little mouth squared down into an expression of such injured feeling, as she sat in the rocking-chair, and Alison's anger disappeared at once.

"Why, Nellie, I never heard you make half so smart a speech in my life, and I never felt myself such a consummate scoundrel. Won't you kiss me, and make up?"

"No, I'm getting tired of being scolded all the time!"

"Well, don't I love you all the better when it's over, you little dumpling?"

"Do you really! Well, then, I'll make up," and the sweet mouth was lifted for a kiss. Edward Holmes was certainly a beautiful, as well as precocious child, and I used to watch him as his snowy, dimpled arms flashed among the toys that were always strewn about him, and wonder if the vast wealth to which that little curly head was heir, would make him a wiser or a better man; and one day I said to his father, while the child stood by my side, "Don't spoil him, Alison, it is a great trust God has given you."

"I know it," he said, with a sigh that was quite unusual in him. "I suppose it will be 'like father, like son!' You know, Ethel, I was a spoiled child."

"I know it, Alison. But the first step towards improvement is a knowledge of our faults. You are young yet; you can *correct* the errors of your education, at least partially."

He ran his fingers through his hair. "But I suppose I want the energy to do this. Nature and education made me an indolent scamp, and I'm afraid it's too late now to reform."

"Oh no, Alison! don't say that. It is never too late so long as God's love is over us."

We were quite alone, for Clyde was gone into Boston, and Nellie was up stairs taking her siesta. Alison gazed a moment very thoughtfully in my face. "Ethel Woolsey," he said, "do you know you ought to have been my wife? You'd have made a different man of me!"

"You forget that your position and my own, forbid your addressing such words to me, Mr. Holmes; I, at least, am perfectly satisfied with my husband."

"Now, Ethel, don't look at me after that fashion, as though I had been breaking the ten commandments. I know you have the noblest fellow in the world, and I'm glad he has *you*; you deserve each other, God bless you! But, between old friends, there may be plain speaking, and I may certainly say behind Clyde's back, what he would be proud to have me say to his face, that if his wife had been mine, I should have been a nobler and a better man!"

"But, Alison, if a man thinks so, he has no right to say it, for her sake who is his wife."

"Perhaps not; I know that mine is the dearest, sweetest, most bewitching little simpleton in Christendom; I know, too, she loves me better than anything else in the world, as I do her—almost. But the only daughter of a southern planter,

petted and spoiled from her birth, wasn't the woman to stimulate or improve a man of my character. Such an idea certainly never entered my Nellie's little cranium. I know, too, the life I'm leading is one of refined selfishness, of mere sensation and enjoyment; that I'm doing nothing for myself or anybody else—in short, that my best powers and faculties lie unused and wasted."

"Well, then, Alison, having come to a knowledge of the truth, why don't you set at once about *doing* it?"

"My dear little preacher, do you know what very tough knots nature and habit generally tie? And, moreover, did you ever resolve, and re-resolve to do a thing, simply because you knew you *ought* to do it, and fail for want of moral energy, or courage; above all, did you ever go on doing what you knew all the time was wrong, and yet without the strength to stop? or are you such a saint that you don't understand or sympathize with the temptations of us poor sinners?"

"'My grace is sufficient for thee.' Oh, Alison, He who said this was tempted in all points as we are!"

He rose and walked up and down the room, whistling some light air, and yet there was a thoughtfulness in his face, that I had never seen there before; at last he came and stood by my chair, and leaned over me.

"Ethel Woolsey, let me say this once again, you ought to have been my wife! I should be a stronger and a better man to-day, if you were."

"Alison Holmes, whatever you may think of yourself, it is a wrong to the man whose guest you are, to say these things to me. Let me assure you now, once for always, that I never could have loved any other man as I love Clyde Woolsey."

"I believe you, Ethel, and haven't you faith enough in me to

know that I love and respect you both far too well to say one word that would be a wrong to either? And believing this, as I know you must, however your wifely dignity may take alarm at my brotherly freedom, I want to speak to you one moment of the past. I wrote you a letter, Ethel, once, which under any circumstances was unpardonable; I thought my provocation was very great, and I was instigated to do it by one whose excuse is that she loved me, and whose death has atoned for all her faults. Neither of us will blame her, however much we (you infinitely the most) have been wronged, for she bears now a tender relationship to us both. But that letter! Ethel *can* you forgive me for writing it?"

"Fully, Alison."

"Thank God that I have heard you say those words. Believe me, I atoned for all the wrong I had done, by my sufferings, the week after I met Clyde in Paris. One word, too, of my mother, here, for we shall not speak of this subject any more: I cannot depict her agony when she learned, on our way to Europe, of the dissolution of our engagement! It came near costing her her life, for she loved you better than anything on earth, but myself. I believe she always entertained some doubts of your perfidy, and would certainly have written to the minister, or his sister, if I had not acquainted her with my engagement. She has since told me that she always had some suspicion that you had been unfairly treated; and I felt from the beginning she had no warm affection for one who had taken your place. She knows *all* now; she is the only person I have ever told, or ever shall."

"Dear Mrs. Holmes! will you tell her I always loved her?" I said, my heart too full for more words.

"Yes, and here let me add also, Ethel, in conclusion, that I rejoice unselfishly in your happiness. I would not have it otherwise, if I could; Clyde is worthy of you, and I am glad you are his wife, but if you were any other man's, I'd shoot him."

"It's well, then, for the security of his neck, that he happens to be in your good graces," I answered, trying to give a lighter tone to the conversation.

Just then Nellie's soft voice rippled down the staircase: "Al, baby's awake, and Nan's going to comb my hair; don't you want to take him?"

"To be sure I do," and he sprang up the stairs. In a few minutes he returned with the babe laughing and crowing on his father's shoulder, both little chubby hands full of coral toys. Alison tossed him in the air, till the child's loud merry laugh struck through the house; and then they sat down on the divan, and the little one plunged his white fingers through his father's hair. "Papa's precious boy," said the proud parent, gazing on the beautiful face. "He hopes Eddy'll make a better man than his father has done."

"Not if you persist in letting him have his own way every time he screams, my dear sir."

"Well, now, Ethel, what would you have a man do? If I should go to acting the disciplinarian, Nelly and Nan would mutiny at once, and when I get home, his two grandmothers, and one grandfather would think it little less than manslaughter to refuse him anything he cries for. You can't expect he'd be anything but a spoiled child."

And looking at the beautiful boy, I said, more to myself than to his father, "I wonder if fortune and friends are, after all,

blessings or curses. Sometimes I think that touch of experience I had at the Frost's was just what I needed—that it nourished and strengthened my character at a time when tenderness and indulgence would have enervated, and ruined it."

"Well now, Ethel, what do you think of my handing Eddy over to them, for the next ten years, for the benefit of their example and training. Don't you think Uncle Jake would take him? But you're right, after all," said he, in a graver tone. "I wish you'd speak to Nellie on this subject of training our boy. She loves you dearly, and will listen to anything you say."

And in a little while the young mother came down, rosy and smiling, looking as if she had never known a sorrow or care in the world.

"Now, my dear husband," she said, nestling herself on an ottoman, and crossing her bare arms on her lap, "I'm going to embroider you a beautiful pair of satin slippers, if you'll promise never to scold me when I don't do right about baby, or keep you waiting when we go to ride, or tear up your papers, or anything else. Nan's going to Boston to-morrow morning to get the materials. You know what exquisite taste she has. Mrs. Woolsey," fluttering her bright head round me, with the golden curls straying over her bare neck and shoulders, like a tangle of sunbeams, "don't you think Alison ought to be good to me all the days of his life, if I do this for him?"

Before I could express an opinion on this subject, Nan came in with a saucer of strawberries she had gathered in the garden for Eddie. She was a black woman, who on account of her long services in her master's family, had received her freedom from Nellie's father three or four years before. She was

a true African, warm-hearted, demonstrative, and possessed that unbounded admiration for tropical colors which is a national characteristic of her race. She usually wore a bright yellow turban, with a calico dress in flaming red flowers and spangles, while a crimson handkerchief confined at the neck with a green, blue, or scarlet ribbon, completed her variegated costume. She was ardently attached to, and I do not doubt she would have laid down her life for, Eddie.

"I got somethin' for dat are precious chile you won't complain on dis time, Maser Holmes," said Nan, as she came towards the child, displaying to his admiring eyes the tempting berries. "It takes ole Nan to find out where de good tings grow for her boy."

"Don't give them to him, Nan," said Alison. "They'll make him sick, sure as you're alive. I don't believe they're ripe."

"Yes they be, Maser Holmes," stoutly affirmed Nan, while Nellie added, "I think it's too bad of you, Alison; do let the child have the fruit." But here the young gentleman interposed, vociferating with an emphasis which drowned the voices of all the others, "Eddie will have 'em ! Eddie will have 'em !" meanwhile kicking his feet, and stretching his arms.

"No, Eddie mustn't ; Nan take them away." Alison Holmes could speak in a tone which those who heard would not be likely to disobey. Eddie threw himself down on the floor, stamping with rage, and dashing his head against the carpet.

"Poor boy ; can't he have anything he wants?" said his mother, in a tone that varied between pity for him, and indignation at his father.

"Now, you see, Ethel," pettishly retorted Alison, "all the

good it does for me to exercise anything like authority in my household. I declare, Nell, I've a good will to bundle you and Eddie up stairs, and give you both a whipping."

"Well, you'll never have the slippers, you old ogre, if you do !" laughed Nellie, whose ill-humor never lasted ten minutes, and whose variations of temper only made her the more piquant and charming.

Just then some one knocked at the door, and Nellie made her exit at once, with her boy.

After our neighbor's brief call was over, Alison and I went into the garden, where we had seen his wife and the nurse walking with Eddie. We came suddenly upon them in the grape arbor, which, within the last two weeks, had put on its covering of pale green leaves, and the trio were so interested that they did not observe our approach.

They formed a beautiful tableau; the mother and her child, with Nan in the background, her black face fairly radiant with happiness, as she looked down on the two beings she loved best on earth.

Eddie sat cross-legged on the oaken seat, his little head thrust forward, and his white arms fluttering to the motion of a spoon which was making rapid journeys, under the supervision of Nellie, from his lips to the interdicted saucer of strawberries.

The mother was kneeling on a low stool, her sunny hair straying down to her waist, and a merry, self-congratulatory smile dimpling about her rosy lips, as she plied her boy with the forbidden fruit, murmuring meanwhile fragmentary sentences of condolence and triumph, after this fashion, "It might have some berries, so it might; and papa won't be any the wiser, either; they didn't hurt him one single bit."

"Oh, missis," interposed Nan, "don't you know men doesn't know nothin' about bringing up o' children. They's al'ays full o' qualms and notions, and it's best to keep mum and have your own way arter all. They means well, but they don't know so much as they thinks, and it won't do to conterdict 'em; so my 'sperience has kinder learnt me to look one way and pull t'other."

Nan concluded her oracular speech with a laugh which showed two rows of white teeth a belle might have envied.

"Don't the little deceivers look cunning?" whispered Alison to me; and then he clapped his hands and shouted, "Stop thieves!" and Nellie sprang up with a shriek, and the saucer fell from her hands and was dashed to pieces on the pavement, while Nan, exclaiming, "My goodness! who'd a thought it!" caught up Eddie, and stood at bay, as though she would protect him from any assault his enraged father might make on his person.

Nellie was quite disconcerted at being surprised in her surreptitious employment.

"I'll never do so' again, never, as long as I live, if you'll forgive me this time," she said, looking timidly in her husband's face, for he had assumed a terrible frown.

He was too kind-hearted to keep up his apparent displeasure long. "It's a fortunate thing you're handsome, Nellie, for I never would have forgiven you if you hadn't looked so pretty." And the little wife buried her blushing face on her husband's shoulder, and said he was a "dear old fellow, anyhow."

"Oh, Clyde, haven't you nearly gotten through with that

tiresome business for your friend?" I asked that evening, as I met my husband in the front door, for he had gone into Boston immediately after breakfast.

"I shall get through, Ethel, to-morrow, probably. Have you been happy to-day?"

"Very, thank you; at least, as much so as I could be without you. Do you know I've been a little fearful that you didn't look quite well this morning? I should have spoken to you about it if you hadn't gone off so hurriedly."

"I am quite well, my Ethel." Clyde drew me to his heart, and the sunshine leaped suddenly through a rift in the cloud that had darkened his heart for the last three days, and with my head resting there I thanked God that I had a husband on whose strength I could lean, instead of one who must lean on me, and that Clyde Woolsey, instead of Alison Holmes, was my husband. Ah me! if I had only spoken the prayer aloud!

"Clyde, do you know I'm getting jealous of you?" asked Alison, abruptly, in a pause of the conversation.

It was evening, and we were all gathered in our sitting-room. Mrs. Holmes was chatting, in her pretty humming-bird style, to Clyde, who was holding some skeins of silk while she wound them. I saw Clyde was quite amused with the little lady, who looked perfectly bewitching with her earnest, graceful pantomimes, and the dainty, restless motion of her bright head, as she related to him some amusing adventure she had with an old bachelor, who became greatly enamored of her while she was in England. After all, Nellie had a good many veins of womanly wit and acuteness, and that faculty of "bringing out" the picturesque or ludicrous parts of a story, which belongs to her sex.

"I certainly had no suspicion of so terrible a fact until this moment, sir," laughingly answered Clyde.

"Well, it is a fact, my dear fellow, and there's no telling how soon coffee and pistols may be on hand. It isn't in human nature for a man to stand quietly by and see his wife falling in love with another woman's husband, to say nothing of being told of it to his face."

"Be still, Al!" Nellie shook her finger at him.

"I can't, madam; my outraged feelings won't permit further silence, after receiving such a lecture as I did to-night for not showing you the thousand little respectful attentions that Mr. Woolsey did his wife—in short, for not being as deferential and attentive as I was before you had the misfortune to be Mrs. Holmes."

Nellie appealed to me if she were not in the right.

"To be sure you are. I should be sorry to ever find that my husband thought his wife less deserving of his attention and courtesy than she was when he courted her."

"But, Ethel," interposed Alison, reasoning after the fashion of most men, "it isn't any proof that a man *thinks* less of his wife than he did before he married her, only in their every-day intercourse he is apt to grow careless and inattentive about these little matters. They're all very proper, I grant, but then a man can't keep them up all his life, can he, Clyde?"

"I think so; they should be habitual to him. No man has a right to merge the lover in the husband, or at least he should always remember that this latter relationship involves all the duties of the former one."

"And then, too," I added, "these little cares and attentions make up so much of the poetry and beauty of married life.

They are its flowers and its aromas, shedding over it that softening, refining influence, which every-day intercourse always requires."

"But you won't find this in one case out of a thousand, Ethel."

"And do you find, my dear sir, in one case out of a thousand, your ideal of married life? However, don't think I lay the blame altogether on your sex. Our own has its full share of culpability in this matter. Indeed, I believe if all married women were habitually regardful of their dress, speech, and appearance before their husbands, they would have little to complain of in the way of carelessness or neglect."

"But wouldn't it seem rather stiff and formal after all, Ethel? Men generally, you know, go in for a free, easy sort of life, and it seems to me the one you defend might become a little oppressive."

"Is politeness and courtesy ever a formality to the refined and the cultivated, Alison, or is it the coarse, the ignorant, the vulgar, who pronounce them so? Does a man love or respect his wife less because she is as pretty, as gentle, as lovable, ten years after he married her as when he courted her?"

"You're pushing me into a corner, Ethel, I see plainly. But when you've done, 'men and women are not perfect,' and 'human nature' will come out, and there must be, sometimes, jangles and discords in married life. That's common sense, if it isn't poetry. You're an authoress, you see, and can talk and write on this subject, and it all sounds very pretty; but we *cannot* live out our ideals in this every-day, practical world."

"But we can *aspire* to them, at least, not sink down and never reach out our souls to them. Then, it is our place to

set the example in these matters. *It is a wife's duty to be better than her husband.* That woman has a fearful responsibility, most likely a fearful account to settle with her Maker, whose husband cannot say to her, after having lived with her half a dozen years, 'I am a better man because you married me.'

"My dear preacher, if one-half the men in the world *could* say it to their wives, what a different world it would be!"

"What a different one!" echoed Clyde, and even Nellie looked thoughtful.

Then the domestic came in to tell us the cream was ready in the dining-room; and Alison rose up, went to his wife, and made her a bow that an ambassador might have offered to a princess, though there was a world of lurking mischief in his eyes as he said, "Mrs. Holmes, can I have the honor of giving you a glass of cream?"

Nellie took his arm with alacrity. "Now, Alison," looking up in his face with charming entreaty, "you'll always remember and behave like that, won't you? And when I run down to meet you at the gate, you'll take off your hat, and give me a chair when I enter the room, and, in short, do on all occasions just as you did before we were married."

"Well, what are *you* going to do, Nellie?"

"I am going to be, as Ethel says, *better* than you; always patient and gentle, a real model wife; and you shall have your own way with Eddie, and when you've lived with me twelve years, see if you don't say you're real glad you had me."

There was a unanimous laugh at this as we seated ourselves at the table; but Alison promised.

"I sincerely wish I were not going to Boston to-morrow," said Clyde, as we were eating our cream.

"So do I, my husband; but what suggested that thought to you now?"

"Oh, we'd all go down to the beach to-morrow, and then ride over to Mount Auburn, and round the country. The fruit trees are in blossom, and it would gladden all your eyes to see the orchards and gardens in their May-robos of white and pink; indeed, the whole landscape is one vast, rich, variegated painting just now."

"See here, dear, do get out of that musty old law business," I said, excited by his description. "I am sure it will be pleasant to-morrow, and one must be in time to catch these 'spring pictures,' they so soon change into summer ones. Can't you arrange it to go, Clyde?"

"I might manage it, if I could be in Boston until eleven. You could ride in, you know, and take me up at the office."

I was so glad at this I clapped my hands, and Clyde laughed, and said, "I was Ethel Lindsay yet."

So it was all settled that we should start for Boston about ten the next morning, take in Clyde, and then go down to the beach and hearken for awhile to that "solemn measure" which beats up from the white pulses of the ocean; afterwards we would ride to Cambridge, then wander amid the sweet silence and wondrous beauty of Mount Auburn, and at last we would ride until sunset among those new paintings which May, the year's young artist, had opened on hills and hedges, in meadows and orchards.

So we retired early that night, with bright visions of to-morrow filling all our slumber,

"Don't you think, Ethel, I can't go to-day!"

Mrs. Holmes burst suddenly into my room with these words, as I stood before the mirror putting on my bonnet.

"Can't go! What in the world do you mean, Nellie?"

"Why," panted the little lady, "I've just received a message that Sara Wildman is stopping in Chelsea, with some friends, and she starts this evening for the Falls. You have heard me speak of her? We were just like sisters, and I never had a thought Sara didn't share, from the time I was six years old until I went to Europe. She was married last Fall; I wouldn't miss seeing her for a million dollars, plank down. What is to be done?"

"Yes; that's the question, what is to be done?" asked Alison's voice at the door.

"Come in. Ah, you won't mind *him*, Ethel?" And then, hats and gloves in hand, we held a consultation what course we had better pursue, now things had assumed this new aspect.

It was a bright fragrant morning, we were all in high spirits, and bent on enjoying ourselves, so it was at last settled that we should leave at once, and dispatch a messenger to Clyde, informing him of the change in our plans, and that we would call at his friend's office between two and three o'clock. Meanwhile we were to deposit Nellie at her friend's in Chelsea, while Alison and I had a short ride on the beach before we went into Boston.

Our gardener was both intelligent and faithful. Being in great haste, I gave him a verbal message for Clyde, bade him take the horse and get into Boston before an hour.

So in a very short time we were snugly ensconced in the carriage, all, even to Eddie and Nan, in the very highest of spirits.

After a ride of two hours, almost every rod of which elicited fresh exclamations of delight at some new handiwork of Spring, on tree, or river, or hill-side, we arrived at Chelsea, and witnessed a most demonstrative meeting between Nellie and her friend, a gay, blooming brunette, as unlike her as possible.

"Now, Ethel, don't you elope with my husband," Nellie called out to me as we drove away; and she stood in the front door, kissing her hands, and shaking her golden curls at us.

We rode for more than an hour on the sands, while the grand "ocean metronome" filled our hearts with the thunder of its everlasting "Glory to God!"

We reached Boston about two o'clock, and learned to our surprise, and great disappointment, that Clyde had left nearly two hours before. No one could give us any information where he had gone, and we could only ascertain that some man or boy had brought him a message a short time previous to his leaving. I was much perplexed at my husband's departure, as I could assign no reason for it, but Alison insisted that Clyde would make it all straight when we saw him.

He was very anxious, too, to visit Mount Auburn, as we had planned the night before, and I finally yielded to his entreaties.

Of course the hours slipped away rapidly while we wandered through that beautiful "country of the dead," and it was almost sundown when we left the grounds.

"Why, Nellie, what makes you so white?" asked Alison, as he sprang from the carriage, and his wife ran out of the front door to meet him.

"Nothing," said the little woman, "only Clyde has fallen from his horse," and there was a rush and roar in my ears that drowned her words, and a blindness came over my eyes, but I

staggered up to her and caught her arm : " Where is he, Nellie, where is he ?" I gasped.

" He's in the house. Goodness, Ethel, don't look like that. Here, you mustn't go up there, so—stop her, Al."

Her cry followed me, as I rushed past her into the house, and, guided by instinct, darted up the stairs before any one could detain me. I sprang into the front chamber ; my husband lay on the bed—the doctor, several ladies and domestics with restoratives, gathered about him ; I rushed up to the bedside, unmindful of them all. I only saw that *Clyde* lay there, that his eyes were closed, and his face was as white as the dead.

" My dear madam, he is not dead, he is only stunned by a fall from his horse, and has probably injured his arm, not broken it, as we first feared," said the physician.

I believe they removed my hat and shawl for me. I know, too, how my hands shook, as I knelt down there and tried to smooth back the brown hair I was so proud of from the broad pale forehead.

" Ethel, there is no danger," said Alison, who had come in. " You are so overcome, you had better go into the other room with Nellie."

" No, no, I shall stay here by my husband. Oh, Clyde, Clyde, do speak to me !"

He opened his eyes ; in a minute they ran with a startled expression over the strange faces round his bedside, and then settled upon Alison and me, for we were standing close together, and it seemed as though a slight spasm crossed his face.

" Clyde, you know me, don't you ?" putting my face down close to his.

He bowed his head, and then Alison spoke. " My dear fellow, are you really injured ; how in the world did this all happen ?"

Here the doctor interposed. " He is too weak to converse yet, my dear sir. Mr. Woolsey rode into Chelsea about two hours ago, with a young, fiery horse, which took fright as he turned the corner, and threw him against some stones in the road. He was found insensible and conveyed here. I do not think he has fractured his arm, as I first feared, or sustained any serious injury, though he has probably met with a number of sprains and bruises."

" Well, my dear fellow, it's very lucky you escaped with no worse acquaintances," and I saw Alison covertly motion Nellie and the doctor to get the others out of the room ; and in a few moments we three were alone.

" Oh, Clyde, thank God it was no worse," and I clung to him, shuddering, for I was almost as helpless as he, from the fright I had undergone.

The great beautiful eyes fastened on my face with an expression I had never seen there before. " Were you so alarmed for *me*, Ethel ?"

I did not understand the question or the tone ; I only felt he was there scarcely harmed, and putting down my faint head on his pillow, I sobbed : " Thank God, Clyde, thank God."

" Now, see here," said Alison, in the half jesting tone he usually assumed to hide deeper feeling, " I want to see the drift of all this, Woolsey, though it don't become me to catechise a man on his back very severely. Why, in the name of common sense, didn't you wait for us in Boston, as we sent you a message to do, instead of running off after this fashion !"

Clyde lifted his head. "Sent me a message to remain for you! Our gardener's boy told me that you had given up your plans of last night, altogether, and would remain at home."

"Did he send that dolt of a boy with the message, instead of taking it himself?" I cried; and then Alison, in a few brief sentences, related all that had transpired since morning, after which he suddenly recalled some message he had for his wife, and so he left the room; this time he saw clearer and farther than I.

Then Clyde lifted himself up, and drew down my head to his heart, but his voice shook like a woman's, as he said, "Ethel, *my* Ethel;" and his tears falling among my hair, oh, they were like a woman's too.

"What does it mean, Clyde, my husband, what does it mean?" I whispered, frightened at this unusual emotion, and yet, with a dim suspicion of its cause breaking into my mind.

And in the next half hour I learned *how* Clyde Woolsey loved me, as I had not learned it even in the days of our betrothal, learned how, once in a great while, a man does love a woman, and what she is to him when she has gone into the bridal chamber of his soul. A few words will tell all that is necessary, for the rest is laid away in my heart and his.

It appeared the gardener returned home, and found his youngest child quite ill, so he dispatched his son, a raw, blundering youth of sixteen to Boston, with the message which I had delivered to him.

The boy's memory was never very tenacious, and the strange sights and sounds of the city quite bewildered him, and he informed Clyde that we had all concluded to remain at home on account of a letter which Mrs. Holmes had received. His sur-

prise can be imagined when, an hour later, some acquaintance informed him that he had just returned from the beach, where he had seen Mrs. Woolsey riding with a gentleman whom Clyde at once recognized, from the description, as Alison Holmes.

Now, ever since my expressions of regret at Alison's intended visit, Clyde had been haunted by a fear that I might have deceived my own heart, and that, after all, its first love might be its deepest.

No wonder this thought goaded him almost to frenzy, when, after the message he had received from me, he learned of my ride on the beach with Alison. He could not believe that I had intentionally deceived him, but he feared the whole plan had been concocted by Alison, and that I had yielded to it so readily because my own wishes endorsed it.

Clyde returned home immediately; our two domestics could only inform him that we had concluded to leave Mrs. Holmes in Chelsea, and for two hours he paced up and down the solitary rooms, a very madman, to use his own words.

At last he could bear it no longer. He procured the first horse he could find, and rode into Chelsea. I have told the rest.

"And now, Ethel, life of my life, you know all my weakness, and all my love; can you forgive me?" He knew *why* I answered him with mute kisses.

"I never knew, till to-day, how precious you were to me;" he said afterwards. "It's a terrible thing for a man to be jealous of his wife."

"But I should never have believed it of you, Clyde; you, so strong, and proud, and self-reliant. I thought it mostly belonged to women to be jealous."

"Ah, my dear, there is something of the woman away down in the heart of every man."

"And without it he would be less of a man. But now there shall be perfect confidence between us, Clyde?"

"As between the angels in heaven!"

He was able to return home that night, though he was mostly confined to the house for a week afterwards, from the effects of his fall. I shall never forget that long ride, from Chelsea to our cottage, with the sweet, solemn moonlight brightening and idealizing every object on the road. I felt that Alison suspected much of the truth, when I told him how the gardener's son had misapprehended my message, but he never alluded to it, and his delicate conduct in this matter made him dearer, both to Clyde and myself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I NEVER was more touched in my life by any little occurrence that came within my knowledge, than I was by a circumstance that happened this afternoon at recess," said Miss Pike, the district school-teacher, as she brushed off several drops, which, spite of all her precaution, had fallen on her sleeve. She was a very prim, but most estimable lady, not now in her first youth, and we had insisted upon her entering the house as she was passing it on her return from school, for the day had worn a dull, heavy physiognomy, and the afternoon had settled down into a thick, stormy rain.

"What was the circumstance, Miss Pike?" I asked; "we all feel just in the mood for a story."

"Well, this afternoon, just at recess, I stood in the school-door, when a little boy, with a most pitiable, poverty-stricken aspect, came up to me and inquired the road to Boston. He could not have been more than ten years old, and as I looked down on his wet, threadbare garments, and his pale, sunken cheeks, my heart ached for him.

"That is the road,' I said, pointing it out to him; 'but, my child, it's twelve miles to Boston, and you can never walk there; besides, I think it's going to rain again, very soon; for, if you remember, about two hours ago there was a rift in the clouds, and the sun *almost peeped out.*'

" 'But I must keep straight on, if it does rain,' answered the child, looking up into my face, with his clear, earnest eyes. 'Mamma sent me to a friend of hers in Boston, and I've got to walk all the way there.'

" 'But your mother, my child, wouldn't wish you to go in the rain; besides, it's much too long a walk for a little boy like you. You had better come in here, and sit awhile, till the shower is over, and then you can go back and see your mother, before you keep on to Boston.'

"I shall never forget the look of the little fellow's face, as he said, 'My mother is dead, and she told me to go straight to the gentleman, and I must. If it rains very hard, I can get under the trees, or a shed, till it's over.'

"At that moment there was a loud shriek in the school-room, and I sprang in to see what was the matter. One of the smallest children had fallen from my desk, which she had mounted, and bruised her forehead so badly that I could not leave her for some time. When I returned to the door, the clouds had darkened, and the child was gone. The mists were so thick I could scarcely discern the road, and I had only time to call the children in before the rain fell in torrents. But if it had been possible, I would have started off myself for that little child, keeping his solemn promise to his dead mother, as through the rain and wind he makes his slow way to Boston."

"But he can't get there to-night, Miss Pike," said Clyde. "Oh, if it were not for these bruises, I'd start off for the little fellow myself."

"You'd have to get my permission first, sir."

"I should be certain of it, Ethel, in such a case."

At this moment Alison rose and left the room hastily. We

did not observe this, for we all sat listening to the dismal wind and rain outside, and thinking of the little boy, battling his weary way through all that fearful storm, to the one friend his mother had left him.

"Where's Alison gone?" asked Nellie suddenly, half an hour later; and then, before any one could reply, she ran up stairs and commenced a vigorous search for him. In a little while she returned with a most lugubrious expression of countenance, "It's just as I guessed," she said; "Al's started off in this dreadful storm, to find that child. Betty saw him go. He came into the kitchen with his overcoat on, and told her not to say a word, but get him the largest umbrella in the house, and off he started, and I don't believe he'll ever get back alive, again."

And in the midst of our ejaculations of surprise at Alison's leaving the house in such a storm, Clyde cried out reproachfully, "It's all my doings. If I hadn't made that unfortunate remark, about setting off myself, he wouldn't have gone. Nellie, if anything happens to Al, I shall never forgive myself."

"Yes you shall, too, Clyde," said the impulsive little southerner, as she went up to his chair and smoothed the pillows on which his head was resting. "I just know you'd do yourself what you wouldn't let Al, or anybody else do; and—oh, my! how it does rain!"

It did, indeed; the storm strengthened every moment, and the thick drops beat against the windows, and the wind roared and fought through the pines and the maples along the road.

We were all in a most unenviable state of anxiety on Alison's account. Nellie could not sit still a moment in one place; now

she flung herself down on a corner of the sofa, and cried as if her heart would break ; the next, she walked up and down the room, wringing her hands, and protesting Alison would certainly die.

Nan stood at the window, with Eddie in her arms, declaring, with sundry solemn shakings of her head, and the yellow turban thereof, that "Maser, kind-hearted soul, could never stand it in such a pourin' down rain as dat are," and then she hugged Eddie tighter than ever.

Poor Miss Pike never ceased lamenting that she had not detained the child, or that her pupil had fallen from her desk at that unpropitious moment.

Eddie himself was the only unconcerned individual among us. That young gentleman enjoyed the storm hugely, stretching out his white arms, and crowing with admiration, as gusts of wind and rain drove thicker against the windows.

"Ah ! you can laugh and crow now, little boy," said Nellie, reproachfully, with the tears standing still on her cheeks, "but perhaps papa'll be killed, out in this dreadful storm, and then what'll become of mamma and you !"

But this appalling possibility did not seem to disturb Eddie in the least ; he only crowed triumphantly at a fresh blast of wind. And I saw there was a true woman's heart beating under all the little caprices and weaknesses of the pretty southerner.

Clyde tried to comfort her. "The child can't have gone more than two or three miles, against this wind, and Al will, of course, get a horse, and can't be long in coming up with him. He won't be likely to miss him either, for the road is a straight one, and there are no houses, nor shelter but the

trees, for the first three miles. Oh, if I could only have gone with him. You see, Ethel (in an undertone) this comes of my making a fool of myself, day before yesterday."

"What should you do if Clyde had gone, Ethel?" asked Nellie, who had not heard the latter part of this remark.

"I should think he was out on an errand of mercy, and hope that good angels would take care of him." This seemed to comfort the young wife more than anything we had previously said. I had not believed it possible she could have evinced so much energy as she did at this time. She had Kitty build a huge fire in the kitchen, and constantly bustled back and forth, heating Alison's dressing-gown and slippers, setting his favorite chair in the cosiest corner, and even preparing the coffee, under Nan's directions, with her own hands.

"After all, there's something in Nellie," Clyde whispered to me.

But notwithstanding the excitement of these preparations, the night darkened very gloomily around us, for the fury of the storm increased with the setting of the sun.

"Come, Nellie, do go to the piano, and sing something. It will cheer us all," said Clyde, at last, who, from recent illness and present anxiety, had worked himself almost into a fever.

We all seconded this request, and Nellie went to the piano, and her sweet voice throbbed and wavered through several mournful little airs, which were just in harmony with our mood, calming and soothing, even while it saddened us.

In the midst of one of these, the bell rang sharply, accompanied with a vigorous knocking and stamping at the front door. We all rushed into the hall in time to see Alison enter, holding a little child by the hand ; two very pitiable looking

objects they were, drenched with rain, and thoroughly worn out in their struggles against the wind.

"Oh, Alison, my husband, you're an angel!" cried his wife, rushing forward.

But Nellie's *angel* was decidedly *bearish* at that moment. "Don't come near me," he very peremptorily ordered; "I'm as wet as a drowned rat, and worn out as a racer. Somebody take that child in hand, at once, and don't speak to me until I get some dry clothes," and he stalked up stairs, while Nellie followed him with looks of unutterable admiration and sympathy, without uttering a word.

The child was at once put in charge of Nan and Kitty, with such a supply of apparel as could be produced from wardrobes which had nothing to suit his age or size; but he was so bewildered and exhausted that we forbore to question the little fellow.

In a short time Alison returned, and was duly marshalled to his corner of the fire-place by Nellie, and a glass of strong "sling," prepared by Nan, and two cups of coffee, somewhat restored his speech and his temper.

Of course we were all profuse in our sympathy and congratulations that he had escaped so well.

"How could you, Al, go off in this hurricane?" said Nellie. "We've almost died about you!"

"How could I!" tarning angrily towards her. "Do you suppose I could have seen that little fellow of mine toddling and crowing round here, and known some other child, that some other parent loved just as well, was out in this terrible storm, without a house to shelter, or a hand reached out to help it! No, hang it, I couldn't!" bringing down his fist on

the chair arm, in most belligerent style. "I know, Ethel Woolsey," turning to me, "I'm not a bit of a saint, but I've got a tender place away down in my heart, a place that, while I've life to help him, will never *let me see a little child suffer.*"

"Bravo, a speech worthy of a hero! Al, you're a noble fellow, and the deed of this day shall procure you immunity for anything you do afterwards, no matter how bad it is," said Clyde, who had feebly made *his* way into the kitchen.

"Now give us your hand, Clyde Woolsey. I'd rather have a word of praise from you, than all the laurels that ever crowned all the poets from Homer down to Halleck. Mr. Midget," one of the numerous pet names he bestowed upon Eddie, "papa's little man! didn't he care a bit if he was out in the rain, and got drowned?" And he gathered up the boy tightly to his heart, and we knew of what *he* was thinking; but Clyde and I thought, as we stood there with our fingers locked in each other's, of that blessed old gospel precept, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you."

The little boy whom Alison had rescued was so exhausted, that we concluded, as soon as he was thoroughly warmed and fed, that Kitty should take him to bed, without questioning him at all. He was a bright, intelligent-looking child, with large, clear, hazel eyes, and a timid, sorrowful expression on his little, pinched features, which touched all our hearts.

We were a happy company as we sat down to the tea-table that evening, caring little for the storm that still heaved and shrieked outside.

Alison was, of course, quite a hero in our eyes, and no matter what he did, Nellie took it all in good part, neither pouting nor retorting at any of his speeches; and it must be

admitted, he was not all the time in the most amiable humor.

He had found the child, he said, about two miles and a half from our house. He was sitting under some oaks, on the edge of the forest, close to the road. A more pitiable picture could hardly be conceived than that little solitary child, sitting there under the trees, with the rain pouring down on the small weary figure, and the tears streaming down his cheeks, for all hope had now quite deserted the brave little heart.

He seemed hardly to realize the deliverance that had come to him, and could scarcely get on his feet; but when Alison had seated him safely on the horse, he turned round suddenly, with a new thought brightening his large, sad eyes, and asked earnestly—

“Be you an angel, and did God send you?”

“No, my child,” answered Alison, “I’m not an angel, but I do believe God sent me.”

And when he related this, his voice shook through the tears, that were an honor to his manhood.

“I’ve got the best husband in the world,” whispered Nellie, as she came to bid me “good-night.”

“So you have,” thought I, “but one,” as I kissed the little wife.

The next morning we all assembled, after breakfast, in the sitting-room, to hear the story of our little *protégé*.

The storm had gone down during the night, and the morning had risen clear and beautiful. The winds came in gushes of fragrance from the fruit-blossoms, and the robins’ song sent pulses of music through the open window. Alison had quite

recovered from his fatigue and exposure, and Nan had combed out the tangled hair of the child, and arrayed him very comfortably, though somewhat grotesquely, in a bright crimson sacque of her own, which, by dint of a good deal of pinning and pulling, somewhat resembled a coat, while Kitty had produced a pair of pantaloons, which belonged, ten years before, to her son in the West Indies.

The child was so much embarrassed, at first, that we could only learn his name was Willie Grant, and that he had no friends in the world, but there was a purity in his enunciation, and refinement in his manners, which proved he had been carefully brought up.

“Now come and stand by me, little man, and tell us all you know about yourself, and you shall have one of the prettiest hats and coats in all Boston,” said Clyde.

He always won the confidence of children. The boy went to him, and standing by his side, told his simple, pathetic story. His father was drowned at sea, and his mother lived all alone in a place called Branford, in Connecticut. His mother used to cry a great deal, and took in sewing to earn money.

After a while she grew very thin, and pale, and couldn’t sew any more, and the neighbors used to come in and look sorrowfully at her, and bring her things to eat.

One night she woke Willie up suddenly, and told him she was very sick, and didn’t think she should live but a few hours. “And now,” she said, “I want you to remember every word I say to you, my child. There’s a man in Boston who was once my friend, and you must go to him after they have laid me away in the ground, and tell him your mother sent you to him, and prayed him to be a father to her fatherless and motherless

child ; I know his heart is a warm, tender one, and he won't resist this appeal. You'll find his name written on a piece of paper in the drawer, and some money there, too, and you must take this and go to Boston. Somebody will tell you how to get there, and you must show the paper when you ask for the gentleman. Will you remember and do this, Willie?"

And Willie promised as well as he could, for he was crying very hard.

Afterwards his mother told him to go for some of the neighbors, but when he returned she could not speak to him. She only pointed up once, and then her eyes closed, and they said she was dead.

The day after the funeral, Willie left Branford. He hurried away without speaking to any one, because he overheard some of the neighbors say they must sell what little furniture his mother had in their one room, and put the boy out to some farmer in that vicinity.

He came half of the distance the first day, and stopped over night at a tavern. The man who kept this was very surly to the child, and would not permit him to pass the night until he had paid him for it beforehand.

The next day Willie found he had not money enough to take him to Boston, so he concluded to walk, but several men gave him a ride in their wagons ; and he slept one night in a barn, and the second under the trees. The third day he lost the paper on which his mother had written the name of her friend, and at last, worn out and despairing, he sat down under the trees, not caring much for the rain, and thinking he should die in a little while, and go home to his mother in heaven.

"And what was your mother's name?" asked Clyde, after the child had finished his simple, touching story.

"Sara Grant, sir ; mamma told me to say to the gentleman that Sara Grant sent him her poor little fatherless, motherless boy, and begged him, for her sake, to be a father to him."

"And you are sure you lost the paper?" said Clyde, bending down and searching the boy's face eagerly.

"Yes, but a gentleman I showed it to on the cars read the name to me. It was *Clyde Woolsey*. Please, sir, do you know anything about him?"

"Sara's child ! Sara's child !" cried Clyde, as he drew the boy to him. "Oh, for her sake, I *will* be a father to you !"

We were all struck dumb with amazement. None of us had ever heard this name. "You have your mother's eyes, my boy, and, I see it now, her mouth and smile. Poor, poor Sara !" Clyde seemed quite unconscious of our presence, in his great surprise.

"Who was she ? What *does* it mean, Clyde?" I asked at last.

"Nan take the children into the other room, and let them play together," he said.

And after they were gone, Clyde gave his deeply-interested auditors the history of his acquaintance with Sara Grant.

"She was a dressmaker in our family, before we removed to Pennsylvania. My father brought her from New York, where he was recommended to her by some of his friends, as she was not in good health, and her physician advised her going South.

"Sara was a gentle, amiable, and exceedingly pretty girl, to whom we all became very much attached.

"One day (she had been with us then about a year, I think), I observed, on going suddenly into the room where she was sewing, that she was looking very pale and wretched, and that her eyes were swollen, evidently with weeping. You know, Ethel, how it disturbs me to see any one unhappy, and I must plead to this weakness, from my early boyhood.

"I took my Virgil, and went down to the brook, but the sad face of the young dressmaker rose before the page. I could not study, and at last I threw down the book and went into the house.

" 'Sara,' I said, seating myself beside her, and taking the work from her hands, 'you believe I am your friend, don't you?'

"We had been on good terms from the first of our acquaintance, and as we were members of one household, there was a good deal of freedom in our intercourse.

" 'Of course, I believe you are my friend, Clyde,' she answered, looking up in surprise.

" 'Well, now I see very plainly that something is troubling you, and I cannot be deceived about it, either. Don't you think you ought to confide in me, and let me know all about it?'

"She tried to prevaricate, but it would not do, and at last, she buried her face in her hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Then I drew the story from her. Her brother, William, several years younger than herself, was at school in New York. They were orphans, and Sara supported him by her own industry. She was very proud of this brother. He was a handsome, warm-hearted, impulsive boy, she said, but though

he meant no harm, his social disposition and love of fun got him into a good many boyish scrapes, from incurring the penalties of which he was rescued by his classmates, among whom he was a great favorite.

"But he had recently contracted some heavy debts. I seem to hear her sobs now, as she told me of it. He had borrowed the money to meet the payments, and this was now due.

"The day before, Sara had received a letter from her brother, whose wildness and despair made her shudder for his future. In a few days all would be discovered, and he should be compelled to leave the school in disgrace. He besought his sister, in most pathetic terms, to procure the money to defray these debts, if possible, otherwise he had made up his mind to go to sea.

" 'And I haven't half this sum in the world!' sobbed the poor child.

" 'Sara,' I answered, as soothingly as I could, 'don't cry any more; write to your brother, by next mail, not to take any rash steps. By day after to-morrow I will be in New York.'

"She looked up with new hope kindling in her face. 'But Clyde, how can you go? What will your father say?'

" 'I have some cousins up there, you know, whom I shall take a sudden notion to visit, and he's not apt to deny my wishes!'

"I shall never, to my dying hour, forget the poor girl's gratitude.

"A few sentences will tell the rest. I went to New York, saw Sara's brother, found her story literally true, paid his debts, which only amounted to about two hundred dollars, and

procured him a lucrative situation as book-keeper in a large mercantile house.

"He kept this for six months, with satisfaction to his employers and credit to himself, then he was taken ill. Sara returned North to see him, but the seeds of hereditary disease were in his constitution, and the poor fellow died of consumption soon after.

"Sara married the young man who succeeded him as book-keeper, and afterwards they removed to Connecticut, where his parents resided.

"I never saw her afterwards, but it seems the memory of the kindness I had once shown her was with her on her death-bed, and she bequeathed her child, a touching and solemn trust, to me."

"Why, Clyde, you never told me a word of all this before!"

"My dear Ethel, a man would surely be sounding a trumpet in his own praise, were he to make a practice of telling his wife every instance where he had lent a helping hand, or done a kindly deed to others."

"Well, I'll give up my claim now, old fellow," said Alison "I intended to keep the boy myself, but he is yours by all rights, human and divine."

"Well, Al," I laughed, "you can take ten boys under your protection, where Clyde takes one, for I don't doubt you have more thousands than he has hundreds."

"And I presume, my dear Mrs. Woolsey, you don't doubt either that he does more good with his hundreds than I do with my thousands."

Here Nellie's voice broke in very earnestly, as it always did when she stood on her husband's defence. "If you only

knew, Ethel, how generous Alison is; he supports a dozen fami——"

"There, that'll do! that'll do!" interrupted her husband. "I intend, Nellie, you shall write my obituary some time, and I don't doubt it will be so eloquent a panegyric, you'll get a second husband in less than six months after my decease."

"I shall never marry the second time, Alison!" said Nellie, shaking her little head in such a solemn manner that we all clapped our hands and laughed.

Clyde and I were very sorry when the time arrived for our guests to leave, and this time was hastened by letters received from Nellie's parents, who wished their children to join them in New York, early in June, as they were going to the Falls, to the Cave, and various other places of interest, before the sultry weather should take them to the "White Mountains."

But we did not part without promises of frequent meetings, and it was decided that Clyde and I should visit our friends at their own house, late in the autumn.

"Mother will be overjoyed to see you," said Alison, as we were all assembled in the parlor, a few moments before they left. "Next summer I shall bring her up here, if she can bear the journey."

"Oh, I hope she can; and uncle and aunty will be here at the same time."

"And now, Ethel, shall we go back to the old names, and the old relationship? Shall we be brother and sister once more?"

I glanced at Clyde; he was holding a small bouquet of

geraniums for Nellie, who was tying it with a blue ribbon—her parting gift to him.

He came towards us, and taking our hands, clasped them tightly together. "Brother and sister always," he said, smilingly, and looking up in those glorious eyes, I knew no shadow of jealousy would ever darken them again.

A few minutes later brought the farewell those seasons always full of acute pain to me; but Clyde and Alison's good spirits kept up to the last moment.

So we stood in the front door, and sent many kisses and prayers after them, as they rode away, until Nan's crimson turban, and the blue plumes of Eddie's cap were most conspicuous in the distance.

"Married boy and girl," I murmured, as Clyde drew me into the house, "and they will never be more than this; how strange and true it is, Clyde, that some people never outgrow their childhood!"

"Very strange, indeed, oh, sweetest of philosophers!"

I looked up, at the tones. "Ah, I know what you're thinking, Clyde; that somebody not very far off from you, will never outgrow *her* childhood either."

He laughed; "I shall not love her the less for keeping it, anyway." He paused a moment, and then continued, "After all, Al is a good, a noble fellow, and despite his failings and want of discipline, his life will write out for himself a great many beautiful deeds; will, with all its discords, have many, very many, harmonies."

And then I thought of a life that would be far richer with beautiful deeds, and grander harmonies; and thinking this, I looked up in Clyde's face and smiled.

"That smile was a compliment, Ethel; what are you thinking about?"

"Oh, several things. One of them was, that I shouldn't have thought you'd ever have married me, Clyde Woolsey, and thus practically refuted your own words. 'If there's a man upon earth who receives my especial sympathy, it's that poor, deluded individual who has had the honor of marrying an authoress.'"

"Eaves-droppers never hear any good of themselves, my dear, but whose words did you practically refute, when *you* married a man who had nothing but the ashes of his heart to offer you, whose love, and life, and poetry were all dead, whose great jewels were the past, whose joys were only memories—in short, who was a *widower*!"

I cannot tell which laughed the louder. "Well, I am cornered now, but I'll be generous, and say, honestly, that of all men whom I ever knew, the one whose heart held the most real youth, the most romance, the most poetry, was a *widower*!"

"And for that most flattering affidavit, I'll say, in return, the most womanly woman I ever knew was a *genius*."

Do you know how sweet such words are, coming from the lips of one's husband, reader.

"Well, my dear, I guess we've complimented each other this morning about enough for two married people, who've gotten beyond their honey-moon? But you're looking sober again."

"No wonder, Clyde; I'd gone far beyond the time when I said those words, that afternoon, when I stood with Seth Robbins under the swamp willows, and he asked, 'What sort of

a woman are you going to make?" My life only could answer *that* question; I wonder how it has done it!"

Clyde drew me down close, very close to his heart. "I'm satisfied," he said, in tones of triumphant fondness, "with its answer, Ethel; I'm satisfied!"

The next month Aunt Ruth and Phil came to the cottage. The latter was now in his eighteenth year, a slim, handsome sophomore, with the usual recklessness and love of fun which characterize that class of persons.

He never *would* forgive Clyde for "carrying me off," he said, and he intended to punish him by passing every vacation with us, instead of giving them the light of his presence at the Parsonage, it had grown *so* humdrum since I had gone.

"For shame, Phil, to speak so disrespectfully of your birth-place. Besides that, you couldn't get along without aunty's apple-pies and dough-nuts (two things of which the young gentleman was extremely fond), you know you couldn't."

"I'm not so certain but I might even make that great sacrifice. The truth is, Ethel, I never held in exalted estimation the domestic capacities of authoresses, and I came here expecting to find everything at sixes and sevens, with Clyde washing the dishes, and doing general housework in a check apron. But I'm happily disappointed."

"It's my opinion, Phil," replied Clyde, "that authoresses' domestic qualifications have been greatly maligned; and I speak *ex cathedra*, you know. They can get up as good dinners, and keep as nice houses, as the rest of their sex."

I glanced at the gentle face opposite me, and thought how

all the housekeeping qualities Clyde praised were owing to her long and patient cultivation. That afternoon, when my husband and Phil had gone fishing, Aunt Ruth said to me, "I am half tempted to believe, my dear child, that your 'dreams,' as Gerald and I used to call them, were true prophecies, after all."

"I am very, very happy, aunty.

"And you have married your ideal?"

"Yes."

"And found him faultless?"

"No, that can be said of no man; and if it could, I don't think I should want to marry him; the contrast would be so great. Clyde has his faults, and they are those indigenous to a temperament like his. He loves power. He might be obstinate, but it would never be the obstinacy of pettiness, or an illy governed temper; and a true woman can forgive some faults in a man whose faults are the faults of manhood."

"And you do not love him the less for these?"

"Love him the less! Do I love the sweet faces of the stars less, because the clouds sometimes hide them?"

Here Aunt Ruth leaned down and kissed me.

"Besides that," I continued, "if Clyde does like to have his own way, and see his wife yield to him rather more than would always meet the views of the woman's rights advocates, there is no man on earth who more deeply reverences womanhood than he. I see now whence his old dislike to authoresses sprang, but he believes to-day that a woman may write a book, and have just as warm, and true, and loving a heart; aye, and believes too, the very faculty in her which made the book, may warm, and deepen, and enrich her affections."

"But you can influence him, my dear, like all other men, can't you?" asked Aunt Ruth, with a little pardonable curiosity.

"Certainly I can. But I could never scold or *fret* him into anything; his will is stronger than mine, and then he has learned that grand lesson of life, *self-discipline*."

"But I am sure he is very impulsive."

"I could never love a man that wasn't. But he can control his impulses."

"Well, my dear, *you* used to have a very strong will of your own."

"I know it, aunty; but love generally makes the yielding very easy," I said, throwing myself at her feet.

And we were both silent for awhile. When Clyde and Phil returned they found us sitting there; there was a third person with them, and I sprang up, crying, "Uncle Gerald! Uncle Gerald!"

Two days later, we had other guests, Mrs. Howard and her two daughters, who were in Boston, and came out to see us.

The latter were beautiful girls, in the first blush of womanhood, and their advent was a source of great pleasure to Philip; indeed I am sure his memory carried back to old Yale the sweet face and merry laugh of Nettie Howard; but sophomore memories are not usually very tenacious of pretty faces. Nettie has the heart of a child yet.

And now, reader, among the waning of these summer days, I close up the history of the life I have written you, while *It is yet Morning* with me.

My husband is not a rich man; I do not think he ever will be; I am sure I do not care, for have I not the riches unspeakable, unfathomable, of his love?

Willie is with us, a noisy, merry, mischievous rogue, who is held responsible for all domestic contingencies, losses and inadvertencies, but whom we love very dearly, notwithstanding.

Clyde has given up his professional career, or rather the people have compelled him to do this, for he cannot now answer half the calls for lectures which he receives.

And very peacefully we live here in our cottage home, while all round us are the hills, and valleys, and singing waters of our beloved New England; and here, please God, we shall die.

And so living, even *while it is morning* with my life, I learn daily the old new lesson, that unalloyed happiness is not the portion of mortal, and never has been since the angels closed the bright gates of the garden of Eden on our father and mother, and that not here but "further on" is appointed our rest!

Sorrow, and pain, and disappointment must come to walk with us all; but one truth, whose grand significance overshadows all others, has the life I have lived and written taught me; THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL NOT LOSE THEIR REWARD!

Oh, believe it, reader, this Right, taken to your heart, lived up to in the midst of struggle and temptation, will not fail you, when, at the last, heart and strength do!

So, have faith in the "Further on," ye who walk through the valleys, amid the darkness and the storms!

The night may soon be black around, and the rains may beat heavy upon your soul, but *further on* the morning may break, the great life discords lull down into sweet harmonies, and then, through the glass, darkly, ye may catch glimpses of

the home promised of the Father, with its green hills and its singing fountains, and almost hear "the morning bells of eternity," as their notes roll triumphantly across the blue plains and the still rivers of Heaven.

Then take comfort and consolation, ye who bear through life the weary burden of needs and aspirations misapprehended and unfulfilled, and ye too, oh, mighty company of women, married in the sight of men, but not in the sight of angels, and all ye who walk in sorrow and suffering your appointed ways, take comfort, and be true, through all cost and sacrifice, to the *Right*, for, "Though a sinner may do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely, I *know* it shall be well with them that fear before God."

THE END.

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