Glen Luna

GLEN LUNA.

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Warner, Anna Bartlett

GLEN LUNA.

BY

AMY LOTHROP, pseud.

"Penny, whence camest thou? Penny, whither goest thou? And, Penny, when wilt thou return?"

OLD ENGLISH PROVERB.

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

LONG AGO, ... 1

CHAPTER II.

MAY-DAY, ... 6

CHAPTER III.

THE MOON, ... 11

CHAPTER IV.

SPRING-TIME, ... 19

CHAPTER V.

THE WHITE FLAG ON BROWN BLUFF, ... 26

CHAPTER VI.

TEACUPS, ... 33

CHAPTER VII.

HAYCOCKS, ... 42

CHAPTER VIII.

WOLFGANG AND HIS MASTER, ... 50

CHAPTER IX.

OUR BARNYARD IN OCTOBER, ... 57

CHAPTER X.

DAISY LEA, ... 69

PAGE

CHAPTER XI.

A PANORAMA OF GENTLEMEN, ... 81

CHAPTER XII.

"SWEET PEACE, WHERE DOST THOU DWELL?" . . 91

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SNOWBALL AND MISS HOLBROOK, ... 101

CHAPTER XIV.

TONGUES, ... 113

CHAPTER XV.

FIRE, ... 120

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT WENT TO BERMUDA, ... 129

CHAPTER XVII.

WATER, ... 136

CHAPTER XVIII.

COFFEE AND CAKE, ... 141

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SECOND CHRISTMAS, ... 150

CHAPTER XX.

THE FOUR SIDES OF A DINNER-TABLE, ... 160

CHAPTER XXI.

KING CHARLES AND LOUIS QUATORZE, . . . 167

CHAPTER XXII.

READY MONEY, ... 179

CHAPTER XXIII.

IRONING DAY, ... 184

CHAPTER XXIV.

SMOKE, ... 194

PAGE

CHAPTER XXV.

MR CARVILL'S GUN, ... 207

CHAPTER XXVI.

MISS EASY, ... 220

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR BARRINGTON IN A RING OF ROSES, ... 229

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WHAT IS WORTH IN ANY THING,
BUT SO MUCH MONEY AS 'TWILL BRING?" . . . 238

CHAPTER XXIX.

A ROBBER IN DISGUISE, ... 250

CHAPTER XXX.

KID GLOVES, ... 257

CHAPTER XXXI.

PUPILS, ... 262

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PLEASANT KNOCK AT THE DOOR, ... 271

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A FEARFUL ONE, ... 280

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FLOWERS COME OUT, AND WE DON'T, . . . 292

CHAPTER XXXV.

GOING UP IN THE WORLD, ... 302

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PILLIMAQUADY, ... 313

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JACK'S BEAN, ... 322

PAGE

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ENTER A DUCK SOLUS, ... 333

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR PHIBBS' BLUNDER, ... 341

CHAPTER XL.

WHAT MR PRATT DID WITH OUR PLATE, . . . 348

CHAPTER XLI.

OUR PROSPECTS LAID BARE, ... 358

CHAPTER XLII.

WHERE ONE HELPED US IN, AND ANOTHER HELPED US OUT, . 364

CHAPTER XLIII.

HEART'S-EASE, ... 375

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE ROAD TO ETHAN COLLEGE, ... 386

CHAPTER XLV.

TENANTS FOR THE BIRD'S NEST, ... 395

CHAPTER XLVI.

GLAD OR SORRY, ... 410

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DAPHNE, ... 416

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"ONLY," 430

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LITTLE CHURCH AT LAKE END, ... 448

CHAPTER I.

LONG AGO.

> "'Tis far off;
> And rather like a dream, than an assurance
> That my remembrance warrants: Had I not
> Four or five women once that tended me?"
>
> TEMPEST.

I WAS but a young thing, not yet

> "Standing with reluctant feet
> Where the brook and river meet,
> Womanhood and childhood fleet"—

when there came a change in our outward circumstances. During my first years, we had enjoyed what some of our ancestors had toiled for; and my father, after each day's soaring and diving into philosophy and science, walked about our garden in silk stockings, and with a rose in his mouth,—at that time I was a little thing that the rose-bushes looked down upon. And I looked up to them, with admiring eyes that often went higher still, and took in the straw-hat that Mr Howard wore of an afternoon: certainly that hat was a miracle for all purposes of shade and adornment.

Our winters were spent in town, and in the long evenings I, perched on a chair by my father, studied with him the last engravings which he had sent home, wondering at the strange German and French names which he pronounced so easily, and sometimes hiding them with my hand, to test his skill or recollection. Pleasant little unbound packages!—pleasant to me still is the thought of their brown and yellow covers as they lay piled on the pier-table, whither my feet made frequent journeys, as bundle after bundle was exhausted. And Kate would look up from her studies and say—

"Another one already!—why, how fast you get on to-night!"

And I would reply—

"Oh, it's only St Bruno—and we didn't want to see him."

Then at other times there was talk—often above my comprehension, and where I could only amuse myself with the different looks and tones of the speakers; with Kate's earnestness and my father's coolness, and with Mrs Howard's smile at them both, and at my listening face. If my father caught sight of this last, he would often end the lesson he was giving with some laughing remark to me.

"It is well you are a little younger than Kate, Gracie, or I should do nothing but answer questions."

And to reward my close attention, he would give us a long account of some one of his favourite shells—where it was found, and how it was obtained, and what its former inhabitant lived on,—or now and then a mineral was the text; but there I soon lost footing again, between the crust of the earth and its different strata. And yet, though my thoughts could grasp but very little of such subjects, they seldom came down without some token of where they had been—a kind of stepping-stone for the next effort.

"To labour, and to be content with what a man hath, is a sweet life," says some wise proverb: of the first clause we had then no experience, but for a time we did prove the second, and the conclusion.

Then came the years of speculation, when money seemed as inexhaustible as the gold of California, and far more easily come by. No labour nor content now; the bargain of yesterday sold for five thousand dollars advance to-day; with almost as little ceremony as in the Irishman's "Done and done, is enough between two jantlemen."

I thought and cared little about the matter—even the tangible part of it; though I certainly found it pleasant to ride to Levy's, and see muslins and silks bought for me; and also to pay as many visits as I liked to the candy shops; but I had never felt the want of money, and knew not its value—even so much as a child may know. It seems strange to me now, to think of accounts at the bank—of the time when cheques cost but a scratch of my father's pen.—As I have said, there came a change.

It came, and was at work some time before it reached my understanding; and the tokens of its progress puzzled and sometimes disturbed me—giving a sort of check like a handful of earth thrown on a young plant's head. But the impulse of

life and spirits was too strong—and after a few minutes the shoot would push its way through the encumbering soil, and shake off the last particle from its un-tear-wet leaves.

"Mamma," I said on one of these occasions, "that man must have sent home the wrong handkerchiefs—these aren't near so fine as my last set."

"I know they are not, Gracie," she answered.

The words struck me with a sort of surprise. That my step-mother should have done a thing of intent, was as much as to say, that thing was best to do; and an undefined half realisation of the truth took away all desire of further information—I asked not another word. And Mrs Howard quietly left the lesson to Time's teaching.

That was in the beginning of our descent—I had yet to get used to it. Now, on looking back, I feel as if we had come like a child slipping down hill—afraid to let ourselves go, and catching at every bush to stop our progress; but that, if we had come straight to the bottom, it would have hurt us less than we imagined, and we should the sooner have got breath to go up again. For even in temporal things, the valley of humiliation is far more pleasant than the side-hill which leads to it. Yet I do not mean to regret what is passed,—the shock has perhaps been less—the wholesome discipline and experience, greater.

Let me go back for a moment to the time when our feet began to lose ground, softly, softly,—when we laid hold of a great tree that we thought would sustain us—finding too late that its top spread further than its roots; ere I tell how that tree loosened and loosened, and finally brought us to the foot of the hill. It did not fall on top of us—that was one comfort; neither strength nor hope was quite destroyed. "And, indeed," says Bunyan, of the valley, "it is a fruitful soil, and doth bring forth by handfuls."

Gently the wind swept over the snow-covered streets; gently the firelight brightened and faded, brightened and faded, on the ceiling of the last parlour where we sat as rich people; while my father was conning one of a half dozen evening papers, and pencils and books occupied other heads and hands that were about the table. Suddenly broke forth the following advertisement:—

"For sale—A large property on the banks of Lake Luna—

consisting of meadow, farm, and woodland—splendid sites for country-seats, unrivalled water-power, &c. &c. &c. The scenery and salubrity of this celebrated place cannot be surpassed. Roads of the greatest variety and excellence afford opportunity for driving and equestrian exercise; while pedestrians will find a never-failing source of delight in the romantic strolls about the neighbourhood.

"Fish and game abound in every direction; and the near vicinity of the Honiton turnpike (one of the finest in the country) renders it easy for gentlemen who are so disposed, to attend to their business in other places.

"The neighbourhood is eminently moral.

"A celebrated physician has been induced, rather from regard to the mental than bodily wants of his friends, to locate in their midst; and although there is as yet but one church within ten miles, other denominations will no doubt find it for their advantage to share so interesting a region.

"It is also in contemplation to erect a college in Ethan township.

"The present proprietor being obliged to go to Europe, is desirous of curtailing his business and responsibilities in this country; and would dispose of the above grounds on terms that could not fail to render them a profitable purchase.

"Apply to R. H. M'Loon.—Wall-st., New York."

"Why, that is the very place!" said my father.

"What place?"

"Why, the place that brother Ned is so anxious to have me buy—that he says could be made so productive. He has been writing of nothing else for the last two months."

"And why should you buy it?" pursued Mrs Howard, with a woman's desire to know the *what for*—even of a speculation.

"Why?—oh, Ned says the purchase-money could be doubled in no time; and I daresay he is right. I presume it would make my fortune."

Mrs Howard smiled—one of those smiles that are half a sigh—and her eye glanced round the room. A superb coal fire and an equally superb Carcelle lamp, shone upon Turkey carpets, damask curtains, and sofas, chandeliers, carved furniture, pictures, shells, and statues; while between the windows a second fire and lamp seemed to gleam and blaze in the long mirror,

and called forth a reflection even from the far end of the next room. "Make my fortune!"——

"Well?" said my father, as the quiet eye came back from its survey. "Well?—what now?"

"I was thinking," replied my stepmother, "of what somebody said to Alexander."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said my father; "but at that rate nobody would ever speculate."

Another slight smile, a half sorrowful shake of the head, answered this remark, and my father seemed a little posed.

"To be sure," he said, thoughtfully, "the place is larger than I like—some thousand acres, I believe—and would need a good deal of attention and outlay. Well, we shall see; I will talk to Ned about it; but I always thought you would like a country-seat again."

CHAPTER II.

MAY-DAY.

> "From thence the tide of fortune left the shore,
> And ebb'd much faster than it flow'd before."
>
> DRYDEN.

THE man who, getting frightened when half across a river, turned about and swam back, has been more laughed at than he deserved; for there is always at least a question of shores, and the remnant of that strength which will suffice to reach either, may be much the most available on one. It is possible to rest and recruit, where enterprise would be madness.

Had we followed this renowned example, and turned our backs upon Fortune when she took leave of us, we should have been—I don't know what—it is impossible now to say; but we should *not* have been the possessors of Glen Luna. Like wise people, we pushed on, and entered "the diggings" with neither the proper utensils nor the means and skill to procure and use them.

One precautionary measure we did take—we sold our town house—as soldiers burn ships which have brought them where they are to conquer or die. It was not quite for the same reason; but the times are changed now, in earnest, and as we could not keep all, of course we chose the new. How far this desired possession had made it needful to part with most things else, perhaps no one guessed but Mrs Howard; nor do I now know. One thing was certain—we were to leave Philadelphia, and because we must.

Various were the opinions of people about us and our private arrangements; and my father's regard to them was as steadily cool and careless. In the first place, he merely meant to go for the summer; and had that not been so, with the glowing visions he had in prospect, Mr Howard would have said—

> "No shame to stoupe one's head, more highe to reare;
> And much to gain, a litel for to yield."

Shame!—that found no place in my father's mind, with such a police as his own honour and self-respect; and if he had been to try his hand at daily labour instead of a new speculation, he would have walked as erect, and looked people in the face as unshrinkingly. He had no fear of losing *himself* anywhere.

Mrs Willet declared his conduct was "noble! noble!"—a speech I could make nothing of, for I understood but partially the reasons of that conduct. It seemed a small piece of self-denial to give up one house for another; and as my imagination had already supplied Glen Luna with chickens, cats, and flowers—three tribes that flourish but ill in a city—I thought we were like to gain as many pleasures as we should lose. But sense and appreciation were quickened as the last weeks came, and I knew them to be the last, and felt them going!

Stephanie Holbrook—a somewhat quicksilver ward of my father's—was to spend our moving-time with her aunt, Mrs Eustace; and as Kate had not been well, it was agreed that she should go too, and escape the confusion. While they remained, nothing was stirred nor taken leave of. Yes, there was one exception—Kate and I had a farewell drive, and stood watching the quick feet of our receding ponies as they trotted round the corner, with a feeling of sadness that would perhaps have been deeper, had we known how many a long day would pass before their successors appeared at Glen Luna. But, at all events, these were old friends; and we had seen them toss their heads and kick their feet over the traces, till we felt well acquainted. Perhaps, too, the young hearts felt what the young reason could not quite follow out and define—some shadowy *if;* as though other of our comforts were beginning to trot off in a cloud of dust. Certainly we both entered the house feeling very sober; and I began to cling more closely to all we were to part with.

"It is good that we can keep our saddle-horses," Kate said, with a half sigh; "I should be sorry to think we should never mount Puck and Mopsa again. But papa says he shall make us ride a great deal, Gracie."

I assented, with that qualifying breath of which I was learning the use; but the house did not regain its old look. Neither was there any other look to brighten it. There was altogether too much resolution about my father; he could not have come down to common intercourse, if he had had time. Mrs Howard

was too busy, and too anxious; and Kate's untutored foot tried too hard to keep step with my father's. Stephanie chose her own way of expressing her thoughts.

"Do you suppose, Kate," she would say, "that we shall have any occasion for kid gloves in the backwoods? Or what do you think of *our* speculating a little—selling all our laces and buying linen collars? a great many more than we want, but still very useful. I don't know whether Mechlin and Valenciennes will be quite becoming in farmers' daughters."

A very decided refusal of this last title was expressed by Kate, without words.

"You may be as scornful as you please, my dear—it's true. I don't know what the women wear, but you'll not see a coat in that region that isn't made of baize, nor a pair of pantaloons of anything but velveteen."

"I shall not see many of them," was Kate's cool rejoinder.

Other people, however, took up the same notion; and we were favoured with more than one speech of warning and condolence; but they went for little, because, as we said, no one had any right to make them. Meanwhile the season stood not still, and by the time spring was half gone, Mrs Eustace came for her visitors. That was the breaking-up day; after it, the sooner we went the better.

It did not look like breaking up; the April sun shone very fairly, and all the imprisoned birds in the street sang their gratitude for the imaginary freedom they enjoyed outside the brick wal s; or rather that the wires which kept them in were passable to sunbeams. So were not the dark lines which had ranged themselves around me; I had treasured up all my regrets for that day, and there was not one of them wanting. From that chief one—the parting with Kate—the rest seemed to stretch away in perspective.

I said good-bye to Stephanie, and saw her get into the carriage, unmoved; but when Kate, ready dressed for her journey, came down stairs, and pausing in the hall, took one look at the drawing room—one last survey of the things we had loved and the place where we had been so happy—I felt a degree of sorrow that surprises me even now; and when she slowly turned away and passed out of the front door, I felt that we had quitted our home — the after dismantling would be a less matter—the crisis was passed.

And yet it was a trial to see our beautiful rooms, where taste,

and fancy, and wealth, had been so effective, stripped of all their adornments—to have the associations which like sprites lurked in the folds of the window curtains, perched on the chandeliers, and peeped at us from statues and vases, scattered and driven away into the cold world of strangers. Poor little sprites!—they come round me now, once in a while. Even the things we were to take with us seemed to share the general air of confiscation; it was hard to realise that we were to see them again, or to believe that they could look the same when taken out of their rough boxes and set down in a new place.

Then the furniture to be sold must be examined and displayed; and this latter duty fell upon me.

How did I feel the lines of my face change, as with a childish feeling of dignity, and grave as was ever bearded senator, I obeyed my father's summons to the drawing-room, and went through all the mysteries of drawers, and cushions, and strings, and locks — of which Mr Howard knew about as much as most men.

These strangers were not of those who "walk as friends,"—they had bought our house, and now wished to buy some of its contents—it never seemed to occur to them that it was not quite the same thing as going to a cabinetmaker's. They thought but of their own interest—not of my sorrow; nor ever dreamed that the child who knelt by the sofa, and busied herself in untying the strings of its chintz cover, had eyes and fingers half unfitted for the task. There was no look towards me, no softening or hushing of their comments; no gentle word or smile. Perhaps it was well — I could hardly have borne them.

And so I went quietly through my task, while Mr Howard walked up and down with an air of the most frigid abstraction, and the future occupants talked, and canvassed, and measured, —this they would take because it would fit, and that they would not take because it was old-fashioned. The pier-glasses happened to meet their approbation; and I think sometimes of those quiet mirrors hanging there still — clear, bright as ever; while the little figure that danced before them is so changed—so altered!

Oh! how the new-comers plagued us during those succeeding days of confusion! Not content with sending their furniture, they would come themselves — walk through the house, open the room-doors and look in, until even the quiet Mrs Howard

threatened desperate measures. And when I, sometimes sick, and often tired and sad, was sent up stairs out of the way of cold and dust, and sat there all alone, wearying myself for my sister, the first thing would be the intrusion of a bonnet, and one of those chilling, strange faces.

"Prosperity gains friends, and adversity tries them."—The day our first carpet was taken up, a neighbour whom we knew very slightly sent a most cordial note of request that we would *all* come and stay with her till we were ready to leave town. It could not be done, but the kindness was not forgotten — is not to this day. Meantime nothing was heard from Mrs Osborne round the corner, nor Mrs Willet over the way—both old friends.

My stepmother found that she had no time for farewell visits; but the day before we were to go, she sent me to say good-bye to a few whom age or long acquaintanceship marked out for such an attention. With what a strange mood I went my little round, feeling neither very well nor very bright; exchanging silent greetings with the pavements and familiar corners, and now and then finding my grave little self in a circle of well-known faces and loudly-spoken adieus — I suppose they were meant for that; though they had a kind of abstraction, a savour of curiosity, or wonder, or carelessness, that kept them very far from my heart.

I have sometimes thought, that not till we are in trouble can we understand the force of that expression, "the salt of the earth." How might one look, one word, season as it were whole scores that are flat and heartless! I did not follow out any such idea, nor indeed get hold of it; but the *want* was upon me as I reached the dusty and littered side-walk, and saw my father overseeing the loading of a cart, and then found my way to Mrs Howard and declared myself tired.

I had been under a cloud; — but now that the house was cleared, the sky seemed brighter. Childlike, I turned my thoughts forward; and when the last hour came, and we drove away, leaving our old servants grouped together on the side-walk, I was much less sad than I had been before the moving began.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOON.

> "O my ain fireside! my ain fireside!—
> There's nought like a blink o' one's ain fireside!"
>
> OLD SONG.

MR NED HOWARD lived in a village which was the *vis-à-vis* of our new home, and which was known in those regions as "the Moon"—whether because the two horns of the lake half inclosed it, or because some early settler had been learned enough to translate the name of our watery crescent, I know not; but the Moon it was called, and in the Moon lived Mr Ned Howard—or I should rather say near it—in the village-ship, if one may coin a word—and somewhat looked up to by his neighbours for being rich enough to do nothing.

Thither we came one rainy night in April, weary with the long journey and with the unsettled state of our affairs and spirits; and there we took up our abode until both should be somewhat set in order.

No wet travellers ever received a more stirring welcome. Mrs Ned put herself in a bustle, her mother asked all manner of questions; and bustle and questions went sweetly down when we caught a glance of my uncle's bright eye, and saw the glad expression of his face. We had the one word and look then.

Mrs Ned Howard was a very different person from her husband. She had the misfortune to be come of what she thought a good family, and was not sufficiently ballasted with sense and fine etceteras to bear her honours meekly. So her silk dress always rustled, and her hands wore brown gloves to breakfast, and white gloves to dinner; and, from the exceeding erectness of her head, you might have supposed

that there was an imaginary crown upon it, which she was afraid would tumble off.

Unhappily, she had never learned to act out the common but expressive maxim, "Put the best foot foremost." Yet there could be a most kind smile in her eye, a most friendly tone in her voice; but in her education the good had not been developed, nor the evil kept down.

Mrs M'Namara had all her daughter's temper and pride, without the redeeming qualities. Her eye was cold, inquisitive, or sinister, by turns. No needless toilet labour here; —if the grey woollen wrapper with which Mrs M'Namara covered her head in cold weather *could* have been exchanged for something more tidy—even for another of its own species —it would have been a public benefit. And in her combination there was an ingredient far more disagreeable than Mrs Ned's anomaly of sharp bluntness—the faint shadow of a second face under the hood, makes the first a thing to look away from. Perhaps the object on earth to which she had most regard, was her youngest son, Victor M'Namara; but of him I need only say that inheritance and education had unhappily combined their forces.

"And how does the house look, Ned?" said my father.

"Well, very well; but you are wanted sadly. I'm sure Morrison lets his men stand idle one half the time."

"I doubt whether they *stand* idle," said my father.

"Pooh!—well, what you please. They haven't near done blasting those rocks."

"Blasting!" said my stepmother. "But I thought the house was almost finished—are they at the foundations yet?"

"No, no, my dear—not at all—this has nothing to do with the house. I am only taking off the top of a height that came in the way of a certain view I want."

"But will the view be as pretty as the height?"

"Of course—if it isn't, we can put the rocks back again."

"It will be a great comfort to your husband to have you here to advise him," said Mrs M'Namara in a soft way, that at once gave one a caution. "Gentlemen know so little how to get on alone."

It is fortunate that nothing can be discovered where there is nothing to conceal. My stepmother's quiet "Do you think so?" made Mrs M'Namara settle her wrapper and change her ground.

"What did you do with all your furniture?"

"All that we did not sell we brought with us."

"I suppose you didn't save any of your parlour furniture? Dear, dear, what a pity!"

"It was no great pity to part with what we could not use here," said my stepmother, smiling—"and some of it we kept."

"Not mirrors, or anything of that sort?"

"Of course not!" put in Mrs Ned. "Do you think they have no sense?"

"Why, my dear, I didn't know."

"I think if you will excuse us," said my stepmother, "Grace and I will go to bed—we are both tired. I suppose we have the same room as last summer?"

"No," said Mrs Ned—"the front room on the second floor."

"But that is your room—I would much prefer the other."

"No," said Mrs Ned again—"it makes no difference to me, and that one has been arranged for you."

My stepmother hesitated a moment, and then saying good-night, she preceded me up stairs.

"It seems we are giving a great deal of trouble," she said when our door was shut—"this will hurry our house-cleaning."

"It wasn't very goodnatured of aunt Harriet to put us in this room," I remarked; but Mrs Howard made no reply, and I went to bed and dreamed of our umquhile ponies.

There was a bright sun shining when I opened my eyes next day; and, as I looked at the various objects in our room —the dark carved bedstead, the glass jars of West India snakes (I don't think I always felt sure of their prison-walls), —the blue sofa, the lamp,—there came a thought of something else that I had wanted to do or see—what was it? My mind roved about for a minute, and then I had sprung out of bed and was peeping through the window curtains to get a distant first view of our new home. There it lay on the other side of the lake, the fresh boards shewing bare and unhomelike in the sun; and the quiet Sunday morning investing everything with a character that even the eye could perceive. It looked pleasant, it looked peaceful; and though its appearance suggested neither chandeliers nor long mirrors, I turned away with only one feeling of dissatisfaction—I could not have a nearer view till next day.

Meanwhile the hours were sufficiently uneventful. Mrs

Howard was in bed all the morning with a headache; and, except that when I was ready for church Mrs M'Namara inquired "if that was my last winter's bonnet," my presence excited little attention. Happily, I needed it not—my mind was full of its own fresh pleasures—the fountain asked no supply from anybody's hand. I had never been in that region before, though my uncle had lived there three or four years; but, since he left Philadelphia, none of us had tried Mrs Ned's hospitality but my father and mother, and the latter only once. So everything was quite new to me—I had not even made its acquaintance at second-hand; and first impressions came in a delightful stream.

There never was such a walk to church—there never was such another church at the end of a walk; and there I was not far wrong. It stood at the western extremity of the lake, the beautifully kept groundwork of turf running quite down to the still water, the boundaries set back among the trees so as to be invisible. No pillar reared its Corinthian capital there; the rough hewn stone, the unpretending, substantial architecture, gave to the little church an air of truth and frankness that was very pleasing; and echoes caught each stroke of the bell, and gave them back with faint and fainter music. I came home in a sort of ecstacy, and assured my stepmother, as she sat in the easy-chair by the fire, that it was "the very loveliest place anybody had ever lived in."

"And it cannot be so very lonely, mamma," I added, "for, even on the side where our house is, I saw smoke coming out of the woods in several places. Now, mamma, you need not smile—don't you remember how Mrs Osborne talked about there being nobody here?"

"I shall have no fears for your happiness, Gracie, when we are once settled."

"Oh, I should be very happy to-day—if it was only to-morrow."

I thought myself so as it was, when afternoon brought me another walk; and in the few minutes before and after service I tried to see something of the congregation, and to decide over which of the assembled heads that smoke was in the habit of curling; but most probably I chose the wrong ones.

Monday morning brought a disappointment.

"You will not think of going to Glen Luna yourself?" said Mrs Ned, as she drew on the brown gloves after breakfast.

"Certainly," replied my stepmother—"I am going at once. But I think I shall not take Grace—the weather looks threatening."

"I did not suppose you dreamed of taking her," said Mrs Ned; "such a child is only in one's way, and in danger of getting sick. I think you are very unwise to go yourself."

"Dear me! to be sure!" said Mrs M'Namara with a voice that made me wonder what concern of hers it could possibly be.

"Indeed I am never in mamma's way," I interposed. But a few drops of rain settled the question, and sorrowfully enough I watched Mr and Mrs Howard drive away.

O the weariness of being left alone! especially where one does not want to be!

It did not rain after all, and Mrs Ned and Mrs M'Namara went out for their usual daily walk in the garden. Perhaps they feared I might follow them, for at the foot of the steps Mrs Ned paused, and called out—

"Victor! take Grace and shew her the beauties of the orchard."

Nobody wanted me; Victor, who had grown to that uncomfortable age which is neither one thing nor the other, escorted me a little way into the orchard, shewed me two dead pigs which lay in the road, and then went off to his own pursuits. And I, knowing better than to go after the ladies, re-entered the house, and sent longing glances to those new clap-boards which seemed the pleasantest thing in sight.

Now, among the peculiarities of Mrs Ned and her mother, was an insane desire to keep cool—not within but without—it was their idiosyncrasy. At that chill time of year when a fire is wanted almost as much as in winter, there was none to be seen—unless possibly three sticks at night and two in the morning. Also the windows were opened immediately after breakfast, and not shut again until—I hardly know when. The rules of the house were a very slight lunch and a very late dinner. I went up stairs with no inward or outward defence against the cold, and between that and hunger was fairly driven into dreamland, and slept a good part of the morning.

It would be hard to describe my satisfaction one evening, when, the weather being cooler than usual, or Mrs Ned more sensitive, she really wanted a fire—and a fire could not be had. There was no wood sawn, and the saw was broken,

and nobody to mend it; and the way she shivered and warmed her hands over the chafing-dish comforted me for a week's freezing.

Three days did Mrs Howard go and come without me, ravishing my ears every night with accounts of chickens and garden; on the fourth I was again left behind, but with a promise that I should follow her at midday with Mr Ned.

With what joy did I set out! with what concentrated senses did I take note of everything! how little justice I gave the speed of my uncle's good horses. It was a long drive, for beyond the church the road swept back from the lake, and made quite a circuit before it approached Glen Luna. I wished myself on foot that I might take one of the tantalising little paths which promised a shorter route; but, as my uncle said, it would be all the same when we had once got there—and it was.

The house itself was not only upside down with carpenters and masons, plasterers and painters, but literally "turned out of the windows;" for boxes of furniture were standing about the lawn in all directions. A child's magnifying-glass has no lens for troubles. What did I care for the blasting in one direction, the scraper and oxen in another; the boards, the nails, the utter and hopeless confusion everywhere?—they were all hidden, at least from my mind's eye, by a brood of little, soft, downy chickens, that called a barrel their home, and a most benign-looking old hen their mother. So I watched them, brought chips to the little kitchen, which looked like one of our town pantries, examined my new garden tools, clambered up and jumped down the front door step—it was then full three feet from the ground—and finally went up stairs and seated myself in the midst of baskets, and jars, and bundles, to lunch. I had been offered something to eat before I left the Moon, but preferred to reserve my appetite for home stores; and with a good will I now brought it to bear upon bread and butter and raspberry jam.

Luncheon over, Mr Ned proposed that I should go home with him, but my mind was made up to the contrary. So he departed alone. Mrs Howard returned to her labours, and I to mine; and surely I wore rose-coloured spectacles that day, if ever child did. Indeed, I careered about rather too much for Mrs Howard's comfort; for, while I was quietly digging up

flowers at the edge of the woods, or walking round some rock or knoll to see what was on the other side, she would get quite frightened about me.

Towards evening my uncle sent a boat for us, as being the quickest and least fatiguing way of getting back; and, after a last feeding of chickens and locking of doors, we set out to cross the lake. It was near dark, but very quiet, and the dip of the oars was as good as a lullaby. Gently my spirits subsided, and I came back to the every-day world.

"How very good dinner will taste!" said I.

"Yes," said Mrs Howard; "I begin to feel quite hungry."

"You had better curb both appetite and expectation," said my father; "it is long past dinner-time."

"But, papa, they must have saved us some, for they knew we should be very hungry."

"Hum," said Mr Howard, as the boat struck the shore—"well—must is a strong word, no doubt; but you are welcome to my share of the dinner, Gracie."

My stepmother and I went directly up stairs, and having made ourselves presentable, we descended to the parlour with our hopes somewhat cooled by my father's remarks. He had reason.

The tea-table was set with wafers of bread and butter, and fractions of toast, but dinner might have been an obsolete meal for all that appeared to the contrary. We took our seats without a word.

"Harriet," said my uncle, taking a survey of the plates before him, "didn't you save some dinner for these people?"

"Certainly not, Mr Howard. I thought they knew our dinner-hour."

"But when people are cleaning house, they can't be tied down to a minute."

"I could not possibly tell when they would come," replied Mrs Ned, her face flushing, and the imaginary crown in unusual danger; "and as to waiting dinner, it would have been absurd; I did not know but they would choose to dine on the other side."

"Choose to dine on chips and mortar!" said my uncle, with a mixture of laugh and vexation. "Is there nothing left from dinner?"

"I really cannot tell, Mr Howard," said Mrs Ned, getting up, and ringing the bell with great energy; "how should

I know what was left from dinner? Charles," she added, as the waiter came in, "just go down stairs and bring up any cold meat and vegetables that you can find."

"And tell Violet to warm them first," said my uncle.

There was a moment's pause, and then my stepmother entered her protest—in vain.

"Certainly we could have dinner," Mrs Ned replied—"if there was any." So we half waited and half went on eating, till the arrival of some boiled fish, re-warmed, and brown uncomfortable-looking potatoes.

By this time Mrs Ned recollected herself, and did the honours of the cod as well as might be; but we had eaten so many of the decimal fractions, and had heard so much conversation, that the reinforcement was little heeded except by my father, who eat his dinner very unconcernedly.

Three weeks passed thus. Every day we went to the glen, but having been taught our lesson, we took care always to return by dinner-time. Every day I made some new discovery—a strange wild-flower, a nice chicken-coop in place of the barrel, a moss pincushion of peculiar luxuriance, or a rock that had some extraordinary advantages as a table or a lookout. But Mrs Howard grew very tired of the punctual dinner system, and found it most inconvenient to be so far from the scene of action; and at last she resolved to take possession of our house before it was quite ready for us, and let Mrs Ned have her own room again. So we removed.

It was near the gloaming when we took our first meal at Glen Luna—we three; the two older ones thinking gravely of ways and means, prospects and probabilities—the younger with "eyes brimful of delight," and a mood that thought herrings and bread and butter the very best things that ever were eaten.

And a whip-poor-will, who knew not of our coming, sat on a tree close by the house, and sang—as he thought, to himself—but to us it seemed a strange, wild welcome. We could not translate his plaintive notes, yet not one of the listeners but felt an echo of that trill, as wild as untranslatable.

And we were fairly established in our new home; and one of the number, at least, had very bright hopes and forebodings—an undefined expectation of everything pleasant.

CHAPTER IV.

SPRING-TIME.

"Our youth! our childhood! that spring of springs!
'Tis surely one of the blessedest things
That nature ever invented!
When the rich are wealthy beyond their wealth,
And the poor are rich in spirits and health,
And all with their lots contented!"

HOOD.

WE were awakened next morning by a perfect concert of cat-birds and song-sparrows—waked to see the sun rise on our new habitation, and our untried country life.

Who does not remember some first awaking in a strange place?—the quiet lying still as the eye takes in unwonted walls and windows, that are bright with the old familiar sunlight—the gradual gathering up of the stray ends of remembrance—the where, the how, and the whence—and then the sudden spring of both mind and body at the thought of the new and unproved things that await one below stairs.

I remember it all, though now what my waking eyes first rest upon has been so often seen in every variety of early light, that I can hardly realise its having ever looked strange to me—as hardly as that the cat-birds which have sung at my *matinèes* this summer were then unheard of in the musical world; or, by some remote possibility of long life, were on that very morning hiding their undeveloped feathers and faculties together, beneath a blue egg-shell. So have we both emerged!—they from the nest, I from the child's mist which was pervious to nothing but sunshine.

Uncle Ned was at the door by the time we had breakfasted; and after some words of greeting and advice, and a long message from Mrs Ned and Mrs M'Namara, about our health

and happiness, he and I set forth on a walk. All new to me—all glittering with fresh dew-drops!

My uncle was in his element, and talked almost as fast as I did. Now he led the way through a little thicket of young trees, charging me to tell my father that there was the place to transplant from; now he pointed out some fair little flower, and told of his success or failure when he had tried to inure it to his garden. It was in that walk I first saw the moccasin-flower, or rather its bud, for they were not near their full size, and had scarce begun to shew colour. But we dug them up—vain experiment! and Mr Ned told of yellow ones that he had found; and then I hoped that every green bud a little paler than usual belonged to the yellow species. We found, too, the fair pink azalea—the shadblossom—with more literal but less spiritual fairness; and mosses and ferns, and little nameless white flowers, that to this day I know only by sight.

There is nothing left of that walk but the remembrance. The child and the man have both passed away: the slight flower has raised up its head, and shaken out its full petals—the stronger plant has withered and been cut down.

We came back in a great heat, for the sun had got the vantage-ground, and was pouring down his beams with as perfect unconcern as if we had been pineapples. Mr Ned threw himself on the ground in the shade, while I went off to dispose of my spoils. Presently I heard—

"Grace, Grace! *here's* a new flower for you!" I ran, but all I could see at first was my uncle, still on the grass, and laughing very contentedly—then I espied the object of his contemplation in a slow-moving mud-turtle. I don't know why we laughed—unless our spirits were just waiting for a chance, but the mud-turtle had some reason to turn about and laugh at us.

"Now run," said my uncle, "and see if we are to have any luncheon, for I must be going home."

"Where's mamma, Caddie?" I called out as I approached the house.

"Sure I don't know, Miss, but she's got company."

"Company!" I hesitated, but curiosity carried it over timidity, and I marched on.

"Yes ma'am," was the first thing I heard as I entered; "do you think you will like it here, Mrs Howard? yes, I do hope so indeed—I shall be so glad—yes, ma'am."

My stepmother was in the kitchen, cap on head, and broom in hand, and opposite to her stood a lady who looked as if house-cleaning and moving had formed no chapter of her existence. Not very tall, nor very large, rather delicately formed, indeed—her morning dress spotless, a nice little parasol in her hand; while on her head the very pink of pink handkerchiefs self-denyingly received the dust wherewith our atmosphere was loaded.

"And this is one of your daughters?—yes," said the lady, as she caught sight of me—"the oldest, I suppose?—yes, ma'am. How old is the youngest?"

"This is the youngest," replied my stepmother.

"The youngest!—but, my dear Mrs Howard, you surprise me indeed—yes. I hope they will come and see me very often—yes, ma'am. And won't you let one of them go home with me, and stay till you get settled—or both of them?—yes, ma'am, it would give me so much pleasure."

"There is only this one at home now," said my stepmother, smiling; "and I think she could hardly be prevailed on to leave me without her important assistance. But we are very much obliged to you for such a kind offer, Miss Caffery, and for coming to see us in all this dust and confusion."

"Dust!" said Miss Caffery—"oh, I have seen dust before, ma'am—yes, very often; and I can always breathe where my friends can. Not obliged at all—it would be only a pleasure to me—yes. But I wish you could come out of it for a while."

"I will come and see you as soon as I *am* out of it," said Mrs Howard—"you may be sure of that."

"Yes, ma'am, pray do. And do send to me if I can be of any use—I should be so glad to help you—yes, ma'am, I should indeed."

And the pink handkerchief departed, somewhat the worse, I fear, for its sojourn in our kitchen, and we saw it passing along the walk till it reached the woods, and was hidden like a rose in the green foliage. Then Mrs Howard and I looked at each other and laughed—at least I did, heartily—but my stepmother soon checked herself, and then me.

"Come," she said, "you must not let your amusement change into ridicule—Miss Caffery is by no means a subject for it."

"Who *is* Miss Caffery?"

"One of our neighbours."

"One of our neighbours! I didn't know we had any."

"Have you forgotten the smoke that came out of the woods in two or three places?" said Mrs Howard, smiling.

"No; but, mamma, you laughed at that; so I thought, maybe, it was nothing after all. Where does Miss Caffery live?"

"Some distance below us, on the lake; but I don't think you have seen her house; it is almost hidden by trees."

"But what is she?"

"She is a lady."

"Dear mamma, I know that!—I mean, *who* is she; and what does she do; and who does she live with?"

"She is Miss Easy Caffery, for your first question; and, for the second, I shall know better what she does when I have seen more of her. She lives with her cousin, Miss Avarintha Bain, or, rather, Miss Bain lives with her."

"Alone?"

"Alone in the parlour; I presume they have servants in the kitchen."

"Well, they have got a pair of names between them!" I remarked. "But, mamma, have we any more neighbours?"

"I think it is probable; but, Gracie, run and call your father and uncle to lunch. If they had not been more forbearing than your chickens, we should have been deafened by this time, and they would have been hoarse, which, unhappily, chickens never are."

This was our last day of fine weather. We had first a long quaker storm, and then a long storm of some other kind, and of most unquakerlike vehemence, with only a day's sunshine between. Rain, rain; the potatoes washed out of the ground, and I kept close prisoner in the house. Now there was literally not one habitable apartment. The bedroom walls were so damp, that the windows were dripping with water every morning we got up (Mrs M'Namara could not imagine why we were not sick); and though we managed to get three dusted chairs and a fire when evening came; by day, both parlour and kitchen were a compound of paint and plaster, streams of cold air and of soapsuds. If I had but been a mason or a cleaner, all would have been well enough. I had no earthly objection to touching either mortar or soap; but merely to see and smell them was not pleasant; and danger as well as discomfort came hand in hand with the damp air from without. As a last resort, I

betook myself to the garret, and reigned queen of the new floor and the old lumber. It was a dear-bought eminence. There I sat, hour after hour, and day after day, with nothing to do, with no one to speak to; sometimes watching the carpenter bees, who thought our rafters were laid for their express accommodation; sometimes looking over at the misty Moon across the lake; and then wondering wearily what Kate was doing, and whether she wanted me as I wanted her. I wonder at myself now for those long, lonely days.

I had besought our whitewasher to get me a cat, but the cat was long in coming; still the mere hope was good, as far as it went. Now and then, when I got very tired, I clambered down the steep ladder-like steps, and, wrapping myself up, went and stood by the painter to watch his up-strokes and down-strokes.

Then, when the weather held up a little, I would run out to see my chickens; but the poor things, with their half-grown wings drooping to the ground, looked as desolate as I was; and their shrill, piercing "peep! peep!" rang in my ears for an hour after, and gave me the heartache.

At length I bethought me of overhauling some of the boxes that encumbered my dominions—it would be employment, if nothing more; and, dragging one out to front the window, I set to work. The amount of will in my finger-ends supplied the place of strength; and as the fastenings were also wanting in that last particular, the box—not exactly flew open—but was with some hard work forced to reveal its contents. They were numerous, odds and ends of all sorts; but among them I did find one little volume—a prayer-book. It may be questioned whether prayer-book was ever so devoured. Not the service part—I cared little for that—but the hymns; they gave me something to do; and many a one I learned in those solitary days in the garret. This held me some time, and then I had another search, which produced Mrs Sherwood's *Roxobel*. The intensity of delight and appreciation with which I read it cannot be told.

I was poring over my little red volume one morning, when I heard my name called. Down stairs I went, even to the kitchen, and there stood Mrs Howard, holding in her arms a little grey and white kitten. I should despair of making anybody who had never felt the like, understand how glad I was. My frock was immediately outstretched to receive her, and I carried off my new companion, with a charge from Mrs Howard "not to spoil the cat," to which I replied—

"Ah, but she has just come!"

And with this universal reason for spoiling, whether cats or children, I was quite satisfied, and petted my kitty to her heart's content and mine. I was alone no longer; and, to do the little thing justice, she seemed to think almost as much of my playmate qualifications as I thought of hers. I might have quoted Montaigne—"Who knows whether puss is not more amused with me than I am with puss?" It was my delight to run dancing towards her, and then to see the raised back and sidelong jump, as with outstretched paws she darted to catch my foot. A couple of kittens, kind reader! I fear you think them scarce worth writing about; yet many a time did Mr and Mrs Howard stand with pleased eyes and relaxed muscles, to watch our gambols on the gravel-walk which was now laid in front of the house.

We were taking a walk one day, I and my little cat; and puss was quietly sleeping in my arms, except when some misstep of mine giving her a slight jar, she would purr a sleepy little acknowledgment; and wandering on, I came at last to the western boundary of our premises—in this direction not very far from the house The fence did not divide us from the turnpike, but from the grounds of our next neighbour, Mr Collingwood. Formerly he had owned our glen, and then a farm road had come through without interruption; now, where I stood, a bar-place cut it in two, and on either hand stretched away the young thorn hedge and its guardian fence. I stood a long time looking over.

The road went naturally on, though now the tracks were almost overgrown, and at a little distance from me took a short turn to the right behind the woods. Woods hemmed it in on the left also; but just beyond the turn there was an opening through which I could see a field of spring grain, then more woods; and further still, and to the left, as the ground sunk towards the lake, a gleam of its bright waters. The spring air brought almost as sweet ideas as odours; and two phœbe birds were telling each other just what I felt.

I had a longing desire to pass on, and to sit in the shade of a beautiful cedar that was drooping over the road. I tried the bars—they were fast, or too heavy for me to move. No matter, I could climb well enough; so putting down my sleepy cat, that she might run under, I went over, took up puss, and sat down beneath the cedar-tree. I know not how long I had

been there, but I was lost in the attempt to find out how phœbe No. 1 could understand phœbe No. 2, when I heard a loud impatient bark; and as a great dog dashed out of the woods, kitty sprang from my arms with a farewell scratch, and up into the tree.

Here was a situation!

I was somewhat afraid of the dog, and still more for the cat; so backing up against the tree, I alternated between "Poor kitty!" and "Go away, sir!" while the dog threw his head back, and barked at the limb of the tree with his whole heart.

Then in a moment a voice had called the dog off, and ordered him home, and the owner of the voice had walked up to me.

I believe I looked at him as if he might have been a party to the onset, but a pleasant smile reassured me; and I pointed out the only visible white paw of my little companion where she lay hid, far out of my reach, and asked if he would not keep the dog away till my kitten came down. The danger had frightened me out of my usual shyness.

"The dog will not come back," said the gentleman; and reaching up his hand, he disengaged the cat, after some efforts, and though she spit at him vigorously, and deposited her in my apron.

"I am very sorry my dog has frightened you," he said; "does this little cat belong to Miss Howard?"

"No, sir."

"No?"

"It belongs to me, sir."

"But *me* is very indefinite," said the gentleman, smiling. "I thought you must be one of the young ladies from Glen Luna."

"Yes, sir, I do live there—at least I am going to; but I am not Miss Howard, I am only Grace."

"And why not Miss Howard?"

"Because my sister is not married yet."

The gentleman laughed, and then, as we walked along to the bar-place, he said—

"I hope this little felina of yours will not be the worse for her fright."

"No, sir, but——that isn't her name."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, sir——at least *I* never gave it to her. Do you think it is a pretty one?"

He laughed again.

"I see I must call things by their right names," he said. "Well, when you know Latin, you may call your cat felina; at present, I would recommend Muff or Tippet. And now, shall I put you both over the fence together? or, stay, I can let down these bars."

His strength readily accomplished this, and with a very pleasant farewell we parted.

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," I said, turning round again with the little cat in my arms, just as the last bar was replaced.

The gentleman rested both hands on the topmost one, and smiling, inquired—

"For what?"

"For getting kitty down from the tree."

"That was rather an act of justice to kitty than of favour to you, Miss Grace. I was bound to repair the mischief I had occasioned."

"But it was the dog's mischief."

"I am afraid the dog's mischief will always be visited upon me; he is not a responsible person."

"Well, I thank you very much, sir; and for letting down the bars for me, too."

CHAPTER V.

THE WHITE FLAG ON BROWN BLUFF.

"He that will have a cake out of the wheat, must needs tarry the grinding."
SHAKSPEARE.

"I DO wish I could do something to-morrow," said I.

"Do something to-morrow!" said my uncle Ned. "And what ails to-morrow, that it should have something done on it, of all days of the year?"

"Because papa is going to Kellerton to-day, and Kate and Stephanie will come home with him to-morrow; and I do so want to make a fuss."

"There will be fuss enough, I'll warrant you," said my father. "If you would prepare an anodyne, to be administered as soon as they get here, there'd be some sense in it, Gracie."

"There wouldn't be much fun, papa; and I haven't seen Kate in so long; and one can't have bonfires by daylight."

"Why don't you put up a flag?" said my stepmother.

"A flag! so I might! that would be the very thing. But then I don't know where to put it; and papa will be away"——

"And I will come and do it for you," said my uncle.

"Will you really? Oh, I should be so very glad! But where shall we put it? And where can I get a flag? Oh, I know! Those red curtains would be splendid!"

"No, indeed," said my uncle; "I have no notion of hoisting Captain Kidd's colours at Glen Luna."

"And, besides," said Mrs Howard, "the red curtains are too heavy to fly well; and much too good to be let fly at all. But there are some white muslin curtains, Grace, that you may sew together, if you like."

"Well, thank you, mamma; only I'm afraid they won't shew much."

"Couldn't anything shew better," said Mr Ned. "You sew them up, and we will raise the flag on that high bluff that looks down the Honiton turnpike; the white muslin will make a great appearance against the green woods."

"And then, papa," I said, anxiously, "you will be *sure* not to forget to make them look for it?"

"Suppose they are riding backwards?" said my father.

"Now, papa, you know they won't be—you mustn't let them. I should be so disappointed if they didn't see my flag after all."

"That shall not be, dear, if I can help it," he answered, with a smile. "If they can't see out of the window, I'll put them on the roof; and if they are asleep, I'll wake them up; so make your little heart easy."

The white curtains were upon my mind when I awoke next morning; indeed, I might say that everything else in my mind was curiously wrapped up in them; so that I could hardly get at an idea of any sort, except through the medium of their white folds.

It was the fourth of June—early summer in reality, while in effect it was yet spring; for the season had been very late; but now it was pushing its way with a very lovely and quiet working. The bright sheen of the late rain was upon everything—the trees in a perfect hurry to get their leaves out—it seemed as if they had grown inches since yesterday, and our plan could not have finer weather.

With needle and thread we transformed two curtains into one big flag, fastened it to the top of a pole, and then Mr Ned and I set off for the Brown Bluff, with an Irish boy for standard-bearer. There was no regular path—or we missed it—and many a delusive opening in the woods, many a promising little hill, lured us on to new disappointments. If my will had not been stronger than my feet, I should hardly have reached the bluff at all; but once there, the rest was easy. We chose the most promising tree, and then Andy squirrelised to the top, and receiving the pole from my uncle, lashed it to the upper branches, with so many knots and twistings, that the future unfastening thereof seemed problematical.

And away went the white folds of our flag of truce—hanging lazily for a moment among the pine boughs, and then rousing themselves and stretching off upon the sweetest possible north wind. If we had foreseen what was before us, we could have

shewn no more appropriate colours on our first settling at Glen Luna.

We watched the flag for a little, speculating upon the probable distance to which it could be seen, and then turned homeward. The moccasin-flowers were fully out now, and in beautiful variety; some very tall, and of the most delicate pink, while in others, the rich depth of colour seemed to compensate for a lower growth. My hand was never ruthless in the matter of picking, but I could hardly pass by such beauties; and, with some late anemones, an early wild lily, and corydalis flowers, I soon had enough to dress a vase to put in Kate's room.

How weary I was then!—with having done so much, and with having no more to do! Weary of waiting for the stage-horn, which I thought would never blow; and then fluttered and excited when I heard the faint sound in the distance, and stood watching for the first glimpse of the carriage. We had an April meeting, all round; but the rest of the day was clear sunshine. I remember that we found the first ripe strawberry and the first wild violet that afternoon; that we told everything and shewed everything, and yet could not be satisfied with telling and shewing; that we settled down into being very quiet and happy, despite bare floors and confusion. Kate had seen the flag miles away, and had received all the messages that I sent my absent sister through its white folds.

"And how do you like the looks of things, Katie?" said my father, next morning, at breakfast.

"The *place* is lovely, papa."

"And what isn't lovely?"

"Why, nothing, I suppose," said Kate, rather dubiously—"only I was thinking of what Mrs Osborne said, 'that nobody lived here.'"

"Mrs Osborne said that, did she? Well, if I am as wise for a man as she is for a woman, I make no doubt we shall get through the world comfortably."

"But, seriously, Mr Howard," said Stephanie, "are we to have anything in the way of neighbours?"

"There'll be plenty of them in *our* way, I'm afraid," said my father. "If the earth fails us, we'll fall back upon the Moon."

"Uncle Ned does not think very much of his neighbours,"

said Kate; "and who are ours, papa? what do you mean by 'plenty'?"

"Plenty, my dear, is defined by Johnson to be 'such a quantity as is more than enough.'"

"But what do you call enough neighbours?" said Stephanie.

"Depends entirely upon the kind," replied Mr Howard. "If the kind were Mrs Osborne, I should call herself 'plenty.'"

"Ah, papa! you are too bad. Who is there here that we shall be apt to see?"

"Why, there's your old friend Mrs De Camp, and our new friend Miss Caffery, and there is Mr Collingwood's family."

"Mr Collingwood is only a farmer," said Kate.

"And if he were a fair type of the class, it would be well if all the world were 'only farmers.' I am thankful Osbornes don't grow in the country! Then, my dear, when I get my stone cottages built, you know we can sell them to whom we please; and for the present we are at least in a wholesome atmosphere."

"Stone cottages!" cried Mrs Howard.

"Why, yes," said my father. "Ned thinks, and so do I, that there is more land here than I want myself; and I talk of putting up a few cottages to sell or let."

"And how much would it cost?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly—not much—there's abundance of fine stone on the spot—they would pay for themselves in no time."

"I don't believe it," said Mrs Howard. "You'll just lay the foundations with dollars, and there it will end—unless you are ruined by the means."

"Pooh! I tell you they couldn't help paying for themselves, and I shall set men to getting out stone at once. Ruined, indeed! And, by the way, I mean to take some specimens of the stone over to—what's the name of the place?—where they are to build this college—Ethan—I don't doubt the trustees will buy of me, for I never saw finer. I will go now and get some pieces of it before I forget."

For a little while after his departure, my stepmother sat eyeing her coffee-cup with a somewhat sad expression of face; but then rousing herself, she remarked, that whatever else was done, we might as well get in order. And for many days that was

the word. Busily we all worked at jobs too nice and delicate for hired hands; books could be dusted and arranged by none but our own; and if Mr Howard's head had not been full of granite and cottages, he would hardly have trusted even us to unpack his precious shells and minerals. But for the time the new hobby supplanted the old. What he was about we could not always tell; there was great talk of mills and mill-dams, roads and plantations; and Mr Ned Howard and my father would come bustling in, and desire a dusted table in all haste; to be as quickly covered with maps and plans. New ones, just finished, apparently; coloured and uncoloured, lithograph, pen and ink, and pencil. Here a road going smoothly through impassable places; and there an imposing row of stone cottages about which a fine young forest had suddenly sprung up; but that might have been the lithographer's fancy. Then the scene changed to wheels, and timbers, and foaming torrents; a half-finished mill-dam, with a cart and horse comfortably carrying out gravel; and, at the bottom, a long string of units, and tens, and hieroglyphics; "wheels—say so much;" and, "mill-stones—say so much."

"If you were anybody else, I should laugh at you," said Mrs Howard one day, when she had been listening and looking on. "As it is, it comes too near home, and is too serious work."

"A great deal too serious!" said my uncle, looking up, with a very excited face. "The thing to laugh at will be the profits."

"When I see them"——

"I don't believe you would look at them if they were here," said my father, whose hobby did not like a check.

"And if I am to laugh at the profits," said my stepmother, gently, and laying her hand on his shoulder, "what shall I do when I see the loss?"

"Laugh at that too," said Mr Howard, but with a change of tone that said hers was not unfelt. "Pshaw! my dear," he added, looking up at the eyes that were brighter than he liked to see them, and with no touch of impatience now in voice or manner—"you don't know anything about the matter—won't that content you?"

"It would, if I could think so."

"Well, think so," he said, smiling, and taking her hand;

"have you so little trust in my sense as to suppose that I shall take a flying leap off a precipice?"

"But I did hear of a man once," said my stepmother, with an answering smile, "who, being upon a wild horse, could not dismount, and had to go whither the horse carried him."

A momentary expression of doubt, which I had once or twice seen before, crossed my father's face;—then, shaking it off, he said, laughingly—

"Never fear; I will make sure that the horse is a tame one."

And seeing that more words would be useless, my stepmother, as usual, spoke them not.

CHAPTER VI.

TEACUPS.

> "A sweet attractive kind of grace;
> A full assurance given by looks;
> Continual comfort in a face,
> The lineaments of gospel books;—
> I trow that count'nance cannot lie
> Whose thoughts are legible in the eye."
>
> SYDNEY.

WE were happily resting from our long turmoil, enjoying the sweet quiet order of everything in and about our new house; and the summer's luxuriance came wafted through the open windows, and Kate was trying her harp-strings, but softly, as if half unwilling to lose the merry choir without.

"If ye plase, ma'am," said one of our subordinates, opening the door after an admonitory tap, "Miss Caff'ry says, when would ye be settled till ye'd come and drink tay with her?"

"Has Miss Caffery sent up here, Caddie?"

"She did, ma'am."

"To ask if we were settled?"

"Well, I don't just know, Mrs Howard; it's wanting ye she is, at tay."

"And when does she want us to come?"

"Meself doesn't know, ma'am, if it wouldn't be the day."

"Who brought the message, Caddie?" said I.

"He's a fine-looking lump of a boy, Miss Grace, with a face as big as me two hands; I don't know his name, nor he didn't say."

"Tell him to come up stairs," said Mrs Howard.

"That's what I did, ma'am, and I couldn't get him into the house itself."

"And he didn't say when Miss Caffery wants us?" said Kate.

"Never a word, Miss; only he said, 'It's a fine day,' says he."

"I suppose we must put that and that together," said Mrs Howard, laughing. "Caddie, you may tell him—no, I will write it."

"And are you going to-night, mamma?" said Kate, when the note was dispatched.

"Yes, that seems to have been the request."

"If ye plase, ma'am," said Caddie, returning, "he says, *all* the young ladies, and Mrs Howard, and the master; and would you be plased to come at four o'clock? he says, ma'am."

"We will be very punctual."

"Well, I am glad!" said I—"I do want to see some more of Miss Caffery; she is so very comical."

"I wonder if there will be any one else there," said Kate.

"*I* shall be there," said Stephanie, "and will make you laugh with everybody, and at everybody too, if you choose."

"I shall not choose—therefore give all your attention to your own risible muscles."

What a fair, bright walk we had! For a while there were meadows and grain fields on either hand; then two dark points of forest ran down to the very edge of the road; then again came fields and distant woods, with here and there a house. One stood at the top of a high slope which came gently down towards us, but at some little distance. The turf was beautifully short and green, and the forest trees had been judiciously cut and spared; the remaining ones, which stood generally alone, had a fine roundness of form and luxuriance of foliage, of which their very shadows seemed to speak. These spots of sober light set off the sunshine perfectly. Then we passed a house at the very roadside—brown, unpainted, but having in its window a box of the most beautiful "painted ladies" I ever saw. Then came a little spring running swiftly under the stone wall by the way of a latticed opening—which lattice served the purpose of a barrier to pigs and geese—they might not run with the stream. And then we approached the place of our destination.

"Caffre-land," as Stephanie called it, was on a private branch of the high road, which, forking off towards the lake, ran along its shore for some distance, and then turned up to the house. There was neither fence nor wall; the little cottage stood peacefully in the midst of its green lawn, as if

marauders were never thought of; and certainly all looked as if they never came.

The architecture was in no one style unless that of convenience and comfort; though, so far as the steep roof, projecting rafters, and gable ends could make it, it was rather Dutch. The windows were of every sort and situation that a particular view or a particular breeze seemed to make desirable. The front of the house had but one below stairs—a large bay; over and about which a beautiful maurandia hung its purple-blue flowers and abundant foliage. Above this a long oval look-out, of which the sash was slid back into the wall, let one see the waving white drapery beyond; and higher still, a sharp gable reared itself from the roof, which then sloped down until it overhung the bay's side companion—the little brown front door.

The house went by the name of "the Bird's Nest;" though not at all wanting in size and accommodation, yet something in its lichened grey stone and the substantial compactness of its appearance—shadowed as it was by an immense weeping elm on the other side of the road—made the name seem not unsuitable.

The elm had been trimmed up to a great height, and through its drooping branches the long sunbeams came from the western horizon to the pretty bay window, unchecked in winter, but now softened by the leafy covert through which they passed. And from among the foliage there shot now and then a gleam like fire, as two Baltimore birds, or orioles, darted about their nest, which swayed gently to and fro on one of the long weeping branches.

All this we took in ere we reached the door. It is opened to us, and we have entered the hall, which runs straight through to the back of the house. It is narrow, and the rafters stand out in full relief; but at the side is a large Venetian window, of which the broad centre compartment opens like a door upon the flower garden. And here come in the south breezes—freighted with all the bouquets that ever perfumer tried to imitate. I said there was no fence, but this garden was hedged with the Cherokee rose—then covered with multitudes of its large buff-centred white flowers. We were in danger of forgetting that we had come to see anything else; but Miss Caffery did not wait long before she came behind us with—

"Yes, ma'am, it is very pretty; but you must all be so tired —do come and sit down. My dear Miss Grace, I am so glad to see you!—yes, very glad. And these other young ladies, they are most welcome—yes, ma'am, they are indeed. But, my dear Mrs Howard, do come into the parlour."

The same pink handkerchief, the same spotless dress, only of finer muslin this time, and the handkerchief had a shade more pink, and a half-inch more fringe. But I liked the wearer's looks much better upon a second view. Miss Caffery was not young, but she had taken Time so pleasantly, that Time had returned the compliment. Her hair—still unchanged—was of so soft a colour, so neatly parted, her whole voice and action were so gentle and truthful, that one would at a venture have joined her in saying "yes, ma'am" to everything she uttered. Perfect repose as her eye was, it was not the repose of shallow water; and her mouth was eminently sympathetic.

Very different was her cousin, Miss Avarintha Bain. Tall, dark, with hair so black that one wondered where the colour came from—some mental fever shining out through every feature—more display in her dress, and more manner in her mannerism—Miss Bain acted the *au fait* in everything; and the perfect delusion which she put upon herself in this respect made her, to be sure, good-humoured and satisfied.

There were other visitors already in the room; so, when the first little bustle was over, I, the only child there, had time to look about me. Except Miss Caffery and my own family, there was very little to detain my eye among the animated objects, and it presently wandered to the inanimate—they were more satisfactory. A bookcase on one side, a like case of varieties on the other, flanked the chimney and completely filled up the recesses; while in the fireplace itself, little brass musketeers mounted guard as andirons. All the wood of the room—cases, furniture, and wainscotting—was very dark; and the high range of the latter contrasted well with the hard finish above. On this hung one or two old portraits—telling, amid all their silence, that the hopes and fears of the present generation are no brighter, no darker, than those of a century ago—which have passed without leaving a trace, except upon some such bit of canvas. It is a hard thing to realise, that just such a face appeared in "this working-day world," when that world was two hundred years younger than it is now!—it is like seeing that mysterious sort of shadow where the

substance is out of sight. But the child's eye and mind soon left the stately lady for something with which they had more sympathy.

Instead of a table in the middle of the floor, there stood a pyramid of basket-work, dark, like the other articles, and rising tier above tier, from a broad base to a little nest at the top, where was a cluster of roses—crimson, white, and blush. Mignionette and ivy, honeysuckle, multifloras, and alyssum, looked over the side of each tier upon a bed of heliotrope, geranium, yellow roses, and all the variety of spray flowers and buds that make such beautiful filagree work about those that are larger and more showy.

Opposite the bay, a glass door looked into the tea-room; and thither my eyes had just gone, caught by a bright gleam of silver, when Miss Caffery left her older guests, and called me to come and sit by her in the window. And for a while she talks, and I listen, pleased to hear the gentle voice, even when it tells me a bird or flower story that I knew before. And then we both listen, for a horse's hoofs are coming up the road very fast. They come nearer and nearer, even to the very window where we are sitting, and then I see that the rider is my friend of the bar-place. He bowed to Miss Caffery, then smilingly recognised me; and then, still hat in hand, said—

"Have you anything for the post-office, Miss Easy?"

"Not to-day, Mr Collingwood. But you are not going to the post-office? you must stay with us, sir; you must indeed. We want you very much—yes."

"Thank you, Miss Easy, but"——

"Oh, don't give us any buts or ifs," said Miss Avarintha, coming up; "I daresay you're very busy—you always are—but 'when a lady's in the case,' you know—and there are half a dozen in this."

"I am afraid 'ladies first and business afterwards' would not be a very good rule for me," said Mr Collingwood, smiling.

"Oh, Mr Rodney! for shame! and these such young ladies, and you such a young gentleman! Why, you deserve to be posted up. Here is Miss Howard, and Miss Holbrook, and Miss Suydam, and you are leaving the field all to Captain De Camp."

Mr Collingwood sat contemplating his horse's head so quietly, that, except for some slight play of the lines of his face, I should hardly have thought his hearing very good; and then looking up, with a smile as pleasant as peculiar, he said—

"Well, Miss Avarintha, I am just such a young gentleman; very busy, very odd, I suppose; but what will you do with me? I must go to the post-office, and then across the country to Squire Brown's for my father, and then home to write."

"Now, Mr Rodney," said Miss Easy, earnestly, "that is the very thing; yes, sir, you oughtn't to write a bit more, not a bit. You're as pale as your paper—yes."

"My ride ought to have cured that, Miss Easy."

"It hasn't," she said, with an answering but not assenting smile. "Now, be kind-hearted, and go to the post-office and Squire Brown's, and then come back here and mend my knitting-needle, and drink coffee, and tell me all about your dear father. I tried to get to see him to-day, but the sun was so hot I couldn't; and I knew you'd be here, or I should have sent for you—yes; and what Mr Carvill said in his last letter. It will do you more good than writing."

Mr Collingwood bowed, with one grateful appreciating glance, and saying, "If I can, dear Miss Easy," he rode off.

Miss Easy looked after him with an unusual shade on her placid face, but Miss Avarintha walked away; and then up came my stepmother.

"Dear Miss Caffery," she said, "I fear Grace is keeping you here; do let her amuse herself."

"O yes," said Miss Easy; "but I like to talk to her—yes, ma'am, very much."

"But the wind comes in so fresh; and your face"——

"My face? O yes, ma'am," said Miss Caffery, smiling most good-naturedly—"to be sure! you thought I had the face-ache—yes. But I always wear this handkerchief, ma'am; I do indeed."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said Mrs Howard, quite shocked at her mistake.

"No, ma'am, pray don't. You see," continued Miss Easy, so much interested in her story, that she forgot the accustomed refrain—"you see, when Avarintha first came to live with me, I never could arrange my back hair as she liked, because I wasn't a spider, with eyes at the back of my head, as I told her, ma'am; and every day she would say to me, 'Oh, Easy, your hair does look so!' and at last she said, that, if she were in my place, she would wear a nightcap or a handkerchief, rather than let people see such a twist on *her* head. So I told her I wouldn't wear a nightcap, for I didn't think nightcaps were becoming;

but I would wear a handkerchief, and welcome; and I always have, ma'am, ever since."

"I am sure you were very obliging."

"O no, ma'am, not at all. Indeed, yes," said Miss Easy, "it was as much for my comfort as hers—yes, ma'am; for I was as tired of the back of my head as she was."

When Mr Collingwood came back, Miss Easy was in the glittering and aromatic region of the tea-table; but Miss Avarintha pounced upon him at once, passed her arm through his, and walked him round a circle of introductions and greeting. Even I could not but notice the well-bred quietness with which he met all her shewing-off attempts—they seemed to disturb nothing but the corners of his mouth; and when the circuit was made, he walked into the tea-room, and receiving his cup of coffee from Miss Easy, stood talking to her for some time.

"Mr Rodney," said Miss Bain, the moment he returned, and pointing out a place somewhat antagonistic to Captain De Camp, who was talking to Kate—"Mr Rodney, there is an unoccupied chair."

"But here is an unoccupied lady," said Mr Rodney, as he crossed the room, and seated himself by poor little me; "and a lady in a dream, I should judge. Miss Grace, is it allowable to wake you up?"

"Me! oh, I was not asleep, sir."

"May I inquire, then, upon what profound subject your waking thoughts were employed?"

"I am afraid you would think me very rude or impertinent, sir."

"No, I will promise not beforehand."

"Ah, but you don't know, sir; I am sure you would say I had better have been thinking on something else."

"Possibly," he said, with a smile; "but if that be the case, you may as well let me give you an opinion, and then you will know for next time."

He had a frank way, that was very catching.

"I was thinking, sir—I was wondering who you could be."

What a merry laugh greeted this speech!

"Upon my word," he said, "I don't wonder you looked abstracted! And you would like to be helped out of the difficulty? But I should think you might have heard my name half a dozen times at the window a while ago; you seemed wide awake enough then."

"Yes, sir, I thought I did hear it; but then they seemed to call you something else, and that puzzled me."

"They did call me something else; but you see I take the benefit of both my names, not having your conscientious scruples on the score of cadetship; I am Rodney Collingwood. And now, to change the subject, or rather the application, suppose you tell me your little cat's name, that I may make no mistake in future."

I hesitated.

"Hasn't she got one yet?"

"Yes, sir, but——I didn't call her what you advised me to, Mr Collingwood."

"Never mind that; I do not expect to have my advice followed in most cases; only tell me what you did call her."

"Why, sir, Kate brought a little white cat from Kellerton, and it cried all the time for a day or two, and Kate declared she would call it 'Mew;' and then I said, if she did, I would call mine 'Purrer-purrer.'"

"Why, at that rate," said Mr Collingwood, laughing, "I should have called Wolfgang 'Bow-wow,' or 'Barky-barky.'"

And how we both laughed then!

"Is his name Wolfgang?" I said.

"Yes; don't you think he's a fine fellow?"

"Oh, very! but, Mr Collingwood"——

"Well?"

"Why don't you teach him not to kill cats?"

"He has been taught; he never does kill them. But," continued Mr Collingwood, with a smile, "little Purrer-purrer did not know that; there was the whole difficulty. If she had stayed in your lap, Wolfgang would not have looked at her; but a dog will almost always chase any animal that runs from him."

"Then it was well I didn't run too."

"I did not mean to include you in the animal class; I hope Wolfgang would have had so much or so little sense as to prefer the cat."

"The cat is very nice, sir, indeed."

"No doubt of it!" he said, with a grave look of amusement. "Does she ride out every day in the little carriage your arms make for her?"

"It isn't quite fair for everybody to laugh at me about the cat," I said, but laughing myself. "I haven't taken her out in a great while; indeed"——

"Indeed you were afraid of another fright?"

"Yes, sir, a little. But that hasn't been all the reason, Mr Collingwood; since Kate came home, I have had her to think of; and you know I would rather hold her hand than the cat."

"How should I know that?"

"Oh, to be sure," I said; "but you would if you knew her; I forgot that you didn't, sir."

"My remark referred only to you, not at all to your sister. But tell me, Miss Gracie, have you so far forgiven Wolfgang that you will let me bring him to see you some day?"

"O yes, sir! I wish you would! we should be so glad! You know you can come through the bar-place, and then it will not give you a long walk."

He smiled at this; but then Miss Avarintha came up, saying—

"Mr Collingwood, you do look so entertaining and agreeable, that you must absolutely come and talk to me."

And she kept him in the bay-window until we came away.

CHAPTER VII.

HAYCOCKS.

"A man first builds a country seat,
Then finds the walls not good to eat."
PRIOR.

"FINE hay weather, isn't it?" said my father, as he looked away from his saucer of raspberries to the beautiful summer light that was upon everything out of doors. "I must be off to the oak-meadow directly."

"*You*, papa?" said Kate.

"I, my dear—I must go over and set those men to work. Ezra Barrington, to be sure, is a good mower; but the rest will be as like to cut themselves as the grass, unless I shew them how."

"Why don't you let Ezra do it?"

"He won't mow much himself if he has to teach half a dozen others."

"Never mind if he does not," said my stepmother; "you are not used to the sun, and will just tire yourself out."

"No, I'll stop short of that," said Mr Howard, eating the last spoonful of cool cream and fruit with complete satisfaction.

"But, papa," said Kate, "do you think it will have a good effect on the men?"

"Think what will have a good effect?—their cutting the grass instead of themselves?"

"No, no—but your working with them."

"Yes, a very good effect, for they'll have to do something."

"They won't respect you so much—you needn't think it," said Kate, gravely.

"Pshaw!" said my father—"well, I shall respect myself a

great deal more than if I let those six men do nothing all day; so that's settled. And now to put myself in working trim."

"I do wish papa wouldn't!" said Kate, the moment he was out of the room. "Can't you persuade him, mamma?"

"I shall not try," said Mrs Howard, smiling. "He will do himself no harm, Katie."

"Indeed, mamma, you are mistaken,—I am sure"——

"By the way," said my father, coming in at that moment, "I wish you would send over some luncheon about eleven o'clock, and a pail of buttermilk or something of the sort—the poor fellows will be thirsty." And he went out before we had breath to remonstrate.

"Why, they should all bring their own luncheon!" exclaimed my stepmother—"they are only day-labourers."

"And I am sure there are springs enough in the neighbourhood," remarked Stephanie, rather scornfully.

Mr Howard opened the door again, and putting in his head, he added—

"I forgot to tell you, my dear, that I must take Andy over to turn hay; but I suppose Caddie can bring the things."

We looked at each other, and then gave one clap and shout.

"What is papa thinking of?" exclaimed Kate.

"I am sure I don't know," said Mrs Howard; "but it's pretty clear what I must be thinking of;" and she began to roll up her sleeves.

"What are you going to do, mamma?"

"Make some cake for those men."

"No, indeed, you must not," said Kate, earnestly. "Just let it alone, and they will know better next time."

"Your father would not like that, Katie."

"Well, I'd give them bread, then—I wouldn't give them one morsel of cake. Now, mamma, only look at your little arms and hands, and then think if they ought to make lunch for mowers."

"It won't hurt them any more than 'making lunch' for other people, I imagine," said Mrs Howard, laughing; "and as to bread, Katie, we have but just enough in the house for our own dinner. No, I must make some gingerbread, and then we must go and carry it to the oak-meadow."

"Carry it! why, mamma, you are absolutely crazy! Carry a basket of cake and a pail of buttermilk for those men to eat!"

"Well," said Mrs Howard, "I am quite willing it should go in any other way, if you will only say how. Rose has a sick headache."

"Let Caddie take it, as papa said."

"You know about as much of the matter as he does. Caddie is washing, and I should have to hang out clothes during her absence."

"Well, I do think it is rather too bad!"

"Now, Kate, my dear," said Mrs Howard, with a smile, "you may as well make the best of it. Your father did not think nor understand what he was doing—he has been a citizen too long to turn farmer at once—but this will not happen again, and the day is not so hot that we shall find the walk disagreeable."

"Stephanie and I will go with the basket," I said; "she is old enough to escort me, and it would be clear fun."

"Very poor fun indeed," said Stephanie. "Why, the sun will make our hands as black as a coal—to say nothing of the pail's dragging down our fingers."

"Oh, well," said I, laughing, "but I can't go alone, you know; so you may carry a piece of gingerbread, and I will hang the pail on one arm and the basket on the other."

"No, we will all go," said Mrs Howard; "I cannot let you go so far without me. I will make the gingerbread at once; and if you, Stephanie, will sew up the fingers of those gloves that I saw lying about this morning, I think they will protect *your* fingers sufficiently."

"Don't put any carraway in your cake, ma'am," replied Miss Holbrook, "because it might be mistaken for hay seeds."

"Carraway in gingerbread! you foolish child!"

"My dear Mrs Howard, I assure you that combination is not unheard of. You are not quite read up in your cookery book, ma'am."

"I must grant that," said Mrs Howard, smiling.

"But, mamma," said Kate, "in the abstract, you know—don't you think it is very bad policy for ladies to do such things?"

"In the abstract, Katie, I think books are pleasanter companions than flour-pails and boxes of sugar; but I have a poor opinion of the lady who is not woman enough to do anything that comes in the way of her duty. The less of *such* delicacy

of hand we have, the better; and you must not grow up to practise it."

"You'll never practise anything else," said Stephanie when we were left alone—her own disapprobation having faded before the amusement of seeing Kate's. "Miss Howard, how will you dress yourself for the hayfield?"

"In my sun-bonnet."

"But, my dear, you might be mistaken for a farmer's daughter. Do at least take a fan, and a bottle of smelling salts."

"I don't doubt the hay is sweeter."

"But more trying to delicate nerves—when combined with baize jackets. Think of your being obliged to behold those articles, after all!"

"Stephanie," said Kate, "you ought not to try to aggravate my notions till you are sure they are wise and right—or until I am."

"I am wondering," said Stephanie, "what name you will bear in this region. Mr Howard's chief support in the farming line has given me the pleasing title of 'Miss Ste Fanny'—I am curious as to the probable cognomen of Miss Howard a few years hence. In most circles of society one might guess—but here"——

"I hope Miss Howard will always be herself," said Kate, composedly.

"In other words, that she will always be Miss Howard?"

"She might easily be a better thing," Kate said, so gravely, that Miss Holbrook took up her gloves and was silent.

The sun looked hotter than it felt; and we who walked quietly through the thorn-hedged lane, had often a cooling wind and shade. But when we reached the oak-meadow we found a most glowing atmosphere, and all the mowers in their shirt-sleeves. Sometimes these were partly rolled up, disclosing the red flannel undersleeve; and coats and jackets hung from the trees or lay scattered about on the swath. Even Mr Howard had adopted the prevailing fashion (to the dismay of Kate and Stephanie), and was now watching the irregular mowing of the Irishmen, which formed a strong contrast to the long, steady, and even sweeps of Ezra Barrington.

Besides the fresh swath, a part of the meadow was spread with half-dried hay, which Andy was turning; and in one place it was even gathered into winrows. Several rakes stood upright

on their sharp-pointed handles in different parts of the field; and its central and naming tree, a great oak, cast a broad shadow that was ever shortening.

We stood on a little rising ground, looking over the fair scene, and presently my father espied us, and sent one of the mowers for our load.

"We put some ice in the pail," said I; "and now, if you set it in the shade, it will keep cool."

"Ya-as," said the man, who had a goodnatured, pleasant face —"vera true; I'll put it by the big tree there beyont."

"And here is some gingerbread."

"Och, it's too much trouble!" said the man. "Indade, thin, Miss, we're intirely thankful t'ye; for it's a vera hot day, surely."

We watched him as he descended the hill; saw the others gather round; and smiled to see the little shake of the head with which each man finished a cup of the iced buttermilk—"the Squire" being first served.

The wind was blowing very softly, just bending the tops of the uncut grass, and stirring the long winrows, and waving my short hair. It was hard to regret anything that had brought us to a scene so lovely; and we did not move until my father joined us.

"Now, papa," said Kate, "*do* you think it is well for a gentleman to go about with his coat on his arm?"

"Very well—when he doesn't want it on his back."

"But, papa, it looks so"——

"Hum," said Mr Howard; "I don't see why one may not follow a country fashion as well as a city fashion, when one is in the country."

"It *isn't* the fashion—that is just it, papa; you wouldn't see any one else do so."

"I beg your pardon; if you go over to Daisy Lea this morning, I don't doubt you will find Mr Collingwood and his son making hay in as comfortable gear as I am. To be sure, they are only farmers.'"

I don't believe you would ever see Captain De Camp looking so, Mr Howard," said Stephanie.

"Captain De Camp's epaulettes are a part of himself," said my father, a little impatiently, "which, happily, my coat is not. Come, I don't want to hear any more of this; if my respectability lies so near the surface, and is so easily got rid of, I

can't hope to keep it long, any way. Neither Captain De Camp nor any other youngster would hesitate to pull off his coat if he were going to row you on the lake; but a moustache seems to confer as many immunities and privileges as a seat in the House of Lords."

"I thought you were so very notional and particular, papa," Kate said, in a low voice.

"I always shall be, my child, about realities," he answered, kindly; "these false landmarks of breeding I take no note of. I make some distinction of time and place, Katie; if I sat in the drawing-room without a coat, you might justly complain of me."

Stephanie shook her head, and Kate walked on with a grave look, that seemed to say, she could neither give up her own position nor attack my father's.

"I can't conceive, papa, where you ever learned anything about mowing!"

"I have learned a great many things when you were not present, Katie," said he, smiling.

"But you never *had* to do it?"

"Never."

Kate looked better satisfied.

"I don't believe you know any too much of it now, papa," she said, with a laugh; "I daresay Ezra Barrington was not pleased with your performance."

My father looked at her for a moment, as if her words had not quite pleased him; but whether he had some feeling for the notions that were in such a fair way to be rubbed off, or whether he thought Kate might indemnify herself for a morning's discomfort, he at all events left her remark undisputed.

It was destined to be a day of trial. When we reached home, we found Mr Ned Howard had arrived during our absence.

"Where have you been?" he said, as he caught sight of my father.

"Tiring myself to death with those mowers."

"What, in the hill field?"

"No—in the oak-meadow."

"Why, brother, I am surprised at you! the grass in the hill field is a great deal the ripest; it is just fit to be laid by the first high wind."

"Ezra Barrington thought not; he said the meadow would suffer most."

"I'll tell you what," said my uncle, looking round with a stern face—"it's my opinion that Ezra Barrington leads you all by the nose—yes, every soul of you."

It was our turn to laugh now.

"Well," said my father, when he regained his gravity, "if he leads us in the right direction, it don't much matter;" and then skilfully throwing in some word about improvements, they both dashed off into granite, and mills, and cottages, until—making allowance for the anachronism—one would have thought the one speaker to be Crœsus and the other Rothschild. Mrs Howard sighed, and once or twice looked up as if she would have ventured an opinion; but the millstones and blasted rocks that were flying about might have deterred more courage than hers.

"Are you looking so grave about me, mamma?" Kate said, when we went up to dress. "Are you afraid that I shall grow up a fine lady? If I have a great many follies, you do not think them incurable?"

"No, dear," she answered, smiling; "they are anything but that. I was not thinking of you at all, except indirectly; I was thinking of this wild system of improvements. It seems to me, Katie, as if your father was going to fill the hopper of that mill out of his own pockets; and once in, the dollars will rattle down till there is not one left."

Rattle down! if my father had had the use of his senses, he might have heard them even then. I think he never went out without a bag of dollars to put somewhere. It was not only on the mill-dam—but here they were laid down on some new road instead of paving stones, and here they went up in the air per force of gunpowder; and another time were exchanged for a new pair of farm-horses, though we had five already. But, alas! there was no transforming back again; whenever this was attempted, mill and roads and horses became all dry leaves.

Then, as ill luck would have it, Squire Suydam's gardener got hold of Mr Howard with a plan for raising fruits out of season—out of reason, it might have been called; and what a pile was raised there! or several piles—we thought they were only stone and mortar, but I know now they were dollars. I say ill luck, for the fable declares that when Fortune once found a boy asleep by the side of a well, she roused him, saying, "Pr'ythee, child, awake; for if you should fall in, people would lay all the blame upon me."

Then there was the haying; but whether it did not cost more than it came to, "is a matter of opinion." My father tired himself out systematically, for the hayfields were far off, and the weather July. Had less been undertaken, Ezra Barrington's practical sense and steadiness could have kept things straight enough; but the power to make so many ends meet never existed save in the mind of a speculator.

And so the season wore on; and we young ones sported like butterflies, nor realised that winter was coming. And Mr Howard was the busiest of bees; but he made one grand mistake—instead of filling his cells as fast as they were finished, he went on adding comb to comb while not one contained any honey. And what did we butterflies care for that?—Nothing. We thought the making cells was very pretty work, and had no doubt but they would be running over full some day, and somehow. So thought my father. Mrs Howard, to be sure, had misgivings, and often looked grave, and sometimes remonstrated; but what was her one word against the combined forces of my father and Mr Ned?

Meantime the flowers faded.

CHAPTER VIII.

WOLFGANG AND HIS MASTER.

"Cry, holla! to thy tongue, I pr'ythee; it curvets very unseasonably."
As You Like It.

Now in all this time neither Mrs Ned nor Mrs M'Namara had ever been near us; of course we never saw each other except as we occasionally met at other people's houses or at church. My uncle tried to make it out that the initiative lay with us; but, though my stepmother said little in reply, she rightly felt our claims as strangers, and would by no means make the first move. Once, after a long drive with my uncle, I had sat in his parlour for a few minutes, but the visit produced nothing except a question from Mrs M'Namara as to whether our new oven baked well, and who made the bread. So our intercourse was restricted to messages and inquiries, of which my father and Mr Ned were the medium.

Other visitors we had had;—Captain De Camp and his mother (when the former was at home), the ladies from the Bird's Nest, and now and then an inroad from the Moon or a deputation of neighbours. The Collingwoods, father and son, had called once or twice when we were out, and on the afternoon of our haying expedition Mr Rodney came again.

Stephanie, Kate, and I were alone in the study, having resigned the sitting-room to my father's slumbers and Mrs Howard's letter-writing; and, as the gentleman saw us in passing, we admitted him by the private side-door near which we sat.

Stephanie immediately began with—

"Oh, Mr Collingwood, I am so glad to see you! I have been wishing every day that you would come!"

He looked all surprise, that was not attention, but ventured no reply.

"Do tell us something about those good ladies down yonder that you seem to know so well. What sort of people are they?"

Mr Collingwood hesitated a moment, and then said, with a somewhat singular grave expression—

"May I be excused, Miss Holbrook, for asking a more particular description? It so happens that I know a good many ladies in the neighbourhood."

"I don't believe you're in the least doubt as to what I mean," said Stephanie,—"those inhabitants of what they call the Bird's Nest, and I call Caffre-land—who gave us such remarkably good muffins the other night."

Again Mr Collingwood paused, thoughtfully dressing the leaves of a rose which he held in his hand; and it seemed to me that some feeling of pain shaded his smile when he said—

"Miss Holbrook, you ask me a question, and then in the same breath give me good reasons why I should not answer it."

"Why, what do you mean? I haven't done such a thing."

"I beg your pardon; you first reminded me that I know these ladies very well, and then that they have tried to entertain you pleasantly at their own house."

"Just the reasons why you *should* answer. If you didn't know them, you couldn't; and if I had never been there, I shouldn't want you to."

"I knew a lady once," said Mr Collingwood, "who, whenever she was questioned too closely about a friend, would reply, 'Oh, I cannot tell you, I have eaten of her salt;' and I must confess that even I have a little of the Arab about me."

"It is very strange they should feel it as they do," said Kate—"that so nice a point of honour should be more universally recognised among those wild tribes than in any civilised society."

"That is not the only flower of savage life: very few people practise hospitality after the manner of our North American Indians."

"I hope very few people practise teasing after the pattern of our neighbours!" said Stephanie. "Don't you think the world has rather gone back by dint of civilisation?"

"Not at all!—but I wish it would go further forward. And I would not refuse to copy a fine example, even though it were found only in Arabia."

"Or Caffre-land," said Stephanie.

Bnt the person she addressed neither looked up nor spoke for a minute, and when he did speak it was not to her.

"Miss Howard, did you ever notice the beautiful arrangement of the petals of a fine rose?"

"I believe I have noticed that it *is* beautiful. What analogy were you thinking of, Mr Collingwood?"

He looked up then, with a smile of pleasure at her quick tracing of his thought.

"Might not one compare it to the balance of a fine characacter?—where every quality holds its due proportion and place; where those which must come into every-day contact with the world are unfolded like these outer petals, with yet a leaning towards concealment; and where there is always a hidden treasure folded away out of sight, which we judge of by what we can see of the rest, and by the exceeding sweetness it sends forth."

"Your picture wants touching up," said Stephanie. "Why don't you add, that, like the rose, a fine character always blushes at being unfolded?"

"That would be too obvious a remark."

"Obvious! Well, now that you have kindly given the rest of the company something to think of, will you satisfy my curiosity?"

"If I can without dissatisfying myself," he said, with a smile.

"Very well, then; but, in the first place, I think you are all crying up the Arabs for nothing. I never heard that the salt-protection tied anything but their hands. If you come to robbery and murder, there may be some sense in it."

"'Who steals my purse, steals trash,'" answered Mr Collingwood, playfully.

"But what has that to do with the matter? Now don't be absurd—I thought you were a person of such extraordinary sense, and all that—at least, so says Miss What's-her-name—I never shall get along unless I give them some cognomen that I can remember. Let me see—I will call one 'yes, ma'am,' and the other"——

There was a flash of indignation in Mr Collingwood's face that surprised me; and as his quick glance came from

Stephanie to us, I was too happy that we were looking grave. Stephanie herself stopped short; but, determined not to shew her discomfiture, she directly added—

"But tell me how you like that name, before I look for another."

The flash had passed away, and it was with a very grave, almost sad politeness, that he said—

"I think you can find none better, Miss Holbrook, if you have neither respect for Miss Caffery's excellence, nor sympathy for anything in her that you might wish otherwise."

The reproof was too just to give offence—even Stephanie felt that; and now, waked out of her thoughtlessness, could see that it had carried her too far. But she did not speak, nor did we. Never had crickets such an audience as those that were then performing. I sat looking out into the fading sunlight, and wishing most intently that the silence might have as speedy an end, when my eye suddenly perceived a slight motion of the half-open door. Slowly it moved in, and, a little startled, I touched Mr Collingwood, who sat next me. He turned, and at that moment the door swung clear back, and we saw the fine head and shoulders of Wolfgang. I am sure we were all obliged to him, and drew breath more freely.

"Oh, no!—don't send him away!" exclaimed Kate and I together, half answering half anticipating a gesture.

The dog stopped, and looked at us.

He was a very large hound, of the old Talbot breed, deep black, except where upon the muzzle and legs that colour changed to a brownish red; and with large deep-set eyes, finely curved nostrils, and broad and very low-hanging ears. He stood for a moment, and then walking up to his master, he laid his head on his lap, and looked up with all the love and confidence of a child for its mother; yet with a shade of humility, of conscious inferiority, which made the expression of his eye very touching. I saw Mr Collingwood's own glisten as he passed his hand over Wolfgang's head.

"I never can meet the eye of a fine dog without being moved," he said at length.

"But what makes it look so?" I said—"what is he thinking of?"

"Nay, there you ask too hard a question. It would be as difficult for me to read all his thoughts as for him to read mine; and yet in a way we understand each other perfectly."

"He has beautiful eyes," I said. "But what do you see in them, sir?"

"Miss Grace, when you have been coming home at night, did you never look with particular pleasure at the windows?"

"Very often."

"And why were they so attractive?"

"Why, because of the light within."

"You have answered your own question as well as mine."

"Then you think, Mr Collingwood," said Kate, "that Wolfgang is a sort of animated Baku, with a perpetual fire in his head?"

"In his head or his heart," said he, smiling—"I don't quite know where it should be located. But I am sure it shines out through his eyes, and gives this half melancholy, half resigned expression, which tells his consciousness of having less intelligence than I have—poor fellow!"

And Wolfgang shut his eyes, and drew one deep breath of satisfaction.

"Mr Collingwood," said Kate, as Stephanie left the room to see what a knock at the front door might announce, "will you let me ask you one question?"

"Will I let you, Miss Howard? Surely *that* is one you need not ask."

"Yes I need, for I want you to explain yourself a little. Do you think it is wrong ever to criticise people?"

"You are reproving me now," he said, with one of his pleasant smiles.

"Indeed I am not—I have no right—I am simply asking your opinion."

"I don't know but I deserve a reproof," he said, after a moment's thought—"not for a bad intention, but for the wrong working out of a good one. To your question, Miss Howard, I believe I must answer yes and no."

"And you must please to explain," said Kate.

"I think, then," he replied, "that it all depends upon the how and the to whom. To say that members of the same family, or very near friends, ought not to speak to each other concerning the looks or character or manner of other persons,

would be to abridge that freedom of speech and thought of which I am a strong advocate. But one may talk and even laugh about such things, without a touch of ridicule or contempt."

"And you think it is not right to speak of them to strangers?"

"I think if you mention the faults or infirmities of one person to another who knew them not before, you do the first an unkindness, which can only be excused by the hope of doing good to the second—either in the way of warning or example; unless always the friend to whom you speak is judicious and trustworthy, and can see things with your own friendly eyes. So I think," he added, as he rose to go;—"I wish I were always quite true to my own convictions."

"But, Mr Collingwood," said Kate, "I don't quite understand—we haven't got to the point yet."

"Because you are afraid to bring me to it," said he, smiling. "Why did I speak so rudely to Miss Holbrook?—is *that* what you want to know?"

"You did not speak rudely at all; but why was it wrong for Stephanie to speak of these ladies to you, who know them better than she does?"

"It was not in the least wrong for her to speak of them to me or to any one else, unless in a way that—forgive me—she ought not even to think of them. Words are not much—it is the feeling which prompts them."

"Then you *do* think one ought not to laugh at people?"

"I think," said Mr Collingwood, gently, "that it is dangerous to indulge one's self in ridicule, especially of personal defects or failings which are now, at least, beyond control. But I beg you to make every needful apology from me to Miss Holbrook; perhaps I felt and spoke too strongly, for Miss Caffery is one of the few really good friends I have ever had."

"We all liked her very much," said Kate—"she is so very gentle and pleasant."

"It is more within than without. Upon a naturally fine moral temperament has been built up that superstructure without which mere natural qualities are so unsatisfying, so unreliable—a lovely, well-developed Christian character!"

How warmly he spoke! how like a chill fell his words upon both our hearts! We had it not—that beautiful superstruc-

ture. I felt the shade gather upon my own face; and, as I instinctively drew near Kate and looked up to hers, I saw the shade there—saw my own tears reflected beneath her drooping eyelashes.

He said no more, but stood looking at us for a moment, and then, with one kind clasp of the hand that emphasized his words, that seemed to tell of sympathy in his eyes too, he left us. And we sat down in the gathering twilight, hand in hand, and thought; until I, weary with the unusual excitement of feeling, laid my head in Kate's lap, and knew nothing more till I felt her lips upon my cheek, and heard her voice say that it was bed-time.

"It don't signify," said Stephanie; "I daresay I oughtn't to have said what I did about Miss Caffery, and I won't give her any name but her own in future; but nothing shall prevent my calling t'other one 'the bane of my life.'—My mind's made up; and I won't 'come about' for any Collingwood that ever set sail."

CHAPTER IX.

OUR BARNYARD IN OCTOBER.

"I wear the hoop petticoat, and am all in calicoes, when the finest are in silks."
SPECTATOR.

I SAID the season wore on; and yet it was hardly that, it rather flew—flew very quietly, for the two or three people we liked best to see came but seldom; and not even "Miss Howard" would leave her books for mere bonnets and coats, unless when it seemed absolutely necessary. So morning visitors were left to my stepmother and to Miss Holbrook—who was sufficiently amenable to the charms of society—and Kate and I kept ourselves as usefully busy as Mr Howard could desire. Stephanie often joined us, and would work in good earnest for a while; but a double rap would always banish Euclid, and set her to speculating upon "who that could be." In the afternoon we were of course all together, and saw whoever came; and as Kate's habits became better known, it did seem that the late circle increased at the expense of the early one. At all events, we had company enough to keep us from loneliness, and for the rest we amused ourselves with Kate's harp, reading, flowers, walks, and the moonlight reflections in our lake—"Luna and Luna," as we called them.

Early in the fall Mr Ned Howard removed to Baltimore. This was a sudden determination, but he had grown tired of the Moon—or his wife had, which answered just as well—and after very short debate and preparation they went;—we paying and receiving one farewell visit. This change was a trial to us all; and we looked sorrowfully at the deserted house, and thought of the kind heart and smile that had so often come to us from thence. Oh! what a blessed thing that man has not

foreknowledge!—how even then the lines of circumvallation were drawing closer and closer to our citadel, and we knew it not!

It had been matter of grave deliberation, as the cold weather drew on, where we should spend it. To have town life and country life succeed each other had always been our intention. But now that hopes and interests, and means too, were fairly shipped upon "the full tide of successful experiment," Mr Howard thought he had better look after them, and perhaps felt that one establishment speeded the dollars quite fast enough—so we concluded to winter at Glen Luna.

Plans and debates on other points were called for, but that was in the in-door department. The fact was, that the stream of dollars did not run our way; and we found it not always easy to intercept and turn them to our own purposes. And when they could not be had, of necessity a substitute must—such a one as woman's wit can furnish.

"But if we are to stay here, mamma," said Kate one morning, "we must at least go to town for a few days, to get winter dresses, and all that, you know."

"I think we shall need nothing but what we have," said Mrs Howard, musingly.

"Why, my dear mamma! there is not one of us but Stephanie that has even a bonnet; and as to wearing those we had last winter, they are a great deal too slight for the country; the first wind that came sweeping over these woods would go right through them—the bonnets, I mean."

"I know that, dear Kate—we cannot wear those; but I think we can do without any. You know since Mr Cary was taken sick there has been no church to go to, and there is like to be none; and for all purposes of walking, I am sure nice hoods will answer very well; for them we have materials."

"But visits, mamma?"

"All the neighbours we need go to see on this side are very few, and very near, and sensible. I know Miss Easy would welcome a hood as heartily as a bonnet. Visits at the Moon may wait till spring."

"Yes—to be sure," Kate said; "but it seems very strange, mamma, and I don't quite see the reason of it."

"I hope it will not be so long," said Mrs Howard, "but at present your father has a great deal on his hands."

"Yes, mamma; but I cannot conceive what that has to

do with our dresses; it seems to me that *we* are the most important."

And Kate looked up with an air that quite rivalled Don Quixote in his defiance to windmills. Mrs Howard's face rather grew graver and sadder.

"I don't care much about the thing itself," Kate went on; "it is not that, but the principle, mamma—the reasonableness."

"There are few principles more important to a woman, my dear child, than that of patient submission to circumstances. They are very seldom brought about by her own agency; her work is not to build, but to beautify; and that may be done in a log cabin. Money is less plenty than it was, and we must try to see how little we can cost. We have nice dresses enough for visiting, Katie, and at home calicoes will best suit our means, and therefore best suit us. I shall like to see how you will beautify them," she added, with a smile.

"How many things which I call impossible, or wrong, you prove to be possible and right, mamma!" said Kate. "I wish I could always take the right view of things at first!"

"To be sure of doing that," said my stepmother, fondly passing her hand over the fair brow that was looking so thoughtful—"to be quite sure of taking the right view of things, Katie, one must always take the right stand—upon duty, and not upon inclination. But if you sometimes make a mistake, you never refuse to see and own that your position was a wrong one."

The calicoes were sent for, and we made them up, for the first time. I thought myself quite dressed in one, especially when I wore, too, an apron of new white cotton. Ah, I was a simple child! but so little had dress ever been a part of ourselves, that the transition from one style to another seemed very slight. It mattered but little to our light hearts whether caterpillars or jennies spun for us.

Mr Howard knew nothing of all this; it may be questioned whether he even knew that we had asked him for very little money. If we had proposed the question of Calico *versus* Silk, he would have said—

"Have anything you want—there is money enough; just make out a list, and I'll get you fifty yards of anything."

But we knew there never could be money enough while there were too many calls for it; and our debates were quietly

settled without a reference. As to the mere fact of our wearing one thing instead of another—if Mr Howard noticed it at all, it was probably to remark upon our taste instead of our economy. My stepmother knew better, saw clearer, than he did, which way improvements were tending, and made a vain attempt to counterbalance; it would not do. Things have their due weight only in the philosopher's apparatus—where

> "A lord and a lady went up at full sail
> When a bee chanced to light on the opposite scale."

Late in October, my father left home for some time on business, and came back, as we thought, in remarkably good spirits. But we got no clue till tea was over.

"Well!" he said, with a vigorous shove of his tea-cup,—"I've been buying some of the most beautiful cattle you ever saw."

"Not *buying?*" said Mrs Howard.

"Yes, buying—to the tune of six or eight. Let me see,"—and, taking a paper from his pocket, he went on—

"There is, first, 'Lady Howard' (she shall be yours, Kate, my dear), a beautiful frosted Durham: I think she's the finest creature I ever set eyes on."

"That's well," said Kate, laughing; "I shouldn't like to have mediocrity bear my name."

"She's handsome enough to bear anybody's name," said my father, enthusiastically, "and has more fine points than I ever saw in any other animal. Then 'Snowdrop,' a white two-year-old; 'Auld Reekie,' a fine Ayrshire heifer"——

"But, my dear father," said Kate, "who did help you with that list of names? Edinburgh isn't in Ayrshire."

"They both happen to be in Scotland," said Mr Howard; "and as to the names, Kate, the cows may have dubbed themselves, for all hand I had in it. Well, next comes 'Duncan Gray,' a frosted Durham bull; 'Dewitt' and 'Lord Clive,' two yearlings; and 'Sunbeam,' an eight months' calf, that I think may prove the finest of the lot. She's a perfect beauty."

"But what could you be thinking of, to buy so many cattle just at the beginning of winter?" said Mrs Howard.

"What could I be thinking of?—a dairy next summer, and prize cattle for the fair. Why, Van Alstein (who is a very clever fellow, by the way) says there is no surer way of investing money."

"No surer way of losing it, I'm afraid," said Mrs Howard. "But you haven't half enough hay to keep them till spring."

"Plenty, for I mean to have it all cut and mixed with brewers' grains. I must have some mangers put up to-morrow; and I have bought a cutting machine that will make inch-lengths of the hay in no time. Is there a fire in my study? I have some writing to do."

"He is absolutely crazy!" said Mrs Howard, as my father left the room.

"Why don't you tell him so, mamma?" said Kate.

"It does little good to speak when the thing is done; and, besides, I don't know that I ought. Your father must know his own affairs, one would think—and yet these 'investments' make me nervous."

"But would these people mislead him, mamma?—maybe it will all turn out as he thinks."

"Well, we will hope so," said my stepmother, with a very unhopeful face.

The cattle came, and very beautiful they were, and in fine condition. It seemed impossible that such fine creatures should ever look less well and thriving; and the mere step of Ezra Barrington about the yard gave promise they should not starve to death that winter.

We were eating dinner one day soon after this, when Caddie rushed in with—

"If ye plase, sir, the cow's in the mud beyont."

"In the mud? what cow?" said my father.

"It's her that was coming from Squire Bulger's, Andy says, sir."

"Where, in the name of all uncommon sense did she find any mud to get into?" said my father.

"Meself doesn't know, sir—it's a soft spot some place."

"As high up as Andy's head, I suspect. Most extraordinary thing, that a boy and a cow couldn't travel the highroad without walking into the first ditch they met!"

"More cows to be fed?" said Mrs Howard.

"More cows to get out of the mud, my dear, which is the present matter in hand. Have you any rope in the house?"

"None but the clothes line."

"Well give me that, then! how many clothes lines do you think one cow would buy?—study that, to restore your equanimity."

And seizing the coil of clean rope which Caddie brought in, my father set off, with all the men he could muster, to find and help the unfortunate cow.

Then Kate and Stephanie and I laughed, and Mrs Howard looked grave and then joined us—in which merry mood we finished dinner.

"My mind is quite clear now about papa's being bewitched!" said Kate. "I don't suppose he would care if all Philadelphia were to see him!"

"He would have small reason to care," said Mrs Howard; "it is none of Philadelphia's business. Your father judges of propriety by his own sense—not by other people's want of it."

"I wonder if everybody else in this region does such things!"

"You had better ask Mr Collingwood," said Stephanie; "it's to be hoped he knows something in the neighbourhood besides ladies."

The afternoon passed till long-shadow time, and nobody came back; and then, partly anxious and partly curious, we walked out to seek tidings. The scene in the barnyard was worthy the pencil of Paul Potter.

The cow was alive, indeed, but too much exhausted to get up from the sled which had brought her there; and being of a somewhat spare habit, she looked none the less gaunt for the coating of blue mud, which left a narrow strip of dun colour along her backbone in rather bold relief. Hard by stood the oxen—loosed from the sled but not unyoked, quietly chewing the cud, and perhaps ruminating as well upon the probable fate of the load they had conveyed out of "the soft spot." Away off, Andy was holloing after Sunbeam's vagaries, and the rest of the cattle followed in single file the windings of the brook; while cocks strode majestically about the yard, and hens hopped upstairs to roost, and the real sunbeams were saying very plainly, good-night. Mr Howard stood with arms folded, looking at the cow; and Ezra Barrington, who was rubbing her head and side with a wisp of straw, discontentedly remarked—

"If she'd been taken care of as *I* take care o' cattle, I'd ha' had her kickin' up her heels by this time, instead o' having to pull her out o' the mud!"

"What could make you buy such a looking cow, papa?" said Kate.

"She's not in very good condition, to be sure," said my father, "but that is easily mended; and she has some excel-

lent points, and will make a fine milker. And now she must have a name."

"Let's call her Lady Bulger," said Kate, laughing; "which is both an expression of politeness to the squire, and of our hopes that the cow may grow fat."

Even my father had to laugh at this; and we left Lady Bulger, and walked back to tea.

It became a constant amusement to go to the barn at feeding-time. Even when the weather grew cold, and the road was but a beaten track in the snow, we would run over, at the end of the short winter day, to see the hay cut and distributed, and then to watch the cows as, in emulation of human nature, they pushed and hooked each other about from manger to manger, nor were ever satisfied with their own.

We were all there one afternoon, leaning over the fence, and smiling at the strange cries and gestures which Mr Barrington bestowed impartially upon Andy and the cows, when Squire Suydam's English farmer came by. He stopped and stood talking.

"Bad 'abit, sir," said Roberts, shaking his head, as Snowdrop executed a most prolonged lick upon one of her shoulders—"very bad 'abit, sir!"

"Why?" said my father.

"They lick off so much of the 'air, sir, and then swallow it. I saw a calf once, sir, that died—most beautiful calf I ever saw in my life!—and nobody could tell what was the matter with him. Well, sir, they cut him open after he was dead; and they found a ball of 'air in his stomach as big as your two fists, sir!"

"A ball of air in the calf's stomach!" cried Stephanie. "I've heard of a soap-bubble, but—why, Kate, what do you mean by stopping my mouth?—I say, I shouldn't think that would stand swallowing."

"You may be glad they had both walked away," said Kate, gravely.

"Why? you think I should have had a lecture? Not a bit; Mr Howard would have laughed—he couldn't have helped it."

"But just suppose Roberts had heard you."

"Fiddlesticks! do you suppose he would have been scared at the sound of a little h'English? Come, let's go home; they won't have done their talk in a week—and,

'By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes'—

so I don't want to wait for it."

"Will you go, mamma?" said Kate.

"No, I shall stay for your father. But you had better all run home as fast as you can—it is getting very cold; and Andy is just going with the milk, so you will have an escort."

"*He* will," said Stephanie. "Oh! how he would run if anything appeared 'suddently!' I think I see the capsizing of the milk-pails. And how you do run, both of you! do stop!"

"But I am so chilly!"

"Stop, nevertheless—in other words, moderate your pace—in other words, walk slower. If you go rushing into the house at that rate, you've no idea what you will rush against. What do you suppose I meant by 'the pricking of my thumbs'?"

"Nonsense," said Kate, coolly.

"Well, I meant sense for once. You see, while your eyes were intent upon the cattle, mine saw where 'a little skiff shot to the bay;' and I have no doubt—just walk, and not run round this corner, will you?—that its contents are quietly reposing in our drawing-room. At all events," added she, as we entered the hall, "their caps are at rest on the hat-stand."

Kate gave her one reproving glance, and then composing her muscles, gravely entered the drawing-room.

Sure enough we found visitors—Captain De Camp and Lieutenant Henderson; which last having voted three legs of his chair a nuisance, was quietly balancing himself on the fourth, with his head against the open study door.

"Fine season for walking, Miss Howard," said the Captain.

"Very fine," said Kate. "I hope Mrs De Camp is well enough to enjoy it properly?"

"Quite well, thank you," said the Captain, putting his head and neck at right angles.

"But don't you think," said Mr Henderson, who had a slight lisp, "don't you think, Mith Howard, it ith very fatiguing to walk in thuch cold weather?"

"Fatiguing? Oh, no!" said Kate, smiling; "I think it is very pleasant. I get fatigued if I do *not* walk, Mr Henderson."

"So do I," said the Captain. "I wanted to march off after you at once, but Henderson wouldn't hear of it."

"One hath to walk tho fatht!"—explained the Lieutenant.

"You would have had a quick step to march to if you had been with us," said Stephanie. "I don't doubt you would have been fatigued."

"Impossible, I should think, in such company," said Captain De Camp. "Have you been walking far, Miss Howard?"

"Only to our little settlement of barns and barnyard. It is almost a pity you did not take so much trouble as such a walk can give, and then papa could have displayed his new cattle."

"Did you ever know," said Stephanie, "that 'air is very pernicious to calves?"

"Ah?" said the Captain—"pernicious?"

"Very," said Stephanie, with a grave nod of her head.

"I always supposed the more they had of it the better, Miss Holbrook."

"That's what I used to think," said Miss Holbrook; "but Squire Suydam's Englishman says they should be brought up as much as possible on the 'air-tight principle."

The officers stared, and Kate and I were on the verge of uncontrollable merriment, when Stephanie changed her ground.

"Have you been bird's-nesting lately, Captain?"

"Not lately—no, I have not been there in some time," said the Captain with a rapid laugh.

"Birdth-nethting!" said Mr Henderson.

The Captain explained.

"Oh, I thee!—Mith Holbrook ith quite thevere."

"But those are excellent people, Miss Holbrook—they really are, though you would not think it. Most excellent people!" said the Captain with a face of grave consideration.

"*I* should think it," said Kate, quietly.

"Miss Howard," said he, turning to her, "you have not seen the new sulphur spring near the Moon, and the fine building that is being erected for the water-drinkers?"

"No," said Kate.

"I should be exceedingly happy to escort you there some day, if you will permit me."

"And Mith Holbrook?" said Mr Henderson, from his centre of equipoise.

"Certainly!" said the Captain, bowing.

"Oh, thpare your 'thertainly,'" said his friend, languidly—"I will take that honour upon mythelf."

"I will go in a minute," said Stephanie, "and so will Kate, of course."

"I should like to go," said Kate; and then, rather hesitatingly, she added, "but I don't think I can."

"I hope I may disregard that doubt. A few days of this weather will shut up the lake, and, I assure you, Miss Howard, the ice is a perfectly safe and pleasant bridge. Will you let me come for you next week?"

"But suppose you were to come when I had made up my mind I could not go?"

"Then I should at least have the pleasure of seeing you," said the Captain; and there it rested, and the gentlemen took leave.

"You are a strange girl, for a truth-teller," said Stephanie; "what doubt could you possibly have?"

"Whether papa would wish me to go."

They went off upstairs, and as I sat alone in the twilight I heard Mr and Mrs Howard come in.

"What does that man come here for?" said my father, in an annoyed tone of voice.

"What man?"

"De Camp—I wish he'd do it!"

"Do what?" said my stepmother, laughing.

Mr Howard vouchsafed no reply but an impatient glance, and then, hearing Kate as she came singing down stairs, he walked off into the study and shut the door.

"Mamma," said Kate, "I have got myself into such a scrape!"

"Such a scrape?"

"Yes; or Captain de Camp has."

Mrs Howard really looked startled for a moment, as if my father's last words might have been prophetic, but Kate went on—

"You see, mamma, he wants me to go to the sulphur spring with him, and I demurred at first, not knowing what you would think of it; but at last I half consented that he should come for me next week. And then, after he had gone, it flashed upon me that I have no bonnet! Now, what am I to do? and what do you suppose papa would say to the plan any way?"

"I will see to that," said Mrs Howard; "and as to the rest, Katie, I will make you a bonnet."

"O no, mamma! you can't!"

"O yes, I can, and will; so you need think no more about it."

She was as good as her word, and before the next week Kate was provided with a sufficiently nice bonnet; but at the expense of what fitting and trying on, sewing and ripping out! nobody wanted to go through that week again.

"The skating is as fine as possible," said Captain De Camp, when he entered our sitting-room Wednesday morning; "it is perfectly delightful!"

"But I hope you are not going to skate back with me?" said Kate.

"Certainly not!" said the Captain, with one of his strange little laughs—"on no account! I wouldn't deprive myself of the pleasure of your company, Miss Howard, by running away from it in that style. But I suppose I may infer from your question that the doubt of last week is nowhere?"

"I found it not quite so substantial as you represent the ice to be."

"Melted away as the ice froze?" said the Captain, with secret delight at something.

Kate read his thought more truly than he read hers.

"I never could understand," she said, "why gentlemen feel so much amusement whenever they find, or think they find, fear in a woman. They are so often mistaken, too, as you are in this case, Captain De Camp."

The Captain was quite willing she should say more about his mistakes, but she did not.

"That ith becauthe they find tho much delight in coming to the rethcue, ith it not, Mith Howard?" said Mr Henderson.

"The gentlemen ought to know, sir," said Kate; "if they do not, how can I?"

"The gentlemen ought to go," said Stephanie, while one of them laughed and the other considered—"and the ladies too."

"But, Miss Grace," said the Captain, "aren't you going? Come, I can take care of you all, or at least of you both. I suppose Henderson will attach himself to Miss Holbrook. Run and get your bonnet."

I told him no, and with a very smiling face, for I felt exceedingly amused. There was no touch of shame or mortifica-

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I told him no, and with a very smiling face, for I felt exceedingly amused. There was no touch of shame or mortifica-

tion in my mind; but it seemed a very funny thing that my reason should be the want of a bonnet, and that the Captain should tell me to put it on, and be quite unable to guess why I didn't.

I stood watching the diminishing figures as they crossed the ice, with a feeling that if I could have gone with them it would have been pleasant, but that, in the present state of things, it was rather amusing to stay at home.

CHAPTER X.

DAISY LEA.

> "And after him came next the chill December;
> Yet he, through merry feasting which he made,
> And great bonfires, did not the cold remember."
>
> SPENSER.

WE were to spend Christmas at Daisy Lea, with all the neighbourhood. This was the invariable custom, Miss Avarintha informed us: farmer Collingwood never accepted any invitations himself, but always insisted upon this annual gathering at his own house. For the last two years, indeed, his health had been so poor, that he seldom could go anywhere, except as he now and then made a short visit in the course of his daily exercise; and this, as we learned from the same authority, was the cause of Mr Rodney's being at home from college.

"He won't hear of anything else," said Miss Avarintha, "though he was getting along so finely; nothing could persuade him to go back after he had once found his father not quite well; and now, he just stays at home, and does everything, and sees to everything, and studies himself to death besides. I doubt," she added confidentially, "whether their circumstances are over-good—that is a fine farm too; but the oldest son was desperately extravagant, and I know that Mr Rodney supported himself at college; so sometimes I think that all this writing isn't for nothing. Easy could tell you, if she would; but she never will talk about Mr Rodney, except to say that there is nobody like him, which may be all very true, you know, Mrs Howard, and still one likes to hear something more."

It was the perfection of winter weather—that is, of winter weather in clouds; for the sky was softly covered with the gray forerunners of snow, and the wind, which had been piercing for

the last few days, had now lost both coldness and activity. Not a leaf stirred—at least of those that still clung to the trees; but many a one rustled and crumbled under our feet, as we and the two ladies from the Bird's Nest walked to the Lea together. Miss Easy was an embodiment of merino and fur, with the tiniest indication of black silk below all; while Miss Avarintha's dress was as usual of the same edition, but gilt and illustrated.

"The Lea house," as it was called, was neither very large nor magnificent. It stood near the extreme horn of the lake, but set a little back in what seemed a mere clearing, so thickly did the forest close in around it. This was but a belt of woodland, however, through which little leafy paths led to the farm which was thus fenced off; the trees being now bare, we could see the background of hill and meadow, and stubble-fields, with the barns and other farm buildings which were grouped just at the far side of the belt. The house had only one storey, but the dark roof seemed to stretch away over enough of that, while most hospitable curls of smoke welcomed us from the four corners. No coal-bin here, but a great wood-shed—filled as if winter were in truth a besieger. Late as it was, the turf kept somewhat of its green, and one or two hemlocks thrust out a well-clothed arm from among their winter-bound companions. A broad gravel walk surrounded the house on all sides, and was overhung by its roof; and the perfect order of everything seemed to have infected even the aforesaid blue telegraphing, which went on softly and steadily as if it had never heard of vagaries.

"But they don't keep house for themselves?" said Mrs Howard, with a sudden look and tone of pity for the two gentlemen that were to stand such an inroad of ladies.

"O no, ma'am," cried Miss Avarintha, "my dear Mrs Howard!—dear me, no! They have an English housekeeper, who has lived with them always for what I know—Mrs Crown; she's a most excellent person. You'll see her at the door; she'll come to meet us."

And she did, and ratified the lady's praise. To say nothing of the snowy apron and jingling keys (to both of which I am partial), Mrs Crown's face and manner took your fancy at once.

"How do you do, ladies?" she said, with a tone as fresh as the open air; "I am glad to see you indeed! Come in, pray—it's right cold, or seems so to me who have come from the fire.

But it's handsome weather for young faces," she added with a smile, as she looked at our flushing cheeks.

"How is the farmer, Mrs Crown?" said Miss Easy.

"But poorly, ma'am, I thank ye—this last starving weather doesn't agree with him. But Mr Rodney is well."

And leading the way into a room which owned one of the four chimneys and an unusual complement of books, she took off our wrappers and shoes with all the good-will in the world.

"My mind misgave me it would snow to day," Mrs Crown continued, "and to be sure I think it will to-morrow; but it's held off for Christmas. And somehow I've always thought a stormy twenty-fifth brought ill-luck. Miss Howard, there's a death of cold comes in at that casement! I would have stopped it out, but Mr Rodney says the room's warm enough—he has his table this side mostly, in winter. Won't you please to take that chair till I can undo these fastenings for Miss Caffery?"

"Come here," said the lady referred to, as Kate somewhat unwillingly left the fine view down the lake; "come here and look at the room—I think it is the pleasantest in the house."

"I can't imagine how you can let all these people come into it!" cried Miss Bain, with a glance at the cloaks and hoods and muffs that lay helter-skelter upon sofa and chairs, and which were strangely at war with the spirit of home and tasteful comfort which dwelt everywhere else. "I should think it would put you out of all patience, Mrs Crown."

"Dear me, ma'am," said the housekeeper, "if Mr Rodney keeps his, I can't say a word—and he never lost it yet, I do believe. To be sure, I wouldn't let that black muff lie on his desk—that did make me feel a little lofty. Thinks I to myself— And I did speak to Mr Rodney about it this morning, but he just smiled as you know he does, Miss Easy, and said that when ladies come so far in the cold, there couldn't be anything in the house too good for them."

"Has Mr Carvill arrived?" said Miss Bain.

"No, ma'am, he has not."

"But I thought he was to be here by this time."

Mrs Crown's loquacity was, however, suddenly checked; and bending down by Miss Easy, she seemed to have concentrated all her faculties upon a sleeve-button and loop.

"This button is a thought too large, ma'am, or the loop too small. Now, is there anything more I can do for you, ladies?"

"Not for me, thank you, Mrs Crown," said Kate, to whose eyes the appeal had rather been made. And thereupon Mrs Crown gave it as her opinion that "there was nothing in the house too good for some of the ladies—certainly!"

We crossed the hall, and filed into a room of very different moral atmosphere from the one we had left. The physical atmosphere was even warmer, for in the huge fireplace there blazed, with that slight, quiet noise which denotes good wood, logs enough for a week's supply of an ordinary family and chimney. But instead of the silent sensible books, there was a buzz that one knew was not all about fruits and flowers. The room was well filled when our five selves were added to the Bulgers and Suydams and Browns and M'Loons, whom the fire had already driven to the verge of desperation and the wall.

Farmer Collingwood sat in his arm-chair by the hearth-stone, and Wolfgang lay at his feet—paws stretched out, and nose upon them—occasionally raising his eyes, but not his head, at some extra noise or bustle. Mr Rodney was everywhere and nowhere—at least I never could find him where I looked for him. Now with Miss Easy, now with Mrs Howard, first with his father and then with mine—then coming to my quiet corner to smooth down my hair and ask after my little felina, and once to bring me forward and find me a seat by Kate. Then he would be moving some Miss Bulger's chair from a door-crack, or shielding some Miss Suydam's face from the fire; and at last he took a stand by us "to refresh himself," as he said, "with a little reasonable conversation."

"Oh, Mr Collingwood!" said Kate—"*you* to say that!—'a little reasonable conversation'—when you have been talking to ever so many people that we do not know!"

He laughed, and answered—

"You may suppose, Miss Howard, that I wish to think myself a friend, and you and Miss Grace very judicious. But what if I were to follow your example, and beg an explanation of something you said that night?"

"With all my heart—if I said anything needing or worth an explanation."

"I am supposing that we are friends, you know, and one likes to have a friend's opinion even in slight matters. You said you had 'no right' to reprove me; do you think friends have not that right?"

"Yes—and no," said Kate, laughing; "but you must remem-

ber, Mr Collingwood, that I was almost an entire stranger; and"——

"And you see that your shot glances," he said, with a smile, for Kate had stopped short in some confusion. "Ah, I have your opinion now about one thing at least! But, in the abstract, Miss Howard, do you not like frankness, and simple, plain speaking?"

"Very much."

"Then why should it not be practised?"

"It should," said Kate, hesitating a little; "there is nothing I love better; only"——

"Only the laws of etiquette forbid?"

"No, not at all; or, if they do, it makes no difference; I was not going to say anything so silly as that. But I can't talk about it, Mr Collingwood," she added, laughingly, "for you will make some other side-application of my words, and be as far from my opinion as you were at first."

"Set me right where I am mistaken, then," he said, smiling. "If I understand you, Miss Howard, you think the privilege of plain speaking should be confined to very intimate friends. Now, I go a little further, and think that true friendly interest may confer the right, when neither age nor circumstances forbid. If I know myself, I would take reproof most kindly even from a stranger, if it were given in that spirit which is of charity, and not of meddling."

"If—but there is the difficulty; and people so generally *do* meddle, that one is afraid of being misunderstood, and classed with them."

"Granted; and yet, Miss Howard, if *appearances* are to be the rule of right and wrong, do you know where that would land us?"

"But," ventured I, "mightn't one do harm, sir, if one was even *thought* to be meddling?"

"Perhaps so," he said, smiling; "though, I think, I always feel the spirit with which advice or reproof is given; there is much less danger of being misunderstood than people fear; the chief point is, to be sure of one's own motives. But I do not think, Miss Gracie, that it is best to peril even appearances for a trifle; in matters of importance, 'let every man stand or fall to his own conscience.'"

"And how of things that are but incidentally important—that you would neither put first nor last?" said Kate.

"Such as?" he answered, with a look of keenness and amusement, that rather indisposed Kate to answer. "Nay, if you will not give me an instance, how can I tell? Perhaps we should not agree in our division of classes."

"I am sure you think you would not agree with mine," said Kate, laughing, and colouring a little; "but, Mr Collingwood, there *are* cases of minor importance, and, in such, what would you do with public opinion?"

"What would I do with it?" he said, with a smile, and a bright lighting of the eye;—"defer to it always, Miss Kate, where I could, without compromising better things; and where I could not, give it to the winds! Public opinion must be kept in its place; and when it runs counter to my own sense of right, the question is, or ought to be, easily settled."

"In other words, one ought to have a great deal of moral courage?—but that is an uncommon quality, and not easy to get."

"Because people take the wrong way to get it, I think," said Mr Collingwood. "The man who is brave for nothing, hardly deserves the name; but men will dare every bodily risk for what they love, or rather than desert their standard. And so with moral courage;—let the cause be but precious enough; let the mind but fairly take in the need there is that all lovers of truth should be not only steadfast but active on her side; and that phantom of the world's approval will vanish before the reality of its lost and suffering condition."

"You have got back to the more important things again," said Kate. "But I think the same rule applies to all, except, as you said, to mere trifles."

"I think so. The division of classes would never be fixed. And, after all, the matter comes very near home;—

> 'To thine own self be true—
> And it must follow as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.'"

"That is just what you were telling papa the other day, that you liked so much, Katie," I said.

"Do you always remember everything your sister says and does, Miss Gracie?" said Mr Rodney, with a smile at me, or my information—I wasn't sure which.

"Not quite, sir—I wish I could."

We had been too earnestly engaged with our own talk to

notice that of other people; but in the pause that followed these last words, Miss Bain's voice demanded attention.

"Isn't it very strange, my dear sir, that your son never thought of acting up to his name?"

"Up to his name!" echoed farmer Collingwood.

"Why, yes, sir—it's always a wonder to me that Mr Rodney should have been anything but a sailor. Now there's Captain De Camp went into the army for nothing in the world but his name being Wellington."

"He might better have stayed out of it, then," was the reply.

"But that's nothing to do with Mr Rodney, nor why he shouldn't make a noise in the world," pursued the lady. "Just think, sir—he might have been another Admiral Collingwood."

"We don't have admirals in this country, Miss Avarintha," said the person spoken of, wheeling about—"and if ever I trod quarter-deck, it would be under the stars and stripes."

"Then you might have been Commodore, which is just as good. Commodore Collingwood has a very distinguished sound—extremely so; and I wonder you never thought of it. There's something so stirring in a sea life—don't you think so, sir?"

"Very stirring indeed," said the farmer, with a look and tone of voice that spoke of some discomfort.

"And it's so good for young men to knock about in the world!" added the lady, complacently.

"Miss Avarintha," said Mr Rodney in his way of quiet determination, "will you take my arm, and let me find you a seat by Squire Suydam? He made me promise an introduction, and I would bring him here, but you see there are neither chairs, nor good place for them."

"Distinguished!" said farmer Collingwood, in a low sad tone, and looking after his son with unspeakable affection—"Rodney will find it hard to distinguish himself, if he spends all his young life in taking care of me!"

"That depends upon what meaning you attach to the word, sir," said my father, who was standing quietly before the fire. "The noisy applause of the crowd he may miss; but if the smile of God be distinction, Mr Rodney is in a fair way for it."

The farmer took my father's hand, with one look of thanks.

"You are right, sir," he said; "and yet I am so prone to

satisfaction about this mysterious string of questions? It is hardly fair, sir, to set one mind at rest at the expense of another."

"You must explain," said the farmer.

"Yes, sir, we are very curious indeed," said Miss Easy.

But Kate had sprung up, and placing her hand before my father's mouth, she exclaimed—

"Now, papa! if you say any more!"——

And Stephanie ejaculated—

"Oh, Mr Howard, pray do not! I don't know what Mr Collingwood thinks of me already."

"I don't believe he knows himself," said my father, drily, as he took hold of Kate's hands; then looking up, he told her, smiling, that "she might either stand there handcuffed, or go back to her seat;" and having so dismissed all opposition, he proceeded—

"It's nothing very extraordinary, good friends, and, I'm afraid, not at all uncommon. One day last summer, I went into the hayfield, and the day being warm, I laid aside my coat—unsuspecting mortal that I was!—and not realising, as I said, its importance. And these two silly girls came over—(shall I say what for, Kate?)—and there, to be sure, they found me working without a coat. Well, sir, it might a'most as well have been my head. Stephanie quoted Captain De Camp, and Kate gave me an abstract of other people, and fairly charged me with having left off to be notional!—which, from her lips, is a grave imputation. I denied that, of course; but not being able to think of any one else, of whose common sense I was sure, except you two gentlemen, I declared my firm conviction that at that very moment you were making hay in as comfortable gear as I was. And then afterwards, naturally enough, I began to debate my question—what part of a man *is* his coat?"

"Well, Mr Howard," said the farmer, with a very indulgent smile, "you have taught us at least one thing—there are no mistakes in Miss Kate's temper."

"No one could be long at finding that out," said my father, affectionately.

"But, papa," I said, "Kate did not mean that *she* thought so—only that other people did."

"O you gipsy!" said Mr Howard, "to come in with your elucidations!—Never spoil a good story, my dear—if it cuts your friends to pieces."

"I don't believe Mr Rodney would agree with you there, papa."

"I'll tell you what we had better agree upon, all round," said my father—"that an invitation to spend the day does not mean to stay all night. Miss Easy, I don't wish to hurry you, ma'am, but Mr Collingwood will think we are all singing privately the old song of

'We won't go home till morning—
Till daylight doth appear.'"

"I wish you would sing it," said the farmer.

"My dear sir," said Miss Easy, "I am quite ready—and very much obliged to you, yes, sir, for reminding me. But I waited for Mrs Howard."

"I did have some such wild notion too," said my father; "but I recollected that 'time and space are trifles to a lady.'"

"Oh, papa," said Kate, laughing, and stopping short at the door, "I have an indefinite recollection of a gentleman who always writes a page after he is called to dinner!"

We were soon ready, and leaving the other ladies in consultation with Mrs Crown, Kate and I went back to the room where we had spent the evening, and to the three figures standing before the fire.

"And so, Miss Kate," said farmer Collingwood, taking her hand as she came up to him, and looking in her face with a very gentle amusement and interest; "and so you think that books must of necessity grow mouldy in a farm-house?"

"I have said nothing of the sort, Katie," said my father, laughing, as her quick glance brought the accusation.

"Is not that your opinion?" said her questioner, still detaining her hand, but very gently.

"No, sir," said Kate. "At least," she added, colouring exceedingly, "I suppose it is not true—whatever I thought."

"I am quite sure you are true," was the satisfied rejoinder—and there were no eyes there that were not well pleased.

"I should not venture to be anything else here, sir," said Kate, trying to rally a little; "Mr Rodney will think I have profited by his lessons."

"No, I shall not," said he, smiling.

"Lessons!" said Miss Bain. "Who has been giving lessons? You, Mr Rodney?"

"No, ma'am."

"Who then?"

But nobody claimed the question.

"Did you never hear of taking what is not given, Miss Bain?" said my father. "Mr Rodney, you need not stir—I will see these ladies home."

That, however, was not listened to; so we sallied forth eight strong.

There had been a flurry of snow, but it had passed over; and now the stars were shining out, though dimly; while in the west they were entirely concealed by the thick black curtain of a cloud that hung there. The air had grown cooler, and our steps fell quick, and our spirits were as light as the untrodden, unsoiled snow that our dresses brushed from the path. Mr Rodney walked first with his two companions, then Kate and Stephanie, then Mr and Mrs Howard; while Wolfgang and I joined them all by turns.

CHAPTER XI.

A PANORAMA OF GENTLEMEN.

"Every moment is expectancy
Of more arrivance."

SHAKSPEARE.

WE had a busy week of it. Time was, when both Christmas and New Year were days of expectation and gilt books,—now, having to *make* all our presents, one day seemed enough to prepare for; and as we were somewhat belated, we had agreed to keep New Year. Each one had her secrets—each chose her particular workroom or corner; and any other eyes or feet that ventured within the tabooed region were met with little screams of prohibition and dismay. The house was full of mystery,—on the carpet lay strange scraps of silk and paper—from the pantry came no less unaccountable poundings. Things were made of nobody could tell what, and savours came from nobody could tell where. We were kept in a state of delightful uncertainty.

"Oh, Kate, my dear! how you do smell of varnish!" said I when she came up to bed, New Year's eve.

"I!" said Kate.

"You—what have you been doing?"

"Papa has been varnishing a picture; do you suppose that could infect my clothes?"

"Can't tell—something has. O me! you are all mastich or copal—whichever it is."

And Kate bent down over me, and gave me, as she said, the last kiss for that year; but I think she gave me another when I was half asleep.

We had been busy about things we knew not of—busy all that week in making wings for our spirits—in brightening up

our hearts to reflect the sunbeams on that New Year's morning, till the sunbeams themselves seemed doubled—quadrupled. Oh! people may talk of the spring of the year! there is no spring like that of a young heart. Its fresh leaves, its unexpected flowers, the new life inhaled at every breath, till the spirit swells like a mountain stream, with the numberless rills of pleasure—like the throat of one of May's early songsters, that would fain tell what it feels, but cannot. And so on that bitter cold first of January, we young ones had spring.

Our presents were but simple, except that my father gave us each a handsome book; for the rest we had worked slippers and ruffles and needle-books, and home-made *bonbonnières*,—whence the varnish. Then Miss Caffery sent us each a little geranium, and farmer Collingwood an Indian basket of lady-apples; so we thought ourselves well off.

The moment breakfast was over, Stephanie began to hurry herself and us.

"You see," she said, "it will take us some time to dress, and I wouldn't miss a visitor for anything."

"My dear child," said Mrs Howard, "you forget that we are in the country. What visitors can you expect?"

"But some might come, mamma," said Kate, "and it's just as well to be ready."

"They always visit here," said Stephanie; "the Captain told me so himself."

So while I went over everything in the drawing-room with my eye and hand (voted the quickest and carefullest in the house), they arranged the cake-basket.

"What's all this for?" said Mr Howard, pausing before the table where Kate had just placed it, and coolly helping himself to a macaroon. "Your cake will be nothing but chips by tea-time."

"But it isn't meant for tea."

"What then?"

"Company."

"Company!" It was quite unnecessary to say more; and presently my father helped himself to macaroon the second, remarking—

"I suppose I'm in no danger of interfering with anybody."

"Why not?" said Stephanie.

"Because there is nobody to interfere with."

"Well, now, Mr Howard, why shouldn't gentlemen come here to-day?"

"Why should they?—even granting there were any to come. To be sure, I could go over to the Moon and beat up recruits; I daresay I could pick up somebody that is fond of macaroons"—and Mr Howard took a third.

"Now, papa," said Kate, putting her little finger in his buttonhole, "will you *please* to let my cake-basket alone?—our resources are not inexhaustible."

"But so long as I have enough, my dear, what does it matter? You can eat poundcake for tea."

Our gravity was so completely overset, that even Mr Howard's face relaxed a little.

"Why should they come, indeed!" said Stephanie;—"because there are three ladies here, and ladies are not as plenty as blackberries in this quarter of the world."

My father shook his head, as if the blackberries had the advantage in more respects than one.

"Three ladies!—I wonder where you studied multiplication!"

"There is Mrs Howard, one, and I am two"——

"I always thought you were something besides yourself," remarked my father.

—"And Kate makes three," concluded Stephanie, not noticing the interruption.

"Kate is nothing but a rosebud," said my father, looking at her fondly, and arranging her hair after his own fashion—"you need not put her in your grown-up class; and as I am in no haste to have her gathered, the longer she stays out of it the better."

"I have heard of people's doing such strange things as to admire rosebuds, and pick 'em too," said Stephanie.

"Not in my garden!" said Mr Howard, roused to an extraordinary fit of communicativeness—"and, if they do admire, it shall be across the fence. Let the bud open of itself, but don't try to force it. A *terra incognita* has its own peculiar advantages. Ah, Katie!" he added, half smiling, and yet half sadly too, "you are certainly shewing colour in spite of me!" And with one kiss on her forehead, he left us and the cake-basket in peace. Surely if there had been any New Year's folly in Kate's head, my father's words had quite cured it. If

the colour came, the tears came too. But with Miss Holbrook "to the fore," there was nothing to do but dress.

"Dear me!" said Stephanie, "this cold weather sends my hair flying fifty ways, and I should like to keep a little of it at home; for I am firmly persuaded that somebody will come —Mr and Mrs Howard to the contrary. Though, by the way, Kate, if your father hadn't been sure of it too, he wouldn't have said all he did. But you have your instructions now, my dear—you can copy the children in the Fairchild family—'stand behind your mamma's chair, and nobody will take any notice of you.' Except, of course, those people who come to look at nothing else. I am afraid to think," added Stephanie, with a mischievous glance, "how large a proportion of our visitors will fall under that head."

But Kate's mind lay too high for the subject—as a mountain-top rears itself pure and fair above the lower strata of clouds.

"It don't much matter," concluded Miss Holbrook, "so that somebody only comes."

Somebody came—and, first of all, Squire Bulger. He was a heavy weighing and looking man, with a very "*slow*" face, that seemed as if it must be always in the last century—and a light brown wig; but nothing could be more marked than his politeness. Approaching my stepmother, he stood before her with his feet in the first position, and making a very low bow, he ejaculated—

"Compliments of the season, ma'am."

Then stepping off to the left, where Stephanie sat, he made a bow some inches smaller, and repeated—

"Compliments of the season, miss."

Kate was served with a still fainter performance; and when my turn came, Squire Bulger so nearly stood upright, and gave me so little but "the season," that I felt not at all flattered.

Then appeared Mr M'Loon—in a small whirl of coat-tails.

"Good morning, Mrs Howard! happy new year! How d'ye do, Miss Howard? happy new year! Miss Holbrook, Miss Grace, I hope you're well? happy new year! Mr Howard's out, I suppose?"

"Yes, he walked down to the Bird's Nest."

"Ah! yes—ladies are so scarce here, that one has to make

the most of them. But, my dear Miss Howard, bless my soul! is that a grave you're digging in the garden?"

"No," said Kate, who would have laughed if she hadn't been vexed; "papa wanted some kind of a frame for cauliflowers, but the ground froze before it was finished."

"Oh—must have been what they call a 'cold frame,' I should think; I congratulate the cauliflowers. But do you know it startled me dreadfully? really Mr Howard ought to have it covered with boards or something till the 'cold frame' gets there. It's quite shocking, you know, to have such things even suggested. Good morning, Mrs Howard; good morning, young ladies;" and Mr M'Loon took his disagreeable face and laugh away.

We abused him for a while to our hearts' content: then came quick smart footsteps over the frozen ground.

"'Scarlet's asy seen at a distance, any way,'" said Kate, laughing. "I am sure that is our marching friend."

Captain De Camp it was, and Lieutenant Henderson, and Mr Snow Freeman—who had come to see his namesake, and help the two officers spend their furlough.

"It is a perfectly beautiful day," said the captain, his eyes quite rivalling the sky—"really beautiful!"

"We have been birdth-nethting, Mith Holbrook," said Lieutenant Henderson.

"Well," said Stephanie, "and what did you bring away?"

"Only a few straws," said the captain, laughing.

"I should hope so," said Kate; "spoils from such expeditions are not creditable."

"I do athure you," said Mr Henderson, whose moral nature wanted the archetype, "that when any gentleman thaid, 'Happy new year, Mith Bain,' the replied, 'Thame to you, thir.'"

We all laughed in spite of ourselves; but more at the speaker than with him—if he had only known it.

"And then," said Mr Freeman, "when Miss Caffery asked De Camp how deep the snow was, he said, 'about six feet in our lodgings, ma'am.' Too bad, isn't it, Miss Howard, to pun upon my unlucky name?"

"And why unlucky?" said Mrs Howard, when the captain's little rolling fire of a laugh had subsided.

"Upon my word, I don't know, ma'am—except that it's a cold, uncomfortable kind of a name."

"It carries no uncomfortable look with it," said my step-mother, smiling; "and as to coldness, Mr Freeman, people will have the pleasure of finding out that you are warmer than they had supposed."

"To be sure, ma'am—that never occurred to me before; and capable of being melted—ha! ha!"

"At any season of the year," said the captain.

"And even by thtarths," said Mr Henderson.

"I think you are all making a snow-ball of me," said Mr Freeman, trying hard not to laugh at his own wit.

"Then you'll grow bigger, which ithn't to be dethired," said Mr Henderson.

Not laugh!—there is a degree of absurdity which unchains all one's muscles—we laughed till we cried; or till, as Mr Henderson expressed it, "the thtarths were obthcured."

Our next and last visitors were Squire Suydam and Mr Collingwood, who came rather late, and together.

"Same to you, squire," said Stephanie, in reply to his greeting; but when Mr Rodney shook hands with her, the intention to give him a like answer failed; for, as she remarked afterwards, "his eyes looked so much like dark port-holes, that she didn't care to throw in a match."

"My father was not well enough to come out to-day, ma'am," he said, addressing Mrs Howard, "and could only send his good wishes."

"And you must carry back ours; I think Mr Howard has gone to the Lea himself."

"I am sure he has, mamma—at least I am sure he said he would."

"Is that a corner wherein Mr Howard may change his mind?" said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"He seldom changes his mind—it is only a corner where there might be hindrances."

"And pray," said Squire Suydam, glancing at the book which lay by her on the causeuse, "is it the fashion now, Miss Kate, to humbug gentlemen into the belief that you read between visits?"

"The last Philadelphia novelty, sir," said Kate, laughing.

"And what have you got here?—Plutarch! as I am alive! Comparing Captain De Camp with Cæsar?"

There was the slightest possible curl of the lips that answered—

"No, sir."

"And what do you think of the gentleman in question?"

"I should think more of him if he had been a gentleman," said Kate, with a cool misapplication of his words; "I have no great fancy for savage heroes."

"I'll tell you what *I* think, Squire Suydam," said Stephanie—"that when a man gets leave of absence for a day to see his mother, it's absurd to spend half of it in visiting somebody else."

"That's what he does with his furloughs, is it?" said Mr Suydam—"I thought they came pretty fast. But you can't tell what he gets them for, Miss Stephanie; the present Mrs De Camp has little to do with it, maybe. So you like modern heroes best, Miss Kate?"

"If I could find them, sir," she said, with a voice and cheek a little at variance.

"Find 'em, eh? Well, look sharp, and maybe you will."

"Looking sharp might be a destructive mode of proceeding," said Stephanie, as the squire turned to speak to Mrs Howard. "Mr Collingwood, you are well read in the ancient poets, I suppose; do you believe that a *coup d' œil* is ever a *coup de grace?*"

"I have heard an old saying which may perhaps answer as well, Miss Holbrook—'*un coup de langue est pire qu'un coup de lance.*'"

"I think some people have the habit of using both," said Stephanie, with a little vexed abandonment of her raillery. "Pray, Mr Collingwood, are you of the family of Nelson's friend?"

"I have heard various things said on the subject," he said, with a somewhat amused look.

"Why don't you go to England and find out?"

"To find out whether I am a gentleman?" said Mr Rodney, smiling. "I could not afford the time, Miss Holbrook—I prefer to ascertain the fact here."

"But, for aught you know, you may be entitled to a coronet."

He answered with a smile and a slight shake of the head, as if many things might be "for aught he knew."

"If I had lived a few centuries ago, Miss Holbrook, my patent would have been clearly made out. At present, Wolfgang is only a friend."

"Wolfgang!" said Kate, looking up.

"You know, Miss Kate, a hound was one of the three ani-

mals that entitled their owner to the name of gentleman or nobleman."

"No, I never knew that—what were the other two?"

"A hawk was one, and I believe a horse the other."

Stephanie went off to the window, and Mr Rodney sat down by us.

"What do you say to Mah-ta-to-pah, among savage heroes?" he said.

"Oh, I like him very much—but he was only a heroic savage. When a man gets half way into civilisation, the contrast strikes one—I think he shews less well than in the all savage state—unless he be such a man as Alfred, with light within that makes up for the darkness without."

"Yet Cæsar had great qualities."

"Yes, but I like or dislike people as a whole."

"Cannot admire the good and pass by the evil?" said Mr Collingwood. "Are you looking for some Utopian corner of the earth, Miss Kate?"

"No, indeed—of course one must pass by some things; but when the prominent ones are disagreeable, I am inclined to pass by the person."

"What do you think of Napoleon?—his most prominent qualities hardly deserve the epithet disagreeable, they were certainly wonderful."

"But they were the less important, Mr Collingwood—who would care for head without heart?" said Kate, quickly, and then looking down, a little abashed at the smile which met her words.

"You think heart more important than head?"

"I think it can better stand alone."

"Then you do not call Napoleon a hero, Miss Kate?"

"A man who would sacrifice the whole world to himself? O no!—the scales must turn the other way before he could even enter the lists as a hero."

"Hoity-toity!" said the squire, "what are you talking about? Sacrifices, indeed!—fiddlesticks! Sacrifices don't pay, Miss Kate."

Kate laughed, but did not seem disposed to take up the cudgels.

"Who have you been sacrificing yourself to?" said the squire.

"No one, sir—it is not my habit."

"Here comes Mr Howard," said Stephanie, returning from the window as he entered.

"I hope you have been eating macaroons, gentlemen?" was his first remark.

"What for?" said the squire. "I haven't thought of such a thing."

"It's not too late yet," said my father, seizing the cake-basket. "There was a premium offered this morning for somebody to eat macaroons, and—but, bless me! there isn't one here!"

"The premium was taken up," said Stephanie.

"Absolutely eat 'em yourselves for want of somebody else to do it!" said Mr Howard. "Well, then, there is nothing worth offering but dinner. Squire Suydam and Mr Collingwood, will you please to sit down and wait patiently?"

"Not I," said the squire—"I must be going in two minutes."

"Why, Mr Suydam," said Kate, "do you think it is right to treat your friends so?"

"And do you, Miss Kate, think it is right to leave a little old lady at home, all alone, and waiting for me?"

"Oh, if Mrs Suydam is in the case," said my stepmother, "we may not urge our claims. But you, Mr Collingwood—cannot you disregard Mrs Crown's turkey for once, and eat part of ours?"

He smiled.

"No, ma'am, not possibly—even if I had not already refused part of Miss Easy's."

"I shouldn't think they would cook anything but robins down there," observed Stephanie.

"I'll tell you what, Miss," said the squire, taking hold of her ear, and giving it a gentle pinch—"you want a lit-tle o-ver-hauling. Now, Mr Rodney, if you've looked long enough at these roses, we'll betake ourselves to the snow-wreaths."

So they went, and we sat down to dinner.

"Why does one always enjoy everything more on such a day, papa?" said Kate—"even little things that at another time one would hardly notice."

"One does not *always*, my dear—sometimes one enjoys everything less—that, I trust, you may never prove. But a young gay spirit, on such a day, is like a snow-ball at play,

in its own element—every turn adds something, and every something but furnishes new points to sparkle in the sunlight."

"*That* is not much like Mr Freeman," said Kate, smiling. "But everybody seems to look better and brighter than they ever did before—even Squire Bulger."

"You know there are certain states of the weather," replied Mr Howard, "in which we say 'nothing can help looking beautiful;' so are there states of the spirits that form an embellishing medium for everything. The mind, pleased and content with itself, looks charitably at all the world. Put Squire Bulger in such a mental sunshine," added my father, smiling, "and it lights up even his brown wig. But when we look through tears we judge more truly—it is only here and there an intrinsically fine scene or character that can abide the atmosphere of storms and clouds."

"Like Mr Collingwood!" cried I.

"I don't believe you ever looked at him through anything but clear air, Gracie," said my father, smiling. "However, I am not disposed to deny his radiance—he is a star at home, certainly—very different from that man in the Moon who shines only on his shoulders."

"I don't think you do Captain De Camp justice," said Mrs Howard; "they say he is the best son in the world, and his mother is as proud of him as possible."

"Is she?—very likely," said my father; "but I don't believe he'll ever set fire to anything; and as to his being the best son in the world, that I deny—a man cannot go beyond his qualifications. That sulphur spring," he continued, suddenly changing his tone, "is like to bring us and the world near enough together. They are putting up hotels and cottages and nobody knows what all, over there; and the Egertons have bought a place, and the Osbornes, and Mrs Willet. It will make our own land more valuable, that's one thing."

"Not our old friend Mrs Willet?"

"The very same."

"Why, that will be good fun," said Kate—"I should like to see them again. Will they be there next summer, papa?"

"Probably not, for their houses are to build. But if you'll have patience, my dear, you'll have neighbours enough."

CHAPTER XII.

"SWEET PEACE, WHERE DOST THOU DWELL?"

"Sweet music went with us both all the wood through,
The lark, linnet, throstle, and nightingale too;
Winds over us whisper'd, flocks by us did bleat,
And chirp went the grasshopper under our feet."
BYRON.

It was easy to have patience in that beautiful winter weather; easier still, when the spring came with its new treasures; when one day we found the soft willow catkins, and another the yellow tresses of the black birch; and another, the dainty little squirrel-cups, that rose from their brown bed of leaves, before Bunny himself was visible. When robins, and sparrows, and phœbes, and cat-birds, came like a winged fleet at the opening of navigation in some ice-bound river; and there were

——"notes of joy from the hang-bird and wren,
And the gossip of swallows through all the sky."

Who could lack patience to wait for anything that lay beyond? Surely none of spring's denizens. And such were we. Our eyes saw no cloud, no ruffling of the stream of affairs; could not even discern that increased swiftness of current which experience knows is near the fall. To three at Glen Luna, all was absolutely lovely and placid; but those to whom Time had given the freedom of his great city of life, had their trials—hope disappointed, and fears confirmed. Mr Howard might say to himself, "if I can have patience!"—to take a little wisdom along with it never occurred to him; and improvements went on as fast as ever. Mill was finished; mill-dam in progress; fruit walls were already decked with dwarfs and riders; and the rocks for the stone cottages were blasting, blasting, till our ears were tired. But, in short, it was a bad honey season, and,

of course, there was nothing to do but to make combs; and, lest the workers should starve, the little swarm at home were very careful not to overeat themselves, figuratively speaking.

Despite Mrs Howard's fears, the cattle had survived the winter: how, Ezra Barrington best knew; and it was doubtless owing to his exceeding good care and management. But feed had not been always plenty, nor easy to get, and Snowdrop's hide had certainly lost some of its marks of high living. Lady Bulger had roughed it better than the rest, being of a rougher nature to begin with; and now that grass was to be had for the cropping, all difficulty on that score was over. It was a difficulty which had hardly reached our apprehension.

"Will anybody bear me company in a long walk?" said Mr Rodney, as he entered our sitting-room one April morning.

"One body will," said I.

"And another," said Kate.

"Are you going up the hill Difficulty, or Discretion?" said Stephanie. "Because, if it's the last, Mr Collingwood, I never shall get to the top, so it's no use to try; I may as well stay where I am—in the valley of 'Fits and Starts.'"

"Let one of the starts take you with us, Miss Holbrook," he answered, smiling, "and I will promise to help you up every hill we come to."

"Don't attempt to help me up *that* one," said Stephanie, "for I tell you it's no use. If you dragged me up, I should roll right down again the first thing I did, if I didn't take a wilful start, and run."

"I have no opinion of *dragging* up any hill," he replied; and we went to get ready.

"Are you going to the Brown Bluff, Mr Collingwood?" I said.

"No, not this morning—unless some of you wish it."

"I don't; I like a new walk better. Oh, you should have seen the flag I had up there last summer!"

"I did," said he, with a smile, "and thought of Purrer-purrer immediately."

"Purrer-purrer! what *could* make you think of her? I'm sure my white flag didn't look much like pussy."

"Not much—but extremely like pussy's mistress."

"So I thought," said Kate. "It went about as straight to my heart, Gracie, as if I had been eying you through a tele-

scope, or had caught some shadow or reflection of the little figure that was out of sight."

"Mr Collingwood," said Stephanie, "do you know everything?"

"Not quite," said he, smiling—"I am in no danger of leading an idle life for want of something to learn."

"But don't you know most things that other people don't know?"

"I am not very well acquainted with other people's acquirements."

"Look here," said Stephanie; "you're dragging me up the patient hill at present, and in the most roundabout way that can be. Won't you just give me a plain answer?—didn't you ever study strange, out-of-the-way things?"

"Sometimes—a few," said Mr Collingwood, with a rather comical play of the mouth. "What do you want to know, Miss Stephanie?—I'm sure that is straightforward."

"I want to know why that white flag looked like this young one—for it certainly did, even to my unsentimental eyes."

"Unsentimental—yes, none other could see it. Sentimental eyes look rather at the effect of matter upon mind, than of mind upon matter."

"I confess that my eyes look into obscurity at present," said Stephanie.

"To come into daylight, then—I think that every work not purely mechanical bears the stamp of the author's character. A very country-seat will shew whether ignorance or education be at the head of it—whether its owner have cultivation and refinement as well as taste."

"Do you think they can be separated?" said Kate.

"Not if you take the word taste in its true sense. There is a sort, current in the world, which sometimes knows strange associates; and many persons have a key to the streams of beauty, who can by no means unlock the secrets of the fountain-head."

"But Grace and the flag—I was not talking of country-seats," said Stephanie.

"I said *every work*—there was so much of Miss Grace's character in the flag, that it was not very hard to imagine it a personification of her own little self."

"In other words, to make a dissolving view—vanish the flag into thin air, leaving Grace on the top of a pine-tree! If

I had followed out that train of reasoning in the stage-coach, I should have been desperately uncomfortable!"

"You are disposed of now, Miss Gracie," said Mr Collingwood, laughing.

"But I think you are all wrong," I said; "the flag made *me* think of Kate, so it must have looked like her. You didn't see straight, Mr Collingwood."

"Maybe I did," he answered with a smile.

"After all," said Stephanie, "Grace didn't put up the flag—we ought to have seen Andy."

"No, indeed!" said Kate; "the plan is the work, to all intents and purposes."

"To all intents, if you please," said Stephanie—"I demur to the purposes. Instance Squire Bulger's saw-mill yonder—built over a stream that didn't exist. Looks like him, doesn't it, Mr Collingwood?"

"I think you would make a difficult pupil, Miss Holbrook. I should need to study one or two more out-of-the-way things, if I had to give you lessons."

Thus talking and discussing, we had followed a winding footpath to the very top of what was called the Green-hill—from the crops of winter grain which there shewed their beauty. The owner never planted it with anything else, except where a short alternation became absolutely necessary; and in the spring Green-hill was the prettiest sight that could be. A small clump of hickories grew near the top, and there we sat us down to rest and look about.

We were to the north-east of our own Glen, which lay full in sight; as did also the Bird's Nest, shadowed by its great tree. The lake lay beyond, visible from horn to horn, and gleaming in the soft spring sun; and on the further gently sloping shore, the white houses at the Moon shone clean and bright, as if their spring confusion were already over. Between us and the level ground, there was nothing but winter grain—some three inches high now, and covering the swells and hallows with a surpassing verdure, that was more or less bright in places, as the spears bent before the breeze, or stood breathlessly waiting its approach. There was not a sound, there was not a stir, except in nature's pure kingdom—the faint "haw!" to some distant team seemed hardly to belong to any other; and now and then a bird in the tree-top above us "shook out of his little throat floods of delirious music"—as Longfellow has it.

Far to the west stood the little brown church; and somewhat nearer, a faint touch of blue against the budding trees told of the Lea fireside. There Mr Rodney's eyes were fixed—fixed with such thoughtful, grave expression, that no one cared to interrupt his musings. And the phœbes called to each other, and the song-sparrows uttered their joyous allegro; and breeze and sun and song seemed to pass on like a flood—ever varying, ever the same—a kind of mingled sweetness for which the mind had no prism.

On all sides of us a well-cultivated country stretched away to the blue distance. Long rolls of grass and stubble and ploughed fields, with here and there a patch of dark forest, or the white spot of some farm-house and the sanguinary hue of its barn. Often both buildings were of the same uniform no-paint colour, and hardly discernible in the distance. There was little rough ground to be seen, and what appeared so by contrast, would hardly have deserved the name in a ruder region. A few heights, of "sterner stuff" than their neighbours, were left to choose and enjoy their own tenants—stones, and wild plants, and trees that disdained cultivation and shewed the want of it; while their tumbling brooks felt the power of influence when they reached the lower grounds, and flowed gently and with fertilising leisure. These rude spots were but few. Farms and farm-houses, mills, water-courses, rail fences, a stone wall or two, and a mere sprinkling of pleasure grounds, made up the landscape. In the extreme south a short line of blue pyramids checked the soft cultivation, and told us that such was not all the world.

"Mr Collingwood," said I, as his look came back to the things near him, "did you ever read *Evenings at Home?*"

"I believe I have, Miss Gracie. How should daylight out of doors make you think of evenings at home?"

"Those blue mountains, you know—they're like those the squirrel wanted to get to."

"I don't think the squirrel was so far wrong after all," said Kate, "seeing he didn't know any better. Blue mountains are some of the most attractive things in the world."

"Why?" said Mr Collingwood.

"They look so pure and peaceful—so resting; as if rough winds could not blow there—as if there one could never be weary."

"It is but earth still," he answered, "and a fair type of

earth's power to satisfy; so inviting in the distance, so cold when reached. Many a one has proved the squirrel's experience. The only land

'Where tempests never beat nor billows roar,'

lies out of sight; and concerning it there have been no more striking words written than those few, 'I shall be satisfied!'"

He spoke with a grave realisation, that seemed an echo from the very land he referred to.

"But it's so pleasant to take a bright view of things!" said Stephanie, breaking through a silence she had no liking for.

"So pleasant, that I would seek for the brightest. If my words bear any gloomy construction, Miss Holbrook, I expressed myself ill."

"But, Mr Collingwood," said Kate, rather timidly, "do you think aerial perspective is meant to serve no purpose? that one ought to disregard its effect as much as possible?"

"By no means—either in the physical or mental world. It would be a sorrowful thing if all the chequer work of life were as distinct at a distance as near by. And yet, Miss Kate, it is good sometimes to look through a telescope—good always to approach hope's blue mountains with a mind braced for possibilities. No joy was ever less sweet for a moderated expectation."

"I don't believe in your telescopic view," said Stephanie. "Why shouldn't I think that little brown speck to be a hermitage instead of a hut?"

"And that huts and misery do not exist?"

"In my neighbourhood — they may be somewhere in the world, of course."

"Why shouldn't a physician try to think all his patients in perfect health?"

"Fiddle-de-dee! they're in his charge, and have called for his help."

"And did you never hear an appeal from a mere outside of wretchedness? Ah, Miss Stephanie, that will not do! I wish I had a spy-glass to give you a nearer view of that same brown speck. You would think it spoke pretty plainly."

"I wish you hadn't! Don't it make you sad to go to such places?"

"Yes."

"Then why should one go?—I don't like to feel sad. Now the physician knows he can do something."

"I beg your pardon—he only knows that he can try—whether he shall succeed or not is a matter quite out of his hands. Miss Kate, will you not give us the result of this long meditation?"

"I was thinking that one does not always know how to try."

Mr Collingwood smiled.

"But one can always use those powerful simples, encouragement and sympathy—and, Miss Kate," he added gently, "one *ought* to know how to apply the catholicon."

"Yes, that is very true."

"They are such dreadful places to go to!" said Stephanie—"I don't suppose one in fifty keeps a broom, and even the farm-houses are curious enough."

"I have always thought," said Mr Collingwood, "that there is nothing more beautiful about the sunlight than its seeking the darkest places, and giving at least a passing notice to all that is most shunned and despised. And nobody ever thought that those pure rays compromised their dignity."

"But, after all," said Stephanie, with a mixture of seriousness and mischievous insinuation, "there isn't apt to be *more* than one sun in a neighbourhood."

Mr Collingwood coloured a little, but then lightly answered her according to the letter.

"If you charge me with being fanciful, I must fall back upon George Herbert. He says—

'Shine like the sun in every corner.'"

"He *is* fanciful—I don't like him."

"I do," said Kate. "But, Mr Collingwood, the sun has a power of going about which very much assists his benevolence."

"I know that very well," said he, smiling; "but remember, too, Miss Kate, the sun is felt where he cannot be seen."

"Does your telescope say that is water or mud down yonder?" said Stephanie, as we began to descend the hill.

"Mud—decidedly."

"Are there no springs hereabouts?"

"There is one not far off," he answered, somewhat comically; "but unluckily it is in a garden, and the garden sur-

rounds a house—painted red! and the front door has a horizontal division."

"How absurd you are!" said Stephanie, while Kate and I laughed. "Is it a hut?"

"No—a farm-house."

"That *is* bad. I could go to a hut for water, but these farm-house people would pull us in and put us in rocking-chairs."

"And the consequences, Miss Stephanie?"

"The consequences would be that we should have to sit and talk to them."

Mr Collingwood stood with folded arms, as if awaiting further information.

"Don't you see?" said Stephanie—"they would take it as a visit."

"And perhaps come and see us in turn," said Kate.

Mr Collingwood laughed, and walked on.

"You are quite beyond me now," he said. "I thought I could answer all your objections, but I am out of my depth. However, if you will wait for me at a safe distance, I will bring you some water—I think I can be trusted with a tumbler; for, unfortunately," he added, with a smile that was keen as well as bright, "I have some acquaintance with the family."

"We do not need it in the least," Kate said; "you need not take the trouble—we can wait till we get home."

"It is no trouble, Miss Kate—you will be quite safe if you stand here. There is very little passing on this road, and I shall be back in a moment."

He went before we could hinder it, and we stood rather thoughtfully eyeing the dell and the red house, and Mr Rodney and the divided front door—which had certainly opened to admit him with all the unanimity of good-will. It was but a moment, as he said, before he brought us a pitcher of the brightest and coldest water, and glasses which, if not cut, were admirably clean. They were scarce filled before a messenger came running from the hut—a little girl, with a very pretty face, bare feet, and toilet arrangements that spoke an abundance of out-door play.

"Mr Rodney," she said in a shy half-whisper, and looking at us between words, "Granny said to tell the ladies, if they'd drink some milk, I'd fetch it to 'em right away."

"Why don't you ask the ladies themselves, Susie?"

The child looked up at Kate, but did not open her lips except to smile; and the answer she got was so very smiling and pleasant, that her next question was somewhat startling—though spoken low, as at first—

"Mr Rodney, who is the pretty lady?"

Stephanie took her tumbler from her lips and laughed, while Kate reversed that action and blushed; and Mr Collingwood with perfect gravity gave our names in the order of seniority.

"I should like to kiss her, so much!" said the child, folding her hands together.

"You may kiss me, Susie," said Mr Collingwood, quickly—"will not that do as well? Or, if you like it better, I will kiss you."

But Susie did not choose to wait for that; and, after a little twisting of herself about, she turned round and scampered back to the house, while Mr Collingwood followed more leisurely with the borrowed articles; and then we presently resumed our walk.

"Do farm-house children usually exhibit such discernment?" said Stephanie, with the delight of annoying one of her companions, and the hope of annoying two. But that failed.

"As what, Miss Stephanie?"

"As this little rustic we have just seen."

"And as how exhibited?"

"Why did you interfere to hinder the child's wish?" said Miss Holbrook, abruptly.

"I trust my interference was not unwarrantable nor ill-timed. I am sure miss Kate forgave me."

"Only half," said Kate, looking up as if she meant to have her question answered—"it was not *more* than half out of good-nature to me, Mr Collingwood?"

"Yes, rather more," he said, with a smile.

"Weren't you afraid I would refuse, and so hurt the child's feelings?"

"A little."

We had paused upon a rising ground to look back, and the farm-house dell shewed very fairly in the distance; but now we saw a figure approaching the door whom we all recognised at once—indeed, as Kate said afterwards, "it could be nobody but Miss Easy." Mr Rodney said nothing—he neither called our attention to the lady, nor told us who it was; but, as she

reached the door and went in among the little troop that had rushed out to meet her, his eye wore a look of singular brightness and pleasure; and so much of the glow remained when we turned again to our walk, that Stephanie lost patience.

"Then you would absolutely encourage uppishness?" she said. "Well, I wouldn't."

"Nor I—and therefore"—he stopped short.

"You may just as well go on — 'and therefore you wouldn't practise it.' You are mistaken, for once in your life."

"Don't you think such people are apt to presume, Mr Collingwood?" said Kate.

"Very apt, if you give them a chance. But if we meet the poor now and then on their own ground, they will care the less about attaining to ours. It is this nervous guarding of position which makes them feel looked down upon; and then, naturally, they try for a stand where that shall seem less possible. The silk slipper never hurt itself by a step off the dais."

"Not even into the mud?"

"If people cannot keep out of the mud," said Mr Collingwood, laughing, "they had better put on hobnailed shoes at once, and keep off the dais. Why, Miss Stephanie, I have seen a delicate slipper pass through city streets as if they were carpeted!"

"Then, on the whole, you like farm-houses?"

"On the whole, I prefer large mirrors, if any, and ungarnished with asparagus—also I confess to a predilection for other than rag-carpets."

And then, as he bade us good-morning, Mr Rodney said, with a smile—

"You do not like George Herbert—will you quarrel with Shakspeare or with me, if I remind you of Portia's little candle?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SNOWBALL AND MISS HOLBROOK.

"Nay, if our wits run the wild-goose chase, I have done; for thou hast more of the wild-goose in one of thy wits, than I have in my whole five."

SHAKSPEARE.

"PERHAPS you remember, Kate," said Stephanie one morning, "that very wise and sententious remark that your father made the other day about the properties of man?"

"'The chief properties of man are contemplation and sociableness'? that was only a quotation from More, I think, he said."

"Only!—well, since Mr Howard quoted it, I suppose I may venture to refer to it. It struck me as particularly wise; for I have been thinking that man, and of course woman, was made up of only one. Now, don't you suppose that standing too much upon one foot may have a tendency to weaken the other?"

"Do you think of trying contemplation?" said Kate, without looking up from her book; "yes, I should think it quite probable."

"I wish you might fall into somebody's hands who would give you an overdose of contemplation for once!" said Stephanie.

"Overdoses never kill," said Kate, smiling; "I should come out a hermit."

"My dear, you are that already, only you don't know it; the life you lead here at present by no means savours of dissipation."

"I doubt if my life would, anywhere," said Kate.

"Might savour of it, you know—just a *soupçon;* as people put a grain of sugar in gruel."

"I never do," said Kate; "a grain of salt is to my liking; and no one ever found *that* in dissipation."

"I declare," said Stephanie, "if you will not attend to my words, I will pelt you with quotations."

"Where from?"

"Don't know, in the least; but you will as soon as I tell them to you. How do you like this?—'The eagle flies alone, it is only the sheep that likes company.' Are you going to make an eagle of yourself? one of the 'select few'? for I'm sure my quotation should be in the plural; eagles do occasionally like company."

"You are altogether too profound for my light reading," said Kate, shutting her book. "What is all this about? I thought you had been turning pirouettes on both feet, all your life."

"It is all about my going to pay Mrs Eustace a visit."

"What put such a thing into your head?"

"This letter of request that I would come; and my mind being an easy one to make up, I shall spend all my energies upon my trunk, and depart to-morrow morning with your father."

To say was to do—and she went.

We were particularly quiet after that, for Mr Howard began to be a good deal away; property elsewhere demanded his attention, and Glen Luna had to wait its turn. Yet even this repeated absence had a bright side—the coming back; and then, besides the pleasure of seeing him and hearing of the people and things he had seen, there was always some interest about my father's trunk. The Moon shops were but so-so, and those at Wiamee still worse; so we always sent elsewhere when we could; and Mr Howard brought home things in every variety. The long journey, or the trunk, gave them a peculiar charm. Never were there such spools of cotton; never were the various little articles of family use so well appreciated; and often there came, too, a surprise—a new book, a work-box, or a gold pen.

Whenever Mr Howard stayed at home for a few days, the improvements went on in double quick time; for, as Ezra Barrington remarked, "he made the men fly round like shell peas." We thought some of the improvements might have had another name, and felt it hard to spare fine branches, because by and by the tree would be the handsomer. Indeed we always

took that promise with a doubt, and other innovations that were confessedly for use met with still less favour. A wall must cut us off in that direction, because the cattle got into the garden; and this road must be changed from its pretty winding curves to a direct line, because a short cut to the barn seemed desirable. But whenever I went that way, I quitted the new gravel for the old crooks, which the grass was lending a hand to obliterate, and followed them pertinaciously. Everybody laughed at me for it, but my feet were discontented else.

One day, when we were roaming the fields, and admiring the white promise of wild strawberries, we came to a little hollow that had last year been very liberal. The march of improvement had set its foot even there. Ezra Barrington, with cart and oxen, was dumping gravel into the very hollow; and the amount of white blossoms that tried to shake their heads clear at the outskirts of the heap, gave a fair indication of the fruitless efforts that lay beneath its centre. My father stood complacently looking on.

"Why, papa!" exclaimed Kate, "you are filling up my beautiful strawberry patch!"

"Must be filled up, my dear; don't you see it is just in the course of this road?"

"But why can't the road go round it?" said I.

"That would hardly do—it would be inconvenient, and wouldn't look well, besides."

"I think it would look better than this."

"Ge' 'long!" said Mr Barrington, in a very audible *aside* to his team. "Come about! haw! You want it right straight across, squire?—maybe another load'll fill it up sufficient if you don't mind it's being a bit wavy. Otherwise it'll take three."

"Straight across," said my father—"there's gravel enough. I don't care if it takes a dozen."

"There aren't strawberries enough," said Kate. "Papa, it is rather too bad!"

"Nonsense!" said my father—"we shall have berries in the garden next summer; and, if we didn't, the road is of much more importance."

"Nobody likes to eat them better than you do, papa!"

"Well, I will curb my appetite for once," said Mr Howard, laughing.

The subject of country neighbours was not quite laid asleep;

for, in spite of Kate and Stephanie's precautions, we were exposed to a visit now and then, which did not please them—sometimes dictated by curiosity, sometimes by policy. If the family of the country doctor had failed in attention, there would have been danger of our being sick under nobody knows what auspices; and the same might be said of our quarrels had the attorney been remiss—while the proprietor of the only mill in the neighbourhood probably thought that, as we were putting up another, there could be no reason why we should not be well acquainted.

Mrs Howard bore it all with her usual gentleness towards human nature in whatever form; but Kate found it very annoying, and would fain have made the visits begin and end at the front door. This my father negatived with his usual coolness. Everybody might come that wanted to, he said, and get all the good that eyes could take it; as for being "engaged" to one person and not to another—merely because the one was poor and the other rich—he had no idea of it—"he knew what was due to ourselves." To do him justice, he never put *himself* out of the way for anybody, in the least. If he didn't want to stay in the drawing-room, he walked off into the study; and when he did stay, it was to be silent as often as to talk. But listeners are always popular, and my father was soon voted the pink of politeness—either physician or attorney would have attended him with pleasure.

July was well on its way before Stephanie returned; and then she came tired, grave, and rather silent—a most unusual combination for Miss Holbrook. Sleep exerted its restorative powers but partially; for, though she talked fast enough all breakfast time, afterwards, when we took our work into the room where she was unpacking, Stephanie seemed to plunge as deep into the recesses of her mind as of her trunks—and brought forth much less.

"What *are* you thinking about?" Kate said, at length.

"I was reflecting upon the amount of things that a visit may do and undo;—just look at this dress! who would suppose it had ever been fit to put on?"

"Why, anybody that knew anything about dresses and wearing them. But what has the visit *done?* this is just the undoing."

But Stephanie only made another plunge. "It must be yourself!" said Kate, laughing—"I never saw you in such

good order before—you have excessively the air of having just come from the ruffle-woman. I didn't know that Mrs Eustace made such liberal use of starch and fluting-irons."

"If it's all the same to you," said Stephanie, with something of her own manner, "I'd as lief not be exasperated."

"I would exasperate you in a minute," said Kate, still laughing, "if I only knew how—at present I have not the slightest idea who you are. Just look out of the window and say that you feel at home, or I shall conclude you are somebody else."

"Wilder conclusions than that have come true, and my eyes have at present full occupation."

"But, Stephanie," I said, "it is so lovely out, it's a shame not to look at such flowers and sunshine—we think everything is prettier than it ever was."

"Very likely," said Stephanie—"I can answer for Kate; but Grace, my dear, I do not wish to have my fancy entangled among flowers and sunshine."

"Why not?"

"Because I have made up my mind to run a race with a snowball; and in those latitudes, you know, such things don't flourish."

"I wonder which foot you are on now?" said Kate. "Why do you talk such nonsense?"

"Truth must be spoken, if it is nonsense."

"Do separate them," said Kate, a little impatiently, "and give us the short cut of this rigmarole. What are you talking about?"

"Short cut!" said Stephanie—"it's a hard knot, or like to be; and as to talking, I was alluding with sufficient distinctness to a person I thought you might remember."

And locking the empty trunk, Miss Holbrook pushed it from her, and opened a full one.

Kate laid down her work.

"I never saw you serious in my life, so it's no wonder if I am puzzled. You don't mean that you intend to marry Mr Freeman?"

"Precisely—if you like that name better; I prefer his appellation of Snowball."

"How can you be so absurd?" said Kate, laughing in spite of herself at the cool demureness of the reply.

"My gracious me!" said Stephanie, as, with an emphatic

fling of a pair of shoes into the corner, she crossed her arms and looked up at us; "you're enough to try more patience than I have got! Here am I making revelations that ought to be *à la rouge*, I suppose, and you won't believe them. Don't I tell you I'm going to marry that man? Was nobody ever married before?"

"But not to Mr Freeman," said Kate, with a most innocent rendering of her thoughts into plain English.

"Not to Mr Freeman!—probably not; your pieces of information are startling. I suppose there must be a first time—even for Mr Freeman. You see the 'thtarths' have melted him, as Henderson says."

"But what has melted you?" said Kate.

"I don't profess to be an iceberg," said Stephanie, drily, and turning to her trunk. Then changing her tone, she added—

"And it isn't desirable, you know, that we should both be of 'the melting mood,' or we might run away together. Now don't look so horrified, either of you. Kate, do you perceive how completely unstarched I am?"

Kate smiled a little, but with rather a grave face, and went on taking stitches in the most abstracted manner; while Stephanie, as half in argument with her silence, continued—

"What is it to any one if I like snowballs? I don't say they're as striking as epaulettes, or as aspiring as eagles. And, by the way, how is his falconship?"

"I didn't know eagles were falcons," said I.

"Belong to the Falconidæ, don't they? or I've forgotten all about ornithology. But you know, Kate, *I* never was strong-winged enough to 'follow such a flight'—that is reserved for somebody else. Better eyes than mine must exert their powers, when the object is some miles above earth. Don't puzzle your head Gracie."

"Well," said Kate, "as I do not know Mr Freeman, I cannot congratulate you."

"And knowing me, you cannot congratulate him—I'll forgive you all that if you'll do something else. Katydid—just be Katydo for once, and tell Mr Howard what I have told you. I really cannot tell him myself, for he'd certainly pour out some of the prophecies he used to make about the poor captain; and I'm afraid I should pass all bounds of decorum if he told me my snowball would "never set fire to anything."

"Oh, Stephanie!" Kate said—then checking herself, she folded up her work, and sticking the needle in it with unusual care, remarked—

"I will do all you wish me to."

"That was not what you were going to say?"

"No."

"Tell me that."

"It's better unsaid.—Is there anything else for me to tell papa?"

"Nothing—only make him understand all this clearly, so that he won't come down upon me with any questions—my self-possession extends but to ordinary occasions. And now, Kate," she said, springing off the floor, and laying her hands on Kate's shoulders, "I know every word you were going to say, and you are altogether right and partly wrong—which is a charming combination. There, now go, both of you, and let me finish this job without the distraction of your eyelashes—which make me feel melancholy. Preliminary 'tears and white muslin' are more than I bargained for."

When Kate and I had talked over this strange conversation with a mingling of sorrow and wonder, we went into Mrs Howard's room and gave her the benefit of it. My father's comments were deferred for a day or two, as he was from home.

"Papa," Kate began, the next morning after his return, "do you know that Stephanie is going to be married?"

"No I don't," he replied, facing round upon Kate, as if he wondered how the subject got into her head.

"Then I have the pleasure of informing you," said Kate, with a laugh at the gravity with which she was eyed.

"I have not the pleasure of hearing," said Mr Howard, knitting his brows.

"But you must hear, and be pleased too, papa."

"With what?"

"Why, with this news I am telling you."

"Humph," said my father. "Who set that ball a-rolling?"

"Mr Freeman in the first place, I suppose, papa."

My father looked at the demure eyes that met his, as if he would like to find fault with something—he couldn't with them.

"Freeman!" he said, turning round to his former position. "Marry that man! no, indeed, she shall not!"

"Why, Mr Howard," said my stepmother, "what can you possibly mean?"

"Just that," said my father, coolly.

"But you have no right to say so—and it wouldn't do any good, besides."

"What can *you* possibly mean now? No right, and I her guardian! No good to forbid her marrying a man with more inches than ideas!"

"No good at all—for she'd marry him when she came of age, or run away before. And as to the right, as your friend the Chancellor used to say, 'you may have it in law but not in equity'—if she really likes the man, and he is unobjectionable."

"I tell you he *isn't* unobjectionable. I never heard any harm of him—but he's a nonentity."

"That is only a negative objection," said my stepmother, smiling.

"*My* objections are positive enough," said my father.

"Now, my dear Mr Howard, do be reasonable. Make inquiries about Mr Freeman, and if he is good and respectable, and has enough to live upon, let them please themselves—you can't bring everybody to the same standard of sense and enjoyment."

"I wish everybody was brought to your standard of sense, my dear. Well—but whom shall I ask? I don't even know where the man lives—and I'm sure it is not my fault if we have any mutual friends."

"Go over to the Moon and see Captain De Camp," said Mrs Howard.

"Yes, I suppose I may as well go to the Moon as anywhere. But De Camp—he hasn't got another furlough, has he?"

"O yes, papa," said I—"he has been here twice."

"Has he? has he?—I am well set to work, certainly."

"But, papa," exclaimed Kate, as he reached the door, "you musn't tell Captain De Camp why you want to know about Mr Freeman—you must be very careful."

"I shall say first that Stephanie's going to marry him—after which I shall inquire if he is a respectable man. Do you think I am a fool, Kate?"

"No, papa, but"——

"Well, my dear, if I can't deal with Captain De Camp, it's a pity. You needn't wait dinner for me—I shall stop at the Bird's Nest."

"But stay," said Mrs Howard—"you must find out *where* Mr Freeman is, as well as who he is—he may be staying at the Moon again—and then you must call upon him, and invite him over here."

My father stopped, and stood irresolute.

"No doubt he is there!—it's the rallying point for all the satellites of this region. I wish he was in Egypt!"

There was such a mixture of the undecided, the ludicrous, and the dismayed, in my father's face, that we all burst out laughing.

"Take care, or that child will hear you," he said.

"She has gone out," said my stepmother. "But why does this annoy you so? If it were Kate, indeed"——

"Kate!" interrupted my father—and, as if words could no further go, he quitted the room, and left us to laugh at our leisure.

The afternoon was just ending when Mr Howard returned.

"Well!" he said, as he sat down, "I ought to have come back luminous after such a sojourn in that precious planet!"

"Did you see Miss Caffery, papa?" said I.

"Good Miss Caffery!" said my father, his face unbending; "she half persuaded me out of my ill-humour—half convinced me that, if people could be happy without anything to make them so, it was none of my business."

"And what said Miss Bain?" inquired my stepmother.

"Miss Bain said that the very best thing young people could do—at least," said my father, checking himself, "she said sundry foolish things, which I need not repeat. Do we have any tea to-night?—or are we to live upon laughing?"

"But, papa," said Kate, composing her face, "you haven't told us about Mr Freeman."

"What about Mr Freeman?"

"Why, all about him—what you have heard and seen. Stephanie will come down when the tea-bell rings, and then you will have no chance."

"Well," said Mr Howard again, and reseating himself, "I went to the Moon, and I saw Captain De Camp, and Mr Freeman, of course. And Mr Freeman had the sense (which I didn't expect) to take himself off. I reckon he was afraid of me. And the captain was unusually lucid in his answers. So I learned, without much difficulty, that Mr Freeman has survived a precocious childhood; that he rests his knowledge

of the State's prison solely on information and belief; that roguery and riches are in the future tense with him; and that, to hinder as much as possible his pursuit after both, 'he has fallen desperately in love with Miss Holbrook—quite head and ears, I assure you, sir.' If I could imitate the concluding laugh, my dear, you would have a fair presentation of the whole. Kate and Grace, what are you laughing at?"

"Only at the presentation, papa. And what did you say?"

"I? Oh, I said, 'Ah, indeed?'—and 'You are sure, sir?'—and finally rushed about after the man himself to tell him of my joy that he was not an escaped convict, and to ask him here to dinner, to-morrow."

"And he will come?"

"Come!—he would have followed me home to-night if I hadn't looked rather cross, I believe," said my father.

"But you must not look cross," said my stepmother. "Think of that poor child up stairs, and don't take the edge off her happiness."

"Tut! my dear—if the sight of Mr Freeman don't take the edge off, it's quite out of my reach. But poor child! as you say; and she's a good child too; and I love her for her father's sake, as well as her own."

So he did. No remark that was even doubtful in its bearing was suffered to reach Stephanie's ear; and there was a kindness in his tone that brought tears to her eyes, when he said—

"Well, Stephanie, my dear, your old friend, Mr Freeman, dines with us to-morrow, so I hope you will make yourself very agreeable. And, by the way," he added, "I told the two ladies that we should be glad of their company."

"That is just what we were wishing!" said Kate and I together.

It so happened that Caddie M'Inn—the only specimen of womankind who then inhabited our kitchen—knew about as much of the mysteries of flour and spice, as she did of botany and Epicurus. Therefore, on that eventful morning, which, as Stephanie expressed it, "would bring a coolness among the members of our family," Kate and I rolled up our sleeves and "went but," as the Scotch say; for we had declared that Stephanie should play visitor, and see neither Charlotte nor soufflé till they were on the table.

I was busily engaged before the kitchen window, introducing

ladies' fingers to the most intimate acquaintance with the Charlotte mould; and Kate, in the shade of the wall, sat quietly mixing an odoriferous compound; when a quick frosty step made me look up; and there, just before my open window, stood Squire Brown. Since our coming to Glen Luna, the Browns had sent frequent messages that they meant to call upon us, but themselves never came; this was the first time a Brown foot had approached our house.

The present apparition was a little old man—or he would have been old if he hadn't been jolly—whose roll-about body sat rather insecurely upon his little roll-about legs; whose coat was snuff-colour, and his trousers a compromise between pantaloons and small-clothes. His hat was broad-brimmed; a whip flourished in one hand, and his little sharp eyes were endeavouring to see from the bright open air into our kitchen—of course dark by contrast. Perhaps an occasional waft of maraschino may have quickened these efforts.

"Ah, my dear!" said the squire, "how d'ye do? busy, eh?" here he gave himself a little twist, and peered more anxiously than ever; "how's your father? well, eh? and the rest of you?"

"Quite well, sir, I thank you."

"Well, my dear," with a turn of the head that convinced me he knew where Kate sat, and was trying to see her; "well, my dear, has your father got through haying?"

"O yes, sir, long ago."

"Long ago! eh? well, that's good. D'ye think now—you're his dau'ta, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"D'ye think your father could let me have Mr Barrington for a couple of days? I've got a field of grass down, and my man's taken sick."

"I don't know, sir; I'll tell him when he comes home."

"He's out, is he?"

"Yes, sir."

"D'ye know where he is gone, my dear, eh?"

"To Mr Collingwood's, I believe, sir."

"Farmer Collingwood's—that's out of my way," said the squire, again nearly oversetting my gravity and his own; "fine young man his son is, ain't he? Well, my dear, you'll tell him; d'ye know my name, now, eh?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Yes, I guess so, too; and, harkye, my dau'tas have been coming down here this long time; only it's so far, you see, they haven't made it out; but they'll come very soon. Good-day, my dear."

How we laughed!

"He didn't see you, Kate, after all!"

"No; but I wonder what he means by 'so far;' I'm sure they go often enough to the Moon, which is much farther."

"If they're like him, we needn't care," said I; "did you hear him say 'dau'tas'?"

"I suspect they are modernised copies," said Kate; "at least according to Mrs De Camp. I wonder papa did not ask *them* here to day; it would have been only polite."

"He did; I heard him telling mamma this morning."

"Then I haven't made enough soufflé!" said Kate, despairingly.

"Oh, they're not coming to dinner—only to tea and ice-cream."

"Ice-cream!" said Stephanie—"that sounds pleasant. Do I look quite fiery?" she added, advancing into the kitchen. We both turned and looked at her.

Pretty, very pretty she always was, and that day especially. Excitement had given even neck and arms a slight reflection of her pink dress, but the prevailing tint was kept down by her gracefully-arranged black hair; while in her eyes the expression—half dance half defiance—which usually shone there, was softened by other feelings—the new and the timid. I even fancied that her eyelashes were wet, and that tears lay hid behind them as she returned our earnest gaze.

"Well, Katie—well, Gracie," she said, at last—"what are you thinking of?"

I saw the sigh that might not be heard, as Kate answered—

"I was thinking of you, dear; how nice you look!"

"Nice!—and not fiery?"

"Not a bit."

"And do you say so too, Gracie?"

"I don't know—I was thinking your neighbourhood might be pleasant to—to anything very cold," said I, inexplicitly.

Stephanie laughed, and saying, "She wasn't wanted in the kitchen, then?" she left us.

CHAPTER XIV.

TONGUES.

> "The Doctor now obeys the summons,
> Likes both his company and commons:
> Displays his talents, sits till ten;
> Next day invited, comes again."
>
> COWPER (*Horace*).

WELL might my father say, "Good Miss Caffery!"—our hearts echoed it many times in the course of that afternoon. The mere sight of her would have soothed most people; and her white dress, so delicately ruffled, was enough to *un*ruffle every one else. Her tone of voice, too, was so pleasant, so feelingly gentle, that one was touched as well as interested by what she said. Every word and look spoke the eminent *humanity* of her nature, but said as plainly that it was humanity purified. I never saw her now without thinking of Mr Collingwood's words, "a lovely and well-developed Christian character"—they helped me to understand what before I had only felt. It was like being shewn the secret spring whence came some indefinable freshness of the atmosphere.

I do not mean that we were all out of humour on that eventful day, but there was some embarrassment or anxiety with each one—now and then with my father a little moodiness. But Miss Easy seemed to smooth away everything—no one could be in such a ray without, for the time at least, assuming its colour.

Miss Avarintha was, as usual, peculiar: very unwilling that things should go on quietly, and not having the least idea how to put her finger in with judgment. Mrs De Camp was full of talk; the captain very bland and benign; and Mr Freeman (when he thought my father was thinking of some one else) very happy and comfortable. He sat basking in the light of

Stephanie's pink dress, far beyond all disturbance from trifles; but Miss Holbrook herself was well disposed to give the aforesaid finger a rap over the knuckles every time she encountered it; and, if she sometimes forbore in deference to Kate's look of reproof, it was only to utter an energetic *aside* about "the Bain of her life."

In the evening, when my father and I were walking about, and joining everybody by turns for the sake of variety, Mr Collingwood came in, and like us took a promenade ticket. Miss Bain had just crossed the room to make an attack.

"Where do you reside now, sir?" she began. "At least, I don't mean now—of course you are at the Moon, and likely there to continue, I suppose, for some time—but where have you been residing?"

"Really, ma'am," said Mr Freeman, returning from the antipodes, "I can hardly say—I did live in New York until the last six months."

"And since then?"

"Since then," he replied, laughing partly at his questioner and partly at what he was going to say—"Since then, ma'am, my head has been in the condition of a family in moving-time, the house in one place and the furniture in another—of course my existence has been somewhat compounded and intermediate."

"'Who of all the world should meet,
One summer's day, but Love and Reason?'"

said my father, with a smile. "That moving state, Mr Freeman, always brings two evils—the house wants settling, and the furniture wants mending."

"I wish no delay about either, sir," said Mr Freeman, with great frankness.

"But, Mr Howard," said Miss Bain, insinuatingly, "*that* is a lady's province—you would not expect a gentleman to undertake it."

"My expectations are but limited, ma'am, from either man or woman."

"What a singular idea!" said Miss Bain.

"You will find it a very plural idea," said my father. "Mr Freeman—I can't ask you, of course. What do you say, Mr Rodney?"

"Not quite that, sir."

"See there, now, what it is to want experience!" said my father; "where's the use of expecting uncertainties?"

"Isn't there an expectation of hope?"

"And a disappointment of hope too, I'm thinking. You'll come out of that delusion, my good sir, unless your charitable eye-glass gains all the magnifying power that your mental eye will lose."

"And what is to hinder?" said Mr Rodney, smiling—"why shouldn't it, Mr Howard? Charity is not so much needed till delusion fails."

"I'm sure I can't tell why it shouldn't. I don't know how it is with you, but there's a considerable degree of perverseness that will always hinder it in me."

"Grains of allowance, sir," said Miss Bain, picking up an end of the subject.

"And a little soil for them to grow in. I've thrown out plenty of 'grains of allowance' that came to nothing—so you see my stock has decreased. I don't mean to expect anything from anybody in future."

"Except from that one person in the window?" said Miss Easy, smiling. "Yes sir, you have been looking at her the whole time to disprove your words—yes."

"Pooh!" said Mr Howard, laughing, and bringing his eyes back. "I beg your pardon, Miss Easy, but sometimes one knows what one cannot see. 'Love all, trust a few.'"

"With a little trust to the all, and a very special love to the few," said Mr Rodney, smiling. "I will subscribe to that, Mr Howard."

My father smiled too, a little—half to himself, as it were.

"I don't know whether I must put her among the few," he said; "I suppose in reality Kate is just like that little intruder over there. Now Grace thinks all the world of that cat, and yet would not for all the world trust her near the open closet."

"But it's her nature, papa," I said.

"Precisely, my dear."

"But it isn't Kate's."

"What?" said my father, laughing—"to steal into the pantry? Which one is the cat going to now, Gracie?"

I turned round to watch her progress. She took a good look at me, and then marched off towards the window.

"Does she like Miss Kate better than you?" said Mr Collingwood, smiling.

"O no, but she wants to get on somebody's lap: if I had been sitting still, she would have come right to me. She likes Kate very much, though."

"How perfectly graceful!" said Captain De Camp, waving his hand as he surveyed the advancing felina; "there cannot be anything more easy and natural than a cat's motions—every one of them." And dovetailing two fingers into the breast of his closely-buttoned coat, he looked on complacently.

Purrer-purrer seated herself in front of Kate, winked once or twice by way of recognition, turned her head, winked once at me, and then with a light spring she reached the desired resting-place.

"My dear Kate!" said Miss Bain, in an earnest voice, and walking towards the scene of action, "how can you bear that creature!"

"Why, I like her very much, ma'am," said Kate, while she stroked the pleased little pussy.

Mr Collingwood and I involuntarily approached the window.

"But you shouldn't like her—I can't bear to see you waste your young affections on cats."

Kate smiled—"I should not give it that name, Miss Avarintha,—mayn't we apply to one sort of charity what Bunyan says of the other?—

> 'A man there was (though some did count him mad),
> The more he cast away, the more he had.'"

"Charity!" said Miss Bain—"you are getting very far from the cat."

"And into most classical regions," said the captain, laughing. "No wonder the cat don't dare to follow!"

"Well!" said Kate, looking up with a mingling of displeasure at his, and trust in her own, position, so bright that it quite dazzled the captain; "and how are they *un*classical? or contemptible, sir?"

"Contemptible!" said the captain—"I really did not mean to go quite so far; but you know Bunyan himself was a very low man."

"And therefore his work, being what it is, stands all the higher."

"But how is it classical, Miss Kate?" said Mr Collingwood.

"I cannot undertake to prove my assertion as well as defend it," she said, laughing and colouring. "I suppose one of the things Sir Thomas More would have said 'women had better *not* do,' may be to argue with superior information. I refer you and Captain De Camp to Macaulay, Mr Collingwood, and you can dispute the point with him at your leisure."

"Which is one of the things men had better not do," said he, smiling.

"But just see you all this time petting the cat!" said Miss Bain—"wasting your affections, as I say."

"Oh," said Kate, "I don't think one has a measured amount, which must lose in depth what it gains in breadth."

"Nor I."

"My dear Mr Rodney," said Miss Bain, "what can you possibly know of the matter? Bless me, *I* ought to know a little about cats—my aunt had thirty of them! Now, what do you think of that?"

"I should think she kept no dogs."

"And I that she had no mice," said Kate.

"Why, Miss Avarintha," said I, "her house must have been like the one in the fairy tale, where the two green-eyed cats kept watch over the princess."

"And the eight-and-twenty relieved guard, I suppose," said the captain, laughing. "But why don't you have prettier pets?—a canary or chickens? I like to see a lady encompassed by chickens."

"Not in the house?" said Kate, smiling; "and I have no time for canaries, and like cats better."

"Oh, so do I, Miss Avarintha! a great deal better!"

"Oh, *you*, of course. I never saw such girls—just persuade one to like a thing, and you've persuaded both. You needn't smile, Mr Rodney—it's true."

"My smile meant no contradiction, ma'am."

"It's not a good thing, in my judgment," said the lady, with a new interpretation and answer. "Do tell me now, Kate—Miss Stephanie—I've seen so little of her—is *she* always of your mind? or has she tastes of her own?"

"Of her own," said Kate, trying hard not to smile.

"And have you no tastes of your own, Miss Gracie?" said Mr Collingwood, smiling quite.

"Indeed she has," said Kate.

"So I thought."

"Take care," said Miss Bain; "this is a dangerous atmosphere—a person cannot remain in it long and be dissimilar."

"Mr Freeman," said Kate, getting up, and opening a cabinet, "did you ever see these shells?—papa would tell you that they are worth the trouble."

"And will you tell me the same thing, Miss Kate?" said the captain.

"No, sir," she answered, with light gravity; "I know too little of them, and of you—your taste may not lie that way."

The taste of several persons seemed to lie that way just then, and we had full occupation as show-women. Kate laughingly set out a cold collation of "olives" and "pigs," "poached eggs," and "thorny woodcocks," which Captain De Camp immediately declared he should choose—"he went in for utility."

"What do you say to a 'weaver's shuttle,' then?" said Stephanie; "don't you call that useful?"

"Not to my taste, Miss Holbrook."

"Well, here is the ear of King Midas—and, more useful still"——

But Kate took the shell out of her hand with a glance which Stephanie did not see fit to disregard.

"What is that, Miss Kate?"

"This one?" said she, taking up another. "It is Venus's comb; don't you wish to inspect such an antique?"

"By no means," he said, with a gesture of refusal—"everything shews best in its proper place."

The shell was immediately restored to the cabinet, and Kate bestowed her attention upon Mr Freeman.

"Here is a perspective shell for you, Mr Rodney," I said,—"and this Argonaut—isn't it beautiful?"

"I wonder where all the shells get their names!" said Captain De Camp—"such as this, for instance."

"Why, this must have been called after the Argonauts," I said, "because it is such a good sailor."

"The Argonauts!" said Captain De Camp. "And pray who were they, Miss Grace?"

"Why, you know, sir," said I, as if he wanted to find out the depth of my knowledge—"they were the men that rowed

the Argo—the ship in which Jason went after the Golden Fleece."

"I don't know anything about it," said the captain, frankly—"I am ashamed to say, Miss Grace, that I have never read those old stories."

"Papa told me," I said.

"But what is this shell?" said he, helping himself. "Miss Holbrook, this is the one you were going to shew me."

"That's the most useful shell in the case," remarked Mr Freeman.

"Well, it's one of the prettiest. I don't care much for quirlicues."

"You don't like that," said Mr Freeman—"you wouldn't have one in your room for a dollar."

"I tell you I like it particularly," said the captain, with an approving and contemplative twirl of his moustaches. "If ever I buy any shells, I shall begin with this one."

"I wonder who knows the names of things now!" said Mr Freeman, with an air of injured innocence. "Why, man, that is a razor shell."

The captain certainly looked posed for a minute, but then he laughed as if he had received an extraordinary compliment. As for Mr Freeman—this turn, together with his previous good-nature, so won upon my father, that at parting he gave him a most cordial invitation to come as often as he could. Which invitation the gentleman certainly complied with.

CHAPTER XV.

FIRE.

"He must be very wise that can forbear being troubled at things very troublesome."
TILLOTSON.

"WHAT can that light be?" I exclaimed, as we passed the hall-window on our way to bed. It was late at night, but some happy combination of circumstances and wakefulness had allowed me to sit up with the rest; and we now stood all together, looking out and wondering. A steady red light shone to the north of us, beyond intervening woods and hills, deepening and fading, now clouded, and now clear, as smoke and flame chased and displaced each other. In town, so far off a fire would have fixed no eye that was not quick to appreciate the beautiful; but here there were no visions of warring streams of water—the fire burned on in solitude; and instead of bells and rattling engines, there was the soft whirr of a multitude of insects. The flickering light seemed a more wild and fearsome thing, in that silence, and we looked with a not untinged admiration. Perhaps men never feel what a weaker and more timid nature feels so readily—that undefined fear with which mystery can invest even a beautiful object. My father had been called to Baltimore by the illness of his brother; and we, left alone, felt all the influences of a simple but unexplained phenomenon.

"Wise people we are!" said Stephanie, at length—"of course it's just a house at Wiamee!"

"Wiamee is more to the west, and the houses are too small to make such a light."

"Not too small to burn up, are they?" said Stephanie—"and it may be the whole village; you can't tell west from east in the dark."

"But it does not spread nor move on," said Kate; "it burns steadily in one place—there went somebody's roof!"

There was a sudden deadening of the light, then it burned furiously for a few minutes, and then seemed to die gradually out.

"Exit!" said Stephanie, turning from the window; "it was probably one of Mr Collingwood's favourite farm-houses, so, if we go to bed at once, Kate, I don't doubt but we shall dream that we saved all the furniture except a tumbler."

"Here's Misther Barrington, ma'am," said Caddie, as she brought in the second plate of muffins next morning.

"Mr Barrington? does he want anything?"

"He does, ma'am."

"I have no idea," said Stephanie, helping herself to a muffin, "that I could ever have learned the style of a laconic, if I had been fifty times a Spartan."

"Shew him in here, Caddie," said my stepmother; and our factotum presented himself.

"How are you, Ezra?" she continued; "have you got quite well?"

"*I*'m pretty smart, ma'am," said Mr Barrington, with a strong emphasis on the pronoun.

"And Mrs Barrington, and the children?"

"Couldn't be no better," said Ezra; "if all folks was as quiet and well-behoven as they be, the world would go on a sight straighter."

"Intimate connexion between mankind's obliquity and that of the earth!" said Stephanie. "What's going crooked, Mr Barrington?"

But that gentleman, after the involuntary compliment to his family, had relapsed into silence, and stood with raised brows, eyeing the carpet, as if it held the key to some problem.

The look and attitude were a little startling.

"Is anything the matter?" said Mrs Howard.

"No, ma'am," said Ezra, hesitating, "nothing partic'lar—only the mill's destructionised."

"Burned down!" cried we all, taking a short cut to the truth.

"Jus' so," said Mr Barrington, looking up in some surprise; "who telled ye?"

"Nobody—the light," said Kate, drawing her breath.

"Dear mamma, don't look pale about it! How did it happen, Ezra?"

"Well, I reckon there was sunthin conbustible sot next to it," said Mr Barrington, as if he had worked his way to that conclusion. "There warn't no one into it, so it must ha' been done outside."

"Not on purpose?" said Mrs Howard.

"If it warn't a purpose, nothin' ever was; the mill didn't burn up of its own head, I'm clear."

"That can't be—it's some carelessness; nobody would set it on fire."

"Well, ma'am," said Ezra, slowly, "they tell me hearsay ain't evidence in a court of judgment; and, I s'pose, guessing ain't no more, otherways I'd get that Simpson took up, first thing."

"He could not have had any hand in it," said Mrs Howard.

"Couldn't hardly been no one else, ma'am. He's always kep' a-talking how our mill stopp'd his 'water privilege'—massy knows 'taint much 'privilege' I'd give him, if 'twarn't in the water! Why, the squire ain't an unfriend in the county but him."

"I did not know he was one."

"Like enough," said Ezra; "but most things can't be known till afterwards. There's my woman said this morning, she saw a dreadful big light off to Wiamee, and I telled her she was dreaming of the kitchen fire; so, she said, wouldn't it be wonderful if it was the mill? and I said, wouldn't it be wonderful if she had more sense? Howsever, I got tired, and went to see, finally, and there it was, all ashes and burnt sticks. It took me right on a none-plush," he added, feelingly.

We sat silent for a while, not knowing what to say or ask.

"But Mr Simpson wouldn't have done such a wicked thing—and for no reason," remarked Mrs Howard.

"Folks don't stand about reasons for wickedness, commonly," said Mr Barrington, with a slight touch of disdain—"or don't wait till they find good ones, anyhow. Mr Simpson's pretty nigh as fond of hard dollars as most men; and the squire'd ha' been certain to pick up some of his'n. But the mill's burnt, and no mistake; and, I s'pose, sunthin' ought to be done about it."

"Nothing can be done till Mr Howard comes home, Ezra, unless you can find out who has done us this mischief."

"Well, I guess likely," said Mr Barrington; "but as to finding out—the likest thing is, when a man's got only one enemy, that *he's* done it. Howsever, I'll look over the squire's friends—if it don't do no good, it can't do no harm; and there's no telling where a blessing may light, as my wife says."

And Mr Barrington departed, with a face that said the worst part of the business was over.

The muffins came in unheeded.

"Surely, mamma," Kate began, "papa has not interfered with anybody's rights?"

"I know nothing about it, my dear; some one has interfered with his, most certainly; but, for the rest, we must be in the dark till he comes home," she added, sighing.

"It's very good he doesn't know of it!" I said.

"Won't you write to him, mamma?" said Kate.

"No, it's not best; his head and hands are full enough now; and he ought not to leave his brother for any mill that ever was built."

This was all true, and we acted upon it. But how does a trouble swell when it is locked up!—how were we tried by our own quiet endurance!

"It seems strange that such a thing should affect us so nearly," said Kate. "Just think, mamma, two years ago we should hardly have noticed it, and now that mill seemed to be our best hope of getting on."

"I should be sorry indeed if that seeming were reality," said Mrs Howard; "and it depends upon circumstances, Katie, whether 'to get on' be a blessing or a curse; sometimes the word is, 'Back, for thy life!'"

"But, Mrs Howard," said Stephanie, "how you *do* talk! Look here," she added, planting herself before her; "now, weren't you most troubled because of these girls?"

"Yes," said my stepmother, with a voice not yet untroubled; "but, my dear child, that does not prove me wise or clear-sighted; perhaps it is for them that I ought to be glad. Better lose the world than rest in it."

We were yet musing over the breakfast table, when Caddie ushered in another visitor—Mr Collingwood.

"No, ma'am, I can't sit down," he said; "I scarce ought to have come in so early; but, dear Mrs Howard, will you tell me in all frankness—is there anything we can do for you?—my father would have come himself, but he was too unwell."

"Thank him very much, and you too, Mr Rodney—but I think there is nothing: all we can do is to keep ourselves quiet."

"Are you sure? I will see anybody, and do anything that you can think of use."

"Quite sure," said Mrs Howard, answering his earnest look with a smile that was withal a little tremulous—"unless you will sit down and read us a lesson of patience."

"It would be to myself, ma'am," he said—"I am but an unpractised learner."

"You see, Mr Collingwood," said Stephanie, who had a great aversion to that silence when people feel too much to speak—"there's nothing to be done but to build up the mill, and catch the burner; and, no disparagement to your strength and wisdom, you can't do either."

"Miss Stephanie," he said, with a smile, "are you laughing yet?"

"Only because I'd rather not cry—one must do something, and Kate always says it's folly to be worried."

"I fear she has not persuaded herself of that," said Mr Rodney, approaching her. "Miss Kate, are you thinking of those blue mountains?"

She looked up to answer him, but the recollection was just one she could not bear—her eyes fell again.

"You remember what we were talking of?" he said, very gently—"that they are but like the rest of the world when reached? If we feel sure that our happiness cannot be *perfect* in this life, we should the less grieve over the things that come to mar it. 'In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.'"

"But she is only worried for papa," I said, "and because mamma looked so grave."

"And you are troubled for her, Gracie? I wish I could give you more than sympathy."

"That is the best thing we could have just now," said my stepmother; "and if your time or exertions can do us any good, Mr Rodney, we will call for them."

There were indeed but few people to give us sympathy, but they gave it in double measure. Miss Easy came to us the moment she heard of our disaster, and with a face of such quiet sorrow and concern, that our own brightened immediately.

"Dear Mrs Howard," she said, "could any one think there

were such wicked people in the world? after all the difficulty you have had with that mill! yes, ma'am, it really surprises me."

"You must not be troubled for us, my dear friend," said my stepmother.

"Troubled!" said Miss Easy, her eyes filling to their utmost capacity; "yes, ma'am, I will be troubled—yes. What's the use of friends if they're not to be troubled for each other? Yes ma'am, I hope I am a friend. But how do you all do? and poor Mr Howard—what will he say?"

"I hardly know—I almost dread his coming home."

"He will bear it well—he has a true Christian spirit," said Miss Easy, thoughtfully—"but trials have their effect nevertheless. Though the promise stands sure, 'There shall no evil befal them that trust in me.' And yet," she added, sadly, as she bent down and kissed my forehead, "I cannot bear to see the weight over this child's eyes—yes, ma'am, that grieves me more than anything."

How quick other eyes in the room answered to her words!

"Papa will set it all right when he comes, dear Miss Easy," I said—"and there will be no weight over my eyes then."

"Nobody could give a better definition of supporting faith," said Miss Easy, with another kiss—"even so should we trust our heavenly Father—'it will be all set right, and there will be no weight over our eyes then.' Dear Mrs Howard, that should make the weight sit lighter now."

"It ought, and does."

"But can't you all come and stay with me till Mr Howard gets back? Yes, ma'am, now do," said Miss Easy—"it would make me so happy."

"We must not do it, even for that, dear Miss Easy," said my stepmother; "he may come at any time, and would want to find us here."

"True," said Miss Caffery; "yes, ma'am, you are always right, and always think of everything—yes. But I must see you often somewhere—you can at least come for a few hours—yes, you must promise me that."

And we did.

My father came not for three weeks, and after each letter we had a feeling of mingled pain and pleasure—that he must so soon know—that as yet he knew nothing. But the appointed day came, and with it Mr Howard.

The moment we saw him on the walk, we all felt that he

had already heard the news; not that there was exactly a cloud on his face, but there seemed to be a slight drooping of the head, a relaxing of the muscles, a want of the usual alert resolution of his gait; the very swing of his umbrella spoke of disturbance; and when he entered the house, his greeting, if not less affectionate, was graver than usual. Since we had lived at Glen Luna, one difficulty had come on the heels of another, and this new one was much the worse for the long string which had gone before it. Thoughts took a far range, but our first words were simply—

"How is uncle Ned, papa?"

"Somewhat better—not satisfactorily so to my mind," said Mr Howard, throwing himself into a chair. "Dear me—this hot weather is trying!"

The weariness of that long breath!

"One must not mind even trying things too much," said my stepmother, forcing herself to speak—with what effort, the voice told.

My father looked at her, and then looked out of the window.

"It won't do, Mary," he said; "you never can imbue my spirit with the quiet patience of yours. I declare! I thought last night of David's words—'Oh that I had wings like a dove! then would I flee away and be at rest.'"

"Not from us, papa?" said Kate, softly.

"My dear child!" he said; but her words had struck deep—through all the clouds of doubt, weariness, and vexation, clear to the very springs of life and duty—they rose at once, and after a few minutes, my father breathed freer.

"When did you hear all this?" said Mrs Howard.

"Yesterday."

"You will not let it worry you, papa?" I said; "nothing is so bad as that."

"It is hard not to be a little troubled, Gracie—the loss is a very serious one of its kind. I would fain bear it submissively." And then looking round at us, he said, "But you must wear bright faces, if you expect me to."

"Oh, we will, papa," said Kate. "Do you think Mr Simpson could have done this? have you interfered with him in any way?"

"No more than I have with you, my dear; but I suppose he thought my mill would deprive his, not of water, but employment. Yes—I presume he did it, or got it done."

"But how could he?—what right had he to interfere with your mill? Surely he couldn't take the law into his own hands for any reason?"

"He will find he has it *on* his hands," said Mr Howard; "but my own rights are growing so very misty and undefined, that I know but little about those of other people."

Alas! we had the law on our hands, too! Suits and cross-suits, and pleas, and bills, and demurrers—money to be paid for all. Dollars here for witnesses, and there for a journey to some distant court; and again for a speech, which Mr Howard said wasn't worth a pin. The war of poor rights against rich injustice.

In the midst of all this expense and annoyance, some pleasant things sprang up. We were greatly touched by an offer from Stephanie, of a part of her own small fortune towards the rebuilding of the mill.

"My dear child," said my father, "do you think I would do such a thing? I cannot tell you how it grieves me that I should be quite unable to add to what you want to divide."

"But, Mr Howard," said Stephanie, "I feel as if it belonged to you,—you have had trouble and expense enough with me —not to speak of the care and kindness which cannot be paid for," she added, tearfully.

"It is all paid for, with interest," said my father, kissing her, while we gathered round with glistening eyes; "and you will want what you have, my dear, depend upon it. Come, you must think a little of somebody else."

"If somebody else can't get along without my help," said she, colouring slightly, "he will never get along at all, so my conscience is clear there. But you, dear Mr Howard, have lost and suffered so much"——

"That I ought to know how to take care of other people? You must let me do it for you as long as I can, my dear; it is a pleasure that I shall owe Mr Freeman some ill-will for depriving me of. No, I will not hear another word; and here comes somebody, in good time, to receive them all. Mr Freeman, I am very glad to see you, sir, though Stephanie has just been persuading me that I ought to dislike you."

"Dislike *me*, sir?"

"You, sir."

"And yet you are glad to see me?" said the gentleman.

"Then Miss Stephanie's eloquence must have failed—if she could employ it in so bad a cause."

"She did employ it," said Mr Howard, gravely; "but, as she taught by precept, and not example, all I learned was to love her more than ever."

"And if *that* lesson is not perfect, sir, you know where to find the example," was the smiling reply, as Mr Freeman shook hands with us all round.

He had certainly improved since our first acquaintance—or we had learned to appreciate him. Without anything very bright or extraordinary, he had a pleasant mixture of good-nature and good sense, with a slight spice of peculiarity—not enough to laugh at, but with. Altogether, you felt sure Mr Freeman would get on in the world, though you never thought of his making a stir therein. Stephanie, too, had improved—perhaps by the prospect of real life before her, or, as she said, "of the arctic ocean;" and the feeling that Mr Freeman's house was tolerably glazed may have made her more tender of other people's windows. So it was, that while her chance of happiness increased, our unwillingness to part company increased also; and at length Mr Freeman declared that he never came to the house without feeling as if he were going "birdth-nethting."

The bird was fledged at length. Stephanie and Mr Freeman were married one fair day, when the autumn was showering gold leaves; and beneath a blue October sky they went forth into the world to seek their fortune.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT WENT TO BERMUDA.

"The simmer is gane, when the leaves they were green;
And the days are awa' that we ha'e seen:
But far better days, I trust, will come again."

LADY MARY ANN.

"WE shall have a lonely winter of it," said Miss Easy, as she sat at our tea-table, some two weeks after Stephanie's departure—"yes, ma'am, we shall indeed."

"*We* shall," said Mrs Howard; "it will take us some time to get used to the change—but you, Miss Easy?"——

"Didn't you know that Mr Rodney is going away?"

"Mr Rodney!" cried I.

"Not for the winter?" said mamma and Kate.

"Yes ma'am, for the winter. Farmer Collingwood's health seems even less good than usual, and nothing will content Mr Rodney but to have his father try a warmer climate. So they are both going"—and Miss Easy's voice went with them.

"I am very sorry indeed," said Mrs Howard.

"Yes, ma'am, every one must be that—we are all sorry—yes; but I have always seen so much of him—and the Bermudas are a long way off."

"Bermuda!—do they go there?"

"Yes; and what troubles me most is, that I fear they can ill afford the expense. The farmer, I know, thinks so—yes, ma'am: but Mr Rodney won't hear or allow a word of it. So they go," she repeated, with a sigh, "the first of December."

"He should command my purse, if I had one that wasn't filled with other people's fingers," said my father, coming out of his brown study.

Miss Easy looked very much concerned.

"My dear sir," she said, "pray don't think of such a thing! dear me, what have I said! I am very sorry indeed—yes, sir. But I never can get him to speak on the subject—it's only my own notions—yes; pray don't think of it again. I should have been wiser, but I thought you were dreaming, as we say. Yes, sir, I did indeed."

"You thought about right, ma'am," said my father; "but, like most dreamers, I was weaving a web of mixed truth and falsehood, and your words were the nearest realities that came to hand. But I must think of this matter—I must find out how it is; and if he wants anything, I will dispose of the other fingers somehow—he shall have it."

"My dear Mr Howard! that is like you," said Miss Easy—"but now, sir, you mustn't do such a thing. If you would be willing to act for me, if you should find what I have feared true, I have spare funds—yes, sir—at least, I think I could get them; and Mr Rodney would never take anything from me, but perhaps I might do it through you—yes, sir."

"No, ma'am," said my father; "I will neither take credit that does not belong to me, nor let you deprive yourself of a single comfort if I can help it—the business must be managed some other way."

"It would be to give myself comfort," said Miss Easy, sighing, "if I could relieve that poor boy from what I fear he has taken upon himself, and what I know is too much for him."

"And what is that?" said my stepmother.

"Earning money, ma'am, in all times and ways—yes, ma'am. I am sure he is not always studying—I am sure he is trying to provide for this journey. Why, I can hardly get sight of him."

"But what could he do out here?" said my father.

"Oh, I don't know, sir—copying, and translating, and draughting—he is good at everything. Why, sir," said Miss Easy, with sparkling eyes, "he taught school in the first place, till he could prepare himself for college; and then he paid his own way when there—and his brother's too, for that matter, so long as he would stay. And he was always at the head of everything, too—though he spent half of the study hours in hearing recitations. I suppose he's ahead of every one now, for he has studied harder than ever since he came home—too much for his health, I know."

"I hope he will get as much good as his father from the journey," said Mrs Howard.

"He don't want to go, ma'am, not at all, for himself—yes, ma'am, I think he looks very sober about it."

"Hush!" said my father—and Caddie opening the door, announced Mr Collingwood. Sober he did look, or it might be fatigued, but with no tinge of gloominess in either eye or voice; there never was a nature more absolutely without it. Had the business of his life been to seek his own individual pleasure, in the pleasantest way, Mr Collingwood could not have looked more free from doubt and discontent.

"I have been to see you, Miss Easy," he said, after the first salutations; "and Miss Avarintha told me you were here—so I thought my escort might not come amiss. I haven't given you a chance to get tired of me lately."

"Nor us either, I am sure," said my stepmother; "do you think it necessary to excuse yourself for coming here once a month?"

"No, ma'am," he said, smiling, "it is not quite so long since my last visit."

"But you ought to come very often, Mr Rodney," I said, "when we like to see you so much."

"And when it is so soon to be ended," said Mrs Howard.

A grave bow, and a look where there was too much feeling for a smile, answered both remarks; and after a moment he said—

"Yes, very soon."

"How is your father to-night, Mr Rodney?" said Miss Easy.

"Not well, ma'am: I hope he will gain strength when we are once off, but I think the *idea* of the journey rather fatigues him."

"But, my dear sir," said my father, "why don't you go at once?—you ought to have finished your journey by the first of December, instead of beginning it. Surely two gentlemen need not be so long getting ready."

The deep flush which crossed Mr Rodney's face while my father spoke seemed to confirm Miss Easy's words; it was but a moment, however, and then in his usual quiet way he said—

"You are quite right, Mr Howard—I am truly sorry our decision was not made sooner."

"But it wants three weeks to December—why not set off at once?"

Again the flush, the slight hesitation; and then with a smile came the answer—

"Nay, sir, I have arranged to go on the first of December, and we must even wait till then. Miss Avarintha would tell you that it is owing to my 'native obstinacy.'"

"How long shall you stay?" said Mr Howard, abruptly, changing his ground.

"I cannot tell, sir. If, as Dr Revere thinks, the climate should particularly suit my father's health, we may be there long—perhaps permanently."

"You don't mean *always*, Mr Rodney?"

"Always is a long word, Gracie," he said, smiling half in spite of himself at my earnestness—"I am sure I do not wish to speak it in such a connexion."

"You haven't seen Bermuda yet?" said my father.

"No, sir."

"Characteristically disposed of!" said Mr Howard, laughing—"you won't even condescend to notice my insinuation."

"What kind of a place is Bermuda, papa?" said Kate.

"Really, my dear, I know very little about it, though I have heard a great deal. But as people always praise what they do like, and slander what they don't, my knowledge of Bermuda is simply geographical."

"And mine," said Mr Rodney; "but if I live to come back, Miss Kate, you shall have at least such a one-sided account as Mr Howard refers to."

"Who takes care of Daisy Lea while you are gone?" asked my stepmother.

"Mrs Crown and her nephew for the present, ma'am."

"And Wolfgang?" said Kate and I together.

"Wolfgang," said Mr Rodney, turning to us with a smile, "is to live at the Bird's Nest—so he will be farther than ever from Purrer-purrer, Miss Gracie."

"Ah, he will come here sometimes," I said, "and we shall go to see him. How he will miss you, Mr Rodney!"

"Miss me?—yes, a little—I hope so—I should like to be missed. And yet it is a selfish hope, too," he said, as he rose in obedience to Miss Easy's summons. "Strange, that one should wish to give pain to one's friends!"

"But if you take away the power of pain, Mr Collingwood," said Kate, "the power of pleasure goes with it."

"And the power of usefulness too, in a measure," said my father—"they are all interwoven."

"Then I will be as selfish as possible," he answered, smiling; "good night."

My father mused for a while after they were gone, and then jumping up, he said—

"I shall just go out and waylay that boy, for I shan't rest till I know the truth."

But at the end of an hour he came back with an unenlightened face.

"And what is the truth?" said Mrs Howard.

"The truth is, that Mr Rodney is rather the best and most unmanageable person in the world. I dashed into the subject at once, according to custom, and without more than half an apology; but he either made up the other half, or didn't want it."

"And did you get any satisfaction?"

"Not a bit—except, as I tell you, as to his being a little better than other people. He didn't attempt to deny or remove my suspicions and inferences, but I could get no farther—he was as stiff as buckram. Only he gave me much warmer thanks than I deserved, and left me, I do believe, with wet eyes."

How swiftly those three weeks sped away!—and we saw but little of the friends that were to follow them. Even when we all walked over to the Lea, to visit once more its kind master, he was so unwell, that we were not admitted. But he grew better after that; and on the last day of November, Mr and Mrs Howard went again to see him.

It was Sunday afternoon; and Kate and I sat alone, in our little tea-room, singing hymns—going over with a strange pleasure the bright hopes and anticipations which we had no share in. One and another was finished, and at last that one, "I am bound for the kingdom," when we became aware of Mr Rodney's presence.

We had heard neither door nor step; but as our voices ceased he came forward, shook hands with us silently, and then seating himself by us, he said—

"'Bound for the kingdom'—dear friends, are you indeed that?"

We did not answer—we could not. The hymn had wrought upon us both a good deal, yet in an indefinite, unfruitful sort of way; but now, with these applying words came its full force; duty, responsibility, privilege—all neglected, seemed now all set before us—all weighing us down. What had we been singing?—"Bound for the kingdom"—and the intention had never entered our hearts!

Mr Collingwood looked at us earnestly; and perhaps he read in the quivering lips and half-interrupted breath the negative to his question; for he added, very gravely, and yet with even more than his accustomed kindness and gentleness—

"If not for it, then from it?"

True! true!—and, with bowed heads and weeping eyes, we gave silent assent to his words.

"There is no better description of a Christian's life," he said, presently; "there can be no more perfect reply to the trials of it. 'Bound for the kingdom;' as a ship is bound, that, even in adverse winds, so sets her sails that she is driven forward, or so casts anchor, that she is not driven back; and for that kingdom which is so beyond comparison with all others, that there is no need of specification; 'the kingdom!' that is enough! Enough for him, too,—the light that sheds one straight, undeviating line of brightness over the restless sea—uneclipsed by the sun, unhid by the cloud; that lures him to breast the waves, though trembling, shuddering with their violence, yet still on! He is homeward bound, and for the kingdom!"

Again he paused, and again did our hearts answer to every word that came so warm, so energized from his; yet we could not speak. As when the wind comes out dead a-head, and checked, startled, the ship seems uncertain how to trim her shivering sails, so did we hesitate—not from doubt of the right, but from a mixture of bewilderment, surprise, and fear. Had we, then, been bound on a reef?—*from* "the kingdom"?

"Yes!" said Mr Collingwood, at length, as if he read our thoughts; "for it, or from it! you cannot choose but be one. Dear Miss Howard, dear Miss Gracie, think of it! bound *from* the kingdom! *from* its blessings, its rest, its everlasting reward!"

We were weeping bitterly; and for some time there was no word spoken, except now and then one of counsel or entreaty from Mr Collingwood. But at length, Kate, exerting all her self-command, looked up and thanked him in a few earnest

words for what he had said; while I, whose feelings were less under control, dared not trust my voice.

"God grant we may all sail on together!" he said, sighing; "and to that shore where there can be no shipwreck."

And then taking a hand of each, Mr Rodney parted from us, with the words of Samuel Rutherford—

"I shall rejoice to hear of your welfare, and that your faces are up the mountain!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WATER.

"The game of life
Looks cheerful when one carries in one's heart
Th' inalienable treasure."

COLERIDGE.

YES, that was a lonely winter. For our spirits had not now that full tide which sweeps away slight obstructions, sports with them, tosses them a one side in a mask of its own foam; —now, the current had need of a clear channel. We all missed Stephanie's bright, unshadowed eye, farmer Collingwood's morning visits, and the frequent sight and hearing of Mr Rodney—so many of the visitors we had left talked neither sense nor sympathy. And then, without any defined cloud, the light of our fortunes and prospects seemed declining; though, as in the day's twilight, we hardly realised the progress except when we looked back. Things were changed. We were changed ourselves—how much, from that first bright day when I came to Glen Luna! Ah, me!—it was a necessary, inevitable change —the young heart cannot keep its spring,—and yet it makes mine ache now to think of it. I had not lost the childish simplicity of hope and enjoyment, but upon it was grafted a scion of real life, to which all fresh shoots of the former must in time be sacrificed. And I was softly passing from the brook to the river, and knew it not!

As the winter passed, we felt more and more the truth of Mr Rodney's words—were more and more resolved to follow them. We could have answered him now: yes, we were "bound for the kingdom"!

There had been sundry new things done and begun in our neighbourhood: if Time drove not in full career through that

quiet seclusion, we yet saw the dust of his chariot wheels. Surely, if "there is no new thing under the sun," it might almost be said, that in one sense neither is there any old! The very tree at the house-door is not to-day what it was last year; and this other, behind which the chimneys loomed up, unapproachable, now towers above them, and throws its leaves and shadows upon the roof beyond. The stone step which in all its rough newness said "I have just come," how lovingly the turf closes upon its edge! how firmly the green tufts cling and grow, even encroachingly! The rains and the dews have bleached its gray, and loved feet have worn its hardness—it is "an old inhabitant."

Shadows where there was sunshine—the wearing down of what seemed unchangeable—yes, such is Time's work: but here we see his work too—the opening of a fair view that before was hid—a path for the light through a dark forest that seemed impenetrable.

Foremost among the changes—not in itself, but in its effect—was the death of Mr Cary, the minister at Lake End. He was succeeded by a man of strong mind and body, with a will that spared neither, when they could be of use—and we could go to church once more. Then we realised what we had been without. I never knew what sermons were worth, till I heard them after those years of privation.

Consequent upon this, came another comfort. It was clearly our duty to go to church, therefore it was a duty to have bonnets and cloaks to go in; and, little as Kate and I cared about dress, it *was* pleasant to feel free to go where we wished, like other people.

Mr Ellis was not the only new-comer—the M'Loons had settled in the neighbourhood, and we had Mrs Willet and other old friends, for prospective *vis-à-vis* at the sulphur spring. Yet, from all these, we turned with what pleasure to the Bird's Nest! Miss Easy was more beloved than ever, and these novelties faded away by contrast. She always came to us as soon as she got a letter from Bermuda, to bring news and messages: always gave us comfort when it was most needed; and would sometimes lay her hand sighingly upon my forehead, as if she feared the weight were there still.

My father could not resolve to leave the mill in ruins all the time the lawsuits were pending, but had set men to rebuild as fast as possible; though Mr Barrington avowed his

belief that "Mr Simpson could burn it down more speedier than we could put it up." As yet, however, there had been no interference, but with the spring came "nimble mischance" in another form.

I came down one Monday morning, when, after several days of warm, breaking-up rain, earth and sky looked their loveliest, and found Mr Howard putting on shoes that were unmistakeably for out of doors.

"You won't have any time for pruning, papa," I said; "breakfast is just ready, and here come mamma and Kate."

"Don't wait for me," said my father, tying his shoe-strings with needless energy.

"Why, where are you going?"

"To Wiamee creek."

"To the mill!—so early!" said my stepmother; "oh, wait till after breakfast."

"There is no mill there, nor anything else that I know of, but water," he answered; and then, seeing our anxious faces, he added, in that tone of desperate calmness which betrays the excitement it is meant to cover—

"These rains have brought a tremendous freshet, and the mill is carried away."

How my heart sank! and then in a moment I said—

"Dear papa, do not look so grave—maybe it is not so bad as you think."

"It's as bad as it can be, I fancy," said my father, sighing.

"But do not look grave about it, still, papa," said Kate; "perhaps it can be mended, if it is bad; and at all events, let us take things quietly."

"See that you set me a good example, then," he said, looking first at mamma and then at us.

We followed him to the door, and called out—

"Now, don't stay long—come back and get some breakfast, and then you can go again;" and he gave us one smile that spoke of more trouble than even the cloud had done.

Silently we sat down and waited; and the hearts to which the birds sang songs, grew heavy and inattentive, and the brightening light of the sun seemed more and more uncongenial, until at last Mr Howard returned. The damage was not *quite* so great as it might have been—at least it could be repaired with dollars; but where were they to be had? There were some yet, my father said—he would find ways and

means; and, once in order, the mill would soon pay for itself. Would it ever do that? would it ever be in order? Both questions might be read in my stepmother's face; but Mr Howard heeded them not, and having talked himself into at least temperate latitudes, he went off again; and we stayed at home and talked our spirits down to zero.

And then, of all days in the year, Mrs M'Loon came to see us; and, of all subjects of conversation, she chose the mill; and, in the pure thoughtlessness of wealth, told us how she had been riding past Wiamee, and had seen the carried-off timbers—and how she was amused; and how the water had grouped them here and there—and laughed all the while at her own description, till we were in doubt whether to cry or be angry. But, as says some French paper—

"Avec le 'Go Head,' qui personnifie en lui l'audace dans l'entreprise, et le 'No Mind,' qui represente le courage dans l'adversité, l'Américain du Nord accomplit des prodiges."

My father had both principles in action. No loss, no discouragement could affect his practice: the head might be weary of arrangements, the mind sick of endeavours, yet the hand rarely stayed its workings. Arrangements and endeavours were made and forwarded as if "time was" had come back to us; and if sometimes the first brush of a disaster would sweep before it even the will to do—the calm followed; and patience and faith-nerved energy came with the thought.

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Again men were set to work at the mill, and then my father got his witnesses together, and went to attend one of the Simpson trials. To no purpose—the trial was put off.

"It is very vexatious, isn't it, papa?" said Kate.

"Trying enough—and expensive enough, too, that's the worst of it."

"But this won't hinder your building up the mill?"

"Hinder it completely. If the whole affair was to be settled in a few weeks, I thought I might venture to go on and rebuild; but I can't count upon Simpson's forbearance for six months. No, I must get the mill-dam in good order, and then wait patiently for September."

Mrs Howard sighed.

"No need to sigh about it, my dear," said my father,

cheerfully; "it will all come right — it is all right now. Being assured of that, we may well submit to what God sends."

"But, papa," said I, "that does not prevent our feeling troubled—do you think it can?"

"Submission," said my father, "is a very different thing from insensibility; it never was intended, Gracie, that trials should be unfelt, for then their end would be unattained. 'No trial for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous;' and pain, sickness, and poverty, are in themselves evils. Yet, if we are 'walking in the way of God's commandments,' we need fear nothing that shall meet us—not even the passing pain; for with it God may give such views of 'the rest that remaineth,' that all the intervening labour and weariness shall seem but as a sweet preparation."

"One must have strong faith for that," said Mrs Howard, with a half sigh.

"Yes, and strong love. Do you remember the account given of some lady, who, when she was about to submit to a dreadful operation, gave to one of the physicians the last letter which had come from her husband, asking him to hold it before her? And with her eyes fixed upon the open page and love-traced characters, she sat unmurmuring, unfainting, throughout the whole.

"So let a man but keep eye and heart fixed upon the words of Christ, 'As my Father hath loved me, so have I loved you,' and, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;' and they will gild even the deepest sorrows — how much more such trifles as beset us!"

"Do you think they are quite trifles, papa?" said Kate.

"Yes, dear, they are trifles—such trifles as 'make up the sum of human things'—not motes in the short sunshine of a day, I grant you; but pour on them a light from the eternal world — 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'—are they not trifles now?"

And with one look of joy and tears Kate and I had put our arms round each other; for we too could see the distant light which shone upon my father's sea of troubles.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COFFEE AND CAKE.

> "For lo! the board with cups and spoons is crown'd,
> The berries crackle, and the mill turns round;
> On shining altars of japan they raise
> The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze;
> From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide,
> While China's earth receives the smoking tide."
>
> RAPE OF THE LOCK.

OF course, when our Philadelphia friends arrived, we felt bound to call and see them; but farther than that we could not go. Entertainments were out of our power, and so many were given by other families, that the strangers had small time or inclination for mere tea-drinkings. Thus our intercourse with them rather languished; their visits were seldom, their invitations Mrs Howard usually declined.

"So you wouldn't come to the party!" said Mrs Willet, with a slight air of pique, as she reclined in our dormeuse one morning.

"Mr Howard was not at home to go with us," said my stepmother.

"Why didn't you tell me that was the reason?" exclaimed the lady—"I could have sent you quite a body-guard. Plenty of young men that would like nothing better. Well, you're coming next week?"

Mrs Howard shook her head.

"Now don't say one word—I shall be really hurt if you don't. Kate, I know it will do you good, and your husband will be here to go with you—your father, I mean," she added, as the flush on Kate's cheeks disentangled her thoughts,—"la, child, I never think what I'm saying. But will you come?—I *know* it's good for these girls—I want Grace to come too."

It was a plea my stepmother felt, and still she hesitated.

"Now, if you're thinking of dresses," Mrs Willet proceeded, "that makes no sort of difference—just come in your country clothes—nothing can be prettier. Simplicity's the true style, after all," said the lady, arranging her *volants*.

"They are in no danger of adopting any other style," said Mrs Howard, who could not forbear smiling.

"Yes, but it don't do to be *too* simple. Now, Kate, my dear, never be afraid to put a bow of ribbon in your hair, or under your collar here," she said, touching the little crescent which fastened the band of lace round Kate's throat—"or loop up your sleeves with it—so—pink, if you like it, or blue would look well—you have such white arms—it's so sweet and becoming. And if you want a dress a *little* nicer than usual," said Mrs Willet, while Kate's face took for a moment an expression of proud and somewhat scornful self-respect, "just get tarleton—it costs very little, and it's the prettiest thing a young girl can wear. I keep Caroline in it all winter (I'm so sorry she's away now), and when one wears out, I get her another. Just have it made with three deep tucks, and boddice, or sash if you like, and wear a bow of the same ribbon in your hair. There can't be anything more pretty and suitable. Now good-bye—I shall expect you."

"I wonder if she thinks we don't know how to dress ourselves!" said Kate, as the door closed.

"She means it all kindly," said Mrs Howard, smiling.

"I should like to see myself with a bow of ribbon in my hair!" was Kate's uncompromising reply.

And if any style could have told Mrs Willet as much, Kate would probably have adopted it for that evening—as it was, she had to content herself with the negative teaching of beautiful hair, in its usual quiet arrangement.

Mrs Willet's house was lavishly lined with comfort and money, but the first came in per favour of the second; for there was no particular taste or judgment displayed anywhere. Yet the purse will do a good deal if you give it *carte blanche*, and the rooms shewed not the wants of their mistress.

She herself, in a white turban, came forward from a circle of new and old friends; and receiving us very graciously, carried off Mrs Howard to the circle; while my father gazed abstractedly at the bisque on the mantelpiece, and Miss Suydam called Kate and me to take seats by her.

Unlucky request! Mrs Willet presently came up in dismay.

"My dear girls, what can you possibly be thinking of? Why, I never heard of such a thing!"

"As what, ma'am?"

"Why—bless me!—here you are, three ladies on this sofa, and no gentleman even near you!"

"So much the better," said Miss Suydam; "then they won't overhear our conversation, Mrs Willet."

"Why, Jane!—how can you talk so! Here," she said, turning about and laying hold of the first three coat-sleeves that came in her way, "your services are wanted in this direction. Mr Elliot—Miss Howard, Miss Grace Howard—my nephew Mr La Roche—Miss Suydam, Captain De Camp. Now, for pity's sake, don't sit two ladies together." And, giving a downward glance at her frock waist, Mrs Willet walked away.

"Is this what you call 'open ranks,' Captain?" said Miss Suydam, as with a gesture of impatience she moved to one corner of the sofa, and motioned me to the other. But Kate, not well pleased with such manifest manœuvres, sat in absolute gravity as two of the gentlemen laughingly placed themselves on either side of her; while Mr La Roche, perceiving that a sixth place was not, folded his arms, and taking a position in front of me, remarked—

"Well, Miss Grace, I suppose I am to *stand up* and do the agreeable to you."

The resignation of this speech set us all to laughing, and Mrs Willet looked back quite satisfied with her arrangements. So were also the gentlemen on the sofa; but Mr La Roche grew weary of some part of his position, and after a few sentences, he walked off to bestow his time and talents elsewhere. Thus left to amuse myself, the loud talking of sundry people furnished a fair supply of thoughts and information—using the common meaning of both. Now a voluble lady would pour out a long string of news and descriptions; or a delicate city-made gentleman would utter compliments and commonplaces in a tone that was perfumed like his pocket-handkerchief. Exclamations of all sorts came with so little discrimination, that one had need to be told, "this is for joy, and this for sorrow." Then a word from Miss Easy or my stepmother would reach my ear—speaking truth, heart and simplicity; or one of my father's energetic, pointed expressions, had all the pleasant effect of a straight line in a picture of curves.

"My dear Kate," said Mrs Willet, while I was drawing com-

parisons, "do go and sing us something; there's nothing so pleasant as music. Couldn't you sing a duet, with somebody to accompany you?"

"No, ma'am, I don't think I could," said Kate, gravely.

"Well, anything else, then. Come, my dear—a prompt compliance!"

And as Kate went to the piano, Mrs Willet with a touch and whisper sent Mr La Roche in the same direction, while herself flitted about observantly. Then seating herself by my father—

"Oh, Mr Howard, I do take *such* an interest in the love affairs of young people!"

"Do you?" said my father, at no pains to repress his smile.

"Oh, *very* great! Amelia," she said, looking towards the piano, and beckoning her daughter—"tell your cousin to come here."

And with another whisper, Mr La Roche was ordered somewhere else.

"You see," said Mrs Willet, turning again to my father, "I sent him to turn over the leaves for Kate—I wanted to see if it would disturb her."

"Did you?" said Mr Howard, again.

"Yes, and I found it did; so I called him away."

My father gave an involuntary glance towards the piano, but the unconscious victim of curiosity had returned to her seat, and was talking with Captain De Camp.

"Very fine young man, that!" said Mrs Willet.

"Is he?" said my father, who had fallen into the laconics.

"Oh, *very* fine!" then raising her voice—"Captain, can't you give us a song? some little military ballad?"

"No, ma'am, I never went farther than military exercises," was the chuckling reply.

"Oh, but you can sing something?"

"No, I can't, ma'am," said the captain, bowing.

"Dear me!" said Mrs Willet, "that is very extraordinary."

"Not at all, ma'am," said my father; "there are many fine young men that have not fine voices—even in the army. I presume the 'Ha! hum!' adjurations tend rather to power than sweetness."

Mrs Willet looked puzzled, and my father looked at the ceiling.

"Nothing up there worth your notice, Mr Howard," said Squire Suydam, pausing in his perambulation.

"Where then?" said my father, with a half smile.

"Miss Avarintha!" called out Mrs Bulger across the room—"Miss Avarintha! look at Squire Suydam—he is absolutely sporting a moustache!"

"Squire Suydam!" said the echo—"I would not have thought it! You, sir, of all men! Well, I am surprised!"

The squire turned, and bowed his acknowledgments.

"Daresay, ma'am—don't doubt I shall astonish you a good many times before I die, Miss Avarintha; but as to a moustache, I haven't a sign of such a thing—unless they're catching; I took a ride with the captain this morning—maybe that's how it is."

Nobody laughed louder at this than the gentleman referred to, who evidently thought himself complimented.

"'Pale faces!'" said my father, musingly, and half to himself; "the Indians would have to invent some new name for us now. If any part of a man's face shews it's natural colour, it's because he can't help it." And then, still in an under tone, my father proceeded—

> "'Some are reap'd most substantial, like a brush,
> Which makes a nat'ral wit known by the bush
> (And in my time, of some men I have heard,
> Whose wisdom have been only wealth and beard);
> Some like a spade, some like a fork, some square,
> Some round, some mow'd like stubble, some stark bare;
> Some sharp, stiletto-fashion, dagger-like,
> That may with whisp'ring a man's eyes outpike;
> Some with the quadrate, some triangle fashion,
> Some circular, some oval in translation;
> Some perpendicular in longitude,
> Some like a thicket for their crassitude,
> That heights, depths, breadths, triforme, square, oval, round,
> And rules geometrical in beards are found.'

Think of the world's travelling back to 1630!"

"Well remembered!" said Mr Suydam, laughing; "I should think you might have missed some of the varieties."

"Couldn't," said my father; "just look about you. There's a stiletto opposite, and an oval by the fireplace, and triangles enough to make one think the world is standing on end. My dear sir, I can't find any plain surface to look at, but the ceiling, and there's a bearded Silenus in the mouldings up there!"

Mr Howard roused himself from his gloomy contemplations, and talked briskly with the squire till the little French clock jogged his elbow—then he came to where we sat, and gave us sundry taps on the shoulder, as a gentle intimation that he

was ready to go. And Mrs Willet's arguments failed to convince him that the hour was very early or our house very near.

"This is a great deal pleasanter than all those people!" I said, as we walked home, and when by two or three deep exhalations I had purified my lungs from the atmosphere of bouquet and badinage.

"Our Katie sang better than her little namesakes, though," said Miss Easy, with a smile. We were on our way to the Bird's Nest.

"But Kate is one of *these* people," I said, laughing; "and that is quite different, you know, Miss Easy."

"Quite another thing, Gracie."

"And yet, one cannot help being amused," said Kate; "I'm sure I have been."

"What an interesting woman is Mrs Willet!" said Miss Avarintha, from behind; "I think she is quite remarkable."

"She certainly is," said my father, drily—"especially in point of judgment."

"Yes, especially as you say, sir."

"But, Miss Easy," said Kate, "you don't speak—don't you like to see people?"

"Yes," said Miss Easy, "some people and sometimes—yes; and yet, I rather agree with Grace, and like stars better than gas-lights."

"I'm sure I do," said Kate. "But I believe I like company better than Grace does."

"I wish she liked it better," said Miss Easy. "You needn't wear such a grave face, Gracie, till you are as old as I am, at least."

"As old as you are! dear Miss Easy," said Kate.

"Yes," she answered, affectionately; "I am what most people call old, Katie—yes. But I don't feel old—that's one great blessing; and it doesn't trouble me to think of it—that's another."

"Isn't Mr Rodney coming home any more, Miss Easy?" I said: "isn't there any hope of his coming soon?"

"I don't know whether I ought to say hope or fear," she said, with a tone that had lost its bright cheerfulness. "Yes, I expect him—he will not come if his father continues better, but that can hardly be."

"Do you think so, Miss Easy?" said Kate; "that last letter was grave, certainly, but was it more sad than usual?"

"It seemed to me less hopeful. And then, these journeys —I know, I have seen them tried—they do so little good. I think we shall hear worse news."

She was right. Farmer Collingwood's health, which had at first improved rapidly, declined as fast; and he died in Bermuda, just a year from the time of his leaving Daisy Lea. Close upon this came another loss, and to us a much nearer one—the death of Mr Ned Howard. We had expected it—he had never been well since the year before; but, though surprise might have increased the first shock, it could hardly have added to our grief—that was to be of years.

The autumn leaves had meaning in them now, as they fell fluttering from the branches, and the wind took up our half-stifled sighs, and breathed them out over the strewn earth, till we could have wept at the expression of our own thoughts. Perhaps it was well for us that smaller cares ceased not at the coming of the great—though they were felt with double annoyance.

My father sat before the fire one morning, early in December, with a most perplexed face.

"I do not know how I am to manage," he said, at length—"I do *not* know."

"Manage what?" said my stepmother.

"To raise a hundred dollars immediately. Here's this man M'Carthy going somewhere—back to Ireland, I hope—and wants his money—says he must have it; and where it's to come from I don't profess to know. I could pay him by degrees, but that won't do; and how to get so much at once —unless"— and he paused.

"Unless what?"

"Unless I raise it upon some of our plate."

Mrs Howard looked grave.

"But for Kate and Grace, I would say yes, in a moment."

"I know—that is the only doubt. But I shall have money by and by, and then we can redeem it—I should lodge it with some friend."

"Pray don't think of us, papa," said we both; and Kate added—

"You know, papa, what does it signify? so long as your way is made easier—that is the best thing for us."

"It will be in the end, I trust," said my father.

So our company tea-set was packed up and taken to Phila-

delphia, and M'Carthy received his money. But I think we all felt the poorer for this transaction. It might be long before we should need anything better than the service we had in use —we had the right to redeem the pledged one at any time— but when should we have the power? At what future day should we have a hundred dollars to spare?—and for what we could do without? We were like to have more than one hundred engaged beforehand.

Things were changed. Our fine English live stock had dwindled—some sold, others dead; and those still on hand were all too many for the hay. Just in the mowing season Ezra Barrington had been ill and my father away—the consequences we were now meeting. Our Yankee would come in with—

"Squire to home, Mrs Howard?"

"Not yet."

"Ain't an airthly thing for them critters to eat; and they're as hungry as can be." And Ezra would place his hat upon the floor and straighten himself up, as if he were supposed to be at his wits' end—not at all as if he was. And with a passing shadow on her face, my stepmother would look up and say—

"Is all that hay gone already?"

"Ain't three straws left, ma'am, if I was to take a rake and count 'em; and the cows is eatin' the mangers. They do put away the most fodder!" he added, with a shake of the head; "there ain't no sense into it."

"Well, what will you do? Mr Howard is not coming till Saturday."

"Then 'twon't answer to wait for him, that's a fact," said Ezra. "I s'pose I'll just have to make tracks to Squire Bulger's, and back down a couple of bundles—ain't snow enough for the sled. That'll do 'em till Saturday, I reckon; but it beats all my wife's relations to be scant o' hay afore Jinooary."

We longed for the spring and its supply of grass. There were other things, too—for the house, for ourselves—things wanting, and not got. A pair of shoes, "if it should be convenient to get them"—or sheets and towels, with a conditional "never mind." Still my father always said, "have everything you want," or, "shall I bring you some silk dresses?" But we knew better, and while so many dollars were needed elsewhere, we could not bear to use any for ourselves.

Sometimes we did question whether the money was going in the best direction; but if improvements were not finished, how were we to recover the dollars which had begun them? how ever get our heads above water unless the mill set the example? And then we did enjoy things when they came; and when my father said, "there are your shoes, my dear—I hope they will fit," I felt, even tearfully, the kindness that had found time and means to get them. And when, after a long waiting, he would bring home some needed piece of stuff, we set to work upon it with much more alacrity than if it had come at our call. Yes, there are pleasures in poverty; and the very appreciation of my father's trouble of mind lightened all things else to us. So we worked away, smoothed down all things to him, and kept them from every other eye and ear. By dint of carefulness, our nice clothes long kept their good appearance; and though people knew we had had losses, they were far from guessing how nearly it was low water with our dollars; while we said privately—

> "Oh, filling out—oh, filling in!
> Oh, paying out—*no* paying in!"

And so, amid the changing light of doubtful weather, that year, which had seen the end of so many things, drew near its own.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SECOND CHRISTMAS.

"The cherish'd fields
Put on their winter robe of purest white.
'Tis brightness all: save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low the woods
Bow their hoar head; and, ere the languid sun
Faint from the west emits his evening ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,
Is one wild dazzling waste."

THOMSON.

CHRISTMAS day passed in whirlwinds of snow; and we within doors were doubly quiet for the sporting elements without. Our few simple presents were given and received with a mixed pleasure. There had been doubts whether we *should* receive—whether we could afford to give; and to make much preparation, we had wanted both time and spirits. Then there was the strong contrast with former years—how keenly I felt it, when Mr Howard came in with a paper of candies, and, laying it on the table, said he had brought us that for Christmas! I would rather he had forgotten the day.

Towards evening the wind lulled, and, though snow-flakes still fell doubtfully and at intervals, Kate and I resolved to walk to the Bird's Nest. We seldom went by the highroad now, it was too roundabout a way for our frequent visits; but we had struck out a little footpath which, going across wood and meadow, brought us to the Nest much sooner; and though its narrowness left our dresses to take the benefit of the snow, it was too pretty to be abandoned for such a trifle. So, literally, this time, we "made tracks" for the little path which fell into our own garden ground.

The weather was quiet, except as now and then a puff of wind would sweep over the white country, and put first pearls and then diamonds upon our eyebrows and lashes — then

whirling away—its course marked by the light white cloud which it raised.

The chickadees were in full force, and they alone broke the stillness; while their black caps told as beautifully upon the waste of snow as their merry notes amid the universal hush. We stopped to look at them. Upon a bush close to our path there were perhaps a dozen—in every variety of attitude and position; the little black heads turned up, and down, and sideways; and having, from their round, full-feathered plumpness, a look particularly comical; while one bird was perpendicular, another horizontal, one perched, and another swinging beneath a branch, their heads never at rest; and from every twig in succession came the joyous "chick-a-dee-dee-dee!" And all the time their little gladsome eyes watched us — half as it seemed in curiosity, half in commiseration, that we too were not blackcaps. One might have fancied that they sang—

"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!—
O see! O see!
Wouldn't you be, wouldn't you be,
Like me? like me?—
Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!"

I think if they had really put the question, Kate and I might have answered "yes;" but with a chirp, and a flutter that showered the snow from its resting-place, the flock sprang to their wings—if I may use the expression—and we silently walked on. It was time; the light came more and more askance, and neither for birds nor bad walking must we loiter now. Yet, fast as we step, it is not so light that we cannot see the glimmering fire through the white muslin curtains as we reach the cottage.

"How those curtains look like Miss Easy!" said Kate—"simple, pure, and quiet as she is."

"And transparent to 'the light within,'" I added.

"Yes—I wish every one had as bright a light, and as gentle a medium for it to shine through. But then the world would be too pleasant. Ah, Gracie! we shall not see many such this side 'the kingdom.' How evidently she is bound for it! how plainly the expression of her face tells which way she is looking!"

The cottage was deprived of its green setting, and to the rough stone walls the snow clung in patches, and the roof bore its white burden with very grave quietness: yet the many little tracks upon the walk where no other feet had yet been, told of

the revels of chickadees; and the elm waved its long branches not cheerlessly in a late gleam of sunlight, which came from the west, a very "beam of tranquillity."

We had long given up knocking at Miss Easy's door; so opening it gently, Kate and I passed in and entered the parlour. The room had that soft, uncertain light—the interregnum between sun and fire—which is the very atmosphere of dreamland; even the fire seemed weaving visions, as it flickered and flashed and sighed, and had the conversation all to itself. Nobody heeded it; and the bright coals fell and the white ashes gathered, and nobody heeded them.

Miss Easy was not there, but a great chair stood before the hearth, and in it was Mr Rodney. We recognised him at once, though, with his head sunk in his hands, he sat like one whose thoughts are travelling painfully the long-quitted roads of former life; but after one glance at him, Kate and I looked at each other. Yes, it was Mr Rodney himself. Wolfgang lay near him, but the dog's pricked-up ears were quickly lowered, and his tail gave us a quiet greeting as his head went down to its former attitude of repose. We stood still a few moments, and then were about to go as softly as we had come, when Miss Easy entered by another door.

"Why, my dear girls!" she said, "where did you come from? I am so glad to see you—yes. And you took this long walk in the snow to wish me a merry Christmas? But what in the world were you going away for?"

"Not because of me, I hope?" said Mr Rodney, as he came forward and gave us a greeting that had all the warmth of old times. "Friends should not run away from each other after so long a separation," he added, more sadly.

"Don't they look well?" said Miss Easy, coaxing the fire into a bright blaze and then coming back to untie our hoods—"don't they look well? and haven't they grown and improved?—yes."

Mr Rodney smiled—

"They certainly have, Miss Easy, and they look well; but—is nothing the matter at home? is all well there, too?"

"Yes, perfectly," Kate said; and I looked up rather wonderingly, and asked—

"Why, Mr Rodney? what makes you say that?"

"Something in the eyes I was looking at, Gracie," he answered; "but perhaps the shade was in my own."

"There mustn't be a shade in anybody's eyes," said Miss Easy; "I am so glad to see you all here together, once more!—yes. And now, Katie, love, sit down and tell me how you have spent this long stormy day; yes—I want to know."

"The day has not been so very long, Miss Easy, considering its quietness and the little Christmas feeling that I have had; we were too busy to do much in the way of present-making; but your engravings looked like Santa Claus, and gave us a great deal of pleasure."

"And you see what a present I had," said Miss Easy, looking with glistening eyes at her guest. "I found him here this morning just as you did this afternoon—yes; and I have hardly recollected what the day was. And only think! there lay Wolfgang at his feet, and he hasn't stirred from him since. I declare," said Miss Easy, wiping her eyes, "it quite touched me."

Mr Rodney laid his hand upon the dog's head, which Wolfgang acknowledged by one of his looks of mute affection; and for a little the fire crackled and blazed unheeded as before. Then our two friends spoke again, in tones low at first, and very grave, as if each read the other's thoughts; but brightening and strengthening, as word and eye almost passed from the ruins of earth to "that city which hath foundations."

And Kate and I, listening with charmed ears, noticed not the waning light, till Miss Avarintha and candles came in; then we started up in surprise at our own forgetfulness.

"Now just sit down," said the lady; "I didn't know you were here, and I've twenty things to say to you. Are your father and mother in health?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Kate, "but we must take another time to hear the twenty things. We have stayed too long already—it is quite late."

"You need not look so anxiously at the window," said Mr Rodney—"you will not be afraid with me, if it is a little dark."

"No, but we are not going with you, Mr Collingwood," said Kate—"at least you are not going with us. We are not at all afraid—it is not far."

"O no!" I said; "and you must be very tired—you cannot want a walk, Mr Rodney."

"I am sure I shall take one, whether you let me go with you or not. I must go to the Lea to-night, Miss Easy," he

added, turning to her, "but you shall see me again in the morning."

"Why should you go there, of all places?" said Miss Bain—"it will only make you feel sad. You ought to stay here, and get up your spirits. It isn't right to indulge yourself so—a pensive state of mind is very unhealthy."

No one answered this speech, but, after a minute's silence, Miss Easy said, gently laying her hand on his arm—

"You will come back to-morrow? yes, you promise me that? then I will not keep you longer, for I know these children want to be off."

And Wolfgang roused himself to follow us, keeping close to his master, as if he feared another separation.

The clouds were scattered now, and the new moon's faint light just served to shew the snow's full beauty. My thoughts went back to our first Christmas in that region—when we had dined at Daisy Lea, and had walked home in such a night—but how different! Perhaps Kate's mind had taken the same course, for after a while she said—

"It is strange that the snow cannot keep its lightness, even where there has been no heavy weight to press it down!"

"And what reality were you looking at through that shadow?" said Mr Rodney.

"I was thinking of a time, years ago, when we said the new-fallen snow was like our own spirits," said Kate, with a scarcely perceptible sigh.

Again we walked on in silence, and then Mr Rodney said—

"You have told me nothing of this long year as it has passed at Glen Luna. I know from Miss Easy that you have been well, but what have the months brought besides health?"

"A little experience—a little more of real life than we ever had before," Kate answered.

"The shade was not all in my own eyes, then?"

We had taken the road home, for the little path was too narrow and dark for pleasant walking at that hour; and now we were passing the same slopes and fields that we had first seen in all the luxuriance of summer dress. Unbroken white now, the bare trees cast the faintest of shadows, and almost looked shadowy themselves in that pale light.

"Miss Kate," said Mr Rodney, "the snow will, as you say, lose its lightness—will melt away entirely; and yet the earth

is thereby much more fertilised than if that reflector for the sunbeams were abiding."

"Yes," she answered, though her voice trembled a little—"I know—I feel that to be true. And yet"——

"And yet," he said, gently, "sometimes you forget what Baxter says—'There is no mirth like the mirth of believers, which faith doth fetch from the blood of Christ, and from the promises of the Word, and from experiences of mercy, and from the serious fore-apprehensions of our everlasting blessedness.'"

"Forget it because I have so little of it," Kate said presently.

"Well," he answered, in the same pleasant, encouraging tone, "it is something to know what we want—it is more to know how the want may be supplied; but the arch will fail of its purpose without the key-stone. Let faith bind the remedy to the need, and the work is perfect. The lack of this makes many a half-way Christian; and it often hinders the realisation of that promise—'They that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing.'"

"Will you come in, Mr Rodney?" said Kate, as we reached our own door.

"Not to-night."

"You have done us more than one kindness by taking this long walk!"

"And you are not going away any more!" I said. "I am so glad!"

"We will not talk of that now, Gracie; but I trust your power of remembrance could stretch over more than one year, if I should try it."

I was not quite satisfied with the indication of these last words: and when Miss Bain paid us a visit next morning, I repeated my remark about Mr Rodney's staying at home.

"Indeed!" was the somewhat disdainful reply; "the idea of his doing anything half so wise!"

"And what foolish thing does he mean to do?" said Mrs Howard.

"Why, of course, that's as people take it; but, here he's just come home in great affliction—or ought to be; and, instead of visiting about among his friends, and trying to get his spirits up—taking a little relaxation, you know, Mrs Howard—he's going straight off to college, or somewhere; and the next thing

I hear will be, that he is dying of a pain in his chest, or some other mathematical disorder."

"I hope not," said my stepmother, quite unable to repress a smile.

"But, Mrs Howard," said Miss Avarintha, "really, ma'am, you ought not to laugh; just imagine him bending all day over his books—and he a young man of such erect carriage and symmetrical proportions! Why, it's perfectly melancholy!"

"Very melancholy, indeed, if it injures his health; but I should think he had sense enough to guard against that."

"My dear ma'am, he hasn't a bit! he told me gravely this morning that he had no time to lose, or throw away, or something—complimentary to his friends, too, as I said. Just think of it! and he so young, too! Why, he might settle down, and get married, and study for a profession afterwards."

"If he cared nothing about his wife"——

"If he did! Now, Mrs Howard, *were* you ever married to a man who hadn't been through college? and Mr Rodney has been part through, besides."

"Never," said my stepmother, laughing; "Mr Howard graduated with all the honours. But I must venture to assert my opinion, that a man had better study before marriage than after."

"Why? for pity's sake?"

"More time, and fewer claims upon it."

"You don't mean that people oughtn't to read nor anything of that sort after they're married? Why, there's Mr Howard spends hours and hours at his books, I'm sure; didn't you say so once when I asked you? Why, if a man did nothing but look after his wife, what would become of his mind, ma'am?"

"His *wife's* mind might oftener become something than it does now," said my stepmother. "But I am no advocate for idleness in any department, Miss Avarintha; though I must say that I think intellectual men often slight too much their non-intellectual duties. They are so busy making a clear way for their heads, that the walk of their practical every-day life becomes sadly encumbered."

"Then, what *would* you have Mr Rodney do? Suppose his health fails?"

"I'm sure I was laying down no rules for Mr Rodney," said Mrs Howard.

"No, ma'am, of course! but I want your opinion; young men in general, for instance"——

"That's a pretty large for instance. I think 'young men in general' are in no danger from over-application to anything; the more they study, the better."

"My dear Mrs Howard! you really are too evasive. Should a man give up his books when he gets a wife?"

"By no means; but he should see to it that they are not obstacles in the way of his wife's happiness."

"As if they could be!" said Miss Bain, indignantly, for she was lady-patroness of books in general. "Why, Mrs Howard, I have always maintained that you were the happiest woman in the world, because Mr Howard *was* so fond of study, and all that! A pretty life a woman must lead when her husband's head is nothing *but* a head! It had better be something else, and be in the clouds."

My stepmother's smile was quite beyond Miss Bain's comprehension, neither was it explained, but she said—

"We are talking in the abstract, you know: if you apply all my words to myself, I shall have to stop. But I have seen many a married student, and have seen him—with his head in the clouds, as you say—go stumbling along over the obstacles which had accumulated through his abstraction, and hardly know what they were or how they came."

"Very well, and what harm then?"

"I did not say harm to *him;* but, Miss Avarintha, I have seen his wife trying to remove those obstacles, or with her own unassisted strength to get herself and her children over them. I can tell you it is a sight which might almost disgust one with books in general! Let a man study—but oh! let him study his wife first!"

The eye that was so seldom roused out of its gentleness—the sympathetic, womanly indignation that flushed her cheek and made her voice tremble—obtained for my stepmother even Miss Bain's respect and admiration.

"Well, I must say," she remarked, "you are a most extraordinary person! But do you ever tell Mr Howard all this?"

"Sometimes—when I think he's in danger," said Mrs Howard, with a smile so sweet and placid, that it turned the edge of Miss Bain's curiosity.

"Dear me!" said that lady, suddenly coming back to the starting point,—"why, if Mr Rodney heard all this, he'd kill himself right away!"

"I hope not," said my stepmother, as with one quieting, long

breath she too came back,—"I certainly have advised no such desperate measures."

"No, ma'am, but he wants to know so much, you see; and if he thought this was his only chance, it's my belief he'd study himself to death in six months."

"Maybe he does not intend to get married so soon," said my stepmother, smiling; "and if a few more months dilute the poison, it may not prove fatal. And you may tell him from me, that, instead of having no chance to learn anything after he is married, the chances will be so many, that he will have hard work to keep pace with them."

"My dear Mrs Howard! how queer you are!—what funny men and women you would make!"

"Oh, she would make such good ones!" said Kate.

"Well, I believe she would, if everybody was make-upable into Kates and Graces—for you are certainly the best girls I ever saw in my life. But now you're coming to dine with us to-morrow, and you mustn't say one word of all this."

"I will be very good," said Mrs Howard.

"Because, you see, Easy's very anxious—and so am I, of course—that he should rest himself; and he thinks so much of your sense, and all that, Mrs Howard, I'm sure he'd do just what you told him to."

My stepmother shook her head, as if she were sure of no such thing.

"Who will take care of the Lea now?—Mrs Crown, as usual?"

"O dear, no!" said Miss Avarintha; "Mr Rodney has nothing to do with it now, you know—it belongs to his brother Carvill Collingwood. At least he *was* Carvill Collingwood, but he only calls himself Carvill at present."

"A good riddance!" said my father, who had come in while she spoke.

"Yes, sir, so I think—I can't say I'm fond of very long surnames—one or two syllables is plenty."

"But I didn't know this brother was alive?" said Mrs Howard.

"Dear me, yes! Very fine young man, too, only wild—but that one can't help."

"I shouldn't think he would care to live at the Lea, then," said Kate.

"Not going to, my dear; O no—he'd think himself buried

alive. He'll only come down there now and then to kill the birds his father was so fond of. Mr Rodney will take away all that belongs to *him* at once, which isn't very much, to be sure; and what Mrs Crown will do I am not informed—probably she will choose to reside somewhere in the neighbourhood, and perhaps she'll stay at the Lea house still, if Mr Carvill makes it worth her while. But that's not likely, for these hairbrained young men never know what to do with their property. Easy's quite troubled to think of the old place going into such hands, but I tell her it's no use. I daresay he'll be a delightful neighbour, and wake us all up."

"I don't wish to be waked up," said my father, knitting his brows and walking out of the room.

"Mr Howard is so strict," said Miss Bain, laughing. "But Mr Carvill is going to be married, Kate, so you needn't even look that way. Bless me!—what a face! why, he's not a Turk or a Mussulman, child—and if he was, I'm sure the Turks are very handsome, and turbans very becoming. I can tell you there's many a girl would jump at Carvill, for as wild as he is."

"I am not at all allied to the kangaroos," said Kate.

"But who is the jumper in this case, Miss Avarintha?" said I.

"Jumper!" said Miss Bain in high indignation—"what in the world is the child thinking of?—kangaroos, indeed! the idea of calling Clemence St Cloud a jerboa!"

"Nay, we did not touch upon that species," said Kate; "she is French, then?"

"To be sure she is, so you'd better not laugh at her. She's a most exquisite young creature, they say—brought up in a convent—so I suppose she knows everything."

"Well, but is she coming to the Lea, too?" said my stepmother.

"Dear me, ma'am, how can I tell?—no, I should think not, —from all I hear of her, she's not the sort of person to run about after her husband."

"Only to jump at him," said I.

Miss Bain had half a mind to be vexed, but we laughed so heartily that she could but laugh too, protesting that we were "as ridiculous as possible;" and so we parted in good humour.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FOUR SIDES OF A DINNER-TABLE.

"Something like home that is not home is to be desired; it is found in the house of a friend."—TEMPLE.

I FEAR there was a touch of selfishness in our feelings next day, when we heard that Miss Bain had a headache. Miss Easy and Mr Collingwood were alone in the little parlour, and the explanation of this circumstance was, truth to say, very satisfactory; we could be sorry for the invalid, but not for ourselves. So long as we were very bright, her company and conversation came not amiss; but in those circumstances where the tongue—"that little horse that is perpetually running away"—requires the guiding hand of nice feeling, at the very time when Miss Easy was most lovely, Miss Avarintha was least endurable.

Moreover, when dinner was served, I discovered that she would have been too many in another respect. We were such a pleasant number, as matters stood—mamma and I on one side, Mr Rodney and Kate on the other; my father, armed with the carving knife; while opposite to him sat Miss Easy, with a face of such pleased affection, that none but those who knew her well, would have guessed that she had always at least one thought up stairs. I felt reproved for my secret joy every time I looked at her—get rid of it I could not.

An acute observer, who had surveyed that happy dinner-table, would have thought none of us in exuberant spirits; and yet would have judged that we were possessed of as much comfort, of as much counterbalancing good, as man needs to bear the evil patiently—and so we were. The wind went noisily about the house, as it had been the world's turmoil: dark clouds, that would have done honour to November's moodi-

ness drifted in close order across the sky, like threateners of our peace. Yet did not the world enter, nor the darkened light without do aught but brighten the world within,—we were very happy. Quietly, soberly, as people who have tasted life must be, to be happy at all; though with Kate and me the taste was half sympathetic, and in return the older members of the company caught from us somewhat of the smack of young pleasure that yet lingered on our lips—

> "Sous les aimables lois dont l'amitié nous lie,
> Et les biens et les maux, tout doit se partager:
> Mais quel partage heureux! le bien s'y multiplie,
> Et le mal y devint leger."

There is something very fair in the unbroken glow of a summer day; but fairer yet, and of more interest, is that play of light and shade when the sun cannot quite banish the clouds, nor the clouds refuse to admit its influence; when the shadows that fall are soft and fleeting, and every touch of light is burnished by the strong hand of contrast.

My stepmother went to see the sick lady after dinner; and leaving my father and Mr Rodney to finish their conversation, Miss Easy walked into the drawing-room again, followed by Kate and me. The short day was just ending; but, as if to make amends for its past cloudiness, the sky was now perfectly clear, and the wind had gone after his playthings.

"How long does Mr Rodney stay, Miss Easy?" said Kate.

"He goes to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

We watched the passing light almost in silence; but when the sun had set, and we were looking for darkness, there came through the bay-window a strip of the fairest, softest radiance, that ever fell upon a twilight world. It glimmered faintly upon the window, but within—upon carpet, and chair, and wall—the ray had not even that approach to gaiety—it breathed the very spirit of pure consolation. We looked at each other and then at the western sky. There hung, just over the horizon, a slender crescent, coming forth from the cool white light of the sky most beautifully—like a diamond in silver setting; and from point to point, faintly mapped out, the eye could just trace the outline of its future greatness. Steadily it shone in upon us in its descent, and for a while we watched it almost as steadily.

"My dear Kate," said Miss Easy then, "what are you thinking of?—the moon?"

"No, ma'am, my thoughts had descended to earth."

"Come here and let me see you."

Kate left her stand at the back of Miss Easy's chair, and kneeling down at her feet, lent her face to her friend's kind and somewhat thoughtful scrutiny.

"Well, dear Miss Easy," she said, "can your mind find the path by which mine came down? I don't think I could direct you to it."

"Tell me where it came to, and I will try," said her friend, smiling. "Katie, your eyes are just like the channels about those islands Mr Rodney was telling me of—only there are no hidden reefs."

"What islands?" said Kate, laughing.

"The Bermudas."

"Was he telling you about them? Oh, I wish I had heard it! I wanted very much to ask him, but"——

"Wanted to ask me what?" said the gentleman in question, as he came up and placed himself in Kate's former position behind Miss Easy.

Kate hesitated.

"I was thinking—I was wishing that I could ask you—that you would tell us something about Bermuda," she said in rather a low voice, as if afraid of giving pain. And to that he answered—

"I love to think of it, Miss Kate—it is very pleasant to me. What was your question?"

"Sit down here, Katie, and tell him," said Miss Easy; "I am going up stairs."

"I don't know enough about it to ask questions," said Kate, as she took the offered chair, while Mr Rodney left his stand for one by the mantelpiece; "I have just a general idea of a group of islands east of the United States. Are they remarkable for anything?"

"Very remarkable both for beauty and situation. You are so fond of this little inland lake, Miss Kate, what would you say to a lake in the midst of the ocean?—its boundary a coral reef—its horizon one low water-line. Well, Gracie—you look at me as if I were telling travellers' wonders, and not very credible ones either."

"Because I can't quite understand them, sir. Was there ever such a place?"

"There was when I came from Bermuda—the islands lie in just such a one. It is a singular shoal, some twenty-three miles by thirteen, the deep sea on every side of it, and the nearest point of land almost six hundred miles off."

"And the lake is on the top of this shoal?" said Kate.

"Precisely. And the reefs which surround it are so high as to keep out entirely the action of the sea."

"And how near to the islands is this reef?"

"The outer edge of it? The distance varies very much—ten miles off in some places. The islands are low and always green—indeed, there is no climate there but of spring—it is one of the prettiest evening scenes you can imagine; and the little boats go gliding about the narrow channels like a train of fairy things."

"Oh, Mr Rodney," I said, "that is just what I wanted to ask—those channels"——

"Are among the islands," said Kate—"didn't you understand?"

"Of course! where else could they be? But Miss Easy said that Kate's eyes were just like those channels—except the reefs—is there anything peculiar about them, Mr Rodney?"

He smiled.

"They are peculiarly clear and pure, Gracie—I presume that is what Miss Easy was thinking of. But, do you know that you have a great fondness for indefinite pronouns?"

"How have I? what do you mean, sir?"

"What was the antecedent to your 'them'?—'eyes,' or 'reefs,' or 'channels'? If I had been a stranger to all three, I might have been puzzled."

"I know," said I, laughing; "papa talks to me about it sometimes. But then you always understand everybody, Mr Rodney."

"I generally understand *you*," he said, with a smile. "But it is only by means of this same clearness of the water that the islands can be reached at all. When a ship comes to the boundary, a negro pilot takes her in charge, and leaning over the prow to keep close watch of the reefs with which the lake is studded, he guides her safely through the narrow channel."

"It must be a lovely place!" said Kate, who by dint of strong imagination had conjured up a visionary Bermuda in

the fire, and was surveying it intently. "I almost wonder you did not want to stay there, Mr Rodney."

"That could hardly be!" he said, with that quick light of the eye which sudden and strong feeling often wrought in him —"that could hardly be!" then adding more quietly—"if you knew me better, Miss Kate, you would better appreciate my love of friends and home."

"But one might make friends—there are plenty of people there."

"Plenty of strangers—that give one as much of a home feeling as does the wild ocean outside the reef! they seemed like a barrier between me and everything that I cared about." He paused, and then said, in a lower and graver tone—

"Yes, there are people enough there—and in some moods one might, as you say, make friends. But if one knew them all, home is not easily transferable—even the eye wearies of strange beauties, and longs for those which, if more common, are far more dear. I would have bartered all the graceful, unfading loveliness of Bermuda, for one look at the roughest view in this neighbourhood, in the wildest storm that ever bedecked it with clouds and snow."

"And yet"——

"And yet, I love to think of it now? Yes, very much, but not for the sake of the place itself;—there are some associations that can endear anything, and some recollections that are much more gladdening than forgetfulness."

"There are a great many false notions on that subject," said my father, suddenly pausing his steps by Kate's chair; "I am glad they are not yours. In 'throwing off' and 'forgetting' some cause of sorrow, how often hidden blessings and comfort go with it! while, if men would seek them out, they would by and by get on the bright side of the cloud, out of reach of its shadow."

How sadly the shadow was on Mr Rodney's face for a moment, ere he answered—

"I cannot say that for myself, Mr Howard—not always; sometimes I am selfish enough to feel the cloud far too much —assured as I am that, to be out of this world, is not for a Christian to be beyond the pale of all good, but of all evil."

"How many people," said my father, "look upon heaven as a man whose house is burning looks at the rest of the world!—he must leave his house, but what to do elsewhere?

I was struck with that, almost painfully, the last time I was in Philadelphia. 'Poor Dr ——!' said a clergyman to me, speaking of the late minister of the —— Street church! Sir, I wondered if the man thought 'the promise of none effect.' What a slur upon his friend's faith! What a commentary upon his own! I was happy to know that the former was undoubted."

"You remember, papa," said Kate, "what Cotton Mather says of old Governor Bradstreet—'death seemed rather conferred upon him, than life taken from him.'"

"Ay," said my father, turning off again to his walk, "but it is much easier to see some people's mistakes than to imitate other people's excellencies."

I had a presentiment that the headache would go off by tea-time, and to be sure it did. Miss Bain was not only able, but very glad, to take her place at the table, and as large a share as possible in the conversation—to make up for lost time.

"What are you going to do?" said my father, seizing a time when he thought the subject matter at the other side of the fireplace seemed pretty engrossing. "You don't mean to turn counsellor, Mr Rodney?"

"Not 'at law,' certainly."

"That's well—though perhaps I shouldn't say so; but it always seems to me as if the atmosphere of other people's quarrels must be unwholesome. But what are you going to make of yourself, then? what profession have you chosen?"

"That one, sir, for which a man is least of all self-made—the church."

"But, my dear Mr Rodney!" said Miss Bain, suddenly turning round—"the church! I always thought you were a dissenter?"

"From what, Miss Avarintha?" said Mr Rodney.

"From what?" said the lady, dubiously eyeing her antagonist; "well, that is a question! Why, the Established Church, of course."

"And what is the Established Church of America?" he answered with a smile.

"Really, sir," said Miss Bain, a little piqued, "I did *not* know that you were in the habit of evading a fair question."

"It doesn't so much matter what he dissents from, after all, ma'am," said Mr Howard, "if he only lives up to Bunyan's

standard. You remember, Miss Bain, that 'Christian saw the figure of a very grave person hang up against the wall; and this was the fashion of it: it had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books was in its hand, the law of truth was written upon its lips, the world was behind its back; it stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over its head.'"

"To be sure," said Miss Bain, half involuntarily.

"Well, Mr Rodney," said my father, "I am glad that such is your choice. I only hope they will build you a church at the other horn of the lake, to keep Mr Ellis in countenance. We can't afford to lose you permanently from this neighbourhood."

"Ah, sir!" said Miss Easy, "that would be too pleasant! Yes, sir, I wish I could see that!"

The wish and the tone of loving interest were well paid for, if a look could pay.

"It would be almost too pleasant a thing to happen, dear Miss Easy," he said. "I cannot hope to have just the place in the world that I should like best."

There was some wistfulness, some sorrowful feeling, in her eyes for a moment; and then she said—

"I will hope it! and if not—it will be better for you—that is enough."

But we all felt very much drawn together that night.

CHAPTER XXI.

KING CHARLES AND LOUIS QUATORZE.

"I do not envy thee, Pamela; only I wish that, being thy sister in nature, I were not so far off akin in fortune."—SIDNEY.

THREE months passed by, and how did we stand then?—if standing it might be called. Another piece of plate had followed the tea-set, and another debt had been paid off. Our last city property we had let go, with all the money paid on it, for just the comfort of untying a weight from our necks. The mill worked not, because some needful machinery we could not buy; so the rest of the works rusted, like the money that had been spent on them, and the stream babbled of our folly for want of other employment. A little more or a little less, and we had been richer. Our cattle were diminished in size and numbers; our fruit-walls done, but wanting a gardener to make them productive; while the stone cottages stood unroofed for the following reason. Mr M'Loon had begun to add his unnecessary aid to the discomposing of our affairs—had declared that our selling out cottage lots would be an injury to him, and that he would not give title. He had promised the contrary—but it was not on paper, and he was not fully paid,—so we went to law again.

Then came a judgment for the schooling of some poor boy whom my father had tried to educate—a friend took that off our hands. Then another for cattle feed—but that, too, was settled.

Then Mr Howard decided that he ought not to let Ezra Barrington work for nothing (which Ezra seemed inclined to do), and that he could not afford to pay him proper wages. So we began to live along with "help" that were no help. Sometimes it was an Irishman, who got offended; or a Scotchman,

who got drunk; or some other specimen of humanity, who was light-fingered. Honesty, in all its senses, was never heard of; the best man we had would just work while we looked at him. When my father left home, idleness was the order of the day; and we poor women saw it with helpless discomfort. I say we —I was not a woman, hardly was Kate that in years; but sympathy and circumstances did the work of Time,—mowing down spring flowers and ripening the grain.

"I shall not keep any servant this summer," said Mrs Howard, when she had apparently resolved herself into a committee of ways and means, and had sat thinking long and silently.

"Not keep any servant, mamma! why, we want another this minute."

"Did you ever read Miss Taylor's *I can do without it?*" she answered, with a smile.

"That's all well enough, mamma, when you're talking of inkstands and bonnets—but servants are another affair."

"We will try how the rule will bear stretching," said Mrs Howard.

"It won't bear it, mamma—you needn't think it; and you're not able—you are doing too much now." And Kate laid down her work and looked up earnestly.

"We had much better save in some other way, mamma."

"What other? I can think of none, Katie. No, we will try this; it is much pleasanter than owing money that we cannot pay. Ezra Barrington is to live at the Lea, you know, and his wife will come and wash or do anything else that is needful."

"But how"—said Kate, and she stopped.

"How will it look? Yes, it will look a little odd, and people will think less of us; but, after all, our own self-respect is of more importance."

"Mamma," said Kate, "what do you think of giving up sugar? we could do without that, and it would save something."

My stepmother looked wistfully at the young proposer of such retrenchments.

"It wouldn't save a great deal, dear Kate," she answered—"however, I am willing, but don't tell your father."

So we drank our tea unsweetened, and felt that we were doing something.

Nobody knew all this, and few suspected the half of it—for we still kept up a cheerful appearance. Miss Easy seemed quite taken aback by our asking if she knew of a place for Caddie.

"Why, dear me!" she said—"yes, ma'am, I thought you liked her so much."

"I do like her," said Mrs Howard, smiling—"but I don't want her."

Miss Easy looked perplexed.

"I am going to try how we can do without servants."

"Without *any* servants?" said Miss Easy.

"Yes," said my stepmother, smiling—"I want to economise a little, I think we ought to do all we can for ourselves."

"Yes, ma'am, to be sure—dear Mrs Howard, I feel as if I *must* do all that I can: but you cannot do more than that—you cannot indeed."

"Ah, but you don't know us yet, Miss Easy," I said; "we can do a great deal when we set about it."

"Dear Gracie, yes, I do know," said Miss Easy—"I am sure you can do a great deal—yes. But, Mrs Howard, is this really necessary? it seems to me, yes, ma'am, that you are doing too much now. And you don't know what it is to be without anybody—I shouldn't think you could bear it. It's well enough for strong country women that are used to it, but you—and these girls"——

Mrs Howard looked at us half in sorrow, half in hesitation.

"I do know it all, Miss Easy—all that you might say, all that others *will* say—and still I think I am right. You know, unless we can save money enough to finish some of our beginnings, they will never be profitable. And it's only for a time—just now, Mr Howard is so harassed and engrossed with one thing and another, that I would try almost any means of relief; but in a few months all difficulty may be over, and in the meantime a little more exercise will not hurt us."

"No," said Miss Easy, "not while you can all smile upon it so. But I think I can find Caddie a place—yes, ma'am, I will take her myself, and then you can have her back again any minute."

"Is that why you want to take her, Miss Easy?" said Kate, laughing.

"No," she said, with a smile, "not all the why—I really want her on my own account."

"I intend to send Grace away till we get these matters arranged," said Mrs Howard; "she is going to pay Stephanie a visit."

"Are you, indeed?" said Miss Easy—"well, I am glad, and sorry too—yes, very. I think it will do her good. But, dear Gracie, how we shall miss you!"

"I like to be missed, ma'am, as Mr Rodney says."

"Have you heard from him lately?" said Mrs Howard.

"No, ma'am, not very lately. You know that his brother is here?"

"Not absolutely come?"

"Yes, indeed, he is, and his wife too. I saw them yesterday."

"And I must see them to-morrow!"

"What kind of a person is his wife, Miss Easy?" said Kate.

"Not like you, dear," said Miss Caffery, with an affectionate smile, "nor like Grace—no, not one bit. I don't exactly know what she is like—very different from anything I ever found at the Lea before," she added, sighing. "It quite made me sad to go there again—yes. But Avarintha liked her very much—thought her beautiful—yes, ma'am, and so polished. I don't know," said Miss Easy—"yes—I believe it's a kind of polish that makes my eyes ache, and my heart too."

"Mamma," said Kate, "if she is such a sort of person, it is not worth our while to call upon her—she would not care to see us. And then you know"——

"What do I know?"

"You know if we are to have no servants we could not ask her here," said Kate, colouring a little.

"I should have paid but few visits in my life," said Mrs Howard, "if I had waited to feel sure of my welcome; and even if your last position be unapproachable, Katie, we may at least do what we can."

"Quite right," said Miss Easy, "and you will think so too, one of these days. One never regrets doing a polite or a kind thing, no matter how it is received."

"If this were either," said Kate——"Now, Miss Easy, what are you smiling at?"

"To see how little you know what is and what isn't, I should think," said Mrs Howard.

"Something like that," said Miss Easy. "Yes, Katie, it is both polite and kind—to the family."

And there was no more to be said; though, as Kate remarked, "her forgetfulness had been very natural; she had but looked at Mr Carvill, where he had put himself, and that was—*out* of his family."

The next day we set forth to pay our respects to the new-comers. I certainly had none to pay, but the rest did not want to leave me, and I did not want to be left—two very obvious reasons for going.

What is there in some exquisitely fine weather to make one feel sad? It was one of those days of which March has a few, that seem to embody the very quintessence of spring,—the sky of the fairest and calmest, the grass in the yellow-green transition, the trees softened with the swelling buds as with the lightest veil of clothing, and shewing green or red as flowers or leaves were to come first. In sheltered fence-corners or bank-protected hollows, there were tufts of grass that might have come from the emerald isle itself; now and then a tuft of tiny white flowers—quiet, insignificant, little things—that the eye sought and rested upon because it was March and not June. And even one or two bright-faced dandelions, that had been waked up by some extraordinary sunbeam, looked at us smilingly from the wayside. The birds were in a twitter of delight and consultation; robins and song-sparrows excited each other; and the phœbe's gentle note of reproof, and the crow's loud "caw" of disdain as he sat on a cedar and bowed his head mockingly, neither calmed the spirits nor roused the ire of the warblers; their dignity was safe bound up in enthusiasm. On one bush sat a committee of fifty robins; in another, where two sparrows made mysterious darts through the evergreen foliage, there might be the nucleus of a nest. The scarce stirring air was as soft and delicious as if it had been laid up all winter in sachets of satin and sweetness; but bouquet nor patchouli can approach the unspeakable aroma of early flowers and leaves—that indefinable perfume that spring compounds for itself. And yet, as we breathed it in—and breaths seemed all too short in such an atmosphere—the exceeding beauty of everything brought no exhilaration, but rather sadness. It might be the association with other spring days when our hearts were lighter—a mind somewhat out of tone with the season; it might be that the beauty was too perfect. Perfection of any kind is too near the contrast.

So we walked musingly to the Lea house, and there, instead

of Mrs Crown and her pleasant white apron, we were met by a man in an embroidered cap, which the weight of responsibility, or its long tassel, had drawn very much to one side. Following this gentleman's flourish of head, and hand, and foot, we were ushered into the room that had been Mr Rodney's study, and where we had taken off our cloaks on that first Christmas.

No study now. A guitar in one corner, a flute and castanets on the table! a cabinet that seemed to contain more gilding and morocco than letterpress; a large worsted frame with a St Cecilia who had as yet but one eye, and half a nose; a French clock, from which the dial-plate looked forth timidly, as doubting its right to be there, and a pistol—Izaak Walton and Dumas at hand for light literature.

On a stand near the window sat a beautiful scarlet lorius, who, with his yellow breast-collar, orange bill, and the mingling of green, purple, and violet-blue upon his head and wings, looked almost like some gay piece of patchwork.

Mrs Carvill Collingwood—or, to carry out my father's "good riddance," Mrs Carvill—sat reading in a luxurious easy-chair. No one could have mistaken her for anything but French. A face that would have been handsome but for its haughtiness, was displayed to the uttermost; not only was a strip of hair turned quite back, but the large black bandeaux had also a retrograde twist, giving full effect to the ear as well as the eye sparklers. A rather pale complexion, and a mouth that might have been educated to sweetness, were kept in order by a somewhat disdainful and self-satisfied little nose. She was dressed in a light summer silk, the skirt of which, opening at the waist and stretching away over an embroidered petticoat, spread its soft folds upon the floor for the nestling place of a little King Charles. His gentle, lustrous eyes looked up at us as we entered, but the long ears still lay silkily over the shaggy feet; till his mistress, drawing in her own satin slippers, roused him with a somewhat impatient "otez-vous!" and came forward to meet us.

It was a doubtful coming forward, too; and the book was still held with one finger for a mark, as if she trusted the interruption would be short. My stepmother's manner was, however, hard to withstand; and Mrs Carvill relaxed into at least conventional pleasure at our visit, and listened to all that was said with some attempt at interest.

"I have heard Mr Rod-e-ney speak of you," she said, with that deliberate accentuation which the voluble French sometimes give to our mother tongue, and perhaps meaning to explain the long stare with which Kate and I had been honoured.

"Qui vive?" cried the lorius—"gare! gare! vive les sans-culottes!"

"Chut!" cried his mistress, impatiently. "It is not me, Madame Howard, who teach him such remark—je ne suis point revolutioniste—it is Mr Carvill."

"Adieu perfide! adieu volage!" sang the bird. "Pain! pain! à Versailles! à Versailles! —Vive le roi s'il est de bon foi! Il y a long temps que je l'aimait. Plutôt la mort que l'esclavage! Ah, ça ira! ah, ça ira!—Ah, la belle France!"

Mrs Carvill's displeasure softened at these last words, which she had doubtless taught the bird herself, and which he pronounced so pathetically that we were all touched; and with no further reproof than a muttered "si bête!" she turned to us again, for the lorius had seemingly had his say. Stretching out one leg and wing to their utmost extent, he shut up his eyes, gaped, and was mute.

"You live here always?" said Mrs Carvill to Kate.

"No—only for the last three years."

"And you never go away—never go anywhere?"

"Not often," said Kate, smiling.

"But what you do? there is not no societé in this place."

"Liberté! egalité! fraternité!" cried the lorius. "Qui vive? à bas les aristocrats!"

"Cela passe!" said the lady, jumping up and opening a door—

"Atanaise! ôtez cet oiseau et faite qu'il se taise. Well," she added, coming back to her seat, "it cannot be that you like these person about here—in what you call the neighbourhood?"

"Some of them I like very much," said Kate.

"You do not know them yet, Mrs Carvill," said my stepmother.

"C'est ce que je ne ferai jamais!" said she, with a shrug of the shoulders; and with this hopeful remark "we tumbled into a well," as Dickens has it. The little King Charles had jumped into his mistress's lap, and lay stretched upon the worked petticoat; while Mrs Carvill passed his long ears

through her dainty fingers, and called him "mignon," and "petit aimant," and "mon beau Chevalier;" and the dog just moved his little fringed tail by way of answer.

"You know Mr Rod-e-ney much?" said Mrs Carvill.

"Yes, we have seen a good deal of him."

"And you like him?"

"Oh, yes!" said we all.

Again we were treated to a comprehensive stare; and finding the well rather too deep to be pleasant, we were about to come away, when the master of the house entered.

He was a good specimen of strong family likeness combined with a great want of it—the resemblance in feature and voice being almost nullified by the difference in character; which gave a gay, heartless, matter-of-course expression, to what in his father and brother had been grave, kind, and full of meaning. He looked good-natured, too, and rather prepossessing, but neither straightforward nor reliable. Salutations so demure that they almost made us laugh; a very quick, keen survey through a veil of carelessness, and Mr Carvill sat down with a look that said his mind was made up—about something.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "I am glad you have come, to prove the truth of my assertion that we should have *some* neighbours down here. Upon my word! I haven't seen—— pray, Mr Howard, are your daughters a fair representation of the county?"

"Really, sir," said my father, who had hardly spoken hitherto, "I doubt whether the county would choose them to that office."

"It ought to, I'm certain of it—Miss Howard is colouring with displeasure that I should even have asked the question. Clemence, where's Louis Quatorze?"

"In the other room."

"Why isn't he here?"

"I did not want him—he make too much noise, Mr Carvill."

"What! has he been talking politics? Ha! ha! he shall have a bit of cake for that!"

"For to have disturbed me?" said the lady, raising her eyebrows.

"No, my dear, for pleasing me."

"When did you see your brother, Mr Carvill?" said my father.

"Who, Rodney? I declare I don't know, sir—of course I saw him the minute I landed; but since then—I think it was two weeks ago—an interview with him always stands out in such bold relief, that it's hard to locate it precisely."

"He was well?"

"Well? yes, I hope so—rather pale, too, now I think of it. Not alarmingly so, ladies—only enough to be interesting—fatigued, perhaps—he's going to be the greatest savant of the age, I suppose, so we have a chance of one star in the family."

"Only a chance?" said my father, smiling.

"Why," said Mr Carvill, answering him, but looking quietly at us, "I suppose you know best—I have seen so little of the gentleman since he was a boy, and then you know—in the moral firmament, of course—but I was speaking of the mental. Can't tell what sort of a star it will be, neither—Rodney looked prodigiously grave, but I couldn't tell whether it was philosophy or mathematics."

"I daresay not," said my father, drily; "I think it would puzzle any one to settle the question."

"Miss Howard," said Mr Carvill, rightly interpreting the slight compression of Kate's under lip, "is the honour of amusing you due to Rodney or to me?"

My father saved her reply.

"How do you like this country life, Mr Carvill?" he said; "it must be a novelty at least."

"Yes, sir, and that's a charm it shall never lose. It was a dull season in town, and so I just came here to see what wanted doing for September. You don't suppose I'm keeping this place for anything but a shooting lodge, Mr Howard?"

"I did hope so," said my father.

"My dear sir! a man of your sense and experience to imagine such a thing! Live here! why, I'd pocket the whole concern in five minutes, if I didn't want to bag the birds separately."

"As to sense and experience, Mr Carvill," said my father, "men with more than I pretend to have not only imagined such a thing possible, but have actually done it."

"Oh, you mean my father," said the young man; and for a moment there was a shade upon his face that quite came in aid of the family likeness—then shaking it off, he said, gaily—

"All right in the abstract, sir—I can comprehend how Rodney thinks you such paragons—but you are wrong as regards

me, I assure you—I never was meant to live at Daisy Lea. In the first place, I have some little regard for my wife's liking, and a most tender one for my own. Now, I do suppose that brother of mine could establish himself here, and probably," said Mr Carvill, speaking slow, and as if he were contemplating possibilities—"probably he might find all the society he would care about. But as for me—well, I couldn't exist—that's enough. I shouldn't have lived through these five days but for my precious lorius, whom my wife has consigned to temporary banishment, because he's a little too much of a republican."

"I am afraid our neighbours would share that fault with him," said my father; "perhaps some of them may have a trifle more education."

"Everything in proportion, you know, sir," said Mr Carvill. "Don't despise the neighbourhood at all—leave that to my wife—like it very much—Squire Suydam especially, fine old gentleman enough; but as to *living* here! I'd shoot myself first—would, indeed, as gladly as I'd shoot a woodcock."

"I have just been wondering," said Kate, "whether you kill the woodcock for the same reason that you say you would kill yourself—if you were condemned to their habitat."

"Hardly worth while to let 'em live, when it takes so little to put 'em out of their misery," said Mr Carvill. "You don't mean to say that *you* like this place, Miss Howard?"

"No, sir, I don't mean to say anything about it," replied Kate.

"Incroyable!" muttered our host. "I suppose you, Mr Howard, get along by means of your daughters, but how on earth *they* support life, is more than I can understand."

"You need not try," said Mrs Carvill, whose cold eye had watched the laugh with which Kate and I indulged ourselves; "it is none of your affair."

"Don't look dismal either," pursued her husband. "Well, it's a comfort to one's philanthropy to know that handsome young ladies can exist and be happy anywhere. I always thought the line about 'full many a flower' was a poetical fiction; but the man must have had second sight—and have drawn from the Miss Howards."

"It would be hard to prove that anything is wasted, sir, merely because God has put it in one place instead of another," said my father, gravely. And with that we took leave, and released Mrs Carvill's forefinger.

"Let us go home by the lake," said my father; and, quitting the field road for a little path that yet was hardly a path, we skirted the bright water, which sent one and another of its tiny waves almost to our very feet to greet us. We sat down and watched them as they came up, each sparkling and swelling with importance, then making its low obeisance, and, with a soft word of welcome, retiring again behind its fellows.

"Kate," said my father, suddenly, "it matters very little to farmer Collingwood now, that the waves of health and riches rolled from instead of towards him."

She looked inquiringly, but said nothing.

"Don't you think so, daughter? is he any the less happy?"

"No, indeed, papa—the happier, if contrast has any power out of this world."

"And may we not suppose that he looks back upon all the circumstances of his life as the best possible for him? that his 'day and night, and summer and winter' (they must succeed each other, Kate) were of just the right temperature and proportion?"

"Yes, of course, papa. But why do you ask me?"

"Merely because, 'if these things are so,' we may as well take the comfort of them. There is no latitude on this earth, my dear, where the sun shines unceasingly, but neither is there any where he never comes: and it is well to remember that 'the sailing of a cloud hath Providence to its pilot.'"

"But, papa, you do not answer my question—I do not quite understand you."

"I thought," said my father, with a look more of sympathy than reproof—"I thought, Katie, that you both came from the Lea feeling a little sober—I was afraid the power of contrast had been too strong."

"I believe it had some effect, papa," said Kate, her eyes filling as she spoke—"I would not change place with the Carvills for anything in the world; and yet, there seems to be a great deal of comfort in the abundance of means—the perfect freedom from all embarrassments."

"I have thought so, very often," said my father.

"And never to hear of a judge or a lawsuit," said I.

"Dear Gracie," said Kate, "don't think of them now—I am too glad to have you go away for a while beyond their reach."

"Come," said Mr Howard, getting off his stone, "haven't

you sat here long enough? I believe, if I am to take the benefit of my own lessons," he added, "we had better not pursue the subject."

"I am sure we have as much happiness—on the whole—as we used to have," said my stepmother.

"More," he answered. "For my *own* sake, I would not change places with myself as a rich man."

But there was an expression in each speaker's face, that said, faith and sense had many an encounter upon that dearer point —"for the sake of the children."

CHAPTER XXII.

READY MONEY.

> "I can get no remedy against this consumption of the purse;
> Borrowing only lingers and lingers it out, but the disease is incurable."
>
> SHAKSPEARE.

"DON'T think about them"—how easy to say, how hard to practise, when annoyances are in question! Former ones we could in a measure forget; but those new perplexities that ever sprang up by our wayside—could we pass them by without notice? Sometimes—and sometimes we took them up and bare them along with us.

"I do not want to go, in the least," said I, when the preparations for my visit were near an end.

"Kate is going to spend one day in Philadelphia with you," said my stepmother—"you will like to go in her company?"

"But I wish she would stay longer—why should she go for one day?"

"It will do her good, and we want sundry things that your father will have no time to get—if he attends that meeting of the —— Society."

"Mamma," said Kate, "was it for that he said his coat was not fit?"

"He wants a new one, at all events," said Mrs Howard; "and I'm sure—I'm *sure* I don't know how he's to get it just now."

"I'll tell you, mamma—let's sell our old cake-basket."

"Oh, Kate!" said I, "you don't mean the one grandma gave us?"

"That is the only one that belongs to you and me, Gracie."

"But, would you sell it?"

"We have another, you know," said Kate, "and the old one is not a good shape."

"I know—but I love it so much!"

"But papa wants this coat."

"Well," said I, sighing.

"What do you say, mamma?"

"I should say yes, my dear, if it were mine; you must do nothing that will trouble your sister."

"Oh, you must not mind me."

"But see," said Kate, "perhaps papa will be able to give us the money again before long, and then we can redeem our fruit-knives; wouldn't you like that as well?"

"No—you know I have a great fancy for old things; but let us sell it; papa must have the coat."

So it was settled; and when I went to Philadelphia, Kate and the basket went too, and from the trunk it was speedily transferred to the jeweller's counter.

Many a time one wants sympathy when it cannot reasonably be looked for, yet does not the want seem lighter. I know that it was with a feeling almost of impatience that I watched Mr Jewett, as he turned the cake-basket about, eyed it with some curiosity, and some little compassion for the "dark ages" of his craft, and finally remarked (what business had he to remind me of it?)—

"A piece of old family silver, I should judge; we don't often see such things now-a-days."

Then came question and answer; and it was worth so much in ready money, and so much in other articles of plate; and the matter ended, we left the shop both richer and poorer than we had entered it. The coat took but a part of the money, and for the rest we debated between our fruit-knives and some other things that had long been wanting, but prudence prevailed over inclination.

I know not what became of the cake-basket; perhaps it does duty as silver skewers at the table of some millionaire who never heard of scarcity or sacrifice. The coat is long since worn out—the "other things" have disappeared, but the fruit-knives have not been heard of; and Kate and I sometimes say to each other, "our poor basket! it is almost a pity we sold it! and yet what could papa have done without that coat?"

Once more we resorted to such an expedient, and then learned the wise lesson, that expedients of all sorts are but poor things—a barter of the reality for the seeming; not only failing to remedy the evil, but weakening the energy which alone can.

Once more, as I said, we tried it; while the ready money from the first attempt yet dwelt in our minds and tempted us. The proposed articles of exchange were brought down by Mr Howard when he came for me.

It was a selection from our small stock of trinkets, and touched me far more nearly than the cake-basket. I cared little for the things in themselves—in fact, most of them were either worn out, or such as we should never use; but if dimmed and broken, so were not my associations with them. The hands that had touched them, the faces they had touched, I had heard of, at least; and these poor little reminders of what had long ago perished, seemed to help both imagination and memory. It signified little that my mother's old watch could not be made to go—it had kept time once, and for her, and the grasp of strange fingers seemed almost sacrilegious. Mr Jewett shewed no curiosity this time, but his look was, methought, a little scornful as he tumbled the things about, and then declared he could not say what they were worth, till he had separated and weighed the gold. Even then would I have rescued them had the money been for me! I had enough of expedients.

And what did we live on all this while? Partly on driblets of former debts and property, partly on new trifles; a little rent here, and a little business there; not on very much of anything. But Mrs Howard was an excellent manager in any circumstances, and our neighbours thought our style of living both comfortable and pretty. So it was, had we reached it by some other road; but the enjoyment of many a thing was shadowed by the preliminary "ought we?" or "can we have it?"

I realised it all the more, when, after spending some time with Stephanie, in a happy forgetfulness of money and its long train of difficulties and doubts, I came back to Glen Luna. Nothing had changed for the worse; but my mind, once set free, loathed to take up again the old burden of dollars and cents. Neither is there much truth in that favourite maxim with some ladies, that "servants are the greatest plagues in the universe"—a house with no servants is more to be deprecated. However, we managed pretty well, for Mrs Barrington was only too glad to do anything for us, and her daughter, Prudence (become 'Dency by a little contraction and elongation), was always ready when wanted. Indeed, if for nothing else, they liked to come and tell of the queer doings at Daisy Lea.

"Don't it beat all!" 'Dency would say. "Why, Mis' How-

ard, they've sent down the dreadfullest sight of dogs! and a man that ain't got nothin' to do but mind 'em; and he says, when they begin to hunt, he feeds 'em on raw meat to make 'em more savager."

I may notice, in passing, that during my absence Mr and Mrs Carvill had left the Lea, and without returning our visit.

"You may as well tell her at once, mamma," said Kate, the day after I got home.

"Tell me what?"

"Poor child!" said my stepmother, kissing me; "she don't look as if she could bear much. Why, Gracie, have you worn such a face ever since you went away?"

"I don't know, mamma; I suppose I am tired now. But tell me what?"

"Did you ever hear your father talk of his being surety with a Mr Van Wart for somebody?"

"I believe I have."

"Well, things have gone so that the sureties are called upon to pay; and Van Wart's son-in-law, Jenkinson, has contrived to have the creditors come down upon your father for the whole amount."

"But he can't pay it?"

"Certainly not; and they have entered up a judgment; and while you were gone, a sheriff came here with an execution upon all our furniture."

"Is that all?" said I, with a long breath, and really feeling relieved for the time.

"All!" said Kate—"books, shells, and everything! I should think that was enough."

"But they didn't take them," said I, casting a somewhat blank look round the room.

"Oh, no," said Mrs Howard, "and I hope they will not. But your father was away, and this man Jenkinson came with the sheriff, and knocked at the door, and Kate let them in; for we didn't know that we could do otherwise. Your father says we had a right to keep even the sheriff out, and that Jenkinson had no business to come at all."

"And only think!" said Kate, "he had put on green spectacles, that mamma might not recognise him! And they went all over the house, making a list of everything, silver and all—and I had to go with them. And now they have advertised the things to be sold some day next month."

"And will papa let them?"

"Not if he can help it; I don't quite understand what he means to do—get an injunction, I believe, whatever that is, till the matter can be tried."

The injunction was obtained; but though a stay of proceedings was in one way a comfort, yet we found the suspense very trying. And the courts were dilatory, as courts always are, and months wore on; and still we looked doubtfully at our indoor possessions, and wondered how long we should keep each other company. Whether all this was made public we could not tell; but as no one ever spoke to us of it, the contrary seemed most probable. From Miss Easy we carefully hid all our troubles, for she had been and was still unwell; and though she would sometimes look earnestly at Kate and me, as we sat by her sofa, and sometimes sigh to herself, as if she saw or imagined too much gravity in our faces, we generally contrived to be so very bright during the rest of the visit, that she at least did not question us. Miss Bain would certainly have found out all, and more than all, that was known of our affairs, had she been at home; but while I was away, she had gone to visit some fourteenth cousin who was as far off in geography as in blood.

And with these sayings and doings we came to the last week in August.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IRONING-DAY.

> "There be some sports are painful; but their labour
> Delight in them sets off: some kinds of baseness
> Are nobly undergone; and most poor matters
> Point to rich ends."
>
> TEMPEST.

"THEM's come, Miss Kate!" said 'Dency Barrington, as she entered our kitchen one morning while we were washing the breakfast things; "them's all come! and mother said I'd best put right off and tell ye, for likely you'd want to hear."

"Thank you, 'Dency," said Kate; "but what is the news? I did not understand."

"Mr and Mrs Carvill, Miss Kate—they all come to the Lea last night, and forty 'leven servants! And father went up, he did, to see was there anything wanting, and if they would have some of the new wheat ground; and Mr Carvill said *he* didn't know, nor *he* didn't care—father might ask Mrs Carvill, if he felt disposed. Father said he shouldn't do no such a thing; he says he don't believe Mrs Carvill knows where wheat comes from. Don't it beat all, Miss Kate?"

"Why, it's rather a queer way of doing business, 'Dency."

"That's just what father says; he says it beats the Dutch, he does. There's the most company come!"

"Any ladies?" said I.

"Oh, I couldn't begin to tell you, Miss Grace. Father says it beats him to know where they'll all sleep. Ain't it wonderful how people goes on?" said 'Dency, by way of summing up; but we ventured no reply, save a grave shake of the head.

A few days after, Mrs Barrington made her appearance.

"Hope you're pretty smart, Mrs Howard and Miss Kate and

Miss Grace," said the good woman, who was really one of the best and kindest of our neighbours.

"Yes, we are very well," said my stepmother, smiling pleasantly; "and how do you do at home?"

"My children's all dreadful well, ma'am—they never had such health. My husband, he's dreadful well too, only he's got a little pain into his shoulder,—I tell him he's getting old," said Mrs Barrington, with a pleased little laugh at the idea of imputing to Ezra anything but the most absolute youth and heartiness. "'Taint no particular thanks to anybody, neither, if he is well—if he was some folks, he'd be laid up as sure as can be."

"Is he more busy than usual?" said Mrs Howard.

"Why, he don't hardly get time to eat his victuals, ma'am. To be sure, as he says, he always was occupied, and always calculated to be, but this beats all. He could see to the farm well enough, he says, but when Mr Carvill's got to be seen to at one and the same time, he don't rightly know which foot to put foremost, he says. And they can't one on 'em find a bird without he shews 'em."

"Mr Carvill is very fond of gunning," said Kate.

"But don't it beat all, Mrs Howard, that he ain't called Collingwood? he can't be the farmer's own son, likely."

"He took his uncle's name," said my stepmother.

"Do say!" ejaculated Mrs Barrington—"well, of all things! it don't seem nat'ral like for a person to give his child to some one beside. He's a very pretty man, too; but it's like nothing else the way they go on up there. And Mrs Carvill, she don't never do a hand's turn, they say; and the dinner ain't never ready till the chickens is going to bed—dear knows when *they* go! But they say one of the ladies is the beautifullest singer, Miss Kate! she's got the loudest voice you ever heard."

"Has she?" said Kate, smiling.

"That's what they tell me; and Ezra says he guesses it's true, for she's always a singing and never leaves off, that he can find out. But my! I think they're all raving crazy there. He goes up most mornings the first thing after breakfast—that is, after their breakfast—and when Mr Carvill sees him, he says, 'Well, what's to pay now?' he says—'is the cow mad, or has one of the sheep got a fit?' Why, Miss Kate, it's as true as can be."

"I don't doubt it in the least, Mrs Barrington," said Kate,

whose gravity had fairly given way, "but I couldn't help laughing."

"Well, don't it beat all?" said our informant. "One time he went to see about ploughing the clover meadow, and there was a set of the gentry out on the lawn with Mr Carvill, so they all kinder gathered round to listen, and Mr Carvill he said, says he, 'Oh, plough it up by all means,' says he, 'but I won't have no winter grain on the farm,' says he—'just plant it with green peas, and they'll be all ready for spring,—I'm going to make my fortune raising early vegetables. And, Mr Barrington,' says he, 'tell the old gray hen,' says he, 'that if she lays in the wrong nest another day, I'll wring her neck off,' says he. And they all shouted so, you've no idee!—my husband said he was a'most mad."

"It is well Mr Barrington is good-natured," said I, laughing.

"That's what I say, Miss Grace. I tell him he's the most good-naturedest soul alive, or he couldn't stand it. Why, it's just only this morning that Mr Carvill sent for him up to the house for nothing at all but to say that he didn't believe it was good for the horses to plough afore sunrise; and then, says he, 'Mr Barrington,' says he, 'what do you feed the pigs with?' says he. So my husband knew there was somethin' coming; however, he says to him, 'They've had milk all summer, Mr Carvill,' says he, 'and now they runs in the stubble,' says he. 'That's just it!' says Mr Carvill. 'Well, don't let 'em run there any longer,' says he, 'for I'm certain it don't agree with them; last night the little spotted pig did nothing but squeal,' says he. And Ezra said he had to laugh, though he felt real crabbed too."

This being the last specimen of Mr Carvill's eccentricity, Mrs Barrington felt she had no more to communicate, and therefore took leave; and we sat and smiled at each other, in a very amused state of mind.

"Mamma," said Kate, "what comes next? Ironing, doesn't it?"

"Not for you, dear—I will iron this week, and you and Grace may take holiday. There is but a handful of clothes."

"No, indeed—it is our work, and you're not to touch it, mamma. Please go and sit down and do what you've a mind to—we don't want your help at all. Gracie, won't you call Andy to bring some wood, and I'll put the irons down? Now, mamma, you know we want exercise, and you don't."

"Well," said Mrs Howard, "then I will finish mending that shirt—perhaps that is as necessary as anything. I'll tell you what, if your father don't get a piece of cotton the next time he goes away, he will want new shirts very long before we can get them made."

So she goes to her work, and we to ours.

Imagine a long wood fire (we eschewed stoves) upon whose sticks the flame seems to make little impression, as it curls and twines about them; yet it blazes on, no way discouraged, cheered by the bed of red coals beneath. And here, like good soldiers that face the hottest of the fire, stands a row of irons—cool to the eye, but fast losing their original temperament beneath the mighty power of assimilation. One table is before the window, and another before the dresser; the clothes-basket between, and the clothes-horse "beyont," as Caddie would have said. And we make passes at the window and dresser, and take as much trouble to smooth a cap and shirt, as if they had been the daily path of their owners. And the basket grows empty and the horse grows full—and the forestick breaks, and we arrange the fire by turns; and Kate takes her irons from the left end of the row, and I mine from the right. And our faces are a little flushed; and an uncomfortable, soreish feeling in our finger-ends reminds us that hot irons were not always their playthings. Then enter Purrer-purrer, and jumping on Kate's table, she seats herself on a small pedestal of warm, nicely-ironed pocket-handkerchiefs, and winks with satisfaction; and being dislodged with sundry gentle pats, she takes to the clothes-basket, and purrs forth her eulogium of damp sheets. And I set down my iron, and straightening myself, exclaim—

"Oh, Katie! don't your back ache? and aren't we glad to have cool ironing days once more?" And she replies—

"Isn't it *very* strange that the Carvills never came to see us?"

"Yes; but if they can be so rude, they are not worth caring for."

"Not worth caring for, to be sure; but still it would be pleasant to be on other terms with them—seeing who they are."

And then, the irons being too cool, I seat myself upon the corner of my table, while Kate occupies a like position upon hers, and gently swinging one foot (for mere variety's sake), we look at the fire and make little remarks, till Mrs Howard calls from the other room—

"Gracie, what if we should have a potato-pie for dinner?"

"Oh, I should like it very much! but you had better make it, Kate—you are tired."

"Not more than you are, I guess."

"But wouldn't you rather?"——

"Why, no, child—go off and make it yourself. I'm sure you have ironed more than I."

So I make the pie; and while it bakes, we iron the last few pieces, all stamped with the pattern of the basket, and then set our little table even in the neighbourhood of the clothes-horse: for "papa is not at home," and it is "less trouble" than to carry all the things into another room, and then bring them back. And after dinner we dress, and Kate sings at her harp, "I had a horse, and I had nae mair," and then we walk down to the Bird's Nest—that is, Kate and I, for my stepmother is still busy at the shirts.

"Well," said Miss Easy, with her cheering smile, "and what have you been tiring yourselves with, to-day?"

"Not very much with anything, ma'am—we have only been using that kind of dumb-bells which are denominated flat-irons."

"If you would only let me know!" said Miss Easy—"you could always have Caddie, yes, just as well as not; but I never can manage to guess the right day. Now, why don't you send for her?—yes."

"Because it isn't necessary at all," said Kate—"it don't do us any harm."

"Not a bit?" said Miss Easy, who had hold of my hand; "why, this child is trembling now—yes, all over."

"No, ma'am, not all over—only my hands, because the irons were a little heavy."

"And she will work so hard at it," said Kate; "she irons up all the clothes away from me."

"But it's good for me, Miss Easy," I said—"it's quite good exercise."

"Not the best, I fear. However, there is, no doubt, a bright side to it, Gracie; yes, if I had not seen you tried, I shouldn't know you half so well."

"And this is a very gentle trial, too," said Kate—"only a little bit of real life—enough to keep us from being butterflies. You don't suppose, Miss Easy, that those same winged rovers are half so well acquainted with honey secrets as are the bees?"

Miss Easy smiled, but shook her head.

"It is strange," she replied, "that we cannot always rest satisfied with God's dealings—they are so surely the best that can be! And yet how I have longed to shelter you two—yes, from every 'touch of real life;' how it has grieved me to see where the touch has fallen! Dear children!—well, there cannot any real harm befall you, and with that I ought to be contented."

We were all silent for a few minutes, and then, wishing to bring our friend's thoughts from graver subjects, we detailed Mrs Barrington's information.

"Just like him!" said Miss Easy; "never was such another wild, random-headed boy as he always has been—yes, from a child."

"Have you known him so long?" said Kate.

"Why, my dear, yes; I lived here before they came to the Lea—that was just after their mother's death—and Mr Carvill and Mr Rodney were quite small then; and as they grew older they used to come and get nuts off my great tree—yes, they did indeed. I never liked any so well as those they knocked down for me, and they always got mine before they would help themselves."

"And was Mr Rodney the same then?" I asked.

"Just the same—yes; always ready to do for everybody—always gentle and affectionate—yes. And I don't mean to say that Mr Carvill wasn't affectionate too, but he was wild and thoughtless—yes, very. Yet, so long as he stayed at home, he did pretty well; but then, you see," continued Miss Easy, "when they went to college, Mr Carvill went all sorts of ways; and he's never gone straight since."

"But how *could* farmer Collingwood leave the Lea to him?" I said.

"He didn't, my dear. Oh, no! it was not his—that is, it was his but for life; and then, by his uncle's will, it was to go to Mr Carvill.

"And that was the uncle Mr Carvill was named after?"

"To be sure, yes, and they thought all the world of him—yes. But, dear me! the farm won't do Mr Carvill much good at this rate."

"It's well he has an honest man to deal with," said Kate.

"He needn't thank himself for it," said Miss Easy—"no, not one bit; for Mr Rodney engaged Ezra Barrington as soon as

he knew that your father would not keep him—yes. I suppose he thought Mr Carvill would never take the trouble to turn him out, and that he would not be quite so likely to ruin himself as if he chose his own farmer. But he did not say that to me—he very seldom speaks of his brother's doings, though I believe he's the only person who can influence them in the least. Indeed, Mr Carvill always looked up to him—yes—but in a queer sort of way, too—as if he couldn't help it; and they never are on anything but the best possible terms."

"Has Mrs Carvill ever been to see you, Miss Easy?" said Kate.

"Why, my dear child!—yes, to be sure—several times—yes. What put that question into your head?"

"Because she has never been to see us."

"Never at all? never returned your visit?"

"Never—isn't it odd?"

"Very odd—yes, and very rude," said Miss Easy. "And yet—I don't know—yes, I think I can understand it—yes. Well, you are better worth going to see than any people I know, Katie; Mrs Carvill loses more than you do, dear—yes, much more."

"It isn't quite pleasant, though."

"No, not quite; but there are a good many things in this world that are not quite pleasant—yes, very many; and I fear you must find that out—yes—like other people. Even you, little Gracie."

"Even I?" said I, laughing,—"why, Miss Easy, you would'nt have other people get the start of me in finding out things?"

"Ah, child!" she said. "But tell me, were you ironing all day till you came here?"

"No, ma'am," said Kate, "there was breakfast, you know, and Mrs Barrington; and this afternoon I sang for a while, and Grace studied German."

"Most praiseworthy occupations!" said a voice behind us; and turning round, we saw Mr Ellis, the minister of our little church. He was rather an old man, though Time's assistants had done more than the great innovator himself; but if his head had grown old, so had not his heart, and the smile that now greeted us was almost childlike in its brightness.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, shaking hands with Miss Easy; "but, after knocking three times at your door, I thought I might venture to let myself in."

"My dear sir!" said Miss Easy—"knock three times! did you? I am very sorry, indeed—yes, sir."

"No occasion, ma'am," said Mr Ellis, "since I have got in, —if I hadn't, we might both have been sorry together. I needn't ask any questions of you, young ladies—I hope the half of Mr Howard's family that is at home is as well as the half that is here?"

"Papa is away, sir," I said; "but I don't know but half the family is at home still."

"Yes, and a large half, too—no disparagement to the rest. And how are you, Miss Caffery?—better, I should think,—and when is Miss Bain coming back?"

"I am better to day—yes, sir; and Avarintha expected to be here this week—yes—but I hear this morning that she has changed her mind."

"So, so! Why, she seems to like Ashton."

"Oh, she is not there now, she has gone further west."

"But I should think you'd want her here," said Mr Ellis, knitting his brows a little—"you are not well."

"O yes—but then she's enjoying herself so much," said Miss Easy, apologetically; "and besides—yes—I can hardly want anything while these children come to see me so often —yes, that makes up for everything."

"And how does Miss Howard like to be called a child?" said Mr Ellis, turning to Kate, with a smile.

"Very much," said she, smiling in turn.

"And are you both learning German?"

"Yes, sir, we study it together."

"Do you know Italian, Miss Kate?"

"Only half, sir; I did study it for a time."

"And why not now? What made you give it up?"

Kate coloured a little—"I thought it would be of no use to me, sir, and I parted with all my Italian books. I have been very sorry since."

"Ah, that was a mistake!" said the old man, gently; "a great mistake to suppose that any kind of harmless knowledge could help being useful. And yet it's the very one that many people fall into, just when they ought to be most clear of it; when they are ranging themselves with those whom the world calls not only fanatical, but illiterate and low-bred."

"And often justly," said Kate.

"Often justly; that is, supposing of course that you refer to

my two last adjectives. Strange! that every Christian should not feel, as wrote some old author—'I would acquire all knowledge; I would do whatever could perfect mind and character, that I might lay it all at the foot of the cross.' I may not give the exact words, but that is the idea."

"It is seldom that you hear a clergyman say that," said Miss Easy, smiling; "yes, very seldom."

"Ma'am," said Mr Ellis, bringing one hand down emphatically upon the other, "in my opinion, clergymen are under a delusion, that they don't pay more attention to such things. They should not forget 'the weightier matters of the law'—God forbid!—but manners and education may be perfected with little more outlay than of care and attention. Why should a man give people a chance to pour contempt on his message, by delivering it in bad English? or make his presence distasteful by the want of that nicety of dress and habits which the world holds in so great esteem? I say not they are excusable for the sneer or the contempt, but such things will have their effect—ought to have; and I do know, from experience and observation, that, humanly speaking, a minister's Christian efforts are greatly furthered by the manners and conversation of a gentleman."

"'Lovely, and of good report,'" said Miss Easy.

"Exactly, ma'am; and lovely as the picture may be in some respects, it will neither be of so good report nor so well appreciated, if the glass before it be dull and covered with dust. Christians should give the world no handle, no occasion of reproach; and therefore, Miss Kate, I would set very wide bounds to the field of knowledge, and go over it in full career, being careful always not to encroach upon higher duties. I would not leave all the breeding, and manners, and education, in the hands of the world; let the tide of Christian influence be swelled by every harmless auxiliary."

"You would have liked Whitefield, Mr Ellis," said Kate; "you know, he is said to have been so particular about everything, that even when dining quite alone, he would care for the whiteness of the cloth and the line-and-rule arrangement of the dishes."

"Was he, indeed? I don't remember to have met with that; thank you, Miss Kate, for furnishing me with such a precedent; I am exactly of his mind. But, by the way, Miss Caffery,

speaking of manners and education, when do you expect Mr Collingwood home? Coming for the holidays, isn't he?"

"O yes, sir," said Miss Easy, with a smile; "dear me, yes, to be sure! before that, I hope."

"Won't stay at the Lea, will he, ma'am?"

"I don't believe there'll be any one there to stay with; but he'll be here—yes, sire—the most of the time."

"Glad of it," said Mr Ellis, energetically; "I shouldn't see him once a-week, if he set himself down among those monkeys."

"Monkeys!" said Miss Easy; "why, Mr Ellis—yes, sir—they haven't got monkeys there, too?"

"My dear ma'am, they've got plenty of two-legged ones, I'm sure; whether any of the real Monboddo progenitors of our race have yet arrived, I can't say. For my part, I'd rather see Simon Pure than his imitators. You needn't laugh, Miss Grace; if you'll give me a clear, forcible definition of the difference between a hounuman and some of those French servants—not to say their masters—I'll be obliged to you. And now good night, Miss Easy; good night, young ladies, and success to all learned enterprises. A woman's mind is far too good and valuable a thing to be given up to housekeeping. Mind, I say *given up;* bread and butter in its place; but keep a place, too, for 'pictures, taste, Shakspeare, and the musical glasses.'"

CHAPTER XXIV.

SMOKE.

> "I see a column of slow-rising smoke
> O'ertop the lofty wood that skirts the wild."
>
> COWPER.

It was October—with all the peaceful fairness of its blue skies, and all the frosty stillness of its nights, and the dainty colouring of its woodland, that might have vied with the lorius at Daisy Lea. Nor woodland alone; for, while the lawn and sheltered hill-side were yet green and unfrostbitten, there was many an acre that shewed brown from the recent ploughing, and many a field where, despite Mr Carvill's prohibition, his *Suidæ* yet gleaned among the yellow stubble. The locusts had long forsaken the great maple before our house, and in their stead a few katydids began to sing as soon after sunrise as they could get warm enough. Poor things! their slow, doubtful "ka-ty-did!" told of cold weather: my father said it quite made his heart ache; though, as we laughingly reminded him, it was not many weeks since he would have drowned them all in the Red Sea, if he could. As for the dapper little brown crickets, they were facing life bravely; as cheery and hopeful in chirp and gait as if they were nothing daunted by the white frost—nothing doubtful of spending a most agreeable underground winter,—they prepared for it daily. The spring birds had forsaken us, and now came visitors—a flock of robins to breakfast on our lawn, or a little band of ruby-crowned wrens to take a night's lodging in our evergreens. Sometimes, too, the sky would be speckled with crows, in numbers that distanced all arithmetic—whirling, cawing, and clamouring, as in debate when to go south; or, perhaps, as to which should go and which stay,—for we were never without some black represen-

tatives in our feathered congress. Then came an arrival of my pet black-caps, or a sulky looking butcher-bird; and then another set of strangers that kept me puzzling and wishing for Audubon.

Well, it was such weather; and Mr Howard sat looking out at the artemisias and alyssum and xeranthemums, that, with the help of mignionette and a late rose or two, kept up their end of the world's progress; and the lake was but another sapphire set in a gold ring of autumn woods; and the wind like nothing in the world but sighs—for the past, for the future—indefinite sighs that come from a heart too full of, it doesn't know what; and my father looking out at all this, drew one breath that was but too definite, and said—

"There seems to be no end of weariness and vexation!"

"Is anything new the matter, papa?" said Kate.

"Why, nothing new as to its being weariness and vexation—I have got a further development of the same."

"About what, papa?"

"It's not worth while to trouble you all with it," was the somewhat gloomy reply.

"Yes, it is," said Kate—"if you fold up a black sheet of paper, it will look very dark indeed; but open and hold it before our faces, papa, it won't be more than gray at the most, and who knows what bright specks may appear?"

My father smiled. "Well," he said, "it would be a dark sheet indeed that your faces couldn't light up. This is not anything so very bad, neither, if it didn't come on top of everything else. But that man Curtis, who bought the farm near Wiamee, and has been living on it ever since, now says that he can't pay for it, nor even rent for the time he has been in."

"Is this Mr M'Loon's doing?" said my stepmother.

"No, I think not, for I had talked with Curtis, and he was quite willing to take my word about the title. But he's very poor, he says—I think every man is—and has lost something somehow, and really cannot pay. So that place is still unsold, with a considerable loss of rent."

"But why don't you make him pay, papa?" said Kate, for my stepmother sat silently looking at the little fire, which sighed and flickered like our waning fortunes. "Haven't you the law on your side?"

"Ay! and there it may stay. The law is an excellent

battery for gold and silver, Kate; but it's rather too strong to be played upon poor flesh and blood that has lost its wall of defence. I have suffered enough myself, to feel for others. Curtis told me I might send a sheriff to his house, and make what I could by the means, and that he shouldn't blame me; but I never would visit troubles upon a man's family—I never could; nor upon himself in that way. Let him keep his home if he has nothing else to keep!—hard if losses and law-officers must invade even there! It makes no difference how Curtis has behaved—his wife and children would feel the want of furniture none the less because it went by his misconduct. I never should sleep another night in peace, if I thought I had deprived that poor little dwelling of a single comfort."

I saw the big tears glistening in my stepmother's eyes, and her look spoke a pleasure far beyond gold's bestowing, as she said—

"Surely poverty is not always hardening!"

"I don't know," said my father, shaking his head—"I think I'm pretty hard sometimes; but a man must melt a little among such sunbeams. You were quite right, Katie—the black sheet has faded—faded so much, that I can even seem to see written on it old Philip Henry's trustful saying—'There is no must be, without a needs be.' Ah, one's eyes get sadly blinded sometimes! But we'll struggle on a little longer, and maybe win through yet."

"When will that suit with Mr M'Loon come on?" said Mrs Howard.

"I'm sure I dont know—there it is, again; if one could but have things decided one way or another, there'd be some comfort in it. But patience, patience!—

> 'Brought safely by His hand thus far,
> Why wilt thou now give place to fear?
> How canst thou want if He provide?—
> Or lose thy way with such a guide?'

There is a full answer to every doubt—'Fear not, I am with thee.'"

"Come, children," he said, after a pause, "brighten up! Aren't you going out this fine day? take Andy and go pick up butternuts."

"What for, papa?" said Kate, smiling.

"What for?—exercise and fresh air. Get them child-fashion if you can't any other way. Such weather ought to tempt everybody out."

"Suppose it should tempt you, papa."

"It must tempt me in another direction, Gracie. I must go and see if Squire Brown has any spare hay, and then to ask Squire Suydam to let me have his oxen for a day or two. I have a great mind to tell Barrington to buy me a yoke."

"Better not," said Mrs Howard; "you won't want them much this winter, and hay is so dear."

"Dear enough; if I live to see another season, I'll stay at home and mind my own haying. I might as well have had a pitchfork for overseer as that man M'Kee."

"I would get rid of him," said Mrs Howard.

"Can't, my dear. I couldn't turn him away at this season, or at least if I did, it would be hard to get another. Oh, he'll do well enough for the winter—I daresay he means to do right."

"You would'nt dare say it, if you could once see him work when you are away—or rather *not* work," said my stepmother; "and I'm afraid he'll make Andy as idle as himself. If I were you I would send him off, and teach Andy to do what is needful. Get Mr Suydam to send some one with the oxen, and I presume Mr Carvill would let you have Ezra for a day or two."

"I presume I sha'n't ask him. If ever I am rich enough, I'll have Ezra for good; I haven't had a bit of comfort since he went away; and as to the rest, I'll see."

"But, papa," said Kate, "won't you try to get somebody else? some new man for the winter? M'Kee is a mere old woman."

Now, among Mr Howard's peculiarities, was that of not taking female testimony with regard to man or man's doings—a kind of Salic law of evidence. So, in reply to Kate's request, he only laughed, and said—

"Don't libel your sex, my dear; I should be sorry to think all old women were like Adam M'Kee. But, as I told you before, I'll see about it."

My father went off, and Kate and I assumed bonnets and baskets, and with Andy for escort, began to thread the woods—keeping carefully to our own grounds, however. Threading it was, the path being sometimes a slight wearing of the rock moss, sometimes a channel-like passage between stones and trees; while the eye caught intuitively those trifling way-marks which the understanding could scarce perceive.

The trees hung full of their late honours; and now and then, as we walked, a crimson dogwood leaf, or one of bright yellow

from some maple, fluttered reluctantly down; loth to quit its free waving station for the low ground, already gay with such trophies. The asters were luxuriant in bloom and variety; the small white flowers of some, and the thick purple clusters of others, forming a bright contrast to the bending golden-rods and erect ladies' tresses. Wintergreens carpeted the ground in spots, loaded with their carmine berries; and bunches of other small fruit—red, white, blue, and purple—hung from cahosh and buckthorn and creeper. Here and there beneath a tall chestnut the open burrs shewed that fingers or paws had been busy; while away on the top of some that were exceeding straight and slim, a profusion of well-filled green pricklers seemed to mock us with just a peep of their brown contents. Whatever could climb that slippery unbroken bark, must be more akin to cats and squirrels than was even Andy.

"How can you ever find the cows in these thick woods?" said Kate.

"Every morning I sees where they goes, and then I goes after them," said Andy, displaying his whole set of teeth at the perfectness of the reply. "But see, Miss Kate, there's the chestnuts, sure! Och, whillastrew! how will I get into it?"

And, with an insane desire to ascend one of the tall chestnuts, Andy pressed every member into the service, and began to climb—not on all-fours, but on all inches.

"Andy! come down!" said Kate. "You will fall and break your neck."

"Sure and it's meself wouldn't do that thing," said Andy, whose limbs were beginning to assume a downward movement that could not be checked, and which soon brought him to the ground, with no further damage than the temporary detention of each trousers leg about the knee.

"Never mind the chestnuts," said Kate.

"Och, they'll be all on the ground hereafter," was the philosophical reply, as Andy examined his hands. "Then, for a tree that had no holt to it, that same was mighty rough!"

"Did you hurt your hands?" said I.

"Troth and I did not, Miss—that is, I did, but it's little it hurts me itself."

We rambled on, gleaning after the squirrels, and sometimes wishing that their purveyance had been delayed a little; but then again we saw such a picture of rural felicity in a fur coat,

that there was nothing for it but to wish him health and happiness—or, as Andy said, "success to you! and why wouldn't you be afther throwing us down a few?" Chestnuts were not to be had, but at length we came to an old butternut whose white and brown branches stretched their leafless length in the warm glow of a golden hickory. Aloft, there was neither fruit nor foliage; but snugly embedded in the long grass and fallen leaves, the greenish-yellow nuts lay in great abundance, and were to be had for the gathering.

"Be sure I can aisy get *them!*" said Andy, as with a most grasping disposition he threw himself upon the butternuts; and "be sure" we did; and pretty little green heaps soon arose in all directions.

Leaving Andy to transfer those to his basket, and to refresh himself with cracking and eating, Kate and I sat down upon a lichened rock, and took in our refreshment at eye and ear. Behind the bit of woodland where we had been nutting was a long stretch of forest trees, with so thick a sprinkling of silver pines, that it went by the name of the pine wood. But it was not an old forest, half a century being perhaps the most that had rolled on since some of the trees were hid in acorns and cones, and others had sprung up from the trunk of some fallen ancestor. Before us lay a strip of greensward strewed with the yellow butternut leaves; then came a clump of cedars festooned with the Virginia creeper in its scarlet dress, and the cat-briar boasting no ornament but its dark blue berries and freckled leaves. Other trees, mingled with gray rocks, feathery tufts of brake, and lively green beds of moss, lured the eye on to where the western horn of the lake lay, glimmering and sparkling in the soft light. A black-cap or two, and a belated song-sparrow, joined issue with a cock whose hearty crow came to us pleasantly from Mr Carvill's barnyard, and made the stillness perfect.

"How very lovely it is!" said Kate, with that half sigh that comes from the hidden recesses of enjoyment.

"But it's getting so hazy—just look; the air was as clear as possible when we sat down here, and now it is—oh how blue!"

"We often have hazy weather in October," replied Kate. "Yes, it is blue enough—the whole landscape seems melting away into dream-land. I shouldn't wonder if I got there myself, with such a lullaby atmosphere around me."

"There's more than lullaby in the air," said I, laughing—

"it makes *me* very wide awake. I don't think that's haze—it looks much more like smoke, and smells like it, too;" and jumping up, I carefully scanned the sky. There was nothing suspicious in the appearance of south, east, or west; but away to the north, the blue heaven had as it were the shadow of a golden cloud—so slight, that we thought at first it was only a cloud; but something in the light curl of its outline, together with its steady ascent, soon told the truth: it was surely smoke, and from our woods.

Hastily we went back to Andy, guided by the monotonous tap of his stone hammer; and then walked home at a rate which would have left gay leaves and busy squirrels unnoticed, even had our minds been free. But Mr Howard was yet away. What was to be done? We stood debating the point round the two pleasant-looking loaves of bread that were baking at the kitchen-fire, feeling, as we had often done before, that woman is very powerless out of her own sphere; and that, with so large a place and no one to take care of it, we were in the same predicament as the Vicar of Wakefield's picture; "we wondered how we should get out—we wondered still more how we had ever got in!"

"Squire to home, Mrs Howard?" said a very unfeminine voice, while a corresponding hand swung open the kitchen door.

"How do you do, Mr Barrington?" said my stepmother, with a brightening face: "we have not seen you in a great while."

"Thank'e, ma'am, I'm pretty smart—'tain't my fault neither," said Ezra, in reply to her last remark, "but a body can't be every place. Squire too deep to be spoke to, ma'am?"

"Oh, he's gone to Mr Suydam's," said Mrs Howard.

"That's just what he oughtn't to ha' done," said Ezra, with a tone of some vexation.

"But he'll be back soon."

"You'll tell him then, ma'am, to start for the pine wood as tight as he kin put; some o' them 'ere guns has gone off in the wrong place, and the trees is a-burning like seventy-five."

"Is that where the fire came from?" cried I. "And why in the world did Mr Carvill go into our woods?"

"It beats me to guess why he does anything," said Ezra: "I s'pose Washington might ha' telled—I kint. But the woods is a-fire, and no mistake."

"I'll tell Mr Howard as soon as he comes," said my stepmother.

But Ezra still kept his stand—

"The squire never kin put 'em out himself," said he, ruminating; "and Mr Carvill" (Ezra never dignified *him* with the title of squire) "is in a takin' to know where to ketch patridges—I reckon he'll just have to find out—it goes agin my conscience to let them woods burn. But the squire had better come too, ma'am—there won't be a hand too much," he said, aloud.

"And will you help him?" said Mrs Howard, with an immediate feeling of relief. "Oh, I should be so much obliged to you!"

"There ain't nobody in the world I'd sooner help," said Ezra, "and there's some folks I wouldn't nigh so soon."

And, with one expressive little nod of his head towards that point of the compass where Mr Carvill was supposed to be, Mr Barrington strode off in the direction of the pine wood; admonishing Andy, the while, to "walk up smart." Thither too went Mr Howard as soon as he got home, and with him Adam M'Kee; so we were left to guard ourselves and the house, and to gather such comfort or discomfort as we could, from the columns of smoke, their size and drift, and from the gradual westing of the sun, which promised no indefinite length of daylight for the labourers.

We had talked it all over for the twentieth time, and the loaves of bread stood brown, and cooling upon the table, when Mrs Howard suddenly exclaimed—

"They'll be all starved! your father hasn't had a thing to eat since breakfast, and he's been on his feet the whole time."

"And the men can't have gone home to dinner," said I. "Oh, let's take them something, mamma! I should like it so much."

To think was to do; and in a little while we had fastened up the house, and with basket and cup and pail were on our way to the pine wood. The road led us to a cleared field at its very edge; the forest now spurning the open ground with a rude bluff, and now meeting it half-way on a slope of gradually increasing smoothness. Here the fire had been left to take its course till checked by the greensward: we could hear it distinctly as it ran along among the dry leaves and undergrowth with the rustle of a snake, and now and then with a quick

short sound, like the same creature lapping to quench his thirst; while a low, unbroken roar seemed to bring tidings from all parts of the burning district; tidings of the fire—not those that we wanted. In vain we listened for some other sound—there was not even a chirp: the birds had all flown off in dismay, and the hot breath that came in our faces told of no living presence. We called—no one answered—there was no labourer there save the fire. And again that same feeling of powerlessness, with a touch of fear, crept over us.

"Mamma," said I, "if you will let me go further down the road, perhaps I shall find them, and then I will come back and let you know. You can rest here nicely till then—you are so very tired."

Mrs Howard hesitated, but at last gave her consent upon condition of Kate's bearing me company, and we set forth with the basket between us. The road that we took now was but a half-made one—little more, in effect, than a broad wood path, but the free access of sun and air had kept it grassy, and free from dry leaves. As yet the fire was on only one side, and even there had not come down the hill which rose abruptly from the very roadside. All along the ridge we heard and saw its progress. Now and then a shoot of flame would leap into the branches of some dead pine, and little inverted cones of smoke went up from many a damp or half-burnt pile of leaves. Still no sign of any one, and uncomfortable recollections of falling trees and suffocating smoke began to strengthen in my mind. We walked on, then came in sight of Adam M'Kee, sitting on a stone, and carelessly waving his cedar-bush extinguisher.

"Where is papa?" said Kate.

"I dinna ken, Miss."

"Where's Mr Barrington?"

"I dinna ken," was again the reply. "The maister said to bide here and tent the fire till he'd come."

Again we went forward, then turned and walked back.

"Why, child, you need not look frightened," said Kate; "don't you suppose papa knows enough to take care of himself?"

"But if he should have got tired and faint, as he sometimes does?"

"Not at all likely—and then, there's Ezra. Oh, here comes mamma to meet us."

A short consultation determined us to go together as far down the road as we could, until stopped by the young growth of trees and bushes which were fast concealing the unfinished work of so many dollars. Again we reached Adam, and having given him a drink of milk, went on and on. Long, and wearily, and worriedly: still the road bounded the fire; still were blackened trees, and burning stumps and smoke, our only companions. We stood and called.

"Hollo!" came from the distance.

We went on joyfully—then stopped disappointed. "Is that you, Ezra?" called Kate.

"I used to think so," replied Mr Barrington, as he came down the ridge, bush in hand. "I reckon I ain't quite myself in this plaguy smoke. I vow, I think the old woman 'ud say I was somebody else!"

We were very near saying so, too.

"Where is Mr Howard?" said my stepmother.

"Land knows, ma'am!—he's choking himself some place, I calculate. If Mr Carvill was one o' them 'ere spouts of smoke, I'd walk into him in arnest, and put him out in a way he ain't been used to!" and, stimulated by this idea, Ezra gave furious blows with his cedar bush upon one or two mimic volcanos, whose underground fires seemed spreading.

"That had ought to be the squire," he said presently, standing up, and pointing down the road to a tall advancing figure —"'tain't as handsome as a pictur', neither, but it's dreadful like him."

"Dreadful like him" it was—coat off, face and shirt black with smoke and the handiwork of charred twigs, a tall cedar in his hand—my father looked like a figure from the Hartz mountains.

"Oh, papa!" said I, "you are tired out!"

"Pretty near it. There's no stopping this fire—we may as well just keep it from crossing the road, and where it has got hold, let it burn. Don't you think so, Mr Barrington?"

Ezra took a comprehensive view of the hopelessly long line of smoke, and then gave my father a keen glance of his eye, that made words quite needless.

"But stop and eat something first," said Mrs Howard: "the fire won't get down here for a while yet."

My father took off his gloves, and first calling to Andy and

M'Kee, he threw himself down on the grass and opened the basket.

"I don't know," said Ezra, looking at his hands, as Kate offered him a sandwich, "my wife says, ashes is clean dirt, but I'd like to hear what she'd call t'other! However, it ain't no use to starve upon manners;" and he, too, sat down, remarking that it was "as cheap sitting as standing."

Certainly, if our little group was unceremonious, it was picturesque; for effect varies with circumstances, and that degree of roughness and irregularity which finds no place within doors, is often the very point of a scene without. A dead tree, a dry branch among fresh ones, are singled out by the eye (at least by mine) with particular pleasure; and in this case it may be questioned whether water and soap would have improved our general appearance. As Carlyle says of some troop, "singly you might have likened them to Don Quixote; in mass, they were highly dignified;" and the smoke had at least the art to throw an air of congruity over what might otherwise have been deemed irregular. For Mr Barrington, without presuming to take a seat by the squire, had yet placed himself within speaking distance—and their meal was agreeably diversified with scraps of conversation. The two others sat further off, muttering forth information and remarks with that low, uninterrupted murmur which an American would seldom choose to assume, if he could: Andy's face never losing sight of the lunch basket, and expanding most benignly whenever *that* was opened. As for us—if they had been in Sunday or even the usual week-day trim, of course we should have stood aloof; but being men in the last degree of smokiness and fatigue, it was equally of course that we should complete the picture and hand them refreshments.

My father looked in the basket and saw it was empty, save one sandwich; with a smile he gave that to his next neighbour, took a drink of milk himself instead, and then prepared for business.

"The best thing we can do," said he, "is to fire the leaves at the foot of this hill, and then the flames will run up and leave the road, and we may leave it too, and go home."

He caught up a forked stick, and going to a burning heap, brought thence enough combustion for his purpose, and they were soon fairly set to work to meet the fire half way. As

my father had said, the flames ran up the hill, but now and then some slight conductor of dry leaves carried fire across the road in spite of their vigilance.

"Andy!" shouted my father, and pointing to a whiff of smoke on the unburnt side, "there is fire under that hemlock."

"Shew me the bush, sir, till I quench it," said Andy, running up to him, and away from the smoke, and holding out his hand for my father's extinguisher.

"Get your own bush," said my father, a little impatiently; "I can't leave this pine-tree for a minute—what have you done with it?"

"It's up beyont," said Andy, looking dubious and innocent.

"'Tain't the only thing I'd like to see there," said Mr Barrington; "get it, can't ye? and be spry; the bush 'll shew itself afore long, or I'm mistaken. Now, Mr Howard, you just sit down, sir, if it's all the same to you—I'll take what knocking up 'll answer for both on us."

"I believe I have got about enough," said my father; "but I don't know that I am more tired than the rest of you."

"There's some of us ha'n't got enough, by a long jump," said Ezra, with a scornful glance at the Scotchman, who was giving the fire the gentlest of admonitions. "Here you, Adam M'Kee! just see to that smoke yonder—Andy won't be back this side of Christmas—and I'll take a turn at this cedar. Come, step round, or the fire 'll be too many for us yet."

M'Kee moved off accordingly; but so little satisfactory was his handling of the smoke, that Mr Barrington muttered—

"If t'other Adam didn't have more sense, Job couldn't ha' stood him!"

And now the edge fire of the road gradually burned itself out, leaving the scorched undergrowth, and heaps of blackened leaves and twigs, and trees, with a charred stripe or band, to tell of its work. On the other side of that narrow passage, all was fresh and green among the pines, and the few deciduous trees were unspoiled of their lively hangings. The sidelong glances of the sun fell on them, giving and taking loveliness, while the burnt region was in the shade of evening as well as of desolation. The excitement and wild beauty of the fire were all gone, except in the few places where it had mastered some pine or hemlock, and still wreathed them with flame and smoke to their very branch ends.

It was all safe at last; and when everything had been once more inspected, and all possible communication between the green and the dry cut off, we went home; after giving Ezra such of our thanks as could be put in words.

"'Tain't any obligation that a chicken couldn't stand under," he said. "My gracious! I should ha' got sich a combing from the old woman, if I'd been up to doing anything else! And besides," added Mr Barrington, with a near approach to a smile, "I'm afeerd I was a *leetle* too glad to spile somebody's dancing, for want of a fiddler."

CHAPTER XXV.

MR CARVILL'S GUN.

"Now westlin winds, and slaughtering guns,
Bring autumn's pleasant weather;
The muircock springs, on whirring wings,
Amang the blooming heather.
Come let us stray our gladsome way,
And view the charms of nature;
The rustling corn, the fruited thorn,
And every happy creature."

BURNS.

"AND when is Mr Carvill going to town?" inquired my father next morning, when he had disposed of Mr Barrington's first remark, that "he s'posed there wa'n't nothing left o' the squire, but he thought he'd just stop down and see."

"When does he mean to seek winter quarters?"

"Not knowin', couldn't say," replied Ezra, concisely.

"And how do you feel after such a hard day's work?" said my stepmother.

"Spry as a cricket, ma'am; my wife says I hadn't ought to have come for the squire at all; but I telled her, I guessed she'd find out, first time she tried, that a fire in the wood wa'n't a fire in a flower-pot."

"I can't think how it happened," said my father. "They couldn't have been shooting in the wood itself, and the ground beyond is low and swampy."

"They was in the mash, sir, but there's always dry stuff lies round a fence, and that ketched first; and then the fire kinder gin under the fence, and so up."

"And what did Mr Carvill say to your quitting him to help me?"

"Hum," said Ezra, with a little grunt, "his speech wa'n't hardly worth taking down. I reckon he thought if I wouldn't haw, he'd as good holler gee."

"And is the Lea house as full as ever?"

"They wouldn't go—for chips!" was the emphatic reply.

"They'll have to go, by and by," said Mr Howard, smiling; "a little cold weather would soon spoil their singing and sporting."

"Singing!" exclaimed Ezra, indignantly; "'tain't nothing in life but hollering; I'd a sight rather hear a chap fiddle 'Hail Columby.' And, as to the sporting, if the dogs don't have the best on it, I'm beat to know who has—I'm sure it ain't me. Landsakes! squire, I'd as lief as a spring rain that you'd seen one o' them 'ere shootin'-jackets stick fast in the mash! it beat general trainin' all to splinters. If I'd ha' been him, I'd ha' shot every soul of the rest of 'em for laughing." And, with this graphic description, Mr Barrington walked away.

The Lea party seemed to bear the cool weather pretty well; better than we did their behaviour; for, whether by chance or on purpose, they seemed always to choose their shooting-ground as near as possible to the boundary line of our property. Morning, noon, and night, dogs were barking and guns cracking all about us, till we began to be afraid to venture out while such unceremonious pleasure-hunters were in the neighbourhood.

Meantime Mr Collingwood arrived, but took up his abode at the Lea; partly because he thought Miss Easy not well enough to have guests; partly, as he told her, because "it seemed best."

"Do you feel inclined to bear an old man company in a visit to a young one, Mr Howard?" said our good clergyman, as he entered our house some day or two after.

"Why, yes," said my father, "with all my heart; I've been thinking of it; if one could only get there, except across half-a-dozen"——and in the search for a term sufficiently mild, Mr Howard stopped short.

"Precisely, my dear sir," said Mr Ellis; "but it will be hard if you and I together cannot get safe across a half dozen of anything."

"Guns included?" said my stepmother, smiling, though with a somewhat doubtful expression.

"Guns included, ma'am—by the help of Dec. He'll find out the gunners before they fire, and eat 'em up afterwards, if I tell him to."

"Oh, if Dec is along, that alters the case," said Mrs Howard, looking at the huge mastiff, who seemed indeed as if *he* would make short work with "a half dozen of anything."

Now Mr Ellis's dog was called "Declaration of Independence."

The weather was so fine, that after they had gone, Mrs Howard and Kate and I took books and work, and went to spend the morning out of doors: choosing for our retreat a little thicket which was open enough to admit the air's freshness, while yet it sheltered us from the sun. And there we sat in very quiet enjoyment, until, as Ezra Barrington had expressed it, "a gun went off in the wrong place."

We had seated ourselves not far from the bar-place that opened upon Mr Carvill's domains, trusting to our ears to inform us if any one approached; but the unseen sportsman had been so still in his movements, that our first warning was the report of his piece. We sprang up, and at the moment a little bird fell fluttering at our feet—fluttering but an instant, and then the shot's cruel work was done: the foot was slightly drawn up, then stretched out, and the bird lay motionless. Almost as motionless we stood, breathing with that oppressed feeling which finds no utterance; but recollecting immediately that a second shot might follow the first, we retreated—I carrying the bird, yet warm and hanging listlessly over my hand. It was a wax-wing, or cedar-bird, as we often called them: the head and throat and back of a light fawn-colour, shading off into gray, and that again into blue: the tail tipped with gamboge. The feathers were quite unruffled, except in one little place where the shot had entered—softly smoothed down, as the bird had preened himself for his last flight.

Quick as our footsteps were, we had but just cleared the trees, when we heard some one spring over the fence, and then came an impatient—

"It must have fallen somewhere in these confounded bushes."

We turned, and saw Mr Carvill and a companion in mischief.

The former had evidently found more in the bushes than he had counted upon; but a moment's hesitation gave way to his usual easy bearing, and he came forward and "supposed we must be well, as we looked so charmingly;" and then glancing at the bird, he inquired "how long it was since I had taken to petting inanimate nature."

I made no reply; but my stepmother, with more sternness than she often brought to bear upon delinquents, remarked—

"You may be thankful, Mr Carvill, that your shot did not take effect upon one of us."

"Upon my honour, ma'am, I am thankful—remarkably so—wish I could think it *had* taken no effect except on that little bundle of feathers; but both these young ladies look 'severe in youthful dignity.' Well—'variety's charming'—even when the 'statu quo' is so agreeable as in the case of the Miss Howards. Miss Grace, shall I relieve you of your affecting burden?"

"What did you shoot it for?" was my somewhat unceremonious reply.

"What?—the 'burden'? said Mr Carvill, putting his hands on his sides, and looking serious—"wanted him—did, 'pon my honour. Mrs Carvill's remarkably fond of wax-wings—thought she'd like one for dinner; and, if her appetite changed before I got home (which might happen), they always command a good price—one or two shillings a dozen, I think; and that would be—let me see—just one or two cents apiece. You see even I didn't go to college for nothing—never forgot my arithmetic to this day."

"As your memory is so good, Mr Carvill," said Kate, "wont you please to remember where our house is, and to keep as far from it as possible in future, when you are shooting?"

"Do my endeavour, Miss Howard—did this morning—hadn't an idea that you were anywhere in the neighbourhood till I jumped that fence—thought I was off t'other end of my own grounds—left my wits at home, I suppose, to work upon that last lecture of Rodney's. For pity's sake, ladies all, don't tell *him* of my misdeeds!—between the having killed a *protégé* of the Miss Howards, and the not having brought home Mrs Carvill's dinner, there would be nothing left for me but to 'cut my walking-stick.' Hey, George?" he added.

"You had better cut it at once," said his companion.

"Cut your own, and welcome," replied Mr Carvill; but I have some feeling, and cannot leave Miss Grace in such a distressed state of mind. Let me see if the wound is mortal—maybe 'twas only a faint he took;" and the bird was out of my hand before I had decided whether I would let it go.

"Ha—dead enough!—good little gun that, George—don't

suppose he had the smallest idea what was the matter with him. Well, if Rodney was safe in Cumberland, I'd take this chez ma femme, but I've no notion of having a rescue attempted—so farewell, wax-wing—melancholy trophy of a good shot!" and, with one powerful fling, he sent the bird whirling over the tops of the trees. Then kissing the tip of his shooting-glove, Mr Carvill sprang over the fence again, and fired us a parting air-salute from the other side: which just served to exhaust the small remnant of our patience.

"He is the most unendurable man I ever saw!" exclaimed Kate.

"Oh, Dec!" I said, as the dog dashed in between us, "if you had only been here to give them at least a good barking for their pains!"

Dec flourished about with his nose to the ground, and with now and then a smothered growl of discovery or disapprobation, as if he fully entered into my wish; and then subsided into a very quiet dog-trot to follow his master home.

"We did not find our friend, after all," said my father; "and Mrs Carvill either couldn't or wouldn't say where he was."

"So you saw Mrs Carvill?"

"I saw Mrs Carvill—with about as much satisfaction as she saw me. She has taken a fair draught of Lethe since last spring—I had some thoughts of making Mr Ellis introduce me. Ah, here comes the very person we were in search of. Mr Collingwood, we have voted you blessed with an invisible cap."

Mr Collingwood made some light answer to this remark, but he looked ill at ease—very grave, very sad; so that we scarcely knew what to talk about, lest we should touch the wrong subject. We had established ourselves once more under the trees, but he declined to sit down; and though he took part in the conversation, it was with the air of a man whose thoughts are far away from his words—very different from his usual manner. Once I tried to call home his abstraction by some laughing remark about Wolfgang, but the expression which followed his smile seemed graver than ever.

"I was surprised to hear from Mrs Carvill that you leave us this week," said my father.

"Yes, sir, to-morrow."

"And when are you coming again?" asked Mrs Howard.

"Not till December; unless—I may perhaps come before."

"And then you will stay at the Bird's Nest?"

"So I have just promised Miss Easy."

"You have seen her to-day, then—and how is she?" said my stepmother, striking out upon what she thought must be a safe tack.

But the shade deepened painfully upon Mr Rodney's face as he answered—

"I do not see much change in her, Mrs Howard—she says she feels stronger than when I came home."

My stepmother looked at him, with that woman's eye which reflects as truly the shadows of twilight as the distinct figures of noonday; and saw—I could not tell what, but merely saying that she had been out long enough, she left us and went to the house. Thither we followed her, but more leisurely; and Mr Rodney assuming at least an appearance of cheerfulness, asked Kate and me to take a walk with him. There was no need to ask twice; and though our spirits had been a little damped by the constraint of the previous half hour, the mere exercise of getting ready quite restored them. We came into the parlour in a mood too gay almost to notice the faces there, or to perceive the pause that every tongue made at our entrance. But Kate presently recollected it.

"Mr Rodney," she said, when we were a little way from the house, "what were you all talking about when we came down? Mamma was telling you that perhaps you were mistaken—I meant to have asked her then, but something put it out of my head."

"Will you forgive me, Miss Kate, if I do not answer you now?" he said, as he stooped to let down the bars.

"I suppose I shall have to," said Kate, laughing; "happily curiosity is not one of my ruling passions. But aren't you taking us in the way of powder and shot?"

"No," said he, consulting his watch—"not at this hour. Carvill's companions in arms are not romantic enough to shoot all day without eating, and this is about their luncheon time."

"Don't you ever shoot, Mr Rodney?"

"I have done such a thing, Gracie, but of late years my taste has lain another way. Indeed I never thoroughly liked

the business; and when I found that I must 'get used to it' before it could give me more pleasure than pain, I came to the conclusion that I didn't wish to get used to it, and shouldn't think so much of myself if that point were attained."

I said we were in a gay mood, though there was no particular cause; but it was with us that happy time of life when the heart dances to its own music—as it never can dance to any other! The trying circumstances of the last year had but partially sobered us—they were but a weight put in one scale, not the long-continued strain which at last destroys the spring of the balance, so that it never rises again to its fair equilibrium. Thus the soberness was quickly shaken off when past annoyances were old, and the new not come; and this was such an interval, and we were full of enjoyment. Mr Collingwood half caught the infection, in spite of himself, as it were, and in a little while talked and looked much as usual: though, when after a few minutes' silence we turned to say something to him, we could often see that both eye and mouth had resumed their thoughtfully grave lines and expression. And yet that day alone might have cheered any one. It was colder than the day of our fire in the woods, but with such a sky! and air that seemed almost as rarified and sparkling as champagne.

"Mr Rodney," said Kate, "if I thought you would not be displeased, I should advance an opinion."

"You may venture," he said, with a smile.

"One has no right to put one's self under a cloud in such weather."

"I agree to that perfectly, Miss Kate—with this slight qualification: one has as good a right in fair weather as in foul."

"But not so good reason?" said Kate, with the kind of look that the sun sends through the fog.

"Voluntary clouds are unreasonable things at best," said Mr Collingwood, but with no perverse closing of the fog around him; "and truly I have no excuse to plead but human nature—that will sometimes concern itself about those possibilities which are not its care. Gracie, here is wych-hazel—weren't you wishing for some yesterday?"

"This is one of the prettiest of our wild shrubs," said Kate, as we broke off some of the twigs that displayed alternately their bright yellow flowers and large brownish-yellow leaves.

"Is that the power of 'a name'?" said Mr Rodney.

"Partly, perhaps—or of the association the name brings

with it. But I have wished sometimes that one could resolve the near presence of things—joy and sorrow and danger—as easily as the old diviners thought they could find water with one of these hazel twigs."

"So do not I!" said our companion. If I were to wish at all, it would be for a guide to 'the wells of consolation'—one that should point upward, and not downward—and that we have already."

"And yet," said Kate, whom I half suspected to have a secret purpose in what she said—"and yet, Mr Rodney, if I could tell—if I were sure of happiness to-morrow, to-day's grief would not so much affect me."

"Well," he said, "you may be sure of it—only call to-morrow heaven, and to-day earth—

> ''Tis by the faith of joys *to come*,
> We walk through deserts dark as night.'"

His eye had brightened and his brow cleared, and Kate's smile, as she turned from the bush and went on, made me sure that I had guessed right. But for some time we walked in silence.

We had crossed a piece of woodland that skirted the high road, and were about to cross that, too, when the galloping tread of a horse came flying along at a rate that made us pause.

"Here is somebody who has got used to several things, I should think," said Kate. "Apparently she has not your ideas of self-esteem, Mr Rodney."

The apparition came on, surrounded with a cloud of drapery that would have been graceful had it been aught but dust; as it was, the brown steed and his rider loomed dimly out from what seemed a most uncomfortable atmosphere—it made one clear one's throat to look at them. But the wreaths rolled gently off towards us, and settled pleasantly upon our sun-bonnets and dresses, when the lady, after returning Mr Rodney's bow, wheeled her horse and came to a sudden stop just in front of us. Dust was certainly not the only thing with which she was familiar. A light fowling-piece lay carelessly across her saddle, at the side of which hung the game-bag; its contents sufficiently made known by the partridge and quail heads that hung limp and bloody through its meshes. The lady's dress was as near an approach to shooting trim as comported with the retention of petticoats: powder-flask and shot-bag were

not wanting, and our eyes ascended with increasing wonder to the fair hair and face of the second Miss Brown, and her little straw-cap.

"Good morning, Mr Collingwood," she said. "Will you have the goodness to come and look at this buckle? I saddled my horse in such a hurry, that I have been in momentary expectation of a downfal."

"If you will permit me to say so, Miss Harriet," said Mr Collingwood, as he obeyed her commands, "saddling a horse is the very last thing that should be done in a hurry."

"It was the last thing I did in mine," said the young lady, laughing—"for I was all ready before I touched him—but I always do it in a hurry, for that matter."

"You should not do it at all, then," pursued Mr Collingwood.

"Then I never should ride. Jack's always ploughing or something else, and the squire won't be bothered. Can't it ever be done fast and well?"

"By an experienced hand."

"I wish you'd experience my hand," said Miss Brown—"I never had any one to teach me how. Come, Mr Collingwood, say you'll ride over to-morrow and give me a lesson."

"I must ride to Cumberland to-morrow. There, I believe the buckle is all right. Why didn't you make Carvill give you a lesson before you mounted, Miss Harriet?"

"How did you know I had been there?"

"'I can see a church by daylight,'" replied Mr Rodney, smiling.

"Well, but look here, why don't you compliment me on my skill? Shot every one of these myself," she said, shaking the bag with its dangling appendages; "I did, upon my word."

Mr Collingwood made no reply except by an involuntary step back, which to us was sufficiently expressive.

"Where are you going?" said Miss Brown. "I haven't half done talking to you."

"But it will not do to try a lady's patience unduly—and I have left two waiting for me. Is there any other buckle you wish me to examine, Miss Harriet?"

"Half a dozen! Why, bless me! what a squire of dames you would make! Don't you know it's always the distressed damsel that claims most of the attention of a true knight?"

"Rather a sudden promotion from squire to knight, isn't

it?" said Mr Collingwood, whose attention was just then bestowed upon the horse's head-gear.

"Answer me, and I'll answer you."

"It may perhaps be questioned," said he, with a smile, "whether the distressed damsel is the one who carries powder and shot."

"You are enough to provoke anybody! Here, I'll set your conscience at rest," said Miss Harriet, riding up to the stone where we had seated ourselves—"Mr Collingwood, will you please to introduce me? Now, Miss Howard, will *you* please to excuse this gentleman while he examines my girths and martingal?"

"Certainly," Kate said, in a tone of such quiet good-breeding, as sounded strangely after Miss Brown's rattle; and for which she was rewarded by as many examining looks as that lady could spare from her older acquaintance.

"Do you know, Mr Collingwood," she went on, "I have fairly lamed my shoulder with shooting?"

"Does that never act as a preventive?"

"Dear me, no! who'd care for such a trifle? We had the most splendid time to-day! I never enjoyed anything so much."

"I am——This martingal seems hardly needed."

"No matter! What are you?——tired of fixing buckles?"

"Nay, I have rather more strength of muscle than that would imply."

"Well, what are you, then?" said she, impatiently.

"I was going to tell you that I was glad you had enjoyed yourself."

"And what made you stop?——say."

"Never push people into a corner," said Mr Collingwood; "it is dangerous. That girth is perfectly safe, Miss Harriet, and your ride home may be quite uneventful unless you or Peter are wilful."

"Peter's never wilful; but I am; so tell me what made you stop; I sha'nt let you go till you do. Why didn't you finish your speech?"

"I found it was like to be an untrue one, that's all," said Mr Collingwood, smiling.

"Upon my word! So you wish I hadn't enjoyed myself! Well, you haven't got the character of plain speaking for nothing, that's certain. I think I won't talk to you any more,

after that. Oh, stay—who is that handsome Baltimorean down yonder?"

"What Baltimorean, and where?"

"Down yonder, at the Lea; I don't know his name, or I shouldn't ask."

"There are three there," said Mr Collingwood.

"Well, the handsome one."

"I do not think either of them handsome. But, Miss Harriet, I really must bid you good morning."

"Answer me first; you know who he is; very tall, dark, and talkative"——

"I suppose you mean Mr Forsyth," said Mr Collingwood, gravely. "I do not recommend him to your acquaintance, Miss Harriet."

"I didn't suppose you would. There—I release your hand and patience;" and, adding something which failed to reach our ears, the young lady rode off, gathering her brown drapery about her as she went.

Without a word, except those expressed by a deep-drawn breath, Mr Collingwood crossed the road, and entered the pleasant shade on the other side.

"Confess that you are out of patience, for once," said Kate, laughingly, as we overtook him; "but, Mr Rodney, there is no one left in the road to run away from now."

"I will confess and beg pardon both, after such a reprimand," he said, with a quick smile of assurance that it was not from us he meant to run away. "Aren't you too tired to go any further? And you, Gracie, I should think your patience might have failed?"

"I am not tired."

"Nor I," said Kate; "but perhaps you are?"

"Not with walking. I never can rest after such a conversation till I have walked it off. There is something very far removed from folly and weariness in the quiet shade of these forest trees; it is so pure, so peaceful, that the mind is as much refreshed as the body."

"You wouldn't have thought our woods very peaceful the other day—wasn't it too bad?" said I, recollecting the next moment that I ought not to have said it. But Mr Collingwood had that happy tact which never sees more than the pleasant and polite side of a thing. It would have been difficult to offend him, if you had tried—impossible to do it accident-

ally. So he answered my question as simply as it had been put.

"Rather too bad, Gracie; and yet it afforded me some amusement."

"Amusement!" I said, looking up at him.

"I should have said, was the means of it. Ezra Barrington gave us a most striking account of the whole affair; and I am sure you would have been amused, even in the midst of your sorrow. He said, 'He guessed Mr Carvill would have felt cut up, if he had seen Miss Kate and Miss Grace sitting on the stones and looking at the fire.' And, Gracie, he thinks that your sister 'goes a little ahead of all other young ladies;' so you must forgive him for making me laugh."

We laughed ourselves, heartily enough, at this representation, wondering privately what kind of a reply Ezra got for his pains. And then having ascended a little hill where the thinned trees gave us a view of the country round, we turned to go home.

"There goes Miss Brown," I said, pointing to a dark little cloud on the distant highway.

"Does she always do so, Mr Rodney?" said Kate.

"Not always just so—she generally acts in character."

"Why don't you tell her what people think of her behaviour?"

"She knows now, Gracie, it would be wasting words."

"I think you are wrong, Mr Rodney," said Kate; "she may be just carried away by her own flightiness. I'm sure I would thank anybody for speaking the truth to me in her place."

"In her place!" he said. "My dear Miss Kate, if you were anywhere near that, I am afraid I *should* tell you all I think of it—more, perhaps, than I have any right to. Happily there is no danger."

"You wouldn't call it waste words, and think we were not worth the trouble?"

"The one thing is about as possible as the other," said Mr Rodney, smiling. "But as for Miss Brown—she thinks advice is 'good fun,' as she calls it. I have seen her tried, or at least know that she has been—she rather likes to draw people into reproving her."

A slight rustling among the dry twigs made us stop and look; and from a clump of bushes near us a hare darted away

with all the speed that fear could give—there was fear in the very stretch of its slight body across the ground; and its ears lay back to their full extent, as if to take note of our steps. In another instant our four-footed companion had come back from contemplating a woodpecker, and had given himself to the pursuit. Involuntarily I clasped my hands at that disproportioned match of size and strength. But the habit of obedience was too strong for instinct, and Mr Rodney's quick, decided "Wolfgang!" brought the dog at once to a stand—not willingly; his eye sent back a beseeching request to have the injunction taken off.

"Come!" said his master quietly, and Wolfgang turned and walked up to us; but as his head was raised to receive Mr Rodney's caress, and his eye most affectionately answered the word of praise from that loved voice, there was something still in its expression which said it was a pity his master didn't know better!

"Oh, here is its form!" I said—"look, Kate—this little round place at the foot of the pine-tree, with the branches hanging all over it. The leaves are warm yet! Silly thing! if it had stayed still, we should not have seen it. It has given itself a fright for nothing."

A little more time brought us to our own door, but our companion refused to come in.

"We have had such a pleasant walk!" Kate and I said as we shook hands with him.

"It has been most pleasant to me," he answered, "and has done me more good than anything else I could have tried. Good morning—I will not say good-bye till to-morrow."

And with a somewhat slackened step Mr Collingwood crossed the lawn, and took the little path that led to the Bird's Nest.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MISS EASY.

"The path by which we twain did go,
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,
Through four sweet years arose and fell,
From flower to flower, from snow to snow.

"But where the path we walk'd began
To slant the fifth autumnal slope,
As we descended, following Hope,
There sat the Shadow fear'd of man."

TENNYSON.

How did we hear it? how did we bear to hear it?—I do not know—there seems a mist over that day when my father came in from his walk, and told us what she herself had said—that the life-current of the best friend we had at Glen Luna would perhaps not last out the tide of that swift-running year.

I say I know not how we heard it, and yet I remember the unbelief—so hard to give up; the bitter tears, so hard to stay. The anxious questioning of physicians, the unvarying reply—that those months of weakness and ill-health had been but the gradual wearing out from which there was no return—the gentle drawing back of every bolt and bar that hindered the free spirit's flight. Yet still Kate and I hoped, in spite of the grave certainty on my father's face—the steadfast sorrow on Mrs Howard's; with a hope that, Phœnix like, died and sprung up again from its own ashes. It *would* live—everywhere but in Miss Easy's presence. She did not speak to us of her daily decreasing strength: she was placid, cheerful as she had ever been; and, except that we found her on the sofa, instead of at the window, or in her garden, things seemed much as usual. But the eye that met us as we entered the room, the quiet keeping of

our hands after the first clasp was over, said, oh! how plainly, "Not long!"—and sometimes the steady, absent gaze through the bay-window, spoke of other scenes with which the mind was already growing familiar. We could have better borne an expression that had more of earth. Much as we had loved her for those years of sympathetic friendship, we were drawn yet closer by the love with which she now clung to us, even more than ever—as deepen the waters of a stream before the barrier that is raised to their future progress. Miss Easy's greatest earthly comfort seemed to be in our society. At first it was little more than the society of heart—even our eyes shrank from encountering hers; and many an hour passed in almost unbroken silence. Not always—sometimes we ventured to talk, and often read to her; and sometimes—but that was not at first—we sang her favourite hymns. And by degrees, as heart and voice learned to control themselves, we grew to loving all—especially the last—as no pleasure can be loved that is not mixed with one drop of great bitterness.

I said there was no spring like that of life—neither is there any autumn like that which sometimes follows the young heart's summer: when the leaves fall that cannot be replaced, and the birds fly away that will never come back; when the stream that swept off the rubbish of every-day life is stayed with ice which the spirit will scarce ever have heat enough to thaw away. In the calm we had enjoyed for several months, old annoyances seemed to have faded out, but, with this new, real sorrow, how quickly and vividly they all revived! We felt as if it was the fall of everything;—money diminishing, difficulties increasing, and the one friend near us whom we loved and trusted, passing away like the rest! It is not enough to have the support of one's own immediate family—a single fibre of confidence that can take root without, fetches much comfort, and strengthens and refreshes all within. And the fibre takes hold so joyously if perchance it finds a soil that neither repels nor dries it up!—it is hard transplanting.

"Yes," said Miss Easy, thoughtfully, as we sat by her one afternoon—"yes—we have loved each other very much. Ever since the day when this child came running in from the woods, and stood looking so shyly and quietly at me, I have loved her—loved you all. I thought the wind had the best hair-brush I had ever seen, Gracie. And you are just what you were

then—yes, every one of you—only better. What should I do without you now?"

"I wish you would let us stay here all the time, dear Miss Easy," said Kate.

"No; it isn't necessary for me, and it wouldn't be good for you, dear—no, I am sure of it. I won't let you be here except in the day—at least, not at present."

"We love to be here," said Kate, softly; and I looked up and added, "Very much!"—and Miss Easy smiled her belief of our words, but still repeated—

"Not at present."

How glad we all were that Miss Avarintha was away! how happy to want her bustling attentions! and, though Miss Easy never said as much, we were sure she thought it. Indeed, she could hardly help feeling the different manner in which my stepmother did everything; for, putting heart out of the question, Mrs Howard was perfect in that very point where Miss Bain was most deficient—"the not too much"—a blessed thing everywhere, especially in a sick-room. How quietly and thoughtfully was all arranged, provided, or directed! and by such counsels and example, Kate and I became, as Miss Easy declared, "the two best little mice she had ever seen." But my stepmother could not be satisfied that the long nights should be passed alone; and, by dint of a true woman's gentle management and persuasion, she carried her point, and came to the Bird's Nest every night to take the place we had supplied by day. And then, after an early breakfast, Kate and I would have a quick frosty walk in the morning air, to find my stepmother at her friend's side, reading or talking in a voice that carried comfort with it. And Miss Easy would say, tearfully—

"I went to sleep with your mother here, Katie, and I dreamed that it was an angel."

The days never seemed long when we sat there working and talking, or listening in our turn—the bright hopefulness of Miss Easy's face almost forbade their being sad: we were half beguiled into her glad acceptance of whatever God sent. But as November fairly set in—as the leaves lost more and more of October's bright colouring, and fluttered dry and shrivelled from the half-stripped trees, how were the days winged!—how was the little wood-path that we trod every morning dark with more than the sun's absence! And as his long beams looked at

us over the Brown Bluff as we walked slowly home at night, they glanced from my heart as it had been ice—bringing only a quick feeling of pain by their exceeding brightness.

We were less constantly with Miss Easy now—she could not bear to have many in her room at once, and my stepmother, being most needed, hardly ever left it. A letter from Miss Easy's own hand (she would let no one else write it) had summoned Mr Rodney; and he had arrived, and did very much to help and support both patient and nurse. Still our friend made a point of seeing us every day, but they were quiet visits —little said on either side except by the eye and the hand, and that little almost too much. Many a time did Kate and I go weeping home, after one of those long looks of affection from Miss Easy, so full of sympathy for our trembling words, so unshrinking, so undoubting for herself.

The last few days of November came, and with them all the glory of Indian summer—warm, sunny, breathless: the remaining leaves unstirred; the hills blue with haze. Even Brown Bluff lost its ruggedness under the universal veil of that soft sunlight.

We had gone rather late to the Bird's Nest, hoping first to get some message; for without this the walk was always one of painful forebodings: but no message came, and not willing to wait longer, Kate and I set out. No word was spoken—the bright glory of the afternoon was oppressive—clouds would have been pleasanter. We could not breathe freely in that perfect stillness; and, as we passed the white curtains—hanging listlessly and unlooped-up now—our steps were quickened, and I saw Kate's hand pressed upon her heart, as if to silence that too.

We saw no one when we first reached the house, and going softly up stairs, we entered Miss Easy's room. She appeared to be half sleeping, and with more weariness and prostration in her attitude than we had ever seen—the position of the very fingers seemed involuntary. She was a little raised up, supported by pillows, and my stepmother's gentle hands had arranged her hair, and tied over it one of those handkerchiefs which it had become second nature to wear; and a very slight motion of the fringed ends was the only token that breath yet came through the parted lips. We gazed fearfully for a moment, then looked round for Mrs Howard. She had gone to lie down; and there was no one in the room but Mr

Rodney, who had risen at our entrance, and now stood at the other side of the bed—a look was our only greeting.

The windows were all open, and the warm light had found its way even in here; and beautiful pictures lay without—on one side, of the lake—on the other, of meadow-land, then our bluff, and the smoky hills beyond. Again that painful stillness—the chirp of a bird, the rustle of some dry leaf as it fell, were all—each breath that we drew was more and more smothered; while Mr Collingwood's watch measured off the minutes that we were to stand there.

They were not many. Miss Easy turned her head slightly, and opened her eyes; and her first look fell on us. The never-failing smile came on the instant—grave, amid all its sweetness.

"Come to see me once more!" she said, holding out her hand. "Dear children! yes, they have been such a comfort!"

We stooped down to kiss her, but without venturing to speak; and then, when we had drawn our chairs close to the bed, she took both our hands in one of hers, and giving the other to Mr Rodney, she again closed her eyes, and lay for a while quiet: the gentle pressure of the hand from time to time just telling that she remembered and loved our presence.

"Katie," she said, then, speaking low, and at intervals, "never allow yourself to dread anything. Ever since I lost my mother, one sorrowful thought has been on my mind—that I should die alone—and see what has come of it!—how safely we may trust all to God's arranging! What could I have more?—not one friend, but several—the best. Could any sister have been like your mother?—could I have loved my own children better than I love you three?"

"The love is not lost," said Mr Rodney, gently.

Again she lay still, but looking out at the bright landscape and the declining sun.

"It was from this window I saw your flag, little Gracie—and thought what a sister it must be for whom you took so much trouble—how long ago—how past! We have been very happy together—we shall be yet happier—I trust. 'Not lost'—O no!—it brings some pain, but more pleasure. I am quite happy—I shall look for you all!"

"You are not suffering, dear Miss Easy?" said Kate, after another pause.

"No, love—I have nothing but peace—this weariness only

betokens rest—'from this place I cannot so much as see Doubting Castle.'"

Another short silence, and then, without opening her eyes, Miss Easy said—

"Sing to me."

But how? We had commanded ourselves so far—our hearts had been, as it were, locked up that no sorrow might come forth to shew itself: but that little request told so much of the past, so much of the future, compliance was almost impossible—it was like the touch of a master-key. In vain Kate strove—the words would not come unless tears came with them; and then, thoughtfully kind as ever, Mr Rodney gave us time, and himself began the hymn—

"Thou very present Aid
In danger or distress!
The mind that still on thee is stay'd,
Is kept in perfect peace."

The words, the tune, albeit the voice that sang them steadied itself with difficulty, calmed us. There are some feelings too high, too much above the world not to stay its tears; and that one breath of 'things eternal' seemed to keep down the swelling of our hearts—to carry them away from 'things temporal;' and still clasping Miss Easy's hand, we sang to her of that faith she had so long practised—that refuge she had so long sought.

"Another," she said—"my favourite."

Again we sang, but the words were more of life's weakness—it was harder work.

"'We would see Jesus'—for the shadows lengthen
Across this little landscape of our life;
'We would see Jesus,' our weak faith to strengthen,
For the last weariness—the final strife.

"'We would see Jesus'—for life's hand hath rested
With its dark touch upon both heart and brow;
And though our souls have many a billow breasted,
Others are rising in the distance now.

"'We would see Jesus'—the great rock foundation
Whereon our feet were set by sovereign grace.
Not life nor death, with all their agitation,
Can thence remove us if we see His face.

"'We would see Jesus!'—other lights are paling
Which for long years we have rejoiced to see:
The blessings of our pilgrimage are failing—
We would not mourn them, for we go to thee!

"'We would see Jesus.'—Yet the spirit lingers
Round the dear objects it has loved so long;
And earth from earth can scarce unclose its fingers,—
Our love to thee makes not this love less strong.

"'We would see Jesus.'—Sense is all too blinding,
And heaven appears too dim—too far away.
We would see thee to gain a sweet reminding
That thou hast promised our great debt to pay.

"'We would see Jesus!'—this is all we're needing,—
Strength, joy, and willingness come with the sight.
'We would see Jesus'—dying, risen, pleading;—
Then welcome day! and farewell mortal night!"

The mind might have had its wish, for Miss Easy's face was clear as if all shadows of earth had fled away—as if faith had almost given place to sight, when she said—

"Once more—'My faith looks up to Thee!'"

"My faith looks up to thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary:
Saviour divine!
Now hear me, while I pray;
Take all my guilt away;
Oh! let me from this day
Be wholly thine!

"May thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart,—
My zeal inspire:
As thou hast died for me,
Oh! may my love to thee,
Pure, warm, and changeless be,—
A living fire!

"While life's dark maze I tread,
And griefs around me spread,
Be thou my guide;—
Bid darkness turn to day,
Wipe sorrow's tears away,
Nor let me every stray
From thee aside.

"When ends life's transient dream;
When death's cold sullen stream
Shall o'er me roll;—
Dear Saviour, then, in love,
Fear and distrust remove;
Oh! bear me safe above—
A ransom'd soul!"

It was sung—though with that nervous moving of the lip and wavering of the voice that were controlled only because they must be; but with the ending of the last verse all my fortitude gave way—I was trembling from head to foot.

Closer Miss Easy held my hand.

"He will do that," she said—"for me—for you. 'His covenant will he not break,'—His word cannot fail—see that your trust fail not." She was silent a moment, and in that moment came the twittering of a bird under the window, clear, distinct—it was like the echo of those last words, "See that you trust Him!" And Miss Easy looking up at us with exceeding fondness, and with a smile that yet shone through tears, said—

"Good night, my dear children!—I must not keep you longer."

We bent over her, and passing her arm round each of us, she kissed us once and again, and then, after one more long look, quietly closed her eyes, and we left her. But as we passed through the door, we heard her say slowly—

"No more on earth!—but oh, Mr Rodney, I shall see them in heaven!"

And hastily going down stairs, Kate and I went into the little parlour, and wept out all the smothered feelings of that afternoon.

"No more on earth!"—she spoke true. When we met my stepmother in the morning there was no need to ask tidings—they were written in her face. Gentle, peaceful as had been life, even such was death—"the golden bridge from earth's clay banks to heaven's shore!"

The Indian summer still lingered—as lingered the smile upon Miss Easy's face—loth to give place to darkness and decay. It was there to the last—the soul's own gilding on its broken temple—the written receipt of all the blessings to which she had looked forward. That face might have convinced an unbeliever;—how strongly it repeated to us, "See that your trust fail not!"

In that very room where three days before we had sung of the hope that was now perfected, we three stood looking from the north window. The same golden light, the same soft haze, the same sun sending his slant beams over the Brown Bluff; while along the little path that wound about its base, rising and falling with the broken ground, went the little train of dark figures. They were but few—Mr Ellis, my father, Mr Rodney, our old retainer Ezra Barrington, Squire Suydam, and some of the poor country people, whom she had befriended, were all. We would not have had it otherwise—we would not have had a crowd of careless ones:—in

that handful of men there were not more figures than hearts; and as they now and then stopped to change bearers, we knew it was a precious office to them all—knew there was not one whose foot would not go gently over the rough ground, whose hand was not tenderly adjusted to its work. And so we watched them—sending our hearts, too, with the procession, till it had passed round the bluff, and in all that fair prospect there was nothing but the warm sunshine of Indian summer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR BARRINGTON IN A RING OF ROSES.

"I passed by the walls of Balclutha, and they were desolate."
OSSIAN.

At the earnest request of Mr and Mrs Howard, Mr Rodney remained with us for the few days during which he finished and arranged all the business that had been intrusted to his care. It was not much. Miss Easy had given him her cottage and all its contents, except some parting tokens to us. But not finding just the person he wished to take charge of it, Mr Rodney accepted my stepmother's offer of storage-room for such things as were most valuable and easily removed, and then the little abode was securely fastened up, and left untenanted—unvisited, save by the sighing winds and our quiet footsteps. For Kate and I still loved to go there, and to look up at the windows and imagine the light that once came from them; and never did we leave the little far-off church, without going to the one spot near it that we loved best.

It was the night before Mr Rodney went away; and in that wearied state of reaction which follows a time of mental and bodily excitement, we were sitting round the fire after tea, silently musing. For a while I had mused like the rest, and then my thoughts came back from their wanderings, and were concentred upon the group around me. What were they all thinking of? I drew a little more into the shade of the chimney, and tried to determine. My stepmother I judged was asleep; and no wonder, after what she had gone through—if her mind worked at all, it was under the influence of the same fatigue which had drooped her head upon my father's shoulder, and closed her eyes in such quiet rest. Mr Howard himself was very far from

sleep—whatever his mind was debating, mine might as well have threaded the labyrinths of the milky way as the expression of his face—I could make nothing of it. That did not surprise me—I seldom could. I leaned forward to look at Kate. She sat on a low seat at the other side of the chimney, her head bent down, and resting on her knees; but though absolutely motionless, I felt sure she was awake; and though the firelight shone but upon the hand that shielded the side of her face, it seemed to me that I read its look, even in those very closed fingers. I knew with what steady, sobering effect our changed circumstances had wrought, in spite of the young life that had often rebelled against it—I knew how very deeply she had felt this last sorrow—and I thought of her in our old parlour in Philadelphia, and then as she was soon after she came to the Glen, when she talked with my father about our neighbours! How little her attitude now spoke of that touch of pride which my father had called her only fault! But surely the pride had taken other things with it—I could not look at her for a while—it grieved me.

She had not stirred when I again turned my head; but, as I watched her, a slight motion at her side caught my eye, and as the fire blazed up I saw Wolfgang's paw, stretched out and lying upon her dress. His head rested quietly upon his master's foot, which the other paw protectingly encircled;—if dogs can have presentiments, then was Wolfgang's position "no for naething." But he slept profoundly, with only now and then a portentous long breath. He was the only unchanged one of the party—the vicissitudes he had seen he had wanted sense to appreciate; and the three and a half years since I made his acquaintance might have been three and a half weeks, for all that appeared.

Not so his master. I could see Mr Collingwood very distinctly, though he was a little further off than the rest; but he sat with one arm resting on the back of his chair, and his face thus turned towards me was thrown into full relief by his dark dress—I thought I had never seen there so small an amount of health and spirits. It was not quite a year since his return from Bermuda, and well I remembered noticing how much brightness of eye and manner had vanished before the experience of the previous year. But then there had been the joy of getting home, of being among friends again—now his best friends were not, and from the next best he was going

away. Yet never had he looked more characteristically like himself. I could not see the eyes, they were looking down; but the mouth wore a singularly sweet and almost childlike expression of trustfulness—of the most absolute, grave submission—submission, as it seemed to me, that regarded as much the future as the past. I wondered to myself what possible contingencies he could be contemplating.

Apparently my father's revery had brought him back to the every-day walks of life, for his eyes suddenly came from the fire to me, and next took a very particular survey of each person present. Then quietly laying his hand upon Mr Collingwood's shoulder, my father said—

"Mr Rodney, 'there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.'"

Perhaps the person addressed thought the words conveyed some slight reproof, for he coloured a little as he looked up, and replied—

"I was not 'rough-hewing,' sir, believe me."

"When will you be through with your studies?" said my father, abruptly.

"Not for two years and more."

"And you will be living away from here all that time, Mr Rodney!" I said, despairingly. "Do you know how long you have been away already?"

"I do indeed, Gracie—better than you can."

"I don't know where the next two years will place us as they roll on," said my father; "but so long as we are here—so long as we have a home anywhere, Mr Rodney, it is yours too. Will you remember my words?"

"I could not forget them, Mr Howard," he answered, with one of his old looks of brightness and pleasure. But it changed immediately.

"Then come to us whenever you can," said my father. "When is your next time of leisure?"

"Not for some months, sir; and I shall be further off this year than I was the last. I cannot tell when you will see me again—I dare not promise myself that it will be soon—there may be several hindrances in my way."

"But you mustn't be hindered, Mr Rodney," I said; "we shall want to see you so much."

"And, as Grace says," remarked Kate, "perhaps Wolfgang will get tired of us."

"I shall get tired of him if he does," said Mr Rodney. "No, that cannot be; I fear the weariness will be on your side, if you often indulge him with such a place as he enjoys at present."

"It would have been unkind not to let him in to-night."

"And other nights," I said. "He is never in the way; mamma was saying that only this morning; and papa is so fond of dogs!"

"Well," said Mr Collingwood, with a smile at my earnestness, "I am sure of Wolfgang's comfort; but remember, Gracie, you have promised to let me know if any of you should wish him away."

"You may be quite easy on that point," said my father.

We were alone, indeed, when Mr Rodney had gone. Not a friend in the neighbourhood for whom we cared much—not one; and it was fast becoming true, that the neighbourhood cared little for us. We did not regret it that winter; the sleighs that came were so loaded with fashions, and entertainments, and new buildings, the last arrivals of news from town, and the arrivals that were daily expected; we saw them drive off with pleasure. Mr Ellis was always very welcome, but he was too far off, and too busy, to come often.

We had taken Caddie back—partly because we could not bear to have her go to strangers, partly from the belief that Mrs Howard's health would by no means endure such another time of exertion. And, as my father said, "We had tried the experiment, and it didn't seem to make much difference—we might as well be comfortable while we could." And that was a comfort, to the body at least; though perhaps it gave the mind more time to bethink itself.

Oh, hearts and affections! of what stuff are they made!—There was no feeling, no real loneliness in that distant churchyard; and yet, when the weather changed for cold, driving winds and winter storms, it gave me a pang—I never heard them without it; and even the snow had lost its charm, for I thought of it falling cold and thick upon Miss Easy's last resting-place. The solitude was not felt there, but it weighed upon me—a constant, undefined pain that only declared itself as some bitter blast swept eddying round the house; or when we gathered about our little twilight fire, that shone more on the past than the present. The spring came—but its warm sun and springing vegetation had their contrasts—it was like

going to some old lookout point, to see what changes a year had wrought in the landscape. Ah, how many this time! and there was not a flower or a bird that did not speak of them.

Kate and I had determined that the little rose-hedged garden should not be left to utter desolation—we could not bear the thought. Keep it in perfect order we could not, for it was too far away, but my stepmother agreed to walk there with us every afternoon, that at least the flowers might be kept trimmed and tied up, and the more flourishing weeds pulled away. It was a great pleasure to do this—there was nothing in the garden with which we had not some association—that we did not love for Miss Easy's sake; and to spend upon her favourite plants some of the love we bore her, seemed almost a relief. Now and then my father went with us, and applied his strong hand and knife to the Cherokee rose, which had learned that it was a free country.

We were there one day, smoothing the earth about the tulip and daffodil shoots, and watching the fair and sunny-faced crocuses, that seemed almost to open wider as we looked at them, and Mrs Howard stood watching us; when Ezra Barrington came trampling along the road, whistling his favourite "Hail, Columby." At sight of us he checked foot and voice together, and turning about, walked up to the hedge.

"Well!" he remarked, "that does go ahead of all I ever see or heerd tell on! You baint agoin' to dig it up, be you?"

"Oh no, we can't do that," said Kate; "we are only making it look a little nice."

Ezra gave two or three nods of his head, and then stood in contemplative silence.

"I reckon the posies would grow a deal better if there was a plough or sunthin 'nother run about amongst 'em," he said, at length.

"Yes, indeed," I said, looking sadly at our insufficient top-dressing; "the ground wants much more done to it, but this is better than nothing." And, somewhat disheartened by the recollection how little better it was, I stooped down and began at another place.

"I s'pose it wouldn't take me long to fix it," said Ezra, ruminating.

"But you haven't time," said Kate.

"I s'pose I could find it," he replied in the same meditative way,—"I never looked for anything yet I *couldn't* find, 'cept a

four-leaved clover—and I don't believe *that* ever had existence, though my woman says she's seen 'em. Gracious! Miss Kate," he added energetically, and surveying the little patch of ground with great contempt—"why, if I had a team in here, I'd put through it afore you could say gee!"

"But then the plough wouldn't do," said I; "and digging is slower work."

"That's a fact!" said Mr Barrington, gravely. "I reckon I could ha' made that up by myself. Well—so long's all Mr Carvill's work gets done, 'tain't none o' his business what else I take a notion to—a bit o' fun 'ill do me as much good as other folks, I'm thinking. But look a here—I can't come down to this 'ere 'ring o' roses' by myself—there'd be the mischief to pay, and nothin' to pay him with, neither."

"Oh, we would come with you any time," said I—"whenever you're ready—and be so much obliged to you, Mr Barrington!"

"That'll work, then," he answered: "'cause you see I don't know nothin' about gimcracks, and I should dig some on 'em up for sartain. I can tell young oats with any man, but my wife says sun flowers is quite different."

"And when will you come?" said Kate, smiling.

"Couldn't say," said Ezra, looking somewhat puzzled—"my idees ain't begun to be made up on the subject. I'll stop down and tell ye. I s'pose Mr Collingwood wouldn't have no objections? by rights he had ought to be asked. He'd like what was done by anythin' of the name o' Howard, and no mistake; but the name o' Barrington, you see, 's another guess sort o' chap."

"I am sure he would be pleased," said Mrs Howard, with a smile.

"Well—I guess likely," said Ezra—"it don't make much odds—only I'd as soon not get mad with him, for he's a leetle the smartest man I know."

The plan, thus satisfactorily arranged, was soon carried out, and Ezra's sturdy arm made almost as light of the matter as if the digging had been ploughing. And by the time that was done, he had got so interested in the work, or the garden, or us, as to spend many a gray morning hour in the wheat field, that he might have time to spare in the afternoon. He would interfere most watchfully to save our hands from briars, or to uproot some dock or mallows that had grown tall unperceived;

but he never attempted the finer work, and would shake his head gravely over our raking, and profess that "we beat him gardening all to pieces!"

And so tended, the garden flourished and looked gay and lovely as ever, save for the one shade that came from the closed and shuttered Venetian window. And the sweet spring wind, that could there gain no admittance, seemed to come sighing back to us to tell of the different reception it had met in former years. It touched my heart so nearly, it found so ready an entrance *there*, that I could sometimes scarce work for weeping. Wolfgang always went with us, and would lie quietly on the grass or the gravel-walk, contributing his share of interest and association.

"Miss Kate," said Ezra, one afternoon, as he gave the last blow to a support for a Lady Banks rose, "I hope there ain't much of the cat about me, as is always lookin' into other people's cupboards; but don't you think this here garden could live along without you for a spell? I'd see that there didn't nothin' mislist it."

"Why, yes, I suppose so," said Kate, looking at him inquiringly.

"'Cause that 'ere curiosity's exhibitin' itself ag'in," said Ezra, as he gave the stake a trial that embodied the spirit of two or three north-westers—"and I reckon you wouldn't care about seein' it. 'Tain't likely I shall ever want to pull *this* up!"

"Mr Carvill?" said I.

"*I* never see nothin' else half so curious," was the satisfactory reply.

"Is he here now?" said Kate.

"Come a-shootin'," said Ezra.

"But will he be likely to come in this direction?"

"Couldn't say," replied Mr Barrington. "If you'd asked me where he *wouldn't* be, Miss Kate, I could ha' telled ye, and that's to home—walk over there any time o' day when you'd calculate to find him, and 'tain't likely you will. If he knowed as much as he thinks he does, he'd be down here straight."

"Why?" I said—"what makes you think so?"

"Hum," said Ezra—"he likes to fire away at most anythin'. He ain't quite a coon yet, neither—so I thought likely he might take you and Miss Kate for pigeons."

It was impossible to make out Mr Barrington's understanding of his own words, for his gravity was impenetrable:—but

we thanked him for his information, and resolved to profit by it. We did not, indeed, wish to meet Mr Carvill; and, not content with absenting ourselves from the garden, we set very short limits to our walks within our own grounds. Vain precaution!

After a chill, cloudy day, which had persuaded us to remain in the house, a few late sunbeams struggled forth, and Kate and I ran out to enjoy them. It was what the Irish call a "pretty" evening—soft and quiet; and, wrapped in our shawls, we rambled on from one walk to another, with no fear of intruders so near home. But it happened that, at the same time, Mr Carvill—whether belated or tired—had availed himself of a short road across our premises to his own; and we met him without even a moment's warning. As usual, he had been after game, but this day had been unpropitious. His bag was empty, his dress looked wet, and himself a trifle discontented. Wolfgang knew him too well to bark, but the dignified growl and raising of the ears sufficiently marked *his* appreciation of the curiosity.

"So," said Mr Carvill, stopping us short as we were about to pass him with only a bow—"so, young ladies, you have got Rodney's dog?"

"Yes, for the present," Kate said.

"Slender piece of time, 'the present,'" said Mr Carvill—"for the *past*, by your leave, Miss Howard; and for the future I will take care of him."

"No, sir," Kate answered, quietly, but with no concession in her voice.

"I haven't an idea what 'no, sir' means—except in some circumstances," said the gentleman, in an under tone. "Is this the beginning of the 'nineteen nay-says,' Miss Howard?"

"I hope fewer than that will content you, Mr Carvill," replied Kate, in the same cool and quiet manner.

"Content go to the winds!" he said—"I'm like to have little of it. What's to hinder my taking the dog home with me now?"

"I must leave that to yourself, sir; but I beg that you will not hinder our reaching home before nightfall."

And by a quick motion we passed him and walked on. But he turned and joined us, after a vain attempt to make Wolfgang follow him in another direction;—the dog most emphatically shewed his teeth—thereby not sweetening Mr Carvill's temper.

"I've heard of 'Love me, love my dog,'" he remarked—"never saw it acted out before! Am I to understand, young ladies, that I alone am to be debarred from shewing my affection to my absent brother?"

The smile with which Kate had greeted Wolfgang's reappearance in front of her, gave place to a somewhat bright colour, but she made no reply.

"Well!" said Mr Carvill, rather sulkily, "silence gives consent to something—I should like to know what! May I venture to inquire to whom the dog belongs?—whether he is a general assignment or a special *gage d'amitié?*—or is it a system of mutual trust? I know *some* people used to think it dangerous for ladies to walk alone."

"I shall believe it in future!" said Kate, as she turned and confronted her tormentor. "Mr Carvill"——

He stopped, and stood profoundly attentive; with such an air of deference too, of admiration, of amusement—it was hard to tell whether he was most glad to have roused her, or most vexed that she had thwarted him. Kate hesitated, and the sparkling glance of her eye spent itself upon a tuft of violets.

"Nothing you can say, sir, will make any difference," she went on—"I wish you would understand that, once for all."

"Rather a mortifying thing to understand, too!" said Mr Carvill—"perhaps, on the whole, satisfactory. But, Miss Howard, with all submission, if what I say really makes 'no difference'—I believe I am dull—it does not occur to me why I may not have the pleasure of saying it."

"Because I am tired of the subject," said Kate, "and don't mean to talk about it any longer."

"Tout de bon?" he replied; "well—of course—if that be so—*silence!* But, after all, I think I am fairly entitled to an answer—your definitive, Miss Howard. Am I to have the dog or no?"

"Certainly not!" said Kate; "he is to stay with us till Mr Collingwood comes for him."

"I wonder what else Mr Collingwood will come for?" said Mr Carvill, impatiently turning away—"I suppose he'll have it, whatever it is! Good-bye, young ladies—pray, don't fail to guard Mr Collingwood's dog with all care and tenderness—a proverb sometimes works both ways." And with steps that promised to give him the benefit of all the wet bushes in his way, our unneighbourly neighbour disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WHAT IS WORTH IN ANY THING,
BUT SO MUCH MONEY AS 'TWILL BRING?"

"There is a comfort in the strength of love;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would overset the brain, or break the heart."

WORDSWORTH.

"ABSOLUTELY left!" said Mr Howard—"missed the stage after all my hurry; and now I can't get to Edmondtown to-day, and by to-morrow Jarvis will have gone west, and my rent in his pocket! Well"——

"One may say 'well' to almost everything," said my stepmother, gently.

"Ay, if one says it in patience—which I didn't. But I don't precisely know how I'm to get along without that money, there's the truth. M'Loon has hoaxed all my tenants here, except Barrington, into paying me no rent till our litigations are settled; and to prosecute and turn them out would cost just about as much as it would come to. No easy work, neither—that fellow O'Reilly keeps a loaded gun, and swears he'll shoot the first man that attempts to oust him; and he's just good enough to do it."

"Oh, pray, don't go near him!" said we, by no means of opinion that life should be risked to gain the means of living.

"I mightn't be any better off if I got him out," said my father—"the next tenant would like enough follow suit. If all the people together don't checkmate me, it will be a wonder! and, if it was only myself, it wouldn't be much matter if they did."

"But, papa," said Kate, "you know we are never sad nor cast down if you are not; and, as you told me once, these are but trifles—just think how well we are, and how happy, in

spite of it all. And, as to being checkmated," she added, smiling, "the queen can make any number of diversions, and Grace and I are the willingest of all little pawns—it would be a wonder if we couldn't *un*checkmate ourselves, papa."

"Yes," said Mr Howard, a little bitterly, "if one wasn't tied hand and foot! Cut off all a man's ways of raising money or almost of living, and then tell him to pay! M'Loon would contrive some sort of a debtor's prison in any country, I believe."

"Not quite," said my stepmother—"better starve out of doors than in the fleet, and I have no idea that we shall do either. I am sure a decree has gone forth to the contrary."

My father drew a long breath, that half said she was right and half that she knew nothing about it.

"So am I sure—when I'm in my calm senses;—once in a while this multitude of cares and arrangements presses upon me till I get bewildered, and then the world seems upside down when it's only my poor head."

Mrs Howard let her slight fingers rest upon his forehead, where so much rougher things had had their sway, but she said nothing; and stood looking at the fire with all a woman's unselfish sorrow in her face.

My father's eyes had taken the same direction, but the fire said different things to him—or he took them differently; for, while my stepmother looked through larger and brighter tears, his face cleared up, and at length he said with a smile—

"There is magnetism in some people's fingers, let who will deny it! I who sat down here believing myself a poor man, am suddenly deluded into thinking that I am richer than anybody else." And, bringing the little hand appreciatingly to his lips, my father looked brightly towards Kate and me; and our tears were not the less ready that their source was sweetened.

"I suppose," said Mr Howard, after a pause, "since I am here, I may as well go off to Wiamee and see if there is such a thing as a man to be had; for Adam M'Kee and I must dissolve partnership—I can't stand him any longer."

"Oh, papa," said Kate, as he reached the door, "what if you were to take a basket and bring us some eggs?"

He stopped and looked round, the cloud coming back a little.

"I haven't a bit of change, my dear."

"I have got some!" I exclaimed—"I have got that half dollar that you gave us before you went away the last time, papa."

"Better keep that, Gracie," said my stepmother, "we might want it more. We can do very well without the eggs," she added, smiling to my father, who gave us a look that was all sorrowful in its affection, and went.

"It's such a pity we haven't chickens of our own again, mamma!" I said. "Why dosen't papa buy some?"

"It's cheaper to buy eggs, Gracie."

"Oh, mamma! do you think so? have you forgotten the dozens of eggs Ezra Barrington used to bring us—and all for nothing?"

"But the hens didn't live upon nothing; and we have no Ezra Barrington now, but only a man who would perhaps steal both corn and eggs."

"It's an astonishing disadvantage to poor people not to have a little money!" said Kate. "This buying in small quantities, and wearing out one's best things because just at the moment one can't get second best; and now in this instance—we are doing without *economical* comforts because we can't afford to have them! *I* think there's a good deal of humbug about it."

She walked to the window, and stood looking out.

"Katie," I said, following her, "do you feel disposed to go with me to the peach-trees now?"

"Not in the least."

"But hadn't we better? Papa won't have time before he goes away, and it will be too late when he comes home. It's a fine cloudy day, too."

"Yes, I will go," she said; "but here is another of the small delusions poor people are under. To imagine that the fruit *you and I* must thin out can ever be profitable!—I wish we had the money the walls cost!"

"It's not worth while to go back to that now, dear," said Mrs Howard—"you know, 'when the best things are not attainable, the best must be made of those that are.' I am very sorry you should have to do anything that you don't like, but the day is not hot—maybe the air will do you good. And you know we found the fruit money very well worth having last year."

"My dear mamma," said Kate, laughing, "pray don't be sorry that I must do something I don't like—it's very good

for me—what I care most about is that I can't do something I like better. I would rather sit down and read than stand up and pick off little apricots and peaches. And the money is worth having—though I never can see that it makes much difference. Come, Gracie—have you got the scissors?"

So passed the morning. Then came Mr Howard and dinner, and after it a long conversation.

"Did you find a man, papa?" said Kate.

"I found so much else, my dear, that I didn't even look for one."

"Didn't look, when you went on purpose!"

"No. I wish you had my dislike of exclamation points, Kate."

"But, you see, papa," I said, "she has tired herself with the peaches this morning, and we were thinking that perhaps you would find somebody that could do it."

"I will, before long," said Mr Howard, taking her hand in his. "And you needn't either of you have touched the fruit—I didn't mean you should—I am very sorry you are tired."

"It hasn't hurt us, papa," said Kate, her eyes giving quick answer to his change of tone. "But what did you find at Wiamee?"

"A good reason for being always patient, Kate—even when one is left by a stage-coach. If I had *not* been left, we should have been checkmated with a witness."

He went on to tell us that, upon going into a store in that little town, the first thing he saw was a paper signed by Self & Mulhawl, advertising the whole contents of our house to be sold at auction on the following Monday. And this was Thursday afternoon.

"So that I have just time," he concluded, "to see Phibbs and set him to work. I hope it may not be too late now, but, if I had got off to Edmondtown it *would* have been, without question; and we should have known nothing of it till the sheriff came with his red flag."

"But what has become of the injunction?" said Mrs Howard.

"And what can Mr Phibbs do?" said Kate.

"Don't know, I'm sure, one thing nor t'other; but lawyers can find something to do in every case—if they can't, they aren't worth much. So I must try and not miss the stage to-morrow, for that would be bad."

Mr Phibbs, the chief lawyer of our region, did not disappoint my father's expectations—that is, he found something to do; and Mr Howard came home in high spirits.

"It's all arranged, and Phibbs is to bring a replevin—so Self & Mulhawl will get little good by their unrighteous proceedings."

"What *is* a replevin?" said Kate.

"I don't more than half know, myself," he replied, "but that doesn't matter. It's a long stick, my dear, to push these people away from our front door—that's all we need understand. There must be an appraisement, though, that I may know in what amount I must give security."

"What for?"

"For fear I should run away, and defraud Self & Mulhawl of their 'just rights'—which I'd give them if I didn't call myself a gentleman."

"But security!" said Mrs Howard, her face falling again—"you'll never be able to get it!"

"Why won't I? there's half a dozen people would give it in a moment—Adler, and Egerton, and I don't know who."

"I'm sure I don't. I wish they may not have all heard the proverb, 'Let go thy hold when a wheel runs down hill.'"

"By your leave, my dear, that is a speech of Lear's fool."

"May it not be a proverb for all that?" said my stepmother, smiling; "and Mr Adler wouldn't be the first man that has taken a fool's advice. But I hope it will turn out as you say."

Monday morning came, clear, bright, and calm—we a little feverish. The mere appraisement was a disagreeable affair, even if it went no further; and, as to womankind's schooling itself into the belief of all Mr Howard and Mr Phibbs said, *that* was out of the question. So with some little trepidation we saw the wand of our clock fairy approach the decimal—what strange conjuration would then come over the household? We took our work, and sat down to await it.

A little before the charmed hour appeared the sheriff (who was just at the end of his term) and the man who would succeed him—this last had come for a lesson, and to have all remnants of the business transferred to his hands. A novice he was; but Mr Cross needed no explanation of the "long stick," and being presently satisfied that everything was in proper train, he occupied the time in giving instructions and

information to his subordinate; his sharp and not over pleasant face well contrasted with the look of helpless and somewhat hopeless ignorance with which the other listened, and tried to understand, and didn't make it out.

With these two had come the appraisers. They were rough country-looking men, one in a green baise jacket, the other in none; pantaloons that were "inexpressible" in colour at least; and boots that had certainly never before approached the dais. What could they know of Hebe or minerals?—but there they sat in our sitting-room, nevertheless.

The clock struck. It seems to me as if I heard even now the whirring of that little time-teller, as it briskly counted out the hour and then gave place to shuffling footsteps and a call from the knocker. How my heart sprang and sunk at that conclusion! My father opened the door, and the empty frame was filled by the figures of Messrs Self & Mulhawl.

"Walk in!" said Mr Howard, in a tone of cool indignation; and the door was scarcely closed before another knock ushered in Mr Jenkinson—but without his green spectacles this time. The three worthies sat down—just opposite to them were "the village posse," with "*hats* a row;" and at the far end of the room we yet stood our ground—like mice in a cage of rattlesnakes, only more quiet.

Tilting back his chair, the shirt-sleeved appraiser surveyed the scene with much complacency—that curious satisfaction which a vulgar mind derives from circumstances and events, where one better educated would find only pain; as from the same chemical compound one affinity will draw an acid, and the other an alkali. His neighbour in green baise whispered him from time to time, and they exchanged little nods of sympathy. To look at their faces, and then at the two near me! In these was a strange mixture of strength and weakness—the calm resolve that rose above it all, that could say

"My mind to me a kingdom is;"

and then the anxious glance towards my father—the very yearning, as it were, of powerless affection.

The sheriff had ceased his instructions, and now looked a little uncomfortable—perhaps fearing that his employers would not approve of the replevin; and Mr Howard, after a moment's rush of feeling that prompted him to throw the

whole party out of the window, schooled himself and sat down —between the mice and the rattlesnakes.

"Well, Mr Cross," said Mr Mulhawl, with the air of an injured man, "I suppose *now* you're going on with this business."

Mr Cross looked at my father and then at him—keeping his eyelids down, however, as if he didn't mean to be detected.

"Well, no," he said; "I guess it'll have to be put off—there's a replevin brought."

"A replevin!" The coadjutors looked at each other, and then began a muttered consultation.

"I s'pose we may as well go ahead with our work," said Mr Boggs in the green jacket; "that's got to be done, any how."

"Are the sureties found?" inquired Mr Mulhawl, suddenly.

"Not yet—there'll have to be time giv' for that."

"Of course!" said Mr Self, who "did" the benign for the whole trio. "This is a beautiful place, sir."

"Yes—it's a nice place enough—if it were let alone," replied my father, concisely.

"I am quite glad to have an opportunity of seeing it," pursued Mr Self; "I didn't know that anything would ever bring me this way. Very fine minerals, Mr Howard—of your own collecting?"

I looked at the man—what did he mean by thus commenting on the things he was trying to rob us of?—nothing, I verily believe, but kindness. He felt uncomfortable, and saw we did; and from mere want of skill he pressed upon the thorn he wished to make us forget. But his look was very different from that of Mr Mulhawl, who now sat savagely leaning back in his chair, surveying the room and us as one of the aforesaid rattlesnakes might do an escaped mouse—his face a compound of the sour and hard.

"They'll want some one to go round and shew 'em the things," said the sheriff, with a reference of his elbow to the appraisers.

Kate laid down her work—

"I will go with them, papa—I shewed the furniture to Mr Cross when the levy was made, and I know just what is on the list."

"No, daughter," he said, "I will go myself."

"You could not do it so easily, papa;" and with a whispered word or two, that brought her cheek very near his, she passed

on to the other end of the room; while even Mr Mulhawl drew up his foot out of her way, and Mr Self had nearly risen from his seat; and the posse looked shy when she turned to them and said—

"I will shew you the things now."

And, leading the way with as much composure as if they had been invited guests, she pointed out the cabinet of shells to their inspection, and stood waiting their readiness to go further; but her eye had gone out of the window then, to the fair blue sky beyond; and her thoughts were very far from the unscientific debate at her elbow.

"I should like to have a copy of that list," said my father. "Here—if you'll lend me yours, Mr Cross, I'll make one myself."

"I ha'n't got a copy," said the sheriff, "without it's this on the warrant; but I guess you can have that, if you won't be long."

My father drew his chair to the table, compressing his lips as if to keep down the inward disturbance, and began to write—it was no use. That list, of all our favourite possessions, of almost all our needful furniture; and there, with those people who had so ruthlessly injured him, watching every movement—with us there, too, surrounded by such rough intruders—self-command failed for once—the trembling hand refused to do its office.

"I can *not* do it," he said, throwing down the pen.

That was my grief of the morning. I dared not look at mamma and Kate, but I stood by him, and said—

"I will do it, papa."

"What?" he said, looking up at me with an expression of face I can never forget.

"I will copy that list."

"No, dear—it doesn't matter—don't trouble yourself."

"I would rather do it, papa."

And, drawing the papers from under his hand, I carried them to my corner. It was well clear eyesight was not needed. But the words were familiar, I wrote on in a dream—

1 Turkey carpet.
2 blue damask easy-chairs.
1 lady's cabinet desk.
1 case of minerals, &c. &c. &c.

At another time it would have moved me; now I thought but of the conquered fortitude which I had believed unconquerable. I could have borne anything else better. Mamma had left the room, and the loudest sound there was the muttering of the appraisers. I could just hear—

"Hum—about a dollar, I reckon—I wouldn't give more for it—'twont fetch more. What's in that glass box, Mr Pelton?"

"Some sort of money to look at, I guess—house is full of notions," said Mr Pelton, confidingly, as he made the acquaintance of William the Conquerer on a silver penny—"be worth a sight if they was all liberty caps, but crowned heads don't go down in America."

"The box is handsome, though—I guess it might be good for five dollars."

Writing and weeping and listening, all together—my fingers trembling with their own haste. But the listening brought some encouragement, for the smaller the appraised value, the easier it would be to get sureties—so my father had said. He sat just where I had left him, his head leaning on his hand. A bright thought struck me—perhaps a brace for the body might reach the mind. I went up to him.

"Papa," I said, softly, "won't you come into the kitchen for a minute?"

And selecting the best-looking of the two eggs that yet remained in the basket, I gave it him in some milk. He thanked me with another of those touching looks, and we returned to the other room—I certainly feeling refreshed.

A new knock at the door announced Mr Phibbs, who had come down to prevent mistakes, and now discussed statutes and sureties quite as fast as Mr Cross could follow him. Very soon the three associates got up and left the house, thinking, perhaps, that they could talk more freely in the open air; and Mr Phibbs and the sheriff went back and forth between them and my father, to settle statute limitations and other unintelligible matters.

Meantime the appraisement proceeded slowly. If money "to look at" was of uncertain value, how much more the unrefined ore! and so much time was spent in hand-weighing lumps of iron and grains of platina, and in smelling the unsavoury specimens of sulphur, and wondering at the numberless shapes and colours of unknown minerals, that I began to

think business had merged itself in amusement. Then came sofa and tables, and then Kate, pushing aside a large easy-chair, brought the appraisers face to face with Hebe.

"The fathers!" ejaculated Mr Pelton—"who's that? 'tain't Martha Washington, is it?"

Mr Boggs shook his head dubiously, and glanced towards Kate, as if inclined to ask in his turn, but she gave no encouragement.

"It don't look much like the Gineral," he said, with a critical air—"I don't know as that makes any odds."

"A man and his wife is very often different," remarked Mr Pelton.

"'Tain't set down so in the paper," said his companion, consulting the inventory—"I guess it's something else—*she* had chink enough to buy shoes with, *I* know."

"Well, what'll it fetch?" said Mr Pelton.

"Something short of a fortin, I guess," said Mr Boggs, facetiously; "I don' know but I'd give three dollars for't—maybe a little more, if I knowed who it was."

"I wouldn't," said Mr Pelton—"the figur' o' nobody wouldn't be worth that to me—if it warn't Lot's wife; and I don't say I'd give it for her."

It was as hard a matter to value the books. Homer "looked wonderful, but they guessed nobody 'd buy it;" and Locke and Virgil "wouldn't pay, no how;" the articles were fairly beyond their comprehension, and the ignorance of the appraisers did us better service than they were aware of. By the time Kate had taken them up stairs to try their ingenuity upon beds and bureaus, I had finished my copying, and my father and Mr Cross took the lists to compare them. I thought I heard a sound as of some one in the kitchen, and knowing that Caddie had gone off an errand, I went to see who it might be. No less a person than Mr Jenkinson, who, wishing to soothe his surliness with a cigar, had even entered the house uninvited, in search of the kitchen fire. I supplied him with a match, and shut and bolted the door after him with much satisfaction.

We thought the day's work would end with the appraisement—not so. When all were gone but Mr Phibbs and the sheriff, these two came again into the house to talk over the list with my father, and to strike out all the statute exemptions—the levy had been very indiscriminate. To some things we

were entitled by name, and then to such other things as we should choose up to a certain amount. How disagreeable it was! What should we keep? for, if my father failed to get sureties, all the rest must go. Kate and I carried the copy list up stairs to Mrs Howard, and then went back and forth with her decisions and suggestions. It was hard choosing—hard weighing books against silver, difficult to tell what combination would outweigh our Hebe; and yet the three dollars she stood for would keep our sitting-room carpet; and the *Musée Français* must yield to silver forks. For when we said—

"Oh, mamma! wouldn't you much rather have this?"

Mrs Howard would reply—

"But how can we do without that?"

The choice was made, the amount deducted from the total, and the sum of dollars and cents which was to test some of our friends stood there in black and white. Large enough—with only this comfort, that it might have been larger. And at last, late in the afternoon, our house was cleared of intruders; and when it had undergone sundry purifying processes, we sat down to dinner.

For a week my father was away, seeking sureties; and he came home, having succeeded, indeed, but by the hardest. One couldn't and another wouldn't—rich friend after rich friend had refused, though Mr Howard offered them security; and he had well nigh despaired, when two that were friends indeed gave their names, and in a way that was not the least part of the kindness. As Kate said, "It was a blessed thing all the world were not like some of it."

The proposed sale had only been adjourned, to see if the sureties could be obtained; but by some delay or mistake the issue was not made known to Mr Mulhawl, and the sheriff did not hear of it till the day of adjournment. Then he came over to the Glen, to prevent further difficulty.

Mr Howard was from home, but we were able to give the sheriff all necessary proof that the business was really settled, and he left the house, remarking that he would stay about for a while, lest some one should come. This put us upon the lookout.

Again the wand gave its ten taps, and there—yes, it was Jenkinson, Self, and Mulhawl, who came walking through the woods from the turnpike.

"I declare they shall not come in!" said Kate, "unless

they've a mind to break the house down! there's no telling what they may choose to believe."

And with most eager haste we ran to turn every key and draw every bolt; for, though we knew the matter was all arranged, it was impossible to know what such people might attempt. They chose to believe the truth, however, though they walked and talked for a long time, as if it went hard with them. Once the sheriff came to the house, and was honoured with a window audience; and at last they all adjourned *sine die*—leaving us with a partiality for shut doors that did not go off for months.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A ROBBER IN DISGUISE.

"I had a dream—which was not all a dream."
BYRON.

By the time we had fairly talked out on the Self & Mulhawl subject, it was time to have dinner; and while that was in progress, Mr Howard came in and surprised us most pleasantly. Then there was another long talk, finished off by a question from Kate as to whether "any one else could do anything;" and the somewhat dubious reply from my father, that "he hoped not."

"Are you very tired?" said Mrs Howard.

"I?—a little, not much."

"Too much for a walk?"

"Not a bit—where do you want to go?"

"They say Mrs Barrington is not well, and I thought I should like to see her."

"Get ready, then," said my father; "I want to see Ezra too, and the walk will rest me."

"Mamma," said Kate, just as they were setting out, "Grace and I thought of going to the Bird's Nest—do you think we may without you?"

"Better not," said Mrs Howard; "I dont like to have you take that walk alone. I believe these disturbances have made me nervous. And I am sure you are both tired—Grace looks more like going to bed than anything else—you had better rest this afternoon."

"But don't *you* rest too long here," said my father, "if you want to see Mrs Barrington by daylight. Of course they think what you do about it—one word is as good as a dozen. Come!" and my stepmother hurried off.

"Why, you poor child!" said Kate, coming up to me and taking my face in her hands—"how tired you are, to be sure! Did those people trouble you so much this morning?"

"No—not so very much—I was a little excited, and that tires one, you know, Katie."

"Lie down here on the sofa and sleep—it's the best thing you can do. Mr Boggs knew very little of the comfort of sofas, or he would have put a higher price upon ours."

So I lay down, and Kate covered me up; and for some time I watched her as she sat on a low seat reading, with the afternoon sun glancing across her head—her only extrinsic ornament. Yet, to my mind, the calico frock and white collar set off the graceful, high-bred turn of head and throat to sufficient advantage; and in the face there was all the sweetness that little Paul found in his sister's music—"it was too dear to him." Whoever has not seen *that*, knows little yet about beauty. I studied every line and outline—giving Self & Mulhawl credit for the rather pale cheek, and assigning the slight compression of lip to the long course of our difficulties; and I was busy finding a cause for the somewhat sad and patient droop of the eyelashes, when I fell asleep to go them all over again in a dream.

The sun had not long left the horizon when I awoke, and in its place the firelight shone darkly upon Kate as she knelt before me.

"Gracie," she said, "are you quite determined not to wake up? you have not your usual regard for my words and kisses."

"I didn't feel them, Katie. Have papa and mamma come back?"

"Just—and gone up stairs to make ready for tea."

"Well, I must go, too. Oh, Katie!—I have had such a dream!—have you been asleep?"

"No."

"You were so pale when I lay down—and now this cheek looks flushed. Oh, stay quiet till I tell you my dream. I thought those people had come again, and had taken away everything there was in the house—every single thing—and I was so happy!"

"That was rather odd," said Kate, smiling.

"No, but you haven't heard it all—it wasn't odd a bit. I thought I had watched this sofa go off, last of all, and then I

came in here, and you were sitting by the fire just as I saw you before I went to sleep, and I felt quite happy in a minute; and I came up to you and said—not to you but to somebody else—Mr Rodney, I think—that I didn't care one bit about all that had gone, for I had you still, and that was enough."

"My dear Gracie!" said Kate, as she laid her cheek against mine—"what put such a dream into your head, love?"

"I'm sure I don't know—unless it was watching you as I did when I first lay down;—oh, yes, it was Mr Rodney—I remember—he looked just as he did when I asked him about the channels at Bermuda. But you don't seem to like my dream?"

"There is no particular need of your losing everything, even in imagination, dear Gracie," she said.

"I sha'n't let you get up. It was only a dream, you know—what are you thinking of? and what makes you speak in that way? you don't talk like yourself, Katie. Are those tears in your eyes?"

"There will be, if you look at me so—at present you may suppose that it is a gleam of the firelight."

"Ah, I am not asleep now to suppose any such thing—I'm in the full possession of all my senses, Miss Kate," I said, stroking back her hair.

"What if you were to bring some of them to bear upon me?" said somebody who stood at the head of the sofa, while a hand gently touched my forehead.

"Mr Rodney!" I exclaimed, starting up—"is that you? Oh, I am very glad to see you sir, indeed!"

"Thank you, dear Gracie," he answered, "I am very glad to see you."

"But where did you come from?—how came you here?"

"I came from the other side of the fireplace—whence I walked leisurely to the head of your sofa."

"You are a most unaccountable person at that rate, sir," I said, laughing. "And I suppose you will not say how long you have been here?"

"I don't believe I could," he said, with a smile, "except that I came while you were asleep."

"And I must have heard your voice, and worked it into my dream! how strange! I wonder——didn't you stand by the mantelpiece?"

"All this time? Not quite."

"I shouldn't wonder if I had seen you, too; I dare say I did!"

"And I dare say you didn't," said Mr Rodney, laughing. "You have been remarkably fast asleep; and if you had beheld so unwonted a vision even through 'a half shut eye,' Gracie, I think you would have waked up immediately."

"No, I should have thought it was too pleasant a dream to wake up from. But I thought we were not to see you in a great while again, sir; how did you manage it?"

"Didn't you tell me I 'must come'? and 'must always can,' you know."

"Have you any idea how your hair looks, little dormouse?" said my father, as he came up to us.

"A faint one, papa; I am going to arrange it."

"Tell your mother that we should like to have tea some time in the course of the evening," said Mr Howard; "but it's of no use to hurry a lady—ever. Katie, suppose you try if you can hurry an Irishwoman; I am really tired, and want some tea; and so does Mr Rodney, I'm sure."

See the inconsistency of men! My father had wanted his tea very much, and yet wouldn't come when it was ready. Mrs Howard put the sugar in the cups, and stirred up the cream, and leaned back in her chair; and then leaned forward to look into the teapot and make sure there was water enough; and then despatched a messenger;—which, of course, made my father come—just when he would without it.

"I thought you were in such a hurry!" said Mrs Howard; "and here have we waited this ever so long."

"Well!" said my father; "I was in a hurry; but did you never hear of such a thing as 'waiting till your hurry is over'?"

"And Grace has been three times to call you."

"Very well, my dear, I couldn't help that; I'm sure I didn't want her to come. Sit down, Mr Rodney. I am sorry if I have kept you too long from your tea, sir; but I make no doubt it will do you the more good; there's nothing like having an edge to one's comfort."

"If ye plase, ma'am," said Caddie, coming in, "here's Mr Laross."

"Who's Mr Laross?" said my father.

"Meself doesn't know, sir; it's from the Moon he is."

"I wish he'd stayed there," said Mr Howard, knitting his brows. "However, 'the Man in the Moon came down too soon' when I was a boy, and I suppose he'll always keep it up."

"What are you talking about?" said Mrs Howard; "do, pray, be quiet! It is Mr La Roche; don't you remember, Kate, Mrs Willet said he should bring back your book?"

"Will I fetch him in, ma'am? or say you's at tea?" said Caddie.

"May as well do both," said my father.

"Tell him we are at tea, and shall be very glad of his company," said my stepmother. "Why, Mr Howard, what are you thinking of? are you crazy?"

"I've enough sense left to meet the common emergencies of life, my dear; further than that I won't answer. My head is full enough of thoughts, in all conscience. But you know *I* couldn't have sent such a message; I haven't a waistcoat of benignity that I put on under my best coat when the door-bell rings."

"What an insinuation!" said Mrs Howard.

"No, no," said my father, laughing; "I have the most implicit trust in *your* benevolence; I verily believe you would be glad to have your worst enemy come in and sit down to tea, though you sometimes keep me waiting for mine; but I never reached that point—I keep my love and friendship in my pocket, and take 'em out when I see occasion."

"And did you never have your pocket picked by the means, papa?" said Kate, laughing.

"I have heard of such things happening to other people," said my father. "Singular mood we are all in, to-night; Mrs Howard talkative, Mr Rodney meditative, Kate speculative, and Grace sportive—if one may judge by her face. Just move down and take that next seat, Gracie, opposite your sister."

"Mr Howard is queer, I think," said my stepmother—"why *are* you discomposing everything, and congregating all the gentlemen at your end of the table?"

"Most composing thing I can think of," replied my father, with the utmost gravity, while the lines of Mr Collingwood's mouth told of some amusement. "Good evening, Mr La Roche—I began to suppose you had absconded. Did you lose your way in the hall?"

"Lost my way in the Irish tongue, that's all, sir," said Mr

La Roche, "and couldn't make out what road I was to follow. Miss Howard, I have the honour of returning your Macaulay, new-bound in thanks."

"That's a kind of morocco that doesn't wear," said my father.

"What did Caddie tell you?" said Mrs Howard, after a glance of entreaty at my father; while the new comer laid the book on a side-table behind Kate.

"'A thrifle' of contradictions," said Mr La Roche, laughing. "'It was at ta ye was,' ma'am—that is, 'not at ta at all, at all, but at the table—and there was other company—and the family was late—and would I come in or no.' So at last I determined to come and see what the message really was."

"That we are at tea, and would be glad of your company," said Mrs Howard.

"I have been so strictly charged to entrust the book only to Miss Howard's fair hand," said Mr La Roche, who seemed in no hurry to quit his stand by the tea-board, "that I felt justi fied in acting upon uncertain information."

"And you think you have obeyed?" said Mr Howard,—"that's what I call a free translation."

"But, sir," said the gentleman, laughing, "if you will please to recollect—circumstances alter cases—and the fair hand was not altogether within reach."

"Occupied with bread and butter, in fact," said my father. "Well, Mr La Roche, if you will come round and take this seat, I will supply your hands in like manner. You are acquainted with Mr Collingwood, I believe."

"I have that pleasure—slightly," said Mr La Roche, with some doubtfulness of expression. "By the way, Mr Collingwood, I thought I had understood from Mr Carvill that you were—I forget where"——

"Such being the case, I can neither confirm nor deny his statement," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"No, but I mean—not here."

"Apparently he acted upon uncertain information, too," said my father, coolly.

If Mr La Roche knew little of Mr Howard before, he had a fair chance that evening to improve his acquaintance. My father kept him engaged, in a way that made Mrs Howard more than once look up from her work in a kind of wonder; and though Mr La Roche would perhaps have chosen to fix the centre of conversation among the ladies, he could neither break

away from the gentlemen nor tell precisely why he didn't. At length nine o'clock came, and he went; and as the door closed, my father left his seat, and went through a most energetic arrangement of the fire.

"I wonder what you call 'benignity!'" said Mrs Howard.

"So do I—I haven't an idea that such a quality exists upon earth," said my father, pounding down the sticks of wood.

"Don't you remember, papa," said I, laughing, "how you once said you didn't like Mr La Roche? and how Kate said there might be good things in him?"

"Very likely," said my father, replacing the tongs; "but I presume Kate has found out by this time that my first estimate of people is quite as apt to be right as hers. Haven't you, daughter?" he added with a smile, as he bent down and kissed her.

I thought she looked a little troubled—I could not imagine why.

"But don't let us talk of Mr La Roche," said my father, presently—"if we once begin we shall all 'give tongue,' as your brother would say, Mr Rodney; and I would rather think of something else. Come, put up your needles, and let us look at each other,—this gentleman is puzzling himself, as I do sometimes, with a vain attempt to understand embroidery—or why ladies will work at it."

"I can understand the working of some things well enough, sir," said Mr Rodney, with a very unpuzzled smile.

Mr Howard smiled too, but enforced his injunction.

"Fold it up, Katie, and sing—that will put us all in good humour; give us some of Miss Easy's favourites."

"Come sing with me, Gracie," Kate said. And so dwelling for a while upon what was indeed never long out of mind, we did forget—not only Mr La Roche, but all the weariness and vexation of that day and week.

We must have been in good humour, for we sat talking most pleasantly and happily until a late bed-time. But the next morning Mr Collingwood went away, and we were alone again.

CHAPTER XXX.

KID GLOVES.

> "Ye maist wad think, a wee touch langer,
> An' they maun starve o' cauld and hunger;
> But, how it comes I never ken'd yet,
> They're maistly wonderfu' contented."
>
> BURNS.

"CAN you take a stitch in these gloves?" said my father, holding up a pair of which every individual finger was tulip-shaped.

"Yes, papa," said Kate, laying down a shirt-collar and exchanging her needleful of thread for one of silk. "Well, I *do* think! that is what gentlemen call a 'stitch'!"

"And I should like to have this cravat cut in two—it's so thick and clumsy," said Mr Howard, pulling uneasily at the one he had on, as if he still felt the other round his neck.

"Do you want it to-day, papa?" said I.

"If you can—it don't much matter."

"I'll hem it right away."

My father went up stairs, and when he again passed through the room on his way out, it was to throw a pair of pantaloons on the sofa, with the remark that they wanted "a button or two."

"They are hardly worth putting buttons on," said Mrs Howard. "How shall I ever get him some pantaloons made if he don't get me the stuff?"

Kate sat leaning forward, with the tulip fingers abstractedly piercing the air.

"Mamma, how do you suppose we are to get on?"

"I am as much puzzled as you are, Katie."

"What if I were to get a place as governess somewhere?"

"Then nobody would let you take it," said Mrs Howard,

smiling—"I'm sure I wouldn't. I will never consent to your leaving home in that capacity."

"And I will never consent to it in any. Why, Kate! what would become of me? *I* will not let you go—so you needn't think of it."

She smiled at me, and then, with a half sigh, went on—

"What can we do, mamma? I am not disposed to let this state of things continue if it can be mended—we might copy maps—I know I could do that nicely."

"And so could I—and law papers, mamma."

"But, my dear children," said Mrs Howard, "you cannot bear up the house on your shoulders."

"No, mamma, but it would be a great comfort to earn something. Just now in the mild weather we can manage, but will you inform me how we should get the needful things if it were fall instead of spring?"

Mrs Howard sewed on her buttons in silence.

"Don't you think we had better try, mamma?"

"You might copy," said my stepmother—"I could do it, too, at odd times—and, as you say, it would be a comfort. But I don't like to have you spend your time in such a way."

"Better than spending it in this way," said Kate, again displaying the glove—"and we need not do it too steadily—it can't harm us if we take exercise enough."

"And we are not troubled with interruptions," I said—"there is nothing to hinder us."

"It is so strange!" said Kate. "Why, mamma, *we* are worth just as much as when we were rich."

"More, Katie—but people look little further than the purse—most people."

"And some that know us so well—if they were strangers, it would be less wonder. Mrs Suydam has not been here this spring—to be sure, she is not very well—and neither has Mrs Egerton; and Mrs Willet came but once in all the last year; and I don't believe," said Kate, laughing, "that Mrs De Camp recollects where we live."

"Your father talks of taking two or three pupils into the house—how would you like that?" said Mrs Howard.

I dropped the cravat, and Kate paused with uplifted needle, and we both declared it would be "dismal!"

"He doesn't really mean to, mamma?"

"I hope so—I have advised it."

"You have, mamma!—advised it!"

"Not as a pleasant thing, Katie, but as better than nothing. Your father is not quite decided about it—he would prefer a Greek class at the Moon if it could be got together—but if not, this seems the alternative. It would be far pleasanter than taking boarders."

"I never would do *that*," said Kate—"I had rather be a governess, and have the comfort of thinking that the rest of you were enjoying yourselves."

"That's a pleasant little delusion of yours," said I, laughing.

"But can't papa sell some of those cottages?"

"Being a poor man, no—at least, it seems not. He means to pay off Mr M'Loon with a part of them, if he can; and then try if we cannot start fair with the world once more."

"And does he owe nothing except to Mr M'Loon?"

"I don't know—that Van Wart business can be settled, I hope, but it seems to me I have heard some other debt spoken of."

And laying down her work, Mrs Howard rested her head on her hand in an attitude of rather sad thoughtfulness.

"But, my dear mamma," said Kate, "how many pupils do you suppose it would take to support us?—and this house won't hold quite all the rising generation."

"Not quite. Your father says he wouldn't attempt to manage more than two (I'm sure the *managing* will come on my hands); but though that would not bring us a great deal, it would be something certain—much better than larger uncertainties. And there's another reason for this plan—if we have only Andy about the place, your father ought to be at home."

"Then he will get these same pupils at once, I suppose?"

"While he is away this time, if he can. And, by the bye, Gracie, take a pencil and make out a list of the things we want for the house."

In former years our lists for my father had run thus:—

Box of candles.
Do. tea.
Do. raisins.
Do. herrings.
Bag of coffee.

Barrel of sugar.
Half bbl. mackerel, &c. &c.

Now we said—

"Papa, I have put down tea, for we are near out; and if you could bring us a few herrings, or half a dozen mackerel, we should like it,"—or, "Papa, *could* you get us a pound of raisins? we wanted to make some cake for Kate's birthday—but if it is not convenient, never mind. See, papa, I have marked the things we *must* have, so."

And then, when Mr Howard came home, he would say, producing a paper of tea from his trunk—

"I got your raisins, my dear, but I didn't bring the fish after all, for I hadn't money enough—I was promised some more, but couldn't get it. And, for the same reason, Kate, I did not bring your shoes."

And we, feeling more for his disappointment than our own, would answer—

"Oh, it don't matter, papa—another time will do just as well."

So much did we look at each other's trouble, that we forgot to look at our own. How often did we pass lightly over a real want, because my father had been grieved at his failure to supply it!

Incomprehensible we were to other people. On one occasion Mrs Willet happened to be with us when my father arrived; and as, without unpacking his trunk, he gave us a few trifles that lay on the top, she sat and listened to our remarks. At length hearing me say—

"Oh, thank you, papa! how good of you to remember it! I am very much obliged to you"—Mrs Willet fairly turned round, and said—

"Why, what is it?"

"Only this belt for my frock, ma'am—I hadn't put it on papa's list, and I didn't think he would get it."

"Oh!" said Mrs Willet, turning back again, with such an air and tone as she might have used had the article in question been a pin.

Ah, one has need to do without things, and to wait, and to have hard work to get them, to know their value! Mrs Willet could not understand how the spending of a few shillings could ever raise a doubt (the spending them upon *one's self*),

nor how the many other calls for those very shillings should make my father's remembering my belt a matter of gratitude, that stirred my heart as the gift of thousands could not. I believe I have had more pleasure from small things than I ever had from great; and have worn a pair of gloves with an appreciation that no rich person ever got at.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PUPILS.

"Grete rest standeth in litil businesse."
CHAUCER.

THE pupil plan was carried into effect; and on the first of June Mr Howard brought home with him two youngsters, of that pleasant age when a boy is nothing particular except a plague.

I do not mean that Archie and Candlish were exactly plagues: they were, perhaps, better disposed than most of their species, but yet shared its essential properties—an incomprehensible love of noise, a perfect contempt for order, and a quick wit at devising mischief that baffled all power of calculation. Archie, the eldest, was rather reserved and quiet within doors, and by no means so interesting a boy as his brother; but Candlish was very quicksilver for brightness and power of locomotion. But in his little thermometer the mercury never went down—it seemed rising indefinitely,—even a dash of cold-water reproof gave but a momentary check. Fortunately for us, they were not disposed to be home-sick; and it was likewise fortunate that the one who needed most reining was also the most tender-mouthed.

We saw them come with some trepidation,—I should say, heard them; for their quick footsteps, so different from my father's steady pace, first told us that he came not alone. I remember how we looked at each other and then at the door, —I remember how that glance said—

"It will be *home* no longer!"

But a woman can always find something to take hold of,—her love is a very wild-flower, that will grow in the crevices of the roughest rocks, and even there send down a root that the wind cannot dislodge nor the drought wither. And for these

poor children—if they hurt the comfort of our home, they were away from their own; and that touched us.

They were not slow to find it out. The somewhat eager eye with which Candlish had first looked up at us, became singularly trustful; and before the evening was over, he was on my stepmother's lap, as in a very sure and tried resting-place; while Archie detailed to Kate and me some intricate fishing operations in which he had lately been engaged, with no doubt of our sympathy. And so the first hours passed off, and the little strangers went to bed looking as well satisfied as if they had known us always; while, with very different feelings, we remained to talk over our own prospects.

It was no part of Mr Howard's plan that he should oversee his pupils, except just when they were in his study—my stepmother was quite right about the managing. So much of his time as was needed to the perfect learning and understanding of their lessons, my father gave conscientiously, and kept the two boys as well up to the mark as he was himself; but the books once shut, so were his eyes and mind to the very existence of Candlish and Archie—for the rest of the time they were rolled off upon us. Often we were drawn in yet further. It was—

"Miss Kate, *could* you shew me about this problem?"

Or, "Miss Grace, where *is* this word, for it isn't in the dictionary?"

And if we said, "Why don't you ask Mr Howard?" the answer was—

"He looks so dreadfully busy."

This was the sprinkling of the shower of demands and questions which fell in full abundance after dinner—

"Where's my cap?"—"Who's got a pin?"

"Hi diddle diddle!
The cats and the fiddle!"—

"Oh, Mrs Howard! mayn't we go and turn hay with Ezra Barrington?"

This last request always met with a prompt refusal—we did not choose that any of our family should intrude upon Mr Carvill; but there were twenty other proposals standing ready, and which could not be so easily disposed of. Kate and I walked and talked and listened till we were tired—no such blessing ever befell the two boys. Mrs Howard would certainly have dosed them with sleeping draughts, could her con-

science have been silenced in like manner. The garden was a great help, and many a morning's accumulation of energy was worked off in an afternoon's weeding; but even that could not go on of itself. There never was such a locomotive as Candlish—he had delivered one train and was back for another before I had fairly collected my thoughts; and the first thing would be a most startling whistle at my back.

"Oh, child! you mustn't make such a noise in the house!"

"I won't ever again, Miss Grace. But what *will* I do now?"

"And what *will* I do, if you talk to me in the parlour without uncovering?"

Down went the cap on the floor.

"But what's to be done? I've set out the lettuces, and they're all weeping for sympathy with the watering-pot; and now I'm wasting my 'waliable time,' as Sam Weller says."

"What do you know about Sam Weller?"

"Ah!" said Candlish—"Oh, Miss Grace—don't ever tell Mr Howard that I said 'waliable'!"

"Did you ever hear that old proverb," said Kate, looking up, "which says, 'The way not to have a thing known of you is never to do it'?"

"Now, Miss Kate! But isn't there anything for me to do? Shall I help Andy to pick the 'dead paes'?"

"No, no, you let Andy alone. But, Candlish! how can I do anything when you are shaking my chair at such a rate with your dancing?"

The feet stopped, and the hands continued the measure on my shoulders.

"Have you watered the cauliflowers?"

"Some of 'em twice over, for fear I'd missed 'em."

"Then you may wheel off all those weeds that you pulled up yesterday."

And while Archie gambaded past the window with a

"Hey, ho, Jeminey!"

Candlish darted out, and slammed the door so hard, that the flowers in my vase all nodded their heads.

Kate and I look at each other, and for a little while feel stunned.

Another time I am painting, and both boys come rushing in with a fishing line in a puzzle.

"You never *can* get it out, Miss Grace, but we thought maybe you'd try."

"Wait a little, then—I can't try till I have laid on this wash."

So to pass away the time Archie looks over me, exclaiming—

"Splen-did!—ex-quis-ite!—how *can* you paint so?"

And Candlish begins to sing—

"My name was Captain Kidd,
As I sail'd, as I sail'd—
My name was Captain Kidd,
As I sail'd.
My name was Captain Kidd,
And the law did forbid,
That so wickedly I did,
As I sail'd, as I sail'd—
That so wickedly I did,
As I sail'd."

"There—that will do," said my stepmother, when she could be heard; "you can finish it out of doors."

"I must sing one more verse for you, ma'am."

"No—I have had quite enough."

"Ah, dear Mrs Howard!" said Candlish, "just one more!—just this second verse,—it begins—

'I'd a Bible in my hand,
As I sail'd, as I sail'd—
I'd a'"——

But Kate laughingly stopped his mouth, and declared he should not go on.

"Here is your line," said I.

"You can't untie it?"

"Yes—it's all straight; but the next time you bring me such a job, please to dry the line first. Look at my hands."

Candlish gave it as his opinion that I was "the most extraordinary girl he ever saw in his life," and they went off.

We paid dear for our popularity; for it having been once discovered that "Miss Kate could explain everything," and that "Miss Grace knew where everything was," besides being a sort of conjuror in the way of knots and difficulties, all knots and difficulties, whether physical or mental, were brought home to us. Mr Howard's dry answers made the boys rather shy of asking random questions in that quarter, so, except during study hours (those which they spent directly with him), we were dictionaries and general referees. At the same time my father maintained a sufficiently strict censorship of English and manners, but in a way that often posed the objects of it.

We were out walking, one afternoon, and the two boys had been excursionising to their hearts' content, when Archie came up with—

"Oh, Miss Kate! won't you run a race with me? I know I could beat you to the bar-place."

"And I'm certain I should beat you if you did," said my father, gravely.

"Sir!—Mr Howard!" said Archie, with a very perceptible flush of astonishment; while Candlish, presuming for his brother as he would hardly have done for himself, exclaimed—

"Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"Suppose you were to find out before expressing any opinion," said my father.

Our laugh told them, and they laughed too; but Archie said—

"Now, didn't you know what I meant, Mr Howard?"

"Yes,—just as I may know whither a half-made road will lead me; but that don't make it pleasant walking."

The summer passed on, and the fall came in all its bright beauty, with its troop of associations—perhaps no season has so many. And one after another told its tale. That we had been children—that we had been strangers at Glen Luna—that we had found friends—that with them we had seen year after year put on and put off its foliage—that the last autumn winds had made a clean sweep, and we were alone again. Those very artemisias that made such fair show in Miss Easy's garden—the last time they had bloomed she had been there to look at them!

We could not but feel it all; and yet the feeling was more quiet and grave than sorrowful. "The world passeth away, and the glory of it; but the word of our God shall stand for ever." That ought to be joy enough to gild faded hopes and changing prospects, even as does the sun of October its dying foliage.

And as we had now less to do with other people, so had we more love and interest for the few that with joined hands kept our little circle unbroken. The fountain of our affections had been shut in till it had grown deeper than I liked to think of.

With what a rough hand does the world give advice and consolation!

Mrs Willet had taken a sudden fancy, during her last visit for the season, that I should go back to town with her. She urged the point a good deal, but I did not incline to go—I

could ill be spared at home, and felt quite sure that I should enjoy myself so much nowhere else. Of course all my reasons were not declared. When she was going away, however, she would let no one follow her to the door but me, and there turned about to press her request still further.

Again I said no.

"But, my dear Grace," said Mrs Willet, "I know it's very natural for you to like to be at home, with your dear mother and sister and all that; but I don't think it's good for you—it's not well to grow too fond of one's friends—you ought not to indulge yourself in it. The heart becomes so bound up in one little centre—it does not prepare one for life. And, however we may cherish and value our friends, we cannot hinder the course of events—you know, my dear, you cannot hope to keep them always."

I stood silently holding the door in my hand, with that restless spring of love and tears roused from its momentary quiet by her last words—she might have said anything else! Did I know it?—ah, how well!

I attempted no reply, and Mrs Willet, guessing, perhaps, that she had said too much, tried to huddle up matters.

"Well, well, my dear—I didn't mean to trouble you—but, you know, I should so much like to have you with me."

After such a reminder! she had taken away every possible inclination that I could have had. Oh, no!—if I could not keep them always, let me keep them now!

During the course of this fall our replevin business was settled, finally and satisfactorily. Moroever, Mr Howard had at last succeeded in arranging matters with Mr M'Loon about the property, of which a division had been made—Mr M'Loon taking a certain portion for the amount of purchase money that was yet due. We were not quite clear of him, either—there was a something—we could not exactly tell what—about which my father frequently went to consult Mr Phibbs. It seems that Mr M'Loon had formerly held a mortgage upon some property belonging to my father (worth twice all the encumbrances), and, that he might the sooner get his money, my father agreed to have the property sold. And, at a time when Mr Howard was away, the lots were put up for sale, all in one parcel, and bought in by Mr M'Loon—for a less sum, however, than the amount of his claim. Whereupon, not

content with the lots, he turned about and sued Mr Howard upon the bond, and entered up a judgment. Of course, defensive measures were undertaken on our part, and the judgment now sat almost as light upon my father's mind as the unrighteous claim upon his conscience—so far as we could see, it gave him no particular uneasiness. Still the mere raising of such questions gave us a feeling of uncertainty, of unsettledness; and there was nothing to wear it off. When our two boys had gone home for the holidays, we were left in unbroken quiet.

"Sometimes one enjoys everything *less* on such a day."—My father had said true, and we had proved it. In all that bright Christmas there was nothing but contrast—never did sun throw such shadows—it was hard to look at anything else. And the still New-year's day, without a visitor now—for the world stands off from poverty as if it had, like truth, "the plague in its house"—gave us time and occasion to think of the three friends who would have drawn the closer to us for all our troubles—Mr Ned Howard, Miss Easy, and Mr Collingwood.

My first thought that morning was of them; and then I remembered that Time was playing a tune for all men to dance to—and lay in bed pertinaciously. And when I came down to breakfast and answered my father's greeting, it was with eyes that dared not look up, lest he should see the tears in them.

Not such was the mood of the outer world. Bright icicles, and long blue shadows across the snow-covered lawn; and the more prussian blue sky, with a few white clouds; and little whirling simooms of snow, raised by a most freaky wind.

Kate and I stood looking out when the sun had hid his face behind the woods, and a little train of gold-coloured clouds were reversing the custom of French courtiers, and quitting their master without the "*grand coucher.*" The gleam on the distant hill-tops shone brightly, but the lake was in shade; and the tired skaters had most of them dismounted, and were returning slowly to the shore. The ice, cold and unmelting, stretched away in the distance, but immediately in front of us there was a fine air-hole—the water as motionless as the ice itself. Between the trees, as we caught here and there a glimpse, it was of a gold-ribbed blackness; but a fine reddish-purple ran in among the ice-

promontories, which stood out, sharp, and clean-cut, into the bright water. On the lawn, the snow was of a dead white; neither shadow nor gleam lay there—no wish, no discontent!

"Dear Kate," I said, when we had stood for some time in silence, "I am so sorry I had nothing to give you to-day! I meant to have made something, and, after all, I could not seem to find time."

"And, dear Gracie, I am very glad that you did not try—you have been too busy indeed! We do not need to make presents to each other to shew our love."

"No, but still it is pleasant, if one could. Oh, I have a great mind!—no, you would not care for it either."

"For what?" said Kate, smiling. "I shall care for anything you choose to give me."

"No, for it's not worth having—it's only my dream."

"Let me hear it, by all means."

"Oh, you've heard it—don't you remember what I dreamed that night when Mr Rodney came home, and I lay on the sofa? do you recollect?"

"Yes," she said, with a quick change of colour.

"Well, I took it into my head to tack rhymes to it, and see what it would look like then."

"And where is it?" said Kate, leaning her head upon mine.

"Oh, in my strong box. But it only came into my head because I wanted to give you something."

"I must have it, Gracie—I want to see it very much. Run and get it for me."

"No need to run," I said, laughing, "for the box is here, luckily. Now, you shall not go away—you shall sit just where you were when I was dreaming. Ah, if you had seen yourself then, you wouldn't wonder."

And seating her before the fire, I stood behind her, playing with her hair, while she read—

"Katie, I dream'd again
We were forsaken;—
Friends, fortune, company—
Nothing was left but thee.—
Yet was I happy then—
Thou wert not taken!

"Still in the wreck of all
Shone thy smile clearer—
Still thou wert all my own;
Still did thy gentle tone
Make other losses small—
Thou so much dearer!

"Nor do I cling to thee
Only in seeming
Sister, thy presence fills
Some of the sweetest rills
Flowing through life to me.—
Kate—was I dreaming?

She had not finished when Mr Howard called me to look for something he wanted, and it was some time before I could return to the sitting-room. Kate was alone there still, in the easy-chair, with her back to the window. She was leaning her head upon her hand; but as I came up she put one arm round me, and drawing me down to her lap, made my head the resting place for hers.

"Well," I said, putting my arms about her in turn, "don't you think I am a fine dreamer?—did you ever have such a valuable New-year's present before?"

She made me no answer, except by laying her lips instead of her cheek upon my forehead.

"Ah, Katie!" I said, laughing, "you shall not get off so! you must give me most particular and explicit thanks, now, while I sit here."

"I fear I shall never be able to give them, Gracie."

"Why, what is the matter?" I exclaimed, trying to raise my head. "Has that poor dream troubled you again?"

"Troubled me?—it gave me a great deal of pleasure, dear."

"But, you don't answer me—has it troubled you? Oh, Katie, how could it!" I said, sorrowfully, for I felt that my forehead was wet with her tears.

"How could it trouble me?" she said, after a while—"it made me think that you love me a little too much, Gracie—that was all."

"I can't love you too much—possibly! what makes you say that? Aren't you well?" I exclaimed, raising myself up with a sudden feeling of paleness and sickness.

"Yes, my dear child! yes! perfectly well. Why, Gracie, how you look at me! Lay your head down again—what has troubled you so, love? I assure you that your dream gave me a great deal of pleasure."

"You have just been making yourself sad with thinking of old times," I said, sighing—"and no wonder."

"Don't you make yourself sad with thinking of anything," said Kate, kissing me.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PLEASANT KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

"Then top and maintop crowd the sail,
Heave *care* o'er side!
And large, before enjoyment's gale,
Let's tak' the tide."

BURNS.

WE were in some danger of growing sad, all round, in this deep, reminding quiet of winter; and were really glad when the holidays were over—glad to have ourselves roused up, even by noise and confusion.

Archie and Candlish came back repotentised with both. It had always been a hard matter to make them let the cat alone, but now it seemed impossible. No sooner did an inch of fur make its appearance, than Candlish's left hand shot out beyond his right with great velocity, accompanied with a loud

"Me-ow! S-fitz!"

At which unearthly sound Purrer-purrer would give her tail to the winds, and scamper off as if she had been a kitten. It was of little use to remonstrate—promises were made in abundance, but, if one boy remembered, the other was sure to forget.

"Now, what harm does it do, Miss Kate?" Archie would say—"and it's such fun to see her put round the house."

"Put what?" said Mr Howard.

"The cat, sir—I say it's such fun to see her put round the house."

"And I say, put what?"

"I didn't say put anything, sir."

"That's the very thing I complain of."

"Oh," said Archie, "you mean—yes, I remember. But now, Mr Howard, why isn't that good English?"

"Why aren't you a Dutchman?" said my father.

"Mamma," said Kate, one morning as we sat at work, "are we making any headway by means of this teaching business?"

"Hardly—there are so many ends to be brought up. It is an important help, certainly, but we cannot live on it long, if other means fail as fast as they have done for the last year."

"I shall have to go back to my old plans," said Kate; "we must get some maps to colour. Why, Wolf! what is the matter?"

Wolfgang had suddenly roused himself out of sleep, and was expressing some unknown sentiments by a very gruff kind of breathing.

"Poor dog!" said Kate, patting him, "why don't you lie still?"

He gave her such a smile as a dog could, and lowered his ears in acknowledgment of her hand; but in a moment they were raised again, and with one bound he was at the door. It needed not his eager whine to bring us there too, nor to explain the light quick footstep which reached it at the same moment on the outside—it was Mr Collingwood himself!

Oh, how glad we were to see him!—too glad, for we were nearer crying than laughing.

He had but a few hours to spend with us, he said; but some business matters had brought him so near that he could not resist the temptation of coming for those few. And we talked through the rest of that short day with a degree of happiness and sadness that seemed a summary of the past year; and poor Wolfgang said what he could, nor was the least eloquent of the party, as he sat with one paw on his master's knee, or sometimes, as a great favour, in his hand.

Mr Rodney's words were like the fresh evening air to one who has borne "the burden and heat of the day." He told us of his occupations, his plans, his prospects; and gave us full sympathy for all our difficulties without once alluding to them; but his look and tone would often bear no other interpretation. With full eyes we sometimes acknowledged their gentle, beguiling power—I wondered, too, how he could know so well all we had felt—had he heard, or did he see?

It was with a changing expression of face that he looked on as Candlish came bounding into the room, and then, subsiding a little at sight of the stranger, knelt down by Kate, with a

whispered entreaty that she would explain something. The seat next her was taken in a moment, and, gently withdrawing the book from her lap, Mr Rodney said—

"Suppose you let me play the part of assistant for to-day. What is this knotty question?"

Candlish looked up in some surprise.

"Miss Kate can explain it, indeed, sir."

"I have not the slightest doubt of that," said Mr Rodney. "But isn't it a possible thing for Miss Kate to get tired?"

"I don't believe she ever got tired helping me," said Candlish, affectionately.

"She hasn't had a chance to-day," said Kate, as she held out her hand for the book.

But Mr Rodney gave her no answer except a smile; and with one arm drawing the boy a little nearer to his side, he again inquired what he wanted to know.

And Candlish, reassuring himself with another look, dashed off into the midst of his difficulties.

Neither Kate nor I was suffered to look at a study-book that day; but I really thought the little learners found hard passages for the mere pleasure of having them explained.

"Isn't it a possible thing for Mr Rodney to get tired?" said Kate, when one of the many intrusions had come to an end.

"Not when you are his alternative."

"But we are so used to it," I said—"there is no need of your troubling yourself, Mr Rodney."

"Used to it!—I am only choosing the least of two kinds of trouble, Gracie."

Nobody would have imagined that it was any trouble at all.

Even that day could not linger beyond its appointed time. But how sorry we were to see the sun set! and we enjoyed the twilight with a kind of accelerated pleasure. The boys were at their lessons, my father writing business letters, and Mrs Howard had gone to order tea.

"And you are not weary of your charge?" said Mr Rodney, looking from Wolfgang's upturned eye to us.

"O no," said Kate—"you cannot think what a comfort he has been to us. He has seemed almost the only friend we had, sometimes."

"My dear Miss Kate!—I am glad you say 'almost.'"

"But he has missed you," I said—"he never looks so at us."

"He has his own chain of remembrance and association, I suppose," said Mr Collingwood, sadly; "I am perhaps such a link to him as he is to me. It is a great comfort to know that Wolfgang is so tenderly cared for—if it were only for the sake of the friends he used to have."

"You have not been to the Bird's Nest, Mr Rodney?" said Kate presently.

"Yes, I came that way this morning."

And silently our thoughts had gone there, and were viewing it as it appeared when we stood on some of the stepping-stone years that we had passed over; when Andy put his head in at the door, and said—

"If ye plase, Miss Kate—thin it was Caddie should ha' tolt ye, and wouldn't."

"Told us what?"

"Misther Carvill, Miss—he says would ye be afther lettin' him have the dog now, or will he take him? he says, Miss."

"Ask Mr Carvill to walk in," said Kate.

"Carvill!" repeated Mr Collingwood, in a tone of utter amazement.

I threw some light wood on the fire, but at first it only smoked, and the room was not fairly lit up till Mr Carvill had been in it some moments; his salutation was scarce visible.

"You see, young ladies," he said, as he advanced, his words gathering emphasis from Wolfgang's growl—"I must have the dog this time, I really can't do without him—so it's no use to debate the point. Just let him go quietly without any fuss, and I'll answer all—hey!—Rodney! you here!—where, in the name of all the constellations, did you come from?"

"From under some more benign star than Sirius, I hope," said Mr Rodney, as he came forward and extended his hand.

"Deuce take your ears and my tongue!" muttered Mr Carvill, with a very dubious return of the proffered greeting.

"But where did you come from?" asked Mr Rodney, in his usual pleasant tone. "What do you expect to find in the snow at this time of year?"

"Deer."

"Deer? you're too late for that, unless I have forgotten the state game-laws."

"I haven't forgotten them," said Mr Carvill, "for I never knew them, and don't want to know. I came on business, and since *you* are here, I suppose there'll be no more trouble about it."

"No *more* trouble?" said Mr Rodney, with some emphasis.

"Well—call it what you will—I never wanted to have any words with them."

"Words with them!"

The manner was emphasis enough.

"I sha'n't stand here to be catechised about all I ever said or did!" said Mr Carvill, impatiently—"you may ask anybody else you've a mind to. So I shall just take the dog with me, and bid you good evening."

"By your leave, no," said his brother.

"No!—what do you mean by that? you're not going to stay here yourself?" said Mr Carvill, with a look of rather keen inquiry.

"I am not, indeed."

"Then, what do you mean by saying no?"

"Not a very hard word to understand, is it?" said Mr Rodney, smiling. "I mean that I cannot think of taking Wolfgang from such good quarters as he is in at present."

And Wolfgang's tail gave two or three little taps on the floor by way of approval.

"But I tell you I want him, man!—One of my dogs is lame, and I can't hunt without four."

"You must make three answer, for once."

"Why," said Mr Carvill, angrily, "you don't mean that you are going to refuse me, just to please one of those girls?"

I had never seen Mr Collingwood look so displeased; and he stood for a moment with compressed lips, as if afraid to trust himself to speak. But then he said, very gravely and calmly—

"I am quite determined on this point, Carvill—my reasons I will give you at another time—immediately, if you wish, but not here."

"You are an impracticable set, altogether!" said Mr Carvill, colouring in spite of himself before that look of quiet dignity, and all the more angry because he felt ashamed—"I do believe *you* are bewitched as well as"——

He checked himself—Mr Rodney's quick glance might well have cut short any insinuations—and with a very cavalier bow

Mr Carvill left the room. Mr Rodney followed, after one moment's grave thought.

Kate and I sat looking at each other with some surprise and concern.

"I am so sorry I said what I did about Wolfgang! I am afraid it has caused all this mischief."

"Why don't you speak to Mr Rodney, and tell him?" said I.

"If I can get a chance; but I don't want to speak of it before papa—he likes Mr Carvill little enough now."

Mr Howard presently came into the room, but when we told him that Mr Rodney had gone to spend a little time with his brother, he walked back to the study, merely requesting to be called when tea was ready.

Tea waited a while; and then thinking that perhaps our visitor would take that meal at the Lea, we had just seated ourselves at the table when he came.

"I insisted that Mr Carvill had kept you prisoner," said my father, "and so would not let them wait any longer."

"I am very sorry you waited at all, sir."

There was a little of the weariness of sad feeling in the voice, that made me sincerely hope Mr Carvill might not enjoy *his* tea.

My father busied himself about the duties of the table.

"You see," he continued, "a man is never too old to learn; and I have got some entirely new ideas upon the subject of self-denial."

"How? for pity's sake!" said my stepmother.

"In a long talk with Kate after you had gone to bed, one night."

"I hope you do not mean to monopolise them, sir," said Mr Rodney.

"Papa," said Kate, looking up somewhat anxiously, "you are not at liberty to break confidence—I never gave you leave to repeat what I said."

"My dear, you are breaking your own confidence. Nobody knew that it was anything of importance till you told them. If you will keep quiet, I shall not say what you said and what I said—I am only going to give Mr Rodney one or two abstract propositions."

"But, papa—you do not mean"——

"I will tell what I mean, Kate, if you will allow me. We were debating the question of self-denial, Mr Rodney—how far

it ought to be carried, and so on. Whether one person is bound to sacrifice himself for another. What is your opinion?"

"It would be hard to give one upon such a question in the abstract, Mr Howard."

"Well, for instance," said my father—"if by making myself happy, I make you miserable, ought I not to make myself miserable, and you happy?"

"Was that one of Miss Kate's propositions?" said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"Never mind whose it was, only give me an answer."

"Nay, sir; one wants the application of such a question. I could not answer it without knowing who 'you' and 'I' stand for."

"*I* stand for the Dutchman's maxim," said my father—"'every man for mineself.'"

"Why, papa," I said, "I don't see how anybody should even raise such a question, for it *could* not come up except among people who truly loved each other."

"How will you get round the facts, my dear? Kate and I did raise the question, and we do truly love several people."

"But it seems almost a contradiction, papa."

"Well, contradict it in turn, then; come, where lies the fallacy?"

"The thing couldn't be, you know, papa."

"What thing couldn't be? If you know where you are, Gracie, I don't."

"Why, papa, take Kate, for instance; ought she to do anything to make herself happy if it made me miserable? is that what you mean?"

"That's a sufficiently clear statement of the case," said my father. "Well, Gracie?"

"But, then, if she were happy, I couldn't be miserable."

How they all laughed! till I felt half abashed.

"That is decidedly the best solution of a difficulty I have heard this winter!" said my father. "Gracie, my dear, you would have been invaluable at our conference. I hope you are satisfied with the conclusion, Mr Rodney?"

"I should be sorry indeed to come to any other, sir."

And the conversation took another turn.

"My dear Kate," said my father, laughing, and going round to her when we left the table, "what are you so grave about?

I am sure none of the present company can suspect that any of their requests will ever make you miserable."

"Ah, papa, how you do talk!"

"How I do talk! Well, go you off and talk too, while I see what those boys are about."

"An acquaintance of mine, Miss Kate," said Mr Rodney, with a smile, as he followed us into the drawing-room, "says, that there is this great comfort in writing to a friend who knows her thoroughly,—if perchance there is a word left out or put in, or another illegible, or her meaning be but half expressed, that friend has a clue to set it right. What has become of my little questioners? I haven't seen them this evening."

"Oh, their appetites wouldn't abide postponement," said I, laughing; "they had tea long ago, and have been at their lessons. You will see enough of them by and by."

"Mr Rodney," said Kate, "I wanted to tell you"——

"You did or did not want to tell me?" said he, smiling, for Kate hesitated.

"You must not think anything of what I said about Wolfgang; we like very much to have him, but not unless you like it too."

"I do like it. I should not send him to the Lea, in any event; he is just where I could wish him to be. There—you have my hand upon it."

"Oh, Miss Kate!" exclaimed both the boys, as they came in, "Mr Howard never gave us such long lessons before! Oh, me!"

"Hi!"——

"I'm just about tired to death!"

"You'll recover by to-morrow morning," said Kate, laughing.

"No, I shan't! Much you know about it, Miss Kate! I don't believe you've done a thing to-day to tire you. You're looking just as well!—and not a bit pale, to-night."

"You are ever so little of a fast talker, Master Candlish," said Kate, laying her hands upon the little face that was raised very benignly towards her.

"But you understood me"——

"How much you look like your sister!" said Kate.

"Where did you ever see her? you told me, but I disremember."

"And you have a little of that sort of forgetfulness for my instructions, I think," said my father, who had joined us.

"Because I've been so long speaking straight to-day, sir; I suppose I got tired," said the boy, laughing, and then colouring a little, as if half afraid he had gone too far.

"You haven't told me anything about this same sister of yours since you came back," said Kate.

He looked up again as bright as ever.

"Where did you see her? and didn't you like her very much?"

"I saw her at Mrs Egerton's, for about five minutes."

"Oh, then, you couldn't tell. But we didn't see her either, this time; she isn't at home now."

"Not at home! Is she married?"

"O no," Archie said: while Candlish, opening his eyes in grave astonishment, exclaimed—

"Why, Miss Kate! I didn't know you ever thought of such things!"

This tribute to Kate's simplicity was honoured with a very frank burst of merriment. Candlish looked somewhat confounded, but stood his ground.

"Well, you may laugh," he said, the hue of his cheeks nearly rivalling Kate's, "but I didn't! She never talks about such things as other girls do, nor Miss Grace neither."

"Did it ever occur to you," said Mr Rodney, with whom the boy had rather taken refuge—"did you ever hear what 'girls' are usually called after they are grown up?"

Candlish looked up at the eyes that were bent so kindly upon him, and then laughed and shook his head, as if his memory were a very treacherous thing indeed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A FEARFUL ONE.

"Whence are you, sir? Has the porter his eyes in his head, that he gives entrance to such companions? Pray, get you out."

SHAKSPEARE.

THE pleasure of that visit left a long after-glow; for, if we felt more than ever the loneliness of being alone, it was something to look forward to such days as possible—it was something even to have had pleasure. For a while we were very quiet and happy, and were fast relapsing into somewhat of the old peaceful feeling. Not with the old bright visions and enjoyments—that could not be; we had been too closely trimmed to venture forth many buds or flowers—but with a degree of negative happiness that the trials and excitements of late years made very pleasant. We began to think that apprehension might be laid aside—that the world had done what it wished, and would now leave us a corner of the wide earth uncontested; and when Archie and Candlish were again summoned home by some great family occasion, we could have echoed their parting words, that "we had had such a nice time since the holidays!" We could live after any fashion, if only let alone; and the winter had gone off on its smooth runners, without sleigh bells certainly, but yet with few jars. We were just at the end of February.

"The pilgrims came to a delicate plain, called Ease; but that," says Bunyan, "was but narrow, so they were soon got over it."

I was awakened, one morning, just as the day began to dawn, by a knocking at the front door. There was no one stirring in the house, and I lay still for a minute to listen. Again the knock, not very loud but very distinct—what could it be?

I raised myself on my elbow and tried to consider, with a curious feeling, as if the knock needed no particular attention, and might die away of itself—as if it were but a visionary part of the twilight. There it was again, softly as before, but this time at the back of the house. Most unpleasantly startled, I crept out of bed, and, going to my father's door, tapped gently —he was already aroused; and I went back with all quietness, that I might not wake Kate. Was it the cold air that sent such a chill over me?

I heard my father open his window, and call—

"Who is there?"

No answer, and none came to the second demand. I well remembered that when I was a child a messenger had brought us tidings of sickness and death in the very middle of the night; and now, few as our friends were, my mind could fix upon nothing else. But what—or who—or where? I knew whence came the chill now.

By this time Caddie was up, and had gone down stairs. I heard her returning, and, throwing on my wrapper, I ran out, and looked over the balusters to ask what was the matter.

"Oh, Miss Grace," said Caddie, speaking low, and with much sorrow and interest, "wait till I tell ye! it's somebody from Mr M'Loon."

For a moment I felt relieved—then came the strong instinct of self-preservation. Nobody could come for good at that time in the morning.

"Is he in the house, Caddie?"

"No, miss, it's in the piazy he is."

"Then fasten the door — Mr Howard will be there directly."

And even as I went to call him he passed me, and went swiftly down stairs.

I had no mind that any encounter should come off without my powerful presence; so, dressing myself with all haste and stealthiness, I gave one glad look at Kate's closed eyes, listened a moment to make sure that Mrs Howard was not up—a fair proof she was not awake—and then tripped my way down—the gladness of my heart thrown back, and the sorrow thrown forward.

My father was in the kitchen, exchanging most energetic remarks through the window with the man in the "piazy;"

who sat doggedly up against the house, as if he had been part of the clapboarding.

Wolfgang's attention was divided as impartially as could be expected; for, while keeping Mr Howard close company within, his keen looks and deep growls towards the piazza seemed to say that his heart lay there; and the said heart now and then relieved itself by a bark that made the walls ring. At any other time I should have laughed at him, and I came near it as it was.

Caddie had been shut out with the intruder, and was flitting about the piazza, and sending encouraging looks into the dark kitchen, where the morning light was trying to make its way.

"I order you to leave the house," were the first words I heard.

"And I sha'n't go till I've done my job," came sourly from the clapboards.

"What is it, papa?" I said, softly—"what is the matter?"

"That fellow M'Loon has sent a sheriff here with an execution. If *he* comes to the house, I'll put him in the lake!" said Mr Howard, with a fierce reference to the absent Mr M'Loon, his voice trembling with agitation as he paced up and down the kitchen.

I laid my hand on his arm.

"Dear papa! please do not speak so; he is not worth your notice. And do not be so troubled; we shall not mind anything, if you do not. Pray keep yourself quiet."

"What?" he said, stopping and looking at me.

"Pray do not be troubled," I repeated; "can't we keep this man out?"

"Keep him out! yes!" he said, vehemently; "if I had any one to help me, I'd put him out of the piazza! You will take cold, my child," he added, eyeing me, for I was trembling all over; "there's no fire yet—go up stairs, Gracie, and keep yourself warm."

"I am not at all cold, papa—it's not that; I would much rather be here."

"The scoundrel!" he muttered, taking another turn through the kitchen; "when he has no more right to the money than he has to me!" And pausing before the window, Mr Howard repeated—

"I order you to leave the house."

"Yes, I hear," said the man.

"Papa, I wouldn't talk to him," I said. "We've got the doors locked—he can't force them open. Come in the other room, papa, and I'll make the fire—you will take cold yourself."

"No, my dear child, no—I am perfectly warm. You had better go in there—or get my cloak and wrap round you."

"I don't need it, papa."

The sheriff got up from his seat, and taking out pencil and paper, he began to note down all that he could see through the window.

"Can he do that?" I asked.

"No, of course not!" said my father; "that is not a proper levy. I shall go out and tell him as much, and send him about his business."

"Oh, I wouldn't go out there."

"Why not?" he said, kindly. "Don't you trouble yourself, Gracie—I'll manage everything, never fear—and keep as cool as a cucumber. Just fasten the door behind me. No, no, old boy—you stay here."

I kept back Wolfgang, and shut the door; and then stood anxiously awaiting in that fireless room the result of the conference. Mr Howard was very clear and decided, the sheriff cool and impertinent; the point in dispute being whether the piazza was or was not the house. The sheriff maintained that he had got in, my father that he neither had nor should. On this last point I was equally resolved, and took another look at the bolt.

This was neither Mr Cross nor his successor; but whether head sheriff or deputy, I did not know. He had a surly, sneaking look, that promised no fair treatment nor civility.

"Well," said Mr Howard, in conclusion, "I tell you to go; and if you don't go, I shall find some means of compelling you."

And with that he re-entered the kitchen, while the sheriff noted down—

"6 kitchen chairs."

"Is Mr M'Loon here himself?" said my father, opening the door far enough for his voice to go out, and holding it fast.

"I guess he is—he come down 'long with me this morning."

And apparently relieved by this reference to his principal, the man opened the piazza door, and shouted—

"Mr M'Loon!"

A merry "chick-a-dee-dee-dee!" came back to us from an early riser of a black-cap. It was clear he didn't understand English!

"Mr M'Loon!"

"I reckon he's somewheres round amongst the trees," said the sheriff—"he can't ha' went off;" and stepping out on the door-stone, he again lent both eye and voice to the search.

With a quick foot I passed my father; but fearing to lose that one instant, I signed to Caddie, who was before me; and when the sheriff turned round, it was to see a closed and bolted door.

For a minute he looked very silly—then without a word he marched off to institute a personal search for the invisible Mr M'Loon. Was ever sound so pleasant as the crunching of the frosty ground by his boots! I could hardly believe my senses. Caddie put her hands on her sides and laughed as if she had found a gold mine. And retreating into the citadel, we fastened everything that could be fastened.

"Now let's have breakfast as soon as we can, Caddie," said I.

"Breakfast! is it at this time in the morning?"

"Yes, as soon as you can," I repeated.

"Ha, ha!" said Caddie; "breakfast, hey! And what time 'll ye be after wanting dinner?"

"I don't know about that. But we have a fine quiet time now for breakfast, and it's not best to wait."

"It's a fine breakfast they meant yees should have," said Caddie. "There's himself agin! och! 'ye ain't good lookin', and ye can't come in!'"

The sheriff peered through the window of the piazza, and then with a loud voice he called out—

"I come to tell you that I've levied upon the cow, and you ain't to do nothing with her; and upon the wood pile, too," he said, turning back to give this second piece of information.

"Very well!" said my father, with a nod of his head that promised small compliance.

We went into the breakfast-room, and soon had a bright fire blazing; but my father was too much excited to sit down, or even to warm himself. He walked the floor, nervously biting his under lip, and seeing X Y and Z in the carpet: sometimes looking out of the window, or going into the kitchen, with now and then an interjection, or an absent "what?" addressed to me. And I sat and stood by turns, talking or entreating,

but trembling still—for a rough hand had struck the keys, and the wires could not cease their noiseless thrilling.

By this time mamma and Kate came down; and we asked, and told, and consulted, till Caddie brought in breakfast and we had taken the brace of a cup of hot coffee.

My father was not long in determining that he must go that very day to consult Mr Phibbs.

"But I cannot leave you here alone, either," he said; "those men might come back again."

"Very well," said Kate, "let them come—they won't get in."

"Yes, but I can't bear to have you subjected to all this annoyance—you've had too much as it is. Perhaps writing would answer every purpose, and then I could be here to deal with them."

"Oh, no," said Mrs Howard, "I wouldn't trust to it; the post-office is not always regular. And if they should chance to come again, I would much rather you were away than here."

"But you must have some one in the house, and Andy has a week's leave of absence."

"Get John Finigan."

"He is worth little enough; however, I don't suppose M'Loon will attempt violent measures. But keep the doors shut."

The idea of telling us that!

Mr Howard went off to take the first stage; and we went the rounds of the front windows and doors, and then proceeded to the kitchen to give Caddie her instructions.

Miss M'Inn's "tight" little figure, habited in very short petticoats and very high boots, was in full tide of business among the breakfast dishes: the table before which she stood being well piled with them; and bearing, besides, a tub of water, of which the temperature might be guessed from the decided pink of her hands, and the cloud of steam which enveloped her head. It proved itself, too, by the clear brightness of the already washed and dried cups, and by the very small portion of moisture they had transferred to the towels which hung on the maiden at her side. From the very midst of the cloud of steam came forth, in a strange buzzing tone—

> "There lived a tailor beyont Athlone,
> And he had nine daughters down by his knee."

"Caddie," said my stepmother, "I hope we shall have this

matter arranged in a few days; but until it is, we must keep shut doors. Don't open them to anybody; and if you have to go out yourself, call one of us to stand by the door till you come back."

"Then, it's never a fut one of 'em 'll set in here, Mrs Howard!" said Caddie, turning about, and stripping the water off her hands. "I've seen enough of 'em, the villains! It's me ought to know them, for the times I've seen 'em at home—in the ould country."

"Seen sheriffs, do you mean?" said Kate.

"Indeed an' I do, Miss Kate! I've seen 'em! I wouldn't doubt but they're hiding some place round the house now, just; and if we'd open the door ever so little, it's in they'd be, and sorrow a bit could we get 'em out!"

Involuntarily I looked to the door, while a most uncomfortable shiver ran over me from head to foot. I thought of Lady Clonbrony's—

"Slide in? Oh, horrid!"——

"It's many a time I've seen 'em!" said Caddie, going on with her enlivening stories and the dishes at once—"long ago, at home—in swate county Kerry! It'll be goin' on twelve year agin December next, sin' they come to my father's house one morning afore the day. And my father was laying the fire, and wasn't dressed itself. And it's bitter cowld it was, and snow that thick—and we childer in bed; for my father says, 'Lie still,' he says, 'till the fire'll burn,' he says. And then them niggers giv a little knock at the door—just so as you wouldn't hardly hear it—and they'd come up unbeknownst on account of the snow being on the ground, ye see. Well, Miss Kate, sure enough they giv this knock, and little Pat (that's sister's son to my brother-in-law, Miss Kate), he just undid it; and my father never knew a hate about it till they was all in, and he lighting the fire—and the turf wouldn't burn, and my father says, 'Weary on it!' he says; and then he just looks about, and there they was all!"

She had stopped her work, and with excited eye and voice had gone over this bit of her experience as if the whole scene were present before her, giving the last few words with the very feeling of the time.

"And did they take anything, Caddie?" I asked.

"Troth an' they did, miss!—just took all they could find but a bag of pertaters, that was hid in the roof out of sight!

'And isn't it some of the childer ye'd be afther takin'?' says my father, says he; 'for there's nothing in life for 'em to do here,' says he. 'Sh-cat!" exclaimed Caddie, cutting short her account with a sudden spring towards the Dutch oven. "Then, Miss Grace, that cat's intill everything!"

From that time our house might have been the abode of the Koh-i-noor, for the way it was guarded. A casual observer on the outside would have thought the family not at home—and truly I thought so myself. It was a strange kind of a home! Closed doors, and quiet movements, and anxious hearts; and though the sun got leave to look in at the windows, it was across a visionary shadow of Mr M'Loon or the sour sheriff. Not a pail of water could be wanted that Caddie did not come and say—

"Now, I'm going to the pump—if one of yees would be plased to mind the door."

And then generally two of us went. For ourselves, we were afraid to venture out, except all together, lest, as Kate said, they should take advantage of our being out, and beset the door.

A blockade is a much more serious affair than any one would suppose.

No doubt, we concerned ourselves more than need be—perhaps the blockade was only imaginary; but an unseen danger is always magnified—and who would venture upon a "perhaps?" We knew, though they could make no levy in the night-time, they might try to get a man into the house who would open to them next day—such things had been done. And so we considered ourselves in a state of siege, and saw the sun set and the darkness come that first night with no relief, except that the door need not be opened quite so often as in the day; and then sat down to our work with that old feeling of limited strength and unlimited resolution!

It was a perfectly still evening. The winds seemed asleep, and gave only now and then the faintest of murmurs—the field was clear for any sound that chose to take it. Our little fire modestly asserted its existence, and Caddie and John Finigan asserted theirs—by a dead level of talk. But their tongues grew tired, and their boots creaked up stairs to bed, and the field was clearer than ever.

"I think we had better go to bed too," said my stepmother.

But as we looked up to give our assent, there came a knock at the front door.

How our eyes met and our hearts trembled!

It came again. Not a cheerful, busy rat! tat! but one solitary rap, beginning and ending in itself — not very loud, not energetic—it just announced—somebody.

Kate spoke first, and softly.

"We mustn't open the door, mamma—it may be a trick of those people to get in."

Mrs Howard took the light and proceeded up stairs, we following. Invest anything with a hidden, undefined, stealthy character, and you make it terrible;—therefore, as we went we trembled—at that simple knock.

Leaving our candle in the hall, we entered one of the dark bedrooms, and, opening a window, Mrs Howard inquired who was there.

"Is Mr Howard at home?" said a voice, while a man stepped off from the house and apparently tried to see us.

"No," said my stepmother.

"Where is he?"

"He went away this morning."

"Do you know when he'll be back?"

"No," she replied again. "Who wants him?"

"I have a letter from Mr M'Loon."

My stepmother paused a moment, and then simply repeated—

"Mr Howard is not at home."

The man waited a little, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and grinding the gravel under them—perhaps expecting that we would make some proposition—then he walked off.

"It's nothing in the world but a trick!" said Kate. "What should Mr M'Loon have to write to papa at this time of night?—they thought we would open the door, and then they could just walk in."

"Well, we are safe for this time," said my stepmother.

"But, mamma," said Kate, "what if they should come again? and if Finigan heard them, he'd maybe go and open the door before we knew anything about it."

Mrs Howard called Caddie, and desired her to tell our guard that there had been people at the house already, and that, if he should hear any more raps, he must take no notice of them.

We had gone to bed, and, sailing off on the sea of oblivion, had just "sunk" Mr M'Loon, when we were again roused. Caddie and Finigan were earnestly consulting or disputing

across the passage which divided their rooms. Mrs Howard sprang up to see what was doing, just as Caddie presented herself at our door.

"What's the matter now?"

"Meself doesn't know, ma'am—it's John Finigan says it's sick he is."

"Sick!"

"Then he'll never be killed unknownst!" said Caddie, in a parenthesis of contempt. "An' sure an' if ye are sick, says I, why can't ye lie still? says I, and not be wakin' all the house, says I."

"And is he going to lie still?" said Mrs Howard. "What does he want? what's the matter with him?"

"The dear knows! But he says it's home he'd like to be. An' how are ye to get home? says I, and we to be opening the doors for ye? says I—and the master away, too!"

And putting her arms in their favourite position, Caddie laughed comically.

"For pity's sake, let him go, if he wants to!" said Mrs Howard, again getting up. "I presume he's afraid those people will come back; and if they do, he is as well away as here. I'll go down with you to fasten the door after him—he wouldn't be of much use if we wanted anything."

"It's only a peelin' of a man he is, any way," said Caddie. "Och, them greenhorns ain't got the sense of Christians!"

They fastened the door after the deserter, but Mrs Howard and Caddie both affirmed that they had heard other steps on the walk; and between imagining our besiegers still about, and Finigan's sickness another trick, we contrived to fever and excite ourselves sufficiently.

"Suppose we let Caddie come and sleep in our room, mamma," said Kate.

"In our room?"

"Yes, she might lay her bed on the floor. Don't you think we should feel more comfortable?"

So Caddie took up her mattress, and placing it in the middle of the room, where we were all together that night, she presently went to sleep thereon. Not much protection, certainly—but those sturdy, round arms, were company, at least; and when the numbers in a garrison are reduced to feminine units, they tell best together. And the rest of the night passed without disturbance.

We had provisions enough to enable us to hold out for some time—neither did the enemy attempt to invest the pump: so far, we were as usual. Finigan was not again admitted into the house, but Mr Howard's return saved us from being quite alone. Still, no measures of Mr Phibbs could as yet have taken effect, and our door-openings continued to be of the most cautious—especially when my father's place was supplied by Andy. Every window that was not a daily ventilator was nailed down; and never did we open a door at all without a most careful survey of its exterior from some neighbouring pane of glass. I presume we were much more ingenious than either Mr M'Loon or his agents; I doubt whether they could have contrived half the surprises that we did. And to this day I know not but the blockade was imaginary—nor that it was. It made no difference in our discomfort at the time—it was very real for all practical purposes.

"I don't like to have you go into the garden alone," Kate would say. "They might just take advantage of your being out, and station themselves at the door."

"They shouldn't get in—if I stayed out all day!"

"But that would not be pleasant."

And Mrs Howard thought "we had better stay in, or go together." We came to be in the condition of Florence Dombey's dog—with "a perpetual unseen enemy round the corner." Our own dog was certainly more restless than usual, but that might have been caught from us. And if ever we cooled down a little, Caddie would strike in with—

"Why, Miss Kate, I've seen 'em keep watch day and night round a house, nor never lave it till they'd get in!"

Even my father, when appealed to, said he really couldn't tell. Mr Phibbs had done this and that—he thought there could be no danger—but he had been so often deceived and disappointed by law and lawyers, that he hadn't much confidence left in either. What gave emphasis to his words was, that he always locked the door himself. And so bolts and bars were kept in full requisition.

But there never was anything so wearisome!—the constant fear—the constant mounting guard—the constant vision of danger, hooded and cloaked—we were half tempted to run away and leave Mr M'Loon to deal with an empty house. If his desire had been our discomfort, it was fully accomplished—he did not know how well.

Sunday was the only free day; and it was a perfect luxury to open the doors and air the house of its prison-like feeling; to stand in the doorways with careless impunity—to go in and out with no tremor. It was long, long before the experience of those weeks wore off. Even when the whole affair was finally disposed of, there lingered in our minds an association with open doors that made them disagreeable; and many a time, in summer weather, have I got up to turn a key or draw a bolt, and then breathed freer.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FLOWERS COME OUT, AND WE DON'T.

> "Now sit we close about this taper here,
> And call in question our necessities."
>
> SHAKSPEARE.

AND so we lived on; but whether or no Mr M'Loon still "ticed" round among the trees, he did not again present himself at the house, either in person or by the sour-looking sheriff. Meanwhile the little garrison held many a debate—what were they to do? how should they live?

Even before our late disturbance, my father had determined not to have Archie and Candlish come back. "It cost more than it came to," he said; "and what we wanted was capital—not interest." Had that been otherwise, two such little door-openers were not to be thought of.

"But what will you do, then?" said Mrs Howard; "we must get money in some way—I want ten dollars for Caddie at once."

My father expressed his sense of the difficulty by one or two of the wordless signs of emotion, but gave no further reply; and breakfast proceeded rather moodily. It was early spring-time—the season had just arrived, and was setting itself to work; and the sweetest of March winds—they are sweet in the country—was blowing off what it could of the world's dust.

"What will you do, papa?" said Kate.

"Read the letters, I guess," said Mr Howard, as he took up those which Andy had just laid on the table, and moved his chair to the fire. He sat reading and musing for a long time; and then handing an open epistle to my stepmother, he said—

"There is what I *can* do, if I've a mind."

"What is this?"

"A letter from Mr Pelion of the —— Institute, containing a request that I will deliver a course of lectures on American history, for the benefit of the young ideas under his charge, and, as a secondary inducement, for my own."

"At this time of year? I thought winter was the lecture season."

"But Mr Pelion has discovered that 'young ladies' minds are relaxed by the enervating spring weather'—so they'll be the fitter to understand me, I suppose."

"What a foolish man!" I said, "to write that; he might better have kept his opinion to himself."

"I don't care for his opinions, nor for the facts," said Mr Howard; "the question is, is it worth my while to give in to this plan? It's an easy enough way of earning money—and the money would not be thrown away—unless the ears of the young ladies have shared the general relaxation."

"I advise you to do it, by all means," said my stepmother. "If they pay you well, you would not find it a disagreeable business."

"No, not at all—neither does it matter about that. But there is one great difficulty—I should be almost constantly away for two or three months."

"But then, papa," said Kate, gently, "we must do as we can, you know, and consider what is best rather than what is pleasant. It is very bad to have you away, but neither you nor we could be comfortable to sit quietly here and earn nothing."

"I've a notion something would start us up pretty quick if we did," said my father. "I do not intend to stay here in idleness, Kate—the thing is how to leave you alone."

"Why, we must make up our minds to stay with Andy, as we have done before," said Mrs Howard.

"I can't think of that. It has made me uncomfortable enough when I have been away for two weeks, and two months is another affair. And, besides, now I think of it, Andy wants to go to Canada for the summer, to see his sister, I believe. So you see I am in a puzzle. I can neither stay at home nor go away."

"Mamma," said Kate, after our minds had several times made the tour of circumstances, "wouldn't it be almost worth while for us to get board somewhere, for the time papa wants to be gone?"

"Very well worth while, indeed, Katie, if we could; but I shouldn't know where to apply."

"There's Mrs Shelton's, at the Moon," said my father.

"That would cost too much. And our wardrobe is not quite in order for any such place."

"Mrs Barrington!" cried I; "wouldn't she take us? and there we should be near enough to see our gardens once in a while."

"Why, that is a brave thought, Gracie," said Kate; "I daresay she would, for their house has much more room in it than they can use."

I thought both Mr and Mrs Howard looked at us a little wistfully when this plan was proposed; but it seemed feasible: and as my stepmother's eye went back to him with a smile that said, "we must not mind trifles,"—my father raised no objection, and promised to see Mrs Barrington that very day.

"Here's another letter that deserves some attention," he said; "one, too, that I ought to have got long ago. Those books of brother Ned's have been boxed up and forwarded to me from Baltimore, with the trunk I left there, and some other matters. I suppose they have been at Ethan for these two weeks. I must see after them first of all."

But Mr M'Loon had been beforehand with us. Having by some means found out that a little of our property was lodged in the stage-office at Ethan, his first thought was that he wanted it, his second to send the sheriff to make a levy; and when my father applied for his boxes, the office-man was "very sorry, but he had been ordered not to let them be taken."

People do sometimes run so fast that they fall down; and Mr M'Loon, forgetting that the county-line went just this side, and not beyond Ethan, had fairly given the sheriff a job out of his jurisdiction. The levy was easily set aside; but not without another journey to Mr Phibbs, not without an unnecessary increase of our scrutinising and watchful anxiety. During those few days the blockade was redoubled. We began to think with pleasure of being rid of it, at least for the summer. Mr Phibbs would fain have had us rid of it at once. Everything was arranged, he said, and, except the occasional service of a paper, there was nothing more to do. But, when Mr M'Loon's whole claim was such as no man of honour could

have urged, who would trust him for the means he might use to further it?"

Mrs Barrington was more than willing to take us into her house—her only doubt being that it was "a poor sort of a place;" but we agreed to supply any deficiencies from our own establishment, and that set her mind at rest.

We had debated whether to take Caddie with us, but decided against it; partly on the score of expense—partly because it might give our hostess much extra trouble. But Caddie succeeded in finding a lady at the Moon who was glad to get so good a servant even for a short time; and thus all obstacles were smoothed away.

All obstacles to Mr Howard's going—not all to his going speedily. Arrears in the purse usually have ramifications in every other department; and when it is very hard to buy materials, it is not easy to have always a well-ordered wardrobe. Take away the weekly mending, and Mr Howard's was merely nominal. He wanted collars, and he wanted shirts, and he wanted pantaloons.

"If you would get some drilling and let the tailor cut you out a pair of pantaloons, I am sure I could make them," said Mrs Howard. "How much do you pay, as it is?"

"About five dollars," said my father.

"And how much does the stuff cost?"

"From twelve to eighteen shillings."

"Then, it is well worth my while to do it."

When Mr Howard came back from Philadelphia with his various purchases, he produced a great bundle containing the cut-out pantaloons, but also stuff for five other pairs! remarking that "he thought he might as well get enough while he was about it."

He saw not Mrs Howard's look of dismay, and she said not a word till he was out of the room.

"I have got my hands full, now! when in the world shall I ever make six pairs of pantaloons!—with all else that I've got to do? If I were accustomed to the work—but I never made a pair in my life!"

"Why didn't you tell papa?"

"My dear Kate," said Mrs Howard, smiling, "when you are at the head of a house, always remember, that words spoken when they can do no good are worse than wasted. I may talk to you about it, for it's a sort of relief; but what would be the

use of telling your father that he had misunderstood me, and made a mistake?"

"Then he'd remember next time."

"No, he wouldn't—he'd only be uncomfortable now. The time to speak is before, not after; and I did speak, but not, it seems, with sufficient clearness."

"You couldn't know that he would think one pair meant half a dozen."

"It's very plain that *he* never tried tailoring!" said Mrs Howard, with a little shake of her head.

"But why not send some of them away to be made?"

"Because, dear, he did not calculate for that; and though there is not a pair more than he wants, there are several pairs more than he can afford to have made—by any one but me."

Kate looked as if she thought it a doubtful saving of expense.

"The time to speak," said Mrs Howard, with as bright a face as if the pantaloons had been patchwork, "is, as I told you, before the thing is done. Never shew a gentleman a mistake unless it can be mended—that only gives pain: but upon the next occasion I might tell him, 'do so,' and 'do *not* so'—then he would never know that he had given me any trouble. I would rather do anything than that he should know it—or want the pantaloons, either. So would you in my place. But do you think you and Grace can go on with those shirts all alone? for I must touch nothing till this job is disposed of."

"O yes," said Kate, "we can manage the shirts well enough; but that is such hard work for you, mamma—you had better let us take it."

"No, indeed! Don't look so disconsolate, Gracie—'it's a long lane that has no turning,' so we may reasonably hope that this roll of drilling will in course of time pass through my hands, and come out pantaloons. But I wish the tailor had sent a key to his cuttings! I suppose this is meant for a pocket—but how or where? well, I must take an old pair for guide."

Quietly, steadily we worked; Kate and I sometimes bending over the shirts, sometimes sitting up to look out at the blowing trees for recreation. Then Mrs Howard would say—

"See, haven't I put in that pocket beautifully? Now, this pair is all done but the button-holes. I shall leave them for

you, Katie, for you will do them best; and I'll help you on the shirts."

"No need, mamma, I can do them in short order. Gracie, love, stop sewing—I know you are tired. Now, just stop and rest yourself!"

"I want to finish putting in these sleeves, Katie."

"But you'll do yourself a mischief—you've been sewing so long and steadily. I'd rather work all night than have you get so tired, child."

And her words send to my heart one of those two-edged feelings—those bright indemnifications that rich people never know. And, with a smile, I answer—

"I won't hurt myself, Katie—never fear."

I know not if gold always acts as a wedge, but I have proved that, in its absence, the inner particles grow very near together by dint of a little outward compression.

And then Mr Howard comes in, and, patting our shoulders, says rather sadly—

"Don't work too hard."

And we sew on, with a new infusion of the spirit, not of strength, but of willingness.

Nevertheless, Kate says I looked peaked, and I tell her that she looks pale; and Mrs Howard is only too ready for bed.

Then we send for Mrs Barrington to help Caddie clean house; for, as Mrs Howard remarks, "we shan't want to have it done at midsummer." It is not a fair cleaning house, either; we feel too unsettled to undertake that; but it's just enough to make every room chill and uncomfortable. And such a watching of keys and bolts! Sometimes our work-room is without a carpet, sometimes it has a strong savour of soap-suds or whitewash. Sometimes we put up work altogether, and wash china. For the storeroom is clean, and its contents must be clean also; and this china—one of our Philadelphia relics—may not be broken. Mrs Barrington, indeed, might be trusted, but her hands are otherwise employed; and, as for trusting Caddie—who thinks no pitcher has a right to a nose, and that cup handles are supernumerary! So the weariness of constant sitting is exchanged for that of standing; and the varieties of the day are, carrying heavy piles of dishes to and from the closet, and the frequent exchange of wet towels for dry. Kate says she would about as lief run the risk of breakage—for

"when shall we ever give dinner parties?" And Mrs Howard tells her, laughingly, that

> "Did youth but know what age would crave,
> Many a penny would it save."

Whereupon we both express a desire to know where the pennies are, and also an opinion that youth's power of extravagance is sometimes limited.

It is not uncomfortable out of doors—how lovely! how fair! And I think, half sighingly, of the wood beauties that I have no time to search out. The lilacs load the air with their fragrance, and their clusters lose somewhat of their first pink, and take more of the true lilac colour as the buds open; then they are all lilac—or white—then touched with brown; and then among the things that were. And the laburnums are in full flower; but we have only time for now and then a glance at their yellow luxuriance; and Mrs Howard declares, that she never has a fair chance to see them, for they always bloom when she is most busy. Then the air is "faint with sweetness"—or would be, if it were musk instead of locust-flowers—and we are almost as much attracted as the bees. Happy bees! whose work is among the flowers; who thread the air while we thread needles!

And when I have been busy all day with fingers or feet, I sit quietly at the window after sundown, feeling very, very tired, and look at the north-western sky, with the dark outline of hill and trees against it. I remember one night in particular.

The blue of the zenith had disappeared far above the horizon, but not *faded*, it had only given place to a clear, cool, brilliancy—an indescribable colour, or want of colour, rather. And how much the sight rested and refreshed me! the feeling was akin to that of "cold waters to a thirsty soul." Is it that the very idea of peace rests one? or that all the chords of man's being are within Nature's reach, and answer to the touch of her fingers? The mind in its weariness and fluctuation lays hold of what is, as Carlyle says, "so still! eternal!" with immediate steadiness and relief.

The May roses had spent their beauty, the Harrisons were in full pursuit, and one bud on our favourite Rouge de Luxembourg was peeping from its calyx to look at the world, before Mr Howard was ready for his departure. He had protested against going until he had seen us settled in our farm-house;

but we had raised a counter protestation, and, as he was short of time, my father had to yield.

It was but little we had to move. Mrs Barrington's fears had looked rather at our imaginary than our real wants, and the apartments she had got ready for us needed little done on our part. There was, however, much to be done at home; things to put up and arrange; winter clothes to stow away, and summer clothes to get out; and not a few of the latter to be mended or altered. Mr Howard's claims had crowded our own out of sight. Some articles could be finished after our removal, but of others we were in immediate need; and we had a tiresome week before we were ready to leave the Glen; too tiresome, too busy to let us feel its full sadness; there was only the constant pressure of something.

It seemed strange, too. We were going but for a while; my father had left us in excellent spirits, and his absence was not to be very long; but it was perhaps the trying of a cord that must soon break;—should we ever live there again?—and even a temporary removal seemed to take us further from those happy years that we had outgrown. One pleasant thought stood alone in the midst of it all—Mrs Barrington's house would be more of a castle than our own could be; there Mr M'Loon would not even try to enter. We could have open doors to our hearts' content

"Wolfgang's shanty 'll go, I s'pose, ma'am?" said Mr Barrington, as he and his wife made their appearance on the morning of our breaking up. "I guess likely, as he come from England, he mightn't care about sleeping with Coal."

"Yes, it may as well go," said my stepmother, with a smile. "But how will Coal like such an intrusion upon his premises?"

"He?" said Mrs Barrington. "My!—why, Mrs Howard, he'll be tickled to death! He's a dreadful sociable little dog, and not a bit crabbed."

"Ain't a thing in town that don't like him," said Ezra, "'cept Mr Carvill's Mire-a-bow; and *his* likin' would be a small notion of a compliment, for he's as ugly as he can live."

And Coal wriggled himself almost into a circle, to prove his amiability.

"Have done, will ye!" said Ezra. "You ain't got so much to boast of in the way o' looks, that ye need put yourself out to make folks stare at ye."

"The last dog we had was dreadful handsome," said Mrs Barrington, with a benign look at the little, rough, black terrier; "but he got blowed up."

And Kate and I made a rush up stairs, lest our sympathy should be testified in a very extraordinary manner. The laugh was soon checked in those deserted rooms—they looked so desolate; the shadows of past years lay there, and not even the warm May sun could do more than set them off. I had seen that same house, at that same season, in all the complicated disorder of building, cleaning, and moving, but it looked very different now; for, says Bacon, "Hope is a good breakfast, but it is a bad supper."

Kate seized a carpet-bag and ran down again, and I followed her with a bandbox.

"I'd be caution," said Mr Barrington, as in a somewhat summary manner he pounced upon bag and box at once—"I'd be caution I could ha' fetched them things *a'most* as quick as you have. I ha'n't quite forgot how to run up and down stairs yet. Ain't there no other way left o' takin' exercise?"

And marching out with great dignity, Ezra bestowed the bag under the seat of his ox-cart.

"Will this pasteboard thing stand fire?" he said, with an inquiring look towards Kate and me, as we stood holding the door. "You needn't be so skeery about the door, Miss Kate—if he gets in, I'd just as soon pitch him out as not—and a notion rather. But, I say, has this here concern got to be made much of? Had it ought to stand up or lie down?"

"My!" said Mrs Barrington, running out, "don't you know no better than to stick a ban'box eendways up?—It's got things into it."

"It ain't got no hole for 'em to run out of," said Ezra—"leastways, if that 'ere streaked bag don't kiver it up—and then one would think they *couldn't* run out."

"A person would think a great many things," said his wife, as she clambered into the cart, and settled and unsettled the baggage to her liking; "but wiser folks than you and me, Ezra, has been mistook afore now."

"Well, I'll never deny that," said Mr Barrington, who stood with his hands resting on the cart-rave. "Go ahead! the oxen won't run away—that's a blessing. And if they did, you'd ride soft in there 'mongst all that nonsense."

"Fetch out some more o' them trunks!" said Mrs Barrington, with dignity.

"Women is wonderful!" said Ezra, as he walked off. "I s'pose there wouldn't be much done if it wa'n't for them! And if there didn't now and then come along s'nthin' a *leetle* too heavy for 'em to manage, a man might go blackberrying! There—that's all."

We saw the cart drive off, and, after taking a final survey of everything within the house, we went out and locked the door, and withdrew the key. When would it be put in again? There is a character in shut doors and windows that one has been wont to see open—where there is no light from within, the light from without falls cheerlessly. We stood silently looking at the lake. It shewed no sympathy for our sadness—the very laugh of the springtime beamed on it; and the birds—were they heartless in their rejoicing?—only thoughtless, like the rest of the world. Our eyes wandered to the little opening in the woods that marked the footpath to the Bird's Nest.

"Shall we walk down there, mamma?" said Kate.

Mrs Howard consented; and we went slowly along, thinking, noticing everything, but without a word, till we reached the garden. Everything was in nice order, everything wore its old look of quiet security—one could not imagine an intruder there. Yet had one been—we looked at the house, and turned sighingly away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GOING UP IN THE WORLD.

> "All friendship now decays,
> (Believe me, this is true),
> Which was not in those days
> When this old cap was new."
>
> OLD SONG.

THE little abode where Ezra Barrington had been settled on our first coming to Glen Luna, and which he had retained even when he took charge of the Lea, was on our own land. So much was pleasant. The house itself was nothing extraordinary, though larger than many of its race, and with that full complement of doors and windows which an American farmhouse rarely wants. There was, too, the unfailing porch, and the low kitchen appendage with a proportionably high chimney; and in close neighbourhood to this apartment appeared a perfect settlement of chicken-coops, because any nearer the woods was "so handy to the minks." One or two particularly cross old hens were favoured with separate and retired situations.

The house stood half-way up a thickly wooded and rather steep hillside, facing one long, open vista to the south-west; which parallelogram of clearing embraced the path, a cornfield, a patch of forest, a touch of the lake at its western extremity, and the little church. Further still was the low cultivated shore on the Moon side.

About the house, besides the soft pasture and here and there a brown stump, was a neat garden. Long open ranks of Indian corn went up hill untiringly, while pumpkin vines covered every spare inch of ground with their large leaves and yellow flowers; and cabbages, lettuce, beans, onions, and the common variety of tap-roots, deployed off according to their several

uniforms; potatoes were in a distant squad by themselves. A few currant-bushes hanging full of their reddening fruit, and two or three apple and cherry trees, carried the garden to the edge of the woods. This was at the back of the house—no vegetables were allowed in front. Marigolds of every shade of colour and fulness, fine variegated ladyslippers, feverfew, bachelors' buttons, canterbury bells, phlox and amaranths, presented a very gay spectacle to a cluster of tall sun-flowers which looked down upon them; and left in pretty, soft relief, an occasional bed of "creepin' Charlie." A single pole of scarlet runners, and another of painted ladies, represented the aristocracy of the kitchen garden; while on one side an unpretending green vine wandered where it would, because, as Mrs Barrington informed us, the gourds were "such dreadful pretty things for the children to play with."

"The children," strictly speaking, were but two, for 'Dency and 'Lisha were well advanced in the growing-up stage. 'Lisha was away in the field with his father, but 'Dency came forth with her mother to meet us, and Benny and little Susan-Jeanette peeped at us from behind the currant-bushes. Coal followed up his good beginning, and displayed a degree of amiable eccentricity that completely puzzled Wolfgang. He evidently thought his little canine host was mad.

We were assigned the eastern division of the house, that being a little the most modern and commodious, and Mrs Barrington's extreme anxiety for our comfort kept down all notionality on our part. Indeed, our notions had had a schooling, and to be safe and comfortable were matters quite independent of mahogany and brussels. Our simple table and chairs looked very pleasant upon Mrs Barrington's bran new carpet, wherein were all the colours of the rainbow in most unrainbow-like order; and our books, Kate's harp, and Wolfgang, made us feel at home. On one point alone had we any difficulty, and that was the disposal of the best looking-glass, which, to give a finish to our sitting-room, now hung between the windows. If there be such things as "moral pocket-handkerchiefs," then was that a moral mirror! a sure antidote to vanity! no such representation of our faces had ever been made before. The eye involuntarily sought something else—and found it. Above the plate, as if to make amends for its sternness, a ship with the whitest of canvas was at full sail on the brightest of all blue water—her masts and rigging quite startling with

paint and varnish; and, overhung as it was with a penthouse of frame, the whole formed a sort of entablature that was distressing to civilised nerves. What should we do with it? or with them? Rather than hurt the kind feeling which placed it there, we would have watched the ship's progress all summer, and no indirect coaxing or persuasion could make Mrs Barrington appropriate such an adornment. "She didn't want it," and "she'd as much rather as could be we should have it;" and nothing saved us at last but the happy discovery that a little set of book-shelves must hang just there and nowhere else!

"If there's anything been forgot or left, down yonder, Mrs Howard," said Ezra Barrington, next day, "jus' say so, and it sha'n't be there no longer than it'll take me to go and come. And I ain't somebody else," he added, with a meaning look, "nor no connexion! There sha'n't a living soul get in but me—without it's 'Lisha."

We had agreed to provide ourselves with sugar and tea and coffee, and to prepare the two last after our own fashion by means of an urn and spirit-lamp; but for all the substantials we were to rely upon our hostess and her cookery. So when it drew near meal-time, 'Dency's hair, which, not being very long, usually stood straight out from its first twist, was carefully secured and decorated with a large carved comb; and, with clean apron and hands, and white stockings, and new shoes, she came tramping in and out to set our table, and spread it with whatever attainable things Mrs Barrington had thought we should like. In some of the intervals of business Kate and I always gave the table a slight rearrangement, for it was impossible to get 'Dency out of her own style and into ours; and she might have been born and bred a Southerner for the way she left the doors open—she made a perfect avenue for herself from our room to the kitchen.

"'Dency!" her mother would call out from the pyroligneous quarter—"come back and shut that door! now straight!—if I was a girl as big as you be, I'd be ashamed."

And 'Dency would answer, "Yes, ma'am!" and run and shut the doors; but they were open again in five minutes.

Our new way of life had gone on for about a week, when we were honoured by a call from no less a person than Mrs Willet.

"Well," she said, "I've found you out, you see—dear me! I thought I never should get up that hill! I couldn't believe my

ears when they told me you were gone—O me! Grace, my dear, a glass of water. But how comfortable you are here!" she repeated, as between and over sips of water her eyes scrutinised the room. "Why, you're as delightfully situated as can be!"

"To be sure!" said Kate. "You didn't think we were going to put ourselves where we should *not* be comfortable, Mrs Willet?"

"But they told me you had left Glen Luna for the summer—and, of course—I see you've got your harp here, too, Kate."

"What kind of a place did you think we were in?" said Mrs Howard, laughing.

"Dear me, my dear, how can I tell?—how could I tell? I mean. But you're so neat and pretty here!"

"Yes, ma'am," said Kate, gravely—"we always patronise dusting-brushes."

"You're not so much further off, after all," said Mrs Willet—"only for this terrible hill."

"You did not walk?"

"Up the hill—I had to leave my carriage at the foot, you know. Next time I shall stay there too, and send for you to come down—the youngest legs ought to do the running. Well, ain't you surprised to see me?"

"A little," said my stepmother, smiling; "I hardly thought you would come."

"Why not?" said Mrs Willet, with grave earnestness, and the air of repelling an imputation. "What made you think I wouldn't?"

"What made you ask if I was surprised?"

"You always want to know the reason of everything! Bless me! what noise is that?"

"I think it is 'Dency singing," said Kate, with a smile.

"Who's 'Dency?"

"'Dency Barrington—the daughter of our hostess."

"My dear Mrs Howard, I should think it would annoy you to death! Why do you permit it?"

"It's a free country," said my stepmother, laughing.

"But do they often sing so?"

"Pretty often. They are Methodists, and very fond of raising their voices."

"But don't you suppose they'd stop if you told them how it troubled you?"

"I am sure they would; but I think I should interfere more with their comfort than they do with mine—especially as it seldom troubles me at all."

"I'm sure I couldn't bear it for ten minutes!" said Mrs Willet, as 'Dency struck up some new and particularly loud variation, and all the children joined in. "It goes right through my head!"

"That sweet tune?" said Kate. "Some of the Methodist hymns are so fine, that no singing can spoil them."

"But so long as a thing goes through your head, my dear, it don't matter whether it's sweet or not. Well—you're all good-natured, I suppose. Now do come and see me very soon—you must not let yourself stay up here without exercise. And a little diversion for the mind, too. When did you hear from your father?"

"Yesterday," said Kate.

"Oh, that's pleasant. He is well?"

"Very well."

"Give my regards to him when you write. Now don't forget—Cary says she never *can* remember a message. And, by the way, she would have come with me this morning, but it was just the hour for her ride on horseback. I need not explain it to you, my dear Kate, who are systematic, and make such admirable use of your time—you understand it, don't you?"

"Perfectly!" said Kate, with sparkling eyes. But they were beyond Mrs Willet's ken.

"Yes, I thought so," said she, giving Kate a most affectionate kiss. "You must come and see her—come all of you, it'll be a nice walk—you might come every day as well as not."

"I don't know about that," said I, as I watched Mrs Willet's diminishing figure. "I think there would be more than one person tired if we did. 'A nice walk' for *us!*—who have no carriage at the foot of the hill!"

"It is part of our discipline," said Kate, as she turned away from the window. "This would have tried me once; I am thankful that I have grown wiser—that my friends must come up to a higher standard."

"Have you the time of day, Mrs Howard?" said Mrs Barrington, cautiously opening the door. "He's got a watch, but he keeps it to the field—I tell him he ought to get me one. And the clock ain't fixed yet."

"It is just eleven," said my stepmother.

"Well, now, ain't there anything as you'd like to have for dinner perticular?—it don't make no odds to me," said Mrs Barrington, earnestly; "and if there's a thing we kin get, you shall have it."

"It makes very little difference to us," said my stepmother. "Don't send Elisha to Wiamee in this hot sun—give us just what you happen to have."

"Dear me!" said Mrs Barrington, "but there ain't much of anything to-day, Mrs Howard—a place gets cleared out once in a while, someways; and now what could you take a likin' to? 'cause 'tain't no more trouble to get what you like than what you don't like."

"Don't get anything to-day."

"There ain't anything in the house, ma'am, if it wa'n't bread and eggs and strawberries and ham—and Ezra says to me, 'now don't you never give 'em no pork,' he says—and I always reckoned as ham and pork was kinder first cousins."

"But we like ham very much, and pork too, sometimes," said my stepmother, smiling; "and in this weather nothing can be better than strawberries, with your nice bread."

"I don't never get tired o' pork myself," said Mrs Barrington, "but it don't seem right to make them eat it as ain't been used to it. And I'd send 'Lisha to Mr Cleaver's, only he's helping his father—but 'Dency kin go. And Ezra would have went to the lake for to ketch some fish, but he said if he did it would be sure to rain afore he'd get back; and there's a dreadful sight of hay down."

And Mrs Barrington stood looking at us in rather anxious perplexity.

"We won't eat a thing to-day but bread and butter and strawberries," said Kate, laughing, "if you get ever so much, Mrs Barrington. I'd rather have them than chickens or fish."

"Well, of all things!" said the good woman. "But the chickens, Miss Kate!—there ain't a man alive could ketch 'em to-day, for little Benny left the coop undid, and they ran right out; and, if they once takes a notion to go in the woods, there's nothing to do but let 'em go."

The pleasantest thing we did that summer was to go to the Bird's Nest: there was an influence there, that was very soothing amid all its sorrowfulness; and, if every sight and sound

reminded us of what we had lost, they did not speak of the weariness and disturbance of money affairs, nor of the bad side of human nature. All that we had ever known in that little garden was lovely and of good report; and tears there were better than smiles in other places — more comforting. We loved to sit and talk of the pleasant times that were gone—to imagine what Miss Easy would have said to us in the troublous times we had lately been through—how she would have looked —what a relief it would have been to talk out to her; and yet we often felt and said we were glad that our sorrows were hers no longer. And Kate would look at me as with Miss Easy's eyes, and tell me she wished I would wear a brighter face. There was indeed a strange sort of society in that garden—its very stillness said more than other people's words. To go there was like steadying the confusion of mind and every-day cares, that we might see more clearly the bright light from "the kingdom"—it was a never-failing quickener of faith and patience. And yet—and yet—there were times when I could hardly bear to go to it, nor to come away when I had gone. It seemed like another parting.

We were gradually learning to do without more things than money. People fell off from us right and left; and the same persons who, two or three years before, had invited us constantly to their houses, now asked us once in the season, or not at all. This was no sudden change, it had been working for some time; but when we were at home and all together, it was less noticeable, less felt—neither had it ever before reached such a point.

Of course we attempted no remedy—our course was clear. We had but to remain quiet, and find our pleasure in things out of gold's domain. And yet it is impossible to see those whom one has liked and trusted, even moderately, turn their backs, without some feeling of regret — especially if one is thereby left alone. This was where it touched us—it shewed us what we had lost. A few years ago we could have borne it better.

Our quondam friends did not quite break with us, but they acted so that we could give them but the little finger of friendship; nor would we perhaps have yielded that, but for the longing one has to trust somebody. They were exceeding fond of us whenever we met—but took care to have that as seldom as possible; and, prepared though we were for

strange behaviour, some of their manœuvres fairly took us by surprise.

Not long after Mrs Egerton came to her cottage for the summer, the little Barringtons were electrified one morning by the appearance of a liveried footman in their garden; his gold lace and red facings quite outshining the sun-flowers and cockscombs. As the hill seemed to have affected him even more severely than it had Mrs Willet, it was perhaps fortunate that his errand was put in writing.

"This is Mrs Egerton's seal, I know," said Kate, as she handed the note to my stepmother. "What can she want of us?"

"She wants our company to breakfast, on the fourth of July; and 'this is not to ask if we will come, but to say we *must*.' There, you may read for yourself. I think we can hardly refuse—she will send her carriage for us."

"I wonder what has come over her!" said Kate. "But it don't matter—I should like to go very much—it is so long since we have seen anybody to speak to."

"You see," said Mrs Howard, when she had intrusted the fatigued footman with her answer—"you see, my dear Kate, it is never best to form a hasty judgment on any subject."

"We had some apparent reason in her case, mamma. But I will take it back—this invitation has given me real pleasure; and it is given so handsomely, too—so promptly—a thing is worth twice as much that is done at the proper time."

The fourth of July fell on Wednesday. Monday morning came, and with it the liveried footman.

"Mrs Egerton would be happy to have Miss Howard's company on a drive."

Kate went, of course, with an additional touch of wonder at the new state of things; and Mrs Howard and I went pleasantly on with our work, speculating the while upon the benefits mind and body may gain by the aid of wheels and a good pair of horses.

But "our eldest" looked tired when she came home, and her bonnet-strings were untied with an air of doubtful satisfaction.

"What *do* you suppose Mrs Egerton took me with her for, mamma?"

"Anything but a drive?"

"Anything but that—exactly, mamma. I wonder if anybody could astonish me after this! But I thought nobody could, before."

"But what is 'this'?" said Mrs Howard.

"Let me see," said Kate—"if I only could tell it as it was told me! Just imagine that Mr and Mrs Egerton are taking a walk. And Mr Egerton says, 'We will ask those Miss Groomes, my dear, to our breakfast on the fourth.' And she replies, 'No, my dear, I cannot do that—I have already invited our friends the Howards.'"

Kate stopped to laugh, in spite of herself.

"Did she really say that, Katie?" said I.

"She really did, and not in a way that gave it even outside grace. It was how she had given him this answer, and how he had thereupon expressed his regret—think of her telling me that! 'But, my dear,' says Mr Egerton, 'why not have them all?' And then she told him, 'Oh, no! she couldn't have any more to breakfast, for she was not out of mourning yet.' What a farce it is!"

"And what said you?"

"That we would not come—decidedly enough! And she made a show of objecting; but, as it was just what she meant I should say, it was only a show. I don't care about the thing itself—we can do without this little piece of pleasure as we have done without others—but, mamma, why do people play fast and loose with us? They are not obliged to take any notice of us, if they don't choose to; and no neglect can equal *such* notice. Now, mamma," she added, kneeling down by her, "you shall not look grave about it!"

"I am very sorry you should both be disappointed."

"Are you disappointed, dear Gracie?" said Kate.

"A little—I sha'n't be by to-morrow."

"I am very sorry, too, for that. But we shall not think of it, mamma—I was a little annoyed to-day—I believe human nature can't always help it."

"We have better friends left than Mrs Egerton could be, dear Kate—that is one comfort. There are some few bright spots where the eye may rest, some few people that may be trusted, and who would give a great deal to see you."

"They make the rest look all the darker," said Kate, as she rose and turned away. "Well, I had as lief know what the

world is made of. There was some loveable stuff about us when we came here, but there is none now."

"Did Mrs Egerton say nothing else, Katie?"

"Not much—O yes, she said, it was only postponing the pleasure—she should send for us again very soon."

"She won't get us, if she does," said I.

A virtuous resolution—which was not to be tried. The season passed, and Mrs Egerton went back to town, but no further invitation was heard of; and the footman in livery became to the little Barringtons but as a thing that was. Our trials of patience were more enduring—general invitations were at a discount.

"Do come and drink tea with us whenever you can find time and inclination. You know our tea-hour—it never varies."

"Send some day for my carriage—it is at your service."

"Now won't you both come and spend the day with me before I go?" said Mrs Osborne.

"With great pleasure," said we; and there the matter ended.

"Why, really, ma'am," said Kate to another "friend," who "wished she could tempt us to visit her in town,"—"I am very easily tempted." The lady took leave immediately.

Some such remark, and a single visit, satisfied our oldest acquaintances.

We were not troubled by these things—they were not pleasant, and did not tend to raise our spirits—but we grew quiet and grave, not discontented. Very quiet! most of all when we chanced to come in contact with "the world of stuffed clothes suits." How quietly we passed through the throng at our little church! as if we had been invisible—sometimes without a greeting from anybody. Indeed we almost ceased to look for one, for why should those speak to us on Sunday who would not return our visits in the week? Nor did they. A family of old acquaintances, in the pew behind us, might have been the pew itself, for unconsciousness of our presence; and very soon they might have been that for all we cared about them. One thought of Miss Easy was worth the whole congregation.

Yet were the days not without pleasure. We were steadily busy, and even happy—happy, perhaps, because busy; for time to remember is not always desirable. We copied a great

deal for Mr Phibbs, and coloured as much—maps and law-papers came and went by the quantity; and the knowledge that we were earning something was very comforting. We had bright letters, too, from Mr Howard, and most brightening ones from Mr Rodney, and now and then a cheering visit from Mr Ellis. Their breath of hope and faith was not lost, it applied a strong brace to our weariness; and Kate would often say—

"I cannot imagine what people do that have no trust in the particular providence of God—who look to nothing beyond this world!"

And then sometimes—when we had been very hard at work, or had met with some unusually "cold shoulder"—the weariness would prevail; and we felt almost like Noah on Mount Ararat—safe from the deluge, but with a world of emptiness around us.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PILLIMAQUADY.

"Some murmur, when their sky is clear,
And wholly bright to view,
If one small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue;
And some with thankful love are fill'd,
If but one streak of light,
One ray of God's good mercy, gild
The darkness of their night."

TRENCH.

"THE children's been out in the woods after flowers," said Mrs Barrington, as she brought in an immense bunch of July spoils; "and I put some of 'em together, if you'd be pleased to accept of 'em."

"Oh, thank you!" I said—"they are beautiful! but you've given us too many. I am very much obliged to you, Mrs Barrington."

"I'm sure you're entirely welcome," she answered.

"But I'm afraid you have robbed the children."

"Oh, they've got oceans!"

"Why, here are little green huckle-berries," said Kate.

"Them's bear-berries," said Mrs Barrington. "The children takes a notion to pick 'em, because they hang so curious-like onto the bush. I think a dreadful sight of them when they're ripe."

"They are very pretty, indeed. What's this great white cluster?"

"Oh, Kate!" I said, "don't you know that?"

"It's only elder-blows, Miss Kate. I thought they was all gone by this time, but the children found 'em somewheres. He says they're nothing but weeds, but I tell him they're just as pretty as a flower."

"And so sweet, too! Where did they find these pretty spikes of white buds?"

"That grows down in the mash—beyond the pine wood. Clethry, some folks calls it, and some calls it white bush; and some, again, calls it sweet pepper bush!—I don't know no name for it myself. And that other white and pink they call prince's pine—Ezra says it beats all how it got in our woods. And this here is patridge-berry, and that 'ere streaked leaf is rattlesnake leaf."

"Why do they call it so?" said I.

"Well, I don't know, Miss Grace—if it ain't because it's so checked and spotted, like a snake—the flower's pretty, too."

"There are no snakes here?" said Mrs Howard.

"None that have got pison into them. But where we lived afore we come here, there was the dreadfullest passel of 'em!—rattlesnakes—and pilots!—I hadn't no good of my life for fear of the children. There was the most young pilots killed just round the house! But I never see none here—only a black snake, and I threw a stone at it; but it cried so that I had mercy onto it, and let it go. I don't know as I did right."

"But they are harmless?" said Kate.

"They say they don't never bite no one," said Mrs Barrington—"but they'll take and chase a person sometimes."

"Did you ever see a rattlesnake yourself?"

"Why, my, yes! I recollect of one day—and it had been raining, and had cleared off, and the sun was 'most down—and I heard a great noise amongst the chickens. And I telled Mr Barrington he'd better go look after 'em—for he wasn't well that day, and stayed home. So he said he guessed it wa'n't nothing; hows'ever he ketched up a club and went, and there, sure enough, was two of the little chickens a-lyin' dead, and right next to 'em this great ugly beast! and my husband he struck at it, and killed it. I don't doubt but it was six feet long—and it had ten rattles to it. But there's a kind o' root—snake-root they call it—that'll cure any sort o' bite; it don't grow round here. I guess I'm like the old woman Ezra tells about," said Mrs Barrington, breaking off with a laugh:—"she didn't know when she got through, and so she begun again. But you're as welcome as can be to the flowers, Miss Grace, and the children kin fetch 'em every day."

We arranged our flowers, the snake story giving fair subject of debate the while, and then seated ourselves to map out a

parcel of lands in Wisconsin that were to delude some unwary speculator; talking of matters and things, and enjoying the elder and partridge-berry fragrance which filled the room; and after dinner we were still at our work with pencil and brush, when we heard a step, and a portion of the sun's rays on their way to us were suddenly cut off. Our windows were as near the ground outside as they were within; therefore, when we looked up, it was no cause of surprise to see Mr Ellis's elbows upon the window-sill, while his head was advanced some inches nearer.

"Well," he said—"good afternoon. Not round the world yet?"

"Not yet," said Kate, smiling.

"They say a woman can't have too much arithmetic," remarked Mr Ellis; "I don't know how it is as to geography, but I suppose something depends upon the way she studies it. Now, if a friend of mine stood where I do, I make no doubt he would tell me, as he once did when I asked him what he had seen at a certain place—'I have seen a great many things I cannot help, Mr Ellis.'"

"You might look in at almost any window and say that," said Kate, laughing.

"There are some things here I wouldn't help if I could. Well—don't you want to try a little measuring with a two-foot rule, instead of that half-way thing of ivory?"

"Measuring what, Mr Ellis?"

"The road from here to the top of Pillimaquady hill."

"O yes, we should like a walk very much. But what is up there? I thought Pillimaquady had only engrossed all the stones of the region?"

"Yes, it has a good many, but it's got a house on it, too."

"A house?" said Mrs Howard.

"Why, I suppose that little pile of logs is as much in the genus house as its inhabitants are in the genus man."

"Who can live up there, Mr Ellis?"

"A family, Miss Kate, who know so much about hard times, that many other people seem ignorant in comparison—that's why I want you to see them. It's well to find out that we don't know everything; and when I find myself a little proud of my own acquaintance with trials, I go up there."

Kate smiled, with a full understanding of his words, and we were soon ready to set out.

"I'll try to bring your young ladies safe home, ma'am," said Mr Ellis; "but I won't promise when. Pillimaquady is every inch a hill, and lets himself down for nobody."

Not for us, certainly. The road which, gradually ascending, led us through corn and hay fields to the foot of the hill, there changed to a little thread of a path of most steep and unequal grading. Cultivation had ventured no further; and the wild plants and rough footing which had been banished from so much of the neighbouring country, here kept their stronghold. The trees grew in what fashion it liked them best; and thick beds of wintergreen and mouse-ear and squaw-vine luxuriated in their shade. Sweet-fern aromatised the air with its pretty cut leaves, while the beautiful laurels, in their variety of growth and colour, might have appropriated Cowper's lines—

> "This red,
> And of an humbler growth; the other tall,
> And throwing up into the darkest gloom
> Of neighbouring cypress or more sable yew
> Her silver globes."

And the intermediate shades blended and contrasted with these two extremes, in a way that, as the French say, "left nothing to desire."

Stones grew more plenty and flowers more scarce as we proceeded; and over rocks, and moss-beds, and little springy places, which even at that season kept their dampness, we wandered and wound about, till we reached a sort of landing-place, some four-fifths of the way up. We saw no house yet, but the path was more level, and the near cackling of a hen spoke of settlers. Then appeared a clothes-line stretched from tree to tree, and supporting a red flannel shirt and two or three nondescript articles; then the aforesaid hen and her companions; the pig-pen, and finally the house. I put the pig-pen first, for that it was in order of approach—standing at the very path-edge, and rendering "the right of way" a matter for litigation. A *pen* it was not, in strictness, unless when the pigs chose to lie behind their logs, and imagine themselves shut up—generally they preferred lying outside, and looking in. A rail-fence in two parts made an equally doubtful attempt at shutting off the rough courtyard, which ran down to a wet, boggy bit of ground, full of alders, and other plants that will still be paddling.

The house was but a regular arrangement of back-logs, with two or three rickety board steps, and windows that were as

little thorough-going as the rest of the concern; the steps were at present occupied by a marvellously clean and nice-looking little cat, whom the first glimpse of us banished to unknown regions. The dark woods closed in behind the house, and skirted the far side of the courtyard; and from the gable next us, a disjointed stove-pipe, whose inclination was to quit the concern, sent up a lazy indication of smoke—looking as much like that which comes from a chimney as a good open fireplace resembles its iron imitators.

In front of the rickety steps a little girl about ten years old was jumping the rope; dressed as to substantials in a stuff petticoat. For ornament she wore a string of beads, and a muslin waist the skirt of which had once covered the petticoat, but now hung in shortened and narrow fringe-strips over the dark stuff; while her stockings and pantalettes were but of the same material as Prince Vortigern's vest—unpainted. But if rags and mud claimed the whole of the body, the face belonged to nothing but fun; and the child and her fringed habiliments took flying leaps over the rope, in a style that quite distanced the sports of Quilp's boy.

A little cur of a dog started up to bark at us, but seeing Mr Ellis's stick, he dropped ears and tail, and walked round to greet Wolfgang and Dec.

We were endeavouring to pick our way over the stones which clogged the fence-gap, when the house-door opened, and a woman who had seen the shady side of life as well as of forty, came out. Her face was bandaged with a handkerchief, and a muslin cap covered her head.

"Why, laws a me!" she said. "You bain't come all the way up here agin, Mr Ellis? well, that's wonderful clever o' you, for sartain. And these young ladies—pretty girls! to come so far to see a body!"

"How are you to-day, Mrs Flinter?" replied our companion.

"I ain't just well," she answered; "I was wonderful bad with the teethache night afore last, and my face are as big as two yet. Why, ain't that Mr Collingwood's dog?"

"Yes," said Mr Ellis.

"He ain't to the Lea, is he, sir?"

"No, but Wolfgang is spending the summer with Mrs Howard."

"Why I want to know!" said Mrs Flinter—"poor feller! poor feller! Come in, sir, won't you—come in, Miss Howards.

Well, I'm wonderful glad to get a sight o' that 'ere dog!—poor feller! come right in, too—you shan't stay out while this here house has got a roof onto it. Loisy, go straight off and fetch him a bit o' bread."

"I don't believe he's very hungry," said Kate; "he had his dinner before we came away."

"Do tell!" said Mrs Flinter; "but maybe he'll eat sunthin'. Poor old feller! I wish it war plumcake!"

And Wolfgang took the dingy bread in his white teeth, rather than to hurt her feelings by a refusal—very much as his master would have done in similar circumstances.

The indoor look of things was not out of keeping with the exterior, though there was rather more arrangement and neatness; but, in justice to Mrs Flinter, it must be allowed that extreme poverty and half a dozen children do not tend to the nice ordering of a log cabin. The room into which we were ushered had a prevailing odour of tobacco and cooking—not the pleasant smell of good food well cooked, but that sickly unwholesome atmosphere which marks deficiencies on both sides of the stew-pan. There was no appearance of dinner, however; but the stove, which for want of a third leg rested on a pile of bricks, still spoke of a recent fire.

A sort of bed in one corner held an oldish, infirm woman, who was covered with a very gay specimen of patchwork; a few wooden and splinter chairs stood about in the way, a few children ditto; while over the table hung a little looking-glass, and over that a bunch of fresh asparagus. The window by the bed was partially shielded by a white curtain, but there seemed small need of it; for on the outside a large hemlock shot up towards the blue sky, far beyond the ridge-pole of the little cabin, and its lower branches rubbed and scratched against every pane of glass within their reach, forming a perfect barrier to eyes without or within. Through one breach in the window a curious shoot had even found its way into the room, and now hung forth its feathery green foliage in singular contrast to everything else there.

Mr Ellis walked up to the sick woman, who seemed overjoyed at the sight of Wolfgang, and Mrs Flinter busied herself in clearing away the children and picking out the best chairs for us.

"What is your name?" said Kate to a little tow mop in the corner, near which she had seated herself.

The child looked gloomily up, disclosing a dirty face below the mop, but spoke not.

"Charley! where's your manners?" said his sister Loisy, in a sharp voice, and for the first time removing her eyes from us. "Take your fingers out of your mouth, and behave! His name's Charley, miss."

"I hain't got a thing to give you to eat!" said our hostess, in a disturbed tone. "Mary Jane! leave the lady's dress be! —we don't never make much count o' cake up here, nor pies nother."

"Oh, we don't want anything to eat," said Kate—"I should like a glass of water, if you please, Mrs Flinter."

"I'm wonderfully on't for glasses, too," said Mrs Flinter—"the children's for ever and the day after a breaking 'em! But there's water enough, if so be you wouldn't mind drinkin' out o' the dipper."

"A teacup would do perfectly," said Kate; and out of two most unmated specimens of crockery we at last satisfied our thirst.

"What excellent water!" said I.

"It's good it is," said Mrs Flinter; "for there ain't nothin' else to be had here for the asking."

"Yes, you must have to bring things a great way; but I suppose the other road is smoother."

"There ain't but one road, and that's where you come up. He works to Wiamee, and backs the weighty things home o' nights, and the children just fetch the rest day-times."

"Not up that little steep path?"

"There ain't no other," repeated Mrs Flinter. "Why, laws a me, Miss Howard! little 'Minadab, that ain't but knee-high to a mouse, 'll fetch along sich a bag of meal, you wouldn't believe!"

"He is older than this one?" I said, looking at the mop.

"Well, yes—but Charley's wonderful strong, too, when he's a mindter."

"And them's Squire Howard's dau'tas," said the sick woman, looking from Mr Ellis to us. "Many's the time I've heerd tell on 'em. There ain't much up here worth comin' to see," she continued with a smile, as we moved our chairs to the bed-foot; "folks on the mounting lives curious ways sometimes, Miss Howard."

"It must be rather hard living up here, indeed," said Kate's

gentle voice, which had all the sweetness of sympathy; "I wish we could do something to make it pleasanter."

"That's just what you've done a'ready," said the woman. "Visiters is scuss in these days, and it's a pleasure to see 'em—when they're good ones. Sayin' nothin' o' you all, that 'ere dog's better than a doctor."

And she turned herself to look at Wolfgang, who sat gravely by her side as if he had been the very gentleman referred to.

"Mother thinks a wonderful sight of him," said Mrs Flinter, "'cos he used to come here with young Mr Collingwood."

The very name brought a flush of delight to the pale cheeks of the sick woman.

"If ever a blessed angel come into a place like this," she said, clasping her hands energetically, "it was when he did. Oh, sir, we was poor indeed till he come to tell us how 'we might be made rich;' and now," she added, "I don't want for anything."

Nobody answered her—nobody could; Kate's head had sunk on her hands, and for a few moments we sat in absolute silence. Then Mr Ellis rose to go.

"I never come up here," he said, "without learning what does me good. You see, Miss Kate, there is 'neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all'—

'Life's poor distinctions vanish here.'

Good-bye, Mrs Barstow; 'hold fast that which thou hast received, that no man take thy crown;' for 'he that shall come will come, and shall not tarry.'"

"'Even so,'" she answered, looking bright at him; and then turning to us, she said—

"It's a wonderful pleasure to see you—maybe you'd come again?"

"We will, certainly," said Kate, "and bring Wolfgang." The wet eyelashes and trembling lips gave full security for the promise.

Mrs Barstow smiled thankfully, and squeezed our hands with all the goodwill in the world; and then Mrs Flinter followed us to the door.

"How does the doctor say your mother is?" inquired Mr Ellis when we were out.

"He don't just say, sir—she's pretty much of a muchness—she don't get no weller, and she don't get no worser."

"Mind you send to me if you want anything," was his parting salutation; and we walked away.

It seemed as if that road home led us through all the shades of human life. Now the way softened and smoothed—here there was an extra flower, and there a finer tree—then came the farm lands in all the beauty of slant sunbeams and fine crops, the work of hard labour; and then the Lea grounds, where toil had been, but was not now—at least for the owner. We turned from them, and mounted our own hill with surely not an ungrateful perception of our own midway situation and prospects.

"Now, Mr Ellis," said Kate, speaking for almost the first time since we left Pillimaquady—"will you promise to apply to us if we can do any good?—our hands might be useful, to say nothing of mamma's head."

"Well, I don't know," said Mr Ellis, looking kindly at her and then at me. "People that have so much to do in Wisconsin can't have much time for the home department. Have you had a pleasant walk?"

"Very."

"Then sleep sound to-night—you look as if you needed it."

So wore on the summer. Two or three times Mr Howard came to spend a day with us, but travelling was too expensive to be much indulged in—we were obliged to be content with the cheaper intercourse of pen and ink. The first set of lectures had given place to a second, but it was to end with August, my father wrote, and then we hoped to be all together again. He had an offer, too, or hopes of it, of an agency in our neighbourhood that would enable him to stay at home; and he was trying very hard to dispose of as much of the Glen Luna lands as would pay off our debts, and rid us of all farms and farm cares.

For Mr Howard had proved, to his own satisfaction, that his niche was not in the temple of Ceres.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JACK'S BEAN.

"Richer than doing nothing for a bauble;
Prouder than rustling in unpaid-for silk."
SHAKSPEARE.

"THERE is no money in this letter, after all," said Mrs Howard, as she laid down one that had just come from my father.

"How does that happen, I wonder?" said Kate.

"Oh, the old way—poor people cannot be paid until rich people think it convenient."

"Did you want it particularly, just now?" said Kate, in a sort of abstracted *aside* from the letter.

"I wished very much to give Mrs Barrington some, and we want tea and sugar, and Grace wants a pair of shoes."

"Never mind, mamma, I'll mend these."

"Are we quite out of tea?"

"No, there's a little left, and we have plenty of coffee—the rest of the sugar had better be kept for that."

"We shall have to go back to our old economy in the sweet line," said Kate. "I think he is very tired of being away from home, mamma."

"No," said Mrs Howard, answering the last words with a sigh—"I have no intention of going back to that sort of economy—I have grown wiser. Instead of struggling to live along by such shifts in the hope that things will mend, the way is to set to and mend them."

"I am sure you have done your part, mamma. But can't we 'live along' till the next letter comes?"

"The only thing I care about," said my stepmother, "is our board—I cannot bear to be behind hand with that. And you see your father will not be home so soon as he expected."

"But Mrs Barrington will wait, mamma—it won't make much difference to them—it can't, for we cost them very little; and the money will be just as good when it comes. I thought there was some left of the last supply?"

"A few dollars—but I don't quite like to leave ourselves without any. Perhaps I had better give her that."

We had been talking while the breakfast-table was clearing away—making a long enough pause in the important places for our little handmaid to load her tray and walk off with it. The table-cloth had hardly disappeared before Mrs Barrington came hurrying in, quite out of breath with her own eagerness.

"'Dency is so hateful!" she said—"she won't *never* shut the doors!"

We looked up in some surprise, but Mrs Barrington's face was the very picture of smiling good-humour. It was only a Pickwickian hateful.

"I didn't know they were open," said my stepmother.

"They wasn't all—only the kitchen door; but he takes on so about grandmother's pipe—he says if ever a thing went every place, it was t'bacca."

"It very seldom comes here," said Kate.

"Grandmother kin't do without her pipe, neither," pursued Mrs Barrington. "I'll fetch some yarn the first time I go to Wiamee—she don't smoke not nigh so much when she has knittin' work. Why, Mrs Howard, when she ain't got nothin' else to do, she'll smoke three sixpenny papers—that's eighteenpence worth in a week! And I do try to keep the doors shut, but the children has no mind to anything."

My stepmother assured her that the pipe gave us no annoyance; and then, according to her former intention, she offered Mrs Barrington part payment of what was owing her. If it had been labelled as the last we had, Mrs Barrington could not have refused it more decidedly.

"I ain't got no use for it now," she said, putting her hands behind her, "and I couldn't do no less than spend it. By and by, when it draws on to winter, I'll likely want to get some things for the children."

"But you may as well take it now," said my stepmother, "and then you'll have it when you want it—maybe I shouldn't, just at the right time."

"It won't make no odds, then," said Mrs Barrington—"if I was to take it now, Mrs Howard, I couldn't keep it. Ezra

says dollars never stood still on top o' sich a hill, and he don't know where to find 'em when they get to the bottom, he says, nor hain't got nothin' to shew for 'em neither. And he couldn't keep 'em no more. My husband says he knows I make holes in his pockets instead of mending 'em, for he finds more every day, he says, and I tell him it's him makes and I mend."

"I think you could manage to keep it," said Mrs Howard, smiling; "and I would much rather you should."

"Yes, ma'am," said Mrs Barrington, in assent to my step-mother's intentions, but not at all to her request. "But my! there's no tellin'!—it beats all how money goes. There's little Benny asked his father yesterday to give him a sixpen', and he didn't have one as it fell out, however he giv him a fivepen'. And Benny he went off to school, and he giv his fivepen' for five apples to one of the play-boys. Simple child! His father said, if he ever knowed him to do sich a heedless act again, he didn't know but he should whip him."

A startling rap at the door interrupted the conversation.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Mrs Barrington; and she hastily ran out, shutting our door behind her. The thin boards kept out sight, but not sound.

"Good morning," said a familiar voice. "Where's the antecedent to the masculine pronoun, Mrs Barrington?"

"Sir?" was the reply.

"I say, where is he?"

"Oh," said Mrs Barrington, who knew a pronoun when she heard it—"my! he ain't to home, Mr Carvill."

"And in which of the forty-nine agricultural departments shall I find him?"

"No, sir," repeated Mrs Barrington. "He's away to mill with a load o' wheat."

"Confound the wheat!" said Mr Carvill. "When will he be back?"

"I don't know, sir—it can't be long—he didn't hardly get his breakfast afore he started; and he's only went to mill, and then to Squire Brown's to tell him about the hay, and then to Wiamee for the ox-chain."

"And everywhere else afterwards, I suppose."

"He said he calculated to plough this afternoon," said Mrs Barrington, as if that held out some slight hope of Ezra's coming home before night.

"I calculate he won't," said Mr Carvill. "Well—I may as well wait a while. I suppose I can go in here, as usual."

"Stop, sir, if you please!" exclaimed Mrs Barrington, as Mr Carvill's impatient foot crossed the passage.

"I'm going to stop till Mr Barrington comes. What's the matter? Is the room whitewashing, or are all the children asleep in it? I won't wake them up—it will do well enough—I want nothing but a chair."

If Mr Carvill had never been surprised before, he was when he had thus ushered himself into our sitting-room. Astonishment, or extraordinary self-command, suppressed even his usual tokens of feeling, and he stood not only motionless, but silent; while Mrs Barrington's distressed face in the passage touched off the scene so, that we were very near bursting into a laugh.

My stepmother was the first to speak.

"Here is a chair, Mr Carvill," she said—"if that is all you want, we can supply you."

"Hard to tell what a man wants when he's got too much," said Mr Carvill abstractedly, as he bowed in answer, while Mrs Barrington quietly closed the door.

"I hope I need not assure you, Mrs Howard, that the idea of ladies being so tired at the foot of this hill, that they had to come up to rest, never entered my head."

And then crossing the room to where we sat, he said—

"Young ladies, I have had an apology in my pocket for the last six months, directed to you. I hope the original lustre is not so dimmed, that you will refuse to receive it?"

"I hope not, sir," said Kate, quietly.

"Well, you shall judge," said Mr Carvill, "for here it is. As—

First, I was provoked;
Secondly, in a passion;
Thirdly, impolite;
Fourthly, penitent.

Now, will you and Miss Grace give me a receipt in full? Or, if either lady felt herself particularly aggrieved—perhaps—I believe that might be so—I will with pleasure give my apology a special direction. How does the case stand, Miss Howard?"

"You know, Mr Carvill," said Kate, colouring a little, but still speaking with the same quiet steadiness, "the essence of an offence lies in the intention. No one can answer such a question but yourself."

"Never answer questions—to myself nor other people," said

Mr Carvill, looking not all displeased. "Am I to have a receipt for this 'essence'?—whatever it was."

"Certainly!" said Kate, smiling, "though one of your items is a little indistinct, Mr Carvill; but for your good deciphering, we should have been puzzled."

"Shake hands, then," he said, with one of his peculiar looks, which rather indicated than expressed a smile, "and that will deepen the impression. And now I will correct my last mistake as far as possible, by bidding you *mille fois adieu!*"

"Our chairs are quite at your service, Mr Carvill," said my stepmother; "if you wish to wait for any one, you had better sit down. I think Mrs Barrington has given up all her spare rooms to us."

"Rooms!" he said.

"Yes," said my stepmother; "we are living here this summer, for safe keeping during Mr Howard's absence."

"Living here!—on top of Jack's bean!"

"No," said I, laughing; "we are not at the top yet, only 'as high as the house.'"

"There is nothing left for me but Mrs Barrington's 'Well, of all things!'" said Mr Carvill. "Absolutely quitted the Moon for the stars!"

"I hope Mrs Carvill is well?" said my stepmother.

"I hope so, too, ma'am, but at present I am living in a state of single blessedness; and the two days which have rolled over my head since I left Mrs Carvill have not sufficiently aroused her anxiety to make her write to me. Of course, the only relief to my mind lies in the contemplation of the telegraph wires. *Au revoir!* I see Jack has come."

Whether Mr Carvill thought his character as a gentleman had been somewhat jeoparded, or whether the small portion of Collingwood in him was touched by our reverses, he certainly seemed to desire friendly terms; and a few days after his involuntary visit he sent us a brace of ducks, one of which wore round its leg this label:—

"A continuation of the last item."

Ezra Barrington delivered them without a word; but upon my stepmother's charging him with her thanks, he gave one of his uncompromising grunts, and remarked, that "'twa'n't a millennium if folks did once in a while have common sense—the only wonder was they didn't get it oftener."

"You will not forget my message?" said Mrs Howard.

"Well," said Ezra, "I do' know as I kin—it's stowed away in my back settlements—safe enough, I guess. The thing is whether I kin ever get it out."

The loveliest of September weather had set in—bright fresh days, and cool nights, that very soon touched up our forest trees. Down in the valley the trees yet laughed at it, except now and then a sensitive butternut, whose "yellow leaf" came upon small provocation; but on the higher ground the fall colours began to come out beautifully. It was as if Autumn took her stand upon the hills, and there unfurled her banners as a signal for all nature to bow subjection. Now might be seen a cluster of maples assuming the royal colours, at first in a mere cockade or favour—one branch stretching out over the road its crimson leaves, while the rest of the tree remained unchanged. Then a group of loyal oaks came out in the darkest red, from the top leaf to the lowest branch, that held consultation with the maples. The white oaks chose to appear in orange, and the hickories in bright yellow—as if liberty-poles were worth gilding; while all the militia—sumachs, and brambles, and cornus, and buckthorns—came hurrying in, wearing what uniforms they could pick up—green spotted with red or striped with black, or leaves that were indeed of one colour, but so deficient in leafets, that it reminded one of—

> "Upon one foot he had one boot,
> And t'other in his hand, sir."

The evergreens stood out in stout rebellion; only the arbor-vitæ assumed a sprinkling of brown leaves for a time, and then dropped them. But how fast the other trees came in! after the example of a few leaders, and the persuasion of a sharp frost or two. The season was unusually cold; summer had ended with the name of it, and the fall days were not idle. We began to think it high time for us to be at home and established for the winter. Still my father came not; and as he was staying away for the means to stay at home, we were forced to be content. Our letters were an interchange of patience and quiet waiting, though we were not less weary of the separation than Mr Howard, and though summer dresses were in strong need of successors.

We had taken a little money and a long walk one day, to try what the Wiamee stores could furnish, and were returning, under the full conviction that an empty purse never found much anywhere, when the distance was suddenly occupied by

a great cloud of dust. Of course, we turned out for the carriage! but the carriage was neighbourly, and stopped.

"How d' do?" said Mrs Egerton's hat and feathers (the wind blew away the most of her voice); "been walking? going home?"

We made answer by a comprehensive yes.

"Well, get in here, and I'll take you home. Stephen! let down the steps."

The footman obeyed, and a scornful little bronze boot drew itself away from the open coach-door. The silk dress to match was taken equal care of.

"Come!" said the lady,—"jump in!"

But, having caught sight of at least two Misses Willet in the carriage, Mrs Howard declined.

"There's plenty of room," said Mrs Egerton; "we can sit close, you know; Cary and Amelia will take Kate between them, and—Oh, Michael, take care of those horses! Eh!"

The silk dress received another little expressive twitch, and the horses danced.

"Thank you, Mrs Egerton," said my stepmother, with hard-won gravity; "we had rather walk."

"Well, I must have one of you. Come, Grace, I shall be very much hurt if you don't."

And Mrs Howard and Kate fairly put me in—not because I was wanted, but because I was tired.

For a few minutes the Misses Willet found full occupation in surveying me, whom they had hardly seen since I was a child. During Mrs Willet's first summers at the Moon, they had been at boarding-school. From appearances, I judged that they had *never* seen a calico dress, nor a tartan shawl, nor probably a straw bonnet in October; but comforting myself with the proverb, "that dress is best which best fits me," I leaned back in the carriage in a very equable state of mind.

"Then you won't go to Greenleaf's, aunt Egerton!" exclaimed Miss Amelia, suddenly. "How provoking!"

"Why, yes, my dear—I think we can. Are you in any hurry to get home, Grace?"

Miss Willet looked as if the question were a conventional absurdity, and I answered—

"No, ma'am."

And felt that I wished Greenleaf's were at the distance of just half the daylight that remained of that first of October.

"Pull the string, my dear," said Mrs Egerton, "and give your orders; he knows where the place is."

The place was a little nest of hot-houses, in "a most chosen plot of fertile land;" with a fair south-eastern exposure, and sheltering high ground and evergreens towards the cold regions. I had been there years before, when we first came to Glen Luna, but I now went under new auspices. I was desired to get out of the carriage, and then I walked quietly in after the two Misses Willet, who fluttered after their aunt as close as possible. Once in, I could spare their attentions, and bestow mine upon the flowers; but Mrs Egerton needed me.

"My dear Grace, I am going into this little office to speak to Mr Greenleaf about my garden. Will you come with me? I never like to go anywhere alone."

The head man sat in his office, writing letters.

"I am afraid we interrupt you, sir," said Mrs Egerton, politely, and taking a chair.

Mr Greenleaf bowed; it might be in assent to either her words or action. He looked up at the lady and down at his paper, and then moved his pen a little way off, and held it over the inkstand.

"I want to see about a gardener for my little place in the spring."

"Where's that?"

"Down at the Moon—Mr Egerton's place—you perhaps know where it is?"

No, Mr Greenleaf did not; he knew where the Moon was, well enough.

"Well, anybody can tell you. Now, what time in the spring should the garden be made?"

"You want me to send a man?" said Mr Greenleaf.

"Yes—a very good one."

"I don't employ any others. What sort of ground is it?"

"What sort of ground?" said Mrs Egerton, looking blank.

"Well, what soil? Now, the Moon gardens is mostly loom—sandy loom, as good as can be; but, if you say your place is further back, there might happen some clay in it; or nearer the lake, more sand again. And on that it turns, you see; some'll work a week, or maybe two weeks, earlier than others."

"Work!" said Mrs Egerton. "But Mr Egerton will pay

the man just what he asks—if he is willing to work early, we should like it much better."

"No, no!" said Mr Greenleaf; "it's the ground I'm talking about. It's friz up in the winter, you see—and wet, and it won't *work* till the frost gets out, and it comes in—grows meller, like. And some ground comes in sooner than others, and, after all, it depends a great deal on the season."

Mrs Egerton looked absolutely mystified.

"Don't *you* understand?" said the gardener, with a despairing appeal to me.

"O yes," said I, smiling.

"Well, send him when you like," said Mrs Egerton; "I don't know *anything* about it. What's the first thing to be planted?"

"'Pends upon what you're going to have. If you'll just make out a list, I'll see and have 'em in the ground in time."

"But I don't know the name of a single thing! Oh, yes—we want endive—and cresses—Mr Egerton's so fond of them for breakfast."

"Marvin," said Mr Greenleaf to a young apprentice, "just hand out some of them catalogues." And as Mrs Egerton went to the counter, Mr Greenleaf returned to his letter with a feeling of relief.

"Asparagus," said Mrs Egerton. "We've got that, but it does not bear well. How ought it to be managed? Ours has been allowed to run up to seed this summer—will it ever get over it?"

"Let it run up, and cut it down close," said Mr Greenleaf, in a parenthesis.

Mrs Egerton looked at him hopelessly.

"Beans we must have, of course—and everything else that's good—just put in what you can—and radishes. What time do you plant them? What time will they be good to eat?"

"Somewheres in March, if you force 'em," said Marvin.

"Why, how can you force them? But, dear me! we sha'n't be here in March—I might have them sent down—they'd be fresh, and so much better than we get in town. Couldn't they be sent?"

"How fur?"

"To Philadelphia."

"Cheaper to buy 'em there," said Marvin, rather contemptuously.

"Well, I shall leave it all to Mr Greenleaf. Oh, the raspberry bushes need something done to them."

"I guess I'll send a man along to morrow to see to it," said the gardener; and, with a good morning that was the concentration of suavity, Mrs Egerton carried me back into the greenhouse.

"Now, my dear Grace," said she, "just choose out any of these plants for yourself."

And, while she was giving whispering orders to the man in attendance about a bouquet, I walked up and down and looked at the plants. Might I choose one! There were tiny little geraniums and roses—three inches of sweetness could not cost much—and what a treasure it would be!—little cuttings just struck and potted off—I half selected one—I half asked its price; but when Mrs Egerton said—

"What have you chosen?"

I said, "Nothing, ma'am."

"Oh, well, choose something."

She walked off, and so did I, into a room filled with plants in full flower.

See here," said Mrs Egerton, pointing out a most exquisite china rose, loaded with its loveliest of all flowers; "ain't that beautiful?"

My answer was very warm.

"I've a great mind to get it for your mother! do you think she would like to have it? or would you?"

"Oh, don't get it for me," I said.

Mrs Egerton stood looking at the rose, and I was imagining the glow it would cast over our little plain sitting-room.

"I shouldn't know how to get it to her, after all," she said.

Another pause—and I stole furtive glances at the large placard—

"Flowers and plants sent anywhere within ten miles."

"Well, I believe we must leave it for to-day," said Mrs Egerton—"will this grow in a garden?" taking up some ground-pine from the bouquet-table.

"No, ma'am."

"What a pity! Come, girls."

She paused outside the door.

"You haven't got anything now, Grace."

"That's no matter, ma'am."

"It's too bad to bring you up here for nothing—but I'm so dreadfully tired! Well, get in."

The carriage rolled smoothly on, and my thoughts fled away to the few bright spots in this world that said human nature was not all alike.

"My dear Grace," said Mrs Egerton, as we stopped at the foot of the hill, "you look tired."

"A little, ma'am."

"I wish we could drive to the door. Are you afraid to go up the hill alone?"

"No, ma'am," I said, with a sudden feeling that would have braved anything.

"Good-bye, then—I would walk up with you, but I'm so tired. Give my love to your mother and sister. Home, Stephen."

The first few steps up the hill were taken briskly enough, but then I felt that I was tired, and then that the sun was near down and I alone. But I reached home in safety, and spent all my indignation in quieting that of mamma and Kate.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ENTER A DUCK SOLUS.

> "Fields, goods, and far-off chattels we have none:
> These narrow bounds contain our private store
> Of things earth makes and sun doth shine upon;
> Here are they in our sight—we have no more."
>
> WORDSWORTH.

WE were very busy now, preparing for Mr Howard's return, and our own removal to Glen Luna. Every fine day we went down there and spent some time in putting things in order—even linen was got out and beds made up, and wood laid in the fireplace. How pleasant it was to do all this! to think of being once more together and at home!

One not very pleasant surprise awaited us—we must do without Caddie. During her residence at the Moon, she had found an old-country-man to whom, for some hidden cause, she took a fancy; and they were to be married in November.

"He's not just unknownst to me neither," said Caddie, "for he's from the one place with meself; and little Pat Maloney, that was sister's son to my brother-in-law (that's him that let in the sheriffs, ye mind), was this boy's cousin once removed—so we felt acquainted, like."

Affairs being in this state, we concluded to try once more our old experiment of helping ourselves. "For a while," Mrs Howard said, "till we could see a little how things were going."

Meantime our kind friends on "Jack's Bean" came down with us to do whatever they could think of, and would fain have given us at least a few days' steady attendance; but failing to get our consent to this, they finished all manner of odd jobs without asking leave. Wood was cut and brought, the cow driven home and milked; and before we had fairly laid off

bonnets and shawls up stairs, both fires were lit, and the tea-kettle was getting up its steam as fast as possible. As it was by this time near dark, Elisha filled every attainable pail with fresh water, and then went home with his mother; while Mr Barrington sat down in the kitchen to await the stage-hour.

In a happier mood than we had been in for months, we stood round our little sitting-room fire. Never had the house looked so pleasant, so cheerful—our eyes fairly revelled in the pretty things about us—the very lettering of the books seemed to welcome us back; and Hebe and shells, the furniture, and even the well-bred colours of the carpet, had many a glance of affection and greeting. Then the arranging of our own tea-tray and cups and saucers, the hunting out whatever there was in the house that was good to eat—it was all mere play. We had another instance of Mrs Barrington's kindness in a nicely-packed basket that stood in the sitting-room when we came down stairs, and held the result of similar researches made by her in her own house. But it was useless to thank anybody—Ezra only "guessed there wa'n't much in it that was good for anythin';"—in which, however, he was mistaken—the bread alone saved us all baking trouble for several days.

Singularly enough (considering how we expected it), the stage was true to its time, and Mr Howard's cold walk of three miles brought him home not very long after we had given him up. For a while we were too happy to say much—hearts and tongues were too unsteady and fluctuating to be trusted; but, as the first excitement wore off, we saw that my father looked pale and weary, and we began to talk as fast as possible, to cheer him up.

"How long have you travelled to-day, papa?" said Kate.

"Since eight o'clock."

"How tired you must be! we will have tea directly. Would you like anything more substantial than toast and sweetmeats? What time did you have dinner?"

"I haven't had any dinner to-day," said my father.

"Haven't eaten anything since breakfast?"

"No; except three or four ginger-nuts."

"Oh, you were very wrong!" said my stepmother—"it is enough to make you sick."

"How could you do so, papa?"

"Because I hadn't money enough to pay for a dinner—that's the truth," said Mr Howard.

It was all gone, then!—pleasure and excitement and talkativeness—but for the *necessity* of getting tea, I believe we should have sat still and looked at each other, forgetting all about it. As it was, Kate and I went off in quick time. "There is no telling where a blessing may light," as Ezra Barrington had once said; and truly his wife's basket was one that night—failing that, our cupboard had been as bare as Mother Hubbard's of old; but now from its recesses a roast chicken walked into the room, and presented an imposing appearance upon the tea-table; and we had the pleasure of seeing Mr Howard make up for his day's fast. Our own appetites were not worth talking about.

"What's the matter with you all?" said my father, when he had sent his cup for a finishing draught of tea—"you are looking mighty sober. I shall have some money by and by, I hope."

There was a disagreeable little cloud scattered by these words; we had been questioning whether the summer's expenses could have eaten up the summer's gains.

"You mean to stay at home now?" said my stepmother.

"Indeed, I do; that lecturing business is poor fun—in this way of managing it. And now that we have something to begin upon, I must try to find enough to do in this region."

"That agency, papa?" said Kate.

"No, my dear, that is otherwise disposed of. But I doubt not I can find other things that will pay as well."

"We might sell some of our superfluous furniture," said Mrs Howard, "and that would keep us along till you get other business."

"There isn't an article of superfluous furniture in the house," said my father, looking about him; "if by that you mean what our comfort could dispense with."

"I didn't mean in these rooms—there are some things packed away—those curtains, for instance."

"It's hardly worth while to sell them."

"But if we ever wanted to put up such curtains," said Mrs Howard, "we should be rich enough to buy them. I would much rather have their value in money, at present."

"And so would I," said Kate.

"Well, I have no objection—I daresay they could be sold. We'll see—I feel as if everything could be managed now that I am home once more, and find you all well."

We hoped that too, and yet we would fain have seen it. When Mr Howard was talking in his usual sanguine way of plans and prospects, we often went along with him; but left to our own thoughts, the foundation of both seemed misty. We could but fall back upon the assurance that it would all be arranged—wisely, and for our good;—and then try to nerve ourselves against the seeming evil that might come with it. This effort sometimes concealed from us our own feelings in a measure; and we thought we had passed bravely over some little trial, till a sudden point of contrast told the full effect it had wrought. The coming on of winter, with a larder and store-room as unfurnished as ours, and a purse to which supplies came so slowly in, was no trifle—Mr Howard's dinnerless journey had given us a hint on the subject—yet we thought we took it lightly.

A day or two after, Mrs Willet came to see us, and to congratulate us upon being at home, and out of that farm-house; which, though it did very well, was yet not just the thing for us.

"Suppose you all come and dine with me to-morrow?" she said. "No—not to-morrow, either—I am engaged—we have a little dance, and you don't like that—and I suppose Cary and Amelia couldn't give it up—but some day soon. Can't you? Would you rather come to dinner or to tea?"

"We are very busy people, you know," said my stepmother, quietly.

"Well, it would be a charity if you would come," said Mrs Willet, "and help us eat up some of our provisions. Such a house full! I told Mr Willet it really seemed wicked—we were living too luxuriously. First, there came a man to the house with turkeys, and I told him to leave three—they looked like nice ones; and then Mr Willet, not knowing that I had bought these, sent home two more—one of the largest I ever saw in my life—and three geese, and a saddle of venison. And he says he has a stageload of stores on the way now. It's absurd—we shall be here so little while—but he always gets things just so. Suppose you let me send you a turkey? will you?"

"No," said my stepmother, smiling.

"You are such queer people! Well, you see," said Mrs Willet, as she took leave, "you'll find enough to eat when you do come. I don't know what's to become of it all, for my part."

Kate and I followed her to the door; but when we came back, Mrs Howard sat with her hands over her face, shedding some more sorrowful tears than she often indulged in.

"Dear mamma, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, dear children, except that I am very foolish—I believe I was not quite in the mood to bear heartless talk to-day—and it touched upon the wrong subject."

"We shall be taken care of," Kate said, though her own eyes were overflowing—"'They that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing.'"

"They do not," said Mrs Howard, putting her arms round us. "But it came over me bitterly for a moment—the do-nothing lives of some people, the toiling life of others—and so little to shew for it. I am very wrong, very unthankful—all the best blessings are with your father—both he and we can dispense with the others. My dear Kate! I am so very glad"——

"Glad of what, mamma?" I said.

She kissed my forehead once or twice, before answering me.

"I have so many things to be glad of, dear Gracie, that it would be hard to count them—therefore, like a true mortal, I search out the few that are disagreeable. I am *very* glad that your sister can bear these reverses better than she once could. I wish you would take them as easily."

"Oh, I do!" said I, smiling. "You know, mamma, I may get tired sometimes, but I cannot feel sad if she and the rest of you do not. I daresay I am the brightest-looking of the present company, this minute—to judge by the feeling of my face."

I might easily have been that, and yet had nothing to boast of.

We began to live now upon the most strict do-without system. Once in a while my father had a day's help from Elisha Barrington—the rest of the time he cut and brought the wood, milked the cow, and gave the garden what attention it needed. Nevertheless the want of servants fell much more heavily upon us than upon him. The work Mr Howard had to do, was good, wholesome exercise in the open air—not more than his health required; and the chars once done, the rest of the day and night was his own. His meals, too, were better cooked than when we had Caddie—his bed sloped with a nicer grading—his linen might have been the envy of the neighbourhood; and the

weariness of hand that sometimes accomplished the one and the other, was quite beyond a strong man's imagination. The endless routine of meals and dishes, sweeping, dusting, bread and bed making—the toil of mind to contrive and arrange it all—the want of a pail of water when the clothes were to sprinkle, of *good* wood when they were to iron, of kindling when the fire went out—the cold rooms and mornings when and where we came down to get breakfast—it took women to understand or to get through it. But the spirit-machine, whether mental or physical, works not so briskly when it works in a circle. Sometimes we grew very tired, and could almost have stopped short in our treadmill, and taken the consequences—sometimes we half resolved to enlighten Mr Howard upon the state of things, and to have a servant at all risks. Never before had we been quite alone, for now we had not even a boy about the place; but with these half-determinations came the difficulty of getting dollars, even in the singular; and, instead of stopping our work, we pushed on the harder, that we might have more time for copying music, maps, and law-papers. When the light served for none of these, we took a turn at mending and making—this last department was but small. I used sometimes to wish that a little of the relief prayed for in the law-papers could have fallen to the lot of my aching wrist and weary eyes; but, though the money was paid us pretty punctually, and that for the lectures came in by degrees, it was kept most charily for any unforeseen time of need that might suddenly come, or until more steady and profitable business could be had. "The destruction of the poor is their poverty"—we appreciated that proverb to the full. With a clear knowledge of the profitableness of wholesale dealings, we could practise but small retail; and while for a few seven or four-pound papers of sugar we paid the price of a barrel, we had not half the comfort of it. "It is pleasant to take from a great heap"—another most true saying, which poor people use in the potential. Furthermore it became very difficult to get anything done;—a light of glass in the window, a shed for the cow, a moulding-board for the kitchen, were left unattended to, because the carpenter thought it not worth his while to oblige us; and other matters in the same way.

For ourselves, we wanted a good many things; but in our department, as in my father's, management had to supply the want of means. Dresses which had been given up in the

spring as past wearing, were now pulled out and overhauled, and made to do further service; but the circle round which both ends must meet was a very small one; it held us rather uncomfortably close.

I still wanted to keep locked doors, but, as Mrs Howard truly said, "that could not last always; and if anybody was to get in, it might as well be done at once." Still we knew of no danger in that way.

"It's a comfort to find that you can laugh yet!—putting nerves out of the question," said Mr Howard, as he came from his study into the dining-room. "What in the world has been the matter? Is dinner ready?"

We nodded assent, but did not speak.

"Well, pray let us have it, then. I don't see much sign of it here," he said, seating himself at the table.

"There isn't much reality of it anywhere," said Kate.

"Something smells very good," said my father; "but, as we are not in fairyland, I should like to have more senses than one gratified."

"You must dine upon laughing, papa," said I. "Mamma meant to have cooked dinner, but she was interrupted, and couldn't go on."

"Hush, Grace!" said Mrs Howard; "give your father what there is, and no more about it."

"The misfortune was," said I, "that our marketing did not come till it was too late to get 'the usual trimmings;' so there's only potatoes and this."

And I set a little covered basket on the table before him.

"I'm afraid we shall find wicker-work indigestible," said Mr Howard, swinging back the cover. "What's here?—napkins?"

"Take it out, Gracie," said Mrs Howard, "or we shall have a breakage of something. That basket-lid just missed the castors."

I removed the basket and napkins, and set on the table one dish covered with another. My father took off the top one.

"Hey-day! where in the world did you get ducks?"

"We didn't, papa!" said Kate—"there's only one!" And the laugh that went round might have astonished anybody.

"Hardly that," said Mr Howard, sticking the fork into the tiny specimen of the broad-bills which lay on its back before

him. "But, my dear, you had better let me buy the next—the smallest are not apt to be the best. What is the mystery about this duck?" he said, looking at us as we exchanged glances.

"That duck was a present," said my stepmother.

"Indeed!—I didn't know we had such good friends left. And this is the laughing-stock, I suppose?"

"I have been almost too angry to laugh," said Kate.

"No," said I, "you laughed too much to be angry. Where do you think it came from, papa?"

"From some one who thought our misfortunes had taken away our appetites, I should judge," said my father. "Is this some more of Mr Carvill's handiwork?"

"Mr Carvill!" said Kate; "no, indeed! his ducks were beauties."

"And this is not a wild one, either. Well, who brought it?"

"It was brought," said Kate, with a little indignant colour coming into her cheeks, "by Mrs Willet's footman in full livery—and he handed the basket in with as much daintiness as if it had been sugar-plums. I wanted to send it right back, and mamma wouldn't. Just think of sending us one duck—ready cooked!"

"Saved you some trouble, that last item, my dear," said Mr Howard, coolly helping himself to another bone. "Mrs Willet, hey!"

"But, papa—wouldn't you have sent it back?"

"Why, no," said my father—"I shouldn't have wished to hire a messenger, and still less to carry it myself."

"Did you ever hear of anything so pitiful?"

"It is a little on that order," said Mr Howard, surveying the wreck. "I am not much in the habit of compassionating roast ducks—but this one does make very little show in the world. My dear Kate," he said, laughing, "doesn't your pride lie beyond Mrs Willet's reach? I assure you, mine does."

"I never want to have anything more to do with her."

"I do—as much as I ever did."

"But this is almost an insult, papa."

"Not meant so, Katie. And if it were—

> 'An honest, sensible, and well-bred man
> Will not affront me—and no other can.'

If Mrs Willet chooses to send us a roast grasshopper, I shall take it thankfully—and make as hearty a meal as the circumstances will permit."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR PHIBBS' BLUNDER.

> "Yet reason saith, reason should have ability
> To hold these worldly things in such proportion
> As let them come and go with even facility."
>
> SIDNEY.

ONE afternoon, late in October, when it was already drawing towards dusk, Mr Howard had gone into the woods to chop, and mamma and Kate were disposing of the dinner dishes, and talking to me as I sat on a bench by the fire. I heard some one knock at the back-door, and going to open it, I found two men who inquired for my father.

Not particularly pleased with their appearance, I promised to call him, and then closed the door; and going round to another entrance, I set off for the woods, followed by Kate. The sound of the axe guided us, and after a little calling and seeking, we found Mr Howard, and asked him to come home. I reached the house first, and saw with no pleasant surprise that the two men had ushered themselves in, and were now sitting composedly in the kitchen. I asked Mrs Howard if she had opened the door; no, they had done it for themselves. I flitted about, much strengthened in my forebodings, and was both glad and sorry to see Mr Howard come in; I thought he had received our message gravely. In some moods the mind is singularly alive to trifles; and the sight of my father, as he entered the piazza in his shirt-sleeves, and bearing the axe with which he had been working, affected me very differently from what it would had he been dressed with his old fastidious elegance. I looked at the cloth coat and shining beaver of the one intruder, the fur cap and boots of the other; I knew they had not come for good!

For a while I heard nothing distinctly but earnest talking; my impatience would not bear delay, and I found an errand to the kitchen closet. At the door I distinguished these words, spoken by the best dressed and most disagreeable of the two men—

"I won't say but I have the right to take 'em all to-night."

"I suppose you will leave us beds to sleep on?" remarked Mr Howard, with a momentary stir of indignation.

"I don't say that I won't—but I don't say that I will; I won't say that I haven't a right to take everything away to-night."

One thought as to the possibility of resting my weariness upon the floor, and I entered the kitchen. Mr Howard stood leaning against the dresser, looking gravely and sadly down at the rag-carpet, while close to each other sat the two men—the one quiet, the other displaying his sense of power. I felt my face burning with some strange fever, and catching up something out of the closet, I returned to the tea-room.

"What is it?" said Mrs Howard.

"I don't know, mamma."

"Do not go in there, Gracie," said Kate, "it will only trouble you. Papa will tell us all about it."

"Oh, I had rather go—not into the kitchen, I'm just going to the door."

"I don't know what to say to this," I heard my father say sadly—"it comes upon me quite by surprise. I had supposed everything was arranged."

"Ay, but, you see, there was this mistake: No notice was given, and so, of course, Mr M'Loon takes his rights."

"His rights!" said my father, indignantly. "Well, it don't signify—he has the power at any rate, which answers as well; I suppose the law will protect him, as it has done many another oppressor. I have nothing to say to this business; you probably know what you are about, and must proceed as you think proper. We have a Sovereign protector in the midst of all man can do."

"It's so late to-night," said the man, after a whisper from his companion, "that I don't think it will be worth while to move anything till morning. You may be sure we know what we are about, sir—certainly. There is no mistake on our part, though, unfortunately, there was on yours. We'll just look round to see that everything is in its place."

My father led the way in silence, giving me once a very sad reflection of my smile, as he caught my eye; and the men looked slightly at the rooms, referring occasionally to their list.

"That's all to-night, I be-lieve," said Mr Pratt, "except we must take something, to make our levy good. Let me see—the—have you not a small picture by Holbein?"

"Yes," said my father.

"Will you please to point it out?"

"This is it," said Mr Howard, laying his hand upon the frame.

"You will take it," said Mr Pratt, nodding to the sheriff.

Until then, I had given no outward recognition of their business, except a flushed cheek; but when I saw our favourite Holbein taken down and in the sheriff's hands, and that pretty, stately, court beauty fairly moving to the door, the tears started into my eyes, and I was glad to move off too.

"Good evening, sir," said Mr Pratt; "to-morrow we will come and look over things more carefully."

The door closed behind them, and another one admitted Mrs Howard and Kate.

"What is all this about?"

"Oh, it's M'Loon again," said my father, throwing himself down upon the sofa.

"M'Loon!" said Mrs Howard; "I thought he was disposed of long ago?"

"So did I; and he was, or would have been, if people were faithful to their business. It's all owing to Phibbs's carelessness. The matter was arranged before I went away in the spring; but when I was not here to write to him and keep him to his duty, he neglected it—didn't serve a notice or something, I don't know what; and then these fellows seize their advantage, and rush down upon me for what they know they have no right to."

"And can nothing be done?"

"No, I fear not," said my father, sighing; "they are not *obliged* to overlook neglect in my lawyer, and they are too sharp and hard business men to do anything for charity."

"*They*, papa?" said Kate.

"They.—I don't know whether M'Wherter has any interest in the affair, beyond the desire of helping his brother-in law, but they work together."

"But surely," said Mrs Howard, "they must leave us things enough to use?"

"I don't know, indeed—if they must they will, but not else. It is a little hard to see all these things that I have collected and been so fond of, scattered to the winds (I'd as lief they were, as sold to pay that debt)—but I could bear it well enough if I were alone in the world. I didn't know that I should ever live to see my dear ones turned out of house and home!"

"'The Lord reigneth,' yet," said my stepmother, softly, though her voice trembled a little.

We sat looking into the bright fire that had seen so many things written on our faces; the silence, unbroken except by a half-checked sigh, or by the wind which came fitfully tossing and drifting away the leaves which had once fluttered in June freshness. Even so!—we thought the trees were pretty bare before, but this night had pointed out the small remnant that to-morrow would shake off. My father spoke first, and it was to repeat my stepmother's words.

"'The Lord reigneth! let the earth rejoice!'—But oh, human nature is a hard thing to struggle with! There may be, there is, a wise purpose in all this; and yet sense seizes upon the present, and faith looks forward very faintly."

"But the house is left us yet, papa," said Kate—"and home lies not in tables and chairs. Dear papa, you ought to be very glad you are not alone,—it will be strange if we can do nothing but increase your trials. And you must not look so sad—see, here is Grace with a face as anxious as if the whole world rested on her little shoulders." And she put her arm round me, as if to ward off at least part of the burden.

"We shall not mind anything if you do not, papa," I said.

He looked at us with more loving sorrow in his face than his words had told of; and Mrs Howard's eyes took sadly the same direction. And what was I thinking of?—even of the blessed change that time and civilisation had wrought—a man's wife and children could no longer be sold to pay his debt!

Then Kate and I went to get another of those careful teas—not this time of welcome, but of comfort. Affection that cannot reach great things spends itself upon the small; and if, as some think, everything has a character, then was the tea-table that night not unmeaning. Never was table set with more exactness, never was more attention paid to its contents,—we

tried to get together whatever the house had that was nice and appetizing. Little that would have been, but for a woman's power of conjuration, and it was labour lost after all —the will to eat was beyond our reach. I should not say it was labour lost so far as we were concerned—we were more than paid by Mr Howard's look, when we pressed him to take one thing and another,—but it was not an enlivening intercourse on either side.

"Papa," said Kate, when we had been musingly gazing at our empty tea-cups, "hadn't Grace and I better take out everything of our own to-night?"

"Everything of your own?"

"I mean all our books and shells—you know some of them belong to us. Mr M'Loon cannot touch those, can he?"

"Of course not — therefore it don't much matter about moving them to-night."

"But won't it save trouble and mistakes?"

"Perhaps so."

The table cleared away, we began our work; taking the precaution to close the shutters, and, where there were none, to hang a quilt before the window. For aught we knew, Mr M'Loon might have watchers round the house, and if they saw us touch anything, there was no telling what desperate measures they might attempt—we had all the old disagreeable feeling of the unseen enemy. But, now the enemy had really got in, we felt almost bewildered. How strange it all looked!—the closed windows, the piles of selected books, the empty spaces they had left—and our own figures in that dusky candle-light—were we ourselves, or were we somebody else? My father came in and stood looking at us.

"You are giving yourselves needless trouble, my dear children—your little possessions cannot possibly be taken."

"Might not there be some mistake?" we repeated.

"I will see that there is none."

"Then you think it would be better to leave them just where they are, papa?"

"I am inclined to think so. These people probably judge me by themselves—it may save trouble to take your books out before their eyes."

"But they haven't a right to one of the others!" said Kate, looking down from the book-steps.

"No, dear, not in conscience—no just man would do as they

are doing ; but the laws cannot fit in to every variety of circumstance ; and in this case they protect most flagrant injustice —I must submit to them, nevertheless."

"Well," said Kate, "hand me up those books again, Gracie. It's a pity the laws should ever be made to do what they don't mean to!"

We went back into the sitting-room, and gathering round the fire, talked long and earnestly of what we might do—how we could replace certain wants—how it would not cost much to get a half dozen plain chairs, and how a cloth would hide any sort of a table. We could not particularise much, for as yet all was indistinct: we knew not what things Mr M'Loon claimed, and had only a general idea that all was to go, and that we and the house were to begin life again together.

"I can't understand anything about it!" said Mrs Howard. "These men made no levy—where did they get their list?"

"I'll tell you," said my father. "You know, in that Self & Mulhawl business, when I got sureties I gave them security in a mortgage on the property in question, and that mortgage was filed at the Clerk's office. There's where M'Loon got his list—he must have asked to see the mortgage, and then have copied from it."

"And does he claim nothing else?"

"Nothing but what is on his list, if I understand right."

"That is some comfort, then," said Mrs Howard, "for the mortgage did not mention everything in the house. At least, the appraiser's list did not."

"Everything of much value"—and my father glanced towards the open door in the direction of his favourite shells and minerals. "Well, let them go—I lived without them once, and I can again."

"But I am sure *everything* was not put down—there was one set of chairs up in the garret."

"What is one set of chairs?"

"They shew for something when they stand alone," said my stepmother, with a smile, that was ordered to report a bright side to the question. "Wait till we have had a few days to arrange things, and you'll see how nice the house will look. There was a lamp, too, I think, and there is some old furniture in the lumber-room. It will be a real pleasure to exert all our powers of contrivance and ingenuity—they surely will not fail us now—for the first time."

"And where will contrivance and ingenuity find material to work upon?"

"Oh, never mind asking questions, papa," said Kate. "Anxiety is the best purveyor that can be, and if the material comes, it don't matter where from."

"There are some things that will never fail me, I am sure," said Mr Howard. "Gracie, dear, will you bring me my inkstand? I have a letter to write."

He went to his calculations with pen and paper, but we continued ours verbally, and soon talked ourselves out of the sorrowful state, into one of headache and excitement; while now and then a most unmirthful laugh told of the overwrought feeling that was too fevered for tears. One thing alone brought them that night—it was my father's prayer for the people whom God had permitted to injure us.

We went to bed feeling very quiet and strange, and wondering if we should sleep on the floor to-morrow night! could such a thing ever be? But the body had been touched with the mind's excitement, and rest was much sooner wanted than won.

CHAPTER XL.

WHAT MR PRATT DID WITH OUR PLATE.

> "See the morn,
> All unconcern'd with our unrest, begins
> Her rosy progress, smiling."
>
> MILTON.

HEAVEN and earth were one bright glow of beauty and promise. The many-coloured tufts that yet decked the woodland, the lake in its luxuriance of quiet, the fair sky, and the scattered clouds that caught and telegraphed the tidings of sunrise—how little akin they were to our feelings! But we had got up very early—when earth was as shadowy as our own hearts—and having lighted candles and fires, we had busied ourselves in preparing breakfast, while yet we had a quiet room in which to eat it. That was a sad awaking; but as the day advanced, and the sun poured his full light in at the windows, everything shone with the very spirit of home—we almost thought we had been dreaming. Could it all be? and it was only that nameless weight about the heart that answered yes. But the peaceful look of the unconscious furniture half gainsaid it.

We sat quietly expecting Mr Pratt. He did not appear until summoned by the clock-fairy with those ten taps of her wand which had more than once called in discomfort. Poor little fairy! she was not to announce anything to us much longer.

Sleep had been a composing draught to Mr Pratt—the rough edges were a little planed off since last night, and his mind in a more comfortable state;—it might be, because, unlike the magician, he found the palace in its usual place—not spirited away by its rightful owners. So he seated himself, and made affable remarks about the weather; while

the sheriff, who was a grave, and on the whole not disagreeable-looking man, kept perfect silence.

"Well, sir," said Mr Pratt at length, and as if he *rather* thought my father should have introduced the subject—"if you please, we will proceed with this business. It's disagreeable, of course, but it must be got through with. Now I'll read over this list, and you'll just point out the articles as they occur. It's only to see that they are here, you know—I've no doubt we shall find everything in its place—no doubt at all! This is what is called the sitting-room, ain't it?—'sitting-room, first floor.' We may as well begin here and go regularly on."

"Are you at liberty to strip the house?" said Mr Howard—"does the law allow people nothing?"

"I claim nothing but what is on my list, sir," said Mr Pratt—"the law allows necessaries, I believe, but not those articles which are merely delightful—if there is anything on my list which is absolutely requisite for the family use, I suppose we'll have to leave it. Now, Mr Flagg, just take notice of the articles as I name them off."

"That stand was bought since the list was made," said my father.

"And that hearth-rug," said I.

"I claim nothing but what is on my list," said Mr Pratt, turning from one to the other—"nothing at all—everything else is left, of course. 'One large vase'—that is it, Mr Flagg—'one work-stand,' 'one lady's cabinet-desk.'"

"Those belong to mamma and me," said Kate.

"Makes no difference, Miss Howard—I suppose Mr Howard bought them."

"Are gifts not excepted?"

"Why—in some cases—small things that can be easily moved; but articles of furniture—I should think not."

"But these are articles of daily use and comfort, I am sure," said my father.

"I suppose that might be said of everything else," said Mr Pratt, rather snappishly. "I can't leave everything, sir—and of course I must take some things that you would like to keep."

"Proceed," said Mr Howard.

"You see, sir," said Mr Pratt, deprecatingly, a little taken aback by my father's manner, "I am only running over my

list now, just to find out that all is as it should be—we'll consider afterwards what is to be left. It is a very unpleasant duty for me, of course."

And finishing that room, they went into the next.

"You had better let me go round too, papa," Kate whispered; "I don't believe you know which the things are."

So she and I followed with Mr Howard the motions of the list-holder.

"'Drawing-room, first floor,'" read off Mr Pratt. "This is it, I suppose. '20 black-walnut and satin-wood chairs'—are these the walnut?"—making the circuit of the room with his pencil.

"We were cleaning house when that list was made," explained Kate, "and the chairs stood altogether in here. The satin-wood chairs are in the next room."

"Ah—yes—then I may say all right. Now, 'one ebony cabinet—shells'—is that the article?"

"Yes," said my father, with a half sigh.

"Very fine—upon my word," said Mr Pratt, walking up to the case. "You must have had great pleasure in collecting these, Mr Howard. Fine drawer of harps—remarkably fine specimen of Wentletrap! I ought to know, too, for I saw a great many when I was abroad—and have a number myself, in fact."

"Do you remember ever to have seen a specimen of Scalaria pretiosa?" said my father, whose patience was giving way.

"No, sir," said Mr Pratt; "that is a shell I do not recollect to have met with—it's a little strange, too—I examined so many of the foreign collections. 'One print of "the watering-place"—framed.' Ah! very fine! I saw a great many of the masterpieces of Wouver*men* when I was abroad, but none that I liked so well as that. Everything seems in its place—turns up at the word," said Mr Pratt, with a pleasant smile. "'One Hebe'—there she stands. You must be very careful in moving that, Mr Flagg."

The sheriff nodded, and touched Hebe's fingers to see what they were made of.

"Now 'the study.' I can't go over all these books—I suppose they are just as they were?"

"They are the same books," said Mr Howard—"whether they are arranged just as they were two years ago, I can't say.

Some of them belong to my children, and, of course, must be taken out."

"Of course, sir. Those, you see, are clearly gifts of possession, while that desk, for example, was but a gift for use. But any presents—or articles of virtu—anything of that sort, of course, is sacred," said Mr Pratt, with a wave of his hand. "You understand, Miss Howard," he added, turning to Kate, "whatever belongs to yourself or your sister I leave, of course."

"You have no right to do anything else," was on my tongue, for his manner was provokingly benevolent and considerate. But I kept silence, thinking it best to let him be good-natured if he had a mind; and nothing makes people forbearing like the belief that they are so.

"I have no doubt this will all be settled in a short time," said Mr Pratt—"no doubt at all. It will be a very easy matter to arrange, and you will have the property all back in a few weeks."

"I am very sure I shall not," said Mr Howard, resolutely—"I am obliged to submit to this piece of injustice, but I never shall try to pay off an unrighteous debt."

"'Contents of kitchen pantry,'" proceeded Mr Pratt.

Such had been the careless designation given in the list to a closet which contained very little pertaining to the kitchen, but many things of much value to us, and which we could hardly have replaced. Here was stowed away the china which had been so carefully washed in the spring; lamps, glass, the old wine which was kept against sickness, and a thousand and one useful etceteras. It was with some trepidation that I now opened the door—but "men are but men!"

Mr Pratt looked in—his eye bringing back about as discriminating a report as might have been expected. I don't believe he saw a thing besides a lantern, a brown paper-bag, and two pans.

"Leave that, certainly," he said, dashing his pencil through "one kitchen pantry." "Now comes 'front bed-room on the west.'"

We went up stairs; and sending the sheriff into the rooms, Mr Pratt crouched in uncomfortable positions in the hall and called over the roll, while Mr Flagg responded for tables, chairs, and bedsteads. "Here"—"yes"—"all right"—"go ahead"—were sent forth in quick succession, while I should

have liked to call out, "all wrong!" and "stop!" Anybody might have cried shame! that heard every bed and bureau in the house read off, with such little varieties as—

"1 bed-room easy-chair."

"1 inlaid dressing-case."

"Yours, Mr Howard?" said Mr Pratt, looking up.

"Yes."

The receiver paused, twirled his pencil, and then, with a little shake of his head, went on to the next article.

But he was somewhat mollified—or ashamed—and now and then checked off a thing to be left of his own accord, after he had (in compliance with the statute) ordered the sheriff to leave the family beds and bedding.

"You may leave that bed too, Mr Flagg—you might like to have a friend with you, sir. And that stand—ah, well, I guess that may stay—you'll find it convenient."

The bureaus went rather hard—they were so large and handsome, and so invariably full.

"Is that one in daily use?" he said, at length, pointing to an old-fashioned wardrobe.

"Yes," I replied; "my sister's clothes are in it."

"Well—I don't see but we'll have to leave all the bureaus. You understand, Mr Flagg—whatever I have checked off, you will leave."

When the rooms had been all gone over, we went down stairs again to consider of unlocated things.

"Now, Miss Howard," said Mr Pratt—"the silver, if you please—that stands next."

Kate and I brought it.

"Ah!—very bright! 'One tea set'—this is it, is it?—'2 doz. large spoons—4 doz. small ditto—2 doz. dessert'—no, '22 dessert'—just run them over, Mr Flagg."

"All right," said the sheriff."

"Upon my word, Mr Howard, you have been remarkably fortunate with your plate—seems to turn up all right—I wish mine could be kept so," said Mr Pratt, politely; "but it's always getting lost."

"I wonder if you have any!" thought I.

"I wish you better success in keeping yours than I have met with, sir," said my father.

Mr Pratt returned to his list—

"8 salt-spoons—2 fish-knives—2 ice-cream do.—2 soup-ladles—6 vegetable dishes and covers—1 doz. egg-cups"——

He looked up in some surprise, and the sheriff handled and weighed them admiringly. I looked, too, and thought of the breakfasts where I had seen those cups—the hands I had seen use them!—I did not hear the next page of the list.

"All right, sir," said Mr Pratt; "it really gives me great satisfaction to find things so straight. Now—'green-house plants'"——

"Part of them are dead, and the rest are in the ground," said Kate. "There may be half a dozen."

"They are of my daughters' own collecting," said Mr Howard.

Mr Pratt checked them off.

"Left, of course. 'Ice in ice-house'—used up by this time, I guess," said he, with an agreeable laugh. "'Farming utensils—waggons, &c.'"

"You will find those at the barn," said my father.

"2 cows—4 three-year-olds—1 yearling'—I suppose they'll be all forthcoming?"

"No—the yearling is dead, and one of the cows."

"Ah!—not actionable—of course. That is all.—I am extremely glad things have turned out so pleasantly; somehow I was under a different impression."

"I daresay!" said my father, somewhat indignantly; "Mr M'Loon could hardly have hoped to succeed so well in his injustice!"

And launching forth upon the broad sea between the shores of right and wrong, my father clearly shewed that Mr M'Loon's sailing chart was rather peculiar and dangerous. Mr Pratt sat with his hands on his knees, his eyes on the floor, nodding his head patiently, and now and then putting in a word.

"Ah!—of course!—very disagreeable indeed—wish I hadn't been chosen for the office—can't imagine why I was, except that I always was a crony of Bob's—suppose that must have been the reason. Well, sir, my time is precious; I should like to look over the list again, and see if there is any article you would like to have left till the affair is settled; for I'm confident it *will* be settled; and, of course, you would pledge yourself that they should be forthcoming, if called for. Let me see—this work-stand, you say, belongs to Mrs Howard?"

"Yes," said Kate.

"Well," he said, checking it off, "I guess it'll have to stay for the present."

"May as well leave this carpet too," said the sheriff.

"O yes, till the affair is settled. The desk is too valuable to be left. Now, about this silver; I suppose you'd like to keep some of it, for the present?"

"It's not very pleasant to eat with iron spoons," said I, quietly. Kate had left the room.

"No—of course,—just lay out what you want, Miss Howard."

I went to the table, and stood there to make the division, feeling that the flush on my cheek was deepening, and that I was getting excited. The sheriff looked at me curiously from time to time, as if to see or to wonder how I could bear it all.

I laid aside four large and four small spoons.

"No, I will take only two of the large," I said; "the small ones will be the most useful."

"You needn't put the others back," said Mr Pratt; "how many small spoons do you want?"

"When we have fruit, we need extra ones; I should like nine."

"Well, take them, then; a sugar-tongs, I suppose, you can do without. Have you any forks in the house but these?"

"I believe there are some steel ones put away somewhere; these are what we always use."

"Well, you must take some; you know I'd as lief you had them all as not, only I must do my duty as receiver. No, I guess you needn't take those," he said, as, after laying out four breakfast-forks, my hand touched the pile of large ones. "There, I'll give you two more of the small, and that'll be more convenient, for you might have a friend come to see you. Won't that do?"

"Yes," I said, wondering at the friend and him together.

"Haven't you any tea-pot but this?"

"One, without a lid," I said, feeling a strong desire to laugh.

"This'll have to stay, then," said Mr Pratt, with a half groan. "The fish-knives, I guess, we won't leave—not things of general use; why, I don't think fish comes on my table above once a year, sir."

"I wonder what your table has to do with ours!" thought I.

"All the rest must go; don't you want salt-spoons?"

"We should like one," said I, the corners of my mouth twitching again; "it doesn't matter, we can use a teaspoon."

"No, take two," said Mr Pratt, as if he felt a little ashamed of his business. "And now, if you have a basket or so, I should like to take these things with me: I'll send the baskets back again. Is that large table in the dining-room in constant use?"

"Yes," I said.

"I'll check that off, then; this may as well go. Would you like that engraving stand?"

"No—I would rather keep something else. Wouldn't you, papa?"

Mr Howard assented by a slight motion of the head.

"This desk in the study—you say it is yours, Mr Howard?"

"The one I am in the habit of using daily. But I can do without it," he added, after a moment.

Apparently the receiver thought Mr M'Loon could not, for he shook his head and went on—

"The book-rack goes, of course—and the harp."

"It is rather a strange proceeding," said my father, who felt this last item as I did; "it is rather a strange proceeding, for a man to make war upon ladies' property!"

"Very sorry, of course, sir. Cosuse in drawing-room—that goes,—ditto in sitting-room. Well, I guess we must call that a mere elegancy," said Mr Pratt, after a prolonged look at it. "Minerals, shells,—I believe we need go no further,—all the rest are clearly luxuries. Would you like to have these four chairs in the north bed-room left, Miss Howard?"

"We can do without them," I answered.

"Mr Pratt," said Kate, coming into the room, "it would be a great convenience to us to keep our dictionaries, at least till this business is finally settled."

"Certainly, Miss Howard—by all means! keep them for good—I shouldn't think of touching them—I wish I could leave everything, I'm sure. It has been a very painful business to me, indeed."

She stood listening to him with a little of her old look of superiority, and some very slight contempt for the pain that was so readily undertaken. Before a stranger could have seen either, they were gone.

"Do I understand you, sir, that we may keep these dictionaries in any event?"

"Certainly—in any event," said Mr Pratt, who had probably never heard of any dictionaries but Walker and Webster. If he had known the number of ours, his "certainly" would perhaps have been more dubious.

"If there are any other volumes you would like to keep for the present," said Mr Pratt, in an excess of goodnature, "just take them out, and give the sheriff a list of them. Only don't take too many."

"How many?" said Kate.

"Oh, ten or twenty volumes; I leave it to you. Don't get me into a scrape with M'Loon—that's all!"

"I heard you mention those two large chairs," said Mr Howard.

"In the drawing-room?—yes, 'two blue easy chairs,'" said Mr Pratt, referring to his list.

"They are not mine, nor bought with my money."

"That should have been mentioned before," said the receiver, looking a little disturbed. "Not yours, you say! Whose are they?"

"No—they were left to my children by a distant relative. You particularly desired, sir, if you recollect, that such information should be kept till the list had been gone over."

"I don't know what to do about it," said Mr Pratt. "Mr M'Loon—I am sure—at least I know"——

"I know what I shall do if you take them," said my father.

"Well," said Mr Pratt, "I don't know; if M'Loon don't like it, I shall have to take the consequences; however, I will check them off. Now, that basket, if you please."

I brought the baskets, and Kate and I packed up the silver, wondering to ourselves if we should ever see it again, and thinking curiously of the times that were gone.

"If you have no objection, sir," said Mr Pratt, "I should like to put a man in the house here to-night."

"I have a very strong objection—it is a thing I cannot consent to."

"It ain't needful," put in the sheriff, looking at the receiver—"I'll risk it."

Mr Pratt demurred, and I was again near laughing. The idea that we should have so little sense or honour as to try to make away with what the law had fairly seized upon!

"Well," said Mr Pratt again, "I believe we shall have to

waive that. You give me your word, sir, that you will let nothing be touched—just as a favour, sir—do you?"

"Certainly," said my father.

"Very good, sir, I take your word, and the sheriff must depend upon mine. I will venture it. You give me your word as a man of honour, and Mr Flagg will take mine. It's probable we may send for these things this afternoon, but perhaps not till to-morrow. Mr Flagg, you will have the goodness to see to the removing them yourself. Have you the time, Mr Howard?—thank you,—I can reach the stage, then. Good afternoon, sir,"—and they departed.

CHAPTER XLI.

OUR PROSPECTS LAID BARE.

"*Bailiff.* Humanity, sir, is a jewel. It's better than gold. I love humanity. People may say that we, in our way, have no humanity; but I'll shew you my humanity this moment." GOOD-NATURED MAN.

THE rest of the afternoon was left to us in peace and quietness—that is, in a way: we had no more intruders, and the taking off seemed to be postponed, but still body and mind found enough to do, and not of the pleasantest. Our own books and shells must be collected and carried up stairs, with every article of furniture that was not on Mr Pratt's list; while those things that he claimed were as much as possible brought together and into one part of the house, that the other rooms might not be overrun. And in the confiscated furniture all drawers and compartments must be emptied.

It was rather hard work. Our blank books and papers had a natural affinity for the desk; and to take Mr Howard's out of his, and then to bestow them in a pile up stairs, roused more than sorrow. It was but a few months since his desk had been put in order by our own hands; the outside varnished; the inside cleaned and decorated with new ribbons and cloth. And all for Mr M'Loon's benefit! Our shells, too, were generally connecting links among my father's specimens. We stood long before the ebony cabinet, taking up shell after shell, and giving each a careful examination; looking once more at the well-known beauties and peculiarities of Volutes, and Argonauts, and Stelleridians; of the fine Carinaria Vitrea that my father had been so proud of; how well we recollected the time when it was bought! They were all old friends; we seemed to have some special association with every one.

"Do you remember," said Kate, as she stood, holding in her

hand Mr Howard's favourite Scalaria,—"do you remember, Gracie, when papa brought this home?"

"And you had been sick, and he said you should have the first sight of it—O yes, I remember,—how could I forget? You know he had been so fearful of not getting it—the man took so long to make up his mind; and then papa was so pleased when he had it fairly in the house."

"What happy children we were then!" said Kate.

"How Stephanie used to vex papa by calling this his 'trap-shell'!"

"She would be sorry for us, if she knew all."

"It's better that she don't," said Kate; "she has enough to be sorry for, I daresay, or will have. Oh, I wish we could keep these stone-lilies!"

"Have you taken out our harps yet, Katie?"

"No—my harp, '*par excellence*,' as that man said, must go. But these poor little harps"—and she pulled out the drawer.

"I wonder what Mr M'Loon is made of!" said I.

"Hard to tell, Gracie. But I wouldn't change places with him to-night; we are a great deal happier than he is."

"Oh, how much! And yet one does love the inanimate things one has grown up among."

"One look at you has almost reconciled me to parting with them," said Kate, smiling. "If you were an ark or an apple-snail, Gracie, I should shew fight for it. Come, dear, it's no use to look at them any longer; let us go and get tea. I believe I have taken out all of ours,—O no—here is Stephanie's old friend, 'King Midas.'"

"And this Olive. That's all, I am sure."

My father kept himself perfectly quiet during all this; looked at nothing; and, except now and then a sigh or an expression of patience or impatience, he sat silently reading—or seeming to read; the pages not turned over very fast.

And we had tea for the last time at our little table.

I was fairly tired, hand and heart, and, perhaps, for that reason feeling for to-morrow's work; but it was a fatigue that courted restlessness, not rest. I found myself inclined to have a leave-taking of the furniture; to seat myself in the chairs; to look into our old cabinet-desk; to open different books. Once I lay down on the drawing-room sofa, but I grew sad there; and then tried to lose myself in Waverley—in its scenes of imaginary comfort and discomfort. It did not rest me. The tears

and interest that one can give to such fiction must come from a mind at ease; the spring of a sorrowing heart lies away from its reach; and the pages I looked at were interlined with our own history.

The morning came—foggy, threatening, sending down a few drops now and then to shew its intentions, as Mr Pratt took away our Holbein to shew his. So doubtful, indeed, was the weather, that neither sheriff nor assistants appeared before mid-day, and I half began to hope that our eyes might have some short reprieve from bare walls. Meantime Kate and I sat quietly at our copying, having made the last necessary arrangements, and persuaded Mrs Howard to keep herself out of the way of all trouble and confusion.

But the sun came out, and the sheriff came in; and with him a man into whose charge he was to give the furniture, and an array of other men to move it. Among them were several who had formerly worked for us; it looked strange to see familiar faces about such unfamiliar work; and waggons of all sorts were clustered as near the house as the grounds would allow. There were so many hands, indeed, that the work proceeded rapidly. My father, with a sort of tender regard for his old possessions, gave many a hint as to how they should be moved or packed; and now and then we were called upon to find some missing article, or give up some key. On one of these occasions, I reached the drawing-room just in time to take a last look at our Hebe. The little figure was moved out of its place, and stood in the full light from the windows, with one or two straggling sunbeams striking across it. I had hardly ever seen it so pretty, and summoning Kate from her work, we stood and looked at it together. Looked and thought. We remembered that Hebe almost as long ago as thought went back; my father had brought her from Italy when we were little children; and into how many a conversation had she been wrought!—how many a gathering of loved faces had we seen near her! And now we were to part company. Yet there she stood with the same graceful attitude, the same sweet brightness of face, the same joyousness—so like what we had been, so unlike what we were now! Kate went away with full eyes.

We were writing at the large dining-table which was left us, when my father came in.

"I can't make out which of these up stairs things are to go," he said.

"*She* knows," said the second receiver, peering round Mr Howard's shoulder, and indicating me by a motion of his head, which was "sorely unkempt." "*She* knows—why couldn't she come and tell about 'em?"

"It is a good deal of trouble for ladies to take," said my father, rather sternly.

"Oh, I don't mind the trouble, papa; pray, let us have no mistakes made."

Up stairs I went, through quite an avenue of "unkempt" heads and extraordinary hats, followed by my father, the sheriff, the receiver, and several helpers. These last muttered to each other concerning the beauty or the weight of sundry articles—sometimes, I thought, with no favourable allusion to Mr M'Loon and his proceedings. The sheriff's eye kept somewhat of the same watch of me that it had done the day before; while receiver Flagler's look and manner evidently shewed that he considered me as some sort of a vision, without whose aid it would be impossible to get safely through the business.

"You say this is the one?—Take it along, then."

It was well I had my father's punctilious notions of honour.

"Wouldn't you like to have them 'ere green settees left?" said Mr Flagler, in an interval of directing the helpers.

"The green settees?" said I.

"Well, I don't know what they be; them things out in the garden. Don't you use 'em every day?"

I could not say yes—to my sorrow.

"Not at this season; in summer we use them a great deal."

Mr Flagler looked sorry too; he wanted to do me a kindness.

"There is another thing we should like to have left—very much," I said. "This large easy-chair in one of the bed-rooms; it is a great comfort in case of sickness, and such a thing cannot be borrowed in the country. If you could leave it for the present—and then if the matter should not be settled, Mr M'Loon can easily send for it."

"I'll leave it!" said the receiver, giving the vision an extraordinary number of nods. "I'll leave it—at a ventur'."

"Such a thing oughtn't to be took, no how," said the sheriff.

"No, no," said Mr Flagler. "I'll leave it!"

Once more released, I went back to my writing; but soon the tea-room door opened, and the sheriff and Mr Flagler stepped in. The latter looked at us, and then at his list.

"It's put down 'four maple-chairs in tea-room,'" he said. "It's 'most too bad to disturb you! Be them the ones?"

The four maple-chairs (which were tea-room extras) stood there certainly—the only chairs in the room; but Kate and I immediately quitted the two we had in use, and informed Mr Flagler that his list was correct.

"Wouldn't you like to have 'em?" said the sheriff.

"O no," said Kate, smiling; "they may as well go with the rest. Four chairs cannot make much difference to us."

The men had no words to answer; and while the chairs were carried off in silence, I perched myself upon a four-legged stool, and Kate wheeled in one of the blue easy-chairs which belonged to us by virtue of inheritance, and so were out of Mr M'Loon's power.

So wore on the day; and before sundown the last man of the posse, the last article on the list, were out of the house, and we had gladly locked the doors behind them. Not because there was much in the house worth coming for again, but because we wanted some tangible barrier between us and those clumping steps, rough faces, and harsh voices, with which our eyes and ears had been filled. The mere thought of any footfall but our own was painful—our heads were almost in a whirl. But when the doors were fast, and Mr Howard established before a blazing fire in the kitchen, we went softly about the house to see how it looked.

Strange!—strange!—we realised that our drawing-room had four corners! It had been used to wear a sufficiently comfortable and well-to-do aspect, but now it might have been the ground-floor of a barn—even the scattered wisps of hay were not wanting. Here was a dark stain in the place where some old picture or engraving had long greeted our eyes;—here, on the bare floor, little indentations marked the former locality of the ebony cabinet; while on the wall long dusty cobwebs told what had been for many a year the background of our univalves and conchifera; here was a blank strip of plaster where once had fallen the soft shadow of our Hebe. Shadowy enough now!—the things we had grown up among were wafted away into dreamland—we should see them no more unless there. *Our* Hebe!—it was Mr M'Loon's; and that last stroke of our little fairy's wand had conjured herself away with the rest. We almost wondered whether we were not some family of Smiths, just walked up!

Clearly the first thing was to have tea, with such an infusion of dinner as our appetites would warrant; and that over, we went to business.

Our sitting-room carpet had been left, because Messrs Flagg and Flagler said it might as well be; and this once swept off, we proceeded to test our resources. The half-dozen despised chairs were placed about the room with as little stiffness as the circumstances would permit—there being nothing to diversify them but Mrs Howard's work-stand, and two odd taborets. Next the two blue chairs were brought in, and looked astonished to find themselves in such company, but very comfortable nevertheless. An escaped lamp stood upon the stand, and before it we presently set a small dish of late flowers, "to make ourselves feel at home." The fire burned brightly, and everything rather surpassed our expectations; but—we had no table!

"What will you do, dear mamma?" said Kate. "Shall we take turns in holding the lamp? or shall we eschew work and be sociable? We never can sit round your work-stand."

"No," said Mrs Howard, who had been thinking busily, "I have a better plan. We will take the little kitchen table that holds the water-pail, and make a top to it of that moulding-board which is too large to use."

"And the first time papa puts his elbow on it, lamp and all will go over."

"He shall not put his elbow on it till he has screwed the two parts together. I will have it done at once."

Done it was, and covered with a cloth, and then our room was furnished. But there was little else done that evening, though the lamp stood steady, and the nondescript table presented a fair field for work. We sat resting. Night before last, at sunset, everything was in fair, peaceful order, with no fear of disturbance; and now—everywhere but in that room it might as well have been an auctioneer's domain as ours. "Well"—as we all said when the subject was mentioned; but it took us long to get used to the change, and frequently we said "where is such a thing?—oh—those people have got it!"

CHAPTER XLII.

WHERE ONE HELPED US IN, AND ANOTHER HELPED US OUT.

"Not always fall of leaf, nor ever spring;
Not endless night, nor yet eternal day;
The saddest birds a season find to sing;
The roughest storm a calm may soon allay;
Thus with succeeding turns God tempereth all,
That man may hope to rise, yet fear to fall."

SOUTHWELL.

A GOOD part of the next few days was spent in making the house what Mrs Barrington would have called "broom-clean;" and ourselves proportionably dusty.

"My dear Kate," I said, "you look as if you had been enacting Miss Brown!"

"So does somebody else I know of," replied Kate, as she untied the handkerchief that was over her head. "I really think Mr M'Loon might have sent people here to do the sweeping. It is rather too much to take away all one's furniture, and make one clear up after it."

"Perhaps he thought we should be too disheartened to attempt such a thing."

"I wish we could enact Miss Brown, I am sure," said Kate, "so far as to have a good ride — there has a small portion of this dust settled upon my mind and spirits. I wonder who has got our poor ponies now! Oh, Puck and Mopsa!"

"'Poor ponies,' indeed! I don't doubt they are as fat as can be. But we couldn't have much good of them—with papa away all the time."

"I don't think he will be away any more—if he can get engineering business or anything to do in this region."

"That would be very pleasant! Oh, Katie — it doesn't matter so much, after all, the losing these things—we have such comfort in each other!"

"A great deal, dear Gracie!" said Kate, kissing me.

"Don't you think you would take still more comfort in each other if you were rid of the dusty dresses?" said Mrs Howard, coming into our room. "I assure you, I find it a pleasant change."

"My dear mamma!" said Kate, "how lovely you look!—and what dreadful ideas you do suggest! Are we absolutely not fit to touch faces?"

"Not quite presentable," she said, with a smile; "and the sooner you are in order the sooner you can sit down and rest."

"It is a remarkable thing how tastes may change," said Kate. "I used to have rather a despising of calico dresses, and now that clean one of mamma's looked positively delightful."

We began to dress accordingly, still eyeing everything with a sort of wonder, and wondering at ourselves a little as well, for our quietness; but mind and body were too weary to be unquiet.

"Are you almost dressed?" said Mrs Howard, coming up again. "Here is Squire Suydam wants you to take a drive with him."

"A drive, mamma? Squire Suydam!"

"Even so, Katie—what do you say?"

"Oh, I should like it so much!" said I.

"How very kind of him!" said Kate. "I should like it too—exceedingly."

"Get ready, then, at once—don't give him occasion to repeat his maxim about ladies and dawdling. You had better take the key of the front door with you, for perhaps I shall go out to walk with your father—we can take the other, and you might get home first."

We were so quick in our movements, that Mr Suydam was fairly surprised.

"Why—Miss—Kate!" he said, "confess that you had your bonnets on when I came."

"Yes, sir," said Kate, laughing; "we have been all ready for some time, expecting you."

"I—thought—so," he replied, nodding his head at us—"that makes it all clear. Now, then, let's be off. Don't mind jolting, do you?"

"Not at all, sir."

"That's well, for these rains have played cut and come again with the roads."

So, with a kind of bustling gallantry that became him very well, Mr Suydam hurried us out to the little nondescript waggon (in no nondescript order, however), and placing us on the back seat, he placed himself on the front, in a kind of sideway position—giving one eye to his horses and the other to us —or rather the corner of one eye—which was, perhaps, his favourite way of looking.

"My girls," he said, as he cleared the reins and gave himself two or three little preparatory wraps in his great-coat — "my girls, Miss Kate — my nieces, that is — are so fashionable, that they won't hear of a buffalo skin anywhere but in a sleigh—they'd rather be cold. I suppose you have more sense?"

"I have a great predilection for being warm, sir."

"Eh?" said the squire—"I'm afraid that answer was a spice of the same thing—smacks of Philadelphia sadly—there's no such thing as a straight road to market now-a-days. Well, keep yourselves tucked up—the buffalo's clean—no need to be afraid of it."

And leaning back, the squire lent vigorous aid to what he called "our shilly-shally attempts at tucking up." It was well that our dresses were not too handsome to be mussed.

The roads were indeed none of the smoothest; and we tried what our friend called "*dive* and come again" pretty often. A fine fresh wind blew from the north, and now swept up the fallen leaves into heaps—now sent them dancing and frolicking off over the smooth ground in a way that often made us laugh. White clouds came drifting thick and fast, but the wind was sometimes too much for them as for the leaves; and would sweep us a piece of clear sky from which the sun shone down gloriously. On some of the trees their thin and faded tapestry yet hung; and here and there an oak stood in a richness of colour that was rather deep than gay, among its leafless neighbours. The ground had been too thoroughly wet for even that wind to raise a dust; and the whirling troops of leaves—gay and brown and shrivelled—skimmed and careered about with every possible vagary; and said what a lawless thing the wind was.

Everybody seemed to be abroad—the squire was perpetually nodding or touching his hat—calling out to one man about

grain, and to another about boards, and to another about his wife and children; while Kate and I sat quietly smiling at the odd answers and sometimes questions that were returned to him.

We passed our little mill—Mr M'Loon's now—working away with its foaming dash of water; and breathed just one sigh, not for the loss of the mill, but for the associations, half sad, half pleasant, that we had with it. Then a turn brought us by the Green hill whither we had so often walked; and another shewed us the Bird's Nest with its halo of recollections, and another the pretty, wooded slope of Jack's bean; while further yet rose Pillimaquady, so pleasant to us now, in all its roughness.

Then come Mr and Mrs Carvill on horseback—the lady in a perfect flutter, the gentleman taking the wind with his usual nonchalance; and we are honoured with quite a profound reverence from him, while her recognition might be only an involuntary tribute to the north-wester. And Squire Suydam ejaculates—

"Fiddlesticks!—and yet, there's some good in him, too."

Then we meet Mr Ellis quietly trudging along, with his never-failing associates—Dec and his good stick; and his bright smile goes with us for the next two miles.

"There she comes!" said the squire, apostrophising—Miss Brown in the distance. "If I went out at midnight I should meet that girl scampering somewhere! I wonder her things don't all fly off from sheer inability to keep up with her! Where now, Miss Harriet?—if you keep on at that rate, you'll run over Mr Carvill presently. Beats cockfighting!" he added, half to himself, "that girls can't rest without being boys! Always at boys' work, and always wanting boys about 'em, too! If I was a boy, I'd see 'em further! Get up!" said Mr Suydam, impatiently, to his horses. "What are you about? Come!"

Again we drive silently on, towards home now, and seeing one after another of the familiar way-marks. Here we had rested in some walk, here we had watched for the stage when we expected my father.

"If I don't mistake," said Squire Suydam, "yonder comes one of your friends, Miss Kate."

"One of my friends, sir?—where?"

"Yonder," repeated the squire, extending his whip in the

direction of the Honiton turnpike—"Mr Rodney Collingwood—he's one of your friends, ain't he?"

"Certainly, sir—but I don't see him."

"Don't you? well, no more do I."

And as we descended a little hill, the squire began to sing to himself, to pass away the time—

"'And how should I know your true love
From many another one?'
'Oh, by his cockle hat and staff,
And by his sandal shoon.'

That's one of the best ballads that ever were written! Now, Miss Kate," he said, as we came upon high ground again, "don't you see a horseman away off on the turnpike?—if that's anybody else, my eyes ain't as good as they used to be—there's nobody in this neighbourhood rides as he does—I can tell him better on horseback than on foot. Ay, ay," said the squire, nodding his head, and apostrophising Mr Rodney now; "you think you are going to get to Glen Luna first, but you're mistaken—serve you just right if I turned about and went somewhere else—would, if my horses weren't tired. Well, you are in a hurry for once!"

"Do you really think that is he, Mr Suydam?" I said.

"Ask your sister."

"Why, my eyes are as good as hers," I said, laughing.

"Are they?—well—ask your own, then—I've told you what mine say, Miss Grace. Is there anybody else you're expecting?"

"We are not expecting him, sir."

"Ain't you?—well, he's coming, anyway. Now, my young sir, I'll try conclusions with you."

"I wonder what the conclusion will be!" said Kate, laughing, as our increased rate of progress made us and the mud fly in almost equal proportion.

"Jolts?—does it?" said the squire, returning to his seat after an experimental leap into the air. "Ne-ver mind—all good for the complexion. So!—Why, where is that youngster going?"

"To the Lea," I said—"he always leaves his horse there."

"Always does, does he?" said the squire. "Never leaves himself there, too, I suppose?"

"Not often," said I, smiling.

"Thought not. What's your idea of volcanos and earth-

quakes?" said Mr Suydam, suddenly facing round upon us. "Think they're nice things to subject people to, eh?"

But his quizzical look and manner made me laugh so, that he got no answer.

"You're nothing but a simpleton!" he said, turning back with pretended impatience, and driving furiously on till he reached our horseblock, which was a little way from the house.

"Here we are—there he is, too. Now just sit still, every one of you, till I've had my say—if you're once out you'll be all off together, and I shan't see the end of a bonnet-string in half a minute. Very good, Mr Rodney—you may touch your cap and unglove if you please, sir—but you may not shake hands with any one but me till I've done with you. Now, what kind of a flying visit are you going to make, this time?"

"Such a one as forty-eight hours can fly away with, sir," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"Hum—well, come and dine with me to-morrow, will you? or have you quite forgotten Slope Hill?"

"I have not, indeed, sir, nor any of its kind inmates—but, to-morrow, Mr Suydam—I have just promised Carvill that I will dine at the Lea to-morrow. I will come and see Mrs Suydam, at all events, before I go."

"Nothing to be done with you, I see," said the squire, shaking his head. "When are you to be quit of those interminable Faculties?"

"In February," said Mr Collingwood, laughing.

"And then you'll go off in a puff of smoke?"

"A puff of smoke! No, Mr Suydam, I hope for a brighter discharge from the 'Faculties' than that."

"Hum," said the squire—"well, I don't know—a puff of smoke's a reasonable bright thing—with a flame in the midst of it!"

It was a picture—but one to which I wanted the key. The old squire sat half round in his seat, looking down at his favourite with the most benign and concentrated gravity; and Mr Collingwood had hitherto listened and replied with all his usual frank and changing expression of face and voice. But at this last remark the eyes went down, and if the lips had parted at all, it would have been to laugh, and not to speak. As it was, they rebelled somewhat against control.

"I guess you don't want any brighter discharge than that!" said Mr Suydam, after a minute, his own features relaxing a

little. "It's about good enough for you! Just hand these young ladies down—if you ain't afraid to look at anybody—and that'll save me the trouble of getting down myself. Will you be all ready if I come for you again?"

"Yes, sir," said Kate, as she sprang out; "we have enjoyed the ride too much not to want another."

"Very well, miss—I'll come for you as long as you'll let me. And don't let that child get a nervous fever—she's just primed for it."

Enforcing his words with a warning nod, the squire drove off.

"Is that true, Gracie?" said Mr Rodney, with a look of mingled kindness and amusement. "What has happened to your nerves since I went away?"

This was a hard question, for it brought back the disagreeable events which our long drive had banished. Kate and I glanced at each other in some uncertainty,—how were we to tell what it would give our friend so much pain to hear?

"It would not do to take up anything Mr Suydam says to-day," I answered, evasively, "for he is in a most unaccountable mood."

"How long have you been at home?"

"Hardly a month."

"And have been enjoying it more than ever?"

"We were very glad to get back," said Kate, hesitating a little—"but—you know 'the mind is its own place'—and things are not always just what they seem."

"I hope not, I'm sure," said Mr Rodney, smiling, "for you seem to be particularly grave and absent. What is the mind's place at present? Have you sent it with Mr Suydam to Slope Hill?"

"No indeed," said Kate, stopping short as we neared the threshold. "Mr Rodney—I have been debating with myself whether I had better ask you to come in."

"Well?" he said, with a very bright glance, "and how have you settled the question?"

"I think, on the whole, you will be most comfortable out of doors."

"Yes, Mr Rodney," I said, "you had best be content with this prospect—if you go further you may fare worse."

"What do you mean by 'this prospect'?—the prospect of standing here till Friday, and talking to you through the

window? I think I must respectfully decline that, and let myself in."

"No—stop!" said Kate, touching his arm with her hand—"don't go in yet—I want to talk to you. You have studied so many 'out-of-the-way things,' as Stephanie says—did you ever hear of a family who were deprived of their Lares, or Penates, or whatever you call the presiding images?"

"Such things have been," said Mr Rodney, with a smile—"but at present I think Mr Howard's Lares are only out of doors."

"But the difficulty is," I said, "they can never be got in again—those that Kate means."

"And what does she mean?" he said, his look suddenly changing—"nay, you must not talk riddles to me with such a voice. Come, Miss Kate," he added, taking hold of the hand which had hitherto detained him, "what is the matter?—I shall not let you go till you tell me."

"I am thinking," said Kate, half laughing, because she would not cry, and with her eyes apparently fixed upon the lake; "I am thinking of a man who forgot that he was wounded until he had to tell his friend of it."

"And whose friend thought the most merciful thing was to shew him the wound quickly."

"Mr Rodney," she said, "do you remember Mr Freeman's definition of a family in moving time?—'the house in one place and the furniture in another'!"

"Perfectly!" he said, looking earnestly at her.

"That is precisely our involuntary condition." And turning hastily round, Kate opened the door, and we entered.

How different things appear, looked at through other eyes and through our own! Never had the room seemed so bare, so essentially four-cornered—we knew how it must strike one so sympathetically keen-sighted as the person who followed us. He said nothing, however, and we having called his attention to one of the blue chairs that yet stood before the fire, ran up stairs to take off our things. One look we gave to each other, silently saying that the sight of a friendly face had more nearly unnerved us than had all the rough encounters of the past week; and then we went down to give at least the brightening effect of our presence.

Disregarding the arm-chair, Mr Rodney stood by the table,

which we had left strewed with law-papers—copied and uncopied.

"I will ask other questions when I am not bewildered," he said; "in the meantime, will you please to tell me what you are about here?"

"Only a little profitable amusement," said Kate, looking laughingly up at him.

But his look in return had nearly overcome us both.

"More profitable for character than health, I fear," he said, presently—"you are looking pale."

"No, I am not," said Kate, with some effort after voice and smile together—"it is only a reflection—induced by these papers. You must talk to Grace about nervous fevers."

"I don't wonder Squire Suydam talked about them—there was more nervousness than strength in the hand that copied this sheet, certainly."

"But how do you know it was mine?" I said—"maybe it was Kate's."

Mr Rodney smiled for the first time since he entered the house.

"That does seem like rather a random remark, Gracie," he said. "But is it absolutely necessary that this work should go on this afternoon; because, in that case, I shall petition for a pen too—or seize upon one of these."

"O no," we said, "it need not go on—there is no hurry—and this is nothing either new or dreadful, Mr Rodney, so you need not look grave about it."

But they were very grave eyes that watched us as we folded up pleas and demurrers, and put them away out of sight.

"Now," said Kate, "if you will just sit down in that great chair, and look at the fire, you will forget all that is or is not behind you."

"Put yourself in it, Miss Kate, and you, Gracie, in that other, and I will sit here and look at what I like. Now tell me all that I want to know—all that you have been enduring while I thought of you as so happy and peaceful."

"Happy and peaceful we have been in spite of it," said Kate—"a little wearied, a little tried—enough to make us appreciate friendly faces; but the confusion of the house did not reach far into our minds, and we have been much less cast

down than I could have believed beforehand; even papa—and you know it came hardest upon him."

"Very hard! it must have been."

"Yes, very hard; and yet we have taken it so quietly—it might have been so much worse."

His eye glanced round the room, and Kate and I could not help smiling.

"You won't find the ameliorating circumstances if you look for them," said Kate—"they address themselves chiefly to the ear. But shouldn't we be very unwise people to grieve over such losses, when papa has tried to put a bright face upon them, and when we are so well, and so happy in each other? Cannot you take a sprig of true wych-hazel this morning?"

"If I do, it will be from another bush."

"You see my dream came true, Mr Rodney," I said.

I could not quite understand his smile—it was for a moment so sad in all its affectionate sympathy.

"I very often think of Miss Easy's words," he said—"that she wondered how she could ever be sorry for anything that happened to you; for it always seemed to work good and not evil. The goodness of God is so sure! so unfailing!"

"We have proved that," Kate said, with full eyes. "But, Mr Rodney, I should almost doubt your remembrance of what Miss Easy said—you are looking so very grave."

"One of the ameliorating circumstances does not appear quite enough for my comfort—I cannot take it upon trust."

"If you would only take my advice and look at the fire," said Kate, "it would cheer you up amazingly—the walls of this room are not enlivening."

"I certainly was not looking at them," he answered, as he rose to greet Mr and Mrs Howard. And nothing could have been more beautiful or like himself than that greeting. It was as if his full love and appreciation for us had but just then come out, and our misfortunes had but bound us together. My father felt half saddened and half cheered.

"You see we have had autumn winds in here, Mr Rodney," he said.

"The buds that are left are better than the leaves which have fallen, sir," said Mr Rodney, with one look of quick sympathy.

"Yes," said Mr Howard—"if the next season were summer

instead of winter—but I think some of my buds grow pale under this frost work."

Leaving Mr Howard to explain and tell what he chose, we began to prepare tea; and that Mr Rodney's eyes might not be shocked with any more dismantled rooms that night, the meal was spread on that smallest and most inconvenient of little tables in the sitting-room—its want of accommodation eked out with an extra chair or two. For this our friend had no grave looks—and we laughed off the inconvenience, and enjoyed the tea as much as possible.

Then when we had again drawn round the fire, talking went on briskly for a time, and the flickering light made our faces perhaps seem gayer than they were, but was at all events a very hopeful, cheer-up sort of a companion. After that came a long, unbroken silence.

"Papa," said Kate, softly, and laying her hand on his forehead, "have you any idea where your eyebrows are?"

"Not the least, my dear—you have the advantage of me."

"Couldn't your thoughts come back for a little while?" said my stepmother. "I think we are in great danger of what you call moodiness"

"Mr Rodney," said my father, with a suddenness that spoke a mind far away from these last remarks, "I have been dreaming of a man who had a precious jewel that he wanted to give to a friend; but when the time came, behold there was no golden box wherein to put it!"

"And I have been dreaming too, sir," said Mr Collingwood, quickly; "but it was of a jewel so precious, that its golden box seemed but the lead that held 'fair Portia's counterfeit.'"

"Ah!" said my father, shaking his head, but smiling too, a little; "my Lord Bassanio was a very sensible young man—after he had seen the portrait."

"But, papa," I said, laughing, "he didn't know what was in the lead casket till he opened it."

"Quite sure, Gracie?" said my father, stroking my hair. "Well, my dear, I always believed that Nerissa gave him a hint."

CHAPTER XLIII.

HEART'S-EASE.

"I think if anything was to be foreseen, I have as sharp a look-out as another; and yet I foresee nothing." GOOD-NATURED MAN.

KATE and I had a busy early morning of it. There was the sitting-room to put in order and coax into comfortable looks, and the fire to make; and this, too, in very good season, before any one else could be up. Similar kind offices must be performed for the breakfast-room, which was, however, much less amenable to coaxing. Do what we would, it was but a bright fire, some lumber-room chairs (of which the original striking colours were much worn off) and the breakfast-table —standing on a centre-piece of carpet with a broad border of bare floor. The floor was very white, and the chairs very nicely dusted, and the table—we did thank Mr Pratt in our hearts for supposing we might have a friend with us—had its old supply of linen, china and silver, minus the tea-set. And yet it looked very like *our* breakfast-room—though that stream of sunlight was certainly "heartsome," as we remarked to each other, and fairer than had ever entered our town house.

"If one could only get here without coming through that empty drawing-room," Kate said.

"Never mind, this will look all the brighter."

We left the room to get warm at its leisure, and went to see about breakfast. Mrs Howard had preceded us in this department, but there were still some light matters for us to do, while she *would* do others that she thought less pleasant. Those finished, we took off our aprons and proceeded to the parlour.

I suppose the quick work and early rising in the cold may have made us look pale or tired. Mr Rodney's face said as

much; and Mr Howard, with a man's disregard of family secrets, exclaimed—

"What in the world have you been about?"

We gave him our lips by way of good-morning and answer; but while I seated myself at the corner of the fire, my father held Kate fast, and repeated his question—

"What have you been about?"

"I have been—among the flowers—just now," said Kate, looking down, and smothering a laugh.

"Doing what?"

"They wanted to be turned in a new direction—or at least they were too aspiring; I have been reducing them within proper limits."

"At this time of day!" said my father.

"The only time of day when they usually flourish, sir—the flowers of an hour which is popularly called breakfast-time. By some people this species is denominated Muffinaria Matinensis."

And covering her face with her hands, the laugh burst forth in good earnest. The gentlemen laughed too—because they couldn't help it.

"You silly child!" said my father—"what do you mean? Are those the only flowers you have been attending to?"

"Not quite, papa—I have managed to pick up a little heart's ease."

My father drew her to him for another kiss, but looked as if he had found less than a little.

"What have you done with your 'Muffinaria'?"

"Oh, they are safe," said Kate, smiling, though the bright tears were ready to fall. "I have delivered them into the delicate hands of 'Dency Barrington—mamma insisted that mine were too robust for the purpose."

"Where did you find 'Dency Barrington?"

"My dear father," said Kate, "you have certainly taken up—whose rule was it?—for obtaining information, this morning! Suppose I were to give you what is called a true American answer, and inquire how you and Mr Rodney could choose such a shadowy corner to stand in, this bright day?"

Mr Howard passed his hand once or twice very fondly over her head, pushing the hair off her forehead, and looking at her in a way that made reply hardly necessary.

"I once had a daughter," he said, "who would not have

borne 'the loss of all things' quite so cheerfully. Can you be the very same child I brought with me from Philadelphia?"

"As near as possible, papa!—only my notions have so much sense about them, that they do not venture out when they are sure to be frost-bitten. You know, none but very humble flowers dare shew their faces until settled warm weather."

"And are there no humble flowers for you to copy but snow-drops?" said Mr Rodney.

Kate laughed, and the snow-drop was very quickly supplanted.

"Why, really," she said, "I did not think of that before—Gracie does look something like one, down there in the corner. But lilies are rather disconsolate—and crocuses rather pert—and violets deal too exclusively in unseen influences—I don't know that there is anything left for us but snow-drops."

"And the rose *à-quatre-saisons*," said Mr Collingwood, smiling.

But, as my father remarked, that was hardly *left*.

"Nobody answers my questions," said Kate, "and I am expected to answer everybody!"

"I must appoint a referee, if you have any more to ask," said Mr Howard—"I am going to my study. But you have the clue to my shadowy corner, my dear; and I daresay Mr Rodney will give you one to his, if you ask him. Perhaps you can succeed in guiding him out."

Kate preferred another mode of tactics—choosing rather to abolish the shadows than to find her way through them. She stood still for a moment after Mr Howard had gone, and then looking up at the referee with a gravity which somewhat impaired his own, she said—

"Did you ever study botany, Mr Collingwood?"

"A little, Miss Howard.—Not so much as some other things."

"Never learned anything about the growth and cultivation of heart's-ease?"

But she could not raise her eyes again for a minute after his glance.

"'Will 't please you sit,' and give me a lesson in words?" Mr Rodney said, gently installing her in one of the easy-chairs, and taking his stand at the back of it. "I believe I know heart's-ease when I see it—what about its culture?"

"Perhaps you know, then," said Kate, her lips trembling a little, but steadying themselves by degrees, "that it is a particular little flower, and needs particular soil and care. And there are many varieties; some all purple, and some all gold; but I think the purple-dashed ones are the prettiest. Then, too, it loves the shade, Mr Rodney, and thrives best there. If you put one of the fine ones in the full light of the open ground, it will sometimes lose its deep colour, and the flowers will be smaller, and all yellow—I think them not so fair. Some of the best I have grow at the back of the house."

There was a deep silence.

"Might one have the benefit of your thoughts?" said Kate, when some ten minutes had passed.

"One might," said Mr Collingwood, smiling. "They were just two. The first concerned the exceeding good care I shall take of all the heart's-ease that ever comes into my possession—or guardianship. The second you may call a botanical question—Might not this flower—in, of course, a different soil and exposure—bear a little more of the sunshine, and yet keep all its sweet fairness?"

"I must go and see to my Muffinaria!" said Kate, springing from her chair. "I am certain that 'Dency is exposing them to too much heat."

"Gracie," said Mr Collingwood presently, "what are *you* thinking of? will you tell me?"

"I don't quite know myself, sir," I said, laughing; "I was just trying to find out. My thoughts seemed to have got tangled."

He smiled.

"Have you really some of the true English heart's-ease? or was Miss Kate talking entirely from imagination?"

"Oh, we have a number! very fine ones!"

"It is a very lovely flower!"

"And such a pretty name! But isn't it strange that the French name should have so different a meaning?"

"Do you think it is so different, Gracie?—it does not seem that to me."

"Pensées?"

"No—thoughts are some of the best heart's-ease I ever had."

"To be sure," I said, "that is true sometimes. But then, to have it true as a rule, one's thoughts must be in very nice order and regulation."

"There is no doubt about that, Gracie. But then, as you say, I would not give much for the so-called heart's-ease which one's thoughts are at war with. Such is not a peace—it is only a truce. There is no way with your thoughts but to make friends with them—then they will fight for you against the world!"

"If anybody is curious on the subject of Muffinaria," said Kate, opening the door, "they are at present ready for inspection."

She made a very bright connecting link between the room we left and the room we were going to, and I half hoped that Mr Collingwood might notice nothing else on the way; but though I could not see that he looked about him, I yet felt sure that his eye sought one or two familiar places, to find whether they were filled or empty. Kate and I both read it in his face when we first sat down to breakfast; but either other influences wore that off, or Mr Collingwood thought there was enough thoughtfulness afloat without his, for there was no appearance of it afterwards.

A part of that day was spent in a long walk, from which we returned to find Mr Carvill managing his steed and his impatience at our door. Or rather, our eyes found him there; for before our feet could get so far, Mr Carvill had espied us, and in the next minute he was directly in our path, and with no apparent intention of getting out of it.

"Hope I see you well, young ladies," he said, uncovering—"hardly needful to ask—only you might not know so well as I that your faces are in very partial concealment."

"Then it is quite unnecessary for me to ask you any questions," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"Good morning!" said Mr Carvill, as if but just aware of his brother's presence, and then bringing back his attention to us. "I made so bold as to ride over after Mr Collingwood this morning, young ladies, because I was morally sure he wouldn't come if I didn't."

"Morally sure I wouldn't keep my promise!" said Mr Rodney.

"'Il fait toujours bon tenir son cheval par la bride,'" said the gentleman, shrugging his shoulders; "and Mrs Carvill had set down her foot that you must come, so I put mine in the stirrup to make certain—not thinking it safe to trust even *your* sense of duty. What do you say, Miss Howard?"

"About what, sir?"

"Why—stand still!" said Mr Carvill, as his horse, after one or two bridlings of the head, took a sudden wheel, and was with some difficulty brought up to face us again, for which he was rewarded with a touch of Mr Carvill's spurs, and gave an eccentric spring in consequence.—"No occasion to be frightened, Miss Kate; if I run over anybody, it won't be you; I believe there is a contingent barrier somewhere. But you see the advantage of this little manœuvre is, that when I come round again, you strike me with all the force of novelty."

"It would strike me with all the force of novelty, if you would come straight to the point, and tell what you are after," said Mr Rodney.

"I'll be after telling you presently, sir," said Mr Carvill, politely. "Do you think now, Miss Kate, that anybody—that is to say, Mrs Howard, of course—would object to Mr Collingwood's dining at the Lea to-day? Mrs Carvill is very anxious—and as I shall not see him again till the winter, you can probably imagine my feelings—but—this creature is certainly possessed with the spirit of whirligig!"

"If you had only taken the trouble to go in and see mamma, sir," said Kate, "she could have saved so severe a trial of his patience, and satisfied you at once."

"Do him good to have his patience tried!" said Mr Carvill. "I am extremely sorry, Miss Kate, to have frightened you into anything like paleness—I shall not soon forget it; but, so far as I am concerned, this interview has been perfectly satisfactory, and well worth waiting for. My mind is quite at rest—wish my horse was!"

"They will be in some danger of growing pale if you keep them standing here much longer," said Mr Rodney, laughing in spite of himself at the extreme demureness with which this was spoken. "Let Necker take you out of our way and home as fast as he is inclined to—I shall not fail of my word."

"What surety?—you engaged in some interesting conversation—Miss Howard suddenly says 'Oh!'—whereupon you inquire, and find that it is nine o'clock. Meantime I have spent the evening over the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*—article 'Social Exchanges'—and can make nothing of it."

"It is not anywhere near your dinner-hour yet," said Mr Collingwood, gravely—"your watch must be too fast."

"My watch is perfect, Mr Collingwood. So is my foresight. What time do you go in the morning?"

"Nine o'clock, Mr Carvill."

"Very good; and as I once had the pleasure of telling these young ladies—on an occasion which I would not for the world recall to their recollection—I really have some affection for my absent brother."

Mr Rodney smiled, but then stepping up to Necker, and resting one hand on his shoulder, he said—

"What do you want with me, Carvill?—say quickly."

"Better stand off," said Mr Carvill—"if *you* get run over, I won't answer for the consequences. What do I want?—this same absent brother of mine."

"But you will have him at dinner."

"See a polite shadow at the far end of the table—that's all. Therefore, to come to the point at once, it has occurred to me—that as the said dinner will not be served but in the neighbourhood of duskiness and atmosphere of wax-lights, you had better give me a little of your time beforehand—as otherwise, you might be detained till 'the witching hour of night.' In which case you might fall in with some hocus-pocus, and not reach Glen Luna any more; which would—to say the least—be a catastrophe."

"I will come immediately," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"Have a care, then!—'*Otez-vous!*' as my wife says to the fag-end of her patience."

And reining back his horse to give full effect to his sudden dash forward, Mr Carvill bowed low and went off.

"Must you go to-morrow, Mr Rodney?" I said, as we walked on to the house.

"I must indeed—absolutely."

"This is but a tiny visit," said Kate.

"I trust the absence which follows it will be short in proportion."

"You were talking to Mr Suydam about February—will you be here then?" I said.

"Hardly so soon as that, Gracie, I fear."

"But you will come as soon as you can? you will not let Mr Carvill keep you in town?"

"I shall not let Mr Carvill nor any one else keep me a moment longer than I can help."

"Ah!" I said, "you do not know how few friends we have

in this region, or you would not laugh at me for asking such a question."

"I think that could only be called a smile, Gracie. But I do know how few friends I have—anywhere—that are just what I mean by the word. Keep back, Wolfgang—you must not come in."

Wolfgang wagged his tail, and looked at Kate.

"Is my authority transferred?" said Mr Rodney, with a laughing appeal in the same direction. "Because, in that case, Wolfgang's mistress will please to issue her orders."

We laughed too at the dog's comical look, and upon the strength of that he insinuatingly pushed himself in.

"It is the funniest thing!" I said. "He will do anything she tells him to, and will mind none of the rest of us if Kate is by."

"He is a remarkably sensible dog," said his master—"probably he has private reasons which he never told you, Gracie."

"I think he will be almost as sorry to part with Kate as she will be to part with him, Mr Rodney."

"And I think I should be the most sorry of the three."

"Why?"

"Why?—Don't you suppose I have a sufficient regard for the two parties in question to be unwilling to displease them?"

"But you said the most sorry."

"Oh, you have no idea of the extent to which I carry my sympathy with Wolfgang!" said Mr Collingwood, laughing, as he left the room.

"How much remains of that copying?" said Kate. "Could we finish it to-day?"

"Easily—and maybe Mr Rodney would take the papers for us."

"That is what I was thinking of. But don't get them out just now, dear. Do you know, next week papa is going to look over our old possessions, and see which of them we are entitled to?"

"I didn't know we were entitled to any."

"They are stored at Wiamee, you know, and papa says the receiver took some which the law allows everybody—fifty dollars' worth of books, and so on. It would be something to have even that."

"Yes—something. But why mayn't I begin to copy?—it will soon be dark."

"Have those papers just been waiting for me?" said Mr Rodney, as he came in again. "I did not know but they were done."

Kate smiled.

"Does North Morris lie in your way to Rutland, Mr Rodney?"

"I go directly through it. Have you any commands?"

"Only this same bundle of papers—it is rather too large to send from here through the post-office. Would it give you much trouble to take charge of it?"

"None in the world—if you will give them to me just as they are."

"We will give them to you nicely done up and sealed, that none of them may get lost," said Kate.

"What are you going to do while I am away this afternoon?"

"Now, Mr Rodney," she said, answering his look with a most fair one, "please do not ask any questions—see how long the shadows are—it is quite time for you to go. And, if you wear such a grave face at the Lea, Mr Carvill will think witchcraft is abroad in the day-time."

"He would come near the truth for once," said Mr Collingwood. "I strongly suspect some conjuration to keep me here, for I feel a singular dislike to going away. Gracie, don't send out any of your familiars to hinder my coming back."

"O no," I said, laughing—"we shall wait tea for you, sir."

We finished our copying, and then sat waiting in the twilight, and talking of what things we were to have per favour of the statute.

"Papa," I said, as a sudden recollection came over me, "I want to ask you now, while I have a chance, what did you mean last night when you were talking about gold boxes and jewels? I asked Kate, but she didn't seem to understand it any better than I did. Was that a real dream of yours?"

"There was as much reality about it as there is about most dreams, my dear."

"But what made you bring it up? what had it to do with what we were talking of?"

"We were not talking of anything just then, Gracie, if you

remember," said Mr Howard, looking down at me from his stand before the fire.

But he saw that I looked puzzled; and coming nearer, and taking my hand in both of his, he said, with a smile—

"It wouldn't be very strange, my dear, if, after all our losses, I should dream of gold and jewels."

"No, papa—but then you were talking—I don't know, I suppose I am stupid."

"Not a bit of it; but older heads than yours, Gracie, have failed to follow out another person's train of thought. I was thinking of the want of what I once had; and Mr Rodney, with most discriminating kindness, reminded me that what I have left is far more precious than anything Mr M'Loon could take away. Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly, papa; it has been such a pleasant thought in all these troubles that nobody could touch any of us. And that was how you came to talk about Portia?"

"That was how we came to talk about Portia, in her leaden casket—much better worth having, you see, Gracie, than the fool's head in the silver one. So you perceive that if I had plenty of money and half-a-dozen silly children, I should be a poorer man than I am now with only you and Kate."

"That might be, in more ways than one," said I, laughing. "Ah, papa! they would be poorer children, too—unless one of them was Kate."

"And another one Grace," said my father, kissing me. "Come over here and sit down on my lap. You would be a treasure of a daughter, my dear, to those people who like to have always a baby in the house. As for me, I am sadly afraid you will never grow up."

"I am sadly afraid you don't want me to, papa," I said, laying my head down on his shoulder. "But how can one grow up unless one lives among other people?—I haven't any idea how old I am, or ought to be."

"I said true," remarked Mr Howard, after a pause, "when I once called all these things trifles. How gently we have been dealt with!—even as regards this world, it is only the least precious things we have lost; and the most precious—each other's love and sympathy and one-mindedness—are all left, all increased, and stand out in a full relief they could scarce otherwise have had."

"And we have learned to put a truer estimate upon things," said Mrs Howard.

"Much truer, my dear; having pretty reasonable eyes to begin with—at least some of us. Certainly if poverty is not your niche, you have the power of filling more than one."

"Don't you think every true woman has that, papa?" said Kate.

"Every true woman, Kate, carries about with her a sort of India-rubber framework that fits itself to any niche where she may be placed; but at the same time one niche is better adapted to her than another. As one woman needs the drapery of wealth and circumstance; while another takes all the adorning upon herself, and makes you forget to look at her niche."

"And don't men have the power of adaptation too?" said Mrs Howard, smiling. "My memory would rather say yes."

"Sometimes," said my father; "but they are more angular and unmanageable, and not always content with their niche when they get it. Therefore they stick themselves into some other—a fact which everybody finds out but themselves."

"Here comes Mr Rodney—and now let us have tea."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE ROAD TO ETHAN COLLEGE.

"Seek not proud riches, but such as thou may'st get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly; yet have no abstract nor friarly contempt of them."
BACON.

To refurnish our house became now an object of effort as well as of desire. Those bare rooms looked very dreary in the cool weather; and to see my father's study supplied with but a pine table and a wooden stool, was more than a match for our equanimity. There was no question as to the propriety of making ourselves more comfortable—the difficulty was to find the means. The bags of dollars we had once possessed lay about us to be sure, but as fast bound up in granite and mortar as the brothers of the princess—only she did not know what the little black stones were, while the materials of our roads and cottages needed no explanation. If we ever got safe up the hill, we might indeed disenchant them—those that were left; but many of our improvements had passed into Mr M'Loon's hands, and, for all present power of doing us good, the rest might as well have been there too.

We decided to buy nothing for the present, unless we could, with one or two cattle and some other things which had escaped the levy, get back a few pieces of our old furniture, a few more of our favourite books than the statute allowance would cover, and a small addition to our present stock of plate.

Again we went over the list to make our choice, and Mr Howard was half inclined to merge the whole number of books and necessary articles in an attempt to get back the harp. But Kate would not hear of it, and even Mrs Howard and I could not say that it would be wise, or that we could not better live without music than without tables and chairs and carpets.

Some of these, which were not very handsome, we thought would cost less than new ones, and large spoons and forks were desirable. But for all these we must wait for Mr Pratt, who was not forthcoming; and, as the sheriff would not take the responsibility of giving us even the statute allowances, my father's visit to Wiamee was constantly postponed.

Meanwhile we tried what could be done without money—with only draughts upon our strength and time. And yet there was pleasure in it too, strange as it may seem; but a sinking cloud is far less dark than a rising one; and we had so long felt as if some possibility hung over our heads, that the removal of it became a relief — even though it left our house empty.

Then, there was really pleasure in filling up the emptiness —in making the rooms at least habitable—in setting off what we had to the best advantage. Contriving became a matter of amusement as well as of study. Old pieces of furniture that had lain for years in the lumber-room, being new varnished and rubbed up, made quite a respectable appearance—now that they were no longer contrasted with ebony and satin-wood; and our few shells, which had been quite outshone by more precious specimens, were now appreciated. Not by my father —he rather shook his head at them; or indeed at anything that had but a pine table and cotton cloth to stand upon. But, in general, what had been slighted by the Howards in their golden dream, was thankfully made use of by the Howards in the mere leaden gray of the morning. And as everything looked better than we expected, we perhaps thought everything looked better than it really did.

So in a while we were quietly settled again, save that my stepmother said she should not feel quite at home until the house had had a thorough cleaning; but that could not be done in November.

Yes, we were very quiet! Mind and body had both been wearied, and now that excitement was over, a stranger might have thought us downhearted—yet we were not that—we were only quiet. Garden work was past, and we took long walks in the leafless woods to rest ourselves from copying; but they were very sedate walks, and Wolfgang would sometimes look wistfully back at us, as if wondering what had become of our old quick steps and laughing voices. Then at some word from us he would come up to be patted, and for five minutes

walk very gravely by Kate, until the discipline of circumstances became too irksome, and he dashed off by himself, seeing that no one would go with him. It was lovely walking there—with no sound but the rustle of the dry leaves, or the chirp of some lingering bird—"pure, peaceful!" as Mr Rodney had said. And when we felt less bright than usual, we went to the Bird's Nest, to think of the soothing presence we might no longer see. At last Mr Pratt came, and my father received notice that on such a day he might have a meeting with him at Wiamee.

Kate had gone up stairs, and the rest of us were in the sitting-room, when Mr Barrington, finding no one in the kitchen to answer his summons, came round and tried the front door.

"Here's some sort of a concern for you, squire," he said—"leastways for Miss Kate. It's just as good to know where a thing belongs—and it's here now, and no mistake!"

"Something for Kate!" I exclaimed. "What in the world is it?"

"'Tain't much out o' the world," said Ezra—"Glen Lunay's seen it afore, any way. It had three gold feet to run away upon, though it ha'n't got only two to come back; but t'other one ain't broke—it's only come out, like. If the squire'd bear a hand, I guess I could fetch it in all the easier."

My father stayed not to ask further questions, but followed Ezra to his cart, whence they presently brought in the only thing that short description suited, and the only thing I thought it could not be—Kate's harp.

Such a storm of exclamations and inquiries! Mr Barrington felt overwhelmed, and prudently refrained from answering anybody till all were silent.

"Well," he said, then, "this is just how it is. I was up to Wiamee, and that feller that takes sich safe care o' your goods, squire—he hollers out to me, and says he's got sunthin' as belongs down here. So I said I knowed that long ago—a good many of 'em. Well, says he, I'm agoin' to keep the rest, but this here jigum—some sort o' music they call it—has got to be sent to the Glen by a safe hand, and I guess yourn's about as safe as another. So I telled him I thought likely, and he had it fetched out and put into the cart. And I missed all the stones comin' down as if it had been a baby—I guess it ha'n't took no harm."

It did not seem to have taken the least. The missing foot

was soon screwed in, and we were prodigal of our thanks to the careful driver.

"But where *did* it come from?" I repeated for the twentieth time.

"Why, I just telled ye," said Ezra.

"I mean, who sent it? Didn't that man tell you anything more about it?"

"He didn't tell me anythin' at all," said Mr Barrington. "He just said it had been waitin' quite a spell for t'other chap to come and say whether he'd make up his inclinations to part with it, and then I come off."

"You are quite sure you were told to bring it here?" said my father.

"I don't know," said Ezra, in desperation. "I haven't any idee what it takes to make a man sure. But it's writ on it 'Miss Howard' as plain as that feller could spell—which ain't sayin' a great deal—and I was telled a matter o' six times besides. I guess it's got to the wrong place—but I kint take it away."

We were left to our own cogitations, and to examine and carefully dust off this most welcome arrival. In all this time Kate had not come down; and I did not call her yet, that she might have the full surprise of seeing her harp in perfect order and in open view when she entered the room. We took off all its wrappings, placed it just to our satisfaction, and then stood to watch the door as Kate came singing down stairs. The knob was turned, and she came in.

Her eye saw the harp at once, and she stopped short with such a bright flush of pleasure as did us all good to see. But the next look was rather sorrowful, and she came forward saying—

"My dear papa! how could you?"

"How could I what?"

"Why didn't you get your desk? or a great many other things instead?" she continued, but giving her old favourite many kind looks and touches the while. "Oh, papa, you should not have done this! I am very sorry!"

"I am afraid the person who redeemed it thought more of you than of me, Katie; in which I am sure I agree with him. I am very glad."

"You should not have done it," she repeated, gently—"it was not quite right; there were so many other things wanted."

"See here," said my father, laughing; "I can't submit to be blamed for another person's misdeeds—keep your reproofs till you get hold of the delinquent. I had nothing to do with bringing this home."

"Nothing to do with it! but you ordered it to be brought."

"No, I didn't."

"He doesn't know anything about it," I said. "That man at Wiamee gave it to Ezra to bring down here, and nobody can tell who sent it."

"Papa knows nothing about it!" said Kate, raising her head and looking at us all by turns. "Why, what do you mean?"

Mrs Howard and I laughed for very pleasure, and my father replied—

"We mean that, Katie—I had nothing to do with it."

"But you know how it came to be sent?"

"No better than you do," said Mr Howard, smiling. "I was as much surprised as you are—for a few minutes."

"Oh, papa," I said—"only for a few minutes! I think it is the strangest thing I ever heard of."

"I don't wonder," said my father; "but you know, Gracie, even surprise cannot last always. Come, my daughter—you need not give your harp so very close an inspection—I know it is in order. Look up and tell me you are as glad for yourself as I am for you."

"Aren't you glad, Katie?" I said. "We were all delighted."

"My dear Gracie, my thoughts are absolutely in confusion? Where is the key? Have you seen it?"

"I see it now," said Mr Howard; "it is fast at the top to that piece of ribbon—the very one it used to have, isn't it? But it is tied in some impracticable true-lover's knot, apparently, —much easier to tie than to untie," he said, as he watched her fingers. "Here, Katie—let me cut it for you."

"It is unfastened now, papa."

"Then sit down and sing for me, will you, love?" he said, bending down to kiss her.

But she turned quick away, and ran off.

"She does not seem half so glad as I thought she would be!" said I, in rather sorrowful surprise.

"She is glad enough," said Mr Howard. "Did your never hear of such a thing as being a little too glad, Gracie?"

"O yes! But, papa, who could possibly have sent it?"

"I shouldn't like to have to give an answer to that question.'

"And you won't even try to guess, papa?"

"It would hardly be worth my while," said my father. "You may as well let your curiosity die a natural death, as mine has, Gracie. Look at the harp, and be content with that."

I was very content with that, but my curiosity had more than one life. If it ever faded amid the keen pleasure of hearing Kate play—of seeing her pleasure—of sitting in the twilight, as we had so often done, to hear the old favourite songs with which we had such loved associations; it revived in double force afterwards; and the very strong love and thankfulness that I had for somebody, went on increasing at the rate of compound interest, because the principal could not be paid. Kate seldom mentioned the subject; but, as I remarked, she spent all her thanks for the harp in her frequent and happy use of it. When she was tired—when she had a spare five minutes—above all, if she felt sad—this was the favourite rest and amusement; and none of us had realised the comfort we had lost till it came back again. The house seemed to be furnished now, and within sound of those sweet strings we looked upon bare walls and floors with indifference.

In a few days we had back from Wiamee the articles we had redeemed, and that were allowed us; and having disposed them to the best advantage, we were established for the season.

Mr Howard had followed out his intention of getting business as an engineer, or rather of trying—for there were other applicants in plenty. Some little he did get, but to live on with no more prospect or certainty than that furnished, would hardly do beyond the winter. It was now January; when one morning Squire Suydam and two strange gentlemen jingled up to the door, and requested to see my father on business. Partly because the sitting-room was thus taken up, partly because the coming of strangers had made us a little nervous, Kate and I went out to walk; and, as we often did when our spirits wanted composing, we took our way to one of the many little brown huts that spotted the beautiful country in summer. Now, they were but slight elevations in the snow; often half concealed by some deep drift, and always with a snow thatch, that hung over as if to shake hands with the snow beneath, and made the show of walls very tiny. Last night's white deposit lay unmelted upon several old bundles that did duty as window-panes; while some had been withdrawn, probably to do duty after a more legiti-

mate fashion. But the open spaces looked very, very cheerless, seen as they were through the clouds of light snow which the wind carried about, and giving, as they must, free passage to both wind and snow.

We passed several of these dwellings, of which the style bore too divided a resemblance to the abodes of men and of pigs to leave any doubt as to what class of the former lived in them; and the one to which our steps were now turned was but little better than the rest. There was more appearance of glazing, but the chimney was but two barrels, standing one on the top of the other, at the end of the shanty; and the amount of old rags and rubbish which the snow covered up about the door, we knew from former experience. Even now a shred of dirty blue or flaunting red stuck out here and there—thrown down after the storm began, or uprooted by the noses of the pigs; and such snow!—it was all in keeping.

The mistress of the shanty was just preparing to make bread, for a large pan of mixed wheat and Indian flour stood on the table, flanked by a cup of most singular-looking salt. To accommodate these, one corner of the table-cloth was turned up, and disclosed the table boards as they came from, but hardly from *under*, the carpenter's plane. For the cloth of thin cotton shirting had been already laid for dinner, and that the viands were getting ready we needed no further evidence than the steam which filled the room. It was but a little place, with a fixed wooden shelf round two sides of it, to save room and chairs; while the stove and a cradle had more space and spared less. A door opened into a very small bed-room, or rather upon a bed; and, in one corner, cleets nailed to the boards ushered whatever lodgers there might be to their sleeping apartment above. At present, the square hole of access was surrounded with several heads and half-lengths, which looked down upon us, as we glanced at them—with a feeling of wonder how they got there.

Mrs O'Keefe left her work, and greeted us with real pleasure and gratitude; and very Irish though her face was, and covered with freckles, it was yet young and goodnatured; and had withal that touch of life's work upon it, which is always interesting.

"And how is this little thing to-day?" said Kate, looking into the cradle.

"She has the chills ever day!" said Mrs O'Keefe. "Oh—

oh—the poor little crathur!" she went on, addressing the child in a tone of mingled sorrow and playfulness, that was sad to hear.

It was a very pale little face that lay in the cradle; and on it Ireland had set her stamp in very strong and not fair proportions, and the lace cap and pink ribbons were strangely out of place. Yet the face brightened at these words, and the baby tried to laugh; but, failing that, it could only cry. It was a picture of mother and child! the same all the world over!

"He's got it the day, too," said Mrs O'Keefe, indicating a head which lay in the bed on which the door opened, and trying, meanwhile, all manner of soothing words and motions upon the little occupant of the cradle.

"And how is your brother?"

"Oh, he's beautiful!" she said, quite rapturously, and shutting up her eyes tight.

"And have you got quite over the chills?"

"I think I'll have it the day—it usen't to come on afore afternoon."

She looked tired, and not well; and the child cried unceasingly.

"Mamma made you some more broth," said Kate, producing a pitcher from under her cloak; "you said your husband relished it?"

"Indade 'n he did, miss! more than anything! Ain't I obliged to you for coming down! Only it's too much trouble."

"No, we wanted a walk Is there anything we can do to help you?"

"And to fetch the pitcher, too! Och, hush! No, miss—there's little to do; the dinner's nigh done; there's just the bread for the boys' supper."

"You are not well," said Kate; "and this poor little thing does not like to be left alone when it's sick. If you'll give me the yeast and water, Mrs O'Keefe, I'll make the bread for you."

Mrs O'Keefe protested, but Kate was determined, and, throwing her wrappers into my arms (there was no other clean place—we had not even ventured to sit down), she began mixing and working, in good earnest.

I thought of the mowers' lunch, and looked on with almost as much admiration as Mrs O'Keefe.

Meantime the child went to sleep, and the mother examined the progress of dinner.

"What is in this kettle?" said Kate, as she stood by the stove to dry her hands, in preference to using a towel.

"It's gruel, miss; it's all I had to make for him."

"Well, don't make any more," said Kate, with a slight shudder at the thought of any sick person's taking such a compound; "I'll send you some. We haven't so many people to cook for, and can make it as well as not. And we have white meal, which is the best for gruel."

Mrs O'Keefe could only repeat—

"Indade, I'm intirely thankful t'ye!"

A few words of advice and promise were spoken, and we prepared to come away.

"Will I send one of the childers wid yees to carry the pitcher, for fear it would get broke?" said Mrs O'Keefe.

"What, the one we brought down? Oh, that can stay till another time—you needn't empty it now."

"There's a mug, miss, left ever since—and a dish, more than all!"

"It's too cold for the children to walk so far—we can carry the things under our cloaks—just as well as not."

Mrs O'Keefe brought them, but still seemed doubtful.

"It's too much trouble!" she said.

"No, it isn't a bit," said we, bestowing them as Kate had proposed.

"The Lord bless ye! and may ye never know trouble!" was her earnest reply, given with true Irish adaptation.

We walked on in silence for some time, our hearts too full to say much. It was very good to look at the trials of other people! And now, as our own home came in sight, how very fair it looked! the pure untrodden snow about it gave no sad suggestions; and if we thought of the bare rooms within, it was with very great thankfulness.

The strangers had gone, and Mr and Mrs Howard were alone in the sitting-room. But our cheerfulness received a sudden check, as we came up to them. Mrs Howard's face wore unmistakeable traces of tears—indeed they were not so banished that she could give us more than one glance; and though my father's face was more composed, there was something about it which said they had thought and felt together. It was not without some effort that he could tell us, that he had been offered a professorship in the new college at Ethan.

CHAPTER XLV.

TENANTS FOR THE BIRD'S NEST.

"Now is the high tide of the year,
And whatever of life hath ebb'd away
Comes flooding back, with a ripply cheer,
Into every bare inlet, and creek, and bay;
Now the heart is so full that a drop overfills it,
We are happy now, because God so wills it;
No matter how barren the past may have been,
'Tis enough for us now that the leaves are green."

UNKNOWN.

THE sudden removal of a burden which had been upon us, till it seemed like a part of ourselves; the resolving of all our doubts and uncertainties; the assurance that we might live without being separated either from each other, or our old home, was almost too much; it took us long to get used to it. What the professor's salary might be, we hardly knew or cared; my father had told us, but his words were unheeded. Just one idea could be dwelt upon—it was the "something certain" we had so long wished for! whether the amount were large or small, little affected its value to us. We could live upon anything, if we could have that regularly. No one could imagine the happiness of such a prospect, who had not been through our long and trying experience.

Mr Howard came to the use of his wits rather sooner than the rest of us, and began to introduce what he called reform measures at home. First, he forbade us to copy any more; then he issued an order against wearing calico dresses in winter; and then, he insisted that we should get some one "to take care of the kitchen."

Servants were got, accordingly, to our great relief—and, so far as one of them was concerned, to our amusement. Our little friend, 'Dency Barrington, was only too glad to come and officiate in that department which advertisements call "waiting

and tending;" and marked her sense of the dignity of her new position, by never appearing about the table, unless coiffed with a spick and span starched sun-bonnet.

It seemed, as we said, as if every circumstance in this new turn of things was particularly pleasant—even that one of Ethan's being so far away. For now, to make sure of reaching it in time and in all weathers, it was absolutely necessary that my father should afford himself a horse—which he never would have done but for the necessity, and which we rejoiced over without stint. What a busy few days there were of arrangement and preparation! Some things to be made and some things to be bought—we were in a little cloud of excitement and pleasure, and didn't quite know where we were. Only my father preserved his identity, and looked at us very often and with exceeding satisfaction. The little cloud was a pleasant medium to his eyes.

But the first morning we saw him ride off for Ethan!—

It was too cold to stand at the door, and we had grouped ourselves round the window to look out. And there, with our eyes taking in the old style of dress and accoutrements—so long unseen about him!—and our hearts looking back to other times and forward to new, and dwelling delightedly on the present fact that change of dress and relief of mind had made my father look like his former self;—both eyes and hearts grew too full. And when, as his horse took the first step forward, Mr Howard looked round to give us one parting smile and gesture—we answered it, to be sure, but then left the window, and sitting down together, wept as uncontrollably as if a sorrow had befallen us, instead of a joy. It was a long time before his daily going and coming ceased to be incidents in our life; or before we could realise that the putting the house and ourselves into such order as befitted my father's new position, was not extravagance, but a proper outlay of money. And we had the money to lay out!—that was the most wonderful of all.

In the midst of this happy confusion of ideas and multiplication of business, I fell sick, and engrossed all the spare time of the family. Copying had been done away with before; but now all other work that could not be brought into my room was exchanged for the more wearisome task of nursing. Task I should not call it—nothing made it so unless sorrow for the cause of it. And so evenly are things balanced in this world, that in every-day life it is hard to be very sorry or very glad

for anything. I knew there was absolute pleasure in taking care of me; and on my part the weeks of moderate illness were well paid for by the love and tenderness they called out; and if gentle words and soft hands could not do away pain, they at least gave it a bright set-off. Yet be not too tender in a sick-room, or at least shew it not too plainly—the word or look too deeply fraught with anxious love is more than the sick one can bear, when bodily weakness leaves every nerve and affection of the mind unprotected. I many a time dreaded my father's visits—mamma and Kate were so constantly about me, that we were in a measure used to each other. As for 'Dency—the satisfaction with which she entered my room was great, and would lead one to suppose that she would be rather sorry than otherwise when I got well. The little green sun-bonnet was hardly less benign than the little face under it.

With the last winter days my illness wore off, and I was able by degrees to hear what was going on in the world—to look at the work that was now often brought to my bedside, and to watch and talk to the workers.

"We shall have you down stairs again to-morrow, dear Gracie," Kate said to me one morning. "I hope you will be strong enough by that time."

"I shall be almost sorry, Katie—it is so very pleasant to lie here, and see you and mamma moving about me."

"You won't think so when you are able to move about yourself," she said, kissing me.

"Yes, I shall—but I shall be glad to have you rest. Oh, Katie! what should I do without you!"

Again her lips touched my forehead, from which she was brushing back the hair.

"Do you see what a beautiful day it is?"

"O yes—and I heard the song-sparrows before sunrise. You haven't sung with your harp since I have been sick."

"I couldn't bring my harp up stairs very well," said Kate, smiling.

"I do wonder who ever sent it home! And I wonder what will turn up next—or if we shall live quiet lives in future!"

"Are you going to get up to breakfast, Gracie? or will you have it in bed?"

"In bed—according to mamma. Where is she?"

"She went down stairs to see Mr Rodney."

"Oh, has he come? and have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"But when did he come?"

"Before breakfast."

"Why wasn't I awake, and well enough to go down?"

"My dear child, I wish you had been!" said Kate. "But here comes 'Dency with your breakfast, in good time."

"How do you feel this morning, Miss Grace?" said the little handmaid, after she had set down her load, and stationed herself to survey my general appearance.

"Much better, 'Dency, thank you."

"What a pretty day it is!"

"Beautiful—and there are so many birds about!"

"Yes, ma'am. There's the most robins in the trees! I guess they was robins. Ain't it good Mr Collingwood had such fine weather?"

"Very good!" said I, with what gravity I could muster. And 'Dency went out of the room, watching me to the last.

There never was anything gentler than the care that was lavished upon me, or than the hands that bolstered me up, and then supplied me with all I wanted from the tray.

"What a strange thing it is to have chickens for breakfast!" I said.

"I think we should have found ways and means to get them for you, Gracie, in any circumstances."

"But you see it is a great deal pleasanter to find the chickens. This sickness would have come hard upon me a year ago—with the constant thought of how much it was costing."

"How often that has been in my mind!" said Kate. "I have never seen the doctor come without such a feeling of thankfulness. I suppose we should have had him just as often, but I don't know when he would have been paid. Miss Easy might well tell us never to dread anything."

"And that, 'If we should be sick!' has been one of the most painful thoughts to mamma in all these years of poverty. But, Kate, I want you to tell me everything that was said this morning, while you were down stairs."

"Everything?"

"Every single thing. Where is Mr Rodney to be settled?"

"I don't know, dear—he does not know himself yet."

"I hope he will be near us."

"He will be near us for a while, Gracie—he intends to stay for some weeks at the Lea."

"At the Lea! why, isn't he going to stay with us, as usual?"

"He says not."

"That is very strange! Then you have nothing to tell me, after all the talk you must have had?"

"Not much," said Kate, smiling. "Mr Rodney is very sorry you are sick, and said he would bring you some flowers, if he could find any in Mr Carvill's greenhouse."

"I don't believe Mr Carvill would approve of *such* a continuation of his apology," said I, laughing.

But the flowers came—beautiful ones; and, to use Mrs Barstow's words, were "better than a doctor." They were doubly pleasant, when I was able to be down stairs on the new sofa, and to take with them Mr Rodney's most kind and affectionate greeting and inquiries. Sometimes, as the season advanced, the greenhouse flowers were exchanged for a bunch fresh from the woods and fields—less striking, less splendidly beautiful, but with no want of loveliness; and with perhaps more of character in their fresh faces, when one remembered the cold spring days, and bleak situations, when and where they ventured forth. Wind-flowers and squirrel-cups laid their fair heads together; and blood-root and yellow violets ranged themselves round the stiff furry leaves and sweet pink clusters of the many-named mouse-ear. And the great yellow cowslip tried to throw them all into the shade, and could not but with its green leaves. On one account I liked these best, —Mr Rodney often told us in what places they grew, and sometimes of the walk in which he had found them. Occasionally he added an account of other things he had seen during the walk, but that was when he had gone with Mr Ellis or my father. We knew him too well to doubt the nature of his own exploring expeditions, and therefore seldom asked for more information than he chose to give. Once in a while Kate was persuaded to take a ramble, but generally she would not leave me, unless I was in one of those deep slumbers with which I tried to make up for lost time and rest. Nor always then; and glad as I was to have her go, my eyes always sought her the moment they were open; and perhaps it was well that she could only see the expression they wore when

successful in their search. Often they went further then, and found Mr Collingwood.

"Gracie," he said to me one day, when I had exchanged a waking-up smile with both himself and Kate, "you remind me of those flowers that contrive to look at the sun all the time—no matter where he is. They face the east in the morning, and then turn their heads by little and little, as the centre of attraction moves on."

"And you think Kate is the centre of attraction?" said I, laughing.

"Certainly!"

"It must seem a little comical! to people that don't know what good reason I have."

"Some people do know," he answered, with a smile. "But, Gracie, if the sun should go under a cloud for an hour or two—or, if the Moon should come between you and it—what would you do then? shut up your eyes and go to sleep?"

"Maybe so! Where is she going?"

"I wanted her to take a ride with me to-morrow—and there is some doubt as to what this little sensitive-plant will do the while."

"This little sensitive-plant will not be in a touching mood at all! Katie—you didn't hesitate about going because of me?"

"She hesitated so far as to refuse pretty decidedly," said Mr Collingwood. "Therefore I chose to defy prohibition, and ask you."

"She shall go! I would give anything to have her ride again—it would do her so much good. And she has been all these weeks shut up with me."

"What kind of a privation do you call that?" said Kate's voice and hand at once.

I kept hold of the hand and drew it down by my face, but paid no attention to the voice.

"What time will you come for her, Mr Rodney?"

"At any hour she will name after eleven—I have an engagement which may hold me till then."

"But, Mr Rodney, she hasn't a horse now!"

"But, Miss Gracie, I do not intend do have her ride without one," said he, laughing. "Do you think my resources are not equal to that?"

"Oh, I was thinking only of our own. I am very glad she

is going! I am sure it will do her a great deal of good! I am very much obliged to you, sir, for my part."

"You are the best little sister in the world! and have as small reason to be obliged to me as ever anybody had. Then, Miss Katie, you will please to hold yourself in readiness for my coming to-morrow. But, at what time?"

"That question may as well be settled as the other has been," said Kate—"I think I will have nothing to say about it."

"Then, as soon after eleven as I can."

"Yes, that will be the best time," I said, "because papa always wants her to sing to him in the afternoon. Oh, Mr Rodney—weren't you glad to see the harp back again?"

"Very glad."

"Wasn't it strange? Did Kate tell you?"

"She said something to me about it."

"Weren't you astonished?"

"I should hardly have thought you could be, Gracie."

"Why not?"

"Astonished that anybody should do anything for your sister?"

"Oh, but—not people that care about her, of course—but people that don't—I mean strangers."

"I should think it probable," said Mr Collingwood, gravely—"so far as I am in possession of the facts of the case—that this unknown person must have belonged to the former class."

"It has made us so happy! We never could have replaced this one! Kate said yesterday, that if papa could have got her a new one she shouldn't have loved it half so well."

"I said so, Gracie!"

"Yes—for I asked you. Do you think that is strange, Mr Rodney, that you smile at it?"

"I should not be quite willing to call it strange, Gracie. But I am very glad Miss Kate is of that mind—since she has this and not another."

I was in my usual place on the sofa next morning, when Kate came down dressed in her habit.

"I wonder if I ever had this on before!" she said. "Look at me, Gracie—does it convey any long-forgotten ideas to your mind?"

"It conveys some long-forgotten pleasure. Kate, you look lovely!"

"Is that a long-forgotten pleasure?" she said, with a laugh.

"No—but how came that to fit you?"

"First place, because for several years my nature has been aspiring and not encroaching—second place, because the tiny alterations my dress needed have been made."

"Sit down here, and let me see you."

There never was anything better deserved the name of pleasure. From the habit to the little cap that lay on the table, and thence to the fair head it was to cover—partially, as Mr Carvill might have said—my eyes passed and repassed, more satisfied each time. I thought anybody might have been proud to ride with her! And perhaps my face bore a strong impression of that opinion—I thought Mr Rodney's smile rather said so—or at least, I didn't quite know what it said; but I half fancied that he read my thoughts and agreed to them.

"I was under the impression that it was a bright day out of doors—till I came in here," he said.

"The sunlight has dazzled your eyes," said Kate.

"Something has, I believe Gracie, I hope you have a picture of Miss Kate to look at while she is away?"

"I have one—by heart," I said.

"And will you remember that it is the duty of little sensitive plants to close their leaves in the sun's absence—to keep out of the way of falling dews, and all such uncomfortable things?"

"I don't know—it would be hardly worth while, for so short a time."

His next words were spoken with that grave gentleness of look and voice which sometimes puzzled me—

"I wish you would make haste and get well, dear Gracie."

"I wonder what suggested that subject! But nobody is in haste about anything to-day, sir—you came just when you said you would, but since then there has been a stay of proceedings."

"You know," said Mr Collingwood, smiling, "the centre of attraction enforces punctuality, but is not obliged to practise it. Miss Kate has been looking at you, and the consequence is that she has but one glove on."

"Well—neither have you, sir."

"It is very clear that you know more of the duties of sensitive plants than of gentlemen. I shall not put on my other glove till I have had the honour of putting this lady on her horse."

I looked round at Kate, and I suppose my face again told my thoughts, for they both laughed, and Kate, after one farewell kiss, declared herself ready.

The moment they left the room, I left my sofa, and, with a perfect disregard of all rules and regulations, made my way to the window. I had no mind to be seen and sent back, however, and therefore seated myself in the shade of the window frame and curtain. The sash was thrown up, and yet the curtain hardly stirred, for spring had a mind that day to try gentle influences. The cold winds had died away, and there was nothing more than the spirit of a breeze abroad—the very breath of love and persuasion. At its request the song-sparrows wore themselves out with singing and building—and the birches and alders loosened their flowery tresses, and the lawn changed its dress with pleasure; while tulips and hyacinths made surprising efforts at getting up—and those earlier risers, the violets, opened their blue eyes, and modestly entered their claim to be, simply, the sweetest things in the world! The trees were leafless, but nothing could look unadorned in that soft light, and the even deepening colour of their shoots said they were not idle.

I would not have it supposed that Kate was all this time in mounting her horse. But, almost before I looked at the principal figures, my eye caught rapidly all the accessories of the picture that lay beyond the window frame—the atmosphere—the tone and colouring. Then it came back with very undivided attention.

The horse destined for Kate had been held by a groom until she came out, but the other one stood quietly by himself a few steps off, with the bridle thrown over his head, as if he could be trusted. Indeed, I never saw Mr Rodney's horse left in any other way; and it always seemed to me as if everything that belonged to him was under the same sort of regulation. And now, though the fine creature pricked his ears forward and back, and turned his head at his master's appearance to utter a low word of greeting, he stood—as if horses had not the power of moving. It was a pretty thing to see.

And a prettier thing was to see the groom's charge mounted. A long period of what the Spaniard called "walking on the earth" had lost Kate none of her old skill as a horsewoman;—her hand was as steady, her spring as light and fearless as ever—I thought I had never seen her do the business so well; but

that might be because she had such very perfect assistance. Her part was perfect, too—and I thought I was not the only one who appreciated it; for a few words which I did not hear had called forth a somewhat heightened colour, and a not at all displeased little laugh. I watched all the finishing arrangements with a strangely mixed feeling. I had often seen her on horseback, but never with so much pleasure—never before with anything like pain—yet there it was now at my heart; I could not mistake it. How did it get there? I tried to find out. The particular pleasure was easily fathomed;—she had not ridden for a great while—it would do her much good—and as much pleasure—I knew that from her face. But the pain? —I could not separate it from that last cause of my pleasure. I quarrelled with myself, and scolded myself, and reasoned with myself—to no purpose. Whenever I tried to see through that unaccountable feeling, those one or two bright looks came up before me. I was not sorry to have her go and leave me—tears started at the very idea of such selfishness. I was not afraid — Mr Rodney's every look and touch told what care he would take of her, and his qualifications for the office. If I had not been sure she would enjoy herself, I would not have urged her going. There seemed some mystified notion in my mind which I could neither seize nor lose sight of — some singular feeling of grief that she could be so very happy independently of me. And yet, as I said to myself — "Of course!—how could I have any connexion with the pleasure of her ride?" It would not do—the difficulty was unanswered; and long after the horses were out of sight and hearing, I sat gazing out into that spring landscape which now seemed to have very little in it. Mrs Howard came into the room and up to me quite unnoticed.

"My dear Gracie," she said, "what are you thinking of? How long have you been by this open window?"

"I don't know, mamma—I am not cold."

"Not cold! And such a pale face! What made you come here?"

"I wanted to look out, mamma," I said, without raising my eyes.

She said no more, but putting her arm round me, she drew me back to the sofa, and there I presently went to sleep.

If I had dreamed strange things it would have been no

wonder, for when I awoke it was to see Mr Carvill standing before the fire and talking to my father. An exclamation was on the end of my tongue, but I restrained it; and having answered the gentleman's inquiries with a soberness which was certainly more sincere than his own, my eyes went across the room to the window. Then I saw that the deceitful spring weather had changed its mind, and was now sending down "prelusive drops" in reasonably quick succession.

"Does it rain?" I exclaimed.

"You may take me for conclusive evidence of that fact, Miss Grace," said Mr Carvill. "Mr Howard, supposing that I was compounded of sugar and salt in agreeable proportions, suggested that the present dissolving state of the atmosphere might produce unpleasant consequences. And as it was a question where mistake might be fatal — there was no help, you see — I was obliged to intrude upon the precincts of Morpheus."

"You forget, Mr Carvill," said I, laughing, "that

'Cynthia still doth steepe
In silver deaw his ever-drouping hed.'

You are not out of danger yet, sir. But, papa, has Kate got home?"

"I have seen nothing of her, my dear, since I got home myself."

"Oh, do you think she will get wet?"

"I am afraid she will, Gracie—if this rain falls upon her."

Sleep had restored my mind to its usual quietness, and I was all anxious to see Kate come back, and to be sure that the rain had done her no harm. It couldn't have done much, for the horses came with my wish. At the first sound I raised myself up, just in time to see Kate ride up to the door, and at the same moment Mr Carvill moved forward as if he meant to go to help her off — then stepped back again with a look I could not comprehend. She would have been off without help had not her companion been too quick for her; and after that light spring down, she came in, holding up her habit, and looking, as I said before, lovely. Her first smile was a perfect cure of the soreness that yet remained from those strange thoughts.

"My dear Gracie," she said, "you are —— Mr Carvill!"—and she stopped short, with a colour that was by no means hesitating—but then instantly went forward, and shook hands

with "the curiosity," in a manner the most quiet and self-possessed.

"You should not have seen me this some time, Miss Kate," said that gentleman. "Of course I could not be blind to your appearance—but Miss Grace has the first right—and it is no wish of *mine* to come between members of a family. Then here is my brother"——

Kate came and knelt down by me.

"How are you, love? you don't look so well."

"Yes—just as well."

"I hope you enjoyed your ride, Miss Kate," said Mr Carvill.

"Why, sir?"

There is something in simplicity that is very amusing to people unaccustomed to it. Mr Carvill was nearly betrayed into a laugh.

"Can't answer—upon my word!" he said. "Had an indefinite idea that enjoyment might exist somewhere. Will you ask why, if I inquire whether you got wet, Miss Kate?"

"I believe I should," she said, smiling—"because you must see that I did not."

"Do your eyes ever turn states' evidence, Mr Carvill?" said my father, who with Mr Rodney had now joined the group.

"Very seldom, sir—their taste lies rather in the way of collecting evidence. But, as Miss Kate very justly remarks—one must see what one must."

"And never what one must not," said Mr Rodney.

"I'll go home and reflect upon that," said Mr Carvill. "Meantime the present company are fast disappearing from my sight—never knew my eyes were so well trained!—Miss Kate—I salute your shadow; Mr Collingwood—will your visionship appear in full proportions at my dinner-table?"

"No," said his brother, smiling.

"I am going to keep him here," said my father—"and you too, Mr Carvill, if you will."

"I thank you, sir—I will not," said Mr Carvill. "I have somewhere found out that in a dance of shadows the presence of a reality interferes with the *pas de deux*—in short, breaks the illusion. Miss Kate—the bright eyes of shadows are proverbial—will you give me ocular demonstration of yours?—and without exactly killing two birds—it is a possible case to

kill one—and make the other fly away—disconsolate, of course, but with the power of locomotion unimpaired."

It was not possible for us to help laughing; but Mr Carvill went away with his gravity as unimpaired as his locomotion.

"What has this child been doing to herself, mamma?" said Kate.

"Nothing, except sitting at the window. Did you leave her there?"

"Of course not!"

But I thought that those who stood round me exchanged looks—and yet I could not see that they did—it might be only fancy.

"I should like to hear your account of the matter, Gracie," said Mr Collingwood, seating himself by my sofa. "What have you been about since we went away?"

"Sleeping part of the time—and I was listening to Mr Carvill—and a while at the window."

"And what were your thoughts doing?"

"They were—busy," I said.

"Do you remember, Gracie, that you and I once found out that thoughts are good heart's-ease?"

"Mine were not in good order to-day," I said, with a sorrowful recollection of how far they had been from heart's-ease.

"Not in good order?" he said, gently—"what was the matter with them?"

"I don't know, sir—I couldn't quite get at it. I don't wonder you look grave, Mr Rodney—but it is easier to know a thing is wrong, sometimes, than to help it."

"My dear child, I was not looking grave about that—I haven't found out that they were wrong. Is this what has made you look pale?"

"I don't know," I said, with a long breath—"my thoughts have been in a strange mood, and I couldn't tell why—I believe that tired me."

"Have been, or are?" he said, with a look as if he had translated my dark thoughts and didn't see much harm in them.

"Oh, have been," I said, feeling soothed—"and my sleep rested me—and I was so glad to see Kate again."

"Were you satisfied with your sister's horse?"

"Oh, yes," said I, smiling.

"And didn't you admire the way she mounted him?"

"Very much."

"You would have admired her management altogether, if your eyes could have followed us. It is a great pleasure to see anything thoroughly well done."

I was a little too pleased to answer, except by a smile.

"If you had been well, and at the other side of me," he went on, "Miss Kate would have enjoyed the ride exceedingly—so she said."

"Oh, she did as it was!" I said, earnestly—"I know she did! she was looking so well when she came in."

"And so she did all the time she was out," said Mr Collingwood. "But I think, Gracie, your sister hardly considered the colour that came into her own cheeks a sufficient indemnification for the very pale ones she had left at home."

"I am so sorry! she should not have thought of me at all! Katie," I said, as she came down from changing her dress, "Mr Rodney has troubled me so much by saying that you didn't enjoy your ride because of me."

"Mr Rodney's remarks were not characterised by his usual exactness."

"Nor Miss Gracie's," said he, with a smile.

"I mean, he said what made me think so."

"You think wrong, dear Gracie; I enjoyed it very much."

"More than any one you ever took? I wanted you to."

"Quite enough to satisfy anybody that is anxious on the subject, Gracie," she said; "as much as I could, with you sick at home. Will that satisfy you?"

I was perfectly satisfied, and lay hearing them talk, with unalloyed pleasure.

The spring wore on; and, by the time I was well enough to go out, everything was in such a state, that it would have been a trial to stay in. So I used to wander about the garden, finding health and enjoyment in every fresh blade of grass and good-humoured-looking daffodil. Sometimes with Mrs Howard, sometimes with Kate, I used to walk myself tired—come in and rest—and go out again.

I had come in from my morning walk one day, and Kate had left the room; and, bonnet in hand, I stood half deliberating whether I would not go once more down the walk—it looked so pleasant——

"Grace," said my stepmother, raising her eyes from her

work, "do you know that we are to have neighbours again at the Bird's Nest?"

"In Miss Easy's cottage! Oh, I am glad! I should like to get in there once more. But how could he let it?—Who are they, mamma?"

"Who do you think?"

"I can't imagine."

Neither did I; and yet, what was it that laid a heavy hand upon my heart, as I saw the smile, and heard the tone with which her last words were spoken? Why did I feel myself change colour, and my voice lose steadiness, as I repeated—

"Who is it?"

And she answered—

"Mr Collingwood and Kate."

CHAPTER XLVI.

GLAD OR SORRY.

"My heart is not so light as it was i' the morning."
BEN JONSON.

WAS I glad? I did not know. Was I sorry? I did not know that either. Would I have undone it if I could? No, not for the world! and with that I was obliged to rest content Rest! never was anything less resting than my mind. I turned without a word, went out of the room and out of the house, and giving the reins to my feet, wandered on unconsciously, till I reached a little hiding-place in the woods—a cleared spot, to which the evergreen undergrowth left but one opening. There I sat me down and tried to think; but it was like the rush of the whirlpool; from which every now and then came up myself as a half wreck, with this one colour nailed to the mast—"Kate going to leave me!" That thought was distinct, all the rest maze and confusion; and I sat with my hands pressed on my forehead, listening to the whirl within, till I was bewildered. I could steady my mind with nothing; the twitter of the birds, the play of the branches, the many sounds that fill the woods of a spring day, all seemed thrown into that vortex.

There came suddenly to my ear a short quick bark—and that roused me. I knew the voice well—it was Wolfgang's; and, not doubting that his master was with him, I crouched closer in my concealment. I would rather have seen anybody in the world than Mr Collingwood, at that instant; and, as his quick step and the bounding frolic of the dog came nearer, I held my breath, as if the thicket were not sufficient to hide me. Nor without reason. Wolfgang stopped his bark and his bounds together; and, with his keen nose to the ground, he

tracked my footsteps, till with one spring he was at my feet, and licking my hand. And Mr Collingwood followed.

"Well!" he said—"you are embowered here, with a witness!"

I looked up, and smiled, or tried to smile as usual; but his eye was too keen.

"You are not well," he said, anxiously—"you are very pale; dear Grace, what is the matter?"

And, with one look at him, my head sank, and I poured out all my confused thoughts and feelings, doubts, hopes, and uncertainties, in a passionate flood of tears.

He sat down by me, but did not speak for some time; and then softly passing his hand over my head as he was wont, he said gently—

"And I am the cause of all this sorrow!"

"No, sir," I faltered—"at least, yes, sir—but I am very glad."

"And very sorry.—I can understand that."

"No, sir, you cannot," I said, forcing myself to speak calmly, for the tone of his voice was more than I could bear. "You cannot understand it yet."

"Not yet?" he said, inquiringly.

"No—for you do not know what Kate is yet."

"I think I know a little about it; but, dear Gracie, I am not going to take Kate far away from you."

"No, sir—but—you have never lived in the house with her—you do not know what it would be to have her even half a mile off."

"I have tried living half a mile off myself," said he, smiling—"so I ought to know something about that too. And if I had ever needed anything to quicken my appreciation of your sister, the love of her little sister would have done it."

There was some comfort in that, though it bowed my head again—but less bitterly.

"And I have thought—I am sure—that she never loved you with such full affection as since I have had some claim upon her. Isn't it true?"

One quick glance my mind sent back, and I answered yes. But the pain of that glance!

"Then cannot you trust her for the future?" he said, gently, and as if he knew and felt all that I did. "My dear child—what shall I say to you?—I cannot bear to see you do so."

"Nothing, sir; please don't say anything to me just now; and don't think that I am sorry—for, indeed, I am very glad—and if she were going anywhere else, I could not be glad at all."

If tears could confirm a declaration, this was signed and sealed.

"Oh, Mr Collingwood!" I said, looking up after a while, "why did you come in here after Wolfgang?"

"I am most glad I did."

"And I am so sorry! you will just think that I care nothing about you, and that I care more for my own happiness than hers."

"I shall think nothing of the sort, Gracie—unless you take up that ceremonious name of 'Mr Collingwood'—I may suppose then that you are unwilling to make a brother of me."

"But, Mr Rodney," I said, "how is it that you can live here? you have not given up preaching?"

"No—I could not do that, even to live here; but there have been a good many things done since you were well enough to hear of them. I have been called to your favourite little church."

"To assist Mr Ellis?"

"Mr Ellis has resigned this charge for one at Ethan."

"Oh, I am so glad! I was afraid it would never be—the very thing Miss Easy wished—and then"—but the words would not come.

"She wished more than one thing that you have learned to-day, Gracie. But now, look up and tell me—are you willing to take that long-ago-refused title of Miss Howard? willing to have the objection to it removed?

"Very sorry still," he repeated, as he looked earnestly in my eyes—for I attempted not to speak. "I cannot wonder!"

And then, reminding me that I had been sick, and ought not to stay out longer, Mr Collingwood put my hand on his arm and brought me to the house with as much care and gentleness as if I had been a baby sister.

There was no one in the sitting-room; but as I ran up stairs, Kate met me.

"Where have you been, Gracie?" she said, with an anxious look, and laying her hand upon my shoulder. "Where are you going?"

"To brush my hair—one minute," I said, breathlessly.

"You will come right down?—you promise me?"

"Yes," I said, giving her one kiss; and then quickly escaping, I ran up to my room—but it was to throw myself on the bed in a new burst of tears—again so sorrowful, so bewildered. Nothing could have stayed them but my promise, and the fear of Kate's coming for me. But I must compose myself and go down, and I did; and seating myself on a low seat by hers, I laid my head on Kate's lap without a word, and with her hand drawn round my neck.

For a while they talked on—of Miss Easy, and all her love and loveliness, of the years before and the years since we came to Glen Luna; but, now and then, the slight tremor in Kate's voice, or the clasp of the fingers I held, told where her thoughts were—and it almost broke my heart to have her grieved for me. Then Mr Rodney left his seat, and came round and took one at the side where I sat.

"Gracie," he said, gently touching his lips to my cheek, "I wish you would look up and talk to me. Are you asleep?"

"No, sir—I was listening—and thinking."

"Trying to make out whether you have any liking for one of your old friends left?"

"Oh, no—it wouldn't take long to do that."

"What then?—which of us is most to blame in this matter?—whether it is all my fault, or whether your sister has some share in it?"

"Ah, Mr Rodney!" I said—"please don't make me laugh."

"I wish I could—I should feel more disposed to laugh myself. As it is, I am like to go away with the heartache."

"You mustn't go away, sir, while you feel so."

"And how am I to get over feeling so?" he said, with a smile at my peculiar mode of consolation. "Gracie, shall I follow Macbeth, who

> 'Chid the sisters,
> And bade them speak to him'?"

I smiled a little, too, but it was very sadly that I answered—

"There wouldn't be but one to chide, Mr Rodney."

"And if I should think that one to be your sister?" said Mr Rodney, with a gentle effort, not at separating our hands, but at taking them away from my face and into his own keeping—"what would you say to me then, Gracie?"

"I don't know, sir—I should wait to hear what she would say."

"If I thought it would make her say anything, I believe I

should try. Gracie, there is one wish I have had at heart for a long time—will you help me to carry it out?"

I was silent—I could not speak.

"Not the wish you think I mean," said he, smiling, and gently drawing back my hair—"I cannot admit any question about that. But it has grieved me very much to see this dear sister of yours look as grave as she has done within the last two or three years, and I have promised myself that she shall never do so again, if I can help it. You must help me—how can her face be anything but sad if such a sorrowful little reflection falls upon it? Look at her, dear Gracie," he added, softly, "and see if I speak without reason."

I did not venture to do that; but Mr Rodney had touched the most powerful spring of self-control, and I did raise my head and leaned it against Kate. And then—it might have been because I thought myself so strong in my resolution—something in the touch of her arms, as she put them round me, threw down all my defences; and I burst into such tears as I never meant she should see.

I could have chidden myself then, severely; but no one else attempted it—unless I could feel reproved by other tears, which fell as fast as mine, or by the exceeding love and gentleness of the attempts which were made to soothe us both. They were successful at last, and I rested wearily from the excitement which had tried too severely my half-regained strength. If anything could have put the mind to rest as well, it would have been the fond lips that now and then kissed my forehead, and the consciousness that they were trembling yet. So Mr Rodney left us; but the moment he rose I looked up at him—

"Mr Rodney, have I troubled you very much?"

There was no chiding, there was nothing but sympathy in the eyes that answered even before his words did.

"Not more than you could help, dear Gracie."

"I am very sorry!—you must not think—please do not!"—

"Please do not think that you love Kate a bit too much?" said he, smiling. "I am in no danger of it, though you give me the credit of knowing so little about her. And as to her love for you—I'm afraid I must submit to that as a necessary part of human nature. Katie, cannot you persuade this child to adopt my philosophy?"

There is a great comfort in being understood—the mere assurance that I might feel as I chose, made me feel as I could

have wished; and I returned Mr Rodney's parting shake of the hand with a very much brighter mood than the one in which I had greeted him.

I had no desire to ask many questions, nor in truth much need—it seemed as if my mind had answered them all to itself; and I lay silent and quiet in Kate's arms for a long time, going over the last two years wonderingly.

"Gracie!" she said, at length.

My arm which was round her waist answered for me that I was awake.

"I want to hear your voice again, darling, very much."

"I will say everything you want me to, Katie—by and by," was all I could say then.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite. But oh, Katie why didn't you tell me before?"

"My dear Gracie, how could I?—I had not the heart to speak of it after your dream—especially when there has been so much else to trouble you. But for that, you should have known it long ago. And lately you have been so unwell."

"I am very glad!"

And wrapping her in an embrace, so close that it half belied my words, and with her head bent down and resting upon mine, sleep came to me without asking.

"Well, little dormouse," said Mr Howard, who stood by us when I awoke, "have you quite slept off the 'winter of your discontent'?"

"I haven't uncurled myself yet, papa."

"I wonder if it's the fashion for dormice to look pale," said my father, kissing me.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DAPHNE.

"Nor have I yet the narrow mind
To vent that poor desire
That others should not warm them at my fire:
I wish the sun should shine
On all men's fruits and flowers as well as mine."

BEN JONSON.

I WAS awakened from my dream now—thoroughly; the only wonder was that it had lasted so long. I marvelled at my own want of penetration. And yet the simple, familiar, almost brother-and-sister intercourse which had gone on for years, had changed so gradually — so slightly, unless one took just the right point of view — that my mistake seemed, after all, but natural.

For a while I was in a perfect hedge of constraint. Listless and weary, but with a constant effort to seem neither—doubtful where to be or what to do—having no spirits to go out, and a great fear of being in the way, within—that first week was one of trial. I could not bear to look any body in the face—least of all those two who most anxiously scanned mine; and the very fear of troubling them, troubled me more than anything. Yet my hedge could not but give way before their gentle endeavours.

I would not venture to assert that they were never without my company, but there was little appearance of it. In all the long walks and talks where I was drawn in by one or the other, Mr Rodney seemed at least as unforgetful of "his sister" as of mine—always best pleased to have us both with him, and assuming, as he said, somewhat of a brother's authority, in the way of taking care of me, and making me take care of myself. Seldom as I was left alone to my musings, I was never indulged in

them unless alone; and often, with my hand and Kate's held together in his, Mr Rodney made me talk whether I would or not.

And this gentle consideration softened—oh, how much!—what would else have been so bitter. We were not separated yet—I knew we never should be, in heart; and I was half beguiled into being happy in spite of myself. Never had Kate seemed to love me so much—never had I so clung to her. Well for me that my love reached the point it did—had it fallen a little short, it might have been selfish. But I was right—I could not be miserable if she was happy.

It was some time before I ventured to ask when they were to be married; many a time my lips formed the words, but uttered they could not be; and the rest of the family had seen fit to follow my lead. Yet I must know—I must find out—that indefinite dread was worse than any certainty; and one day, when Mrs Howard had left me alone for a few minutes, I took the desperate resolution of asking her the moment she came back—I would end these wearying doubts at all hazards. And the moment the door opened, I said in a voice that might of itself have told my question—

"Mamma, how soon"——

But something in the step made me turn round—it was Mr Collingwood.

"How soon what, Gracie?" he said, coming behind my chair, and laying a hand upon either side of my face. "What do you want to know? cannot I answer you as well as Mrs Howard?"

Ay—but I could not ask him.

"What were you inquiring about?" he said, kindly—"anything that concerns the person you and I love so much? how soon I am going to take her away—was that it?"

"Yes," I said, under my breath.

"Gracie, would it be a harder parting in summer weather, when you could see her every day, than in winter, when storms must often keep you at home?"

I had no need to ask more, and yet I did.

"Have I the alternative, Mr Rodney?"

"I hope not," he said, gently.

But "summer weather!"—it was almost that now! I had not expected quite such an answer—or, rather, as has been well said, I "did not know how much hope had survived within me

till I felt its death-blow." Had I been alone, my excitement might have found its way in tears, but they did not come now; and the quick beating of my heart was all I could hear —almost all I could feel—I felt that to my very finger-ends.

"My poor child!" Mr Rodney said, "I thought you had made up your mind to this—does it grieve you so much still?"

"No," I said, struggling with myself, "it does not grieve me at all—except—sometimes."

"Those times will be less frequent in the dreaded summer weather than they are now, dear, I trust. It is only a slight remove, Gracie—you must not call it a separation. It will not be that—unless you are a perverse little sister, and refuse to feel at home in your brother's house. Have you had a walk to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Then what if you were to tell Katie that Mrs Barstow begged me to bring 'those dear young ladies' to see her again, and that I am going there this morning?"

I sprang away to give the message, choking down my thoughts, that Kate might not see them, and with the full intention of not coming back; but she would take no denial, and I could only get ready and follow her down stairs—where Wolfgang had nigh put me in hysterics. For, as it was a mild day, the door stood open, and the aforesaid member of society had planted himself on the outside, having received no permission to enter. But the appearance of Kate was considered invitation enough—the dog rushed in, and, after making of himself a frisking barrier for some moments, sat gravely down and presented his paw to Kate, before she could even shake hands with his master.

The laugh which ensued was almost too much for me; and a mere negative composure was all I could attain for some time. But before we were half-way up Pillimaquady, I was again talked into being happy in spite of myself.

We could not wonder at Mrs Barstow's love for Mr Collingwood—he seemed the very spirit of sunlight in that dark little cabin; a sunlight so pure, so pervading, so brightening to the darkest thing it touched, that the mind's eye looked wonderingly. Even the children felt its influence, and, forgetting their rags and their shyness, they came out from their corners,

and stood near the well-dressed gentleman to see and hear him more distinctly. And then, when he looked at them—though they knew him pretty well, too—the smiling glance of his eye, and pleasant word, would make them smile in return—shamefacedly; and fall huddling back upon each other until he turned his head—when they were again drawn forward by some irresistible magnet.

With what pleasure we saw it all! And I—it seemed to me that I had as much to rejoice in as anybody. To see Kate anything but happy, had been almost the greatest trial I had ever thought of; and now to have her happiness so well secured—even to my jealous fears—was very pure delight—not unmingled, but unalloyed.

I sat a little back from the rest, looking at them and thinking it all over. I remembered what Mr Ellis had once said—that there was just one person who ought to have the charge of that neighbourhood, and he the one who was now to take it. Truly I had no doubt on the subject; but, as I looked at the sweet face by him, I thought there would be more than one place well filled. Mr Rodney had contrived to bring her forward, and to place her in not quite the seat she would have chosen; and I half fancied that the reason thereof was not unguessed. It was easy to read Mrs Barstow's *wish*—the expression of her face was sometimes a little too much for Kate's equanimity; and her eyes went from one to the other, with a look that said her own trials were all out of sight. There could hardly have been a better cure for them than the conversation she had with Mr Rodney, or than his prayer before we came away.

"He often comes," she said, when Kate and I were bidding her good-bye, and our companion was speaking to Mrs Flinter. "Think of him never forgetting us, and he so much else to think of!—he's been a'most every time he's been home! Ah, Miss Howard, poor folks wants more than money!—and 'tain't often as rich folks knows what to give 'em. And now he'll be here always! I never thought to see that."

We left them, and coming down the hill, found near the foot a seat so pleasant, that we felt tired at once, and sat down to rest. Everything was in great beauty;—the trees not far enough out to quite merge in each other, shewed in soft green tufts on every hill-side where the plough and the axe had not been; and the cleared land was in colours as diversified as its

own ups and downs of surface. Sometimes a patch of winter grain, in that luxuriant state between youth and middle-age, came over a roll of land into the valley, and ascended, it might be another rising, following every turn and change with its spread of green the most vivid, the most beautiful—one uniform tint, unless where the wind waved it or a shadow fell. Light clouds passed occasionally across the sky, throwing as light and fantastic shades, that danced off the moment they touched the earth, to be succeeded by others. The birds were joyful as only birds can be; but we were joyful too—yet with a difference. Now the young leaves flapped softly over our heads, and now the wind died quite away, to come again with new freshness.

"That is a singularly happy person," Kate said, when we had sat musing for a while.

"Yes—if you mean uncommonly—in one sense there is nothing singular about her happiness."

"Do you think so, Mr Rodney?—in that absolute rising above all circumstance and suffering?"

"Is it strange, dear Kate, that now and then one should reach a point which all may attain?"

The starting tears were her only answer.

"It will do for me to talk about it," he said presently—"I, who have nothing left to wish for in this world—I fear I should have been a poor example of my own precepts. But, Katie, they are true, nevertheless. The soul whose balance depends on circumstance, hath not a firm enough hold on the Rock of ages."

"Yes, I know that—I have felt it—how often!" said Kate. "One realises the worth of a thing, sometimes, more by its want than its possession."

"Wesley did not go beyond the truth when he said—

> 'Jesus, to whom I fly,
> Will all my wishes fill—
> What though created streams be dry?—
> I have the fountain still.'

But we look away from the fountain, and think of the streams—most of all when they are full. That is one reason why so few reach Mrs Barstow's high stand above the world—the tide of happiness often bears us the wrong way."

"Gracie, dear," said Kate, after a pause, "what are you looking so grave about?"

"Thinking," I said, starting out of my reverie, which had

fastened upon her last words, "What possible lessons would the want of my sister teach me?"

"Thinking? of what? Look up at me—you are tired, dear."

"No, not a bit."

"When I was almost a child, Gracie," said Mr Collingwood, "some one gave me a beautiful Daphne. It was my perfect pride and delight; I kept it in my own room up stairs, gave it every possible attention, and often sat watching it as if it had been a living companion. But one day, when I had been talking to my mother of the pink buds that were unfolding one after the other, she told me that so lovely a plant deserved a larger room; and that, if I brought it down into the parlour, other people could see and enjoy it too. I remember my plea that *I* was oftenest up stairs—and her smile when she answered, 'that makes no difference'—I can understand it well now!—Cannot you, Gracie?"

I understood it all—but I fear my smile was a little qualified. It was answered very kindly, and he went on—

"There was one judgment that I never thought of questioning, and my Daphne was placed in the parlour that very day—but it seemed as if my own room had lost half its furniture. And yet I could hardly regret it. My favourite was so abundantly admired, its sphere of pleasure-giving was so much enlarged, its sweetness spread so much further—I had to be content with the change; and though my little room looked empty when I went into it, if I set the door open my Daphne was never long in finding me out."

I sat looking along the road in a mood too touched, too sorrowful, too comforted to speak.

"What made you think of this story?" said Kate, who, having missed the clue, had taken it all in straightforward simplicity.

But Mr Rodney only smiled; and telling her that it would be hard to account for it except by the association of ideas, we got up and pursued our walk—warned by one or two little pats on the forehead that April showers might come down in May. Happily they did not then; and we met no interruption till it was furnished by Mr Barrington, who, instead of passing us with his usual peculiar greeting on his way home to dinner, stopped short. As there was by this time a reasonably large umbrella of blue sky over our heads, we stopped too.

"I've been away to the Glen to find you, Mr Collingwood," said Ezra, "and they said you wa'n't there—so I 'gin to think folks was nigh as much out of the way as things."

"What is the matter?" said Mr Rodney.

"Matter enough!" replied Ezra, with a gloomy air; "I don't rightly know what to do with myself nor the farm nother. Why, there ain't no two ways about it, sir!—a place can't be took care of without there's sunthin' done to it—that's as plain as my name in capitals."

"Very plain, indeed," said Mr Rodney, whose face by no means reflected the gloom; "but what is in the way, Mr Barrington?'

"Land knows, sir!—I'm beat for once. Seems to me as all the rail fences is made o' muskits, and every woodchuck in the hull of them a pinter! No offence, Mr Collingwood, but you see if two men sends their guns different ways, like enough one on 'em 'll get hit."

"Well, tell me what the guns are, and then I shall be able to judge," said Mr Collingwood, with a smile that quieted Ezra's scruples.

"Why, sir, Mr Carvill ain't a mind to have nothin' done, no place.—'Don't dreen that 'ere mash,' he says, ''cause the woodcocks likes it,'—and 'don't plough that 'ere field, 'cause the quails wants it jus' so.' And t'other day he ketched 'Lisha scarin' the patridges off the wheat, and 'what on airth are you doing that for?' he says—'leave it alone, in the name of all the royal family,' he says; 'the more they eat, the fatter they'll be.'"

While Mr Rodney endeavoured to bring his muscles into speaking order, Ezra took breath and went on—

"When he was down a spell ago, he went on pretty reasonable like; but it's my belief he'd blaze away at the chickens now, if there wa'n't nothin' else! And it's as clear as a commentary to my mind, that if the birds is to have the hull o' the farm, there won't long be gunpowder to shoot 'em—without it grows some place else than here. So that's just how it is, sir," concluded Mr Barrington, with a look and tone of honest vexation. "I thought maybe you could do sunthin'—and if not, why, so. I don't want to meddle nor make, I'm sure."

"So am I sure of it," said Mr Rodney. "You must do whatever you think best with the farm—I will speak to my

brother about it. Follow your own judgment on all points, unless you hear from me again."

"Thank 'e, sir," said Ezra. "I should like to see myself doing anythin' I *didn't* think best!" he added, with a shake of the head that was aimed at Mr Barrington neglecting his duty. "Why, them patridges has been scared out o' their wits regular, ever sen! He don't go to the same place above once a quarter. But now, Mr Collingwood, if I go on and dreen that 'ere bit o' swamp—maybe you've heerd tell what's the likeliest thing to put onto it. Old Squire Brown says 'tain't good for nothin'; but my eyes are as straight as hisn; and *I* know it 'ud be first-rate if I could only fix it."

"What swamp is it?"

"It's just that wet bit 'longside o' Squire Howard's land."

"Beyond the pine wood? I should think lime would be the best thing to put on it, Mr Barrington, if I remember what the soil is."

"Lime, sir!" ejaculated Ezra, with an astonished face. "Then, you're clean out for once, Squire Collingwood—lime ain't no 'count on this farm, anyhow."

"What makes you think so?" said Mr Rodney, with a smile at his unwonted appellation.

"Reason good, sir—I've tried it. I sowed lime on that 'ere side-hill beyond the clearing, and it wa'n't a speck of use, but harm."

"I daresay," replied his adviser; "but that land is very different from the swamp. It has been found out, Mr Barrington, that on some soils lime will destroy the bad qualities and improve the land, while to others it does nothing but mischief. I am pretty sure you will like the effect of lime upon that swamp after your drains are finished; and then I would sow Timothy and June grass."

"I'll put 'em all on, for sartain!" said Ezra, whose surprise did not seem to abate. "Edication's a wonderful thing! And you'll tell Mr Carvill, sir, that the woodcocks has got to move house?"

"I will speak to him about it, certainly."

And we were permitted to walk on.

"Well, you have surely studied a variety of things!" said Kate. "Such comprehensive education *is* a little wonderful."

"You forget how much I once had to do with hay-fields," said Mr Collingwood, with a very amused face.

"And you have not forgotten that talk about the coat yet?"

"Not quite," said he, smiling—"nor the time when I was 'only a farmer,' Katie."

"But we never saw you in a hay-field," said I—for Kate did not seem disposed to speak. "How should we remember that you ever knew anything about the matter?"

"Do you mean to say, Gracie, that if you ever had seen me there, swaths and winrows would be unpleasant to think of?"

"Yes, very," said Kate, laughing; "I don't believe you ever were there, for my part. But, now, I was not so far wrong—one must judge a little by the occupations of a person, till one has something else to judge by. If a man is *only* a farmer, he will always be *only* a farmer—in all probability."

"Therefore, you see, Katie, that it is necessary to set that little seal *only* just in the right place. Often the world knows but half of a man's doings, and not a quarter of the reason for those. Some people undertake certain business *only* because they must; and though that is not generally the case, yet in this country the safest maxim is 'men, and not things.'"

"I wonder what else papa has amused himself with telling you!" she said, with a half laughing half doubtful shake of the head. "But if I had learned no wisdom by our years of experience, I should deserve to be thought anything of."

The smile which answered her might have been translated, "And, as it is, for 'anything,' read everything."

"What do you think of a little practical wisdom in the way of getting out of these rain-drops, Miss Daphne?" said Mr Collingwood.

She looked up in surprise, but then, finding the clue she had wanted before, her resemblance to the very delicately-tinted "Odorata" decidedly decreased; and as her eyes went back to the view before us, Kate gravely remarked, that it "was raining very fast at Wiamee."

"And how about the answer to my demand?" said Mr Rodney. "I think too much dampness does not agreee with the members of your family."

"I'm afraid it is not very practicable wisdom; the trees would be but doubtful shelter."

"There used to be a house somewhere near here—a little further down the road; yes, I see the smoke now."

"Oh, it's Mrs Houghton's," I said. "Don't you remember, Kate? We went there one day last summer with mamma."

"Hamilton, it used to be."

"It's Houghton now, Mr Rodney—we can go there. I only hope her desire to see us again has not died out."

To all appearance, it was in full force. One might have thought Mrs Houghton's house a desert, from the way she rejoiced over the shower.

"If it'll only pour down till supper-time," she said, "I shall be too tickled for anything! Miss Howard, there ain't a doubt on my mind that your shoes is wet. No?—can't be they're dry. Shew me, now. Dry, indeed! do tell if that's what you call dry down to your house! Ain't that soaking, sir?" she said, adroitly slipping off Kate's shoe, and displaying the sole of it.

"It looks a little damp, certainly," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"Now, what'll you do? sit up to the fire and toast your feet while the shoes is drying."

"But our feet are quite warm," said Kate, "and the shoes dry enough."

"Don't tell me!" said Mrs Houghton; "can't be, you know; if it could, why, I expect it might. They ain't so big you need mind having 'em looked at."

And carefully setting up our shoes in the fireplace, Kate and I had no resource but to put our feet in the same region; for the currents of air were rather cool with stockings for a medium.

Mrs Houghton looked on with great satisfaction; and then drawing up a rocking-chair, and planting her heels firmly on the floor, she proceeded to rock herself and her toes vigorously through the air, talking the while with equal animation. She was a rather tall and slim woman, scrupulously neat in her dark stuff dress; but with dress, and hair too, in that state which sailors call "cleared for action." Mrs Houghton might have put herself through any gymnastics without much discomposure of externals. Her face was very busy and 'cute; good-humoured, too, and rather good-looking; and seemed to say that, instead of being disturbed by difficulties, she would find a way to get over them. Her house had as comfortable and *get-on* a look as herself; and that the progress of the rest of the world was not forgotten, might be guessed from the weekly newspaper and monthly magazines which lay on the table, as a sort of light advanced-guard to the very primly arranged books by the wall. From the moment of our coming

in, Mrs Houghton had taken Mr Collingwood for our brother; and our intention of undeceiving her was soon put to flight; indeed, to speak without interrupting the lady of the house was for some time no easy matter.

"Don't it beat the world," she said, "that Parson Ellis should be going away? I never was so cut up about anything! Ain't you as sorry as can be?"

"But he is only going to Ethan," said Kate; "we hope to see him very often."

"What's the good of seein' a man, if you can't hear him?" said Mrs Houghton, disdainfully. "His explanations went beyond everything."

"I am very glad you like him so much!" said Mr Collingwood, warmly. "But perhaps he may preach here often, still, Mrs Houghton."

"Won't get a chance," she said, with a toss of her head. "As if that young one would stay out of the first pulpit he ever had a right to be in!—they say he's a dreadful handsome young feller, too—with eyes like nobody knows what."

Why we did not astonish our hostess with a perfect shout of laughter, is to this day a mystery; for, if her words wanted any set-off, it was furnished by the quick flash of the eyes in question as they sought first ours and then the floor. If the rain had been anything less than pouring, I think we should have taken French leave and rushed out. Fortunately for us, Mrs Houghton looked not to see the effect of her speech, but began another.

"The little sense folks have passes credibility! for, as I say to my husband, what's the odds, whether his hair curls, or whether it's straight, or whether it's crooked? and if his eyes *are* brown, he could see just as well out of 'em if they were green. I don't go to meeting to see personal appearance—if I did, I could stay home. There ain't a spryer lookin' man in town than he was when I stood up with him."

"But don't you like Mr Ellis's looks?" I said, with a desperate effort.

"I guess I do! but there's something of him, bless you! He ain't so tall as t'other one neither, they say. Well—the earth's always rolling about some way—as I tell my husband, 'tain't much wonder if folks once in a while knocks their heads together."

"I don't believe that will ever happen to Mr Ellis and Mr

Collingwood," said Kate, smiling; "they like each other too well."

"Think so?—well—don't you know nothing else about him? don't you, sir?"

"I know something about him," said Mr Rodney, looking gravely up from the carpet.

"Tell on, then, do."

"I think you had better get acquainted with him first, Mrs Houghton," said he, smiling. "It is not good to be prepossessed either for or against people. Are you afraid of the weather now?" he added, looking at us.

"Them shoes hasn't an idea of being dry," said Mrs Houghton, interposing, and setting the shoes down again decisively. "Is the new minister agoing to preach next Sunday?"

"So I have been told," said Kate.

"*What* did you call him?"

"Mr Collingwood."

"I've put his name in my head about twenty times, and it won't stay. I expect I will call him Ellis the first time I see him, or may be Fowler—that was my last minister's name before I moved here. I always do just so; I'd been married ever so long before I could remember my own name. And we'll hear him next Sunday, you say? I wonder what's the use of a man's tryin' to preach till he's old enough to know a little about himself—let alone other folks!"

"But," said Mr Rodney, "if men were not to begin preaching till they were as old as Mr Ellis, they could not be very experienced ministers until they were almost too old to preach at all."

"Well," said Mrs Houghton, with a half convinced air; "maybe so and maybe no; but it would take a smart man to stand in Mr Ellis's shoes."

"He is most excellent, most lovely! you cannot love him better than I do."

"He's got such a sight of gumption, too," continued our hostess. "Now I don't care to go to meeting without I can have something to shew for it; I tell my husband it ain't worth the trouble, though he don't think so; I believe he'd go if there wa'n't nothing there but the meeting-house."

"And the minister, I suppose," said Mr Rodney.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mrs Houghton, with a somewhat curious side-look at her guest. "But, as I said before, when I go I want something to shew for it."

"And what should that something be?" said Mr Rodney, as he rose and brought the full earnestness of his eyes to bear upon her. "What should we have to shew for every day we live as well as every sermon we hear?"

"Sir?" said Mrs Houghton, as her look became graver, and then fell before his. "I don't know, sir; I should be glad to have you say."

"Clearer knowledge of God's will, and more earnest and heartfelt practice of it," he said, gently. "Seek *that*, Mrs Houghton, and then, whether ministers stay or go, neither Sabbaths nor life will be thrown away."

While we quietly took up our shoes and put them on, and re-fastened the shawls we had thrown off, Mrs Houghton neither moved nor spoke, nor indeed looked except at her apron-string —we were in some doubt whether she were not offended. But as we came up to her she left her seat and bade us good-bye very cordially.

"I've enjoyed your visit tip top," she said; "I wish you'd come again. And you too, sir, we'd be as glad as can be to see you."

"I will surely come," said Mr Collingwood, as he smilingly gave her his hand. "Let me be a friend Mrs Houghton, little as I deserve to succeed Mr Ellis."

"Don't tell me!" exclaimed our hostess, with a face of the most despairing amazement. "Well, I never thought to see this day go over my head!—it ain't possible that I've been a talking to the new minister about himself!"

Mr Collingwood laughed, and telling her that it had given him a great deal of pleasure to find out how well Mr Ellis was appreciated, he opened the door; but Mrs Houghton pulled Kate and me back to the fire—

"Now, Miss Howard," she said, "for gracious! tell him I didn't know what I was talking about, no more than a baby. My stars! if I hadn't found out till I was hearing him preach, I should have gone right down through the meeting-house floor. Why, I didn't know him from Adam! Well, I do feel cheap! Is he easy affronted?"

"O no—not at all!"

"Do tell!" she repeated, with additional emphasis. "Well, if ever I talk to a living soul again till I know what his name is, *my* name ain't Mary Jemima!"

We reached home without further adventure, but this one left us no want of merry topics.

"Gracie," Mr Rodney said, as he stood talking for a moment in our little sitting-room, "you look grave in the midst of your laughing. Are you thinking still of that remark of Kate's?"

"Not just now—I was, I believe."

"Cannot you put it into your little head that 'mine and thine' are not always separate interests and possessions?"

"I am trying very hard, Mr Rodney; maybe I shall succeed by and by. And indeed I would not keep the Daphne up stairs; sometimes I wish it could be in both places."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"ONLY."

"Are ye doin' aught weel? are ye thrivin', my man?
Be thankful to Fortune for a' that she sen's ye;
Ye'll ha'e plenty o' frien's aye to offer their han',
When ye needna their countenance—a' body kens ye.
A' body kens ye,
A' body kens ye—
When ye needna their countenance—a' body kens ye."
OLD SONG.

It was plain that most people's ideas about "only" were defective. For some years my father had been only Mr Howard struggling on against difficulties—now, he was Mr Howard, to be sure, and not rich, *only* he was Greek professor at Ethan. The position of the word made that of the family; and the sudden affection and admiration with which we were regarded fairly got the start of reciprocity.

"Many thanks!"—as we sometimes said after the departure of a carriage-load of visitors; "but the friends who,

'When winter comes, are fled,'

can add little to the summer's sunshine." Once learn the relative weights of gold and tinsel friendship, and all the fair show of the latter can never again delude you. So we made whatever advances and returns the circumstances called for, talked and laughed with those who wished to talk and laugh with us; and found our daily happiness in the very few friends and things that had kept it alive during those years of trial.

Among all the people who now "took us up," there were, perhaps, none more zealous than those of our city acquaintances, who, with other strangers, had become a sort of swallows to the Moon, and swallowers of its sulphuretted water. To be

sure, they had most reason—had known us longest—and could look back and recollect how they had "always liked us."

The day of our involuntary visit to Mrs Houghton, when Kate and I came down, after a somewhat long and talkative dinner-toilet, we found Mrs Willet in the drawing-room. A suspicion of somebody there had hindered our seeking out my stepmother, and by no means hurried our motions.

"Here they come at last," said the lady. "Why, you look like May roses—just as sweet and fresh as can be."

"How long have you been home, Kate?" said my stepmother. "I did not hear you come in."

"Some time, mamma—we have been dressing."

Mrs Willet examined the effects thereof.

"That's a beautiful silk of yours, Kate—a new one, I suppose? Suits your complexion, too—did you make it yourself?"

"We find it pleasanter to employ a dressmaker," was the quiet reply from Mrs Howard.

"Where have you been walking?" said Mrs Willet.

"In the neighbourhood of Wiamee," said Kate, by no means choosing to give an exact answer.

"My dearest Kate! you do not mean to say that you and Grace have walked to Wiamee all alone?"

"No, ma'am."

"But I thought you just said so?"

"I said we had been walking in the neighbourhood of Wiamee, Mrs Willet—we did not go quite to the village."

"And alone?"

"No, ma'am," said Kate again, with a little flush of vexation at this string of cross-questions. "Mamma, were you uneasy at our being out in the rain?"

"No, not much—it did not rain long here."

"May I ask who was with you?" said Mrs Willet, whose grave face had seemed to say that she was trying to puzzle the matter out by herself.

"Mr Collingwood."

"Oh, then you were safe, of course; but, my dear, why didn't you say so at once? Never make a mystery of anything—and in this case there was no need. If you had lived a little more in the world, Kate, you would know that nothing is more common than for a gentleman to join any of his lady friends he may meet; and I don't know that his being your pastor need make any difference."

The world was in a conspiracy against our risible muscles that day.

"I'm so sorry he didn't come in!" pursued Mrs Willet. "Where did he leave you?"

"Not before our own house was in sight," said Kate, with a look that promised small information.

"But I wanted to see him so much!—and I do suppose I was here when you came; and Grace might have run to call him back, if I had only known!"

Grace's mouth gave a little twitch of great doubt as to such a possibility.

"Dear me, I'm so sorry!" repeated Mrs Willet. "I drove to the Lea this morning to see Mrs Carvill—you know she's just arrived—and Mr Carvill said he rather thought his brother had some very disagreeable business on hand that would keep him all day; but it seems he was mistaken. And now I've just missed him here. I never saw such a young man to get sight of!"

We could not help smiling at Mrs Willet's small knowledge of Mr Carvill.

"What time are you going to have dinner?" said my father, opening the door. "Mrs Willet!—I did not know you were here, ma'am, or I should have practised more circumspection."

"How do you do to-day, Professor?"

"Rather tired, as a man, ma'am—as a professor, I'm about as usual."

"Why, what's the difference?" said Mrs Willet.

"Well, I used to think there was none," said Mr Howard, with a meditative air; "but it's astonishing what mines of knowledge we walk over without finding them, unless one happens to be sprung; then, if we survive the explosion, we learn a great many things we never knew before. As, for instance, how much it takes to kill a man—how most people dislike the smell of gunpowder—and so forth."

"Bless me!" said Mrs Willet, whose face expressed a vain attempt to follow the speaker; "I'm as afraid of gunpowder as can be, myself. But now, do tell me the difference between a man and a professor."

"A professor, ma'am," said Mr Howard, stroking his chin thoughtfully, "is always himself—he is made of some galvanised material that withstands wind and weather; whereas mere

men are subject to all the effects of cold, hunger, wealth, poverty, manners, habits, and education. A mere man is weak, and needs artificial supports—the professor stands alone —in his coat."

"Where on earth did you pick all that up?" said Mrs Willet, with a look of such blank wonder, that for us not to laugh was impossible.

"Out of a mine that sprung one day when I was on top of it," said my father, coolly.

"Well, you are a most extraordinary man, or professor, or whatever you call yourself! Dear me, I should think you'd puzzle your students to death. Do you always talk such things to them?"

"Not yet," said Mr Howard; "it is necessary that they should first learn to creep as men, Mrs Willet, before they can hope to spread their wings and soar off professors."

"The professor has sent my wits soaring off," said Mrs Willet; "I have absolutely forgotten what I had to say to you. Oh—Mr Howard, you are coming to spend next Wednesday evening with me."

"Am I?" said my father.

"Now, don't interrupt me; I say you are all coming to spend that evening at my house; and I want you to bring Mr Collingwood along. I've tried to get sight of him, and can't make it out. Don't you think you'll see him before Wednesday?"

My father took a grave survey of the ceiling.

"Probably I shall, Mrs Willet—if he happens to come in my way."

"Well, will you promise to bring him?"

"I'll promise to tell him what you say, ma'am; but as to bringing him—he is not in *my* leading-strings, I assure you."

"I never saw such a roundabout man in my life!" said Mrs Willet, getting up in despair.

"Why, Mr Howard," said my stepmother, "what has come over you?"

"Only one of the phases that man is subject to, my dear. But what is your message, Mrs Willet—in case, as you say, that I should see Mr Collingwood?"

"Tell him," said Mrs Willet, laying her hand impressively on my father's arm, "that he *must* come to me next Wednesday; that I cannot do without him, and shall be exceedingly

displeased if he does not. I wouldn't give you the trouble, but if I were to write, he would just send me a refusal, as he has before; and I don't want to go to the Lea again. You are so much about, that you're more likely to see him than the rest of your family, or they could do it."

"Am I?" said Mr Howard. "Well, I'll deliver your message as straight as I can remember it, Mrs Willet—further than that I charge myself with no responsibility. But see—Mr Collingwood will like enough ask what you want him for, and I am in perfect ignorance myself. Is it to be a ball, or a masquerade, or a *soirée musicale?*—must we take pumps or wind-instruments?"

"I never saw anything like you!" said Mrs Willet. "It's to be only a little tea-drinking for social intercourse. Mrs Howard, will you make him understand and remember?—no, I can't stay any longer—Philip has come—good-bye, and don't forget Wednesday."

"What will she think of you, papa?" Kate said, when he came in from handing the lady to her carriage.

"My dear, I am quite willing she should have any thoughts she can get at; if she had been as ready to let us have dinner, it would have been pleasant."

And then, as he often did when he came home, my father took us both in his arms, and spoke, for the ninety-ninth time, of his delight at seeing his children look as they ought to do.

"The first thing, you know, papa," said Kate, laughing, "you will have to give me one of your old lectures on pride."

"No, I shall not," he answered, gravely, and looking down at her upturned face; "because you know, my dear, pride is always considered very unbecoming in a clergyman's wife—so I am sure you would have too much good sense to indulge in it. That is a luxury reserved for the secular departments."

I thought—it half seemed to me as if Mr Howard thought too—of that New Year's morning, years ago, when he had stood just there and called Kate his rosebud—the eyes that rested on her wore so much the same expression—and hers cast down, as they were then. But it was with a graver face now that my father kissed her and walked away.

Mr Rodney received Mrs Willet's message with a look that was rather doubting, in the midst of its amusement.

"It's to be nothing in the world but a little drinking tea for social purposes," urged my father.

He smiled, but not in a way that promised much for Mrs Willet.

"I fear it will be of a kind that I particularly dislike, sir—where fifty people are asked to a private *tête-à-tête* with the hostess."

"And what is the exact number who can have the honour of meeting you at one time?" said Kate, laughing.

"As many as feel disposed—but not without my consent asked and obtained, Miss Kate."

"I would take my chance of the fifty rather than of the hostess, in this case," said my father.

"How you do talk!" said Mrs Howard. "But really, Mr Rodney, you need not fear any trap, I am sure. Mrs Willet was very anxious to have Mr Ellis at her house once more before he went, and not unnaturally wanted some of his friends to meet him there."

Mr Collingwood came and bent down by Kate.

"Are you going, Daphne?"

"Perhaps!—if I don't change into 'mouse-ear' before that time, and feel shy of company."

"If you do, I shall change into 'cat's-eye' and find you," said he, laughing.

"What a dreadful idea!" said Kate, when she could compose her face. "I will turn into something else. But people should not talk of what they don't understand—there never was such a plant heard of!"

"I beg your pardon—I have seen it—and have studied Daphne till I know that it always has some mouse-ear characteristics."

"I hope the debate with closed doors will have a favourable end," said my father. "If you have any scruples concerning Wednesday, Mr Rodney, I being quite disinterested, can perhaps resolve them better than Kate."

"You must not say no," said my stepmother; "Mrs Willet said you '*must* come.'"

"I am a little afraid of people who make such imperative demands, Mrs Howard," said he, smiling. "However, if you are all to be there, and Mr Ellis, I believe I must change my mind, and go."

"Change your mind!—had you heard of this before?" said Kate.

"Yes, from Carvill. But his speeches are generally two-sided

—so perhaps I got hold of the wrong one. And I must have the pleasure of seeing how Daphnes look by gaslight."

"You are altogether too botanical," said Kate. "I wonder if I am to stand representative for all the vegetable kingdom!"

"Not quite," said Mr Collingwood; "I should make a selection. I have not time to tell you them now, but you will find some in your little Scotch song of 'the Posie.' Do you remember?"

"I can remember one name easier than a dozen."

"But one is not always appropriate. Snowdrops would not answer at present; and I am afraid even the Daphne is a little put out of countenance. I should have to choose

'The pink—the emblem of my dear.'"

"I don't know what I should choose for an emblem of you!" said Kate—"teazle, I think. And that would be a pity, too, for it's a disagreeable sort of a thing."

"Not like me, either," said Mr Rodney, laughing. "That never detaches itself, and, Katie, I am absolutely going away!"

"You will come and go with us Wednesday evening?" said my father, looking up from his book.

"Thank you, sir, no—I am sure I shall not be at leisure so early as you will leave home."

With what pleasure we laid our hearts open to the bright influences of that Wednesday—in all its beauty of weather and scene! It seemed rather a climate for exotics than for the hill-side heather that had so long faced

"Chill blustering winds and driving rain;"

and we let thoughts and words flit about as gaily as did the winged creatures of the material world. How pleasantly we talked away the morning!—now dwelling upon subjects too dear for anything like mirth, now amusing ourselves with the advantages of being "professor's daughters"—of which we had several new reminders, in the shape of embossed envelopes of invitation. The end of the day bid fair to be the least pleasant part of it; but that must be gone through like the rest.

With great consideration Mrs Willet sent her carriage for us just when we were ready; but, as my father declared his intention of being "a man" for that evening, we had the pleasure of the quick drive and early arrival all to ourselves.

The Moon society had changed and enlarged so much since

we had been of its acquaintance, that even in that small assemblage there were more new faces than old. Captain De Camp appeared, as large as life; his epaulettes having been burnished with a legacy till they had caught the eye of the eldest Miss Willet. Mrs Egerton came forward—so glad to see us, that it was a wonder how she had lived through the last few years; while Mrs Willet and Mrs Osborne, with their respective daughters, were in an ecstacy.

We had sat talking for a while, and I had found out with great satisfaction that the fair face at my side was the centre of attraction and attractiveness, when Mr and Mrs Carvill entered the room. The same as ever—the lady dressed to perfection, if one might judge by the looks which she received, but with eyebrows that rather wondered at her own condescension in permitting them; while Mr Carvill's face was much too grave to be trusted—the demureness of his greeting to Mrs Willet was like the true quaker colour of gunpowder. He took a free and easy survey of the rooms, and first giving us a propitiatory bow, he come over and shook hands—just as everybody about us flitted away to see his wife.

"It is no excuse for a man's rudeness that he did not know to whom he was talking," said Mr Carvill; "but further information may induce him to repeat his apology. Miss Kate, I am particularly sorry to have given *you* any cause to dislike me."

Kate could very well have dispensed with the repetition.

"Can't quite understand how it ever happened, either," continued the gentleman. "I must confess—I have had a presentiment for a long time, Miss Kate—if not from the first day I had the honour of seeing you—that we should by some means or other become at least better acquaintances—not to say friends—or any thing else."

"Is the growth of acquaintanceship so extraordinary a thing that it requires a presentiment to bring it about?" said Kate, with some effort after her usual composure.

"Extraordinary?" said Mr Carvill; "no one can apply that word to any circumstance of the present case—possibly!—unless, indeed—it does seem a little remarkable—pray where is the Admiral to-night?"

"Who, sir?"

"Thought he was to be here," pursued Mr Carvill, who seldom deigned to explain himself, and taking another look

round the room. "I suppose he was to act as convoy to certain transports—hope he hasn't lost 'em by the way. N'importe!—it will give me a little chance to talk to you; and allow me to say, Miss Kate, I wish it might give you a little desire to talk to me—as the nearest representative of the said Admiral—or is he better known to you by the synonyme of Lord Rodney?"

"What shall I talk about, Mr Carvill?" said Kate, who felt a little doubtful concerning the best means of self-defence—"the weather? don't you admire it?"

"Exceedingly," said Mr Carvill, folding his arms as if the subject was to be a long one; "and the roses—I never saw them so flourishing—so many, too—such beautiful contrasts of white and red, and all the shading-off tints. Have you a good supply, Miss Kate, or may I have the pleasure of furnishing you with some new ones?"

"Thank you, Mr Carvill," said Kate, in whose face there were indeed "beautiful contrasts" she could by no means keep down; "but I think we have varieties enough—at least as many as we can take care of. What a very fine rose the Devonia is—and the Princesse de Nassau."

"Very fine," said Mr Carvill, with a slight shrug of the shoulders; "Clemence thinks there is none like it; but, after all, rather pale—I greatly prefer the blush roses, though there are one or two whites worth having. Ah, Miss Kate! if I could but give you a Parisian bouquet! all of roses, but assorted with such skill!—c'est incroyable. For instance, they would take first a full-blown Compte de Paris, with an opening Victoire modeste, and a few buds of La Tourterelle—that's an extraordinary rose!—then a half-blown Hyménée and Velours épiscopal, and surround the whole with buds of Ne plus ultra and Bouquet tout fait. You cannot imagine the effect—it must be seen."

The effect was seen by one person at least, and roused her to an unwonted piece of boldness in the way of diversion.

"What colour is La Tourterelle, Mr Carvill?" I said. "Is the name descriptive?"

"Perfectly so, Miss Grace; you have no idea how they set off the two principal roses."

"And do you think you could give us a bud, sir, at the right season?"

"With the utmost pleasure—only, unfortunately, I haven't

got one myself. But I intend to send for some by the next steamer—if they come safe, you shall have as many buds as you want—also of Hyménée, Miss Grace, if you think you would like that. And, by the way, I came here under the impression that you and I should offer each other mutual congratulations."

"On what account, sir?"

"Hardly time to congratulate any one else," said Mr Carvill, "and I have a great desire to say something to somebody. I have had a vague idea, Miss Grace, that if the wisdom of the united parishes of Wiamee and the Moon had been less strikingly displayed, our enjoyment of the course of human events would have been somewhat impaired."

"A striking display of wisdom is without doubt a pleasant thing," I answered.

"The only pity is," pursued Mr Carvill, gravely, "that individuals are not bound by the same laws as communities. Don't you think it would have a fine effect if a part of that admirable Declaration of Independence, which I have already quoted, could be more frequently put in practice? You probably remember its general drift:—'When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for two people to dissolve the bands which bind them to all others, and to assume the separate and equal station to which they are entitled, a proper respect to their fellow-creatures requires that they should declare the reasons which compel them to the separation.'"

"That is rather a free translation," said Kate.

"Free!" said Mr Carvill—"don't know, I declare—yes, I believe I should have said induce or persuade, rather than compel. And if you would prefer a more literal wording still—but I perceive that Mrs Willet is of the mind that ladies should

'Sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.'

Miss Kate, will you gratify yourself and me by taking mocha or souchong? Or, if you are nervously inclined, perhaps I may venture to recommend 'a dash of cold water.'"

"I shall not venture to follow your recommendation, Mr Carvill. I will take coffee, if you please."

"Sweet?" said the gentleman, displaying an immense lump of sugar for her approval. "Or does a concentration of the saccharine principle make extrinsic aid a matter of indifference?"

"That is just about twice too much. Did you ever learn, Mr Carvill," said Kate, "the name of the next principle that is usually developed after the saccharine?"

"Must be a sparkling one—so far as I can judge," replied Mr Carvill. "I was under the momentary impression that the gaslights were amusing themselves."

Some one else claiming his attention at this moment, we were allowed a breathing time.

"My dear Gracie," said Kate from behind her coffee-cup, "if I *had* the power of transformation, you never saw a veritable mouse's ear run away as I would do! If anybody would only keep somebody employed for the rest of the evening"——

"And if employments would only let somebody else go free."

"Miss Kate," said Mr Ellis, coming up to us, "I never saw you looking so well."

"You have seen me feeling a great deal better, sir," said Kate, half laughing.

"Eh?—what's the matter with your sister, Miss Grace? not downhearted about my going away, is she? Don't you think you'll all get reconciled to it?"

"What is a good basis for a reconciliation, Mr Ellis?" said I, laughing—"your coming back very often?"

He shook his head.

"Ah, you've been studying with your father. No, I sha'n't come back very often—not at all—till I'm wanted. But here comes my successor, and a better one no man need wish."

And Mr Rodney, with his usual quiet and unconcerned self-possession, entered the room, and made his way through the tea-table throng to the ladies of the house. How it took me back to that first evening at Miss Easy's, to see him standing there!—with the same half-concealed amusement, the same steady doing as he chose, in spite of other people's fuss and endeavours; and, withal, the same touch of gravity in face and manner which, far from hindering the most free and playful intercourse with those around him, preserved it always from any taint of their trifling or worldliness. His mind was like a planet, which in all its daily revolutions never fails to advance in its orbit round the sun.

"I never look at him, Miss Kate," said Mr Ellis, "without thinking of the old sailor's remark about a ship's sails—'how quietly they do their work!'"

"That could not be said of everybody in there," said Kate,

as she looked through quite an atmosphere of gestures and exclamations.

Mr Ellis smiled, and put his hands softly together once or twice, as if in gentle commiseration for human nature.

"I must try and have a word with him before he is fairly engrossed by any one else."

And as Mr Ellis moved off, his place was immediately taken by Mr Carvill, who, I felt sure, had been watching for it.

"Fairly come, at last!" he said; "took an observation first, like a true sailor, and then tacked off to declare himself in port, and shew his colours. The queerest thing is, that nobody can tell exactly what they are. Now, there's my wife, declares, when he's away, that he's nothing but an American; but before he has talked to her five minutes, she is equally sure that he must hail from Port au Prince or some other high-born region. Miss Kate, may I ask you a very rude question? Do you speak French?"

"Yes," she said, with a smile.

"Very glad, indeed!" said Mr Carvill; "perhaps that may enable me to do what I have been trying for, this long time. It's so desirable that all the members of a family should know and like each other; and Clemence has a mortal aversion to speaking English."

"But I thought you liked French, Mr Carvill?" said Kate, gravely.

"Like it! of course—think I do! Miss Kate, you shall excuse me, if I enter into no unnecessary explanations as to *which* member of the family was in my mind. How will the Admiral ever steer clear of all those mamma continents and daughter islands?"

"He does not seem to be attempting it," I said, smiling.

"Beg your pardon, Miss Grace; but the Adventure is naturally anxious to join her consort, the Recluse; and the Admiral has surveyed the north-west passage, at least half a dozen times."

How I did wish he would come, and put an end to a kind of attack that was growing rather painful! Silence was our only resource, for every shot on our part only furnished the enemy with new ammunition, when, indeed, he had plenty of his own left. Our end of the room was almost deserted; near the other end, Mrs Carvill occupied a sofa, while several gentlemen had the floor in front of her; and a few young ladies were

leaning upon the piano, and playing with their teaspoons. By degrees, however, the tide turned, and continents and islands came floating in together.

"The Admiral is trying to break through the ice, in his way—extraordinary machinery!" observed Mr Carvill, as his brother seated himself by Mrs Carvill—thereby scattering her group of dawdlers—and engaged her in a few minutes' earnest conversation. Then rising, Mr Rodney gave the lady his arm, and, bringing her across the room, fairly placed her by Kate, with the simple remark—

"Mrs Carvill wishes to renew her acquaintance with you, Miss Kate."

I thought we were not the only surprised ones of the party; and for a few minutes, Mrs Carvill seemed more disposed to use her eyes than her tongue; but Mr Rodney stood quietly furthering his object—joining in and drawing out, as he knew well how to do,—warding off at least some of Mr Carvill's attacks, and preventing, so far as he could, the transformation of the Daphne into any other flower whatever.

"You do not care for société," was Mrs Carvill's first remark; "you sit here so qui-et."

"Yes, I care for it very much," said Kate, smiling.

"But you have talked this evening à plusieurs gens—as if, à votre grè, you would have been silent."

"Have I? but 'il y a gens et gens,' you know, Mrs Carvill. You would not call everybody society?"

"Tout au contraire!" she said, most expressively—"there is very little that I should call that in this country—there cannot be."

"You are reading the proverb backwards," said Mr Rodney, with a smile; "it used to be 'Tant vaut l'homme, tant vaut sa terre;' and you say, 'Tant vaut la terre, tant vaut l'homme.' It would be hardly fair to take for granted that all America's sons and daughters are as rough as her rocks and mountains."

"Rough!" said Mr Carvill—"talk of rocks and mountains with your eyes fixed upon roses!—never knew before how many trains of thought a man can carry on at once."

"You did not carry on but one? non plus?" said Mrs Carvill, with one of her peculiar looks.

"Have been carrying on two all the evening," replied Mr Carvill; "one concerning my brother, and another in a dia-

metrically opposite direction about these young ladies;—got a little confusion among 'em, too, which was catching."

"What is the greatest fault you find with society here, Mrs Carvill?" said Kate.

"Mais—some of them do not know, and some of them do not talk—et les autres sont si bêtes!" she said, with an expression of disgust.

"Il y a toujours de l'homme partout," said Mr Rodney.

"I do appreciate those faults, though," said Kate—"'some do not know, and some do not talk;' they are not always faults, either—they are oftener mistakes."

"Mistakes!" said Mr Carvill. "Miss Kate, will you enlighten my ignorance?"

"I mean, sir, that many persons err in supposing that certain things are not worth knowing, and that certain others *are* worth talking about. Mr Rodney," she said, her eye almost unconsciously seeking one where she felt sure of sympathy, "you remember what Addison says—'as few of his thoughts are drawn from business, they are most of them fit for conversation'?"

"I remember it well; but I fear it will be some time before the society of this hard-working country reaches quite that point of perfection."

"And which has been my mistake this evening, Miss Kate?" said Mr Carvill—"the not knowing some things, or the talking about others?—must have made one of the two—for you would not talk to me. Did I say too much about my own business affairs?"

"I should like to know what they are!" said Mr Rodney, interposing, for Kate's face gave rather a quick answer. "If you talked about guns and dogs, I don't wonder Miss Kate had nothing to say to you."

"Dogs!" said Mr Carvill—"never shall make a distant allusion to *that* subject again—don't think she likes it. I wouldn't even dare to ask her to look at Canis major."

Mr Rodney could not help smiling; while Mrs Carvill, with a little impatience at what she could not quite understand, said—

"Est-ce là ce que vous appellez conversation?"

"Je fais place à vous," said Mr Carvill, bowing. "And yet, now I think of it—since it has been touched upon—Miss Kate—I believe you have the dog-rose in your collection?"

"Miss Catherwood," said Mr Rodney, suddenly laying his hands upon Mr Carvill's shoulders, and bringing him face to face with a young lady who was passing us, "will you permit me to furnish you with an escort wherever you are going? My brother, Mr Carvill."

And when we could recover our gravity, we had a few minutes' quiet, which Mrs Carvill chose to improve in a somewhat unexpected manner. She had been watching every word and look of Kate's, as if she wanted to make up her own mind about her; now giving most grave attention, now smiling a little that anybody could be confused about anything. Perhaps she thought this last point wanted a remedy, or else the kindliness which I had seen growing in her eyes wished to shew itself; for, touching Kate's cheek as if she had been a child, Mrs Carvill said, with a half smile—

"Est-ce que vous mettez votre rouge toujours ainsi?"

The rouge declared itself natural by unmistakeable signs.

"Elle sera amie à toute épreuve," continued the lady, looking up at Mr Rodney, as if it never entered her head that Kate could dislike the subject—"si belle! si bonne!"

"Comme je vous ai dit"—was the answer, given as gravely as if the idea had never occurred to him either.

"Oui, et plus. J'en ferai sœur de tout mon cœur. Mais —Cateau—votre ami aime mieux vos yeux eu haut qu'en bas; le tapis n'en est pas digne."

"C'est l'affaire qui est sur le tapis," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"But, Mrs Carvill," said Kate, trying to rouse herself, and clinging to English, as if she thought French ground dangerous, "don't you think it is right sometimes to bestow things where they are not quite deserved?"

"I do not know—perhaps"—— said Mrs Carvill, again eyeing her as if she were a very mollifying piece of simplicity. "M. Rode-ney—elle doit faire tout votre contentement."

"Oui," he replied, with a smile of very full assent; "mais Clemence, ce n'est pas à prier."

I believe for once Kate was not sorry to see Mr Carvill come back.

"Mr Collingwood," he said, "if it were not for alarming the present company, I should express my displeasure."

"What about?"

"Your most unceremonious behaviour, sir."

"'Turn about is fair play' sometimes, at least," said Mr

Rodney, laughing. "I think the want of ceremony was on your side for leaving Miss Catherwood so speedily."

And then up came Mrs Willet, and made a pounce.

"My dear Mr Collingwood, for what earthly purpose are you standing up all this time?"

"Simply to talk, ma'am."

"But can't you talk sitting down?"

"No, ma'am," said Mr Carvill, "Rodney never enjoys a conversation unless he can use his eyes as well as his tongue; and, in that respect, his present position gives him what one of my neighbours calls '*a félicité*,' that no arm-chair could do."

"But I am not talking of arm-chairs. Mr Collingwood, do let me take you to the sofa!"

"The sofa!—no, thank you, Mrs Willet; I think I am more in place here."

"How bright you all look!" said Mrs Willet, surveying us by turns. "What have you been talking about?"

"Friends and foes," said Mr Carvill.

"Oh, not foes, I hope—that's quite shocking! Mr Collingwood, do you permit such things? Why didn't you come to us earlier to-night?"

"I thought I had explained to you, Mrs Willet, that I was unavoidably detained."

"But you didn't tell me why."

"No, ma'am, I believe not."

"You ought to take care of your health, first of all," said Mrs Willet, with her favourite attempt to reach the mind through the arm. "Now, don't you think so?—answer me conscientiously."

"I think that I always take excellent care of mind and body—when I do my duty," he answered, with a slight smile.

The lady puzzled over the arrangement of his words for a moment, and then took another subject.

"I am so delighted that we are to have you here—I was talking about it yesterday. But you look as grave as if I had said I was sorry."

"My brother, ma'am," said Mr Carvill, "feels his mind naturally engrossed to some degree by the prospect which lies before him; after a few weeks he will be better able to answer the congratulations of his friends."

"Do tell me if it is true that you are going to leave the Lea, and live in that cottage all by yourself."

"Do you ever believe all that the world says, Mrs Willet?" said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"But, my dear sir, you ought not——will you mind if I tell you what I think about it?"

"I won't promise to mind, ma'am," said Mr Rodney, but in a way that quite captivated Mrs Willet; "I have a little of the perverseness incident to human nature."

"Oh, you know what I meant. But now, really, if you will live there, you ought to have some one to take care of you."

"I intend to take the best possible care of myself."

"Yes, yes, but that won't do—you should engage a *first-rate* housekeeper. Now, promise me that you will."

"I have had some thoughts," said Mr Collingwood, looking up with praiseworthy composure, "of getting one that my father used to have."

"I think Mr Ellis will provide him with one, ma'am," said Mr Carvill, with a glance at Kate, who, though she was talking to some one else, gave most unwilling notice that she heard him.

"Poor Mr Ellis!" said Mrs Willet, "he is all alone on the sofa—you *must* go and sit by him—I do so like to see clergymen sit together."

Mr Collingwood ventured not to reply, but looking round, to make sure that Mr Ellis was really there, he walked gravely across, and taking the desired place, sailed off into too deep water for Mrs Willet to follow. But let him alone she could not, so long as he was within hail.

"Mr Collingwood, you really should put your arm round Mr Ellis."

"Suppose I don't want him to, ma'am," said Mr Ellis.

"Oh, you must!—it's so pleasant to see clergymen affectionate!"

"Ostensibly, ma'am?" said Mr Rodney, looking up at her with an expression that made every one else laugh.

"Any way," said Mrs Willet. "Now won't you just oblige me? there's something so sweet about it."

Mr Rodney laughed, and sending one glance of inexpressible comicality to where we sat, he threw his arm over the back of the sofa, but by no means near Mr Ellis, and quietly resumed his conversation.

"I have got them both on the sofa together," said Mrs Willet, approaching my father and taking his arm.

"Both who?" said Mr Howard, looking towards Kate and Mrs Carvill.

"The two clergymen—see!"

"Oh, did they want to be together, Mrs Willet?"

"Bless me, Mr Howard! what a strange question!—how could they help it, sir?"

"I'm sure I don't know, ma'am. Have you any sofa exclusively appropriated to professors?" said my father, looking about him.

"My dear Mr Howard," said Mrs Willet, laughing, "here is an arm-chair for you—won't that do? Now sit down there like a nice man, and keep yourself quiet—I'm going to make Kate sing."

"I'm afraid it will dislodge the clergymen, ma'am," said my father; "Mr Collingwood is remarkably fond of music."

But Mrs Willet had turned off.

"Kate, my dear, you must come and sing for us."

"Shall I have the honour of being deputy escort and piano opener?" said Mr Carvill.

"Qui vous a deligué?" said his wife, who was no friend to inuendos.

"Never mind, my dear; suppose you persuade Miss Kate to sing 'Où peut on être mieux qu'au sien de son famille'—it's a remarkably fine air."

"Come!" said Mrs Willet.

And Kate, by a rather quick and skilful movement, escaped Mr Carvill's vigilance, and escorting herself to the piano, sang whatever was called for; even, at last, Mr Carvill's song—for everybody took it up so warmly, that she could not get off.

And Mr Rodney and I stood close behind her to listen.

"Miss Kate," he said, offering her his arm as she hastily left the music-bench, "Mrs Howard commissioned me to tell you that you would find her in the dressing-room."

And leading her up to Mrs Willet, while my father and I followed, we made our adieus, and emerged first into the hall and then into the cool starlight—how refreshing to both mind and body!

The next day, Mr and Mrs Carvill called at Glen Luna.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LITTLE CHURCH AT LAKE END.

"The ring is on,
The 'wilt thou?' answered, and again
The 'wilt thou?' ask'd, till out of twain
Her sweet 'I will' has made ye one."

TENNYSON.

THE days flew like a flock of robins in the sunshine—every one shewing some bright touch of gold or crimson; and though it was "summer weather," even I could not be sad. Kate blew away every cloud as fast as it rose, and Mr Rodney half deluded me into the belief that they were but the remnants, not the beginnings, of bad weather. I say half, for there was sometimes that at my heart which said they would not all blow over. Especially when a quick expression of my father's eye, or change in his voice, or some unusual tenderness shewn for me by Mrs Howard, said that my trial stood neither alone nor unappreciated. Yet were we very happy, in spite of it all. Ah, love is not always selfish!—if ever people were happy self-denyingly, we were; and Kate looked at me sometimes with eyes that were all tearful in their gratitude. And so the thirteenth of June came and passed, and late in the evening we stood out of doors in the moonlight, looking quietly at that fair combination of "Luna and Luna." The light was faint at first, as the twilight died away, and the lake was more like a steel mirror than any other; and the shadows were but faintly marked out upon the deep shade which covered the earth. The stars shone with a very softened light, as if the warm weather had damped their energies; and the wind might have been exhausted as well, for it only now and then rustled the elm leaves at the corner of the house, as it were just by way of putting its finger in. The insects were the only busy part of creation,

unless it was the flowers; and they grew sweeter and sweeter beneath the dew, thus rendering back that best of all gratitude for kind offices—improvement. By degrees the glimmering lights at the Moon shewed less distinctly, and the scene seemed fuller of objects, and a bright half-circle in the eastern sky told what was coming. Then the lake whitened, and the trees threw themselves across the lawn, and Wolfgang came out from what had hitherto been but a dark spot on the gravel walk; and then—

> "The rising moon has hid the stars;
> Her level rays, like golden bars,
> Lie on the landscape green,
> With shadows brown between."

And clearing first the horizon and then that inner boundary of woods, Luna herself looked down upon us.

She was variously received. Two or three smart little dogs, on the other side of the lake, rather thought if people were in the dark it was as well to let them stay there, and barked their discontentment at being enlightened. Two or three cocks were quite willing to wake up, but *they* rather thought it was not the moon but something else—and crowed over the discovery. And, without raising his head, Wolfgang signified what he would do to them all if they were within reach.

For us, we had stood looking on in absolute silence, except the slight foot-token now and then of a change of position; but as the light strengthened and our figures came out with the rest, we looked first at the moon of course, and then at each other—then my eyes went away again to the darkest spot they could find—I was half inclined to be of the little dogs' opinion.

"The silent moon" was too talkative for once—she went over all my past life; and the other face I had looked at was too full of the future—I almost felt as if the present were nowhere—had no existence. Not quite—for even with the feeling my hand sought Kate's, and they were fast clasped together.

"Do you remember," said Mr Rodney, perhaps thinking that it was time to draw us from our thoughtfulness or to explain his own—for he had stood there with folded arms as silent as the rest of us—"Do you remember, Katie, those lines of William Harrington's upon 'the Firmament'?"

"No, I don't know that I ever read them."

"Won't you repeat them, Mr Rodney?"

"I do not recollect them all myself, Gracie. They begin—

'When I survey the bright
Celestial sphere,
So rich with jewels hung, that night
Doth like an Ethiop bride appear;

'My soul her wings doth spread,
And heavenward flies,
The Almighty's mysteries to read
In the large volumes of the skies.'

I was thinking of the many efforts men have made to find physical means of sailing through this forty miles of air, and how the wings of the soul lie folded by, forgotten and out of use."

"And then?"

"And then of the different flight of those which are spread—how some flutter down because their supports are not well-grown or of the right kind; while others 'mount up on wings as eagles'—and return to earth, one might almost say, never, except for 'works of necessity and mercy.'"

"And that reminded you of Miss Easy?"

"My thoughts go back to her from almost every point—and they could not fail of it to-night, of all others. Yes, I remembered her—how unlike most people in the simple, undivided, walk and aim! what years of very dear friendship I had with her! I was trying to satisfy myself with those words of Rutherford—'The star that once shined upon Galloway is shining now in another world'—for, if she has not the joy of seeing her wish accomplished, neither does she need it. But I came back again to the mere sprinkling there is of such lights upon earth."

"I shall add another 'and then,'" said Kate.

He smiled as he answered—

"Why?"

"You have just given us the starting-point of your thoughts, and I think it is exceeding pleasant to know whither they lead one—if there be no reason against it."

"There is none in the world, Katie; but it would be too long an 'and then' if I gave you all their ins and outs and wanderings. With the rarity of a thing comes the thought of its difficulty, and then the remembrance that the question is not of ease or of numbers—that the essential characteristics of

God's children cannot change. And there my thought found these words written—'For they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.'"

He paused a few moments, and then went on—

"I was thinking most of that—thinking, my dear Kate, with unspeakable pleasure, that we are both 'bound for the kingdom'!"

There was no more said then, for some time, except as the clasp of Kate's hand told me that the word "both" had for her a double bearing. Then she said, in those very quiet, low tones, where several feelings, as it were, moderate each other—

"How strongly in a few simple words the Bible draws a portrait, while men with their numberless tints and touches sometimes almost cover up what they attempt to make plain!"

"That is a portrait of threefold power," said Mr Rodney—"at once a test, a reproof, and a promise. Henry Martyn took it for his first text when he had left home and friends for ever—and I have felt some need of preaching it to myself to-night.

"But not to you, my dear Daphne," he added, and laying a very gentle hand upon her brow; "I should not think your spirits needed schooling. I fear I have sent your thoughts whither I meant not—where are they busy?"

But she gave him no answer except a slight shake of the head, with a very little bit of a smile to bear it company.

"How beautiful the lake is!"

"Very—but you should see those Bermuda channels that your eyes are like, Katie."

"To cure me of any wild notions I may have on the subject?"

"Precisely. If they run too wild to be cured at home, I shall take you there for the purpose—and Gracie, to have hers confirmed."

"I will take it upon trust, sir," I said, smiling.

"What proportion of the Moon do you suppose will go to church to-morrow?" said my father, coming towards us from a "green settee," with Mrs Howard.

"Why, nobody knows anything about it, papa," said I.

"Then I shall have to wait and see."

"Oh, papa!—I mean about to-morrow."

"Well," said Mr Howard, looking down the lake to a square front of lights that displayed itself illumination fashion, "I don't pretend to know much about it, either; but if Mrs

Willet is not at this moment contriving how to wake up early, and bribing Captain De Camp to give her the benefit of his military experience, it is only because some newer idea has supplanted Mr Collingwood."

"Which is not at all impossible," said that gentleman, smiling; "therefore long breaths may as well be kept till they are needed. I hope that time will not be to-morrow, dear Daphne," he said, as he bade her good-night.

The moon told me a great many things during those few minutes when we were silent again, till the last step was beyond transmitting, even through the stillness of that night.

"What a strange thing 'to-morrow' is!" soliloquized Mr Howard. "A point of pleasure—a point of pain—dreaded, wished for—it enters your life, and already its wedge-shaped train of consequences spreads out before you; and, lo, 'to-morrow' is something else!"

"A wedge of pleasure, or of pain, papa?" Kate said softly, and laying her head on his shoulder.

"Of pleasure, my dear child," he said, passing his arm round her; "pointed, it may be, with pain—with mixed metal certainly—but bringing, as I truly believe, very pure happiness for you, and for us through you. And not even the weakest among us," he added, resting his lips on her forehead, "would evade the one to-morrow, for the sake of those which shall follow it."

And there was another pause, while each one tried to throw off the dread of that point which no endeavours could blunt. Then my father spoke again, and in quite a different voice.

"Are Mr and Mrs Carvill coming here to breakfast?"

"Yes," said Mrs Howard.

"Are you sure, mamma?" Kate said, looking up despairingly.

"Unless they change their minds, dear—which is not very likely."

"Aren't you glad?" said my father, smiling.

"I am not, indeed."

"Can't be helped, Katie—it is generally an unfortunate thing to have relations; but since Mr Rodney tries to like yours, you must even return the compliment."

"I would like them, if they would let me alone."

"That would be asking too much of some humanity," said my father; "and perhaps it is just as well for some other

humanity that it is so. But do you recollect that humanity is apt to oversleep itself if it stays up too late o' nights? — I think we had better go to bed—Gracie would be in despair if you were hurried off to that morning drive without a sufficiently elaborate toilet."

"Pointed with pain"—there was no mixed metal about it when I opened my eyes next morning—a pain so keen, so heart-sickening, that for a few moments I could not wake the quiet sleeper at my side, lest she should see it in my face. But that trying and yet blessed relief, necessity—the call for immediate action—came to my help; and with one kiss and word I roused Kate from the dream which had half given her a shadow of my waking thoughts. Her eye met mine—and as instantly her arms were about me, and my face drawn down to hers — then quickly disengaging myself, I went to the window, and looked out into the early twilight.

The stars were lingering yet, even amid the eastern brightness which came on apace, and before which earth's deep neutral tint was fast changing, and the moon shadows melting away. The moon itself looked white and faint in the west —the lake in its absolute stillness seemed to say—

"When sorrow is asleep, wake it not."

The birds had no fear of waking anything but joy; and they sang as if every egg-shell held nothing but happiness, and each nest had no straws but of pleasure.

I stood a minute—long enough for the mind to draw one of those quick, heartfelt comparisons that an hour's study could hardly retouch, and then turned to find Kate close by me.

"Gracie," she said, with lips that would scarce be controlled, "if you are going to look so pale to-day, I shall not quite know what to do. Suppose you sit down here and let me dress your hair first."

"No, indeed," I said, rousing myself.

"Yes, indeed. You shall not touch mine till I have done what is needful to yours—it has almost arranged itself."

"Wait till you see it when I have been in the garden. I am going right down after flowers, and then between dew and bushes it will be in a pretty condition."

I should have been long getting them had there been time, —as it was, I thought gladly that Kate could not tell dew-drops from tears.

With what pleasure I dressed her hair! ornamenting it with

the loveliest of rosebuds and freshest of green leaves—not more lovely and fresh than the dear wearer, as every one thought who looked at them; while the *bouquet de corsage* displayed against its ground of white muslin the purple tints of heliotrope and violets, as well as the soft colours of "the queen of the flowers." One other sprig, that I thought hidden among its more showy neighbours, Kate saw with tears that were hard to check—the little blue forget-me-not.

"My dear Gracie," she said, taking me in her arms, "never—till I forget myself!"

And I could answer her almost calmly, braced now with excitement. I could even watch—it was not very steadily—the looks that met her when she came down stairs; and I laughed with the rest, though no thanks to myself, at the wondering exclamation of little 'Dency Barrington—

"Don't it beat all, Mrs Howard!"

The sun shone its brightest, the birds sang their sweetest, that morning in early summer, when we stood in the little church to see one of our few treasures made over to another's keeping. We were very glad—no one could help it who looked at them; yet did I feel that stirring within me which would by and by have its way. Not now—I was as calm outwardly as Kate herself.

I had a general impression of other figures about me—of Mr and Mrs Carvill—of Mrs Willet—of Squire Suydam's portliness, and Captain De Camp's epaulettes; with the angular forms of Mr and Mrs Barrington in the background. Yet these were but the trappings of the scene—my eye thought nothing tangible but the place where *they* stood, my ear thought nothing real but *their* words—the words spoken to them were only a breath from dreamland—I almost lost my own identity in that strange mixture of pleasure and pain. And, as the sun rising higher and higher drove away the last shadow, and poured a full stream of light through the open church-door, even Mr Rodney and Kate seemed a vision, in that bright halo. Only I knew that it enclosed but them, it reached not to me—except as one tiny sunbeam strayed away even to my feet, as waiting for me to take it up.

A few words, a few looks, so real that I almost wished myself dreaming again, and we were once more in the fresh morning air, driving quick towards home. I noticed just one thing—that the fourth seat in our carriage was occupied by

Mr Ellis. By some happy combination of coachmen and horses, we reached the house in advance of our visitors, and had a quiet five minutes before they arrived.

Perhaps it was well, as my father had said, that the two kinds of humanity should mingle at such a time. It may be questioned whether anything could have so effectually roused our composure and self-possession as the two pairs of eyes which presented themselves at the end of that five minutes. But Kate heard their carriage approach, with a look that was only half resigned and the other half fearful.

"You seem to have very little trust in my protection, Daphne," said Mr Collingwood, smiling.

"I haven't a bit of trust in my own sense."

And the face shewed how very far the heart was from raillery, such as those quick-coming wheels premised.

"You shall not be troubled," he said, "'more than with safety of a pure blush thou mayest get off again.' But, my dear Katie, do you know the best way to take hold of such plants as you once compared me to? If you touch them too fearfully, there is the more danger of being hurt."

A very resolved little breath answered him, but so much more resolved than strong, that we both smiled, though somewhat sympathetically.

"Perhaps my sense will come back to me," Kate said, trying to reassure herself with a laugh — "at all events, don't think any more about it."

"No, I shall concentrate my thoughts upon some one else," said Mr Rodney, very gravely.

Mr Carvill had certainly some reason for his first remark.

"Miss Kate, it gives me extreme satisfaction to find that the torch which has been so recently waved over your head has not in the least impaired the freshness and profusion of your roses. I think I must felicitate you this morning upon possessing the true '*Cramoisi supérieur*.'"

"And I think," said Mr Rodney, "that 'Miss Kate,' as you call her, would like your conversation quite as well if it were a little less flowery."

"My dear sir," said Mr Carvill, "if you are not classical, that cannot be helped—I perceive Miss Kate understands me perfectly. And as for that form of address—upon my word, I'll change it when I can decide upon an alternative. If she

were in England, of course, I might say Lady Rodney at once —but here"——

"Je ne sais quelle finesse vous entendez à celà," said Mrs Carvill, glancing from one to the other in uncertainty. "Mais Cateau—encore vos yeux! Etes-vous déjà lasse?"

"Tant soit peu," Kate said, with a smile, and raising her eyes "to order," though the lady's look of examination and interest was rather hard to bear.

"Et un peu craintive?" said Mrs Carvill, with that same half smile and manner as if she had been talking to a child. "Il ne faut pas de cela."

Kate might have been thankful for the quick look which protected her from Mr Carvill's commentary on his wife's remark.

"Miss Kate," he said, in a disconsolate tone, "I am forbidden to talk to you!"

"Not by me, sir," she said, so gently and steadily, that Mr Carvill, for the second time in his life, looked a little like the rest of his family. But his wife's next remark brought him back to himself.

"Que faites-vous, de vos 'mademoiselles!'"

"Eh bien," said Mr Carvill; "dois-je la nommer par nom ou par surnom?—comment veut-elle qu'on l'appelle?"

"Cela s'appelle folie en bon François," said Mrs Carvill, disdainfully.

"Cela s'appelle a reasonable question, in good English."

"Tell him, Katie," said Mr Collingwood, "that a stranger is never obliged to take the initiative."

"All I can do," said Mr Carvill, "is to imagine myself in Congress, and cry 'question!'"

"Il est question de manger à présent," said Mr Howard. "Break your fast first and your lances afterwards, Mr Carvill, if you please, sir."

"But, my dear madam," said Mr Carvill, as he led the way with Mrs Howard, "anything like eating does seem too material for the present occasion—when every mind is raised entirely above all sublunary things. With all deference, I would suggest that the occasional burning of a pastille would have answered every purpose."

"Except that of keeping us alive till dinner-time," said my father.

"He would not live upon air, no more than other people," said Mrs Carvill.

"Never intend to try, my dear. You perceive, Mrs Howard, that it all comes of not knowing who was behind me. I had an indefinite idea that my immediate followers—I should say those whom I have the honour to precede—considered the fanning of Cupid's wings as quite satisfying and substantial."

But waiving all rights of precedence, Mr Rodney had given Kate the next place—much to her satisfaction.

"And your roses are not quite so flourishing as your sister's, Miss Grace," said Mr Ellis.

"Aren't they, sir? I am sure my cheeks have felt hot enough."

"There is a little too much of the hot-house about them. They want rest."

"They will have it, Mr Ellis," said Mr Rodney, looking round at us with a smile of very bright affection and interest, "when she is once fairly wonted at the Bird's Nest. When the tendrills find out that their beloved support is not gone —only moved off a little—they will cling as happily as ever."

"And to brother as well as sister, I am thinking," said Mr Ellis.

"I trust so, indeed."

And then, as we reached the breakfast-room, Mr Rodney quietly frustrated his brother's intentions, and placed me in the third seat, by himself and Kate.

"Voilà un homme qui sait naviguer!" said Mr Carvill, with an air of resignation. "Il cherche avant tout le salut de sa prise. Well, 'distance lends enchantment!'"

"See if you can make that rule hold good in all cases," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"Vain attempt!" said Mr Carvill. "I am sure that Miss Kate is saying mentally, 'ni de près ni de loin!'"

"Elle a raison," said Mrs Carvill.

"That rule is of very general application," said Mr Howard; "it seems strange, when you come to think of it, that pleasant things should have the most power to 'annihilate time and space,'—that distant scenes should come to us as it were distilled, through the long medium of years or of atmosphere."

"And yet the bitter has often most present power," said Mr Ellis.

"But you mean not to say," said Mrs Carvill, "that every réminiscence est du couleur de rose? les choses désagréables durent aussi—n'est-ce pas?"

"Sometimes; but the pleasure-winged minutes fly farthest, I think," said Mr Howard.

"I do not understand that."

"I think the will has a good deal to do with it, Mrs Carvill," said Kate; "on garde ce qu'on aime et passe par les autres."

"Remarkable exemplification of that before you, Clemence," said Mr Carvill, in a low tone, as if he did not wish to draw the attention of any one else to the fact.

"And then," said Mr Rodney, "the mind in looking back dwells oftenest upon the pleasantest thoughts, and so deepens gradually the impressions, that were perhaps at first but slight."

"The long and the short of the matter is," said Mr Carvill, "that when this morning shall have been, as Mr Howard says, distilled through a course of years, my fair vis-à-vis will find herself in the possession of a small quantity of very strong Parfait Amour. Are you fond of that cordial, Miss Kate?"

"Not in involuntary doses, sir."

"Vous serez obligée de décliner votre nom, Katie," said Mr Howard, smiling.

"Je ne le ferois point—moi," said Mrs Carvill. "Mr Rode-ney, what for do you permit que votre amie soit si badinée?"

"Is my friend very much troubled by the badinage?" he said, with a smile. "Mais Clemence que faire? Voulez-vous que je prenne un ton protecteur?"

But Mr Carvill found the protection rather too powerful for him till we got back to the drawing-room.

"I declare," he said then, "I will not speak another word to you to-day, Miss Kate, if you will only settle that difficult question—que faut-il que je vous appelle?"

"Votre sujet, ce matin," said Kate, smiling.

"To say that to me!" said Mr Carvill—

> "'A un homme qui jamais n'a fait la moindre chose
> A meriter l'affront où ton mépris l'expose!'

Miss Kate, if you will permit me to pay my respects at some future day, I hope I shall have recovered the power of speech."

"Quelle folie!" said Mrs Carvill. "Allons — il faut le pouvoir faire à present."

"And the question unanswered!"

"I will answer it for you—some time when I have nothing else to do," said Mr Rodney.

But, as Mr Carvill remarked, that would be a remarkably long postponement.

I was proud and surprised and amused to see the way his wife looked at Kate. Of a singularly untrusting disposition—perhaps because she had been brought up among poor specimens of human nature—she seemed to have been half fascinated with the very true and trustful eyes which were my delight—nor mine only. With all Mrs Carvill's respect and liking for Mr Rodney there was perhaps mingled a little reserve; but there was nothing about Kate to call for it, and Mrs Carvill treated her as if she were the prettiest little natural curiosity she had ever seen—and the most loveable.

"Cateau," she said, "quand comptez-vous être visible? Et combien voulez-vous que je vienne chez vous?"

"Toujours," Kate said, with no lack of cordiality in look or voice, but colouring at the same time so much, that Mrs Carvill fairly laughed at her.

"C'est une vraie petite!" she said, turning to Mr Rodney.

But he testified neither dissent nor disapprobation.

"Et la petite du monde la plus simple—que va bien. Mais vous êtes mauvais enfant de regarder toujours en bas."

And laying her hands on Kate's shoulders, and looking at her for half a minute, Mrs Carvill dismissed her with a summary little kiss and "mille amitiés."

"Il n'y faut pas tant de bruit," she remarked, as Mr Carvill came up to make his adieus—"vous pouvez dire 'sœur Cateau'?"

"C'est ça," said Mr Rodney, smiling.

"S'il m'est permis," said Mr Carvill, deferentially; "but she likes not compliments; and if I call her ma belle-sœur—Madame Cateau, I beg you to think of it—and give me your definitive the next time we meet."

"Oh, little Gracie!" Kate said as they left the room, "I have not had a chance to say three words to you. Come and sit down here and talk to me."

"Shake hands with me first, young ladies," said Mr Ellis.

"When shall we see you again, sir?" asked my stepmother.

"Hardly can tell, ma'am—before long, I hope. Only I sha'n't

want to come until——how many days will it take the world and his wife to pay their visits, Mrs Collingwood?"

But the very perceptible start with which the question was met, prevented all answer but a general laugh.

"Ah, I can't say any more to you after that," said Mr Ellis —"I advise you to take Mr Carvill's query into consideration. But I did'nt know that new notions had found their way in here."

"What new notions, Mr Ellis?" said Kate. "I don't think they have—not to me."

"I'm afraid I shall startle you again," said Mr Ellis, smiling. "Don't you know there are some people who think 'it is best not to mention things'? It is getting to be the fashion now-a-days to call a gentleman's wife 'his companion'—and I didn't know what the vocative of that might be. But, good-bye! And if there is any truth in the old saying, 'Happy the bride that the sun shines on,' then will all my hopes and expectations be fulfilled, and the surpassing beauty of this morning be but an emblem of the life you two are to spend together."

It was, indeed, as good a personification of "jocund day" as could well be imagined. Warm-breathed, musical, rich with the deep verdure, aromatic from the time that Phœbus

"Came dauncing forth, shaking his deawie haire,"

the wind spoke its joyousness but softly, as if sympathising with the hearts that trembled as the glad influences swept over them. But no heart let its trembling be known—strengthened by the very love that made its weakness. And all nature's voices gave us one happy reminder—whatever difficulties might again surround *us*, they could not touch Kate.

Was there anything real in the quick-passing hours we talked away in our little sitting-room? It seemed so then, but afterwards I thought them only a dream. Talked?—ah, it was often but the speech of eye and lip and hand—words would not always come to those who wanted them most.

"Gracie," Mr Rodney said, after one of our moments of silence, "what are you thinking of so doubtfully?"

"Doubtfully?"

"That was rather a dubious look that passed from Kate to me. Are you afraid I shall not take good care of your dear sister?"

"I am sure you will!"

"Then what were you thinking of?" he said, with a smile which could not be gainsaid.

"I was thinking how much I like to take care of her myself."

"My dear child, you never liked anything with better reason. But, Gracie, my care can reach a point which yours could not—so far you must be glad; and further than that—my Daphne had a great deal of my attention after it came down stairs. What kind of a selfish mortal do you suppose I am?"

"I do not think you are selfish at all, Mr Rodney," I said, laughing, yet with eyes too full to look up—"I believe I am, sometimes."

"I should like to see you at one of those times," said he, smiling—"I shall be a very uncompromising guardian, now that I have taken upon myself a part of Kate's care for you. But, Daphne, I shall call for your thoughts next."

"I was thinking of the unreasonable wish you had just expressed," said Kate, raising her eyes from a very grave contemplation of her bouquet—"at least, if all wishes be unreasonable which cannot be fulfilled. Gracie, did you ever see flowers keep so fresh as mine have done?"

"Of course—I meant they should."

"You did not put wax on them this morning, in all your hurry?"

"Not in a hurry, exactly—but I wanted them to keep just so sweet and fresh all day, and not being a fairy, I had to resort to common measures. Yes—they have not changed a bit—except that there is no dew on them," I said, looking hastily from her eyes to the flowers.

"I used to hear of a little fairy that was called Goodwill," said Mr Collingwood.

"There ought to be no dew on them now," said my father. "But you see, Gracie, that even the atmosphere of this day does not wither what was well prepared to meet it."

And after dinner we were to accompany Kate to her new home. Not in a carriage—we did not want to go wheeling round that long road in the sight of everybody—but we were to go through the woods; where we need have none to watch us but the song-sparrows and thrushes—where our eyes need see nothing but the soft play of the green leaves, and each other.

And the afternoon was not hot, it had but just such an infusion of summer as made the shade pleasant, and our preparations for the walk very slight. I wished them longer—my heart was taking up its burden now, when least able to bear it—I felt that I was nearing some dreaded point, and the loss of a glove seemed a welcome delay. But once only my fortitude gave way—it was when Kate paused for a moment, as I had seen her do so many years before, to take one look at the home she was leaving. I remembered what I had felt then—I felt it over again now; and my steps lingered by Mr and Mrs Howard, almost behind them, till Mr Rodney looked back, and said, in his very gentle and decided manner—

"Gracie, you must come and walk with us."

And then, though my heart caught at every touch of gravity that the walk could furnish, with the affinity that drops of water have for each other, my companions would not let me be sorrowful; and, as we passed along the little path we had so often travelled—without any violent wrestling of my thoughts from what they were so fastened upon—there was the constant shewing of the bright side—the most gentle attempts to make me see it.

"How quickly the grass has grown over this path!" I said, with a feeling as if it were moralising to me.

"The path will take its old look again very soon, Gracie—'the grass will not grow under your feet' when you are coming to see Kate."

"Nor under mine," she said, "when I am going to see you. How often do you suppose we shall meet half-way?"

"Not often," I said, rather falteringly, but smiling too, "for I shall always set out first and run fastest."

"I shall have to teach Wolfgang to run with you, Gracie," said Mr Collingwood—"this is too lonely a walk without company."

"Ah, you never could teach him that!—see even now how he stops and looks round to make sure you are following him. He never has stayed with us since you came home, Mr Rodney."

And as we approached, Wolfgang gave a reassured wag of his tail, and trotted on.

"I wonder," I said, "what ever made him take such a special fancy to Kate?"

"Don't you remember," said Mr Rodney, smiling, "that I

once told you how he and I always understand each other? I have no doubt his obedience was given wittingly."

I was very calm again; and, keeping close by Kate's side, could look at all within doors and without, that was so hung with associations, and talk of the many pleasant things we remembered in that place. Never had it looked more lovely. In all its old perfect order—the very flower baskets filled with tenants as sweet as those that had long ago withered; years had wrought no change, but of improvement; and but one thing seemed put beyond that shadowy line which divided the present from the past. But one, said I?—nay, in those bright days beyond the line, there was no place for the something which at last began to assert its power, as I sat by Kate, looking up and listening, happy in spite of that weight. And yet it deepened, and, as it were, spread over all my heart a very film of ice.

Again Mr Rodney came and sat down by me, and softly disengaging one of my hands, kept it in his own.

"Gracie," he said, "do you remember that talk about the jewel and Portia?"

"Yes," I said.

"And have you looked at your jewel to see how you like it in its new setting?"

Not as I looked then—and I had never seen it look so lovely. The fair image I had dressed in the morning was unchanged, even to the drooping of a rosebud; and there seemed an indescribable adornment of circumstance and position—it might be of imagination—that made me feel the jewel was where it ought to be—where it would shine best. I could not wish it elsewhere. And as my eyes, too full to look longer, again sought the floor, Mr Collingwood said, with a tone and smile that went to my very heart—

"Are you content with it, dear Gracie?"

And, looking up at him, I answered earnestly—

"Oh, yes!"

With the weight a little lightened now, by the gentle directing of my thoughts, and by Kate's loving kiss, which said the jewel was still the same—and not least, by seeing how precious it was in other eyes than mine—I again sat quietly listening; learning, as Mr Ellis had said, to cling to brother as well as sister. "Ay, de me!" I could not sit there always.

The others had left the house, and still I bent over the

wicker-stand and smelled the flowers, as if they were my only care. But I did not dare raise my eyes, and every moment brought less and less trust in my own self-command. At length, as two or three tears had fallen upon the roses, and I had nearly laid my own face there, for very weariness and grief, Katie softly put her arm round me, and said—

"They are calling you, Gracie, love; good night."

I looked up, but without seeing a thing—felt their kisses upon my face, knew that Kate held me very close in her arms for a moment, and then that I was out of the house. I reached the road, and stopped.

It was late in the afternoon. In such weather and time of year had we first come there. Again the Cherokee roses were in full bloom; again the Baltimore birds fluttered about their nests; again the long sunbeams came over the lake and fell softened upon the pretty bay-window; but now at the open sash stood Mr Rodney and Kate, watching me. My eye went no further; my heart was full.

Of sorrow for myself—of joy for them,—of mingled sorrow and joy for the dear friend who had wished just such successors; and, turning away, I wept some of the bitterest, sweetest tears that ever fell from my eyes.

THE END.

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