

tracts near town — an intricate matter in those times. But he found one farm, the part of an older military grant of the French and Indian wars, to which the title was unmistakably direct.

As soon as his school was out, he went to look at this property again, now that he was thinking of buying it. He knew it very well already, his walks having often brought him into its deep majestic woods; and he penetrated at once to an open knoll sloping toward the west and threw himself down on the deep green turf with the freedom of ownership.

VI

YES, this property would suit him; it would suit Amy. It was near town; it was not far from Major Falconer's. He could build his house on the hill-top where he was lying. At the foot of it, out of its limestone caverns, swelled a bountiful spring. As he listened he could hear the water of the branch that ran winding away from it toward the Elkhorn. That would be a pleasant sound when he sat with her in their doorway of summer evenings. On that southern slope he would plant his peach orchard, and he would have a vineyard. On this side Amy could have her garden, have her flowers. Sloping down from the front of the house to the branch would be their lawn, after he had cleared away everything but a few of the noblest old trees: under one of them, covered with a vine that fell in long green cascades from its summit to the ground, he would arrange a wild-grape swing for her, to

make good the loss of the one she now had at Major Falconer's.

Thus, out of one detail after another, he constructed the whole vision of the future, with the swiftness of desire, the unerring thoughtfulness of love; and, having transformed the wilderness into his home, he feasted on his banquet of ideas, his rich red wine of hopes and plans.

One of the subtlest, most saddening effects of the entire absence of possessions is the inevitable shrinkage of nature that must be undergone by those who have nothing to own. When a man, by some misfortune, has suddenly suffered the loss of his hands, much of the bewilderment and consternation that quickly follow have their origin in the thought that he never again shall be able to grasp. To his astonishment, he finds that no small part of his range of mental activity and sense of power was involved in that exercise alone. He has not lost merely his hands; much of his inner being has been stricken into disuse.

But the hand itself is only the rudest type of the universal necessity that pervades us to take hold. The body is furnished with two; the mind, the heart, the spirit — who shall

number the invisible, the countless hands of these? All growth, all strength, all uplift, all power to rise in the world and to remain arisen, comes from the myriad hold we have taken upon higher surrounding realities.

Some time, wandering in a thinned wood, you may have happened upon an old vine, the seed of which had long ago been dropped and had sprouted in an open spot where there was no timber. Every May, in response to Nature's joyful bidding that it yet shall rise, the vine has loosed the thousand tendrils of its hope, those long, green, delicate fingers searching the empty air. Every December you may see these turned stiff and brown, and wound about themselves like spirals or knotted like the claw of a frozen bird. Year after year the vine has grown only at the head, remaining empty-handed; and the head itself, not being lifted always higher by anything the hands have seized, has but moved hither and thither, back and forth, like the head of a wounded snake in a path. Thus every summer you may see the vine, fallen back and coiled upon itself, and piled up before you like a low green mound, its own tomb; in winter a

black heap, its own ruins. So, it often is with the poorest, who live on at the head, remaining empty-handed; fallen in and coiled back upon themselves, their own inescapable tombs, their own unavertible ruins.

The prospect of having what to him was wealth had instantly bestowed upon John Gray the liberation of his strength. It had untied the hands of his idle powers; and the first thing he had reached fiercely out to grasp was Amy—his share in the possession of women; the second thing was land—his share in the possession of the earth. With these at the start, the one unshakable under his foot, the other inseparable from his side, he had no doubt that he should rise in the world and lay hold by steady degrees upon all that he should care to have. Naturally now these two blent far on and inseparably in the thoughts of one whose temperament doomed him always to be planning and striving for the future.

The last rays of the sun touched the summit of the knoll where he was lying. Its setting was with great majesty and repose, depth after depth of cloud opening inward as toward the presence of the infinite peace. The boughs of

the trees overhead were in blossom; there were blue and white wild-flowers at his feet. As he looked about him, he said to himself in his solemn way that the long hard winter of his youth had ended; the springtime of his manhood was turning green like the woods.

With this night came his betrothal. For years he had looked forward to that as the highest white mountain peak of his life. As he drew near it now, his thoughts made a pathway for his feet, covering it as with a fresh fall of snow. Complete tenderness overcame him as he beheld Amy in this new sacred relation; a look of religious reverence for her filled his eyes. He asked himself what he had ever done to deserve all this.

Perhaps it is the instinctive trait of most of us to seek an explanation for any great happiness as we are always prone to discuss the causes of our adversity. Accordingly, and in accord with our differing points of view of the universe, we declare of our joy that it is the gift of God to us despite our shortcomings and our transgressions; or that it is our blind share of things tossed out impersonally to us by the blind operation of the chances of life; or that

it is the clearest strictest logic of our own being and doing—the natural vintage of our own grapes.

Of all these, the one that most deeply touches the heart is the faith, that a God above who alone knows and judges aright, still loves and has sent a blessing. To such a believer the heavens seem to have opened above his head, the Divine to have descended and returned; and left alone in the possession of his joy, he lifts his softened eyes to the Light, the Life, the Love, that has always guided him, always filled him, never forgotten him.

This stark audacity of faith was the school-master's. It belonged to him through the Covenanter blood of his English forefathers and through his Scotch mother; but it had surrounded him also in the burning spiritual heroism of the time, when men wandered through the Western wilderness, girt as with camel's hair and fed as on locusts, but carrying from cabin to cabin, from post to post, through darkness and snow and storm the lonely banner of the Christ and preaching the gospel of everlasting peace to those who had never known any peace on earth. So that all his thoughts were linked with the

eternal; he had threaded the labyrinth of life, evermore awestruck with its immensities and its mysteries; in his ear, he could plainly hear immortality sounding like a muffled bell across a sea, now near, now farther away, according as he was in danger or in safety. Therefore, his sudden prosperity — Amy — marriage — happiness — all these meant to him that Providence was blessing him.

In the depth of the wood it had grown dark. With all his thoughts of her sounding like the low notes of a cathedral organ, he rose and walked slowly back to town. He did not care for his supper; he did not wish to speak with any other person; the rude, coarse banter of the taverns and the streets would in some way throw a stain on her. Luckily he reached his room unaccosted; and then with care but without vanity having dressed himself in his best, he took his way to the house of Father Poythress

VII

HE was kept waiting for some time. More than once he heard in the next room the sounds of smothered laughter and two voices, pitched in a confidential tone: the one with persistent appeal, the other with persistent refusal. At last there reached him the laughter of a merry agreement, and Amy entered the room, holding Kitty Poythress by the hand.

She had been looking all day for her lost bundle. Now she was tired; worried over the loss of her things which had been bought by her aunt at great cost and self-sacrifice; and disappointed that she should not be able to go to the ball on Thursday evening. It was to be the most brilliant assemblage of the aristocratic families of the town that had ever been known in the wilderness and the first endeavour to transplant beyond the mountains the old social elegance of Williamsburg, Annapolis, and Richmond. Not to be seen in the dress that Mrs. Falconer, dreaming of her

own past, had deftly made—not to have her beauty reign absolute in that scene of lights and dance and music—it was the long, slow crucifixion of all the impulses of her gaiety and youth.

She did not wish to see any one to-night, least of all John Gray with whom she had had an engagement to go. No doubt he had come to ask why she had broken it in the note which she had sent him that morning. She had not given him any reason in the note; she did not intend to give him the reason now. He would merely look at her in his grave, reproachful, exasperating way and ask what was the difference: could she not wear some other dress? or what great difference did it make whether she went at all? He was always ready to take this manner of patient forbearance toward her, as though she were one of his school children. To-night she was in no mood to have her troubles treated as trifles or herself soothed like an infant that was crying to be rocked.

She walked slowly into the room, dragging Kitty behind her. She let him press the tips of her unbending fingers, pouted, smiled faintly,

dropped upon a divan by Kitty's side, strengthened her hold on Kitty's hand, and fixed her eyes on Kitty's hair.

"Aren't you tired?" she said, giving it an absorbed caressing stroke, with a low laugh. "I am."

"I am going to look again to-morrow, Kitty," she continued, brightening up with a decisive air, "and the next day and the next." She kept her face turned aside from John and did not include him in the conversation. Women who imagine themselves far finer ladies than this child was treat a man in this way—rarely—very rarely—say, once in the same man's lifetime.

"We are both so tired," she drowsily remarked at length, turning to John after some further parley which he did not understand and tapping her mouth prettily with the palm of her hand to fight away a yawn. "You know we've been riding all day. And William Penn is at death's door with hunger. Poor William Penn! I'm afraid he'll suffer to-night at the tavern stable. They never take care of him and feed him as I do at home. He is *so* unhappy when he is hungry; and when he is unhappy, I am.

And he has to be rubbed down so beautifully, or he doesn't shine."

The tallow candles, which had been lighted when he came, needed snuffing by this time. The light was so dim that she could not see his face—blanched with bewilderment and pain and anger. What she did see as she looked across the room at him was his large black figure in an absent-minded awkward posture and his big head held very straight and high as though it were momentarily getting higher. He had remained simply silent. His silence irritated her; and she knew she was treating him badly and that irritated her with him all the more. She sent one of her light arrows at him barbed with further mischief.

"I wish, as you go back, you would stop at the stable and see whether they have mistreated him in any way. He takes things so hard when they don't go to suit him," and she turned to Kitty and laughed significantly.

Then she heard him clear his throat, and in a voice shaking with passion, he said:

"Give your orders to a servant."

A moment of awkward silence followed. She

did not recognize that voice as his or such rude, unreasonable words.

"I suppose you want to know why I broke my engagement with you," she said, turning toward him aggrievedly and as though the subject could no longer be waived. "But I don't think you ought to ask for the reason. You ought to accept it without knowing it."

"I do accept it. I had never meant to ask."

He spoke as though the whole affair were not worth recalling. She could not agree with him in this, and furthermore his manner administered a rebuke.

"Oh, don't be too indifferent," she said sarcastically, looking to Kitty for approval. "If you cared to go to the party with me, you are supposed to be disappointed."

"I am disappointed," he replied briefly, but still with the tone of wishing to be done with the subject. Amy rose and snuffed the candles.

"And you really don't care to know why I broke my engagement?" she persisted, returning to her seat and seeing that she worried him.

"Not unless you should wish to tell me."

"But you should wish to know, whether I

tell you or not. Suppose it were not a good reason?"

"I hadn't supposed you'd give me a poor one."

"At least, it's serious, Kitty."

"I had never doubted it."

"It might be amusing to you."

"It could hardly be both."

"Yes; it is both. It is serious and it is amusing."

He made no reply but by an impatient gesture.

"And you really don't wish to know?"

He sat silent and still.

"Then, I'll tell you: I lost the only reason I had for going," and she and Kitty exchanged a good deal of laughter of an innocent kind.

The mood and the motive with which he had sought her made him feel that he was being unendurably trifled with and he rose. But at the same moment Kitty effected an escape and he and Amy were left alone.

She looked quickly at the door through which Kitty had vanished, dropped her arms at her sides and uttered a little sigh of inexpressible relief.

"Sit down," she said, repeating her grimace

at absent Kitty. "You are not going! I want to talk to you. Isn't Kitty dreadful?"

Her voice and manner had changed. There was no one now before whom she could act—no one to whom she could show that she could slight him, play with him. Furthermore, she had gotten some relief from the tension of her ill humour by what she had already said; and now she really wanted to see him. The ill humour had not been very deep; nothing in her was very deep. And she was perfectly sincere again—for the moment. What does one expect?

"Don't look so solemn," she said with mock ruefulness. "You make me feel as though you had come to baptize me, as though you had to wash away my sins. Come here!" and she laid her hand invitingly on the chair that Kitty had vacated at her side.

He stood bolt upright in the middle of the room, looking down at her in silence. Then he walked slowly over and took the seat. She folded her hands over the back of her own chair, laid her cheek softly down on them and looked up with a smile—subdued, submissive, fond, absolutely his.

"Don't be cross!" she pleaded, with a low laugh full of maddening music to him.

He could not speak to her or look at her for anger and shame and disappointment; so she withdrew one hand from under her cheek and folded it softly over the back of his—his was pressed hard down on the cap of his knee—and took hold of his big fingers one by one, caressing them.

"Don't be cross!" she pleaded. "Be good to me! I'm tired and unhappy!"

Still he would not speak, or look at her; so she put her hand back under her cheek again, and with a patient little sigh closed her eyes as though she had done all she could. The next moment she leaned over and let her forehead rest on the back of his hand.

"You are so cross!" she said. "I don't like you!"

"Amy!" he cried, turning fiercely on her and catching her hand cruelly in his, "before I say anything else to you, you've got to promise me—" And then he broke down and then went on again foolishly—"you've got to promise me one thing now. You sha'n't treat me in one way when we are by ourselves and

in another way when other people are present. If you love me, as you always make me believe you do when we are alone, you must make the whole world believe it!"

"What right would I have to make the whole world believe I loved you?" she asked, looking at him quizzically.

"I'll give you the right!"

The rattle of china at the cupboard in the next room was heard. Amy started up and skipped across the room to the candle on the mantelpiece.

"If Kitty does come back in here—" she said, in a disappointed undertone; and with the snuffers between her thumb and forefinger, she snipped them bitingly several times at the door.

The door was opened slightly, a plate was thrust through, and a laughing voice called apologetically:

"Amy!"

"Come in here! Come in!" commanded Amy, delightedly; and as Kitty reluctantly entered, she fixed upon her a telling look. "Upon my word," she said, "what do you mean by treating me this way?" and catching Kitty's eye, she made a grimace at John.

Kitty offered the candy to John with the assurance that it was made out of that year's maple sugar in their own camp.

"He never eats sweet things and he doesn't care for trifles: bring it here!" And the girls seated themselves busily side by side on the opposite side of the room. Amy bent over the plate and chose the largest, beautiful white plait.

"Now there'll be a long silence," she said, holding it up between her dainty fingers and settling herself back in her chair. "But, Kitty, *you* talk. And if you do leave your company again!—" She threatened Kitty charmingly.

He was in his room again, thinking it all over. She had not known why he had come: how could she know? To her it meant simply an ordinary call at an unfortunate hour; for she *was* tired—he could see that—and worried—he could see that also. And he!—had he ever been so solemn, so implacably in earnest, so impatient of the playfulness which at another time he would have found merely amusing? Why was he all at once growing so petty with her and exacting? Little by little he

went over the circumstances judicially, in an effort to restore her to lovable supremacy over his imagination.

His imagination — for his heart was not in it. He wrought out her entire acquittal, but it did no good. Who at any time sounds the depths of the mind which, unlike the sea, can regain calm on the surface and remain troubled by a tempest at the bottom? What is the name of that imperial faculty dwelling within it which can annul the decisions of the other associated powers? After he had taken the entire blame upon himself, his rage and disappointment were greater than ever.

Was it nothing for her to break her engagement with him and then to follow it up with treatment like that? Was it nothing to force Kitty into the parlour despite the silent understanding reached by all three long ago that whenever he called at the Poythress home, he would see her alone? Was it nothing to take advantage of his faithfulness to her, and treat him as though he had no spirit? Was it nothing to be shallow and silly herself?

Was it nothing — and ah! here was the trouble at the bottom of it all! Here was the

strain of conviction pressing sorely, steadily in upon him through the tumult of his thoughts — was it nothing for her to be insincere? Did she even know what sincerity was? Would he marry an insincere woman? Insincerity was a growth not only ineradicable, but sure to spread over the nature as one grew older. He knew young people over whose minds it had begun to creep like the mere slip of a plant up a wall; old ones over whose minds it lay like a poisonous creeper hiding a rotting ruin. To be married and sit helplessly by and see this growth slowly sprouting outward from within, enveloping the woman he loved, concealing her, dragging her down — an unarrestable disease — was that to be his fate?

Was it already taking palpable possession of Amy? Could he hide his eyes any longer to the fact that he had felt its presence in her all the time — in its barely discoverable stages? What else could explain her conduct in allowing him, whenever they were alone, to think that she was fond of him, and then scattering this belief to the winds whenever others were present? Was this what Mrs. Falconer had meant? He could never feel any doubt of Mrs. Falconer.

Merely to think of her now had the effect of instantly clearing the whole atmosphere for his baffled, bewildered mind.

So the day ended. He had been beaten, routed, and by forces how insignificant! Bitterly he recalled his lesson to the children that morning. What a McGary he had been — reckless, overconfident, knowing neither the plan nor the resources of the enemy! He recalled his boast to Mrs. Falconer the day before, that he had never been defeated and that now he would proceed to carry out the plans of his life without interruption.

But to-morrow evening Amy would not be going to the ball. She would be alone. Then he would not go. He must find out all that he wished to know — or all that he did not.

VIII

THE evening of the ball had come at last.

Not far from John's school on the square stood another log cabin, from which another and much more splendid light streamed out across the wilderness: this being the printing-room and book-bindery of the great Mr. John Bradford. His portrait, scrutinized now from the distance and at the disadvantage of a hundred years, hands him down to posterity as a bald-headed man with a seedy growth of hair sprouting laterally from his temples, so that his ears look like little flat-boats half hidden in little canebreaks; with mutton-chop whiskers growing far up on the overhanging ledges of his cheek-bones and suggesting rather a daring variety of lichen; with a long arched nose, running on its own hook in a southwesterly direction; one eye a little higher than the other; a protruding upper lip, as though he had behind it a set of the false teeth of the time, which were fixed into the jaws by springs and hinges,